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Foreword Review HISTORY

Dressed for a Dance in the Snow: Women's Voices from the Gulag

Monika Zgustova
Julie Jones, Translator
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Stalin: if you're Russian and of a certain age, his name causes your blood to run Siberian cold. It's not for nothing that Uncle Joe's twenty-four-year reign (1929–1953) is frequently called the "other Holocaust"—upwards of thirty million people were killed by his minions, many in the remote labor camps known as gulags.

Murder aside, Stalin terrorized his country into paranoid, conspiratorial, nearly complete submission. Neighbors and friends sacrificed each other to the secret police preemptively, not knowing whom to trust. Writers and political figures were arrested as a matter of course, processed without a trial, and shipped east—cattle-class—by train to the gulag for years of murderous deprivation.

In *Dressed for a Dance in the Snow: Women's Voices from the Gulag*, Monika Zgustova traverses the outer neighborhoods of Moscow to interview nine elderly gulag survivors. Exceptionally frail from years of malnourishment while in the camps, the women individually describe conditions so horrific as to be mind-numbing, but the more common thread connecting the stories is how the women explain the reasons for their survival: unflappable belief in the power of love, beauty, poetry, and friendship to overcome any hardship.

Interestingly, coming home proved difficult for some. Susanna Pechuro shares her experience:

> *My parents and my friends celebrated my return, and I was surrounded with love and care. … And despite all that, I felt empty inside. It seemed trivial, meaningless. Nobody who had always lived in freedom could even remotely imagine what I had been through. It seemed to me that they hadn't really lived.*

Zgustova's book is a revelatory attestation to humanity's highest powers.

MATT SUTHERLAND (January / February 2020)

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