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Review Of "A Russian Psyche: The Poetic Mind Of Marina Tsvetaeva" By A.W. Dinega

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Review

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Zamiatin as a Critic," in *To Honor Roman Jakobson*, [The Hague: Mouton, 1967] I, 402–411), Edward J. Brown broadly divides such work into literary history and formalistic analysis. Zamiatin's Hegelian framework and interest in Freudian psychology are also emphasized. The present volume contains Zamiatin's Russian criticism (with the odd omission of his 1918 lecture, "Contemporary Russian Literature"), as well as three Supplements: I. Sketches and Drafts; II. Responses to Questionnaires, Interviews and Opinions; and III. Onufry Zuev's Notebook of Thoughts and Commentaries. The drafts show Zamiatin at his combative best, particularly "On Contemporary Criticism" (May 21, 1926), where on two occasions he crossed swords with a certain Gorbachev (clearly ahead of *his* time) and in which Zamiatin delivered himself of the following pronouncement: "Today's critics are—for the most part—parasitical parasites." Onufry Zuev was a collective effort undertaken in 1924, led by Zamiatin and contributed to by P. Shchegolev, K. Chukovsky, M. Zoshchenko, A. Efros and others, to apparently resurrect a kind of wisecracking, aphorism-spewing, subversive, latter-day Kozma Prutkov.

Zamiatin's critical essays, speeches, article fragments, interviews and occasional pieces speak for themselves, and it is not my intention here to recapitulate their highly informed sweep, personal and civic courage, commitment to artistic freedom, stylistic adroitness, and acute perceptions. While V. A. Keldysh competently surveys Zamiatin's career as a critic in the introductory essay to *la boius'*, the scholarly depth of the book is to be found in the commentaries prepared by A. Iu. Galushkin that form its last sixty pages. Here we discover each critical effort by Zamiatin supplied with its original date of publication, literary journal, newspaper or speech location of first appearance, and additional information regarding subsequent appearance whether in Russia or abroad. The history and context of each publication is given, including the role played by Zamiatin's criticism in the literary-cultural life of Russia in the fateful period of 1914–1931. The swirling political-cultural vortex of the time, devastating to so many lives, is fleshed out through historical excursus and quotations from correspondence called forth by Zamiatin's critical articles from various writers and political figures, and also among such cultural figures, not to mention references to passionate outpourings, mostly of a negative variety, in such public organs as *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*.

la boius' is excellent as far as it goes but falls short in the areas of user-friendliness and completeness. None of the articles is provided with a date attached when first encountered in the text. For that the reader must turn—often hundreds of pages—to the commentaries. Given the plethora of articles, some quite short, it would have been convenient for the footnotes to be placed at the bottom of the page instead of somewhere over the rainbow, *za gorami*, *za lesami*, at the end of the book. To omit all essays on foreign writers, theatre and art criticism, and pedagogical lectures is certainly more than a mote to trouble the mind's eye of any reader. Zamiatin was after all a Russian *and* European man of letters with particular fluency and expertise in French and English. Nonetheless, the volume under review deserves to take its place with *Lisa* and the smoothly translated essay collection by Mirra Ginsburg as indispensable for the study of Zamiatin and twentieth-century Russian literature. I am afraid we must still await the appearance under one cover of a complete non-fiction Evgeny Ivanovich Zamiatin.

Jerome H. Katsell, Independent Scholar

Alyssa W. Dinega. *A Russian Psyche: The Poetic Mind of Marina Tsvetaeva*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002. xvii + 285 pp., \$50.00 (cloth), \$19.95 (paper).

Alyssa Dinega's *A Russian Psyche: The Poetic Mind of Marina Tsvetaeva* is a shapely, well-informed scholarly monograph on the difficult and significant Russian poet. Dinega focuses

on several significant bodies of work addressed to Tsvetaeva's contemporaries, balancing their particulars within the broader context of Russian poetry. The result is unusually rich and well worth reading for anyone with an interest in Russian poetry.

Dinega chooses several major lyric cycles and *poëmy*, examining their meaning and the ways they work to nourish the poet's continuing artistic activity, always Tsvetaeva's first priority. She shows how Tsvetaeva moves through each cycle or long poem by refiguring problematic or literarily resonant aspects of her relationship to her addressee, working to transform that relationship by the end into something both psychologically tenable and supportive of her continuing poetic project. Correspondence with and about Pasternak provides a guiding figure in the myth of Psyche, with Tsvetaeva in the starring role. Besides a few childhood poems, read to good effect in the introduction, Dinega examines poetry addressed to Blok, Akhmatova, Pasternak, Rilke, and Anatoly Shteiger, as well as a selection of Tsvetaeva's theoretical writing; she pays particular attention to the echoes of or comments by Derzhavin, Pushkin and Brodsky.

Along with her "classical rigor" and fierce intelligence, Tsvetaeva is an unusually self-aware writer. Dinega uses Tsvetaeva's own assessments of her work and its meaning in order to build on them, adding a great deal of subtle reading and provocative interpretation to the literature on Tsvetaeva, in particular a serious consideration of the moral questions Tsvetaeva broaches in "Art in the Light of Conscience" and other theoretical essays. Dinega's admiration for Tsvetaeva's achievements complements her clear-eyed and even sharp assessments of the typical extremity of Tsvetaeva's results. About the cycle "Proveda" and its ultimate depiction of Tsvetaeva's relationship to Pasternak, Dinega writes: "This is a newly self-reliant, almost hermetic (or, rather, masturbatory) conception of poetic inspiration: Pasternak is a mere stimulus or occasion for Tsvetaeva's own auto-inducement of her inspirational delirium, rather than her poetry's immediate, active cause" (118). Later, "Her letters to Shteiger are a kind of charade, enabling her to summon the creative will to eke out just a few more poems" (192). This honesty, distinct from the catty tone of some earlier scholars and memoirists, makes the book refreshing and sometimes troubling as well as informative.

Although the title does not mention it, gender is a crucial category in *A Russian Psyche*: "There is an axiomatic disjunction between the two essences—feminine and poetic—that define her identity that she seems to have felt intuitively from the earliest age. It is precisely her gender that forces a wedge between the demands of poetry and the demands of life" (4). Gender, especially as constructed in the Russian fin-de-siècle, makes Tsvetaeva an outsider to literature before she ever writes a word, hence her project as Dinega describes it: "to inject herself into the literary tradition that excludes her, through a poetic transformation of its mythological forms and structures" (6). Dinega chooses not to begin the structuring sequence of Other Poets with Sofia Parnok, the first poet to whom Tsvetaeva wrote a cycle, albeit one composed over many months. Here perhaps she should have distrusted Tsvetaeva's presentation (or, as Diana Burgin argues, telling lack of presentation) of Parnok's importance in her life and poetic development. An analysis of "Podruga" might have expanded her approach to the 1916 cycles to Blok and Akhmatova, as well as others. As it stands, "gender" here means the gender of the poet herself, rather than of her addressees. Dinega taps only slightly the rich theoretical literature on gender, mainly as she outlines theories of gender current in the early twentieth century; her notes nod briefly to theory, but tend to leave it behind once serious reading begins. Although this will certainly make the study more appealing to some readers, at times it might limit the scope of Dinega's interpretations both within the Russian poetic tradition and in a broader, comparative dimension.

Dinega's writing is rich and flexible, with only occasional moments of stylistic excess. On the whole, she writes with great generosity as both a reader and a scholar: never retreating into distance or dry abstraction, she is willing to show not only the gleam of her poet's genius, but also the ways Tsvetaeva touches and inspires her. If a few of her interpretations are

personal or even idiosyncratic, they are always intensely felt and poetically arguable. All of Dinega's responsible attention to Tsvetaeva's manipulation of cultural and mythological topoi still comes in second to this powerful connection, which gives her a particular qualification for examining Tsvetaeva's own links and conversations with other poets. It feels like a very Russian way of reading, attuned to a poet's spiritual features and moral example, to what poetry means for the reader's life.

The volume's production is of very high quality, with meticulous Cyrillic passages and scrupulous translations of verse by Dinega herself. Only a few lapses are at all worth mention: the verb "vozrashchu" is misread as "vozvrashchu" (88), with a corresponding translation; she gives "poju" only as "sing" without the additional possible meaning, strongly motivated by other images in the poem, of "give to drink" (182 and 274, n56). The scholarly apparatus is thorough and valuable — all interpretive flights rest on detailed knowledge and careful analysis.

In a few cases this reader would have like to see Dinega reach farther — particularly in the area of theory — but trying to include everything would eventually make a book into an encyclopedia. *A Russian Psyche* is a substantial, well-presented contribution to scholarship on Tsvetaeva, and a deeply felt, thought-provoking read for anyone who is passionate about Russian literature and culture.

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Susanna Witt. *Creating Creation: Readings of Pasternak's Doktor Zhivago*. Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis. Stockholm Studies in Russian Literature, 33. Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell International, 2000. 157 pp. Paper.

In her thoughtful and well-argued monograph, Susanna Witt explores a variety of the ways in which *Doktor Zhivago* itself both describes the process of artistic creation and contains echoes of certain works with which it enters into a kind of dialogue. Readers of Pasternak's poetry and early prose will recall many passages (and entire works) where the subject is the creative impulse; the guiding notion for this study is not only that the self-reflective passages in *Doktor Zhivago* provide keys to the inner mechanism of the novel, but that the work as a whole belongs to a genre that Roman Timenchik, in an article on Akhmatova, has called *avtometaopisanie*: texts that both refer to themselves and describe techniques behind their composition.

The volume's chief contribution to our understanding of the novel appears in the close readings of individual passages that highlight themes lurking just beneath the surface of the text. For instance, the second chapter opens with a comment on the ambiguity of the verb *pisat'*, with its dual meanings of "to write" and "to paint," and then goes on to examine passages in the novel that ostensibly deal with Zhivago's writing but that also contain direct or oblique references to painting. The first description of the young Zhivago's literary activities (in the second section of Part 2) talks of his dream that involves creating a book that would contain all the most striking things he had thought about or seen. Since Zhivago is still too young for such a book, he writes poems, which are compared to the sketches an artist "would paint" (*pisal by*) during his entire life in preparation for a major work. Witt notes here a likely reference to the painter Aleksandr Ivanov and his famous *Appearance of Christ to the People* (31), and she then goes on to examine other quotations in which writing is linked with painting, often by the verb *pisat'* or by references to shades and colors. The series of careful analyses leads to some fine general observations about the effacing of boundaries between the arts in the novel and about the manner in which the blending of writing and painting (*zhivopis'*, or, literally, "life writing") underscores a specific link between creativity and the affirmation of life.