

America, Britain, France, and the German lands certainly enhances the relevance of her findings. Despite its flaws, *Words, Not Deeds* is an important addition to the social history of imperial Russia and recommended for university libraries and women's studies programs.

Susanne Hillman

University of California San Diego

Ilya Kutik, *Writing as Exorcism: The Personal Codes of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2005), xiii + 152 pp.

Ilya Kutik, Russian 'metarealist' poet turned American Slavist, describes these studies of Pushkin, Lermontov and Gogol as 'unabashedly idiosyncratic' (5). Their starting point is the notion of literature as exorcism, as a means by which authors give expression in their works to their inner struggle with their personal demons and fears by means of a 'personal code' (accessible also to those who know how to read it), so investing them with an 'extra' significance as the product of the 'psychological dominants' with which they must engage or contend (5). What follows, then, is an extended exercise in literary cryptanalysis combining (but transcending) the approaches of intertextuality and biographism: thus, recognition of the biographical fact of Gogol's repeated recourse to pseudonyms, and the (putative) intertextual parallels linking them to the Iliad or the Bible can lead us to the discovery of the author's personal code and one of his psychological dominants: 'his fear of his own name' (8).

Of the three chapters constituting the core of the book, the first is concerned with superstition (otherwise fatalism) as psychological dominant for both Pushkin and Lermontov. In the case of the former, Kutik moves from the historical fact of Pushkin's preoccupation with prophecies and omens to a textual (and intertextual) study of *The Queen of Spades* as the key work in which the poet has encrypted his personal battle with fate (or rather, with his own fatalism). Reduced to a few salient points, the decoding hinges on four playing cards (the three, seven, ace and queen of spades) and the prophecy of a fortune teller that Pushkin would die in his thirty-seventh (3 and 7) year. Germann's success in betting on the three and the seven represents for Pushkin the exorcism of his superstitious dread and his belief that fate can be avoided; although in the event the final victory (in

1837) belonged to the queen (the fortune-teller) and the ace (d'Anthès). In the case of Lermontov, the discussion centres on 'The Fatalist' and to some extent on *Princess Mary* (Kutik erroneously reverses the narrative chronology of the two tales): like Germann, Vulich bets on a seven and an ace, and while his *alter ego* Grushnitsky stakes his life on a rigged duel rather than playing-cards, his loss is presaged by another of Pushkin's fateful numbers (*three* figures on the mountain, *three* horses). From all of which it will be clear that Kutik's discoveries and readings, 'intuitive', 'provocative' and even 'overly impressionistic' as he concedes them to be (5), do not easily lend themselves to summary or analysis.

The following two chapters examine the literary exorcism of Nikolai Gogol. The punning title 'Gogol's Nausea and Nосsea' not only identifies the text under scrutiny but also signals the importance of word play for both code-maker and code-breaker. Following a comprehensive survey of the biographical, cultural, allegorical, literary and intertextual associations of the Gogolian nose, Kutik explores the import of the *nos/son* palindrome before lighting on a less obvious pun as the key to the code: *nos* and *νοῦς*, so that the tale becomes an attempt to exorcise Gogol's fear of insanity. The second Gogol chapter, 'Rome before Rome', focuses largely on the Mirgorod cycle and the punning possibilities of that name: *peace-city*, *world-city* – the latter neatly paralleling the Latin *urbi et orbi*. For Rome (Rim, palindrome of *mir*) represents for Gogol the spiritual (or platonic) home he must regain to find completion and integration; and the 'inescapable pull to Rome through Ukraine' (92) encoded at every level of the stories (Khoma Brut invoking Brutus and so on) represents the author's struggle between the desire for self-completion and a fatalistic fear of its opposite.

Few will reject Kutik's notion of the 'extra' in the text (the 'inner reality' of its meaning for the author); and few will deny that his 'poetic intuition' (5) yields insights (not all of them 'provocative' or contentious or particularly novel) into the mental world of his subjects. The 'decoding hypothesis' (to quote Gary Saul Morson in his introduction: viii) has obvious attractions for readers and critics in pursuit of meanings, and the idea of writing as exorcism might indeed prove to be (as Kutik puts it) 'another professional tool of (*sic*) setting the door ajar' (130). It is, however, a tool to be used with caution and restraint if the act of deciphering is not to become an end in itself. Not all readers will be convinced by Kutik's art of divination or feel able to follow him in his leaps into hypothesis and conjecture ('it is highly unlikely that the similarity between his own name and that of Gog, the

Old Testament precursor to the Antichrist, could have possibly escaped Gogol', 7). It is perhaps no accident that the author should from the first insist upon the idiosyncratic nature of these 'speculative essays' (118), which extends also to their structure (with its numerous self-styled 'digressions', 'u-turns', 'returns' and excursi designated 'magnifying glasses') and, less excusably, to the sometimes eccentric English in which they are framed. An idiosyncrasy so 'unabashed' and so self-conscious reminds us that decoders too have their personal codes.

John McNair
The University of Queensland

Timothy Langen, *The Stony Dance: Unity and Gesture in Andrei Bely's Petersburg* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2005), xiv + 191 pp., ISBN 0-8101-2224-3.

'Protean' is a word that comes up very frequently in studies of Andrei Bely. His intellectual interests were wide, embracing the mathematics and chemistry of his early training, his later philosophical studies and his preoccupation with the intricacies of Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy as well as his more directly literary enterprises. The experimentation with form which characterises Bely's writing suggests an epistemological quest in which full apperception constantly escaped him and which spurred him to the constant evolution of new methods. Bely, moreover, often revised and reissued his work so that it is frequently impossible to establish definitive texts of key works. Boundlessly energetic, but rarely achieving or even aiming at closure, Bely sometimes seems to add up to less than the sum of his parts. Even in what is arguably his best and most influential work, *Peterburg*, Bely refuses to endorse a stable cognitive viewpoint. This was a concern of much early criticism – Mandelstam, for example, writing in 1922, bemoaned a lack of unity in the novel, calling it, as Timothy Langen notes, 'a pile of broken stones' (xii).

Langen's argument in *The Stony Dance* is that on the contrary, *Peterburg*, notwithstanding its multiplicity of themes and its stylistic fragmentation, does indeed constitute a unified whole; moreover, that this unity does not exist primarily on the level of ideology or technique or theme as suggested by more recent critical responses than Mandelstam's, but that *Peterburg* also comprises a systematic