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0521418968 - Nikolai Zabolotsky: Play for Mortal Stakes

Darra Goldstein

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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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*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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 0521418968 - Nikolai Zabolotsky: Play for Mortal Stakes
 Darra Goldstein
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> x
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>Notes on transliteration and translation</i>	xiii
Introduction	i
1 Emergence	8
2 The last Russian modernist	53
3 Visions of a brave new world	108
4 Mad wisdom: the long poems	153
5 Autumnal observations	208
Appendix. Parts 1 and 2 of The OBERIU Declaration	235
<i>Notes</i>	240
<i>Select bibliography</i>	291
<i>Index</i>	301

Illustrations

All photographs are from the Zabolotsky family archive, courtesy of Nikita Zabolotsky.

1 Zabolotsky with his parents, Lidiya Andreyevna and Aleksei Agafonovich, 1904.	<i>page</i> 10
2 Zabolotsky as a child, <i>c.</i> 1906.	12
3 Poster for the OBERIU presentation of “Three Left Hours” at Leningrad’s House of the Press, 1928.	37
4 Zabolotsky’s self-portrait, executed in the style of Filonov, 1925.	39
5 Manuscript page of Zabolotsky’s 1926 poem “Disciplina clericalis,” copied in calligraphy.	55
6 Zabolotsky in Leningrad, 1933.	78
7 Zabolotsky reading the book <i>America</i> with his wife, Yekaterina Vasilyevna, 1951.	102
8 Zabolotsky in Moscow, 1955.	106
9 Zabolotsky’s caricature of his son, Nikita, as a “learned agronomist,” 1950s.	165
10 Zabolotsky with his daughter, Natasha, in Peredelkino, 1956.	203
11 Zabolotsky gesturing in Moscow, <i>c.</i> 1957.	218
12 Zabolotsky relaxing in Tarusa, 1958.	228

Cambridge University Press

0521418968 - Nikolai Zabolotsky: Play for Mortal Stakes

Darra Goldstein

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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0521418968 - Nikolai Zabolotsky: Play for Mortal Stakes
Darra Goldstein
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

xii

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[More information](#)*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.