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Review: Julie A. Buckler, Mapping St. Petersburg: Imperial Text and Cityshape

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ters appeared to be going nowhere; these social impediments needed to be laughed off—and yet in the process were simply underscored.

Moving closer to the present, Graham's overview of anecdotes is tremendously valuable in removing oral creativity from erstwhile, emblematic research upon predominantly political, Jewish, or "new Russian" yarns. In total, all these articles serve to complicate and destabilize a great deal. Their extension of duality into something ineffably "grace-ful" from endless, aimless inversion is a direct parallel to some recent key gestures by Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek. Continental culturology has of late embodied the willful volte-face hinted at by Milne's volume and done so by moving beyond the dual or the political. These movements do not subvert but *embrace* and extend sociocultural dualities—to the point of endless inclusion or *self-canceling* inversions, as Vetlovskaia suggests.

This witty drive emerging via and beyond restrictive or oppositional tenets comes in part from the fact that any term, "brought to its extreme—that is, fully actualized—changes into the next; [for example] an [earthly] object which is *thoroughly* beautiful is no longer merely beautiful, it is sublime" (Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies,* 1997, 218). A universalized category can no longer be an isolated, exclusive, or exclusionary set; it is everywhere and everything. Total employment of *all* an ideology applies to, will by implication touch upon its opposite, too. Vetlovskaia's Pushkinian inversions and mockery of obsession go on and on . . . until nothing is truly left.

On that rather imposing note, we can see why, in her introduction, Lesley Milne leans on Howard Jacobson's assertion—once more via an intermediary (Slava Polunin)—that Russian humor is driven by *compassion;* not by the desire to subvert or invert (once), but to embrace something that is never really there. It sounds like a huge, self-congratulatory cliché from Polunin, but it in fact underlines what might be the most useful and insightful book on Russian humor for a decade. (Shame there is no index, though.)

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Mapping St. Petersburg: Imperial Text and Cityshape. By Julie A. Buckler. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. xiv, 364 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. $35.00, hard bound.

In *Mapping St. Petersburg,* Julie A. Buckler sets out to treat St. Petersburg "in terms of a cultural network that cannot be reduced to a single textual structure, as a body of texts that collectively provides a structural analogue for the material city, and not merely an artistic refraction of it" (5). In pursuing this aim, Buckler accentuates what she calls the "underdocumented middle ground of St. Petersburg" (5). The "middle" encompasses not only the architecture of the middle class, as opposed to the palaces and slums that are foregrounded in the conventional image of St. Petersburg, but also "middling" writers whose place in the literary history of St. Petersburg has been eclipsed by the seminal works of Aleksandr Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol′, and Fedor Dostoevskii. Buckler's study is impressively researched, and the reader will find here many thought-provoking insights as well as the names of forgotten and half-forgotten writers who contributed to the Petersburg Text from the eighteenth century to the present. For those whose major interest remains focused on the rich texts about St. Petersburg by the "big three," Buckler's account still has much to offer in terms of filling out the urban and literary contexts within which those writers worked. In particular, chapter 4, which deals with the genesis and circulation of urban legends, provides an illuminating angle on such works as "The Overcoat" and "The Lonely Cottage on Vasilievskii Island." The other primarily literary chapters deal with eclecticism (chapter 2), guidebooks to the city (chapter 3), and the accounts of provincial visitors (chapter 6).

Three chapters deal extensively with architecture and urbanism: chapter 1, which focuses on eclecticism in public buildings and apartment houses; chapter 5, which treats outlying palace-parks, dachas, slums, and industrial areas; and chapter 7, which discusses cemeteries and their reordering over time, floods, fires, place names, and monuments, as

part of the process of constructing local collective memory. These chapters treat types of buildings and landscapes and discuss textual responses to these urban environs. The first chapter deals with eclecticism in architecture as analogous to trends in literature. Within this chapter, the most important part for the book's arguments is the discussion of St. Petersburg's apartment houses, especially their stylistically eclectic facades, mostly from 1830 to 1890. Ideally one would like to know where the illustrated examples fit in the development of their districts, how their floor plans and interiors relate to their range of occupants, and, perhaps most important, how St. Petersburg apartments are similar to and different from nineteenth-century apartments in Moscow and European capitals. It would be useful if photographic captions included dates, architects, and specific locations, and if figures were referenced in the text. Chapters 5 and 7 are engaging accounts of widely varied types of urban environs and events. As Buckler acknowledges, almost all of these have parallels in Moscow and the west, so it might have helped to strengthen the book's focus if there had been more analysis that highlighted what about each of these urban phenomena was or was not distinctly characteristic of St. Petersburg. Throughout the book, the theme of mapping is explored and maps are reproduced. One would like to learn who produced them for what audiences, and what their cartographic detail stresses. Yet the book's encyclopedic range greatly expands our sense of the urban totality of St. Petersburg and effectively demythologizes its architectural history as a canon of imperial monuments.

The thematic ordering of Buckler's chapters has its advantages and disadvantages. Her assiduous gathering of seemingly every text written on a given topic is truly awe-inspiring, but, within chapter sections, the accumulation of summaries of long-forgotten feuilletons and stories could use a stronger analytical framework. The conclusion, rather than tying together or summing up the disparate chapters, moves on to a new topic, the centenary celebrations of St. Petersburg's founding in 1803, 1903, and especially 2003.

In the introduction, Buckler offers "to interrogate the myth of Petersburg's uniqueness" by showing that many of the phenomena associated with it "have their counterparts in London, Paris, Berlin, Prague, Budapest, and New York" (25). Yet in the body of the text, amid discussion of Petersburg phenomena that have equivalents in other cities, one wishes for more explicit comparisons to these other cities, particularly Moscow. By its nearly exclusive focus on St. Petersburg, Buckler's discussion seems to participate in "the myth of Petersburg's uniqueness," even as she meticulously and thoroughly demonstrates that in many ways, this city has much in common with others.

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Finding the Middle Ground: Krestovskii, Tur, and the Power of Ambivalence in Nineteenth-Century Russian Women's Prose. By Jehanne M Gheith. Studies in Russian Literature and Theory. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2004. xx, 302 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. $89.95, hard bound.

It is almost twenty years since the publication of Barbara Heldt's *Terrible Perfection* (1987) launched "Feminist Slavistics." This volume also initiated the rediscovery of those Russian women writers who had been "hidden from history." Since then huge strides have been taken, even if the pace of rediscovery has slackened recently, partly due perhaps to the reintegration of women's studies into the mainstream. Against this changing backdrop, Jehanne M Gheith's volume, the first lengthy study of Evgeniia Tur and Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaia (the Krestovskii of the title), is to be warmly welcomed.

Gheith's volume is simply ordered. After the usual preliminaries, there are three chapters each on the two writers, detailing their biographies, their literary criticism, and a perhaps too brief account of their contributions to Russian literature around the middle of the last century. In her "Concluding Possibilities," Gheith rightly notes that, "In any serious study there are at least as many questions raised as there are answers discovered" (189), and then attempts to lay out a prospectus for future work. Rigorously researched and written in a most accessible style, the book is also furnished with extensive notes and