

# A Sparkle of Sea Foam: An Interview with Tatiana Daniliyants

by Katherine E. Young

**[KY] You are a visual artist and filmmaker as well as an award-winning poet (you've won the International Festival of Verse Libre in Russia – twice – as well as the Nosside Prize in Italy and the Catherine the Great medal for achievement in contemporary Russian literature). When did you begin writing poetry? What initially drew you to poetry?**

[TD] I started to write poetry when I was a teenager. Before [that], I studied piano (since I was 6 years old), and when I was 14 years old I started studying mathematics. I believe music greatly influenced my sense of rhythm and mathematics my will to make sense of everything around me and formulate it in words.

**[KY] Tell us a little about your books of poetry in Russian, *Red Noise* (2012), *White* (2006), and *Venetian* (2005). Where are your poems available in English?**

[TD] Well, it's hard to speak about books you've written all your life in a few words... A book for me is always the result of a certain period of my life, so I have to describe my life then. *White* and *Red Noise* are connected in a way: let's say that *Red Noise* is the continuation of my research about life and its meaning. As I said in the foreword in *Red Noise*, "red noise" means to be in the middle of world, in the center of danger, when risk is at a maximum. I call this stage "middle age." But it's important to add that the conditions of "white" and "red" noise are not in opposition for me, because somewhere at the edge of red noise we can see whiteness that celebrates itself. Like a beautiful sparkle of sea foam, it indicates that something happens in the middle, as at the center of sea storm.

The book *Venetian* is a little bit different. It's a short story in poetry, like a diary, about the Venetian and the Russian soul.

Unfortunately, my books have not yet been published in English, but they have been published in Polish, Italian, and recently in French. I've read my poems in English at a few festivals, including the Struga Poetry Evenings in Macedonia, a very important European festival, and at a couple of others. [My poems] have also been published in [Katherine E. Young's] translations in the journal *Faultline* and in the poetry anthology of the very good Serbian festival "Treci Trg." You can also find audio of my poems in Russian, including some of the poems now being published in *The Notre Dame Review*, here: <http://phonodia.unive.it/people/tatiana-daniliyants/>.

**[KY] Russian-language poetry in the 20th and early 21st centuries has covered a lot of territory, from radical experimentation during the Russian Revolution to the current trend toward free verse and spoken word poetry. Where does your work fit in? What poets from the past have most influenced you?**

[TD] This is a very good question. My poetry, I believe, is always "at the borders." I like this position, being at the border. It's not radically experimental, but it's not traditional (if we are talking about classical Russian poetry of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). To me, it's very important to express the spirit of the times... and this spirit, I discover, dictates the form of the poem to me. I like to make a parallel between my poetry and sculpture: you have to be precise. You work with words like you work with certain materials; you have to cut a lot of marble, for example, to get the proper shape.

[As for] poets who influenced me...not so many. Gennady Aygi, for one. A great poet. Can't remember more.

**[KY] Please talk about your affinity for the late Chuvash poet Gennady Aygi, whom English-language readers know -- if they know him at all -- through the translations of his friend, Peter France.**

I know that Peter France translated Aygi and was a friend of Aygi's until the end. With regard to any affinity, I would say it lies more in the similarity of our ways of thinking than in our ways of writing poetry. I met [Aygi] when I was in my early twenties, in the middle of the 1990s. At that age it's very important to meet open-minded people similar to you but with more experience: Aygi was this person for me. I like the sense of freedom in Aygi's poetry and essays, his "poetical brief": the rhythm and flow of his poetry...so natural and organic.

**[KY] You are fluent in both English and Italian. Do you read English- or Italian-language poetry? Are there poets in either group that you particularly admire, either from the past or among contemporary writers? How have they influenced your own poetry?**

[TD] Well, I do read Italian- and English-speaking poets. And I participate in international festivals of poetry, I meet my colleagues. We all unconsciously influence each other, even if we don't notice it, and some of our colleagues inspire us. My recent discovery is Norwegian poet Odeveig Klyve. She does things that move me. And – this is very important to me – she does them in a very compact, concentrated way in terms of form. Magically.

**[KY] Anyone who follows your work knows of your passion for Venice and all things Italian. Tell us a little about your love affair with that city.**

[TD] Well. Venice is the Universe. A territory of beauty and peace. A unique combination. That's what we all need, isn't it?

**[KY] Please talk about how your creative work slips from medium to medium, from the visual and cinematic to the poetic, and how unique that makes you among Russian poets.**

[TD] It's really hard for me to answer this question...I don't know. I'm very open to the world, in a very generic and very detailed way. All my senses are open for my personal understanding of the world. Sometimes ideas come as an image, sometimes as words. Film is always a challenge because it requires money and collaboration with many, many people....

About uniqueness, I don't know. I don't think much about it. In all these fields, I prefer to express myself to the maximum. It's very important to be professional in each field and grow up in each, to develop yourself in each. And I always try to separate these three media from each other, not mix them together. The exception is my "poetry in video" project: two poems realized in video that I made especially for the Nosside Poetry Prize. People said it was interesting. Ok, but, again, I don't really want to mix these things too much. For me, it's very important to be unique in each medium you work in, without using the excuse that you're also involved in another medium. To get the best personal result you can in each medium you work with: this is really important.

**[KY] What are you working on now? What should we expect next from you?**

[TD] Right now I'm working on a new book that will collect my poems from 2012 until now. And a film. It's a documentary about the music of Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. And, as an artist, I'm very involved in an exhibition project for the Moscow Biennale of Modern Art: it's about closeness between people and also about our ability to remember. The inspiration comes from T.S. Eliot's lines "Between the emotion/And the response/Falls the Shadow." That's it.

*Tatiana Daniliyants is a poet, film-maker, and artist. She is the author of three books of poetry in Russian: Red Noise (2012), White (2006), Venetian (2005), and three bilingual books (in Russian and Polish, Russian and Italian, and Russian and French). She has twice won the International Festival of Verse Libre (Russia), as well as the Nosside Prize (Italy). In 2014 she received the Catherine the Great medal for achievement in contemporary Russian literature (St. Petersburg Union of Activists of the Avant-Garde).*

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