



Vyacheslav V. Ivanov (a photoanagram by svetlAna ivAnova)

# Vyacheslav V. Ivanov (1929–2017) and his Studies in Prosody and Poetics

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**Abstract:** Vyacheslav V. Ivanov was an outstanding scholar who excelled in almost all disciplines related to linguistic and literary studies. This article analyses his accomplishments in the fields of prosody and poetics.

**Keywords:** Vyacheslav V. Ivanov; poetics; prosody; poetic translation; structuralism; semiotics

Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov (1929–2017) was among the best known and globally recognized Russian scholars of the humanities in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A world renowned polymath, he established himself as an authority in fields as diverse as Indo-European studies, Hittite culture and language, Balto-Slavic linguistics and mythology, mathematical linguistics, machine translation, ecology of endangered languages, cultural anthropology, cultural semiotics and literary/cultural studies, including the history of Russian literature and Russian literary and aesthetic theories, and, last but not least, Russian prosody and poetics, as well as the theory and practice of poetic translation. He was one of the most senior and most distinguished members of the editorial board of *Studia Metrica et Poetica* and enthusiastically supported its launch in 2014.

Over a long and astonishingly prolific academic career that began in the early 1950s, Ivanov published over two dozens of books and over two thousand articles. In his autobiography he wrote with a note of ironic self-deprecation:

There may be something graphomaniac about me, because even though my list of publications includes more than a thousand items (if encyclopedic articles are included), shelves in our flat are still filled with unpublished manuscripts and notes – so many that we live in constant fear of being buried under them. In

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addition, there are many lectures recorded on magnetic tapes, waiting for a time when they might be written down and prepared for publication. There are also projects which were begun but not finished; other ideas still remain unrealized, but most of what I had planned to do I have attempted to carry out (Ivanov 1991 [1990]: 41–42).<sup>1</sup>

These words were written almost three decades ago. Over that period Ivanov's bibliography almost doubled in size. It is hard to say how many items it includes: the complete list has not yet been compiled.<sup>2</sup> Seven volumes of his *Selected Writings on Semiotics and Cultural History* (Ivanov 1998–2010) vividly remind us of Roman Jakobson's multi-volume *Selected Writings*.<sup>3</sup>

There probably isn't a Slavist or Indo-Europeanist alive today who has not engaged with Ivanov's work in some fashion. At the same time he occupied administrative positions of critical importance to our field, among them head of the Research Group for Machine Translation at the Institute of Computer Technology of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Moscow (1959–1961), head of the Structural Typology Sector of the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Moscow (1963–1989), director of the All-Union Library of Foreign Literature in Moscow (1989–1993), chair of the Department of Theory and History of World Culture of the Philosophical Faculty of Moscow State University (1989–1995), founding director of Moscow State University's Institute of World Culture (1992–2017), founding director of the Russian Anthropological School at the Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow (2003–2017), and professor in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures and the Program of Indo-European Studies at University of California — Los Angeles (from November 1991), where he was designated distinguished research professor following his retirement in 2015.

It is a measure of the man and his times that he could be expelled from Moscow State University early in his career and forty years later be made a full member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, as well as numerous other national academies (among them the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the British Academy, the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and the

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<sup>1</sup> No Russian version of this autobiography is accessible to us. We have corrected a few minor stylistic infelicities in the published English version.

<sup>2</sup> The 2007 bibliography (Nevskaja et al. 2007) covers only Ivanov's publications of 1953–2006 and is not exhaustive even in the selected chronological frames.

<sup>3</sup> Two volumes of Ivanov's *Works on the Etymology of Indo-European and Ancient Southwest Asian Languages* published in 2007 and 2008 make up a separate series of his collected writings.

Academy of Science of Latvia) and learned societies (including the Linguistic Society of America and American Philosophical Society). In the Perestroika years and post-Soviet times Ivanov received numerous awards, including the Lenin Prize for the two-volume study *Indo-European and the Indo-Europeans* in 1988 (with Thomas Gamkrelidze), the USSR State Prize for the two-volume reference book *Myths of the Peoples of the World* in 1990 (with other contributors), the Order of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas in 2002, the Russian Presidential Prize for Contributions to Russian Art and Literature in 2004, and the Order of Friendship (a Russian state decoration awarded for strengthening cooperation between cultures, peoples and nations) in 2011.

Perhaps most astonishingly, Ivanov was able to engage actively in academic, political and civic discourse until the very end of his life. His legendary erudition and prodigious memory made him an indispensable resource for scholars around the world. For many decades he maintained fruitful scientific contacts with his colleagues not only in Russia and the United States but all over the globe, in particular, in Japan, Brazil, Great Britain, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Georgia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. More than that, he represented a living link to the literary and scholarly world of the last half century, a man who conversed and collaborated with many of the greatest linguists, literary scholars, anthropologists, poets and politicians of the age, and generously shared their thoughts, opinions and reflections with his students and friends. The documentary series “Vselennaja Vjacheslava Ivanova” (“The Universe of Vyacheslav Ivanov”), produced in Moscow on the occasion of his eighty-fifth birthday (and accessible on YouTube), shows a man who has confronted his own age, and the age in which he lived, and mastered both. Even in his waning months he conducted informal home lectures for his colleagues and admirers.

Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov was born in Moscow on 21 August 1929, the year of Stalin’s “Great Turn”. His father was Vsevolod Ivanov, a famed Soviet writer, member of a literary group called “Serapion Brothers”, which he founded together with Mikhail Zoshchenko, Veniamin Kaverin and others. The “Serapions” were tightly related to the Russian Formalists, members of the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (OPOJAZ). Vsevolod Ivanov even composed one novel together with Viktor Shklovsky (*Iprit* [Mustard gas], 1925). Vyacheslav Ivanov recalled that his father was on friendly term with both Shklovsky and another prominent Formalist, Iurii Tynianov:

I saw Tynianov [...] only once, but he impressed me greatly [...]. Another great Formalist, Viktor Shklovsky, visited us almost every day (Ivanov 1991 [1990]: 5).

Thus, Vyacheslav Ivanov became part of what we consider the quintessence of Russian culture of that time, literally from his birth. Maxim Gorky showed interest in his early educational progress (Gorky's epistolary features his letter to Vsevolod Ivanov with remarks concerning the drawings executed by Vyacheslav and his elder brother Mikhail, who later became an artist). A portrait of Vyacheslav Ivanov as a little child (his nickname "Koma" later became known to several generations of linguists and semioticians the world over) was painted by Petr Konchalovsky. Among the Ivanovs' neighbors living in the writers' colony of Peredelkino were Kornei Chukovsky and Boris Pasternak. Vyacheslav Ivanov became one of the closest friends of Pasternak and Anna Akmatova and often discussed his own poems with them. He was one of the few who supported Pasternak in the days when the author of *Doctor Zhivago* was forced to decline the Nobel Prize in literature. It would thus not be an exaggeration to say that Ivanov not only *knew* literary history, he *was* literary history.

At Moscow State University (1946–51) Ivanov studied, among other subjects, Sanskrit under the supervision of Mikhail Peterson (1885–1962),<sup>4</sup> formerly one of the presidents of the Moscow Linguistic Circle, another important association of Russian Formalists whose founding member and first president was Roman Jakobson. Thus Ivanov established personal links with both branches of Russian Formalism, the Petersburg OPOJAZ and the Moscow Linguistic Circle. The evolution of the Formalist movement was cut short in 1930. Ivanov always considered rehabilitation and revival of the unknown or forgotten legacy of the scholars of the 1920s and 1930s an obligatory task and a necessary foundation for the successful development of the humanities in the second half of the twentieth century.

In 1955 Ivanov received his Candidate's (PhD) degree in Hittite and Indo-European grammar from Moscow State University and started teaching there. Among his disciples, some only a few years younger than he, we find scholars who were soon to become prominent experts in linguistics and linguistic poetics, among them Tatiana M. Nikolaeva, Elena Paducheva, Andrei Zalizniak, Alexander Zholkovsky, Yuri Shcheglov, and Boris Uspensky (Krylov 2007: 11). However, in 1959 he was expelled from the University for his "antipatriotic actions and behavior", manifested in his defense of Boris Pasternak's art and Roman Jakobson's scholarship. Thirty years later, at the height of Perestroika, Moscow State University officially annulled this decision as unjust and asked Ivanov to return (Ivanov 1991 [1990]: 26).

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<sup>4</sup> See Ivanov 1991 [1990]: 14–17.

Jakobson, whom Ivanov met in person for the first time at the Fourth Congress of Slavists held in Moscow in 1958, became a “model” scholar for him. Ivanov accepted Jakobson’s research program of developing a single methodology for the multifarious study of languages, literatures, arts, folklore, myths and other constituents of traditional and modern cultures *sub specie* structural and semiotic approaches. Ivanov accompanied Jakobson on his academic trips to the Soviet Union and left memoirs about his older friend (Ivanov 1995a, no. 3: 171–173; 1999; 2010). Later Ivanov wrote forewords to two late Soviet editions of Jakobson’s works: “The Linguistic Career of Roman Jakobson” (Ivanov 1985a) and “Roman Jakobson’s Poetics” (Ivanov 1987b).

From 23–27 September 1961 Ivanov took part in a legendary workshop in Gorky (now Nizhny Novgorod) devoted to the application of mathematical methods in the analysis of poetic language. Following Jakobson and Lotz (1941, 1952), he suggested using an axiomatic approach to deduce the features of possible metrical systems from the phonological features of the given language.<sup>5</sup> This idea inspired many scholars of poetry, including Ivanov’s mentee Jaak Põldmäe,<sup>6</sup> Boris Egorov (who was the second reader of Põldmäe’s dissertation),<sup>7</sup> Vyacheslav Shapovalov,<sup>8</sup> and Mihhail Lotman<sup>9</sup> (see Gasparov, Lotman, Rudnev, Tarlinskaja 2017: 132–135).

In 1961 Ivanov was invited to join the newly founded Structural Typology Sector of the Institute of Slavic Studies and in 1963 was appointed head of the Sector. His predecessor in this position, who helped Ivanov to establish himself in the academic world despite political pressure, was Vladimir Toporov (1928–2005), his former college friend, with whom he would, in the years to come, co-author numerous works on Ancient Indian, Slavic and Baltic languages and mythologies.

In 1962 Ivanov and Toporov organized the Moscow Symposium on the Structural Analysis of Sign Systems. This event is generally acknowledged to be the symbolic date of birth of “Soviet” semiotics. We use scare quotes here because the Moscow School of Semiotics (soon to become the Moscow-Tartu School) was never fully accepted by the official academic authorities and

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<sup>5</sup> Ivanov’s paper was not published but became known through précis prepared by Alexander Zholkovsky (1962: 96) and Isaak Revzin (1962: 163).

<sup>6</sup> See Põldmäe’s dissertation (1971a, 1971b).

<sup>7</sup> See Egorov 1973.

<sup>8</sup> See Shapovalov 1975.

<sup>9</sup> See Lotman 1998.

remained a semi-formal (although not completely prohibited) movement in the humanities in the USSR.

Characteristic of the Symposium was an attempt to develop a unified semi-otic approach to different disciplines within the humanities, including poetics, which was reinterpreted at this stage as the semiotics of poetic text(s) and, later, as the semiotics of art(s). Ivanov wrote a programmatic foreword to the collected abstracts of the papers presented at the Symposium (Ivanov 1962b) and delivered several papers himself, including one on the rhythm of “Ballada o tsirke” (“A Ballad about the Circus”, 1961), a poem of his contemporary Alexander Mezhirov. The same view of semiotics as a methodological foundation for the humanities was more fully explored in an article titled “The Role of Semiotics in the Cybernetic Study of Man and the Collective” (Ivanov 1965; in English: Ivanov 1977 [1965]).

The Symposium was so uninhibited and unusual for the ruling orthodox Marxists that the academic establishment in Moscow reacted with unanticipated severity. Semiotic research was persecuted and largely suppressed, and regular semiotic venues moved to Estonia. In 1964 Juri Lotman (1922–1993) published *Lectures on Structural Poetics*, which constituted the first issue of the University of Tartu periodical *Trudy po znakovym sistemam* (now *Sign Systems Studies*), today considered the oldest semiotic journal in the world.<sup>10</sup> Lotman and Ivanov got to know each other in 1963.<sup>11</sup> Beginning in 1964 and from that point on, Ivanov, Toporov and several other semioticians from Moscow became regular participants in the now celebrated Summer School of Semiotics periodically held in Kääriku near Tartu. Ivanov joined the editorial board of *Sign Systems Studies*, and a semi-official association was formed that became known as the Tartu-Moscow or Moscow-Tartu School of Semiotics.

The School led a precarious existence on the margins of official humanities scholarship, though its representatives were among the brightest minds of the period. The Tartu branch was headed by Lotman, and the Moscow branch by Toporov and Ivanov. A few years later Ivanov published an article entitled “Sign Systems of Academic Behavior”, in which he developed Jakobson’s typology of semi-formal academic communities (Jakobson 1971 [1965]) and traced the organizational structure of the Tartu-Moscow School back to the Prague School and its kernel, the Prague Linguistic Circle, and even further back to the Moscow Linguistic Circle (Ivanov 1975b).

<sup>10</sup> It started as a series within the framework of *Acta Universitatis Tartuensis*, and became an independent international journal in 1998.

<sup>11</sup> See Ivanov’s memoirs (1995a, no. 3: 173).

The second volume of *Sign Systems Studies* (1965) features Ivanov and Toporov's study of the *Weltanschauung* of the Kets (a Siberian people) as reflected in such semiotic systems as their folklore (epic texts, fairy tales and riddles), rites (fortune-telling) and art (Ivanov, Toporov 1965; in English: Ivanov, Toporov 1973 [1965]). With his broad interests, Ivanov also contributed to University of Tartu publications on Finno-Ugric and Oriental studies, as well as other volumes. And, of course, he attended the Summer School of Semiotics in 1964, 1966, 1968, 1970 and 1974.

The basis for rallying the semiotic movement were the debates on literary structuralism, semiotics and mathematical methods in the humanities on the pages of the journal *Voprosy literatury* [Questions of literature] in 1965–71 (see Seyffert 1985: 172–253, 265–316). They involved Vadim Kozhinov, Isaak Revzin, Zholkovsky and Shcheglov, Lotman, and others. Ivanov contributed an essay under the title “On the Application of Exact Methods of Literary Scholarship” (Ivanov 1967a), which, in particular, made the case for a statistical study of poetic rhythm and a search for correlations between meter, rhythm and semantics.

Verse theory was a discipline in which mathematical methods started to develop earlier than in other fields of literary studies. The Russian Symbolist poet and verse theorist Andrei Belyi and the Formalist Boris Tomashevsky suggested a number of valuable ideas about what aspects of poetic rhythm could be quantified, what features could be calculated and how, and what meaningful conclusions could be drawn from the empirically obtained data. This method was later dubbed the “Russian linguistic-statistical method for studying poetic rhythm” (Bailey 1979). In the 1960s Andrei Kolmogorov (1903–1987), one of the greatest mathematicians of the twentieth century, who made significant contributions to probability theory, mathematical statistics and information theory, discovered new methods of a statistical-probabilistic analysis of rhythm in poetry and corrected several methodological mistakes made by the pioneers of “the Russian method” (see Gasparov 2015). He was also one of the first scholars to apply information theory (calculation of language entropy) to the study of artistic texts (both poetic and prosaic). Ivanov's engagement with mathematical linguistics led him to a collaboration with Kolmogorov. We venture a lengthy quotation from Ivanov's autobiography:

For several years after [1957] I worked with Kolmogorov, which was important for my scientific development. He organized a joint seminar [for mathematicians and linguists] on the informational and stochastic study of language and verse. He delivered a course of lectures in which he developed the approach of Andrei Belyi and Tomashevsky. As a result of my work with Kolmogorov,



I published several articles on the structural and statistical study of several Russian poets [...]

At the time I was deeply impressed by Shannon's theory of information and its applications to the study of language and poetic form as suggested by Kolmogorov [...]. I still think that the discovery of the possibility of measuring information ranks among the major achievements of science in this century; it permitted the introduction of measurement, which up to that time had been the exclusive domain of the exact sciences, into the study of the humanities. This might have completely transformed the whole traditional field of scholarship. The fact that it did not have as many important immediate consequences as all of us had supposed may be explained at least in part by the state of the humanities, which remained extraordinary conservative and not at all prepared for the application of mathematical methods. I still believe in the future of the stochastic semiotics inaugurated by Shannon and Kolmogorov. Kolmogorov's notions of such measurable quantities as the number of all possible synonymous expressions in a language and the whole entropy spent on poetical form and its constituents seem particularly stimulating to me (Ivanov 1991 [1990]: 22–23).

Unlike Kolmogorov's statistical-probabilistic analyses of poetry, almost all of which appeared in print during the scholar's lifetime,<sup>12</sup> his studies of the entropy of artistic texts remained unpublished and are mostly known in Ivanov's summaries as authorized by Kolmogorov (see e. g. Ivanov 1962a; 1976: 141–144). Much later Ivanov, together with a younger colleague, prepared for publication three of Kolmogorov's unpublished studies of rhythmical and metrical structures of Russian poems (Kolmogorov 2005).<sup>13</sup>

Following Kolmogorov, Ivanov himself used statistical methods to analyze Russian twentieth-century poetry. He published two such studies in the second volume of *Poetics. Poetyka. Poetika*, a venue organized by the Institute of Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. One of these articles is a revised and substantially enlarged study of the rhythmical structure of Mezhirov's "A Ballad about the Circus" (Ivanov 1966b). The publication was accompanied by extensive notes that Kolmogorov added to the first draft of Ivanov's paper. The other (Ivanov 1966a) is a study of the rhythm of Vladimir Mayakovsky's narrative poem "Chelovek" ("Man", 1917). It also begins with a reference to Kolmogorov, namely, an initiative involving the collective study

<sup>12</sup> They have recently been reprinted, with additions, as a single volume (Kolmogorov 2015). Unfortunately, these studies have not been translated into English or other European languages.

<sup>13</sup> Only two of them have been included in Kolmogorov 2015.

of polyrhythmical and polymetrical compositions in Mayakovsky's poetry.<sup>14</sup> Later Ivanov explained:

This article was written in the course of a discussion of A. N. Kolmogorov's initial studies on Mayakovsky's polymetrical poems and the transformation of traditional meters in Mayakovsky's later works. I undertook a study of similar phenomena in the early period of his work (Ivanov 1998–2010, vol. 3: 708).<sup>15</sup>

In approaching the question of the relationship between meter and rhythm Ivanov adopted the same position as Tomashevsky and Kolmogorov. It can be described as "deciphering": we reconstruct the hypothetical meter on the basis of the given rhythm. This is the reason why Ivanov chose to analyze poems written in non-canonical meters, polymetrical poems, and poems that exploit canonical meters but have a specific rhythmical structure. This attitude led him to a discovery of rhythmical features that are invariable in a particular poetic text: a rhythmical invariant of metrically different fragments. In a "normal" situation, meter is the invariant of the text, and rhythm presents variations of the meter. In this case, however, it is not meter that is the invariant, but rhythm, onto which heterometrical fragments are threaded (cf. Shapir 2000 [1990]: 93–94). These heterometrical fragments are connected by common elements (e. g., a regularly occurring pattern of accents at the beginning of the line, or long sequences of unstressed syllables in the middle of the line) passing through the text from beginning to end.

Ivanov applied this vision to an analysis of Marina Tsvetaeva's "Poema kontsa" ("Poem of the end", 1924). In this polymetrical poem he identified a single rhythmical tendency, which unifies lines of different meters: in each line the two first words or syllables are marked, followed by a polysyllabic interval or a polysyllabic clausula. Ivanov came to the following conclusion:

...In "Poem of the end", despite the diversity of meters, there is a single rhythmical tendency that manifests itself in different ways depending on specific metrical conditions but does not depend on the meter itself. Such an understanding of rhythm is different from the traditional opposition of meter and rhythm (where rhythm only plays a subordinate role in relation to the meter whose transformation it is) [...]. ...One may even suppose that the unity of

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<sup>14</sup> See Kolmogorov, Kondratov 1962; Kondratov 1962; Kolmogorov 1963; Gasparov 1965, 1967.

<sup>15</sup> All translations from the Russian are ours, unless otherwise indicated.

rhythm which embraces a variety of individual meters might be detected not only in one “polymetrical” (but “monorhythmical”) poem, but also in a whole series of poems (Ivanov 1968a: 200).

This article was published in a collection of essays entitled *Teorija stikha* [Verse theory], the first volume in an irregular series of publications devoted to prosody and poetics launched by Vladislav Kholshevnikov in Leningrad. It is hard to believe today that only three volumes were published in this series in Soviet times, for the simple reason that they were allowed to appear only once per decade.

The use of statistical methods appeared especially promising in analyses of the non-classical verse of modernist and avant-garde poets: the new metrical forms that they invented evade prescriptive deterministic definitions and require an empirical statistical description. But this method is also fruitful in the study of the rhythmical variations of “classical” syllabic-accentual meters, as Boris Tomashevsky and Kiril Taranovsky’s research demonstrated in the 1920s and 1950s. Ivanov undertook two such studies, in which he analyzed the relative frequency of rhythmical forms in iambic tetrameter. The first of these targets the “Ode on the Day of ... the Empress Elisaveta Petrovna’s Accession...” (1747) by the reformer of Russian versification Mikhail Lomonosov. The study was first published as a conference abstract (Ivanov 1969) and ten years later appeared in full in a volume with the tellingly “Jakobsonian” title *Linguistics and Poetics* (Ivanov 1979). The other study, an analysis of the iambic tetrameter of two contemporary poets, Mezhirov and Varlam Shalamov, was published in a *Festschrift* for Kiril Taranovsky (Ivanov 1973a). Unlike Taranovsky, who aimed at establishing major trends and patterns characterizing entire epochs and shifts from one epoch to another, Ivanov was more interested in rhythmical rarities and the rhythm of individual poems, in which “specific rhythmical particulars are not smoothed” (Ivanov 1979: 183). The study of Mezhirov and Shalamov focuses on their use of rhythmical forms of the iambic tetrameter in which two sequential metrical stresses are skipped: the infrequent Form V (xXxxxxxX(x)) and the rarest Form VII (xxxxxXxX(x)).<sup>16</sup>

The full version of Ivanov’s study of Lomonosov includes not only an analysis of the prosody of Lomonosov’s ode but also a structural analysis of its poetics at all levels, from syntax and tropes to imagery and concepts. This part

<sup>16</sup> Skipped metrical stresses (= unstressed ictuses) are underlined. In the Taranovsky *Festschrift* Ivanov uses Taranovsky’s numeration of forms. Most other scholars use the form numbers proposed by Shengeli (1923: 139–141). Taranovsky’s Form V is what Shengeli calls Form VII, and vice versa: Taranovsky’s Form VII is what Shengeli calls Form V.

seems to be the end product of research begun by Ivanov as a graduate student under the supervision of Viktor Duvakin (1909–1982), who is now known for the conversations he had with Mikhail Bakhtin, Roman Jakobson, Viktor Shklovsky and other scholars and writers and that were tape-recorded for the Moscow State University's Interfaculty Department of Scientific Information.<sup>17</sup> Ivanov's recollections about Duvakin are also found in his autobiography:

Among my university professors, Viktor Duvakin supported me in my formal analysis of Russian poetry. (Much later, around the time of the political trial of Siniavsky and Daniel,<sup>18</sup> Duvakin testified in favor of Siniavsky and was dismissed from the Philological Faculty, but we succeeded in organizing a series of protests, after which a special position was arranged for him in the Department of Scientific Information). Although I had worked on a structural description of eighteenth-century Russian odes in Duvakin's seminar during the first year of my graduate studies, it was impossible for me to continue in this vein (Ivanov 1991 [1990]: 13).

Nevertheless, these studies laid the groundwork for Ivanov's later article on Lomonosov.

Ivanov's contribution to the study of Russian poetry was not confined to metrics. In the third volume of *Sign Systems Studies* (1967) he published one of his most celebrated articles devoted to a deciphering of the Futurist Velimir Khlebnikov's poem, incipit "Menja pronosjat na slonovykh / Nosilkakh..." ("I am borne on the elephantine / Palanquin...", 1913). Besides undertaking a formal analysis of the text of the poem (meter, rhymes, vocabulary, distribution of grammatical forms), Ivanov found a key to this poem's enigmatic imagery: an Indian miniature that "depicts Vishnu being transported on an elephant composed of interwoven female figures" (Ivanov 1967b: 157; translation quoted from Ivanov 1976 [1967]: 36). Having demonstrated the links between the contents of the poem and its formal features, the scholar came to an important conclusion:

This analysis is intended to serve as one of several which could illustrate how the mindless tradition that attributes opacity to many of Khlebnikov's works proves on closer inspection to be a profound misconception on the part of critics. It

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<sup>17</sup> Now preserved in the Department of Oral History of the Moscow State University Library and partly published.

<sup>18</sup> In 1965–1966.

was typical of Khlebnikov (and Mandelshtam as well) to pay particular attention to the meaning of individual elements of poetic language (beginning with the phoneme) and to the meaning of the text as a whole. A careful analysis reveals the subtle interweaving of all these elements, which fuse into a single image – like the feminine figures in the Indian miniature that inspired Khlebnikov (Ivanov 1967b: 170–171, cf. 1976 [1967]: 45–46).

A year after its appearance in Russian this article was translated into French and included in a special issue of *Tel Quel* edited by Julia Kristeva and devoted to Soviet semiotics.<sup>19</sup> A Polish translation by Jerzy Faryno appeared in 1969.<sup>20</sup> An English self-translation, edited by Ann Shukman, was published in one of the Oxford-based volumes that constitute the *Russian Poetics in Translation* series.<sup>21</sup>

As Ivanov himself acknowledged, he found the Indian miniature that inspired Khlebnikov in Sergei Eisenstein's treatise on film-cutting (*Montage*, 1937).<sup>22</sup> In 1966–69 Ivanov wrote a book “on Eisenstein's semiotic approach to aesthetic problems” (Ivanov 1991 [1990]: 31). The book was planned for publication in the same series as Boris Uspensky's *A Poetics of Composition* and Juri Lotman's *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (both 1970). Launched by the publishing house *Iskusstvo* [Art] and titled *Semiotic Studies of Art Theory*, the series was curtailed after the first two publications. Ivanov thus described the fate of his own book:

The first version, written at the suggestion of the (then relatively liberal) Aesthetics Section of the Moscow-based publishing house *Iskusstvo*, was completed in 1969, and the second version, substantially abridged and revised, in 1972. Neither the one nor the other could be published in the Soviet Union. [...] At that time I managed to include only part of my conclusions in two chapters of my *Essays on the History of Semiotics in the USSR*.<sup>23</sup> Both the pointedly specialized title of this book [...] and its exceptionally specialized style were needed for my attempt at a history of the study of signs (semi-forbidden in Moscow at the time and only permitted as an import from Tartu) to clear all the obstacles that lay before it (Ivanov 1998–2010, vol. 1: 10).

<sup>19</sup> *Tel Quel* 35 (1968): 9–23.

<sup>20</sup> *Pamiętnik literacki* 1 (1969): 323–336.

<sup>21</sup> Ivanov 1976 [1967].

<sup>22</sup> Khlebnikov's original source, discussed in detail by Natalia Pertsova (2003), was a Russian translation of P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye's *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte* (2 vols., 1887–89; Russian ed. 1899).

<sup>23</sup> See Ivanov 1976: 56–250.

The initial title of the book was *S. M. Ejzenshtejn i sovremennaja nauka ob iskusstve* [S. M. Eisenstein and the contemporary study of art]. The final version was published under the title “Estetika Ejzenshtejna” [Eisenstein’s aesthetics] thirty years later in the first volume of Ivanov’s *Selected Writings* (see Ivanov 1998–2010, vol. 1: 141–378). All his works devoted to Eisenstein were recently collected under one cover (Ivanov 2018). The proofs of this edition lay open on the desk in his Los Angeles apartment on the day he died (7 October 2017).

Another important name that Ivanov revived in the 1960s was that of Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934), who was a founding figure in Soviet psychology but virtually unknown as a literary theorist. Vygotsky’s early dissertation entitled *Psikhologija iskusstva* [The psychology of art] – which contains brilliant analyses of “the Russian La Fontaine” Ivan Krylov’s fables, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Bunin’s short story “Legkoe dykhanie” [Gentle breath] – was finished in 1925 but remained unpublished for the next four decades. Ivanov prepared a thoroughly commented edition (1965), which was then expanded (1968) and republished many times. The fifth edition (1997) features Ivanov’s article “The Art of Psychological Investigation” (Ivanov 1997b). *The Psychology of Art* with Ivanov’s commentary was translated into English (1971), Italian (1972), and Estonian (2016). Chapters on Vygotsky as creator of a semiotic theory of culture are featured in Ivanov’s “Essays on the Pre-History and History of Semiotics” included in the first volume of his *Selected Writings* (Ivanov 1998–2010, vol. 1: 747–755) and in *The Cambridge Handbook of Cultural-Historical Psychology* (Ivanov 2014).

In the mid-1960s Ivanov was commissioned to write an entry on poetics for *Kratkaja literaturnaja entsiklopedija* [Concise literary encyclopedia], which was positively peer-reviewed by Juri Lotman, who called it “a brief but exceptionally informative presentation of the main problems and branches of poetics” (quoted in Pilshchikov, Trunin 2016: 702; see also Pilshchikov, Lotman 2016). According to Ivanov, poetics is “a study of the structure of literary texts and the system of aesthetic means they use” (Ivanov 1968b: 936). It consists of three branches: general poetics, descriptive poetics, and historical poetics. General poetics explores the artistic means and laws governing the construction of any text considered as a multi-level hierarchical structure. Poetic language and artistic (and, in particular, versified) speech differ from other functional varieties of language and speech by the special organization of sound, rhythm, syntax and vocabulary. These differences are analyzed not only by general but also by descriptive poetics, which applies categories of general poetics to specific texts. The opposition of poetic language to other cultural languages is not substantial, but functional: “Structures characteristic of different speech genres can be included in the poetic language, where they

produce a special effect precisely because of their ‘non-poeticity’” (ibid.: 937). Finally, historical poetics studies the diachronic changes of “both separate artistic techniques [...] and categories [...], as well as whole systems of such techniques and categories characteristic of a particular epoch” (ibid.: 940).

The second section of the article is devoted to the history of poetics from the ancient Greek and Indic to that of the present day. In the Russian tradition, Ivanov singles out the works of Aleksandr Veselovsky and Aleksandr Potebnia and the development of their ideas in the works of the Russian Formalists, who later influenced, through the Prague Linguistic Circle, “literary criticism the world over (‘New Criticism’, the work of Wellek and Warren, the *Tel Quel* group etc.)” (ibid.: 942). He also favors Vladimir Propp’s study of the morphology of the fairy tale, Bakhtin’s work on heteroglossia and the structure of the “polyphonic” novel, Eisenstein’s theoretical treatises, Jakobson’s structural analyses and the “verse studies of A. N. Kolmogorov, who developed the traditions of Andrei Belyi, B. V. Tomashevsky and G. A. Shengeli” (ibid.: 942).

Not only in the historical section, but also in the analytical part of this article, the author draws on concepts developed by the Russian Formalists, such as the dichotomy of plot and story-stuff (*sujet* and *fabula*); automatization and defamiliarization as the driving forces of historical poetics; the canonization of “peripheral” trends in literature and the decanonization of “central” trends; and others. The article advances such methods for studying the poetic text as a comparison of the real parameters observed in poetic speech with theoretical models and a structural analysis of the system of authorial or folkloric imagery, or “the model of the world” with its specific architectonics of time and space and specific representation of characters and objects. Ivanov cites his own innovative analysis of the rhythmical and metrical structure of Tsvetaeva’s “Poem of the end” as an example of a study in the field of descriptive poetics. Lotman rightly notes in his peer review that Ivanov’s encyclopedic entry is at once a work of reference and a research article.

Ivanov’s analyses of poetry often embrace all levels of the poetic text; such is the case with his study of Khlebnikov’s poem about the elephantine palanquin. Another example is his analysis of meter, rhythm, language and style of the Symbolist poet Aleksandr Blok’s “Shagi komandora” (“The Commendatore’s Footsteps”, 1912). The poem is written in quatrains of what scholars had called “free” trochees, i. e. trochees with irregularly alternating lines of different lengths (from four to six feet). Ivanov demonstrates that it has a more regular structure than appears at first glance. He examines the statistics of the rhythmical forms of trochaic tetrameters, pentameters and hexameters in the poem, uncovering a specific rhythmical composition in which the variation of the stanzaic structure and the distribution of unstressed ictuses are

correlated with the thematic segmentation of the text. Thereafter he analyzes the poem's phonetics – the rhymes and the anagrammatic structures in which the names of Don Juan and Donna Anna are encrypted (or rather multiplied, since they are also explicitly featured in the text). A homology of form and content in the poem is further demonstrated by Ivanov's description of the "poetic grammar"<sup>24</sup> and vocabulary of "The Commendatore's Footsteps". In addition, Ivanov reveals the influence of the formal particulars of Blok's poem on the poems of Mandelshtam, Pasternak and Akhmatova. The first version of Ivanov's paper was delivered at the First All-Soviet Conference on Aleksandr Blok held in Tartu on 20–24 April 1975 (Ivanov 1975a). The full version of this study appeared in *Russian Poetics*, a volume published in the *UCLA Slavic Studies* book series (Ivanov 1983).

In Blok's poem, tetrameters and pentameters are characterized by an unusually high frequency of stresses on the first ictus, whereas the lines with an unstressed first foot play a specific compositional role (such as the beginning of a thematic fragment or semantically paired verses). In an article entitled "On One Form of Organization of the Rhythmical Structure of a Poem" Ivanov compared the statistics of rhythmical forms in "The Commendatore's Footsteps" with the rhythmical effects found in the poems of later authors (see Ivanov 1981 [1978]). In a poem from Tsvetaeva's poetic cycle "Derev'ja" [Trees] (numbered 7, dated 1922), written in alternating lines of trochaic pentameter and trimeter, 75% of all lines have a "paeanic" rhythm (XxxxXxxxX / XxxxXx), whereas the lines *without* the "paeanic" inertia have a special compositional function. David Samoilov's poem of 1978 titled "Sred' shumnogo bala" [Amidst a noisy ball] is written in amphibrachic trimeters, as is Aleksei K. Tolstoy's celebrated romance (1851), to which the title of Samoilov's poem refers. The 1978 poem is, however, rhythmically unusual due to the absence of a metrical stress in 8 of 44 lines. The first such line skips the stress on the first foot and therefore begins with a tetrasyllabic unstressed interval (xxxxXxxXx) – the rarest rhythmical form of this meter. And it is this line that interrupts the initial quotational unfolding of Samoilov's poem and introduces a new topic (characteristically, it begins with *No... 'but'*). Thus, according to Ivanov, an unusual distribution of unstressed ictuses in traditional meters is specific to twentieth-century Russian poetry.

Among Ivanov's works on prosody and poetics published in the 1970s and early 1980s, we find a note on anagrams in Mandelshtam's late poems (Ivanov 1972a), a study of the category of time in twentieth-century art and culture (Ivanov 1973b, 1973c), and a study of the nominative style in

<sup>24</sup> An appropriation of Jakobson's concepts of "poetry of grammar and grammar of poetry".



twentieth-century European poetry (Ivanov 1981). Ivanov's examination of anagrams in Blok and Mandelshtam is directly linked to his interest in the fragments in Saussure's notebooks dedicated to anagrams in Indo-European poetry that were published by Jean Starobinsky (see Starobinsky 1971). In the same years Ivanov translated these fragments into Russian and published them with an introductory note and commentary in the academic edition of Saussure's work in Russian (see Saussure 1977: 635–649).

“Although Saussure's anagram theory proved to be inadequate for its original object, Indo-European poetry, it became almost indispensable for modern literature and literary theory”, *The Cambridge Companion to Saussure* notes – and explains why: “As soon as this work became known, avant-garde French literary theorists of the late 1960s and the early 1970s received it enthusiastically and integrated it in their own approaches” (Wunderli 2004: 174; cf. Wunderli 1972). Ivanov thought of Saussure's anagram hypothesis in much the same way and sought out examples even more persuasive than Saussure's, though taken from twentieth-century poetry – in particular, Mandelshtam's poem about “Mandelshtam Street” (1935), in which the “twisting” of the poet's surname is not only conscious but forms the theme of the poem” (Ivanov 1972a: 87). This text, as well as another poem of the “Voronezh cycle” – the one devoted to the town of Voronezh itself – provides for interpenetration of sound and meaning by repeating the sounds and syllables of the “key words”: *Voronezh* in one poem and *Mandelshtam* in the other (cf. Steiner 1976: 345–346).

What attracted the scholar in these specimens of modernist poetry was their authors' “adherence to archaic poetic techniques that develop the tendencies underlying the linguistic forms and constructions themselves” (Ivanov 1972a: 87). Anagram is one such archaic technique or device based on variations (particular phonetic sequences) of a single invariant (a common or proper name). Ivanov was fascinated with these links between the present and the past and dedicated numerous studies to folklore, myth, archaic and ancient cultures with a special emphasis on invariant models. Ivanov and Toporov's structural description of a universal invariant and its transformations in folk poetry and ancient visual art (1975, 1976, 1977) is probably the most “structuralist” of their collaborations. It is closely linked to their earlier works on the reconstruction of Slavic mythology and their methodological prototype, Claude Lévi-Strauss's cultural anthropology. It should be mentioned here that the Russian translation of Lévi-Strauss's *Anthropologie structurale* was eventually published, despite censorial difficulties, under Ivanov's editorship and with his commentary, in 1983.

Another cycle of Ivanov's works on poetics is devoted to the earliest known texts of mankind. This cycle includes articles on comparative Indo-European poetics (Ivanov 1967c), early forms of art and pictography (Ivanov 1972b), the

structure of Homeric texts describing mental states (Ivanov 1980a) and the origins of Greek hexameter (Ivanov 1987a). The latter article was published in *Studia Metrica et Poetica* – a series within *Acta Universitatis Tartuensis* founded by Jaak Põldmäe. The original series, discontinued in 1990, was the immediate predecessor to our journal, which bears the same title. Ivanov's later studies on related subjects include papers on the caesura in Indo-European octosyllabic verse (abstract published: Ivanov 2000a) and the significance of Luwian poetry and metrics for the reconstruction of Indo-European meters (Ivanov 2001, in English). In the postscript to a revised and enlarged Russian version of the latter article Ivanov noted:

The comparative linguistic studies published in recent years have suggested that the South Anatolian dialect (being different from the northern Anatolian – Hittite and Palaic – dialects), to which the Luwian is an ascendant, could be associated by virtue of a number of isoglosses within the Indo-European community with Proto-Balto-Slavic [...]. Therefore, it would be justifiable to examine the extent to which the reconstructed structures of South-Anatolian verse are comparable to the archaic forms of Lithuanian, Latvian and Slavic folk poetry (Ivanov 1998–2010, vol. 3: 318).

Parallel to the series of articles on archaic poetic texts were two other branches of study. First, his work on early written and pre-written Indo-European languages and civilization culminated in the publication of *Indo-European and the Indo-Europeans*, a fundamental two-volume study co-authored with Tamaz (Thomas) Gamkrelidze (1984).<sup>25</sup> Second, Ivanov collected his numerous translations of ancient Indo-European and non-Indo-European texts from Asia Minor (Hattic, Hittite, Akkadian, Palaic, Hurrian, Luwian, Phoenician and others) in a book entitled *The Moon That Fell from the Sky* (Ivanov 1977), and separately published translations of even older Ugaritic texts (Ivanov 1980b, preceded by an article on the Ugaritic epos). Ivanov also edited the translations from Assyro-Babylonian poetry made by Vladimir Shileiko (1891–1930), an outstanding Russian Assyriologist, and published them with a preface titled “On the Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia” and an afterword about Shileiko as a translator (see Shileiko 1987).

Ivanov's contribution to translation theory includes “Linguistic Aspects of Poetic Translation” (Ivanov 1961) and “Linguistic Challenges in the Translation of an Artistic Text” (Ivanov 1967d). The former is the earliest attempt to link

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<sup>25</sup> An English translation was published in 1995.

the problems of poetic translation with developments in automated translation. The latter article summarizes the difficulties encountered in attempts to formalize the translation process. In the article entitled “Translation in the Light of Modern Linguistic Theory” the scholar wrote of the significance of poetic translation not only for general translation theory, but for human cognition writ large (Ivanov 1982). Naturally, Ivanov was especially interested in translations from Russian and into Russian. Notable case studies are two of his essays on Tsvetaeva: one on her poetic translations from European languages into Russian, the other on her translations of Pushkin – from the Russian into French (Ivanov 1967e, 1968 [1966]).

It is not common knowledge that Ivanov treated his own activity as a poet and poetic translator very seriously. Like Juri Lotman, he considered “bilingualism, multilingualism, and diglossia”<sup>26</sup> as indispensable elements of human communication and, therefore, of human existence. This was not only a theory. Besides ancient languages, he translated poems from the French (Victor Hugo, Baudelaire, Apollinaire, Louis Aragon, Jacques Lacan,<sup>27</sup> and others), English (Shakespeare, William Blake, Walter Scott, Keats, Byron, Kipling, Yeats, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and others), German (Heinrich Heine, Reiner Maria Rilke, Paul Celan, Johannes Bobrowski), Spanish (Lope de Vega, Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer), Latvian (Rainis, Eriks Ādamsons, Mirdza Ķempe), Lithuanian (Bernardas Brazdžionis), Polish (Cyprian Norwid, Julian Tuwim, Czesław Miłosz), Ukrainian (Mykola Bazhan) – “and”, adds Ivanov, “some other modern poets who wrote in various European languages” (1991 [1990]: 10). His selected translations have recently been published as a single volume (Ivanov 2016). The book is not as large as one might expect – possibly because of the translator’s cautious and highly personal attitude toward every poem. “To me poetry is a method to penetrate the soul of a language”, says Ivanov and explains:

In my own translating efforts, I usually learned the poem by heart in the original [...]. Then I tried to render one line or more, as literally as possible. The next lines might not come for several years. To translate one poem might take twenty years. In this process I often have the feeling that the poem is growing inside me, changing its linguistic appearance as serpents change their skins (Ivanov 1991 [1990]: 8).

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<sup>26</sup> Ivanov 1991 [1990]: 40.

<sup>27</sup> Lacan “is widely known as a semiotician of psychoanalysis but not as a poet”, Ivanov explained. “I published a translation of his early semi-classical sonnet ‘Hiatus irrationalis’, which was written around the time of my birth, in August 1929” (Ivanov 1991 [1990]: 8).

As late as the 1980s Ivanov started yet another “life project” of his: a big book on Pasternak. Its foundation was laid by an extensive monographic study of one poem of Pasternak, “Babochka-Burja” (“Butterfly-Storm”, 1923). It was mostly written in autumn 1980 and later evolved into a course of lectures delivered at the University of Tartu in 1986. Memorably, at these lectures Ivanov recited Pasternak’s poems imitating the declamatory manner of the author himself.<sup>28</sup> The study eventually appeared in print in the first volume of Ivanov’s *Selected Writings* (see Ivanov 1998–2010, vol. 1: 14–140). It was followed by studies of various themes in Pasternak’s poetry and prose: ‘childhood’, ‘woman’, ‘Christmas tree’, ‘demon’, ‘city’, ‘Moscow’, ‘waltz’, ‘tangerine’, etc. (Ivanov 1988d, 1992a, 1994, 2000b, 2008a, 2008b). These articles were complemented by a series of comparative studies of the “Pasternak and ...” type: “Pasternak and OPOJAZ”, “Akhmatova and Pasternak”, “Russian Poetic Tradition and Futurism (the Case of the Early Pasternak)”, “Pasternak’s ‘Marburg’ and the Marburg School of Philosophy”, “Pasternak and Vrubel” (Ivanov 1988c, 1989, 2009, 2012a), and others, as well as various comments on Pasternak’s texts, with a special emphasis on the early Pasternak (Ivanov 1992b, 2007, 2011). All these articles have recently been collected in a single substantial volume, most of them followed by postscripts summarizing the author’s views of Pasternak’s poetics. The book is complemented with previously unpublished research and Ivanov’s memoirs about the poet (see Ivanov 2015).

During the last three and a half decades of his life, besides the aforementioned articles and books, Ivanov published numerous noteworthy studies on poetry, poetics and poetic theory. A substantial number are devoted to Khlebnikov: an overview of Slavonic motifs in his poetry and poetic language (Ivanov 1986a); an expansive treatment of the poet’s engagement with science (1986b); Khlebnikov and the typology of the avant-garde (Ivanov 1990); the image of Africa in Khlebnikov and Gumilëv, the leading poet and theorist of Russian post-Symbolism (in English: Ivanov 1991; in Russian: Ivanov 1998–2010, vol. 2: 287–325); “transrational” language as deployed by Khlebnikov and the Russian dadaists (Ivanov 2000c); and the evocation of the gods in Khlebnikov, de Quincey and Baudelaire (Ivanov 2012b). Other important studies include an overview of oriental themes and styles in Western poetry (Ivanov 1985b); an examination of the mythopoetic elements in the Latvian *daina*, a kind of folk song (Ivanov 1986 [1984]); a description of the influence of Andrei Belyi’s poetic experiments and his theory of rhythm on avant-gardist

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<sup>28</sup> The lecturer also discussed *Doctor Zhivago*. The novel had not yet been published in the Soviet Union, so it had to be referred to simply as *The Novel*.

and post-Symbolist poets – Khlebnikov, Mayakovsky, Tsvetaeva, and Pasternak (Ivanov 1988a); the first multifaceted description of the poetics of Nikolai Gumilëv (Ivanov 1988b); a description of the poetics of the eighteenth-century Classicist poet Derzhavin with respect to his influence on twentieth-century poets and a typological similarity between Russian poetics in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries in terms of tropes, rhythms and rhymes (Ivanov 1995b); an essay on Joseph Brodsky and English metaphysical poetry (Ivanov 1997a); and an analysis of the theme, its metaphorical verbal implementation, and the rhythmical composition in Tsvetaeva's "Ras-stojaniye: versty, mili..." ("Dis-tance: versts, miles...", 1925) (Ivanov 2004b). Articles on Russian poetry written before 2000 have been collected in the second volume of Ivanov's *Selected Writings* (see Ivanov 1998–2010, vol. 2).

An analysis of super-long unstressed intervals in Brodsky's *dolnik* verse (Ivanov 1996;<sup>29</sup> a revised and enlarged Russian version: Ivanov 1998–2010, vol. 3: 732–746) is of special interest because it outlines approaches to describing new metrical-rhythmical forms in twentieth-century Russian poetry against the background of Russian classical verse of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For Ivanov, as we have noted, the new forms of contemporary Russian poetry are characterized by a reversal of the traditional relationship between meter and rhythm. In Mayakovsky, Tsvetaeva or Brodsky, rhythm is no longer a realization of the pre-conceived metrical scheme, but rather the main organizing principle of verse speech, subordinating polymetrical sequences (Mayakovsky, Tsvetaeva) or loosening metrical constraints (Tsvetaeva, Brodsky). Ivanov summarized these ideas in an article entitled "Principles of Russian Versification" (Ivanov 2004a).

Concluding his discussion of Brodsky's *dolnik*, Ivanov speculates that a detailed study of such experiments could alter our approach to studying the fundamentals of Russian verse (Ivanov 1996: 283). It is our sorrow that the exploration of these fundamentals will be left to others, but it is our joy that his spirit continues to inspire us on the path of discovery.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Published in *Elementa*, an American-based journal of Slavic studies and comparative cultural semiotics that Ivanov edited in 1993–2000.

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