Seminar

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George Orwell’s Forerunners and Disciples: Anti-Utopia in Modern Russian Literature

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ABOUT BORIS LANIN

Boris Lanin is Professor of Russian Literature at the Russian Institute of Theatre Arts (GITIS), Moscow. He graduated with honors from Baku Slavic University in 1983, and received his Candidate of Philology Degree in 1990.

After obtaining his Doctorate in Philology from Moscow State Pedagogical University in 1994, Boris Lanin served as a visiting professor at the Kennan Institute and later at Woodrow Wilson International Center (Washington DC), at Institut d’études avancées de Paris, at the Hokkaido, Stanford, Kobe, Waseda (Tokyo), and Saitama universities, and at Alfried Krupp Wissenschaftskolleg Greifswald. In 2018 he was a National Endowment for the Humanities Distinguished Visiting Professor at the State University of New York, Potsdam. Lanin is a member of the Scientific Board of Study Center Vasilij Grossman, Turin.


ABSTRACT

Russian Utopia considered social reality as something to be transformed: the title of Nikolai Chernyshevski’s novel What Is To Be ‘Done?’ is indicative. A Utopian implied goal is the realization of a visionary future, anti-utopia depicts its dark consequences. “Anti-Utopia” suggests the negation of a specific ‘utopian’ system or construct. It implies that there may exist a genuine utopia. “Dystopia” suggests the impossibility of any utopia whatsoever.

Anti-Utopias in contemporary Russia have transformed from a literary genre into a method of modeling reality and depicting the near future. The orientation to political issues happened:

1) because of postmodernism’s legacy, with its ‘border crossing trends’ that reshape the readers’ picture of the world.

2) because of the transformation of a literary genre from intellectual mainstream into mass literature.

3) because modern anti-utopia becomes kind of ‘universal’ - social, philosophical, futurological, and literary genre.