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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 Vetlouksaia 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. Vetlouksaia’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 cliche 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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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

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