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Review Of "Finding The Middle Ground: Krestovskii, Tur, And The Power Of Ambivalence In Nineteenth-Century Russian Women's Prose" By J.M. Gheith

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Review

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and in the context of his intellectual and poetic development. One of the most original discussions in this study is the examination of Pushkin's prefaces to the play as he prepared it for publication (chapter 2), which are a kind of polemic with Victor Hugo and his statements about theater surrounding *Hernani*. This is a new and extremely useful analysis of Pushkin's approach to theater. Another strength in this book is Clayton's attempt to place the play in the context of Pushkin's work as a whole: the figures of the Pretender and Boris Godunov are examined as images of monarchy and juxtaposed with Pushkin's various treatments of Napoleon, Alexander I and Peter the Great (chapter 3). Clayton usefully addresses the difficulties readers face when they recognize characters, tropes and biographical details sliding from one work or character to another: he proposes a process of "overprinting" (81 ff.) that accounts for Pushkin's patterns and layering of characteristics, both within the play and between the play and other works. In chapter 5 Clayton discusses the *narod* and miracle (*chudo*) in the context of medieval Muscovy and its manifestations in Pushkin's play. He avoids interpreting the *narod* as either positive or negative; they are simply the subjects whose favor the monarch must win if he is to govern the country. The discussion in chapter 6 of how to approach Pushkin's patterns of imagery and word roots, like that of "overprinting," is useful for readers who continually notice these patterns and yet have difficulty accounting for them (123 ff.). In this chapter Clayton examines the motif of horse and rider in the play and connects it to the figure of St. George and his role in Russian culture. In chapter 7 Clayton analyzes the parallel motifs of "silence and speaking" and "seeing and blindness" against the iconic tradition in Russia. In both these chapters the reader is offered many examples from the text to support Clayton's reading of the centrality of these motifs and the frequency with which these linguistic elements occur. The final chapter, "Poet and Tsar," sums up the metapoetic reading that has guided to some extent the previous chapters: the play is a poem, it is about poetry, and it is about Pushkin himself. Many others have noticed the lyric force and poetic themes of the play and its characters (especially Dimitry), but Clayton is the first to foreground them in such a comprehensive way.

The book as a whole conveys the sense of excitement of discovery as Clayton gets closer to a "complete" image of Pushkin; it is a work of both deep thought and reader's intuition. Of course, one may object that Clayton stretches his readings too much—if all the linguistic cues he identifies in chapters 6 and 7 were consciously intended by Pushkin, then the poet could hardly have expected his readers or audience to pick up on them. Also, Clayton's assertion that Pushkin is becoming increasingly more conservative politically at the time of the play's publication causes him to view the Pretender in too negative a light, only condemning him for his "chameleon-like" qualities rather than admiring his improvisatory skills. (Although he shares these qualities with Napoleon, the Pretender is more positive, more aligned, in fact, with the image of the poet.) To say categorically that "the play *Boris Godunov* is ideologically conservative and defends the values of autocracy" (173) is to make too clear a reading of a text that resists a direct message. Still, for sheer force of detail and subtlety of analysis this book will be a source of pleasure and inspiration to Pushkinists in years to come.

Catherine O'Neil, University of Denver

Jehanne M. Gheith. *Finding the Middle Ground: Krestovskii, Tur, and the Power of Ambivalence in Nineteenth-Century Russian Women's Prose*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2004. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xx + 302 pp. \$89.95 (cloth).

Feminist literary scholarship, in Russian Studies as in other areas, tends to take several possible approaches: recovery and presentation of neglected works by women; critical examination of the canon-building which excludes popular works by women from a developing tradition; de-

scriptive or theoretical analysis of the special characteristics of women's writing; revision of the history of literature once works by women are reintroduced and approached with greater understanding. Jehanne Gheith's *Finding the Middle Ground* does all these things, focusing on the authors who published under the pseudonyms Evgenia Tur and V. Krestovskiy, and offers a great number of thought-provoking and clearly formulated observations.

Nineteenth-century realist fiction is still the best-known part of Russian literature for western readers. It also happens to be the period and genre in which women were supposed to have written nothing worthy of discussion or inclusion in the survey courses that introduce the canon to new readers. Gheith's introduction points out the continuing neglect of nineteenth-century women prose writers, an aftereffect of Soviet versions of literary development rooted in Vissarion Belinsky's often misogynistic criticism. Gheith stresses that late imperial Russian intelligentsia priorities excluded many of the topics women knew best and most often wrote about. "Women's writings were characterized as long-winded, emotional, sentimental, and overly detailed, focusing only on love and family relations as opposed to matters that had social significance; their work was inherently inferior, inherently trivial" (22). Topics like children's upbringing and education or women's lives were "written out" of the history of discussion of the polity or formation of public opinion. Women were not the only losers in the polarization of literary debate, reduction to Slavophile versus Westernizer and the like; Gheith points out that avoiding extremes could mean later obscurity for male authors, such as Vasily Vonliarliarsky. Reconsidering the usual periodization, so that the 1830s and 1850s are as worthy of comparison and contrast as the 1840s and 1860s, also works to bring new authors and concerns out of the shadows. Gheith stresses the literary milieu, including connections forged by critical discourse and literary commerce, as well as recent critical and theoretical scholarship, all firmly grounded in real texts and documentary evidence.

Gheith's chapters alternate between Tur and Krestovskiy, often referring to other women (and men) writers of the time. Gheith chose Tur (Elizaveta Vasil'evna Salhiias de Tournemir, née Sukhovo-Kobylyina) and Krestovskiy (Nadezhda Dmitrievna Khvoshchinskaia), she writes, "to show something of the scope of Russian women's fiction and criticism in the nineteenth century" (4). Tur wrote more as women were "supposed to"—her fiction's sentimental intensity and melodramatic or fairy-tale elements suggest the dreaded "*zhenskaia proza*," and her turn later in life to religious and children's writing damned her for Soviet critics. Given Tur's lasting popularity with many kinds of female readers, Gheith suggests, her fiction must have enabled ways of reading that women found inspiring or relieving, empowering in spite of elements that could be judged as silly or unrealistic. Tur's fiction and criticism persistently valorize and advance the importance and social purpose of women's writing. She also pointed out, at times, that she was writing in order to feed her children and did not have the luxury of time for polishing and revision. Gheith admires Tur but also examines the causes and effects of the limitations of the author's work. She does not make fun of or speak deprecatingly of her own fondness for Tur, as has sometimes happened in scholarship on declassée women writers. Detailed examination of Tur's role in the literary process of her time, including her interactions with Ivan Turgenev and Fyodor Dostoevskiy, brings out the value of her works and career and offers a deeper, more nuanced understanding of Russian literature and society in the mid nineteenth century.

Khvoshchinskaia's use of the masculine pseudonym V. Krestovskiy in prose fiction (she published poetry under her own name) expressed her ambitions for reception of her work and apparently freed her for many years from consideration as a "female woman author" [*zhenshchina-pisatel'nitsa*]. Nonetheless, her opus reveals revisionist tendencies as radical as Tur's and often emphasizes the "forgotten" characters of old maids and seminarians. Gheith studies the implications of the pseudonym, not only in letting the author pass as a male writer (when eventually the secret came out, some critics began to refer to her as "Krestovskaia") and earn more per printer's sheet in the 1870s than any Russian authors except Turgenev and Tolstoy, but also in letting her deflect attention from her own biography and personal life. The careful lack

of a traditional authorial presence may help to explain Krestovsky's eventual loss of popularity in a climate that had such reverence for the writer's own life.

Gheith is willing to ask all kinds of questions, including some that an undergraduate student might ask; some of these questions, such as the significance of Krestovsky's epistolary romance with a female admirer (56-58), are thoroughly explored but not definitively answered. One result of this approach is that this book invites future readers and scholars to pursue the questions it raises further, rather than pretending to have said the last word on the subject.

Some work by the writers highlighted here is now available in English translation: Tur's *Antonina*, translated by Michael Katz (Northwestern UP, 1996, with an introduction by Gheith), and Khvoshchinskaia's *Boarding School Girl*, translated by Karen Rosneck (Northwestern UP, 2000)—the (more easily pronounced) pseudonym Krestovsky is not used, raising the question of Krestovsky's difference from George Sand, George Eliot, or, for that matter, Evgenia Tur. *Finding the Middle Ground* is well written, informative, thoughtful and provocative, valuable not just for teachers who will assign these texts but for any scholar or serious admirer of Russian literature or women's writing.

Sibelan Forrester, Swarthmore College

Vladimir Tsurikov, ed. *A. S. Khomiakov: Poet, Philosopher, Theologian*. Readings in Russian Religious Culture, vol. 2. Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Seminary Press, 2004. 204 pp. Paper.

Nicolas Zernov once wrote that Aleksei Khomiakov "was not tall, but looked taller than he was" (*Three Russian Prophets*, S.C.M. Press, 1944). Indeed, Khomiakov's stature, 200 years after his birth, is secure. The man, and the movement—Slavophilism—he founded, have been the subject of many recent books in Russia. As the country prepares to celebrate its new Day of National Unity on November 4, the urge to take Khomiakov's measure seems telling. He was the first to present systematically the problem of Russia and the West, a problem that the rocky course of democratic reform has put in the political spotlight. Liberals and conservatives alike invoke the early twentieth-century Slavophile thinker Ivan Ilyin to answer their critics; Ilyin held that only a liberal dictatorship would suit Russia's special historical and spiritual experience. He has been claimed by the extreme right-wing politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the Communist Party leader Gennady Ziuganov, and, most recently, President Vladimir Putin, who quoted Ilyin on state power in this year's address to the Federal Assembly. The Day of National Unity, which is championed by the Patriarch, marks the date of the end of the so-called Time of Troubles, a period of intervention by foreign powers and a favorite patriotic theme of Slavophile dramatists, including Konstantin Aksakov (*The Liberation of Moscow in 1612*) and Khomiakov (*Dmitry the Pretender*). The present volume, the product of a Khomiakov bicentennial conference at the Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary, does not offer itself as a corrective to nationalistic interpretations of Slavophilism; however, it helps us recover Slavophilism as a real idea, an ecclesiology, historiosophy, and aesthetic, not a slogan. The contributors, theologians and scholars of religion, philosophy, and Russian literature, explore the ideology of Slavophilism (the first ideology, stated Nikolai Berdiaev, that Russia could call its own) as expressed by Khomiakov, with whom Russian religious philosophy really begins.

Drawing on biographies and reminiscences, Archimandrite Luke (Murianka) makes a strong case for the reality of Khomiakov's faith; Khomiakov, he explains, "lived in the Church," and his profound sense of belonging was the source of his idea of the Church as the free communion of all. Fr. Luke's characterization of Khomiakov as a traditional "praying theologian" is apt, but that is not to say he was not also a man of his time. In his fine article "The Modernity of Khomiakov,"