

Wendy Rosslyn, *Deeds, Not Words: The Origins of Women's Philanthropy in the Russian Empire* (Birmingham, UK: Centre for Russian and East European Studies, The University of Birmingham, 2007), pp. 516.

When Napoleon first decided to attack Russia, concerns with women's emancipation were presumably farthest from his mind. Ironically, it was precisely the French invasion and the resultant humanitarian calamity that allowed upper class women to make their first forays into the public sphere. *Deeds, Not Words* is the first in-depth discussion of the topic to expand on Adele Lindenmeyr's pioneering work on charity and public welfare in imperial Russia. As Wendy Rosslyn's inquiry into the origins of women's philanthropy makes clear, the national crisis of 1812 was the primary catalyst for the formation of women's philanthropic associations in the Russian Empire. During this period a significant number of women became involved in an unprecedented collective effort to assist fellow subjects in need. In responding to the glaring inadequacy of existing welfare provisions, they were initially following the example of the imperial couple. While the tsar 'saved and spared human kind' on the field of battle, as a patriotic writer gushed, the empress exercised her talents and energy on the 'field of benevolence' (89).

The body of the text is divided into three sections. The first part contains the theoretical and historical background necessary to a discussion of the private and the public sphere as well as a useful overview of female philanthropy in Europe and America in the early nineteenth century. Part two analyses the genesis of women's philanthropy in imperial Russia dating back to the reign of Catherine II. The final and most substantial part of the inquiry is devoted to a comprehensive investigation of a number of case studies. Here Rosslyn describes the founding, activities, membership, and funding of four associations, not all of which were entirely run by women.

Although the number of female philanthropists was never excessive (at its zenith in 1813 the St. Petersburg Women's Association, imperial Russia's largest female philanthropic organization, counted no more than 138 active members), the numerical negligibility should not make us underestimate the significance of the effort. Barred from virtually all forms of participation in the public sphere, Russian women of all estates were limited to supporting the empire by exercising 'civic motherhood', i.e. the proper raising and training of future 'citizens'. Everything going beyond this private endeavor transgressed established boundaries.

The women joining a philanthropic society thus acted as genuine trail-blazers. In so doing, they drew encouragement from the knowledge that they were fulfilling the Christian precepts of charity and love of one's neighbor. Moreover, traditional gender ideology decreed that women were particularly well suited to undertake philanthropic projects such as running schools for orphans or visiting prisons; their 'feminine sensibility' supposedly assured the proper execution of such delicate tasks.

Apart from organizational activities designed to raise funds, philanthropic women evidenced a strong concern for the prevention of future hardship and for social control. The statutes of the St. Petersburg Women's Society unequivocally stipulated that aid be withheld from 'those living in dubious houses', from beggars, vagrants, and spongers, and generally from 'all people of vice' (227). The ideal applicant for financial assistance was a person of 'honest and moral conduct', preferably female, who had fallen on hard times through no fault of her own and who might reasonably be expected to profit from the salutary teachings of the Bible. Whatever the success of such lofty hopes, the activities of philanthropic women undoubtedly answered a pressing material need. Rosslyn concludes, perhaps over-ambitiously, that 'female philanthropy prepared the way for the development of the Russian women's movement inasmuch as these were the first secular autonomous organizations in the Empire created and managed by women' (455).

Part of the problem with this confident assertion and with Rosslyn's account in general stems from the limited scope of her primary sources. Indeed, full documentation including statutes, minute books, annual reports, and applications for aid exists only for one of the four societies analyzed in detail (the St. Petersburg Women's Association). To make up for this lack, the author resorts to obituaries of individual philanthropists, foreigners' memoirs, the contemporary press, etc. As a result of this motley array, there is something of a surfeit of colorful anecdotes that are not directly relevant to the topic at hand. It is not entirely clear, for example, why peasant women assaulting French soldiers with their pitchforks should figure in an inquiry of upper class female philanthropy. A tighter focus might have avoided some of these difficulties, though it would have further narrowed a topic that was rather narrow to begin with. On the positive side, a number of tables provide useful statistical information on membership lists, funding reports, and the like. Moreover, Rosslyn's decision to include comparative data from

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.

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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