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Masha Gessen

USA/Russia

The bravery of truth

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The author

Masha Gessen, born 13 January 1967, is a Russian and United States journalist and author. She is a militant lesbian and an activist for the rights of sexual minorities. The mass media mentioned her as a member of the board of directors for the Moscow LGBT human rights organization "Triangle" from 1993 to 1998. She writes in both Russian and English, and has contributed to *The New Republic*, *New Statesman*, *Granta*, *Slate* and *Vanity Fair*, and *US News & World Report*.

Gessen, author of six previous books about Russia, shot into the limelight earlier this year when she released *The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin*, unarguably the most definitive, well-researched biography of Russia's ambitious President. Her investigative journalism antecedents are evident in the tapping of previously inaccessible sources to document how Putin "seized control of media, sent political rivals and critics into exile or to the grave and smashed the country's fragile electoral system, concentrating power in the hands of his cronies."

Links

Video, *The Man Without a Face*, Masha Gessen on Vladimir Putin: www.blip.tv/slowtv/the-man-without-a-face-masha-gessen-on-vladimir-putin-6304239

Bibliography

The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin (Riverhead Trade, 2012, 336p.)

Perfect Rigor: A Genius and the Mathematical Breakthrough of the Century (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009, 256p.)

Blood Matters: From Inherited Illness to Designer Babies, How the World and I Found Ourselves in the Future of the Gene (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008, 336p)

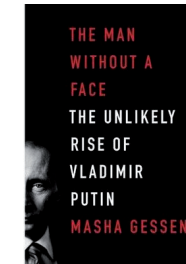
Ester and Ruzya: How My Grandmothers Survived Hitler's War and Stalin's Peace (Dial Press Trade Paperback, 2004, 384p.)

Dead Again: The Russian Intelligentsia after Communism (Verso, 1997, 211p.)

Half a Revolution: Contemporary Fiction by Russian Women (Cleis Press, 1995, 269p.)

Zoom

The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin (Riverhead Trade, 2012, 336p.)



A chilling and unflinching portrait of one of the most fearsome figures in world politics. In 1999, the "Family" surrounding Boris Yeltsin went looking for a successor to the ailing and increasingly unpopular president. Vladimir Putin, with very little governmental or administrative experience—he'd been deputy mayor of St. Petersburg, and briefly, director of the secret police—nevertheless seemed the perfect choice: a "faceless"

creature whom Yeltsin and his cronies could mold in their own image. Russia and an infatuated West were determined to see in him the progressive leader of their dreams—even as Putin, with ruthless efficiency, dismantled the country's media, wrested control and wealth from the business class, and destroyed the fragile mechanisms of democracy. Within a few brief years, virtually every obstacle to his unbridled control was removed and every opposing voice silenced, with political rivals and critics driven into exile or to the grave.

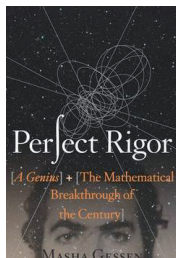
Masha Gessen has experienced and reported this history firsthand, and brings it up to its present moment of unrest and uncertainty. Her spellbinding account of Putin's rise and reign will stand as a classic of narrative nonfiction.

Press

"As Masha Gessen acknowledges in her luminous study of Russia's forever leader, getting rid of Putin will be tough."

Luke Harding, The Guardian

Perfect Rigor: A Genius and the Mathematical Breakthrough of the Century (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009, 256p.)



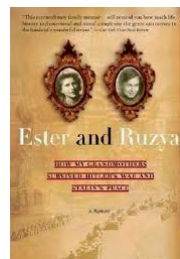
A gripping and tragic tale that sheds rare light on the unique burden of genius. In 2006, an eccentric Russian mathematician named Grigori Perelman solved the Poincaré Conjecture, an extremely complex topological problem that had eluded the best minds for over a century. A prize of one million dollars was offered to anyone who could unravel it, but Perelman declined the winnings, and in doing so inspired journalist Masha Gessen to tell his story. Drawing on interviews with Perelman's teachers, classmates, coaches, teammates, and colleagues in Russia and the United States—and informed by her own background as a math whiz raised in Russia—Gessen uncovered a mind of unrivaled computational power, one that enabled Perelman to pursue mathematical concepts to their logical (sometimes distant) end. But she also discovered that this very strength turned out to be Perelman's undoing and the reason for his withdrawal, first from the world of mathematics and then, increasingly, from the world in general.

Blood Matters: From Inherited Illness to Designer Babies, How the World and I Found Ourselves in the Future of the Gene (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008, 336p.)



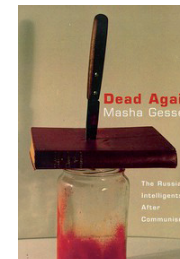
In 2004 genetic testing revealed that Masha Gessen had a mutation that predisposed her to ovarian and breast cancer. The discovery initiated Gessen into a club of sorts: the small (but exponentially expanding) group of people in possession of a new and different way of knowing themselves through what is inscribed in the strands of their DNA. As she wrestled with a wrenching personal decision—what to do with such knowledge—Gessen explored the landscape of this brave new world, speaking with medical experts, religious thinkers, historians, and others facing genetic disorders. *Blood Matters* is a much needed field guide to this unfamiliar and unsettling territory. It explores the way genetic information is shaping the decisions we make, not only about our physical and emotional health but about whom we marry, the children we bear, even the personality traits we long to have. And it helps us come to terms with the radical transformation that genetic information is engineering in our most basic sense of who we are and what we might become.

Ester and Ruzya: How My Grandmothers Survived Hitler's War and Stalin's Peace (Dial Press Trade Paperback, 2004, 384p.)



In the 1930s, as waves of war and persecution were crashing over Europe, two young Jewish women began separate journeys of survival. One, a Polish-born woman from Bialystok, where virtually the entire Jewish community would soon be sent to the ghetto and from there to Hitler's concentration camps, was determined not only to live but to live with pride and defiance. The other, a Russian-born intellectual and introvert, would eventually become a high-level censor under Stalin's regime. At war's end, both women found themselves in Moscow, where informers lurked on every corner and anti-Semitism reigned. It was there that Ester and Ruzya would first cross paths, there that they became the closest of friends and learned to trust each other with their lives. In this deeply moving family memoir, journalist Masha Gessen tells the story of her two beloved grandmothers: Ester, the quicksilver rebel who continually battled the forces of tyranny; Ruzya, a single mother who joined the Communist Party under duress and made the compromises the regime exacted of all its citizens. Both lost their first loves in the war. Both suffered unhappy unions. Both were gifted linguists who made their living as translators. And both had children—Ester a boy, and Ruzya a girl—who would grow up, fall in love, and have two children of their own: Masha and her younger brother. With grace, candor, and meticulous research, Gessen peels back the layers of secrecy surrounding her grandmothers' lives. As she follows them through this remarkable period in history—from the Stalin purges to the Holocaust, from the rise of Zionism to the fall of communism—she describes how each of her grandmothers, and before them her great-grandfather, tried to navigate a dangerous line between conscience and compromise.

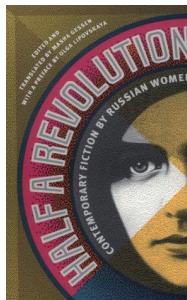
Dead Again: The Russian Intelligentsia after Communism (Verso, 1997, 211p.)



A vivid portrait of the Russian intelligentsia "after the fall." Isaiah Berlin once argued that the concept of the intelligentsia was "Russia's greatest contribution to world civilization". Since the mid-nineteenth century, the Russian intelligentsia has shared a profound sense of responsibility for the fate of its country and a belief in the transformative power of the Word — a belief reinforced by the state, which has relentlessly tried to suppress any form of intellectual dissent. Starting with *Glasnost*, this belief has been sorely tested. The floodgates of information opened, but no miracle followed. Indeed, the novelty of free speech quickly wore off. While the intelligentsia was watching its most treasured dream disintegrate, it was also losing its social standing, its prestige and, finally, its money. As it had frequently done in the past, the intelligentsia responded by declaring itself dead, obsolete. Once again, it was the end. Masha Gessen, one of the most perceptive of a new generation of correspondents in Russia, does not share this pessimism. Her fascinating book is the first to examine the ways in which intellectuals are finding new identities — or survival strategies — in the present social and political *maelstrom*. Through a series of extraordinary individual stories, she shows their quest for a new faith, be it religion or the paranormal, a commitment to nationalist ideology, or to feminist principles. She shows, too, their search for a place in the new society, as artist or politician, entrepreneur or neo-dissident. Her accounts of their careers and preoccupations can be inspiring or harrowing, and sometimes hilarious. Finally, Masha Gessen considers the prospects for future generations of intellectuals, giving a vivid and disturbing portrait of Russia's outcast Generation X.

Half a Revolution: Contemporary Fiction by Russian Women

(Cleis Press, 1995, 269p.)



In Russia, a hot-tempered person is said to start "half a revolution," explains editor Gessen. Of course, since this is a collection of women's writing, another revolution is implied, one quietly involving half the population of a country whose historic milestones have featured plenty of revolutions but few

women. The same openness that welcomed McDonald's has unmuzzled women's voices and admitted previously unspeakable notion mystical beliefs, equal wages for women, homosexuality into Russia's vocabulary and into the tumultuous re-formation of its identity. But, for all that is new, these women honor their roots. The decaying housing complex in Galina Volodina's compassionate tale of bickering, corruption and failure recalls Gogol's doss-house. Turgenev would recognize the insistent details Marina Paley uses to underline the spiritual isolation and selfishness in a provincial hospital; and Valeria Narbikova's six-dimensional journeys over Moscow float very close to the fantastic spaces of Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*. Natalia Shulga's childhood romance of trust, innocence and the forbidden may be lesbian, but it is also universal. In the tradition of great pre-Soviet writers, these authors focus on ordinary lives where fear and pettiness outweigh nobler motives, where the familiar nuances of psychology are still the most complex and intriguing.