

roots of Russian tragedy to court ritual and visiting foreign troops. This section also reviews the basic patterns of symbolic power, positioning Russia within a broader European conversation about tragedy at the service of absolute monarchy. Section II, “*Khorev*, or the Tragedy of Origin,” includes four chapters on Sumarokov’s first tragedy, connecting the playwright’s choice of historical subject matter to Elizabeth’s recent ascension to the throne and efforts to cement her legitimacy. Ospovat makes a compelling case for the “poetics of political allegory,” arguing that pastoral allegories of love, gallantry, and eroticism in fact function to signal political power and submission. Section III, “Poetic Justice: Coup d’état, Political Theology, and the Politics of Spectacle in the Russian *Hamlet*” consists of five chapters that continue to explore court politics, this time analyzing Sumarokov’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s masterpiece. Arguing for *Gamlet* as a celebration of Elizabeth’s 1741 coup d’état, Ospovat reads the play through a specific early modern understanding of “melancholy” along with “Machievellian (or ‘Tacitean’) apprehensions of ruthless violence” (183). *Gamlet*’s denouement is examined against the background of Elizabeth’s reign of terror and clemency. The three chapters that constitute the book’s epilogue, “The Theatre of War and Peace: The Miracle of the House of Brandenburg,” feel somewhat out of place, as they largely ignore Sumarokov to focus on Frederick the Great’s self-fashioning as a tragic hero and Peter III’s sudden withdrawal from the anti-Prussian alliance as an act not of weakness, but rather an ill-received gesture intended to project strength through clemency. The final chapter, “Conclusion: Tragedy, History, and Theory,” reviews the theoretical framework and major claims, adding a fascinating political interpretation of the idea of “fate” in eighteenth-century Russian tragedy and arguing for the “polyphony of tragedy”—its lack of a single authorial voice—as making possible the airing of discourse that in other contexts would be considered outright seditious.

Ospovat’s *Terror and Pity* contributes richly to our understanding of Sumarokov’s dramatic practice, situating it within a complex interplay of history, political power, and art in eighteenth-century Russia. The theoretically-dense prose can be challenging and even distracting, but attentive readers willing to slow down and untangle the arguments will be rewarded. The book can be appreciated as a single study, read cover to cover, or—as its origins in a series of articles suggests—approached section by section in isolation. Perhaps put off by years of Soviet literary scholarship that cast Sumarokov and some of his contemporaries as would-be *frondeurs*, scholars in recent years have largely avoided political approaches to Sumarokov’s work. Ospovat’s book demonstrates the benefits of returning to historical and political interpretations, but with a nuanced and theoretically-sophisticated framework.

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Axiome der Dämmerung: eine Poetik des Lichts bei Boris Pasternak. By Christian Zehnder. Bausteine zur Slavischen Philologie und Kulturgeschichte. Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2015. 478 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. €60.00, hard bound. doi: 10.1017/slr.2017.221

In his comprehensive study of the “poetics of light” in the work of Boris Pasternak, Christian Zehnder takes as a starting point Marina Tsvetaeva’s oft-cited essay “A Downpour of Light.” His analysis of the “metaphysical poetics” (73) of light throughout Pasternak’s oeuvre draws from several theoretical streams: post-Symbolist Sophiology, continuing Samson Brojtman’s work, here linked to the theological

concept of the Tabor light of transfiguration and opposing the Sophianic feminine to the masculinity of Logos; the idea of Modernism as “ocularphobic” (20), adapted from Martin Jay; and views of light in Pasternak as an “occurrence” (46–47) or “occasion” (45), as defined by Henri Bergson and Vladimir Jankélévitch, respectively, and as proximity, as defined by Emmanuel Lévinas and in some departure from Roman Jakobson’s essay on metonymy (contiguity) in Pasternak. Zehnder examines the concept of “light-rain” (46), captured poetically in Tsvetaeva’s essay, in which the proximity of the “dark” and “receptive” element of water with light makes it an “occurrence” (46) in a process that brings about an epiphany. Zehnder distinguishes his “metaphysical poetics” (73), following Boris Gasparov’s placement of “poetics” in quotation marks, from a study of motifs, and by implication from Alexander Zholkovsky’s relatively close concepts of contact and “higher phase” in his studies of Pasternak “invariants,” by noting that his focus is on these phenomena “not as marked or unmarked invariants . . . but as events, occasions, proximities” (73); he argues that metaphysical poetics provides the framework that lends significance to these motifs.

Zehnder examines the paradox that darkness is sometimes overlooked in Pasternak, perceived as a poet of light; he explores the shadows hidden in plain sight throughout his work. He traces Pasternak’s “sympathy with the twilight” (125), a phrase from an early prose fragment, to a Sophiology incompatible with what Zehnder sees as Symbolist ocular—and logocentrism. He examines the early fragments productively through Emmanuel Lévinas’s aesthetics of shadow. His readings of light-rain epiphanies in *My Sister Life* reveal shadows both in the ephemerality of the epiphanies and the necessity of sacrifice that accompanies them. Epiphanies disappear in his poetry of the 1920s, in which light and water clash. Light and shadow take an ethically-tinged turn in stories of the 1920s: Zehnder applies Lévinas’s later ethical writings to explore metaphysical illumination (as opposed to enlightenment) and darkness in “The Childhood of Liuvvers,” a distortion of light-rain in the descending murkiness of “Aerial Ways,” and the flickering, then fading light of the future in the verse novel *Spektorsky*. Zehnder opposes this darkness to the glaring, blinding sunlight of communism projected in Andrei Platonov’s *Chevengur*. In his insightful analysis of *Safe Conduct*, Zehnder reexamines Pasternak’s “light beam/power beam” (276) opposition both as a “transfiguration” (275) not through light, but surpassing it, and through Pasternak’s rejection of Hermann Cohen and philosophy (light) for the power of art serving love, represented by Rainer Maria Rilke. In Pasternak’s *Second Birth* Zehnder sees the illuminations fading behind the “distances” of socialism, and in the artificial glare of electric light, as the poet tried to adapt to a “new reality” in the era of Stalinist darkness (75). The exaggerated ocularcentrism Zehnder sees in the verse of the 1930s and 1940s are reflections of Pasternak’s attempts to adapt to the new cultural context.

Doctor Zhivago, the eye specialist, carries the light of transfiguration, which shines through the water-bearing, neo-Sophianic Lara. Read through Vladimir Lossky’s theology of transfiguration, Zhivago’s light-epiphanies exemplify an originality threatened by the surrounding post-revolutionary world. While Zhivago fades away and ultimately rejects transfiguration in what Zehnder calls a “heroic act” (406), expressed in the farewell to transfiguration in the poem “August,” the memory of the light having been remains, thus preserving the significance of life.

Zehnder focuses on the themes of “content” (Pasternak’s term) and “fulfillment” (76) in Pasternak’s late verse, whose simplicity he reexamines from a metaphysical standpoint; he sees both themes manifested in light that shines to fill the framework of simplicity. In close readings of “In Hospital” and “Bacchanalia,” he analyzes light-rain phenomena that illustrate gratitude and fulfillment in the former and counteract

emptiness in the latter. Pasternak confronts the Stalinist cliché of the “bright future” (76), with which he had struggled earlier, through illumination of the everyday.

In a book of this scope and detail, minor disagreements with some interpretations are inevitable. Overall, however, this meticulously researched and thought-provoking volume makes a significant contribution to Pasternak scholarship and should be of interest to those studying the poetics of light and visuality, and the intersections of Modernist poetry and metaphysics.

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The Gift of Active Empathy: Scheler, Bakhtin, and Dostoevsky. By Alina Wyman. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2016. Bibliography. Index. xiv, 323 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$39.95, paper. doi: 10.1017/slr.2017.222

Alina Wyman’s monograph on Dostoevskii begins with a now familiar dissatisfaction with that most famous of Dostoevskii’s readings by Mikhail Bakhtin. As Wyman complains, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* neither pays proper attention to characters’ actions in Dostoevskii’s novels, nor acknowledges their spiritual growth. Instead, Wyman suggests to “tackl[e] the question of spiritually relevant communication in Dostoevsky” (5) with Bakhtin’s concept of *vzhivanie* or “live-entering,” developed in “Toward a Philosophy of the Act” and “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity.”

To appreciate how radical of a pivot Wyman makes here, we should bear in mind that Bakhtin’s turn to Dostoevskii is commonly understood as a turn away from the architectonics of “Author and Hero” in an attempt to address the fundamental power imbalance inherent in the multi-stage process of *vzhivanie*, which depends on the subject’s “surplus of seeing” vis-à-vis the other and as such exposes the other to the threat of complete objectification. Keenly attuned to the ambivalence of consummation, Wyman revises the concept, supplementing it with the notion of active empathy developed by Max Scheler, who seems to be Bakhtin’s most direct source.

Hence, in the first two chapters of the study, Wyman embarks on a thorough exegesis of Bakhtin’s and Scheler’s theories of empathy, and her grafting of both philosophies results in a powerful and productive methodology for “analyzing empathetic efforts of literary characters” (53). As Wyman shows, Bakhtin and Scheler base their notions of empathy on the necessity of “the ontological gulf between individual personalities,” (50) and the act of divine Incarnation, which they understand as an ideal model for the individuated, embodied acts of agapeistic love directed towards the other. Unlike Bakhtin, however, Scheler reserves a space for the *individual ineffable*, “the Godlike essence of each individual personality [that] may never be completely uncovered even under the revealing gaze of agape” (49). It is the other’s “surplus of being,” inaccessible to one’s “surplus of seeing,” that serves as a guarantee for the spiritually productive intersubjectivity. To become nurturing, active empathy must avoid the pitfalls of objectifying the other, as well as surrendering the “ontological gap” that separates two subjects.

Hence, in Wyman’s analysis, the failure of the Underground Man (chapter III) is that of incomplete Incarnation: unable to positively identify with the absolute, or practice selfless love towards concrete human beings, the Underground Man deprives himself of any opportunity for a positive interpersonal experience.