

Three ways of being a Soviet poet: Vladimir Maiakovskii, Boris Slutskii, and Bella Akhmadulina

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We tend to imagine poets in the Soviet Union as being either obedient ‘artists in uniform’, or heroic figures whose defiance of censorship and Socialist Realism exposes them to persecution. This talk will introduce three poets who, at different stages in the USSR’s history, found their own ways of being a Soviet poet. For Vladimir Maiakovskii, a Futurist, the October Revolution embodied the overthrow of restrictive tradition he sought in his art, and called it ‘my revolution’. Boris Slutskii came of age in the Stalin years, fought in the war, and left a huge legacy of unpublished poetry which charted his response to the catastrophes of the time including the Terror and the Holocaust. Bella Akhmadulina belonged to the generation of the post-Stalin Thaw period, but still had to negotiate demands for politically committed poetry, and managed to do so while creating a poetic persona with links to other cultures and other times.

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Refreshments available from 5:00pm.

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