



A Captive of the Caucasus

By Andrei Bitov

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In Lessons of Armenia, the first of the two energetic personal memoirs that constitute this book, one of the Soviet Union's most gifted stylists explores the way Pushkin's "confines of boundless Russia" seem never to be truly escapable. The second account, Choosing a Location, is an entertaining record of his travels in Soviet Georgia.

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A Captive of the Caucasus By Andrei Bitov Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Acclaimed for his novel *Pushkin House* and his stories, Russian writer Bitov undertakes a spiritual odyssey in this impressionistic travel memoir of Armenia and Soviet Georgia. In "Lessons of Armenia" (1969), the book's first half, he awakens from stagnation and resolves to live in the present moment. Celebrating Armenia's natural beauty, hospitality and simpler way of life, he breaks free from the confines of his homeland, only to discover that in some sense he is still in Russia. In "Choosing a Location," written about the Caucasus in the years just before glasnost, Bitov encounters a nation struggling with its identity as the birthplace of Stalin. Everywhere he goes, he collides with the ghosts of Pushkin, Lermontov and Tolstoy, who enshrouded the Caucasus in romantic stories of love and valor. The smooth translation relays the kinetic energy of Bitov's episodic, alert, hypersensitive style.

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From Library Journal

Unlike Marat Akchurin's *Red Odyssey* (LJ 5/1/92), a sometimes gritty travelogue of the dying Soviet Union, Bitov's book is a brooding and difficult reflection on ideals, nationhood, and belonging; the creative process; and metaphysics, to name a few topics, as he visits Armenia and Georgia. Unfortunately, his work is not helped by Brownsberger's translation, complete with purple prose and fanciful turns of phrase. Where *Red Odyssey* is accessible and illuminating, *A Captive of the Caucasus* is abstruse and more reminiscent of 19th-century literature than of late 20th-century writing. Its esoteric approach limits its appeal.

- *Joseph Parsons, Columbia Coll., Chicago*

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From Kirkus Reviews

This is the third Bitov book to reach us in Susan Brownsberger's exemplary translation (the novel *Life in Windy Weather* and short-story collection *Pushkin House*)--and just how shaggy and exhilarating an encyclopedia of Russian literature Bitov becomes more and more manifest: He's like an anti-Nabokov. The Caucasian regions have been a staple locale of Russian classics since Pushkin: Tolstoy, Lermontov, Mandelstam--all of them found in the foreignness of the Caucasus the place out of time that ratified their artistic intuitions that writing renders both space and time suspect, that it is an activity that doesn't quite belong to either. On the face of it, Bitov is writing a ravished account of Armenian and Georgian integrities and natural beauties (such as the hewn-from-a-rock-face Armenian church, Geghard); as travel writing, the book has a subjective, swoony/goony quality that's appealing. But the literary echoes, and the very phenomenology of being in one place and not another, quickly develop into an argument for the writer as traveler even when sitting in his chair at his desk--without any real idea of what he's encountering, nor the absolute command of language to describe it. This sense of mysterious, giddy provisionality is both very Russian and deliciously individual in Bitov. -- *Copyright ©1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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