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Book Provides New Insights to Russian Literature

April 27, 2011

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – The 20th century provided an unprecedented backdrop for social, political and economic upheaval in Russia. The literature born from this sweeping change is the subject of a new book co-edited by Illinois Wesleyan University's Isaac Funk Professor of Russian Studies Marina Balina.

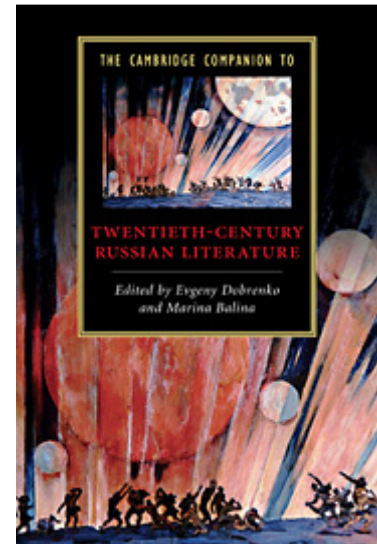
The book, *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Russian Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), is part of the *Cambridge Companions to Literature* collection, and brings together an impressive assembly of scholars from such universities as Yale, Columbia, Oxford, Harvard and Princeton. "These are some of the most prolific Russian scholars of our time," said Balina, who also contributed an introduction and a chapter on Soviet prose after Stalin. "We all came together with one idea – let us create a tool that will help us teach, and help students to learn." The contributors present the most up-to-date scholarship on the historical and cultural context of the 20th century literary development, and place Russian authors within the changing framework.

"With the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the publication of previously unknown sources in Russia – among them works by dissident and émigré writers – readers and scholars were able to see a unified body of Russian literature in its fullness," said Balina, who co-edited the book with University of Sheffield's Professor of Russian Studies Evgeny Dobrenko.

This is the fourth volume that Balina has co-edited with Dobrenko, who is one of the most prolific scholars of Soviet literature and culture. "Working together with Professor Dobrenko is not only a big honor, but also a great privilege," said Balina, who noted his unprecedented expertise in the field of Slavic Studies provides "constant stimulation to my own work and opens up for me new perspectives and challenges."

Chapters of the book examine an array of facets to Russian literature, from the 20th century epic novel, and poetry before and after 1930, to newest trends in post-Soviet literature. Balina says the chapters create more than a simple examination of interconnectedness between cultural history and literature. "Literature is so incredibly diverse. Yes, it reflects changes in society, but also changes in the individual, and changes in the creative process. Making connections between all of these is what the book is trying to show."

A native of Russia who earned her doctorate at Leningrad State University (now St. Petersburg), Balina joined Illinois Wesleyan's faculty in 1989. A member of the University's Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures, she was named to the Isaac Funk Professorship in 2007. Her published research has focused on contemporary Russian "life writing," including autobiography, memoir, travelogue and most recently on children's literature and culture of the former Soviet Union. A highly requested speaker, Balina has traveled the globe to present her research to fellow scholars. She has co-edited *Endquote: Sots Art Literature and Soviet Empire Style* (Northwestern UP, 2000), *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Russian Writers since 1980*, (Thomson & Gale Publishers, 2003,) an anthology of Russian and Soviet fairy tales, *Politicizing Magic* (Northwestern UP, 2005), *Russian Children's Literature and Culture* (with Larissa Rudova, Routledge, 2008) and most recently *Petrified Utopia: Happiness Soviet Style* (Anthem Press, 2009).



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