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Fall 2005

### Review Of "Voicing The Soviet Experience: The Poetry Of Ol'ga Berggol'ts" By K. Hodgson

Sibelan E.S. Forrester

*Swarthmore College*, sforres1@swarthmore.edu

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#### Recommended Citation

Sibelan E.S. Forrester. (2005). "Review Of "Voicing The Soviet Experience: The Poetry Of Ol'ga Berggol'ts" By K. Hodgson". *Slavic Review*. Volume 64, Issue 3. 689-690. DOI: 10.2307/3650199  
<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-russian/24>

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Review

Author(s): Sibelan Forrester

Review by: Sibelan Forrester

Source: *Slavic Review*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (Autumn, 2005), pp. 689-690

Published by: Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3650199>

Accessed: 11-04-2016 13:49 UTC

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man nature by considering demonological, biblical, and mythical subtexts in the Sakhalin-inspired story "In Exile." Swift sees the two characters in this story as representing "different aspects of the Christian tradition" (139). Citing the hagiography of St. Anthony and several verses from the Gospels, Swift presents Semen as a Mephistophelean "deceiv-demon" whose faith has been perverted and who despises God and man (125). The Tartar, though a non-Christian, represents one of God's uncorrupted children. In his supplications to God and acceptance of God's will for him, he resembles, Swift argues, Christ in Gethsemane. Swift's illuminating analysis of "In Exile" together with "In the Ravine" (which follows) constitute two of the book's strongest sections. Two final chapters illustrate the Judeo-Christian subtext of the themes of chance, suffering, and love. In "Ward Six," Swift argues, Chekhov disputes views that hold suffering to be character-building or sanctifying and, as a scientist and a humanist, espouses the view that the influence of suffering is usually negative. "In the Ravine," however, presents a poignant example of the Christian belief in suffering as sanctifying. In his fine analysis of the story, Swift presents another side of Chekhov—a compassionate nonbeliever with a deep understanding of the Christian faith. In his discussions of "The Bishop" and "A Dreary Story," Swift compares the celebrated believer with the celebrated nonbeliever and claims that each is human and ordinary in the same way—that is, that each craves and is deprived of love for another human being.

Swift affirms Chekhov's essentially humanistic stance, concluding that "Chekhov arrived at his democratic ideal on his own terms; its harmony with the Christian ideal may be only incidental, if unmistakable" (176). The incorporation of Chekhov's letters and biographical material, as well as a discussion of theological issues, enriches and enlivens this book. A more in-depth consideration of Russian Orthodox theology and cultural traditions would have strengthened Swift's argument, as would have a closer analysis of "The Bishop" and such important stories as "The Student" and "Holy Night," largely left out of the book.

DARIA A. KIRJANOV  
Hamden, Connecticut

*Voicing the Soviet Experience: The Poetry of Ol'ga Berggol'ts.* By Katharine Hodgson. A British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship Monograph. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. xi, 202 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$72.00, hard bound.

Ol'ga Berggol'ts's relationship to Stalinist repression might be summarized with this biographical fact: she was arrested in the late 1930s, like many of her friends, but a few months later (after suffering a miscarriage) she was released from prison. Katharine Hodgson argues that Berggol'ts has been neglected in the west partly because of her success as an official Soviet writer. Hodgson's *Voicing the Soviet Experience* is the first monograph on Berggol'ts in English and so faces the task of presenting the poet to readers who may know little about Russian or Soviet literature. Berggol'ts is best known for her poetry and broadcasts during the siege of Leningrad; Hodgson works to place this in the context of her other writing, both the (self-censored) Stalin Prize winners and the poetry "for the drawer," first published over a decade after Berggol'ts's death in 1975. She also draws profitably on unpublished drafts from the poet's archive. Hodgson portrays a passionate poetic creativity that struggled against harsh limits and took pride in encoding small but potentially dangerous subversive gestures, as when she had Iosif Stalin bare his head before the (convict) laborers who dug the Volga-Don Canal, in "Velichal'naia Volgo-Donu," published in *Izvestiia* in 1952.

Hodgson introduces Berggol'ts in great detail: she quotes from her poetry often and at length, supplying prose translations that are generally accurate and sometimes quite elegant. Her readings of Berggol'ts's work are sensitive, persuasive, and open to contradiction. An introductory chapter outlines the poet's life as well as her creative emphases, though a few important details appear only later in the book (the death of her oldest daughter; the divorce from her third husband). Three other substantial chapters describe

and examine Berggol'ts's work, interweaving Hodgson's interpretations, which address aesthetic, political, and gender aspects of the poet's work, with an overview of its context within Soviet literature of the time.

To demonstrate Berggol'ts's complex relationship to official Soviet literary policy, Hodgson frequently cites or summarizes comments or reviews by other critics, almost all of them Soviet. Unlike Hodgson's observations, these are not always fully integrated into the flow of the book and can bog down or become distracting. Given her attention to sometimes doctrinaire Soviet critics and the evident importance of gender in her own analyses, it is regrettable that Hodgson makes so little use of work on Soviet women writers by other scholars (excepting Catriona Kelly; she mentions one other article only to criticize its misreading of a long poem by Berggol'ts). This self-reliance for almost all matters of gender in literature can result in unexamined assumptions, as when Hodgson comments, "There are no gestures towards a conventionally 'feminine' self-portrait," without detailing what a conventionally feminine self-portrait would be in that time and place (92). The only other female poet in Hodgson's bibliography is Anna Akhmatova, indubitably a crucial figure for Berggol'ts but one twenty years older and with a very different career. Hodgson does refer to several Soviet male poets (Nikolai Gribachev, Aleksandr Iashin, Lavr Kornilov, Aleksei Nedogonov, Aleksandr Tvardovskii) of about Berggol'ts's age. Her treatment of Berggol'ts's career and compromises (or not) with Soviet power would have been further enriched by even occasional comparison to female poets born around 1910, such as Mariia Petrovykh (less officially successful) or Margarita Aliger (perhaps more officially successful than Berggol'ts). Western or recent Russian scholarship on Soviet female prose authors, such as Vera Panova (or Lidiia Chukovskaia, whom Hodgson mentions only as a source for information on Akhmatova), could have furthered the book's discussion of the status of "official" Soviet literature, especially in the work of western scholars.

Hodgson's book introduces Ol'ga Berggol'ts to a wider readership, arguing persuasively for her literary value and importance. Hodgson's choice of scale and emphasis may limit the book's usefulness even in addressing the questions she herself raises, but its rich presentation of Berggol'ts's poetry and suggestive readings should make broader work on official Soviet literature and Soviet women's writing both more tempting and more possible. It should be of value to any reader with a strong interest in Russian poetry of the twentieth century.

SIBELAN FORRESTER  
*Swarthmore College*

***Conversations with Lotman: Cultural Semiotics in Language, Literature, and Cognition.*** By Edna Andrews. Toronto Studies in Semiotics and Communication. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003. xvi, 204 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Figures. Tables. \$65.00, hard bound.

It has been Iurii Lotman's destiny as a semiotic theorist both during his lifetime and posthumously to be understood in parts and by periods: commentators, especially western ones, have focused on particular aspects of his theory, mostly of the earlier years, and there have been relatively few studies of his theory of global semiotics which he developed latterly. In this slim, lucid study Edna Andrews remedies this, giving a valuable overview for the western reader of Lotman's semiotic theories from the pioneer days of the Moscow-Tartu School in the sixties to the later development of a path-breaking theory of the semiosphere. In part one, the first "conversation," Andrews begins with a succinct and informative biography that sets Lotman's achievements within the difficult context of Soviet restrictions and censorship. She goes on to analyze Lotman's theory of the structure of cultural semiotic systems and gives an extended commentary on the notion of the semiosphere. The particular interest of Andrews's study is that she places Lotman's ideas into the context of contemporary western thinking in the fields of semiotics, linguistics, and cognitive science. So, for instance, in part one she compares Lotman's model of communica-