

Edited transcript of Q&A following the October 10, 2014 lecture and reading.

Question: What is Pasternak's age?

Neshumova: [He was born in] 1890, and this is 1942 – he is 52, and he looks great at this age.

Question: How did it feel for you to be putting your work in a dialogue with the other people you've been working with?

Neshumova: I feel admiration for them. These are the best poets I know – at least the best Moscow poets of today, and I feel sorry that I could not include Maria Stepanovna, whose translations are there but they are of the longer poems and I did not have time to read them in full...all I can say is I love their poems and admire their poems.

Grigorii Dashevskii, as you can well see, was handicapped. He was a champion of handicapped people's rights in Russia. He got sick and lost one leg in the 1990s. He was also a great literary translator and critic. Grigorii Dashevskii and I were preparing an iPad application with all the poems of the poets I've read today and more are there. This app is coming out next month.

Question: Has the heightened tension in Europe changed the situation for poetry and freedom in Russia?

Akhmetev: The situation has changed not only for poets but for anyone who can feel and think. Poets react differently and some have already written poems about this current situation. Some still have it stirring in them, and we will see what happens.

Question: Was there something about the minimalist approach that kind of drove poems underground?

Akhmetev: They became underground poets not only because they were minimalists. Minimalism was just one side of them, and each one of them could be discussed in the category of another style. I highlighted this line to show the history of this trend. As for the reasons a poem or a poet might become underground, it's exactly the question that Justin asked during our first session last week.

This question is so important that I kept thinking about it after we discussed it last week. I wrote several words and I will read them and Julia will attempt to translate them. What's the difference between the Soviet poetry and the non-Soviet poetry? It's not my question. I am an empirical man. I collect everything that wasn't published. And why it was not published, the other people should find the answer to. Now they have the material. I have thoughts about it, but again, it's not my topic. My starting point is the artistic criteria and artistic value of the literature. I tried to make it accessible, at least for the readers of the next generation.

Neshumova: You are now present at the creative process of a minimalist. When a minimalist starts thinking about something and talks about it, it turns into a minimalist poem, just as king Midas long ago touched anything and it would become gold.