

New books on semiotics

Two books on interdisciplinary semiotic studies in the space of Balkano-Balto-Slavica were published in Moscow. They present the proceedings of two conferences under the same titles held in 2022 and 2023 at the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow).

Semiotics in the Past and Present. Ed.-in-chief I. A. Sedakova, eds. M. V. Zavyalova, N. V. Zlydneva, A. B. Ippolitova. Moscow: Institute of Slavic Studies, 2023. – 384 p., ill. ISBN 978-5-7576-0488-6 DOI 10.31168/7576-0488-6

The book includes 21 articles on the theory and history of semiotics, linguistics, folklore, mythology, ethnology, literary studies and poetics, history of arts and cinema.

The “Foreword. A View on Semiotics from the 21st Century” by *Maria Zavyalova, Natalia Zlydneva, Irina Sedakova* sheds light on the achievements of the international semiotics with an accent on the works of the Moscow-Tartu school and the publications by the scholars of the Department of Typology and Comparative Linguistics at the Institute of Slavic Studies (Russian Academy of Sciences). The authors describe the major aims of the semiotic project which are coordinated with the centennial jubilee of Jury M. Lotman (2022) and are designed to evaluate the role of the semiotics and its place in the contemporary academic studies.

Sergey Zenkin in his article “Semiosis and mimesis” notes that mimesis quite often serves as a means of communication between people or animals, and it should be compared with other forms of communication, based upon exchange of signs. He revises the very notion of mimesis and suggests that the mimesis of representation (artistic or not) should be replaced by a mimesis of communication between two or more independent subjects. The author outlines the differences between mimetic and semiotic types of communication.

Igor Pilshchikov dedicates his article “‘System’ and structure’ as terms and concepts (Shpet – Tynianov – Jakobson – Lotman)” to the study of the evolution of the corresponding terms as applied to literature and art by the Russian formalists and some of subsequent structuralist theorists from the 1920s to the 1980s. Yuri Tynianov’s, Gustav Shpet’s, Grigorii Vinokur’s and Roman

Jakobson's ideas paved the way for Yuri Lotman's dialectics of system and structure. According to Lotman, a structure (=text) birthed from a system (=language) metamorphoses into a system in itself, consequently giving rise to new structures (=texts).

Svetlana Tolstaya publishes the article "Propp's method and the problem of typology of Slavic mythological characters" in which she discusses the possibility of using the method of Vladimir Propp for studying the structure and history of the Russian fairy tale to the analysis of Slavic folk mythology. She suggests that the function of a mythological character, just as Propp's classification of fairy tales is based on the concept of a function (i.e. action) of a hero, can serve as one of the typologically significant indicators (along with the habitat, time and place of appearance, etc.).

Georgiy Levinton in his article "Notes on Jakobson's epistolary heritage" offers some observations on the two main epistolary corpora of Roman Jakobson. He analyses the letters from Nikolay Trubetsky to Jakobson and correspondence of Jakobson with K. Levi-Strauss. The author comments on the nature of the correspondence, its pragmatics and Jakobson's attitude to the history of science.

Natalia Zlydneva's article "The problem of modality in painting and the heritage of the Moscow-Tartu school" draws on the problems of studying visual art in the Moscow-Tartu semiotic school, as well as the problem of correlation between theoretical views and artistic practice in the Soviet humanities. Based on the analysis of the 1979 article by Yu.K. Lekomtsev (1929 - 1984) "The Process of Abstraction in Visual Art", the conclusion is made about the breakthrough potentials of the semiotic approach of the scientist to the study of the modality of an image. It is shown how Lekomtsev's article reflected the realities of Khrushchev's "thaw" - the perception of contemporary Western art, as well as the experience of the 1920s generation of artists-expressionists.

Dmitry Polyakov in the article "Semiotic essayistics: works of Vladimír Macura on the history of culture" highlights little-known studies of Czech culture in Russia, written by Vladimír Macura (1945-1999), a Czech philologist, cultural historian, translator and writer, author of the books "The Sign of Birth (National Revival as a Type of Culture)", "The Czech Dream" (about the most important Czech cultural constants), "Happy Time" (about the culture of the era of socialism), etc. Even in his early publications Macura demonstrated his passion for the ideas of the Moscow-Tartu semiotic school.

Irina Sedakova dedicated her article “Bulgarian festive March and semiotic models of calendric time” to the complex analyses of unique festive month in the Bulgarian Ritual Year. March has absorbed the models of several calendric systems – the Thracian, ancient Greek, Balkan and Slavic, pre-Christian and Christian ones. Recently some state feasts have been added to this combination and they made the whole calendric picture even more varied. In spite of the complex genesis of the March rituals, the configuration of the fixed and moveable feasts of the Easter cycle, Gregorian and Julian calendars, the holiday system in Bulgaria looks very harmonious. The feast of Forty Martyrs of Sebaste is scrutinized in detail.

Anna Plotnikova, Natalia Golant published the article “The beginning and end of life as a single complex of ideas (Based on ethnolinguistic materials of the beginning of the 21st century)”, in which they explore lexical and ritual-magical parallels between childbirth and funeral-commemorative customs. They have collected data in two archaic regions among the Russian Old Believers in Romania (Dobruja) and the Vlachs (Romanians) in eastern Serbia (the vicinity of Zajecar). The authors also turn to a wider cultural and linguistic background, drawing on material from various Slavic languages (Serbian, Bulgarian, Slovak, etc.), Romanian and, more broadly, from the Indo-European context.

Maria Zavyalova in her article “‘Way of the Rose’ in the incantations of the Balto-Slavic area” denotes the areas of distribution of the charm texts. It is not always easy to trace the paths of plot migration from one local tradition to another. In the case of the “text of the rose”, i.e. the story about the way of a divine character with roses in his hand reveals gaps: among the Slavs it is common only to Belarussians, while in Lithuania it is represented both in the Lithuanian, but also by the Polish tradition.

Inna Shved devotes her article “Semiotics of the house in modern oral stories about the funeral and memorial rites of the Brest region” to the study of the house as a key element in the locative code of the Slavic funeral and commemorative rituals. The narratives recorded in the last two decades Brest region (Belarus) reflect the “spatial picture of the semiosphere” (Yu. Lotman). The correlation of the topography of the rite and the ritual text with the mythological and real space is analyzed, as well as the category of the boundary, through which the semiotic oppositions “one’s own – someone else’s”, “internal – external”, “center – periphery”, “top – bottom”, “living – dead”, etc. are introduced.

T.A. *Mikhailova* wrote her article “Cú Chulainn as Culann’s dog: towards a reconstruction of an archaic mythological motive” starting with the investigation of the episode in which the Irish epic hero got his name Cu Chulainn, i.e. *Culan-the-Smith’s Hound*. In early Ireland, the prefix ‘Cu’ (Hound) was used in names of kings and of heroes, as it is generally considered, to denote warrior status. The author does not fully agree with this straightforward interpretation. She draws attention to the fact that the Irish hero is referred to as not just *Hound*, but as *Smith’s Hound*, so she makes parallels with the Indo-European cult of the smith in general and the “smith myth” in the Irish tradition in particular.

Several articles are dedicated to literary studies: A.V. *Toporova* “Relations between the Living and the Dead in Dante’s Comedy”, J. *Vojvodić* „Semiotics of Chichikov’s way” and N.A. *Fateeva* „Poetry as a self-reproducing system”. Historians also publish articles on various aspects of Medieval and modern times: V.Ja. *Petrukhin* “Rus’ and alien ethno-confessional space in the initial annals” and N.S. *Gusev* “Symbols of ‘own’ and ‘somebody else’s’ in the descriptions of Bulgaria by Russian travelers of the turn of the 19th – 20th centuries on the example of the work of N.A. Epanchin”. Arts history is touched upon by *Liudmila Akimova* “Dog on Durer’s engraving “Melencolia I”, *Inna Merkoulouva*, *Marina Merkoulouva* “About the Semiotics of Passions in the modern Theater Space: Questions for Reflection” and *Denis Viren* “‘The Man from London’ by Béla Tarr: an observer in space”. Last but not least in the book is a memorial essay by *Andrey Toporkov* “Meetings with Yu. M. Lotman (1977–1984)”.

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An essay by *Maxim Makartsev* & *Irina Sedakova* “Moscow Balkan studies and semiotics in 1970–1989 (myth, folklore, ritual)” sheds light on the history of the semiotics in the USSR and Russia in 1970-1990, in one of the centers of the Moscow-Tartu school of semiotics – Institute of Slavic studies, Russian academy of sciences, Moscow. The Institute was the place where the distinguished acad-

emicians Vyach.Vs. Ivanov and V.N. Toporov have been doing their innovative research and made their publications. Their colleagues and younger scholars follow the major paths that have been shown by the distinguished academicians.

Dmitry Polyakov in his paper “‘Living semiotics’ by Venko Andonovski: Between the lexicon and the manifesto” analyzes the ways the semiotic approach is being used in the modern humanitarian field of knowledge, according to the famous Macedonian writer and philologist Venko Andonovski. *Maria Zavyalova* (Moscow) in her essay “To the Question of the snake/serpent mythologeme in the Baltic tradition: Eglè – Queen of Serpents” follows the traditional scheme of semiotic research methods and gives a detailed investigation into a chthonian character which appears in various genres of Baltic folklore. *Oksana Tchoekha* discusses ethnolinguistic issues of the folk terminology and its links to the ritual year in her essay “Months named after festivals in the modern Greek folk calendar”. *Nikita Gusev* dedicated his paper “Youth of Bulgaria and Bulgarians in Russian Journalism at the turn of the 19th – 20th centuries” to the notions of young and old age in the depiction of Bulgaria and shows the polysemic character, positive and negative axiology of these two notions. *Anna Leontyeva* in her paper “Jewelleries of the inhabitants of Sofia in hereditary records of the end of the 17th – beginning of the 18th century: Values and their symbolic character” investigates the Osman texts and describes the values of Christians and Muslims, two neighboring confessions in the Balkans, to show the tolerance in their relations. Cinema studies are an obligatory part of semiotic studies, so *Denis Viren* in his paper „Co-productions in the ‘Eastern Bloc’ cinema and the problem of borders” pays attention to the semiotic values of the borders and the metaphors of Western and Eastern societies back in the times of the socialist block.

Finally, *Nataliya Zlydneva* writes about the “Graphics by Edvard Wiiralt and its parallels: Towards the problem on semiotics of passions in art”. The well-known Estonian artist chooses the ugly features and creatures in the world and gives the audience their visual interpretation. Part of his graphics *The Hell* is used in the design of the cover of the book.

Both books are published in Russian language with resumes in English. They can be downloaded free the site of Institute of Slavic Studies https://inslav.ru/sites/default/files/editions/2023_balcanica_8.pdf; <https://inslav.ru/sites/default/files/editions/2023semiotika.pdf>.

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