

style, "his mixing of high and low language, refined and colloquial speech" to produce a "jarring ... effect of juxtaposition" (xxviii).

*Beauty and Love* is bound to be used in courses on Ottoman and Turkish culture and literature and in the study of Islamic mysticism. Yet Holbrook's translation deserves to reach a wider audience, one that extends beyond a narrow academic readership, especially at a time of heightened interest in Sufism and the renowned mystic poet Mevlana Jelaleddin Rumi.

Zina J. Gimpelevich

*Vasil Bykau: His Life and Works*

Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005. Xi + 260. \$49.95

Per Anders Rudling

Zina Gimpelevich's recent biography of Vasil Bykau fills a void. As the interest in Belarus increases, so does the need for works on this country's culture, history, language, and literature. This is one of two books on Belarusian topics published by McGill-Queen's University Press in 2005. There are very few academic works on Belarus in English. Therefore this initiative is very timely and contributes to put this often-neglected country on the map. It highlights the fact that Belarus has a literary tradition as old as neighboring Russia and Ukraine.

Of contemporary Belarusian writers, Vasil Bykau (1924–2003) is perhaps the best known. Bykau's uncompromising stance and defiance of dictatorships has been compared to that of Václav Havel and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

Gimpelevich's biography of Bykau, the first one in English, traces the life of this extraordinary man from his childhood, through the war-time experiences of his youth, his literary and political career, and his years of exile in Finland, Germany, and Poland. A relentless critic of the Lukashenka regime, Bykau died in exile.

It is a warm and personal portrait, partly based upon open-hearted and personal interviews with Bykau during his exile. Bykau's life is a microcosm of the tragic history of twentieth-century Belarus. Young Vasil started school just as the Soviet campaign of the 1920s to enforce a switch to Belarusian came to an abrupt and violent end. The relatively liberal political atmosphere of the 1920s was replaced by brutal political terror, something Bykau experienced first hand. Bykau remembers the starvation during the brutal collectivization in the early 1930s. His father-in-law was killed during Stalin's Great Terror.

Gimpelevich holds fellow Belarusian Bykau in high regard in a very personal way. She hears in him the voice of a generation of Belarusians that was nearly wiped out by war and political terror. She suggests that the number of

Belarusians killed in the war needs to be revised from one-fourth to one-third of the population (87). Gimpelevich includes in this number of killed “Belarusans” also the 763,000 Belarusian Jews who were victims of the Holocaust.

Suffering, resistance, and victory in World War II have become central to the Belarusian national narrative. Only three percent of the soldiers from the BSSR, born between 1922 and 1924, returned home after World War II. Bykau experienced the hell of war first hand. He rejected the glorification of the Soviet Army while emphasizing the inglorious nature of war. Gimpelevich sees in Bykau the conscience of the nation. As one of the most important contemporary Belarusian nationalists, Bykau has done more for the promotion and development of the Belarusian language than anybody else of his generation. As an intellectual, a cofounder of the nationalist Belarusian Popular Front and member of parliament, Bykau played a central role in establishing Belarusian as the sole official language in the republic in 1990. (A status it maintained until 1995.)

A relentless fighter for civil liberties and national self-determination, Bykau’s perspective was also that of a primordial nationalist. “I consider a healthy and moderate nationalism to be a rather normal phenomenon. It seems to me that national feeling is given to a person at birth. On the basis of this feeling, national culture and many other things are created. The national idea is obviously the oldest and the most important of all the vital life-organizing ideas that have survived up to our times” (174).

Here, a little more distance from the subject could have been healthy. Rather than deconstructing and problematizing Bykau’s nationalism, Gimpelevich parrots Bykau in making assumptions about “the typical Belarusian national character” (186), which she describes as “docile, if not submissive” (7). Yet she finds that the Belarusian peasant is “honest, hard-working, respects morals and God, and is often overcautious” (111). Troubled by the lingering support for communism and the Soviet model in Belarus, Gimpelevich sees the political choices with which Belarus is confronted as a philosophical question between good and evil. “Why do [Belarusians] support the Bolsheviks, who are so immoral in their evil thirst for power, instead of them, the defenders of Belarus? Patriotic forces in Belarus continue to ask this question even today. The answer can be found in the familiar negative features of Belarusian identity: conservatism, appeasement, and mistrust” (161).

Gimpelevich uses *Łacinka*, the Latin version of Belarusian instead of using the more common practice of transliterating Belarusian names and terms according to the standard Library of Congress transliteration. By introducing this little-known Belarusian typography to a wider audience, Gimpelevich gives the reader a sense of the diversity of the Belarusian literary tradition. In *Łacinka* typography, Vitebsk, for example, becomes Viciebsk, Lukashenka Lukašenka,

Belarus Belaruś, and so forth. For Belarusian names, this is clearly appropriate. More questionable is the use of *Lacinka* when referring to non-Belarusians such as Harbačou and Elcyn in a text in English aimed for a North American readership.

Gimpelevich's account of Bykau's life and literature gives the reader a colorful and very personal perspective on the turbulent history of twentieth-century Belarus. The rich gallery of characters shows that Belarus is something more than just the gray, colorless, and subdued borderland often referred to as "the last dictatorship of Europe" in mass media. In fact, Gimpelevich transmits such a powerful narrative that she almost undermines her own gloomy picture of the Belarusian as submissive, appeasing, and distrusting. Gimpelevich's engaging book is a welcome addition to a sadly limited flora of books on Belarus, and a good introduction to its cultural history.

Marlene Kadar, Linda Warley, Jeanne Perreault, Susanna Egan, eds.

*Tracing the Autobiographical*

Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005. Pp. 240. \$32.95 (Pb)

Reviewed by Sunka Simon

The editors of this volume are to be commended for their daring inner- and inter-generic redefinitions of autobiography. "Tracing the Autobiographical" takes the navel-gazing of autobiographical genre criticism out for a cultural studies spin. In the midst of developments such as MySpace, YouTube, and the continuing dominance of reality-television programs—all of which thrive on and refashion the practice of performing, saying, and writing the self—traditional literature-centric approaches to autobiographical discourse often fall flat. This anthology seeks to remedy the general lack of theoretical discussions by emphasizing the importance of mediations, cross-media hybridization, or the automatic (the machinic, if you will, to follow Felix Guattari) in the production, reception, and classification of autobiographical acts. This volume is for those who are eager to rethink boundaries and to view the promised autobiographical traces themselves (rather than the monographic presumptions of the "Autobiography") as ongoing dialogues between, and hybrid practices of, engendering the self and other/Other, including those of the essayists. This volume delivers by performing the tension-riddled meta-generic discussions before the readers' eyes. While remaining astutely sensitive to gender, sexuality, and race constructions as part of the autobiographical process, the twelve articles collected here discuss autobiographical traces in various spaces, including memoir writing on the Internet (Helen M. Buss), personal home pages (Linda Warley), CBS's *Survivor* (Gabriele Helms), theatrical performance (Sherill Grace), domestic spaces (Kathy Mezei), anthropology (Susanna Egan), legal proceedings (Cheryl Suzack), wartime propaganda (Jeanne Perreault), multi-generational memoirs (Bina Toledo Freiwald), abused female bodies (Christine Crowe), an