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Review Of "Reading Russian Fortunes: Print Culture, Gender And Divination In Russia From 1765" By F. Wigzell

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Review

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name, a mention of this factory in Maiakovskii's poetry, the factory's pre-revolutionary name, and a general review of the hammer and sickle image with reference to Briusov's poetry, followed by a paragraph on the device of listing stops (каталогизирование остановок) in the Old Testament and the works of Sterne, Radishchev, Karamzin, and Gogol' (32).

In his discussion of historical figures mentioned by Erofeev, Vlasov goes well beyond information that could be found in any reference work by describing how these figures were perceived in the Soviet Union and by the Soviet government. His entry on Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir (178–179) quotes five official and non-official sources at length, which might seem to be an excessive amount, but is nevertheless information that could expose new shades of meaning to Erofeev's use of a particular quote or name. There are some cases in which it is unlikely that the text or author discussed had any influence on *Moskva-Petushki*, but even when Vlasov digresses “для особо пытливых и любопытных” the result is enjoyable and thought-provoking, as in his comparison of the “revolution” led by Venichka and his friends to Woody Allen's 1971 film *Bananas* (216–217). Only after contemplating the wide range of sources in which Vlasov sees parallels to Erofeev's work and the Erofeev-esque tone in which he writes (“Вообще-то ерофеевская поэма удивительно мультимедийна [прекрасно сказано: «удивительно мультимедийна!»]) (iii) does the reader come to understand Vlasov's insistence that this book is not a “Спутник читателя” but a “Спутник писателя” written for a future “Erofeev-2” (i–ii). *Бессмертная поэма Венедикта Ерофеева* is much more than a listing of citations used by Erofeev; it is itself an intertextual work that on all levels reveals not only from what the author composed *Moskva-Petushki* but also how Erofeev wove these pieces into a text.

It is inevitable that errors creep into such an ambitious work, for example on page 150 where the name of the heroine of Turgenev's «Первая любовь» is given as Zinaida Zaikina (or is this another example for Erofeev-2?). Many readers will find the small font size distracting; together with the lack of white space on each page it adds to the impression of the book being packed with information but also will cause headaches for some readers. Other welcome addition to the next edition (the present one is “издание первое, исправленное и сокращенное”) would be a larger introductory essay that includes information on Erofeev's life and works and the critical reception of *Moskva-Petushki* and a theme index to complement the existing name index.

Бессмертная поэма Венедикта Ерофеева is suggested reading for those studying questions of intertextuality in modern Russian literature. Due to its many insights into the Soviet Union of the time when Erofeev was writing *Moskva-Petushki* (the late 1960's), it will be enjoyable reading for those interested in Soviet culture. It will be mandatory reading for Erofeev specialists because of its large bibliography (updated regularly at <<http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/Writer/E/ErofeevV.html>>) and because it is the most comprehensive investigation of Erofeev's intertextuality to date.

Jason Merrill, *Drew University*

Faith Wigzell. *Reading Russian Fortunes: Print Culture, Gender and Divination in Russia from 1765*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Notes, bibliography, index. 250 pp., \$64.95 (cloth).

Faith Wigzell's *Reading Russian Fortunes* reveals the depth and implications of a topic that may at first seem surprising. Fortune telling and the texts that purported to teach it were stigmatized by most journalists and writers in the imperial period, and banned from all but the most marginal public discourse under the Soviets. The mutability of the fortune-telling guides themselves, often abbreviated, rewritten, or pirated, makes both texts and their users difficult

to trace. Wigzell's thorough and detailed presentation required an impressive amount of research in libraries and archives and presents information that is substantially new. The book has obvious implications for any study of Russian literature, history or culture.

To integrate this mass of information, Wigzell approaches it from several angles: history, sociology, economic, literary, relationship to oral culture, and to the gender of purchaser, user, and realms of discourse. While gender is a central topic, and women's studies offers a model of interdisciplinary focus, all these factors remain present throughout the study. Wigzell traces the history and contents of printed guides to fortune-telling in Russia, starting with their arrival via Poland and Western Europe in the 18th century and the methods or symbols inherited from classical Greek or later sources. The status of the fortune-telling books fluctuated over time; at first even representatives of high culture, themselves newly literate, purchased the books with naive appreciation. As Enlightenment ideas spread, official discourse began to treat the books with scorn, and their marketing was directed more and more at women, their social and divinatory project coded as feminine. Regardless of the private behavior of Russians of all classes, this official scorn continued through the end of the Soviet period, occasionally broken by Romantic or Symbolist interest in the occult in general and the potential of fortune-telling as a plot-generating engine in particular. Wigzell is always aware that the printed record might not fully reflect the actual practices of divination — by necessity it offers mostly prejudiced reference to fortune-tellers who are disapproved of, rather than neutral or even reasonably thorough ethnographic reports.

As Wigzell demonstrates, the fortune-telling books, and the widely popular dreambooks in particular, enjoyed considerable freedom of form and content precisely because they were not taken seriously. For most of the Imperial period they were much less likely to suffer censorship than other writings. The popularity of certain editions rose and fell, but there were many editions, and high-culture presses might issue fortune-telling books to subsidize other projects. The range of size and price suggests that all economic classes purchased the books; the briefest and simplest publications help chart the spread of literacy and urban popular culture in the Russian countryside in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Some techniques the books described took hold, replacing or reinforcing folk traditions, while others, such as astrology, appealed mainly to a small elite. Even when a new printed dreambook could move seamlessly into an existing practice of domestic recitation of dreams over breakfast for granny to interpret, the printed word claimed and introduced new authority. Wigzell notes the odd dichotomy of how the books present their topic: fortune telling is an innocent amusement and entertainment, but advertised as genuine and dependable. Various editions cite impressive lists of names and authors, though the identities of the authors and the texts are amazingly mutable. Martyn Zadeka, familiar from literature as Tat'iana's inseparable bedfellow, undergoes a fascinating evolution, from an "old man" in Switzerland offering largely political predictions into a primary authority on dream interpretation in Russia. In almost all cases of putative authorship, men are the well-advertised charlatans, while women remain the biggest consumers of the texts, and also the denigrated continuers of fortune-telling traditions in the written records — from reading coffee-grounds to shuffling cards and offering dream interpretation.

Wigzell covers these themes with admirable imagination, subtlety, and dry humor, never treating her topic or its adherents with disrespect and never taking it too seriously. She devotes special attention to dreambooks — a genre whose intended use, seeking the meaning of an item one dreamed of, makes it unlikely that one would ever read the book from cover to cover. Wigzell treats each example with proper attention, discussing which are importations from other cultures (camels, pineapples) and which might be native additions. Recurring comparisons to contemporaneous fortune-telling literature and practice in Britain, though interesting, might profitably have been replaced by references less geographically or culturally distant from Russia.

Because of its very originality, at times *Reading Russian Fortunes* offers a mass of informa-

tion from which many things can be inferred but fewer actually concluded. Written records allow Wigzell to list and describe the editions appearing or publishers active in year X, but she is unable to analyze the use of that edition by a particular individual or community. The very sociological approach that gives the study its broad value and suggestive power tends to blur its conclusions. Writing on a sociological basis, she cannot by definition be as decisive as Pushkin describing his invented Tat'iana — or himself reacting to encounters with monks or cats, or the fortune-teller's prediction about his own death. The fortune told by beans, cards or a dream loses clarity when combined with a host of other fortunes or viewed in light of society's opinions of the activity or its practitioners in general. For this reason, Wigzell's discoveries may be of particular value when applied to individual cases or opinions in memoirs or literature.

Combining archival research with the disciplinary tools of literary study, folklore, and the study of popular culture, this is an exemplary work of investigative and interpretive scholarship. Like many topics that were once taboo or merely "uninteresting," fortune telling reveals all kinds of unexpected aspects in Russian and Soviet culture, gender relations, and discursive history. Wigzell provides a responsible, entertaining and very informative treatment of the topic, and *Reading Russian Fortunes* is highly recommended to a broad range of educated readers.

Sibelan Forrester, Swarthmore College

Aileen M. Kelly. *Toward Another Shore: Russian Thinkers Between Necessity and Chance*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998. 400pp., \$35.00 (cloth).

Aileen Kelly is already well known to Slavists for her valuable book on Bakunin (1982) and for a series of challenging articles on Russian intellectual history. Many of the articles have appeared in professional organs, but quite a few have been addressed to a wider public, mostly via the *New York Review of Books*. Kelly has now assembled some seventeen of these articles under the Herzen-inspired title *Toward Another Shore*. Moreover, she informs us that a second collection of her articles is due to be published shortly, with a title offering yet another variant on the durable riparian metaphor, *Views from Another Shore: Essays on Herzen, Chekhov and Bakhtin*. If there is ever to be a third "shore" collection, perhaps it could be called after Pushkin, "Поздравим/Друг друга с берегом, Ура!"

Aleksandr Herzen, who originally gazed *From the Other Shore* (1851), is the chief hero of Kelly's book, a proponent of ideas that she regards not only as meritorious in their own time, but even as useful to us today, floundering as we are in a postmodern slough of lost illusions and dead gods. A more recent hero for Kelly, one less frequently mentioned but nevertheless a palpable presence, is the late Sir Isaiah Berlin, whose moral vision, she says, "has been the constant standard by which I have measured [Russian thinkers'] failings and their strengths" (p. xi).

Kelly is concerned to salvage what she considers a widely misperceived part of the Russian heritage and especially to refute the stereotype that condemns the whole Russian intelligentsia as fundamentally "totalitarian" in mentality, guilty of choosing as their ideal Čerňyševskij's Raxmetov, the "professional revolutionary," totally dedicated to the cause of bringing down the autocracy, an event that was sure to usher in a new, perfect era of happiness. This noble goal was believed to justify any means needed to attain it; the moral balance for any "crimes" committed now would be righted by the glories of the future.

Kelly is at pains to show that this totalitarian idol was by no means so universally worshipped as has been assumed. One of her principal "totalitarian" opponents is the late