

Title: "About the Weather": Nekrasov's 'Street Impressions' and the Shaping of an Urban Lyric Subject

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The proposed paper focuses on Nikolai Nekrasov's "About the Weather" (1859- 1865). My enquiry, however, concerns more broadly the urban environment in which this poem is set and the kind of urban subjectivity that began, in the second half of the 19th century, to emerge with Russia into modernity.

Here regarded first and foremost as a new register of subjective experience, modernity features in this discussion as a reconfiguration of urban man's sensory relationship to his environment and frames a haptic reading of Nekrasov's text that takes its cue from that cycle's own subtitle, "Street Impressions". 'Impressions' are suggestive of the fleeting encounters made standard by the fast pace of urban life, yet affirm the traces left by the forced intimacy and physical contact of crowded urban life. Signifying both mental perception and physical contact, they provide a figure for the intersection of external sensations and the lyric subject's interiority and invite consideration of the ways in which the former shape the latter, and, concurrently, how interiority itself impresses and defines its surroundings.

My interest in the embodiment of visual experience figured by the lyric subject's emergence into the street concerns the ways in which this newly immediate physicality and its urban setting catalyze an evolution of Romanticism's meditative, reflective mode. Bypassing the ideological connotations of Russian Realism's civic concern with the social, therefore, I instead read Nekrasov's realist verse in conjunction with the developing medium of photography as a reflection on the effect of the burgeoning city's material environment on society and the individual within it—of the complex relationship between the modern self and the modern world. Looking ahead to Russian modernist poems about the city, I argue that Nekrasov's 'prosaic' verse and 'realist' concerns should not exclude the poet from discussions of the Russian lyric but rather demonstrate the evolution of its thematic and prosodic possibilities and of lyric subjectivity into urban modernity.