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Review of M. Jones & R. Miller, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel*

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Jones, Malcolm V. and Robin Feuer Miller, eds.
The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel.

New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

xxvi + 312 pp. \$59.95 (\$19.95 paper).

This collection of thirteen essays by eminent scholars is devoted to such diverse topics as the city, the countryside, politics, satire, religion, psychology and society, philosophy in the nineteenth-century novel, the romantic tradition, the realist tradition, the modernist tradition, novelistic technique, gender, and theory, and is classified under four subheadings—setting, culture, literary tradition, and structures and reading. These are not encyclopedic articles, but they offer insights into the subjects by referring briefly when relevant to important nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels. Each article is accommodated in about twenty pages. This book is a “real companion” to Slavic scholars, a boon to students of Russian literature, and informative for readers generally interested in finding out how any or all of those themes are tackled in Russian novels.

The introduction by Malcolm V. Jones points to the main emphasis in Russian novels where writers (predominantly male) formulate, capture the essence of Russian humanity by paying attention to everyday life, and present it through narrative techniques used in European novels by modifying or stretching them to their limits. Robert A. Maguire begins his discussion on the role of city by affirming the different representations of Moscow and St. Petersburg in the novelistic tradition, and thus reveals how they have defined the Russian character and predicted his/her destiny. According to Hugh McLean, the antiurban drive in Russian novelistic tradition began with Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin*. He continues his discussion on the countryside by giving a quick survey of important works celebrating the rural life. The chapter ends showing that Russian writers toiled with universal questions about the costs mankind pays for “progress” through urbanization.

W. Gareth Jones traces the role of politics from the eighteenth century to the present, when poets/novelists who were commissioned were not happy just being mirrors, but decided to play an active part in shaping the minds of the people. Thus he shows that the defining moments in politics (1825, 1861, 1905, 1917, 1956, 1991) become the focal points in literature. In her article on satire, Lesley Milne surveys works through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from the premise that Gogol and Shchedrin determined the points of reference for the Russian satirical novel. In the chapter on the role of religion, Jostein Børtnes presents a glimpse into the continuous dialogue that well-known novelists had with the words of the Gospels about the true meaning of life. Andrew Wachtel in “Psychology and Society” stresses that the underlying goal of Russian novelists in presenting individual psychology is to provide a view into social psychology. In his chapter on philosophy, Gary Saul Morson concludes that Russian philosophy places the highest value on the particular, the local, the timely, and on the accumulated experience rather than the abstract, the timeless and the general that dominated the European philosophical tradition.

In her discussion on “The Romantic Tradition,” Susanne Fusso says that the Russian novel engages in a dialogue with romanticism but never belongs to it. Victor Terras argues that realism meant an interest in real life, social problems, and involvement in the affairs of real life,

and gives a brief survey of novels from the golden age of Realistic tradition. Robert Russell defines the period between the 1890s and 1930s as representative of modernism in Russian literature and concludes that a strong streak of fantasy, with its roots in Gogol's and Dostoevsky's tradition, is characteristic of many of the modernist novels. On "Gender," Barbara Heldt deals with gender and male tradition initially and moves on to show the uniqueness in the writing of three novels by women writers: Avdotia Panaeva, Karolina Pavlova, and Liudmila Petrushevskaia. Caryl Emerson in her article on "Theory" says that a rich body of commentary is accumulated around the genre, but they are mostly linked with individual prototypes rather than with organizing principles, and goes on to discuss the most important theoreticians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The book is enriched further by an index, a brief bibliography of the most important works on the Russian novel, and a chronology of years from the 1700s to 1991, which are significant to literary movements. I congratulate the editors for bringing out a much needed book which gives an overview into some of the basic topics that we discuss when dealing with novels. What is amazing is that the book contains articles written by the foremost scholars in the field in a very clear, simple, straightforward style, making it a useful book as reference to specialists and an enlightening guide for novices.

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