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Review

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opportunity to meet ... Garshin ... who, if he had not committed suicide, would have become one of our greatest Russian writers.”

It is easy to see why Bunin held Garshin in such high regard. Both men shared striking similarities in both literature and life. For instance, both Bunin and Garshin came from the lower gentry, suffered from severe depression, and entered literature amidst vast changes in politics and art. Their writings melded Realism, Impressionism, and Symbolism, featured “little” men and women, and dwelled on madness, sickness, and death in *povesti*, fables, and vignettes. Both Bunin and Garshin also suffered handily at the hands of critics who, like the elephant and the blind man, grabbed a leg, tail, or ear of their writings and insisted that they stood for the whole. Finally, the two are attracting new interest in both Russia and the West. For instance, contemporary readers and reviewers resonate well with Garshin’s struggle against evil, his defense of pacifism, and his empathy for social outcasts and victims of mental illness.

Vsevelod Garshin at the Turn of the Century is the scholarly attempt of international researchers to restore Garshin to his rightful place in both Russian and world literature. Modelled somewhat on the time-honored series, *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, the three-tomed work has both the strengths and weaknesses of that publication. For instance, *Vsevelod Garshin* provides ample and valuable information on Garshin’s life and art. There are extensive bibliographies on the writer, and excerpts from letters, notebooks, and diaries. There also are surveys of earlier scholarship and reception of the writer, as well as studies of Garshin’s ties and affinities to such artists as Ilya Repin, and to such writers as Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Chekhov, on one hand, and on the other, to Dostoevsky and Andreev. Particularly splendid are the many paintings and photographs of the writer and his family, as well as illustrations and prints from his various publications and the like.

Vsevelod Garshin, though, has several serious flaws. For one thing, many of the articles dealing with Garshin’s fiction are weak: hurried, muddled, and abstract. In particular, they suffer from a lack of scholarly confidence and finesse. Some are poorly written. Others are superficial; for example, “psychology,” “romantic elements,” “impressionist tendencies,” “irony and humor,” and “personality and conscience” in one or all of Garshin’s works. Still other studies forgo or forestall meaningful analysis of Garshin’s writing for digression-surveys of various images and ideas in Russian and world literature. Additional weaknesses include a raft of highly questionable assertions, such as “Garshin was the first to explore direct interior monologue in art” (p. 127); as well as the inclusion of materials that add little to the knowledge of the writer and his work; for example, selections of Garshin’s translated writings, as well as abstracts of papers for a symposium on the writer that never came to be.

Regarding the literary criticism in *Vsevelod Garshin*, however, there are several lights in the darkness. For instance, there are interesting pieces on Garshin’s experiences in the Russo-Turkish War, his interest in both the national and social sciences, his partiality toward visual art, his dislike of Protopop Avvakum and other ideologue-fanatics, and, finally, his fascination with such “mythic” images as Mithra, Prometheus, Saint George, the “fallen woman,” and the soldier in extremis. There are also several attempts to discuss such works as “Four Days,” “The Red Flower,” and “Attalea Princeps.” Such forays into Garshin can serve as seedbeds either for larger works on the writer, or for comparative and/or interdisciplinary studies that discuss themes, images, and ideals that were crucial to his life and art.

Garshin deserves study and attention. Sections of *Vsevelod Garshin* can be a useful tool to this end.

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Borenstein, Eliot. *Men without Women: Masculinity and Revolution in Russian Fiction, 1917–1929*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000. xi + 346 pp. \$19.95 (paper). ISBN 08223-2592-6.

Although the title, *Men without Women*, is taken from a collection of stories by the paradigmatically “macho” American writer, Ernest Hemingway, this new book about masculinity and revolution in early Soviet literature could just as easily have borrowed its title from Neil LaBute’s rather dark (and Dostoevskian) cinematic deconstruction of male bonding, *In the Company of Men*. Eliot Borenstein’s extremely thoughtful and thought-provoking study, in any event, does an excellent job of excavating the rhetoric of masculinity from a number of well-known works of Russian fiction from the 1920s. Focusing primarily on *Red Cavalry*, *Envy*, and *Chevengur*, Borenstein explores how writers as stylistically and ideologically different as Isaak Babel, Yuri Olesha, and Andrei Platonov “simultaneously create and interrogate revolutionary

notions of masculinity (p. 39). Examined within the cultural context of early Soviet Russia, these three works of postrevolutionary literature are said to reflect—as well as to challenge—the myth of a masculinized society that permeates Bolshevik discourse during the 1920s. The values of the new society the Communists envisioned, Borenstein argues, “are the hallmarks of a traditionally masculine ethos: production rather than reproduction, participation in the historic process rather than domestic ahistoricity, heavy industry, construction, and, of course, ‘the struggle’” (p. 3).

Borenstein demonstrates convincingly how the masculinization of early Soviet society entailed widescale hostile assaults upon both the conventional family and received notions of femininity, with male-only structures replacing the traditional nuclear family in the form of pseudo-families based on social or ideological, rather than biological, bonds. In Edward Said’s terms, “affiliation” has managed to replace “filiation” in the masculine-centered Russian fiction of the 1920s. “Domesticity, femininity, nature, and the family were objects of scorn for the Bolsheviks,” Borenstein explains, “while the social sphere, science, productive labor, and, implicitly, masculinity were established as ideals” (p. 17).

After an introductory chapter (“Brothers and Comrades”) that provides the theoretical framework for this study of male comradeship, and an ensuing chapter (“The Ladykillers”) that traces the misogynistic idea of the male collective developed in the works of early twentieth-century Russian writers and thinkers such as Blok, Bogdanov, and Gorky, Borenstein devotes the remainder of his book to analyses of the aforementioned works by Babel, Olesha, and Platonov. In each case, we are presented with highly insightful and nuanced readings of these three complex literary texts. Babel’s *Red Cavalry* is shown to provide perhaps the purest example in all of postrevolutionary Russian fiction of “fratriarchy,” whereby brotherly comradeship is substituted for traditional paternal authority. In terms of literary representation, fathers and sons give way here to a violent male community—the warrior brotherhood of Cossacks—into which the somewhat feminized hero, the Jew Lyutov, at once seeks entry and yet resists full membership. The existential and cultural trials he undergoes come to serve as male rites of passage tinged with heavy doses of eroticism.

In Olesha’s *Envy*, meanwhile, where adoptive rather than natural parentage dominates, we witness the futility experienced by a series of young male protagonists who attempt to escape the traditional bourgeois family and filial connections to their natural fathers at the same time as they search for surrogate father figures and thus the kinds of ideological affiliations that can transcend biological blood ties. Yet no matter how hard Olesha’s male characters may try, they seem unable to escape the seductive pull of the family, a bourgeois institution that they have learned both to fear and to abhor. Olesha’s novella also depicts how the new masculinized world of postrevolutionary Russia has little use (and no room) for traditional femininity, which becomes “a nagging, potentially subversive threat to the male order” (p. 162). The way the members of the masculinized world of *Envy* choose to deal with this feminine threat is to try to subsume it, creating in the process a strange brand of androgyny. The masculinization of the women is invariably accompanied by the partial feminization of the men, especially in the case of Andrei Babichev, who attempts to coopt such traditionally female domestic functions as cooking and birthing. In *Envy*, even important symbolic items like the machine (*mashina*) and the sausage (*kolbasa*), Borenstein argues, constitute male reimaginings of objects that are culturally and grammatically (if not ontologically) female.

In the final example of literary masculinity, Platonov’s *Chevangur*, we are presented with what appears to be the very apotheosis of Bolshevism’s all-male utopia. In this ambiguously parodic novel, Platonov creates quite literally a world of “men without women,” yet one that is “continually haunted by the return of what it appears to repress: desire and femininity” (p. 191), for the author seems reluctant to abandon completely the male utopianism that he satirizes so savagely. Borenstein shows how Platonov’s early masculinist ideology—with an antifamily, antifeminist, and antisexual rhetoric that is heavily influenced by Nikolai Fyodorov’s religious philosophy—is tempered in *Chevangur* by “a love for a distant feminine ideal, an almost mystical respect for mothers, and an identification of (male) children with hope for the future” (p. 224). “The author who gave the ideology of communist masculinity its most forceful expression,” Borenstein adds, “concludes that a world without women is a world without a future” (p. 224). The bonds of male comradeship, Platonov’s novel seems to assert, ultimately fail to provide a viable alternative to biology and tradition: nature, apparently, cannot be completely replaced by culture.

Drawing upon a wide range of literary/cultural theorists, psychoanalysts, and anthropologists (from Freud, Lacan, and Bataille to Lionel Tiger, Girard, and Levi-Strauss), Borenstein’s illuminating study of the construction—and deconstruction—of masculinity in early Soviet culture is truly a pleasure to read: it

is intelligently conceptualized, smoothly written, and convincingly argued. And, most importantly, it is solidly grounded in the social and cultural discourse of that tumultuous, experimental period in Soviet history. Handsomely adorned with a cover design that alters Vera Mukhina's famous statue in a revealing way (the collective-farm woman is eliminated, while the male industrial worker is quadrupled), *Men without Women* is destined to become—much like Eric Naiman's *Sex in Public*—a seminal work for scholars interested in issues of gender, sexuality, ideology, literature, and culture in early Soviet Russia.

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Brintlinger, Angela. *Writing a Usable Past: Russian Literary Culture, 1917–1937*. Studies in Russian Literature and Theory. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000. x + 253 pp. \$79.95. ISBN 08101-1768-1.

Angela Brintlinger's study takes as its theoretical starting point Van Wyck Brooks' 1918 appeal to his fellow American critics that they invent new literary pasts for themselves, usable ones (as opposed to restrictive historical narratives that cannot illuminate or inspire current writing). Russian history required rewriting after 1917. This enormous project involved all elements of Russian society: the folk and intelligentsia, near and abroad. By examining how three Russian writers reconstructed the past, Brintlinger paints a picture of Russian literary culture from 1917 through 1937, the centennial of Pushkin's death.

Brintlinger selected her three authors—Tynianov, Khodasevich, and Bulgakov—because they were among those who attempted to write biographies of Pushkin for his 1937 jubilee year. Two chapters are devoted to each author: one to his biography of Pushkin and one to a biography he wrote of another writer. Her main take on these authors' efforts to write biography is that each used the life stories of earlier writers to interrogate issues in their own lives, to search for a "usable biography." Tynianov, in his biography of Griboedov, *The Death of the Vazir Mukhtar*, was actually examining parallels between Griboedov under Nicholas I and himself in the early Bolshevik and Stalinist periods. Khodasevich in turn used his biography of Derzhavin to articulate his own ideal of the poet in society, one who served rule of law, the monarch, and God. Bulgakov's two works on Molière presented a writer in Bulgakov's own predicament: protected by the monarch (Stalin, Louis XIV) but harassed by cultural ideologues.

While Tynianov, Khodasevich, and Bulgakov were able to write usable biographies of Griboedov, Derzhavin, and Molière, their work on Pushkin was beset with problems. Tynianov's work on Pushkin never got past the great poet's early years. Khodasevich likewise never finished his biography of Pushkin, perhaps because Russia's national poet—in great contrast to Derzhavin—"seemed small and self-absorbed: plagued by indecision, frivolity, and sloth" (pp. 104–5), not to mention his "dissipation ... rowdiness and social insecurity" (p. 92). Bulgakov was able to finish his play about Pushkin's death, but owing to the vicissitudes of Soviet censorship the piece was not produced as planned. As was the case in his work on Molière, Bulgakov's theatrical biography of Pushkin allowed him to depict his own relationship to Soviet power structures, here adding "totalitarian society" to the former triad of monarch, ideologues, and writer.

Toward the end of the book Brintlinger discusses Vikentii Veresaev and Sergei Lifar's work on Pushkin. Veresaev is included because he was a sometime collaborator with Bulgakov. Lifar is presented as having successfully written a usable Pushkin, ironically precisely because the dancer's writing was so bad: clichéd, unerudite, and maudlin.

Writing a Usable Past is not a book for those looking for new, cutting-edge critical theories of biography, autobiography, or even the anxiety of influence. Though Brintlinger does pause occasionally to make generalizations, the thrust of her book is to narrate the experiences of these three (or five) authors as they sought models in writers of the past. The tone is intimate, and we hear much about the authors' personal desires and disappointments. This book is most noteworthy for the biographies within it, be they the life stories of Tynianov, Khodasevich, Bulgakov, Veresaev, and Lifar, or Brintlinger's retellings of their biographies of Griboedov, Derzhavin, Molière, and Pushkin. I have to say I found some of her versions more pleasant reading than the originals. Biography is clearly Brintlinger's forte, and I would hope to encourage her to give us good English biographies of Russia's writers, especially given that post-Cold War scholarship requires a new, "usable" Russia.

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