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In Praise of Poetry

Olga Sedakova

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At an early age, Olga Sedakova began writing poetry and, by the 1970s, had joined up with other members of Russia's underground "second culture" to create a vibrant literary movement—one that was at odds with the political powers that be. This conflict prevented Sedakova's books from being published in the U.S.S.R. Instead, they were labeled as being too "esoteric," "religious," and "bookish." Until 1990, the only way her collections were available in Russian were in samizdat, hand-written copies, which circulated from reader to reader, building her reputation.

In the 1990s, the situation changed dramatically, and now Sedakova has published twenty-seven volumes of verse, prose, translations, and scholarly research—although her work is woefully underrepresented in English translation.

In Praise of Poetry is a unique introduction to her oeuvre, bringing together a memoir-essay written about her work, and two poetic works: "Tristan and Isolde," which is one of her most mysterious long poems, and "Old Songs," a sequence of deceptively simple poems that mix folk and Biblical wisdom.

Olga Sedakova wrote prolifically during the 1970s, one of the "post-Brodsky" poets. Her complex, allusive style of poetry—generally labeled as neo-modernist or meta-realism—didn't fit the prescribed official aesthetics, so it wasn't available until the late 1980s. She currently teaches in the department of world culture at Moscow State University.

Caroline Clark is a British poet and essayist. She holds degrees from the Universities of Sussex and Exeter, and her dissertation was on the poetics of Osip Mandelstam and Paul Celan.

Ksenia Golubovich is a Russian writer, philologist, editor, and translator living in Moscow. She has held a writer's residency at the Iowa International Writing Program, and writes for the *Novaya Gazeta* newspaper in Moscow.

Stephanie Sandler teaches Russian literature in the Slavic department at Harvard University. She co-translated Elena Fanailova's *The Russian Version*, which won the Best Translated Book Award for poetry in 2010.

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