

There are perceptive analyses of a number of stories – those of ‘The Steppe’ and ‘In the Ravine’ should be singled out – and the contrastive study of ‘A Dreary Story’ and ‘The Bishop’ is especially valuable as an illustration of Chekhov’s view of the common humanity of the unbeliever and the believer. On the other hand, the lack of any but the most cursory mention of ‘The Student’ seems a curious and regrettable omission in any discussion of Chekhov’s understanding of the religious experience.

Swift is not always well served by his editor, as witness a number of unfortunate typographical errors (most egregiously ‘Крижовник’ for ‘Крыжовник’, 177). There are too a few solecisms that should not have survived the transition from doctoral dissertation to published monograph: ‘the dominate (sc. dominant) mood’ (77), ‘forced (sc. enforced) idleness’ (12), and ‘shamen’ as the plural of *shaman* (116). Such blemishes notwithstanding, Swift writes with commendable succinctness and lucidity.

The serious study of the biblical subtext in Chekhov’s work (to quote Swift quoting Robert Louis Jackson) ‘certainly is one of the major tasks of Chekhov criticism’ (2). In its modest way, Mark Swift’s book shows us how illuminating and suggestive such a study can be.

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Sarah Oates, *Television, Democracy and Elections in Russia* (London and New York, Routledge, 2006), xv + 222 pp. ISBN 0-415-38134-7

In the light of the recent Duma and the upcoming Presidential elections and the worrying developments in Russian political life, namely the departure from any semblance of support for the concepts of plurality and debate by the Putin administration, this book provides timely and illuminating coverage of the role of the most popular mass medium, television, in the post-Soviet Russian political process, a topic pioneered by Ellen Mickiewicz in her ground-breaking studies *Split Signals: Illusion and Politics in the Soviet Union* (1988) and *Changing Channels: Illusion and the Struggle for Power in Russia* (1999). Divided into ten chapters, the book charts ‘what the interplay among the media, parties, candidates and the electorate has meant for the development of democracy in Russia’ (9).

Sarah Oates initially sets the scene with an evocative description of the televisual spectacle which was the 2004 ceremonial inauguration of Vladimir Putin, an event, she asserts, ‘made for, and by, Russian television’ (2).

Following an introductory chapter outlining the main research themes, Chapter 2 provides an overview of the Soviet media situation and the development of television since 1991, which regrettably failed to mention the first law on the media passed in 1990 and defined the later 1991 RF law in terms more appropriate to the former. The various aspects of the intersection of televisual practices with three presidential (1996, 2000, 2004) and Duma campaigns (1993, 1996, 1999, 2003) form the body of the next seven chapters. The approach is evenly balanced between chapters which illustrate the way in which the authorities and those in power have used the media to maintain their grip on power and those (Chapters 3, 7 and 8) which tackle the vexed subject of the role of public opinion and consumer expectation. Chapter 4 describes the rise of the broadcast party and shows how such parties have played an inordinately large role in each election campaign only to fade away in the aftermath.

For me a strength of the book lay in the numerous quotes from the focus group interviews conducted in Voronezh and Ulyanovsk in Chapter 3 “You watch in pain” and Chapter 7 “No Better Heroes” which clearly illustrated the contradictory expectations Russian citizens have of their media, though more details about the format of the discussions and the selection of respondents would have been welcome. The author notes that side by side with a distrust of the notion of disinterested information is a desire to believe the enhanced picture of Russian life and politics purveyed by state-controlled outlets, one which ‘upholds a sense of national pride’ (62).

The final chapter summarizes Oates’ findings and establishes the framework in which recent events can most usefully be viewed. I applaud her insightful analysis of the ways in which the various players have regressed to past practices and attitudes thus recreating a situation redolent of the Soviet experience. She tellingly reveals audience attitudes, a significant element in the interaction, thus:

What of the public itself? [...] They see themselves as media subjects, without the rights of either media citizens or media consumers. As a result they find a plethora of voices in the media an ominous sign of dissent and weakness among the elite. It is not political choice, but political chaos that

they perceive and fear. They prefer the façade to the messy reality of political divisiveness. This is a dangerous bargain. (192)

Academic writing can be abstruse and impenetrable but this book is illustrative of the reverse. It completely eschews specialist jargon and favours short sentences, making the book very accessible to the general reader without detracting from its function as a solid piece of research. There were however certain minor presentational lapses which indicated a failure of editorial support or excessive haste in production. The transliteration displayed the idiosyncratic function of incorporating a single instance of transcription (where Russian ‘g’ is pronounced as a ‘v’ it was so rendered in the text). This was explained in the note on transliteration at the front of the book, though the justification for this in terms that Russian has very few gaps between spelling and pronunciation was not one I could concur with. Certain words were not consistently rendered: for instance ‘ich’ and ‘itch’ (51, 56) were used interchangeably in the rendering of male patronymics, while Alexander alternated with Aleksandr. Most curious were the constant references to the Committee to Protect Journalists as the Committee to Project Journalists (21, 22, 34) and in the end-notes (200, 201, 202).

These blemishes apart this is a worthwhile addition to the library of any person with a serious interest in post-Soviet Russian politics and media. Sarah Oates’ analysis is incisive and consistent and the material she presents along with her integration of her analysis into the broader picture of media relations in the west makes this a valuable piece of research.

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Alexandra Smith, *Montaging Pushkin: Pushkin and Visions of Modernity in Russian Twentieth-Century Poetry*, Studies in Slavic Literatures and Poetics, 46 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 361 pp.

Pushkin was acclaimed as Russia’s national poet even during his lifetime, and although this loaded term is far from comprising an adequate characterisation of his genius, it is undeniable that Pushkin’s work has exercised an unrivalled influence over his successors, and one that appears only to grow. In *Montaging*