

derives not from the attractions of their false promises but their ability to exploit the human capacity for universal discord.

Equally impressive in this monograph are the subtlety of its searching textual analysis and the range of its command of modern Dostoevsky scholarship. If the theoretical framework derives predominantly from Bakhtin, the approach is anything but monologic, incorporating the insights of folklorists, narratologists, psychologists, philosophers, biographers, literary historians and many others too numerous to list. Indeed, the author himself seems at times aware of a certain tension between the need to do justice to his sources and ‘the risk of rehearsing the already familiar’ (p. 122). However, this is a book not only for Dostoevsky specialists; and even those unable to follow or unwilling to go along with all its arguments will find much in its examination of the great novels, in its discussion of the ‘demonic’ significance of, say, thresholds and other ‘liminal’ spaces, or of lying and story-telling or suicide, to fascinate them and enrich their reading. Generally free of jargon, it combines lucidity with flashes of humour, and in the whole 210 pages I detected only one typographical error: Zosima appears once (p. 26) as Zossima.

With his earlier books on Dostoevsky – notably *Fedor Dostoevsky* (Twayne, 1981), *The Brothers Karamazov* (Cambridge, 1992) and most recently *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii*, 2002 – W.J. Leatherbarrow has established himself as a leading authority in the field; indeed, thanks to the appearance made by the first of these studies in Woody Allen’s film *Match Point* (2005), he might even be said to have attained stardom. With *A Devil’s Vaudeville* he consolidates his reputation and adds substantially to our understanding of Dostoevsky and his demons.

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Evgeny Dobrenko, *Aesthetics of Alienation: Reassessment of Early Soviet Cultural Theories*, trans. Jesse M. Savage, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2005. xii + 152 pp.

The title of this book, part of the NUP series *Studies in Russian Literature and Theory*, may strike a chord of recognition among humanities scholars

labouring under the Howard regime, but from the outset let it be said this is a dense text for specialists only. Dobrenko's thesis is that Socialist Realism, rather than being a straitjacket used by the state to eliminate artistic waywardness, was actually an 'assimilation' of revolutionary theories which, by their own internal logic, were self-destructive (p. 109). Despite disapproving these theories' alienating aesthetics, Dobrenko draws the idiosyncratic conclusion that 'the product of Socialist Realism is life itself (in full accord with the revolutionary theories of creativity)...' (p. 126). (Note that his use of the present tense is no mistake.) He reconciles this paradox by characterizing the production of theories as a process that culminates in a state of praxis whereby life itself is aestheticized and 'art' as a bourgeois and alienating fetishistic product is annihilated. All this makes for an intriguing re-envisioning of Socialist Realism – an especially elusive phenomenon for historians and literary scholars alike.

Unlike others who have attempted the task, Dobrenko arrives at his definition virtually without reference to any politics 'from above'. He instead charts a revolution from *inside*, documenting those philosophical precepts that guided Soviet theorists along their alienating path. His approach, however, is unsystematic, breathlessly jumping from writer to writer and quote to quote in a manner that leaves little space for summarization. Greater attention to narrative may have rendered the book more digestible; although, had Dobrenko dealt in a more conventional fashion with a single text at a time his argument might be less convincing, for while he does (re)construct a *Zeitgeist*, the result is possibly as much his own (as suggested by his use of the present tense in the quotation above) as a reflection of what existed at the time. A greater weakness is that his description of Socialist Realism as an assimilatory culmination of purely theoretical trends functions as a mono-causal and teleological approach excluding other explanatory factors. For example, Socialist Realism could hardly have assimilated Acmeism, a turn-of-the-century movement Katerina Clark defines as 'informed by the ideal of an art that was static, eternal, and crafted the way the artisan constructs a building' (*Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* [Harvard, 1995], p. 63) – had Stalin not been rebuilding Moscow at the time of RAPP's establishment in 1934. Certainly, RAPP owed its origins primarily to the *literati*, but the organization also reflected official policy (call it Thermidor or the Stalin Revolution, as you will) affecting all areas of Soviet life. Dobrenko's

cloistered analysis of literary theorists' inner worlds consequently suffers from a shortcoming common to intellectual histories which portray ideas arising in a vacuum, regardless of the arguably greater influence of material conditions. Nietzsche, after all, wrote that philosophy begins in the gut, and so it may have been that access to rationed goods played a bigger role than 'Mozartianism' in assuring allegiance to RAPP's literary prescriptions.

To be fair, however, Dobrenko's brief monograph (excellently translated by Savage) is intended to be a corrective, rather than definitive, statement on Socialist Realism's literary/historical origins, and so there's no reason to demand a repeat of explanatory formulas that have been around for years. His take on the matter is also made unique by his treatment of Socialist Realism as a present-day rather than *passé* phenomenon, as he seems to be trying to prove his argument through praxis, rendering himself indistinguishable from the text he has created and which the reader may be said to be creating. For those seeking a multilayered and challenging discussion that reinvents a well-mined topic, this is a must read.

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Zoe Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia after Communism*, London, New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005, xi + 257, with index.

Zoe Knox's conclusion – that liberal reformist elements in Russian Orthodoxy have fostered the development of civil society in post-Soviet Russia, while the official church hierarchy has stymied the same – comes as no surprise. This study's strength is the thoroughness with which this conclusion is demonstrated. This well-researched study describes a dynamic state of affairs, still unfolding. Zoe Knox examines the church's activity in three major domains: politics, society, and its internal mechanisations; and around two pivotal pieces of legislation: the 1990 law 'On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations', and the 1997 law 'On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations'. If the former represents the renunciation of Soviet-era anti-religious policies and characterises the relative openness of the time, the latter controversial legislation – in violation of provisions of the Russian