

From the *Slavic Review* Editorial Board:

Slavic Review publishes signed letters to the editor by individuals with educational or research merit. Where the letter concerns a publication in *Slavic Review*, the author of the publication will be offered an opportunity to respond. Space limitations dictate that comment regarding a book review should be restricted to one paragraph of no more than 250 words; comment on an article or forum should not exceed 750 to 1,000 words. When we receive many letters on a topic, some letters will be published on the *Slavic Review* Web site with opportunities for further discussion. Letters may be submitted by e-mail, but a signed copy on official letterhead or with a complete return address must follow. The editor reserves the right to refuse to print, or to publish with cuts, letters that contain personal abuse or otherwise fail to meet the standards of debate expected in a scholarly journal.

To the Editor:

In her review of my book, *The Archaeology of Anxiety: The Russian Silver Age and Its Legacy* (vol. 68, no. 3), Pamela Davidson writes “readers may quibble with the author’s determination to read allusions to the Silver Age in the works of later writers as manifestations of the anxiety of influence . . . rather than as natural expressions of a well-ingrained sense of tradition. The choice of anxiety as the prism through which to view the reception of the Silver Age also leads to a somewhat exaggerated emphasis on the role of the revolution in shaping the character of this legacy. . . . Periods of immense cultural fertility survive in collective memory because of the intrinsic merit and interest of the works produced—not because of links with contemporary historical events” (716–17). I am afraid the central idea of my book has eluded Davidson. Even if there is such a thing as “a well-ingrained sense of tradition,” there is hardly anything natural about it. It is precisely the self-imposed prohibition against wrestling with the representatives of the preceding tradition—evident in the works of many twentieth-century Russian writers—that made me inquire into the nature of the deeply ingrained and unquestionable adoration for the “Silver Age” that is clearly shared by the reviewer.

In my book I do, as Davidson suggests, “tackle an ambitious question: ‘how did the idea of the Silver Age come to occupy such a prominent place in the Russian collective consciousness?’ (6)” (716). And I do give an answer. By analyzing numerous sources from the 1900s to the 1930s, I show that the Silver Age is a cultural construct of retrospective origin. It came into being in the late 1920s and early 1930s as a result of an all-consuming reappraisal of the Bolshevik revolution and of the period immediately preceding it. This pre-revolutionary period came to be known as the Silver Age of Russian culture. If in the 1910s and early 1920s, “the Silver Age had been presented as paving the road to the revolution, by the late 1930s it was recharacterized as having been terminated by the revolution. . . . The fact that the Silver Age came to be associated with political upheavals gave rise to the long-lasting popular belief in the ‘unnatural’ course of Russian cultural evolution and encouraged, on the one hand, feelings of moral responsibility for the preservation of the prerevolutionary cultural heritage and, on the other, the desire to scrutinize and reevaluate this cultural legacy ad infinitum” (63–64). Even as the role of the October revolution has been increasingly downplayed in contemporary Russia, the Silver Age has also been losing some of its appeal and is no longer seen as a means of or a key to Russia’s national survival.

GALINA RYLKOVA
University of Florida

Dr. Davidson chooses not to respond.

Slavic Review 69, no. 1 (Spring 2010)