

CALL FOR PAPERS

Poetic Experience and the “Language Experiment” An International Conference on the Occasion of the Walt Whitman Bicentennial 24–25 October 2019

**Lomonosov Moscow State University
Higher School of Economics**

Walt Whitman posed radical challenges to traditional prosody, introducing forms, as well as subject matter, that forever altered American poetry. *Leaves of Grass*—especially the early editions of 1855, 1856, and 1860—exemplifies his profound innovations in poetic language, their major directions to be taken up and developed by several generations of the avant-garde.

Leaves of Grass comprises an artistic exploration of the fluidity, mutability, diversity and equality of the physical-emotional and spiritual in human experience. As such it invites readings from the vantage not only of literary history, but of anthropology, cultural studies, cognitive studies, and other fields, each of which may reveal the work’s experimental nature in new light.

“I sometimes think the *Leaves* is only a language experiment,” Whitman commented in his later years (*American Primer*, viii). Not only writers, but students of Whitman’s poetry honor the poet’s experiment by posing equally experimental questions: What is poetic form? How does poetry affect us when it rejects metrics, rhyme, and stylistic homogeneity, and demonstratively approximates prose? How do readers participate in the creation of poetry’s effect? How, if at all, are the poet’s experiments in and through his native language rendered (or transformed) when translated into other languages? When adapted to new media?

We welcome presentations that address Walt Whitman’s poetry, its reception, comparative studies, translations, and examinations of various attempts at adaptation and reformulation. The range of proposed subjects for discussion includes (but is not limited to) the following:

- the variety of goals, means, and contexts for (re-)reading *Leaves of Grass*—from the philosophical and aesthetic to the therapeutic: what makes Whitman a classic today;
- the self-reflexivity of poetic language in *Leaves of Grass*, its dramatization of the creative process, and the performativity of word and gesture in Whitman’s work;
- investigations of sensory reception as a substratum of aesthetic experience; the dynamism and energy of Whitmanian form; the displacement (or replacement) of metrics by rhythms of the body and breathing;
- the challenge of Whitman’s “untranslatability” and the reception of his legacy in other literary cultures; the history of translations of *Leaves of Grass* into Russian and possible new strategies for retranslation; the creation of modern-day alternatives to canonical renderings in Russian and other languages.

Deadline for the submission of proposals: **15 September 2019**

Submit proposals as well as questions about the conference to: philol.discours@gmail.com

An International Creative Writing Workshop “Song of Myself” in the World Today: The Ethics and Aesthetics of First-Person Discourse 25–26 October 2019

As an extension of the conference preceding it, the workshop proposes as its goals: 1) to awaken new interest in Walt Whitman’s work within the Russian reading public, and 2) to facilitate—with reliance on international experience—the development of creative writing programs within the Russian educational system.