

## **Abstract for “Literary Institutions and the People who Built Them”**

Jonathan Stone, Franklin & Marshall College

[Jon.Stone@fandm.edu](mailto:Jon.Stone@fandm.edu)

The refrain for much of my work is the question of how Russian Symbolism came to be unified as a concept. This is the starting point for my investigation of Symbolism as a self-conscious movement that places its poetry and theory within the framework of the institutions that organized, published, and disseminated Symbolism to a Russian audience. I read Symbolism through its venues of publication – the Symbolist journal, almanac, and publishing house. Consequently, I reconsider this movement as the inextricable intertwining of the idea of “Symbolism” (an aesthetic mindset) with its tangible products: “Symbolist” books and journals as artifacts complete with a specific inner structure and visual layout. This naturally leads to an examination of the creation of Symbolism’s proper Russian readership, a sociologically engaged approach that can add to the study of relatively well-trodden literary ground.

In particular, my interests reside in an exploration of “isms” – the expression of aesthetic affinity in group terms. As my current projects reflect, I take into account the context of literature’s creation – the living people behind such concrete institutions of publishing and writing as the journals, critical reviews, poetic cycles, and publishing houses essential to producing literature. I look to demonstrate the nuanced interplay between texts and the larger social, theoretical, artistic, and cultural forces behind them. This talk will draw specific examples from Symbolism’s first appearance as a group project – the Russkie Simvolisty collections of 1894-5. As the driving force behind these, Valerii Briusov carefully positioned the emergent Russian Symbolists within the established social institutions of literary criticism, journal readership, and the conventions of Decadence. In negotiating these, Briusov sought to place Symbolism into a Russian literary discourse while inserting the Symbolists into Russian social discourse.