

gratulated; the extraordinary statement that ‘many plot lines found their way from *Uncle Vanya* into *The Wood Demon*’ (196) is clearly an oversight rather than an error. J. Douglas Clayton has also taken it upon himself to translate all the Russian (and Polish) contributions – eight out of the eighteen – into English. Inevitably, these lack the stylistic diversity, individuality and flashes of wit that make some of the English-language contributions a pleasure to read.

Published conference proceedings do not invariably succeed in recapturing the atmosphere and impact of the original presentations, and *Anton Pavlovich Chekhov. Poetics — Hermeneutics — Thematics* does not always avoid the pitfalls of the genre. It does succeed, however, in reflecting something of the state of contemporary Chekhov studies; one might call it a case study (as Cathy Popkin says of ‘A Nervous Breakdown’, 123), ‘for a number of interpretive practices’, reminding us that there is no end to reading Chekhov.

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Matthew Lenoe, *The Kirov Murder and Soviet History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 833 pp.

In the late afternoon of December 1, 1934 Sergei Kirov, the Leningrad Communist Party chief, entered the Smolny building and began walking up the stairs. Turning the corner on the third floor, a man came up behind him and shot him in the head. Kirov collapsed on his face. Within minutes the assassin was taken into custody. His name was Leonid Nikolaev, and he was a card-carrying member of the Communist Party. The Kirov murder sent shock waves throughout the Soviet Union. The very same night Stalin issued the Law of December 1, thereby legitimizing extrajudicial procedures against suspected terrorists. Within weeks mass detentions and executions ensued. As a result of the speed with which the dictator embarked on the Great Terror, scholars have often assumed that he ordered the killing himself, or if not that, was at least in some ways implicated in it. According to the most popular interpretation, Stalin ordered Kirov’s assassination for two reasons. First, he feared his comrade’s growing popularity based on the latter’s supposed espousal of a milder and more moderate version of Communism.

Second, Stalin got Kirov out of the way to create a pretext for the great purges of former Old Bolsheviks whose power he feared.

In a veritable *tour de force* of historical detective work Matthew Lenoe debunks this version. Besides consulting biographical materials relating to both victim and assassin, he draws on transcripts from the initial murder investigation, the mass of documents dealing with the Great Terror and the show trials of the later thirties, reports written by Soviet émigrés or defectors, and materials from later Central Committee inquiries. The account of Kirov's murder is followed by an intriguing analysis of his transformation from Party functionary to martyr and cult figure. Stalin and his successor Krushchev proved particularly adept at using their erstwhile comrade for political purposes. It was only during Perestroika and after that cracks were allowed to appear in the image of the shining leader and friend of the proletariat.

Lenoe's investigation is both a grippingly constructed narrative of one of Soviet history's most famous crimes and a master-class in revealing the uses and abuses of history, a worthy addition to the splendid *Annals of Communism* series. Unlike Amy Knight who wrote the first book-length treatment of the subject in English (*Who Killed Kirov*, 2000), Lenoe does more than just speculate when it comes to the assassin's motives. Piling layer upon layer of evidence, he concludes that Nikolaev acted as a lone assassin as he had insisted after his arrest. Who was this man, and what would have prompted him to kill one of the Soviet Union's most powerful figures? A committed communist of working class background, Nikolaev had participated in the revolutions of 1917 and devoted years of his life to the construction of a socialist society. After repeatedly being fired from his job, he became convinced that the Revolution had failed him and millions of citizens who had similarly fallen upon hard times and whose appeal for help went unanswered. While some had honors and fame heaped on them, he wrote in his diary, others were left with 'sobs over a grave' (235). Nikolaev finally resolved to teach the world that had treated him so cruelly a lesson. In some ways, Stalin's ruthless revenge on Zinovievites, Trotskyites, Right Deviationists, and sundry imaginary conspirators did indeed teach the Soviet citizens a lesson, but it was not the one Nikolaev seems to have had in mind. Stalin's reaction to the murder taught them that their leader would spare no effort in his crusade to stamp out even the most minor opposition and, in the process, to kill thousands of innocents. Tragically, Nikolaev's wife and his two little sons whom he had

blithely entrusted to the mercy of the Party would be among the victims of Stalin's paranoia. While their mother was executed for conspiring with the assassin, the children were dumped in an orphanage.

For a regime that prided itself in having constructed a worker's paradise, Comrade Nikolaev's initial claim that he had acted alone proved a public relations disaster of the first magnitude. Not surprisingly, Stalin found this possibility both too inconvenient and too disturbing to accept. The result was a thorough working over of the prisoner at the able hands of the NKVD. In the end, the assassin admitted to having been part of a broader conspiracy – precisely what Stalin needed if he wanted to wipe out his enemies. Several years after the crime, one of the key investigators, Genrikh Luishkov, defected to the Japanese where he issued a remarkable statement: Nikolaev had acted on his own, and none of the multiple conspiracies concocted by the NKVD had actually existed. For reasons that are not entirely clear Western historians have generally downplayed or disregarded Luishkov's extraordinarily important testimony. Leone rectifies this strange negligence. *The Kirov Murder and Soviet History* leaves us with the sobering realization that in Stalin's Russia even a committed Communist could reach a level of hopelessness where only murder would answer. On October 25 Nikolaev had jotted the following remarkable words into his personal diary: 'A thousand generations will pass, but the idea of Communism will not be made flesh' (226).

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Andrew Hammond (ed.), *Through Another Europe: An Anthology of Travel Writing on the Balkans* (Oxford: Signal Books Limited, 2009), 265 pp.

Every once in a while the academic reviewer comes across a book that is instructive, insightful, and immensely enjoyable. Andrew Hammond's anthology of Balkan travel writing is just such a rarity. The collection spans four centuries and covers ten countries, including the recently independent Kosovo. The authors, by no means only travel writers in the strict sense of the term, range from the genuine explorer to the army nurse, from the ambassador's wife to the anthro-