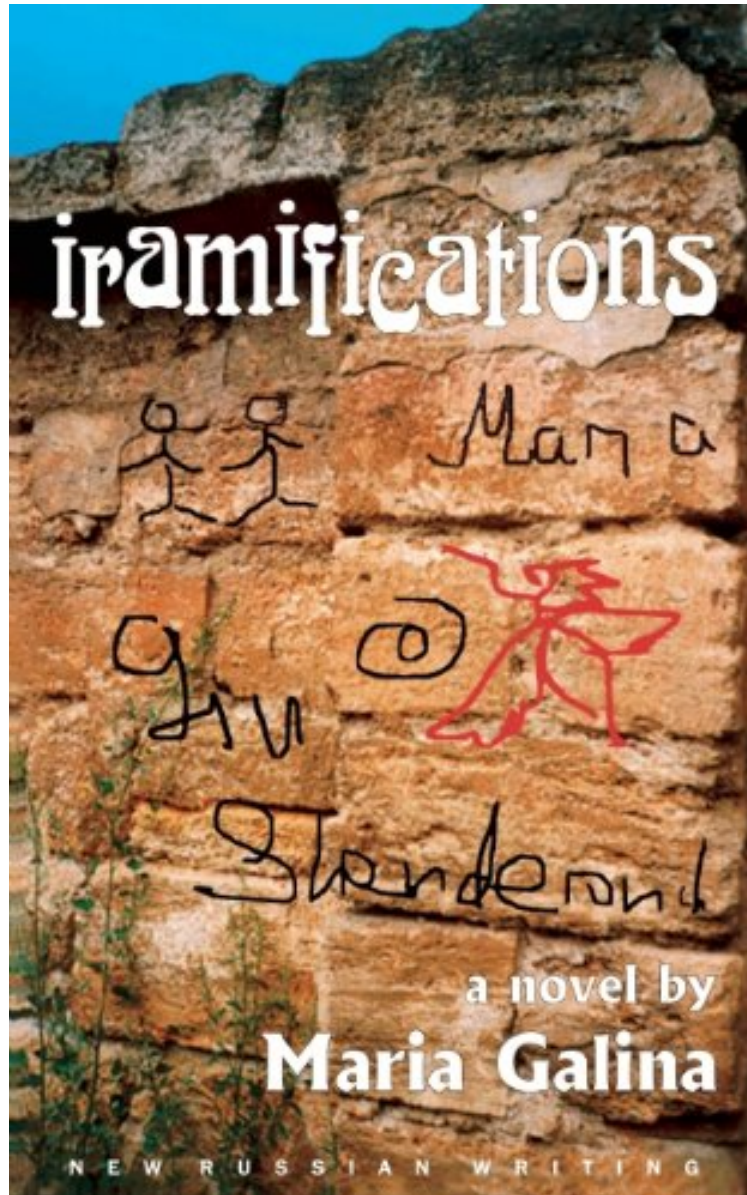


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## Iramifications (New Russian Writing)

*Maria Galina*

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**Maria Galina : Iramifications (New Russian Writing)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Iramifications (New Russian Writing):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. occult, esoteric, fantasy By Susan Welsh I got about a third of the way through this, and was too bored to continue. It seems the author was inspired by Aleister Crowley and the occult, which would explain the novel's weirdness and lack of interest to those who are looking for something more

interesting and profound than an esoteric "niche" novel. A disappointment.<sup>2</sup> of 2 people found the following review helpful. 'Hyper-fiction', a blend of fantasy and reality

By Lost John Russian author Maria Galina's *Iramifications* is a fantasy that draws on ancient Greek, Arabic and Jewish mythology, but is grounded in the realities of post-Soviet Russia and Ukraine. Modern-day Istanbul features too, serving as the gateway to Galina's imagined world of Iram. For the English translation, the running together of the name of Iram with the word ramifications is of intended significance. It seems nothing so clever is possible in Russian; the name of the novel as published in Russian is simply Givi and Shenderovich, the names of the two chief protagonists. The story opens on a beach in Odessa, where Givi and Shenderovich meet for the first time; Givi at first being mistaken for Shenderovich's business partner, who has gone missing. Following some minimal socializing, in the course of which Givi gets drunk, Givi is co-opted to take the place of the missing friend on a trip across the Black Sea to Istanbul. The object of the visit is to buy and bring back goods that can be profitably re-sold in Odessa, a way of making a living known as Shuttle Trading. As we know, Istanbul has a lot of history, and has long served as a bridge between Asia and Europe, between Islam and Christendom. Maria Galina builds on Istanbul's mystery and fascination to use it also as a doorway to her imagined world of Iram. Before long, Givi and Shenderovich are transported through that doorway, involuntarily embarking on the adventure of learning what sort of place Iram is, encountering various dangers and becoming involved in the ongoing problems and feuds of that world. Iram represents a tight knot of Greek, Arabic and Jewish mythology, painstakingly researched and imaginatively inter-related by Galina. It would be possible to read and enjoy *Iramifications* without having much previous knowledge of the mythology, but difficult not to learn something of it whilst reading, or to stop reading from time to time to research the odd point, at least to the depth of Wikipedia. An unusually large proportion of the book is composed of dialogue, and through that Galina injects a lot of humor - primarily as the self-confident and somewhat vain Shenderovich is counterpointed by the much more cautious Givi. Clearly, the success of this as we read it in English owes a great deal to the translator, Amanda Love-Darragh, whose work on this novel would be hard to over-praise. Her use of quintessentially English colloquialisms, her rendering of the banter between Givi, Shenderovich and others, with its hints at self-preening, bluff and, sometimes, self-doubt and fear, must have required a great deal more than simply rendering the Russian text into grammatical English. The breadth of Love-Darragh's English vocabulary and evident personal knowledge of the three ancient mythologies, as well as of modern Ukraine and Russia, also draw admiration. She won a major prize for this translation, the 2009 Rossica prize (shared with the publisher, Glas), and most deservedly so. Generally speaking, fantasy novels are not for me, and I find ancient mythology difficult too, but I always enjoy good writing and this novel has that and more to commend it.

"Galina's ingenuity in weaving together numerous mythological allusions and literary parallels is astounding. Apart from the Hellenic, Jewish and Arabic myths, she introduces references to popular legends and modern superstitions."—The Moscow Times *Iramifications* has all the cheeky comedy of Ilf and Petrov with a touch of Gogolian barminess.

"Her novels equally appeal to lovers of magic realism and ironic urban prose. . . . Exquisite and readable at the same time." -The Book