

successfully conveyed than its unity. Nevertheless, *The Stony Dance* is a valuable and inspiring book, full of insights, and an important addition to the literature on Bely.

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David MacFadyen, *Russian Television Today: Primetime Drama and Comedy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 244 pp.

This is one of three books on Russian television to be published in recent years. The other two, *Television, Democracy and Elections in Russia* by Sarah Oates (2006) and *Television, Power and the Public in Russia* by Ellen Mickiewicz (2008) chart the intersection between the medium and the political process. By contrast, the book under review investigates Russian television serials of both the Soviet and post-Soviet years with a view to drawing conclusions about the main ideas and themes informing them. The topic is a compelling one, potentially of interest to scholars working in related spheres of popular culture. In his introduction David MacFadyen notes that television has taken over the storytelling function formerly the province of literature but that it remains closely interlinked with the written word in that televisual series are often based on pre-existing literary works or in a reverse dynamic give rise to the production thereof. The author contends that television drama uses ‘historical or collective situations to comprehend and articulate a modern selfhood’ relying on ‘some of the most important platitudes of Russian self-awareness, conceivable as an illogical, “indescribable ‘inner world’, an expansive, authentic ‘life force’”’ (p. 2).

This book contains a great deal of interesting information about the main serials of the past few decades, however, treatment of the material is, to say the least, idiosyncratic. The author delineates his theoretic approach in the opening pages and foreshadows analysis along a number of lines, based on Mikhail Epstein’s view of the Russian void and Katerina Clark’s premise of ‘extraordinary time’. However the exposition which follows under the chapter headings of Adaptations, Soaps, Melodrama, Comedy among others, owes little to these themes and essentially reduces to a meandering description of serialized tele-

vision programmes relying heavily on promotional materials provided by the producers. Casual allusions to the theorist Alain Badiou are not developed in a meaningful manner. MacFadyen quotes the opinions of the actors in the various series on the characters they play. Such commentary is generalist and anodyne for the most part and adds very little to the overall analysis. Moreover, the text veers into unexpected and inappropriate directions and provides information which would be more usefully rendered in footnote form. There is a worrying tendency to attribute motivation when this cannot possibly be known and where such speculation does not contribute to the critical framework. A most egregious instance of this occurs in the concluding chapter: ‘Love of the girl next door is both fine and poignant. It also makes for better television and a better philosophy. It may even make for a better society: all that we can hope for is that the politicians don’t start telling us so.’ (210)

From a stylistic point of view the book also leaves much to be desired. The language veers wildly and frequently between the academic and the colloquial. One gains the impression that the author was not sure which audience he was writing for, the learned or the popular, or where he imagined the putative reader to be residing, when he advises ‘if you want to experience classic Russian stories of socially active heroes, walk away from the library, go home and turn on the TV’ (22). Certain phrases and words appear so often in the first fifty pages as to appear almost parodic (a tad, evanesce, effable, ineffable). The sections which have been translated from the Russian (presumably by the author, though no information on this is provided) are very awkward, as in the sentence: ‘The main heroine here is, of course, Fate, that inimitable scoundrel and magician’ (106). There is imprecise terminology, with Lydia Fedoseeva-Shukshina called the spouse of a famous writer rather than his widow (18). Many of the word collocations are non-standard and serve as a barrier to comprehension: ‘modern well-armed panache’ (9), ‘utterly interwoven’ (11) ‘passionate peopled interaction’ (12), ‘socially consequential work’ (13). The author also demonstrates an inordinate love of phrases in apposition located within dashes, commas, or in italics which an editor worth his salt would have moderated. Almost every chapter commences with an epigraph taken from the public pronouncements of President Putin: for an academic treatise these should have been referenced more comprehensively than ‘Putin 2000’. The book is supplemented by a list of television serials and a list of

films but regrettably lacks a bibliography. It is well produced with a low level of typographical lapses and contains black and white promotional materials.

These shortcomings make this a difficult text to derive meaning from. And it is even more difficult to discern a consistent analytical approach. The book reads like the first major work of an undergraduate who is trying out his new academic vocabulary on his lecturer. So many sentences defy decoding. Passages such as the following obfuscate meaning:

Specificity did not seem profitable; the plot outline used for domestic sales similarly condenses both generic sampling and vague social groups to the point of childishness or, to be honest, illogicality and incomprehensibility. The confusion leads to stories of movement and social passage, underscored by placing them within the world of transportation. (128)

In summary, this is a potentially fascinating topic which has become a disappointing book. The breadth of material subjected to scrutiny is impressive but the weakness of the theoretical analysis and the stylistic idiosyncrasies detract considerably from its potential impact.

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Alexander Massov, John McNair and Thomas Poole (eds.), *Encounters under the Southern Cross: Two Centuries of Russian–Australian Relations 1807–2007* (Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, 2007), xiv + 419 pp.

Relations between Russia and Australia have never been precisely at the centre of the national consciousness of either country. They have considerable inherent interest, nevertheless, both historically in terms of concrete interrelations between people, and imaginatively as a site of encounter between culturally and at times ideologically different points of view. *Encounters under the Southern Cross* demonstrates the full range of potential which the topic of Russo-Australian relations has for the interested investigator, highlighting a considerable complexity of response in Russians and Australians alike and engaging with a surprisingly diverse range of material.