

Title: Topical Versus Eternal: Satire and Irony in Contemporary Russian Poetry  
Author: Natalia Vesselova, University of Ottawa

Russian poetry of the late twentieth century, known as neo avant-garde and/or post-modernist, often contains what seems to be topical satire. Timur Kibirov, Aleksei Parshikov, Eduard Limonov, Dmitry Prigov and others, with criticism of various social phenomena of their turbulent epoch, promptly come to one's mind. Some of their works were once read as feuilletons, pointing to certain burning problems of society. Time passed and the country underwent radical changes, but numerous poetic texts written on topics of the day have not lost their interest for the reader – though no longer as satire. What allows this poetry to remain relevant is probably its specific irony, pointing not outwards (as irony as an instrument of satire does) but inwards, at a human being who generates societal problems due to his ontological flaws. Thus, irony in these works uses satire as an instrument, as a starting point; under the pretext of criticizing something “here and now,” it goes beyond the topical and aims at the timeless. The poet provides no unshakable ideals to oppose the bleak reality and heal society; in the situation of epistemological doubt, irony becomes philosophical. Satirical irony usually mocks things despised by the author from the position of an onlooker; in the poetry in question, the author puts himself in the midst of the flawed humanity he writes about and draws attention to the cause rather than current consequences. The process of supplanting satirical by philosophical irony can be clearly traced in Genrikh Sapgir's poem “Sonnet On What We Have Not” (“Sonet o tom, chego net”), where the poet brings together the topical and the eternal, taking everyday necessities and political issues of the day to the level of existential questions.