

fields of gender and sexuality studies and Russian/post-Soviet studies. Certainly lesbian lives are the central empirical focus, but Stella's theoretical critique is far deeper and of relevance to debates in disciplines including Political Science, International Relations, and Anthropology. In this respect, the complexity that is so effectively foregrounded is both a strength and a weakness. For those already broadly familiar with the relevant theoretical debates, it will be a rewarding and thought-provoking read, but the complexity may also leave a more novice reader feeling somewhat overwhelmed at times. Perseverance is nonetheless recommended, since the issues and questions that Stella raises are of universal relevance as the limitations of current LGBT identity politics become increasing apparent.

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Jenny Kaminer, *Women with a Thirst for Destruction: The Bad Mother in Russian Culture*. Studies in Russian Literature and Theory. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014. viii + 199 pp.

The Russian mother is often an idealized figure, but Jenny Kaminer's *Women with a Thirst for Destruction: the Bad Mother in Russian Culture* focuses on the "bad mother," a figure who "shuns, subverts, or manipulates the maternal myth" (4). This presents a valuable negative counterpoint to works that study in large part the idealized mother figure, such as Joanna Hubbs's classic *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture* (Indiana University Press, 1993). Hubbs does include some literary texts in her analysis of the maternal myth broadly in Russian culture, but overall her study tends toward the historical. In contrast, Kaminer's close analysis of the image of the bad mother during three distinct historical periods—the aftermath of the Great Reforms, the upheaval caused by the 1917 Revolution and Civil War, and the Soviet Union's collapse—presents a reading of literary texts that illuminates deep cultural connections across 150 years. Kaminer demonstrates that the bad mother comes to the fore in Russia in such periods, and

convincingly argues that her significance is ambiguous. While her appearance “upholds the importance of the maternal archetype” (137) by showing the negative consequences of the good mother’s absence, she simultaneously “besmirch[es] and mock[s] the notion of motherhood as a force that binds Russian society together” (Ibid.). These apparently conflicting and yet co-existing meanings comment upon the dissonance in Russian society during unsettled, troubled periods.

Structurally, *Women with a Thirst for Destruction* is clearly organized. The introduction situates Kaminer’s argument within the longer history of Russian maternal mythology from its origin in the pre-Christian Moist Mother Earth goddess and the Orthodox Mother of God to the strong maternal figure of post-Soviet prose. Kaminer clearly delineates the positive maternal figures that dominate the periods of her study: for example, in the nineteenth century, the self-sacrificing, loving, feminine mother who played a role in the debates about family and the Woman Question, or, in the early Soviet period, the patriotic image of the Motherland.

In each of three subsequent chapters, Kaminer presents a period case study of the bad mother. First, she examines the mother of the 1870s as embodied by Arina Petrovna Golovleva in Saltykov-Shchedrin’s *The Golovlevs* and Anna Karenina in Tolstoi’s *Anna Karenina* within the context of the myth of the self-sacrificing mother. While both Arina Petrovna and Anna Karenina claim to put their children’s best interest first, in both texts, the children suffer from maternal neglect and, in the case of *The Golovlevs*, abuse. Second, Kaminer juxtaposes two images—one fictional, one real—of a new maternal type, the abandoning mother in the wake of 1917 and the Civil War. While both Dasha from Gladkov’s *Cement* and the defendant of the publicized *Trial of a Mother who Abandoned her Baby* represent examples of abandoning mothers, their comparison demonstrates a difference in official attitudes; an abandoning mother could be seen positively if her motivation was politically correct. This chapter then moves to the Stalin period of the 1930s, treating the emergence of the Great Soviet Family, while also incorporating readings of anti-Stalinist works, including Chukovskaia’s *Sofia Petrovna* and Akhmatova’s *Requiem*.

In her final chapter, Kaminer brings in negative images of motherhood that emerged in the late Soviet and immediate post-Soviet period, in the film *Adam's Rib* (1990) and two prose works by Petrushevskaja, "Our Circle" (1989) and *The Time: Night* (1992). While motherhood ideally serves to strengthen the family in Russian culture, these works present her as a destabilizing figure. Kaminer concludes with a discussion of the film *The Italian* (2005), a useful vehicle in her analysis for synthesizing all of the maternal types she has discussed, due to its thematic connection with *Anna Karenina*, its engagement with the abandoning mother, and its post-Soviet Russian setting.

Literary analysis is the study's main methodology, but, in addition to literary texts, Kaminer deftly analyzes non-literary works such as political posters, trial records, and magazine articles. The work's richness comes from these other sources she brings in and her ability to map connections between the three periods. In Chapter Three, for example, while the analysis ostensibly focuses on *Adam's Rib* and the Petrushevskaja works, Kaminer contextualizes these fictional accounts with an intriguing discussion of two groups of mothers that were prominently visible in Russia in the late Soviet and post-Soviet period: the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, a group of activists working to "save the sons of Russia from the brutality both of war and of the Russian army itself" (102), and the Black Widows, Chechen female suicide bombers who became radicalized after they lost sons, brothers, and husbands in the Chechen wars of the 1990s and 2000s. Kaminer begins the chapter with the idea put forward in the 1990s that "Motherhood is a stabilizing force that counterbalances the dynamism of social and economic tumult and political change" (101). Yet, by the end, she has shown that while ideal of motherhood may be a stabilizing force, its negative depiction emphasizes the overwhelming social anxieties that come to the surface during these same periods. Kaminer links this section with her analysis of Saltykov-Shchedrin's *Golovlevs*, adding a sense of historical continuity to her analysis of Petrushevskaja's works. The 1990s mothers Kaminer analyzes reject the mediating role traditionally associated with motherhood (for example, in the figure of the Mother of God), which allows for the destabilization of the

family, and, ultimately, “question the notion of maternity as a redemptive force” (134).

Women with a Thirst for Destruction won the Association of Women in Slavic Studies Book Prize for Best Book in Slavic/East European/Eurasian Women’s Studies in 2014. The image of the mother is important for Russian culture, but, as Kaminer deftly demonstrates in her first monograph, its symbolism impacts not just literary studies, but also has wide-reaching resonance politically, economically, and socially. Similarly, Kaminer’s study adds a new dimension to European motherhood studies, which historically have largely focused on Western European traditions. This book will be of value to those who are interested in Russian literature, but also family studies, the role of women in society, childhood studies, or the historical transformation of cultural myths.

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Stephen Amico, *Roll Over, Tchaikovsky! Russian Popular Music and Post-Soviet Homosexuality*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014. 336 pp.

The apparent paradox at the centre of *Roll Over, Tchaikovsky!* would be perceptible not just to fans of Russian popular music or specialists in post-Soviet cultural studies but even, through Russian participation in the Eurovision Song Contest, to curious television viewers across Europe and beyond: why, when state and Church homophobia has depicted sexual diversity in general and male homosexuality in particular as a Westernizing moral threat to the values and demographic power of the Russian nation, does Russian pop music contain what Stephen Amico and his gay research participants easily read as “so many embodied examples of a ‘netraditsionnaia seksual’naia orientatsiia” (66) or “non-traditional sexual orientation” among its male stars? Amico’s fieldwork in Moscow and St Petersburg between 2003 and 2005, and his observation of Russian popular culture and gay media into 2011