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Review Of "The Modernist Masquerade: Stylizing Life, Literature And Costumes In Russia" By C. McQuillen

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open, diverse, and pluralistic environment” (330). The English-speaking reader learns that today Russia “is dominated by market mechanisms [...] largely devoid of censorship,” where “people have numerous venues for self-expression.” During the Thaw “the condemnation of the camps and executions had not yet reached the finality and decisiveness that it would reach three decades later” (230), as this process of working through the past was completed in the 1990s, when the Purges were irrevocably condemned.

Today these claims sound like bitter irony, as they certainly did in 2012–2013, when the book was in production. Over the last 15 years, Russian society has developed a new type of a social contract with the authorities, based on a rehabilitation of Soviet times and greased by oil and gas prices. Consensus over a mass voluntary amnesia of the Terror was instrumental in helping Putin’s regime systematically promote antidemocratic politics to mobilize the support of the majority of the population. These developments clearly challenge the role that Kozlov ascribes to the Thaw in the Russian historical consciousness. Contrary to what he outlines, a collective unwillingness to work through the Soviet past continues to condition post-Soviet society.

Despite all its merits as a new source of information clarifying important details of literary debates during the Thaw, Kozlov’s book does not challenge Vladimir Nabokov’s famous phrase, which opens Kozlov’s introduction: “the history of Russia...could be considered [...] first, as the evolution of the police, and second as the developments of a marvelous culture” (qtd. 1). As if by design, the book concludes by comparing a “new Russian culture” with a “rich forest.” This metaphor brings to mind images of the taiga and tree-felling, a forced occupation of so many Russian intellectuals under the Soviets. One can only hope that the last words of this book — “the forest still grows” (331) — do not turn into a malediction.

Dina Khapaeva, Georgia Institute of Technology

Colleen McQuillen. *The Modernist Masquerade: Stylizing Life, Literature and Costumes in Russia*. Studies of the Harriman Institute. Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 2013. Bibliography. Index. xv + 282 pp. \$29.95 (paper); \$24.95 (e-book).

In *The Modernist Masquerade*, Colleen McQuillen presents a rich interdisciplinary study focused on literature in the broader context of fin-de-siècle culture in Russia. The study homes in on the trope of the masquerade in the works of the period’s most important writers, but readers interested in popular culture will not be disappointed either: actual masquerades figure prominently as well. McQuillen defines the Modernist era (3) as lasting from 1872 to 1914, beginning earlier than usual in studies of Russian Modernism and reflecting the reduction or limitation of masquerade balls and their advertising after the start of the First World War. Masquerade functions here as a figure for uses of language, practices of life-creation, and various literary games that mark the period, especially its latter two decades. The importance of the cited poetry and other relevant literary works of the era makes clear why this is a worthwhile topic. The book engagingly explores the relationships of widely known works of high culture to the ephemeral culture of masquerade dances — the posters advertising them, tickets for admission, photographs of costumed guests in attendance at one or another of the balls, and evidence of the patterns sold for costumes (whether intended for sewing at home or for orders at a dressmaker’s shop). After a thorough examination of issues of representation and “the theoretical problems surrounding parody, imitation, and stylization as discursive strategies in literature and in social performance of personal identity” (29), the second part of the book delves into costume design “as a type of legible poetics that avails itself to reading” (29). As her treatment of Akhmatova’s *Poem without a Hero* shows, the metaphor of the masquerade has come to mark the period indelibly.

McQuillen argues:

A metaphor for the contingent relationship between appearance and essence, masquerade expressed the relativistic and dynamic world views that were replacing absolutist paradigms in the physical and social sciences. The masquerade motif in the literary movement of Symbolism corresponded to the privileging of subjectivity and mystery, while in Decadence and Futurism it stood for radical aestheticism and the theatricalization of life. In tandem with the modernist craze for masquerades as a social diversion, cross-dressing, mystifications, impersonations, and the use of pseudonyms abounded on the stage, in the streets, and in literature. (6)

She distinguishes between Symbolism and Decadence while acknowledging their common ground (24).

Literary works treated here include the most famous works of the period, such as Fëdor Sologub's *Petty Demon*, Leonid Andreev's *Black Maskers*, and works by Boris Savinkov, Zinaida Gippius, and Elizaveta Dmitrieva, better known then and later by her pseudonym, Cherubina de Gabriak. McQuillen considers the pseudonyms of writers and other creative personalities extensively. Alongside reflections of masquerade in literature, the book offers a helpful introduction to the material culture of the masquerades. McQuillen opens with a detailed reading of a poster advertising a "decadent" masked ball, helpfully reproduced (5). The lettering is quite hard to read, suggesting both the fin-de-siècle investment in artistic fonts and calligraphy and perhaps the intention of excluding illiterate and barely literate guests from the event. Each chapter of the book integrates information drawn from newspaper stories, historical records and memoir accounts of actual masquerades, used to frame the readings of literary works as examples of modernist aesthetics.

The Modernist Masquerade is smart, well-structured and well argued. McQuillen's lively writing style exploits the inherent interest of the topic's frivolous side while bringing out its deeper cultural resonance. The illustrations (many thoroughly described and analyzed) add a great deal to the book and its interweaving of literary and cultural studies. The selection of information about various masked balls also makes clear what Osip Mandelstam meant when he told Mayakovsky to stop reciting his poetry (at The Stray Dog cabaret) by pointing out that he was not a gypsy orchestra. Akhmatova reported this remark in her memoirs: one of the cabaret advertisements promised that a gypsy orchestra would be playing constantly. A wide swath of elite society participated in the culture of masquerades, meaning not only that they were a literary theme but also that masked dancers were well equipped to interpret literary works on masquerades. The potential that anyone could enjoy the change in identity that comes with a new costume fed into greater flexibility in the deployment of plots and personae in poetry and other literary forms.

Newspaper advertisements and depictions of costume ideas show the local design industry as well as the mass media supporting the fashion for masquerades, especially in costumes for women. Thus this collection also contributes to the repertoire of Russian fashion history (such as Christine Ruane's 2009 publication *The Empire's New Clothes*, Yale UP). McQuillen notes that Decadence in Russia drew on "the French Decadent tradition of stylizing physical appearance, including the inversion of traditional gender markers" (24). The Decadent emphasis on form and appearance made the masquerade a particularly suitable entertainment and venue for practicing self-creation. Moreover, "[d]ecadent self-fashioning challenged the idea of a single, stable identity" (25), while Decadence provided a playful opposition to Symbolist solemnity even as it brooded over death and despair. (Not for nothing has the masquerade provided a backdrop for tragedy ever since Lermontov.) McQuillen pursues the implications of all of this for later theatrical practice by Meyerhold and others. Finally, the masquerade has something to reveal about twentieth-century philosophy. "Scrambling sartorial codes and the correlation of name to person echoed the theoretical premise of the symbol: meaning is contingent, not inherent" (96).

This is an informative and impressive book by a younger scholar, handsomely designed and

a pleasure to read. Colleen McQuillen brings together literary and cultural studies to general profit. Not only will *The Modernist Masquerade* appeal to all scholars of the fin-de-siècle period: it is simply great fun to read. It will appeal to any educated reader, to scholars of many aspects of Russian literature, history, and culture, and it should be in any serious library.

Sibelan Forrester, Swarthmore College

Anna Fishzon. *Fandom, Authenticity, and Opera: Mad Acts and Letter Scenes in Fin-de-Siècle Russia*. Palgrave Studies in Cultural and Intellectual History. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Bibliography. Index. xvii + 273 pp. \$90.00 (cloth and e-book).

In *Fandom, Authenticity, and Opera: Mad Acts and Letter Scenes in Fin-de-Siècle Russia*, Anna Fishzon constructs a framework for understanding a feature of the era's *Zeitgeist*: melodrama. From sources as disparate as Fedor Shaliapin's fan letters to the audiophile journal *Grammofon i fotografiia*, Fishzon builds her case in the context of turn-of-the-century Russia—the greater the intensity of expression demonstrated, the greater the perception of authenticity. Fishzon's insights include common themes found in pre-revolutionary Russian private opera culture and in early Soviet show trials and confessions.

Opera in Russia provides both the backdrop and most of center stage for Fishzon's work. The merchant class and the evolution of entertainment as a consumer industry proved essential to the development and success of private opera companies. Details of new performance practices, standards, and aesthetics—including the German ideal of opera as an integrated and complete work of art, or *Gesamtkunstwerk*—are documented in *The History of Private Opera in Russia*, an unpublished collection of essays edited by entrepreneur Sergei Zimin in 1914 and referenced often by Fishzon. The Moscow Private Opera, established in 1885 by railway magnate Savva Mamontov, and the Zimin Opera, established in 1904, thrived under the progressive and collaborative managerial styles of their founders. By contrast, the state-sponsored Imperial Opera appeared resistant to change, unable to move beyond its tradition of staid performances. Therefore, the lure of greater freedom to be a distinctly Russian artist appealed to the young Shaliapin and others who left the Imperial Theater for the Moscow Private Opera.

Supported by advertisements for performances and popular press coverage, singers of major roles in private opera productions achieved celebrity status, and often their stage roles merged with their personae. For not only were they shown in character costumes for performance publicity, but also in advertisements for chocolates, perfume, and cosmetics—blurring the distinction between the performer and opera character. Singer-character association with a consumer product encouraged audience identification with the blended persona while simultaneously nourishing the culture's inclination toward both veneration and satirization of the artist-character. Fishzon's examples of this phenomenon are the tenor Ivan Ershov of the St. Petersburg Mariinsky Theater, known for his roles in Wagnerian productions, and Shaliapin, who was eventually engaged by Moscow's Bolshoi Theater. Fishzon notes that music critics wrote "Ershov-Siegfried" or "Ershov-Tristan" when referring to him, further fusing Ershov with heroic stage characters; and Shaliapin became the subject of feuilleton fiction in issues of *Budil'nik* (*The Alarm-Clock*).

The author's case for turn-of-the-twentieth-century opera fandom as a feminine experience is based, in part, on the contextual use of the term *psikhopatka* (female psychopath) in the era's theater literature, music critics' disparaging descriptions of primarily female audiences, and contemporary feuilleton accounts of inappropriate behavior of female audience members. Writers for the feuilleton found feminine audiences rich in fodder for ridicule. They described the typical female opera fan as demonstrating an unusual devotion to one male singer, preferring

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