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0521025699 - Nikolai Zabolotsky: Play for Mortal Stakes

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Nikolai Zabolotsky (1903–1958) was one of the great poets of twentieth-century Russia. As the last link in the Russian Futurist tradition and the first significant poet to come of age in the Soviet period, Zabolotsky wrote poetry both highly experimental and classical. This is the first critical biography of Zabolotsky to appear in English. Goldstein examines not only Zabolotsky's poetic career but also his life, from his obscure origins in the Russian countryside to his arrest and imprisonment in the 1930s. At the same time, Goldstein highlights the deep ambiguity of Zabolotsky's era by exploring the ways in which the poet was influenced both by the avant-garde and by the Soviet scientific establishment.

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NIKOLAI
ZABOLOTSKY

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521418966

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First published 1993
 This digitally printed first paperback version 2006

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Goldstein, Darra.
 Nikolai Zabolotsky: Play for mortal stakes /
 Darra Goldstein.
 p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 41896 8

1. Zabolotskii, N. (Nikolai), 1903–1958 – Biography.
2. Poets, Russian – 20th century – Biography. I. Title.

PG3476.Z2Z67 1993

891.71'42–dc20 92-46108 CIP

[B]

ISBN-13 978-0-521-41896-6 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-41896-8 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-02569-0 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-02569-9 paperback

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*To the memory of my brother, Jared Haft Goldstein,
who merged the scientific and the humane
in his work and his life*

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But yield who will to their separation,
My object in living is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
As my two eyes make one in sight.
Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For Heaven and the future's sakes.
Robert Frost, "Two Tramps in Mud Time"

We must shatter the glass wall that
Socrates and Aristotle placed between
nature and the sweet lechery of an
inquiring mind.
Guy Davenport, "Tatlin!"

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Acknowledgements

This book could not have been written without the generous help of many. I am indebted to Gregory Freidin, who first introduced me to Zabolotsky's poetry and shared his considerable knowledge with me. Other perceptive readers include John Bowlt, the late Edward J. Brown, Caryl Emerson, George Gibian, Irene Masing-Delic, Nina Perlina, Cathy Popkin, and William Mills Todd. Ilona Bell and Josephine Woll offered succor at critical times. Nils Åke Nilsson provided a haven at the Slavic Institute of Stockholm University, and Sally Kux was a model researcher. Thanks are also due my editor, Katharina Brett, who sensitively guided this book into its present form. Grants from the American Council of Learned Societies, the Fulbright-Hays Foundation, the International Research and Exchanges Board, the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, and Williams College allowed me time for writing and research and opportunities to travel to Soviet archives.

In Russia, I benefited from the help of the staff at TsGALI, the Central Archives for Literature and Art. Nikita Zabolotsky opened the family archives to me, and his wife, Natalya, opened their home. Without their assistance this book would not be complete. Yekaterina Vasilyevna Zabolotskaya graciously provided personal information about her husband, and Asar Eppel guided me to some obscure sources. Natalya Roskina gladly shared her knowledge of Zabolotsky's late years, as did the poet Viktor Sosnora in St. Petersburg. Also in St. Petersburg, Anatoly Aleksandrov took the time to show me the places where Zabolotsky lived and worked as well as giving

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Acknowledgements

me material from his own archives. Igor Bakhterev shared lucid memories of his OBERIU days with Zabolotsky.

No acknowledgement would be complete without a word of thanks to my husband, Dean Crawford. For all the hours of skilled editing, writerly insight, and emotional support, I am especially grateful.

Parts of chapters one and three appeared in *Slavic Review* (Winter 1989) and *Russian Literature* (1983, 13).

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Notes on transliteration and translation

The transliteration of Russian into English is always thorny. I have opted for a double standard to make this book useful to the widest possible audience. Thus, all Russian names in the text have been rendered phonetically in order to ease pronunciation for the general reader. For the specialist, however, all literary terms and quotations have been transliterated according to the modified Library of Congress system, as have all footnote and bibliographic references. It is my hope that any confusion arising from such variants as Mayakovsky and Maiakovskii, or Fyodorov and Fedorov, will be more than offset by the respective accessibility and precision afforded.

Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the Russian are mine. For the poetry, I have chosen to present literal, line-by-line translations rather than attempt poetic renderings which might mask Zabolotsky's intended meanings. Those able to read Zabolotsky's poetry in the original are encouraged to do so to experience his marvelous word plays and rhythms.