

from Soviet history. Many of his baby boomers experienced breaks and life-changing moments, yet few of these moments seem to have happened precisely in 1991.

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The Visual Dominant in Eighteenth-Century Russia. By Marcus C. Levitt. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011. xii, 362 pp. Notes. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. \$49.00, hard bound.

Marcus Levitt's new book, which explores the early modern Russian imperative to see and to be seen, is a paradigm-shifter. This work challenges the prevailing view that imperial Russian culture was predominantly logocentric and uncovers instead a strongly ocularcentric imperative that was much closer to western Europe's than we have hitherto believed.

Much of traditional historiography would have it that the culture of Russia's eighteenth century was shallow and derivative. Like the Soviet period, the eighteenth century has frequently been cast as an aberration or a mistake. Levitt rejects this view. Through extensive readings of primary sources, he succeeds in firmly grounding the eighteenth century in Old Russian precedent, while at the same time tying it equally firmly to the western Enlightenment. This merging and melding of very different traditions might appear, on first consideration, to be contrived. On closer examination, however, it emerges as a profoundly convincing synthesis.

Levitt opens by emphasizing the ocular perspective of Old Russia and the Orthodox Church. Arguing from Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii's theory of the semiotic reversals that occur in an essentially closed and binary cultural universe, he suggests that the eighteenth century was less concerned with the visual per se than with the need to *become visible*. The metaphor of Petersburg as Peter's "window to Europe" serves as a prime example: most of us have recognized the new capital's role in making Europe visible to Russia, but the "Venice of the North" was also a site where Russia made herself visible to Europe.

When Russians first encountered the Enlightenment, the idea of vision as a privileged mode of understanding was in many ways already familiar to them, in large part because of Orthodoxy's theology of light, as well as its practice of turning to icons as guides to salvation. Their experience of the visual predisposed Russians to embrace the Enlightenment's ocularcentrism, and this embrace endured throughout the long eighteenth century. Disenchantment with the visual only set in after the Napoleonic wars.

As an early example of the eighteenth century's focus on the visual, Levitt offers one of the era's most abiding myths—that Peter's Russia had left the realm of darkness and entered into the light. This abstract formulation received concrete realization in many of the era's triumphal odes. Levitt analyzes extensive passages from Mikhail Lomonosov, in which the poet offers both a vision of Russia's future greatness and a jubilant sense of self-fulfillment. This conduces to a splendid image of empire, which is, as frequently as not, announced in the imperative mode; the poet regularly exhorts his audience to *see* the Russian empire, to *admire* her landscapes, to *recognize* her grandeur. He thereby stages Russia as a political and geographical entity open for all to see. Indeed, in a negation that brilliantly serves to reinforce his initial positive assertion, Lomonosov describes Russia's enemies as enveloped in darkness, gloom, and prideful blindness. Their tragic failure to open their eyes testifies to the primacy of the power of vision just as surely as does Russia's happy willingness to see and believe.

Eighteenth-century Russian theater also speaks eloquently to the importance of vision. Levitt draws our attention to the large number of Russian plays constructed on historical themes. In his interpretation, history is a type of self-mirroring that offers us the possibility of modeling the past in ways that replicate how we see ourselves in the present. Moreover, historical dramas function to render the glories of the past visible. As in his chapters on the ode, Levitt offers extensive readings of texts to buttress his arguments.

Although Russian prose narrative is occasionally regarded as the eighteenth century's unlovely stepchild, Levitt uses memoirs to great effect in advancing his notions of visibility.

Relying on both Gavriil Derzhavin and Princess Dashkova, he defines autobiography as a public stage on which greatness of the soul may be displayed. Prose, however, also has the capacity and, indeed, the responsibility to reflect less admirable aspects of reality. To drive home this point, Levitt draws heavily on Aleksandr Radishchev, whose ill-fated *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (1790) functioned as a mirror, not only of Russia's grand achievements, but also of her squalid failures.

The Visual Dominant in Eighteenth-Century Russia is a beautifully written and timely book. The product of exhaustive research and meticulous reading, it will be of interest to all serious scholars of Russian culture.

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Zrimaia lirika: Derzhavin. By Tat'iana Smoliarova. Ocherki vizual'nosti. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie," 2011. 607 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Plates. Photographs. Paper.

As Tat'iana Smoliarova's monograph suggests by its title, *Lyrics Made Visible: Derzhavin*, she aspires to unite major fields of study (each with its set of methodologies and scholarly contributions) into a single exegesis of cross-disciplinary significance and to apply such significance to the worldview and poetry of the patriarch of modern Russian poetry—Gavriil Derzhavin. Smoliarova's approach will likely be applauded by those who privilege fresh combinations and startling juxtapositions. As her inquiry proceeds (at times with marvelous readings, at other times in labyrinthine notes of uneven sophistication), she touches, not only on the history of literature and of art, on philosophy and political thought, but also on optics, gardening, architecture, manufacturing, meteorology, and even ballooning. Smoliarova uses this motley assemblage to construct an overview of the European scene at the beginning of the nineteenth century, especially in England. With the poetry Derzhavin produced between 1804 and 1807 as her primary focus, Smoliarova discusses in depth only three creations of this period, *Fonar'* (The Magic Lantern, 1804), *Raduga* (Rainbow, 1806), and *Evgeniiu. Zhizn' zvanskaia* (To Eugene. Life at Zvanka, 1807), devoting to each a massive chapter. Citing Mark Al'tshuller's research, she does concede Derzhavin's affinity with the "archaists." She also, however, attempts to depict the great poet as aware of, dependent on, and responsive "to the *mainstream* of western aesthetics *despite* his ideological preferences" (35, emphasis in the original).

Such claims are both far-reaching and debatable. Smoliarova is mostly on firm ground whenever she discusses Derzhavin's manner of writing within the context of Russian theater, painting, prosody, and literary history, and there is indeed much to be learned from the often acute and frequently daring observations with which her book is peppered. For example, Smoliarova's keen eye notes Derzhavin's penchant for almost unintelligible archaisms in *The Magic Lantern*, paradoxically one of the most pioneering texts of the period. On the other hand, such valuable findings get lost in an avalanche of asides, full-fledged essays, and other "apropos of . . ." diversions that often dilute her scholarship. Effortlessly jumping from Derzhavin to Plato, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and William Wordsworth; from Claude Lorraine to John Constable, or to Erasmus Darwin and Alexander Pope, she assumes—but hardly ever proves—that any or all of these *might have, should have* (such turns abound in her study) prompted Derzhavin to write as he did. Smoliarova poses as an expert in some of the aforementioned fields, but many of her excursions are secondhand and often have, by her own admission, little to do with Derzhavin.

Even accepting Smoliarova's premise that Derzhavin's influences came from the west, which might indeed be her chief contribution to Derzhavin studies, her analytic scope concerning the three texts she scrutinizes is oddly limited. In the discussion of *The Magic Lantern*, for example, she omits nearly all mention of the Italian painter Salvatore Tonci, a westerner whom Derzhavin termed a genius and who in fact could have substantially influenced the philosophical underpinnings of this poem. The poet and the artist were well acquainted, and Tonci created the most famous portrait of Derzhavin. It was well-