

Title: How Olya Learned to Write: Vladimir Ufliand's Brodsky Legends

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Abstract:

Among the best known - especially among Slavists - of Daniil Kharm's works are his humorous miniatures about Pushkin and Gogol, in which the author undercuts the literary generals' gravitas by putting them in comical situations. Kharm's gentle mockery of literary hierarchies anticipates the subversive affirmation strategies that would be productively used by late Soviet second culture performance art groups; his short absurd scenarios populated by a cast of familiar figures, meanwhile, corresponds well to the structure of a popular genre of the late Soviet period: the anecdote. Small wonder that among the effects of the rediscovery of the OBERIU in the 1960s was a rich series of imitations which expanded Kharm's original range of characters to other 19th century masters: Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Turgenev among them. The mock heroic condensed into literary anecdote was taken a step further by Vladimir Ufliand in a series of "Legends" about his famous friend and fellow poet "Olya" Brodsky. Composed in the years following Brodsky's receipt of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Ufliand's legends both honor and deflate the best known of the Leningrad poets. Unlike Kharm or his imitators of the 1970s, though, Ufliand, whose biography was directly tied to Brodsky's, inscribes himself into his comic-nostalgic plots, mythologizing the poets of the "philological school" alongside their better known younger contemporary. This paper will describe the scenarios that comprise the "Legends" invented by the "last Oberiut," as one critic called Ufliand; compare them to Kharm's and others' literary legends; and consider how the texts reflect the avant-garde revival that was part of Russian literature's so-called Bronze Age.