

traditions of mystical symbolism in spite of attempts by the Soviet authorities to suppress it. Davidson's elegant book brings this inspiring moment in intellectual history vividly to life.

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Stephen Lovell and Birgit Menzel, (eds), *Reading for Entertainment in Contemporary Russia: Post-Soviet Popular Literature in Historical Perspective*, Munchen, Verlag Otto Sagner, 2005, 202 pp.

The redoubtable Stephen Lovell has done it again. Following the publication of the critically acclaimed monographs *The Russian Reading Revolution: Print Culture in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras* (2000) and *Summerfolk: A History of the Dacha, 1710-2000* (2003), as well as two coedited collections of articles, he has returned to the material which he covered in Chapter 6 (Reading in Post-Soviet Russia) of the first title. The book under review fleshes out the general premises of that survey in the form of introductory theoretical overviews by the two editors followed by five genre-specific articles, four by leading Russian scholars, the fifth by the German academic, Birgit Menzel. The editors have viewed this collaboration as an opportunity 'to put before an Anglophone audience some of the most interesting recent Russian scholarship on popular fiction, its publishers and its audiences' (p. 8). And they are to be congratulated on having selected contributors who have been able to explore the theoretical gap between western and Russian traditions and provide well-argued and comprehensive coverage of the main aspects of Russian popular literary culture. Although each contributor has followed his or her own approach (for Boris Dubin, this is predominantly sociological, while Mariia Koreneva takes a more narrowly literary view) each article roughly adheres to a tripartite division: historical antecedents, current situation, and points of contact and divergence with the Western counterpart. This collection constitutes a timely contribution to a research area, which, as the editors note, 'has not made too many inroads into Russian studies' (p. 7).

Stephen Lovell sets the scene with an introductory note and two chapters: the first on the evolution of popular genres in Russia over the past two centuries and the second on how Russian literary formulas can be classified

and interpreted. In these he argues that popular fiction belongs closer to the centre of Russian literary history than it has usually been placed. His survey is supplemented by a chapter from Birgit Menzel on the sea-change in Soviet and Russian publishing which occurred between 1986 and 2004 and the implications of the new commercial arrangements obtaining in the industry. The following chapters focus on the main genres: Marina Koreneva on Russian detective fiction, Boris Dubin on the action thriller (*boevik*), Maria Cherniak on Russian romantic fiction, Boris Dubin on Russian historical fiction and Birgit Menzel on works of science fiction and fantasy. Maria Koreneva's chapter on the modern Russian *detektiv* provides a substantial historical review of the Soviet literary predecessors before examining the various strands which have emerged since 1991. She includes in her survey potted summaries of six novels as examples of the most salient styles and approaches and devotes as much attention to female authors as male ones. In her summing up where she characterizes the specific features of Russian *detektiv*, she states that we must 'give up the notions of 'criminal' and victim, because these are the great unknowns of contemporary Russian detective writing' (p. 98).

Boris Dubin, who has a background in sociology and translation, brings valuable insights and information to the related topics of the *boevik* and the historical novel. The latter article contains a penetrating analysis of the conceptual framework in which the writer of historical novels must operate: He isolates 'human diversity, dissimilarity of individuals, nuances in social organization, and gestures of autonomy by particular groups of people' as being 'illegitimate and inexplicable' in this type of novel and points out that 'characters in popular historical fiction offer "patience" and "service" as symbolic gifts in exchange for the salvation the whole offers them'. (pp. 188-89) Mariia Cherniak elucidates the particularities of Russian romance fiction, distinguishing it from the other genres treated as being the only one without comparable Soviet antecedents. Although mindful of the patriarchal nature of the content of such works she sees in them a chance for the harried Russian woman to 'reject (if only temporarily) the demands made on them by husbands, children, work and household duties' (p. 172).

Stephen Lovell has done an excellent job on the translations from Russian which read well. There are only very occasional or misprints and infelicities ('prise' for 'prize' on p. 18, 'sore spots' for 'weaknesses' on p. 88). The one factual error I noted occurred in the Koreneva article where Astafiev's novel is

called *Derevenskii detektiv*, instead of *Pechal'nyi detektiv*. This book is a must read for both specialists and general scholars wishing to gain an overview of the contours of popular literary culture in post-Soviet Russia. My only concern is that in being released by a publisher who produces books mainly in German, this book might not find the readership it deserves.

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