

Title: Translating Boris Poplavsky's Stylistic Transgressions: Differentiating between Surrealist Prose and the Prose of a Surrealist  
Author: John M. Kopper, Dartmouth College

I am more than halfway through an English translation of Boris Poplavsky's novel *Apollon Bezobrazov*, serialized partly in the Parisian *Chisla* in the early 1930s and partly in *Opyty* in New York (1953, 1955), and published as a volume for the first time in St. Petersburg in 1993 by Logos. Early readers focused upon the contents of the novel (Berdiaev, for one, upon its perceived philosophical incoherence), while later readers (Karlinsky, Nabokov) judged it as a unique, but straightforward exercise in Surrealism. More recently, scholars (Livak, Kopper, Menegaldo) have drawn attention to the novel's polemical engagement with Russian émigré writing and with French Surrealism (Breton's *Nadja* and Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris*). Poplavsky's prose balances aspects of Symbolist imagery and vocabulary with the narrative conventions of Surrealist prose.

A translator instinctively looks for an English text that demonstrates an analogous tension between "the styles of two movements." Joyce's *Portrait* and *Ulysses* offer rare examples, but both novels are parodic. Poplavsky deploys Symbolist and Surrealist devices without providing a vantage for the reader to evaluate them. Further, 20<sup>th</sup>-Century English literature does not make the categorization of prose texts by "movements" a salient part of its tradition of reception, and as a result the use of a historical equivalent will mean little to an English reader. Instead, I propose modeling the translation on the texture of Gogol's prose, particularly that of *Shinel'* and some of the *Vechera* stories, where blocks of material, written in varying tonalities, are sandwiched together. This translation decision ensures that the frequently grotesque effect of Poplavsky's art survives.

An open question for me: how to "mark" Poplavsky's styles at the lexical level. For example, he uses repetition to flag his Symbolist discourse, but in transferring the device into English, the translator must be careful to avoid creating either monotony or irony. The first suggests bad writing, the other a critical attitude toward Symbolism which I don't find in Poplavsky.