

Grigoriĭ Mark. *Sredi veshcheĭ i golosov*. Tenaflly, N.J. Hermitage. 1995. 127 pages. \$9. ISBN 1-55779-075-2.

Grigory Mark's collection of poems, *Sredi veshcheĭ i golosov* (Among Things and Voices), his second, provides yet another example of the effect produced by the combination of conventional rhymed syllabotonic verse with a harrowing postmodernist sense of "the end," of no future, of despair and *taedium vitae*. Leningrad-Petersburg is the locale and subject of most of the poems. It is seen as a torpid necropolis over whose familiar landmarks hover ghosts of its past glory. Or it is seen in a state of impending apocalypse, with clear echoes of Blok and Bely (for example, "Triptikh II"). Or it is simply the locus of dreary prose, in stanzas "muttered like incantations by their not-so-lyrical not-so-hero over an empty vodka glass." However, all this tedium and hopelessness generates occasional intimations of a divine presence and hints at manifestations of the metaphysical.

A recurring theme is the impasse of a Russian poet who is also Jewish. In "Romance with the Devil" the devil makes the drunken poet sign a contract to give Russia another try—rather than emigrate. Mark's image of post-communist Russia is wholeheartedly negative, his satiric presentation of it in the cycle "Stikhi o Tiurkoslavii" (Poems on Turko-Slavs) at times savage.

In several of Mark's poems the word as such becomes the primary generator of poetic conceits, as in the cycle "Svoimi slovami" (In One's Own Words), where clever language games are played. Mark shows off his inventiveness in creating absurd effects, as when he describes the composition of a poem (it happens to be an Elizabethan sonnet!) in terms of a gang of prisoners (words) marched to their work detail by prison guards (rhymes). Order is gradually created from a chaos of hoarse shouts, curses, and barking guard dogs. Altogether, Grigory Mark is clearly a very talented poet who may yet find an authentic voice of his own.

Victor Terras
Brown University