



ELENA VLADIMIROVNA DUSHECHKINA
(1 MAY 1941 — 21 SEPTEMBER 2020)

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At the joint celebration for Elena Vladimirovna Dushechkina and Aleksandr Fedorovich Belousov,
2 November 2006
Photo: Vadim Lurie

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Elena Vladimirovna Dushechkina
(1 May 1941 — 21 September 2020)

Elena Vladimirovna Dushechkina, an outstanding literary scholar and cultural historian, professor at St Petersburg University, a clever, kind and interesting person, and to many a close friend, died in the eightieth year of her life in September this year.

Elena Vladimirovna's formation as a scholar took place at the right time and in the right place — in the 1960s in Tartu, where she was fortunate enough to be a pupil of Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman, and to be supervised for her candidate's dissertation¹ by Dmitry Sergeevich Likhachov. She taught at the University of Tartu starting in 1972, at Tallinn Pedagogical Institute starting in 1977, and St Petersburg State University starting in 1992, where she had begun her literary career in 1960 as an external student at the Philological Faculty of then Leningrad University. Here Elena Vladimirovna later worked for almost thirty years at the Department of the History of Russian Literature. Besides her courses in the theory and history of literature she ran her own specialised seminars, and also graduate and other general seminars, teaching her students the foundations and subtleties of the literary profession.

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¹ E. V. Dushechkina, *Khudozhestvennaya funktsiya chuzhoy rechi v kievskom letopisanii* [The Artistic Function of Other People's Speech in Kievan Chronicle-Writing]: Dissertation for the Candidate's Degree in Philology, Tartu State University. Tartu, 1973, 26 pp.

Elena Vladimirovna was a friend and collaborator of colleagues abroad, was on the editorial board of the journal of Slavonic studies, *Elementa*, and in the 1990s and the following decade taught as a visiting professor at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Albany, at the University of Kansas at Lawrence, and at the universities of Daugavpils, Joensuu and Tallinn.

Elena Vladimirovna's literary interests were exceptionally wide: they included the Old Russian chronicles, saints' lives and stories, Russian literature of the late eighteenth century and romanticism, the poetry of Tyutchev, Nekrasov and Zhukovsky, and the prose of Gogol, Leskov and Chekhov.¹ To this far from complete list we should add those topics and subjects which were connected with Elena Vladimirovna's special interest in the area of mass literary production and everyday writing, be it verses prepared for children's parties, Soviet children's songs of friendship and health, or family jokes.²

¹ See, for example: E. V. Dushechkina, 'Nestor v rabote nad zhitiem Feodosiya: opyt prochteniya teksta' [Nestor at Work on the Life of Feodosiy: An Essay in Textual Interpretation], Yu. M. Lotman (ed.), *Trudy po russkoy i slavyanskoj filologii. XVIII: Literaturovedenie* [Works on Russian and Slavic Philology. XVIII: Literary Criticism]. Tartu: Tartu State University, 1971, pp. 4–15. (Uchenye zapiski Tartuskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 266); eadem, 'Tsar Aleksey Mikhaylovich kak pisatel' [Tsar Aleksey Mikhaylovich as a Writer], M. A. Salmina (ed.), *Kulturnoe nasledie Drevney Rusi: istoki, stanovlenie, traditsii* [Cultural Heritage of Ancient Rus: Origins, Formation, Traditions]. Moscow: Nauka, 1976, pp. 184–188; eadem, 'Poema N. A. Lvova "Russkiy 1791 god": zhanr, traditsiya, novatorstvo' [N. A. Lvov's Poem 'A Russian 1791': Genre, Tradition and Innovation], A. A. Karpov (ed.), *Aktualnye problemy izucheniya i prepodavaniya russkoy literatury: vzglyad iz Rossii — vzglyad iz zarubezhya* [Actual Issues of Studying and Teaching Russian Literature: A View from Russia — a View from Abroad]. St Petersburg: Skriptorium, 2011, pp. 255–263; eadem, 'Stikhotvorenie F. I. Tyutcheva "Ne ostyvshaya ot znouy..." [F. I. Tyutchev's Poem "Not Cooled from the Heat..."], A. F. Belousov (ed.), *Russkaya klassicheskaya literatura: analiz khudozhestvennogo teksta* [Russian Classical Literature: Analysis of Literary Texts]. Tallinn: Valgus, 1988, pp. 45–57; eadem, 'Stikhotvorenie N. A. Nekrasova "Vcherashniy den, chasu v shestom..." [N. A. Nekrasov's Poem 'About Six O'Clock Yesterday...'], A. F. Belousov (ed.), *Russkaya klassicheskaya literatura: analiz khudozhestvennogo teksta* [Russian Classical Literature: Analysis of Literary Texts]. Tallinn: Valgus, 1988, pp. 58–74; eadem, "'Pri mysl'i o Svetlane..." : ballada V. A. Zhukovskogo v obshchestvennom i literaturnom obikhode' ['Thinking of Svetlana...': V. A. Zhukovsky's Ballad in Social and Literary Circulation], N. M. Gerasimova (ed.), *Imya — syuzhet — mif: problemy russkogo realizma: Mezhevuzovskiy sbornik* [Name — Plot — Myth: Problems of Russian Realism]. St Petersburg: St Petersburg State University, 1995, pp. 45–64; eadem, "'Taras Bulba" v svete traditsii drevnerusskoy voinskoy povesti' ['Taras Bulba' in the Light of the Tradition of the Old Russian Military Tale], G. V. Samoylenko (ed.), *Gogol i sovremennost: tvorcheskoe nasledie pisatelya v dvizhenii epokh* [Gogol and Modernity: Artistic Legacy of the Writer in the Movement of Epochs]. Kyiv: Vishcha shkola, 1983, pp. 30–34; eadem, 'Nikolaevskiy ukaz 1827 g. v videnii N. S. Leskova (rasskaz "Ovtsebyk")' [Nicholas I's Edict of 1827 as Seen by N. S. Leskov (The Story 'The Sheep-Bull')], *Vestnik SPbGU. Yazyk i literatura*, 2017, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 179–185; eadem, 'Bolotnaya topika u Chekhova' [The Theme of the Swamp in Chekhov], M. V. Stroganov (ed.), *Russkoe boloto: mezhdunarodnoy nauchnoy konferentsii* [Russian Swamp: Between Nature and Culture: Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference]. Tver: M. Batasova Press, 2010, pp. 190–197; eadem, 'Chekhov i "izyashchnoe"' [Chekhov and the 'Elegant'], A. Stankeviča (red.), *Slavyanskie chteniya* [Slavic Readings], is. 8. Daugavpils: Daugavpils universitātes akad miskais Apgāds 'Saule', 2011, pp. 107–113.

² E. V. Dushechkina, 'Sborniki detskikh pozdravitelnykh stikhov XIX veka' [Collections of Nineteenth-Century Children's Congratulatory Verse], E. V. Kuleshov, I. A. Antipova (eds.), *Detskiy sbornik: statyi po detskoj literature i antropologii detstva* [Children's Collection: Essays on Children's Literature and Anthropology of Childhood]. Moscow: OGI, 2003, pp. 17–27; eadem, "'Esl'i pesenka vsyudu poetsya..." [If a Song Is Sung Everywhere...], *Elementa: Journal of Slavic Studies and Comparative Cultural Semiotics*, 2000, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 223–234; eadem, "'Esl'i khochesh byt zdorov": ideya zdorovya v sovetskoy

Elena Vladimirovna occupied a special place in Russian literary studies of the second half of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries, and this was determined not so much by the subjects of her work as by the individual stamp of her writing — original, unwavering, always recognisable. She was distinguished by an exceptionally perceptive gaze and acute critical observation — the ability to see subjects, details and perspectives in her material that had previously gone unnoticed or been considered undeserving of scholarly attention. This was the genesis not only of individual articles (for example, on the interjection *chu!* ‘lo!’, the epithet *lupoglazyy* ‘goggle-eyed’, or poetical meteorology),¹ but also of research projects lasting many years. While she was working on her first book-length research work after her dissertation, dealing with the baroque stylistics of seventeenth-century Russian secular literature,² Elena Vladimirovna turned her attention to the calendar context of *Povest o Frole Skobeeve* (*The Tale of Frol Skobeev*), the action of which takes place during the Christmas season. These observations later led her to conceptualise the phenomenon of ‘calendar literature’ (persistent literary forms that are determined by being connected not only thematically, but also by the circumstances of their publication, with a particular season or festival in the calendar),³ the writing of a series

detskoy pesne’ [‘If You Want to Be Healthy’: The Idea of Health in Soviet Children’s Songs], R. Bobryk, J. Feryno (eds.), *Morbus, medicamentum et sanus — Choroba, lek i zdrowie — Bolezn, lekarstvo i zdrowie — Illness, Medicine and Health*. Warszawa: Slawistyczny Ośrodek Wydawniczy, 2001, pp. 399–412. (Studia literatura Polono-Slavica, 6); eadem, ‘Anekdoty o detyakh: iz oblasti semejnogo folklor’a [Jokes about Children: From the Field of Family Folklore], A. F. Belousov (ed.), *Zhanyr slovesnogo teksta: Anekdot* [Oral Text Genres: Anecdote]. Tallinn: Tallinn State Pedagogical Institute, 1989, pp. 159–164.

¹ E. V. Dushechkina, ‘Eto strannoje “chu!..” (o mezhdometii *chu* v russkoy poezii) [That Strange *chu!*.. (On the Interjection *chu!* ‘lo!’ in Russian Poetry)], *Folklor, postfolklor, byt, literatura: Sbornik statey k 60-letiyu Aleksandra Fedorovicha Belousova* [Folklore, Postfolklore, Everyday Life, Literature: A Collection of Essays for the 60th Anniversary of Aleksandr F. Belousov]. St Petersburg: St Petersburg State University of Culture and Arts, 2006, pp. 333–342; eadem, ‘Istoriya i znachenie slova “lupoglazyy” v literature i rechevom obikhode’ [The History and Meaning of the Word *lupoglazyy* ‘Goggle-eyed’ in Literature and in Current Speech], S. Yu. Artemova, N. A. Veselova, A. G. Stepanov (eds.), *Proizvodstvo smysla: Sbornik statey i materialov pamyati Igorya Vladimirovicha Fomenko* [Generating Meaning: A Collection of Articles and Materials in Memoriam of Igor V. Fomenko]. Tver: Tver State University, 2018, pp. 317–325; eadem, ‘O sudbe “poeticheskoy klimatologii” Tyutcheva’ [On the Fate of Tyutchev’s ‘Poetical Climate Science’], A. K. Baiburin, A. F. Belousov (eds.), *Studia metrica et poetica: Sbornik statey pamyati P. A. Rudneva* [Studia metrica et poetica: A Collection of Essays in Memory of P. A. Rudnev]. St Petersburg: Akademicheskij proekt, 1999, pp. 287–295.

² E. V. Dushechkina, *Stilistika russkoy bytovoy povesti XVII veka (Povest o Frole Skobeeve): Uchebnyy material po drevnerusskoy literature* [The Stylistics of the Russian Everyday Story in the Seventeenth Century (*The Tale of Frol Skobeev*): Teaching Materials on Old Russian Literature]. Tallinn: Tallinn State Pedagogical Institute, 1986, 93 pp.

³ See: E. V. Dushechkina, ‘Russkaya kalendarnaya proza 20–30-kh godov XIX veka’ [Russian Calendrical Prose of the 1820–1830s], L. S. Sidyakov (ed.), *Istoriko-literaturnyy protsess: metodologicheskie aspekty* [Historical and Literary Process: Methodological Aspects]. Riga: Latvian State University, 1989, vol. 2: *Russkaya literatura XI — nachala XX v.* [Russian Literature from the Eleventh Century to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century], pp. 32–34; eadem, ‘Svyatochny bum, ili Prazdnichnaya povinnost russkikh belletristov’ [The Christmas Boom, or, The Holiday Responsibilities of Russian Writers], *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1994, no. 6, pp. 192–199.

of articles,¹ several collections,² the dissertation for her higher doctorate,³ and a monograph⁴ on the tradition of Christmas stories in Russian literature from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth.

The study of Christmas texts and the consideration of the calendrical dimension of modern as well as traditional culture suggested another research topic, to which Elena Vladimirovna devoted many years. Her monograph *Russkaya elka* (*The Russian Christmas Tree*) came out in 2002 and is the first and so far the only book-length scholarly publication in Russian on the holiday and its central symbol, and examines their history through the prism of their literary and visual representations in changing cultural, political and ideological contexts.⁵ Her book on the Christmas tree became a real bestseller and brought its author recognition far beyond academe, giving rise to many interviews and media publications in the approach to the New Year; a decade later it was reissued twice (in 2012 and 2014, by the European University at St Petersburg Press).

Elena Vladimirovna's last great research enthusiasm (also partly inspired by Christmastide) was the cultural history of the name Svetlana.⁶ Although the subjects of literary history and the methods of literary criticism have a large place here, still, alongside Zhukovskiy's Christmas ballad, Pantaleimon Romanov's novel and Gaidar's short story, and songs from the street and the popular theatre,

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- ¹ E. V. Dushechkina, "Peterburgskiy mif" i russkiy svyatochnyy rasskaz' [The 'Petersburg Myth' and the Russian Christmas Story], A. I. Dobkin, A. V. Kobak (eds.), *Antsiferovskie chteniya: Materialy i tezisy konferentsii* [Antsiferov Readings: Proceedings and Abstracts of the Conference]. Leningrad: Sovetskiy fond kultury, 1989, pp. 121–125; eadem, 'Svyatochnyy rasskaz: vozniknovenie i upadok zhanra' [The Christmas Story: The Rise and Fall of the Genre], F. P. Fedorov (ed.), *Prostranstvo i vremya v literature i iskusstve: Metodicheskie materialy po teorii literatury* [Space and Time in Literature and Art: Methodological Materials on the Theory of Literature]. Daugavpils: Daugavpils State Pedagogical Institute, 1990, pp. 42–44; eadem, 'Svyatochnye istorii v zhurnale M. D. Chulkova "I to i syo"' [Christmas Stories in M. D. Chul'kov's Magazine *I to i syo*], *Literatura i folklor: voprosy poetiki: Mezhdvuzovskiy sbornik nauchnykh trudov* [Literature and Folklore: Issues in Poetics. Interuniversity Collection of Academic Papers]. Volgograd: Volgograd State Pedagogical Institute, 1990, pp. 12–22.
- ² E. V. Dushechkina (ed.), *Russkaya kalendarnaya proza: antologiya svyatochnogo rasskaza: Uchebnye materialy po spetskursu* [Russian Calendrical Prose: An Anthology of Christmas Stories. Course Materials]. Tallinn: Tallinn State Pedagogical Institute, 1988, 111 pp.; E. V. Dushechkina (ed.), *Peterburgskiy svyatochnyy rasskaz* [The Petersburg Christmas Story]. Leningrad: Petropol, 1991, 174 pp.; E. V. Dushechkina, Kh. Baran (eds.), *Chudo rozhdestvenskoy nochi: svyatochnye rasskazy* [The Christmas Night Wonder: Christmas Stories]. St Petersburg: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1993, 701 pp.
- ³ E. V. Dushechkina, *Russkiy svyatochnyy rasskaz: stanovlenie zhanra* [The Russian Christmas Story: The Origins of the Genre]: Author's Abstract of the Dissertation for the Doctor's Degree in Philology. St Petersburg, 1993, 32 pp.
- ⁴ E. V. Dushechkina, *Russkiy svyatochnyy rasskaz: stanovlenie zhanra* [The Russian Christmas Story: The Origins of the Genre]. St Petersburg: Linguistic Centre of St Petersburg State University, 1995, 256 pp.
- ⁵ E. V. Dushechkina, *Russkaya elka: istoriya, mifologiya, literatura* [The Russian Christmas Tree: History, Mythology and Literary Representations]. St Petersburg: Norint, 2002, 414 pp.
- ⁶ E. V. Dushechkina, *Svetlana: kulturnaya istoriya imeni* [Svetlana: The Cultural History of a Name]. St Petersburg: European University at St Petersburg Press, 2007, 226 pp.

attention is also paid to periodicals, to the names of ships, to the names of the daughters of Soviet leaders, and to contemporary urban ergonyms. As in *The Russian Christmas Tree*, Elena Vladimirovna goes beyond the bounds of literary studies and writes as a cultural historian in this fundamental work of onomastics.

It is hard for one who knew Elena Vladimirovna personally to write about her in the dry language of an obituary and to remember her only as a scholar and a university professor. Her charm was irresistible, and among her friends were people of different generations. Her remarkable character combined a sense of her own worth with a genuine simplicity, a warm heart with rigour, old-fashioned ways with eccentricity, sobriety with indestructible gaiety. Elena Vladimirovna was especially gifted as a storyteller, and her memory seemed inexhaustible. What did she not reminisce about — Lotman and the department at Tartu, or her childhood in Khibiny, teaching in America or dealing with Russian journalists! These were always lively stories, full of details and imbued with irony.

Elena Vladimirovna's long life, rich in scholarly achievements, events and experiences, was unexpectedly cut short, with devastating suddenness for her friends, family and colleagues. Last year she presented a revised edition of her book on *Frol Skobeev* at the Pushkin House, supplemented with new materials and ideas,¹ and as recently as this spring, as she adapted to the format of distance teaching, she was engaged with students and had plans to publish a collection of her articles of various years. Elena Vladimirovna's departure is a heavy loss to scholarship and to everyone who knew her. Blessed be her memory.

Translated by Ralph Cleminson

¹ E. V. Dushechkina, *Povest o Frole Skobeeve: istoriya teksta i ego vospriyatie v russkoy kulture* [The Tale of Frol Skobeev: The History of the Text and Its Reception in Russian Culture]. St Petersburg: Yuolukka, 2018, 128 pp.