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Russian Realisms: Literature and Painting, 1840-1890 by Molly Brunson

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grows out of an English character in the drafts named Flora Sullivan, and she analyzes Kitty's attraction to English charitable ways at the spa. Once again, she follows details in the novel's three plots to explore the question of who one's neighbor is and whom one can love. According to her, Russian Orthodoxy as practiced by the peasant Fyodor in book eight rejects taking one's neighbor's shirt, but does not require us to give him our shirt either (167).

Chapter 5 studies the influence of Blaise Pascal on the novel, both on the level of characters, and also as an approach to the metaphysical problems that plague Levin and underlie the question of human happiness. Knapp argues that Tolstoy follows Pascal's tortured path to faith, rather than the easy one preached by Radstock. According to her, although characters in book eight have forgotten Anna, the author has not done so, and at the level of the author there is a similarity in the Pascalian crisis of faith of Anna and Levin. Knapp suggests that this may somewhat remedy the moral deficiencies in the plot by requiring the thoughtful reader to remember Anna.

The final chapter reads Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* as a response to *Anna Karenina*. Knapp's spotlight here and throughout *Anna Karenina and Others* on the limits of human communication and "neighborly love" has the paradoxical effect of making Tolstoy's art less didactic than it is often presented as being by pointing out what some might regard as an ethical failing in one of his greatest works. In point of fact, however, Tolstoy's strength as an ethical artist depends on a bedrock psychological realism that convinces his readers that he is telling it like it is, rather than how we might like it to be.

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Molly Brunson. *Russian Realisms: Literature and Painting, 1840–1890*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 2016. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. xv + 263 pp. \$59.00 (paper).

In this splendid study, Molly Brunson sets out to reshape how we look at and think about nineteenth-century realist painting and the relationship between painting and narrative realism. Brunson succeeds masterfully at dislodging assumptions about Russian nineteenth-century Realism that are most stubbornly ensconced in accounts of visual art. Russian nineteenth-century painting has, as Brunson points out, tended to play "second fiddle" in a deeply logocentric culture. It has also suffered from interpretive traditions that either dismissed it as "kitsch," as did modernists from Benois to Clement Greenberg, or claimed it as antecedent to Socialist Realism, defined not in terms of formal properties but as implementing a straightforward and un-self-referential aesthetic. Brunson challenges these assumptions by taking us through a series of dialogic moments in which visual and verbal artists engage in "interart dialogue" with a counterpart in the other medium. This is a study that is deeply committed to considering what Victor Shklovsky called the *faktura*—the "madeness"—of literature and visual art. It is also a study that makes bold arguments about evolving interconnections between the visual and verbal, painterly and narrative, advancing a set of arguments about how those interconnections proceed in complex tandem with socio-political and professional concerns.

This is an intellectually ambitious book, and its arguments, while deeply engaging, are not simple. Brunson begins with a densely-argued introduction that situates the interart self-consciousness of nineteenth-century Russian artists and writers in traditions that extend back into antiquity. She references classical antiquity on the power of the word to produce an illusion of presence (Aristotle's *energeia*), Renaissance theorists' conflation of this power with *energeia*, which has still stronger connotations of the ability to "summon objects into virtual presence through the visualizing capacities of the reader or listener" (34), and Lessing's insistence on the appropriate distinction between what is best represented *visually* or *verbally*. In the

remaining, focused chapters of the study Brunson returns to this vocabulary, suggesting both that Russian writers and artists are participating in a longstanding discourse, and that their particular instantiations of the dialogue (or dispute) are worthy of being brought into that conversation. A related concern throughout the book is to situate Russian Realism relative to contemporary European debates.

Guided by a methodology that follows W. J. T. Mitchell in "temper[ing] the role of comparison," Brunson's case studies work instead through multidisciplinary juxtaposition, amplifying what she terms "resonances" between artists and writers (22). The first chapter explores the window as both painterly frame and rhetorical device in the physiologies of the Natural School and the work of Pavel Fedotov. Chapter 2 takes up the prose of Ivan Turgenev and the paintings of Vasily Perov, focusing in particular on the motif of the road as "rhetorical and structural device." (65). The third chapter is given over entirely to Leo Tolstoy and his polemical incorporation of references to visual culture, focusing in particular on *War and Peace*. Chapter 4 takes up a close reading of selected paintings by Ilya Repin, and Chapter 5 considers Dostoevsky's multiple moments of visuality, and attempts at "fusing" word and image, in *The Idiot*.

There are instances when Brunson's attention to artistic self-consciousness and interart competition may seem, to some readers, to go a bit too far. One moment I found myself wondering about occurs in her reading of Repin's *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan, 16 November 1581*. Brunson begins by establishing the historical context in which the painting was conceived and executed, most notably the "brutal historical moment" of the assassination of Alexander II, and then suggests ways in which the painting was read by contemporaries (including Pobedonostsev) as a "dangerous analogy" (148). Brunson reads the painting's deployment of the visual and narrative with extraordinary thoughtfulness and sensitivity; and then, in a concluding question, she wonders whether the bloody hand at the center of the painting might not also be Repin's own—cradling the face of the dead Ivan, for whom the writer Garshin served as model. This reading heads us away from the painting's political content, away from the contemporary "danger" courted by Repin in showing the gruesome scene. Instead, it suggests the artist's desire to murder his literary rival: "[...] it is possible to see something more sinister in Ivan's bloody hand: the hand of the artist, dripping with paint, overpowering the writer in a vicious bid for power" (158). It is hard for this reader, at any rate, to see *that* reading as representing "something more sinister" than murdered heirs and tsars blown up by terrorists.

Such occasional exaggeration aside, Brunson is surely right in pointing out that moments of self-referentiality are not at odds with, but rather "part and parcel of any realist aesthetic," giving the reader or viewer a glimpse of the "precise nature of a given realism" (76). These "precise glimpses" are part of what makes Brunson's study so enormously instructive to read: she zooms in on particular narrative moments (the way Grigorovich takes us on a walk around Petersburg, or what happens when a cart breaks down in one of Turgenev's *Notes of a Hunter*) and on the composition and evolution of some of the best-known canvases of the Russian canon. She takes us through a kind of master class in reading, whether it's a painting or a text—and the effect is not simply to get us to think differently about a particular painting, but about how to consider Russian realist paintings in general. After having read Brunson's book this reader, at any rate, will want to linger more closely and longer with Russian realist paintings, considering how a canvas gives evidence of its making, and pondering the ways in which an artist's socio-political or documentary intentions are accompanied by considered attention to color, brush-stroke, and the sheer tactile delight that goes with putting paint on canvas.