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Rosalind Marsh, ed. *Women and Russian Culture: Projections and Self-Perceptions.* Studies in Slavic Literature, Culture, and Society. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1998. xix + 295 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57181-913-0.

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A Potpourri of Perspectives on Women

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In her essay included in the theory section of this collection, Rosalind Marsh argues that it is desirable "to confront the Russian literary canon as a rich source of motifs and myths about the two sexes, not in order to label and dismiss even the most misogynistic literary classics, but to apprehend them in all their human dimensions" (p. 32). The twenty essays comprising this edition do precisely that. Ranging from discussions and analyses of Russian women writers and their work, to the images of women presented in Russian literature, to the impact of art and literature on the lives of Russian women, the essays together offer a veritable potpourri of perspectives on Russian culture and women.

The collection opens with two provocative contributions from the theoretical perspective. In her essay, Marsh argues passionately that "it is still vital to pursue the feminist critique of Russian literature." Responding to a compilation of essays edited by Sonia Stephan Hoisington (*A Plot of Her Own*, 1995), Marsh contends that such a "revisionist" approach to the study of female characters in Russian fiction is premature "when the feminist critique is still in a relatively early stage in the West, and is practiced so little within Russia itself" (p. 3). Marsh's discussion is broad ranging, complex and insightful. Her conclusion that Russian literature (I would say all literature) is "a collection of great texts…which have been deeply structured by sexist ideologies" is solid (p. 32). Yet as she herself demonstrates, the feminist critique itself is not static–nor should it be–and I am inclined to think that revisionism is never premature, but part of a desirable intellectual evolution. Adele Barker's contribution thoughtfully explores the application of Western literary theory to Soviet literature. She raises sensitive and important questions about the applicability of postmodern literary theories, "with their debunking of the notion of a single all-embracing truth," to literature of the Stalin period, "whose sole purpose was to exhume and bear witness to the truth of the Stalinist past" (p. 43). At the same time, she argues convincingly for "the application of cultural rather than purely literary theory to Russian women's texts in the Stalin and post-Stalin era," an approach which allows us to see texts as "cultural documents, which speak of issues of how gender identity, the public and private personas, and cultural mythologies were constructed or played out under Stalin" (p. 54). These two theoretical essays are thought provoking, and provide a firm foundation for the diverse contributions which follow.

Part Two of this collection is devoted to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (to 1917). With the exception of Joe Andrew's contribution, the essays in this part explore ways in which art and literature affected women's lives. Diana Greene's essay analyzes Russian children's magazines of the later nineteenth century as purveyors of the behavior expected of good little boys and girls, and ultimately of "domestic ideology." This is a discussion that could have been expanded profitably, given the amount of interesting information Greene has gathered and considered. Irina Kazakova analyzes the critical response to the burgeoning number of Russian women writers at the end of the nineteenth century, arguing that in this period the notion of a specifically feminine artistic vision of the world began to take shape, only to be lost in the storm of revolution. Catherine Schuler's examination of the impact of westernisation on the lives of actresses in the Silver Age shows how changing theatre fashions and audience expectations undermined the economic status of many actresses, forcing them to turn to prostitution as the only way to meet the demand for elaborate and expensive costumes–a demand not imposed on actors. Andrew's essay focuses on the positive and benevolent portrayal of older women in the work of Mar'ia Zhukova and Elena Gan, contrasting these images to the negative figures presented in the work of other (primarily male) authors of this period.

This is an essay that is rich in ideas, but could use a stronger and more clearly defined focus.

Part Three and Four focus on the twentieth century. Part Three is devoted to analyses of specific women writers; Part Four to the images of women presented in the works of specific male writers. Sheelagh Graham offers a suggestive reading of the work of Akhmatova, exploring the gender implications of the poet's style. According to her reading, it was not Stalinist repression that shaped the cryptic and oblique nature of Akhmatova's lyrics. Rather it was "a necessity of her secretive nature" as well as being "peculiarly feminine, a means of self-defence" (p. 131). Graham's analysis is sensitive and persuasive, but I think the Stalinist context cannot be dismissed quite so cavalierly. Katharine Hodgson's reappraisal of the poetry of Ol'ga Berggol'ts, one which incorporates the later work as well as the wartime poetry, is important, revealing the evolution of both the poet and the woman. Hodgson's approach and conclusions illustrate most vividly just how fruitful it can be to approach literary works as complex cultural documents. Natasha Kolchevska's sympathetic treatment of Evgeniia Ginzburg's camp memoirs contrasts the female voice, the feminine perspective, with the traditional male voice and perspective of such camp literature. Both perspectives ultimately are linked to the abstract and the historical universal, but they arrive there by different paths. Neil Cornwell's contribution introduces the memoirs of Pasternak's wife, Zinaida, emphasizing their importance in their own right and as a corrective to those of his mistress, Ol'ga Ivinskaia. Julie Curtis and Monika Katz offer close readings of the works of Iuliia Voznesenskaia and Liudmilla Petrushevskaia, respectively, and the essay by Marina Ledkovsky introduces the work of little known contemporary poets working in Russia and abroad. Perhaps the theme uniting all these disparate essays in Part Three is the notion of a specifically and uniquely women's voice in literature. Greene's essay raises the question, to what extent is the women's voice culturally shaped, to what extent given? The essays in this section suggest the fluidity of such a boundary, if it exists.

Part Four examines the images of women as they appear in the works of a number of male Russian authors writing in the twentieth century. Peter Barta's fine essay examines the depiction of elderly women as witches in Andrei Bely's *Kotik Letaev*. He argues that the historical portrayal of the witch in European culture serves as the foundation for Bely's novel, providing cultural archetypes of "a decidedly misogynistic nature" (p. 213). Barta's analysis is usefully juxtaposed to Andrew's analysis of the very positive and affirming depictions of elderly women in the works of Zhukova and Gan, illuminating the drama and importance of their contributions. Svetlana Carsten's essay on the work of the shestidesiatnniki identifies and laments the absence of strong, educated female characters. Carsten's essay, along with those of Boris Lanin ("The Image of Women in the Prose of Sergei Dovlatov") and Arch Tait ("Russian Women in Anatoly Kurchatkin"), suggests that sexism is on the rise in Russia, or perhaps it has only moved from the private to the public arena. These essays focus on the images of women presented in the works of male authors, but at the same time raise important and disturbing questions about the ways in which masculinity has been, and is being constructed in Russia.

In sum, this is a rich, complex and diverse collection of essays. The questions raised are provocative and worthy of further development and discussion. Many of the ideas introduced could have been developed and elaborated more fully–a criticism that is perhaps also a compliment.

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