BOOK REVIEWS

LITERATURE AND FINE ARTS

Khapaeva, Dina. *Nightmare: From Literary Experiments to Cultural Project.* Russian History and Culture, Vol. 10. Leiden: Brill, 2013. vi + 263 pp. $156.00. ISBN 978-90-04-22275-5.

In this densely written and ambitious study, Dina Khapaeva writes that studying "nightmare as a mental phenomenon" can contribute to our understanding of both classic literature and contemporary culture. Essentially, her argument is that the nightmares that today play such a critical role in Russian and Western culture actually derive from literary works composed over the past two hundred years. By analyzing the techniques ("literary hypnotics") used to simulate the nightmare in classic literary texts by Gogol, Dostoevsky, Pelevin, Charles Maturin, Vladimir Sorokin, H. P. Lovecraft, and, surprisingly, Thomas Mann, she hopes to create a new branch of literary criticism: "nightmarology." After close readings of works by these authors, Khapaeva turns to larger questions of the role and meaning of the nightmare in contemporary life, culture, and society.

She begins by reading Gogol's Petersburg tales as psychological "experiments on readers" in which the readers experience the characters' inability to locate a stable border between reality and the nightmare (fantasy, the absurd, and so on) (p. 47). By analyzing "The Portrait," "Nevsky Prospect," "The Nose," and "Diary of a Madman," Khapaeva identifies some of the basic techniques of "literary hypnotics" used to simulate the nightmare: these include deliberately confusing dreams and reality, the sensation of being chased, and constant shifts between the realistic and the absurd. Additional elements of "literary hypnotics" come to light in Khapaeva's reading of Pelevin's 1996 novel *Chapaev i pustota* (translated as *The Clay Machine-Gun*) and H. P. Lovecraft's stories (which Khapaeva calls "a textbook for nightmare aesthetics" [p. 83]), including *déjà vu*, the good dream that turns into a nightmare, the chase, hopeless flight, the sensation of falling, space that is represented as a circle or labyrinth, and time that is collapsed.

In the longest chapter of the book, Khapaeva focuses on the collapse of language in several nightmarish stories by Dostoevsky, especially "The Double" and "Bobok." Her argument grows out of a long polemic with Bakhtin's notion that Dostoevsky's literary world is built on a dialogue between various "independent" voices: Khapaeva adds her voice to a growing number of scholars who see Bakhtinian emphasis on the dialogue as more closely related to the Soviet philosophy of language in the 1920s and 1930s than to Dostoevsky's actual works. But when she concludes that Dostoevsky's achievement was "to convey, through literature, a non-verbal experience of pre-verbal emotion" (p. 144), some readers might feel that her reading of Dostoevsky tells us more about the contemporary cultural moment than about Dostoevsky's works. Finally, she turns to Thomas Mann's epic *Joseph and his Brothers*, presumably because of its close connection to the interpretation of dreams and nightmares. She argues that Mann's view of the history of humanity as "a history of catastrophe" led him to develop additional forms of "literary hypnotics" to investigate nightmares, their interpretation, and their relation to history (p. 195). Although the parallels between lived and literary reality and the nightmare in life and literature fascinated Mann (as they fascinated the other writers Khapaeva discusses), his place in her argument is neither fully nor convincingly explained.

In many respects the circus followed a trajectory common to other areas of cultural production. Initially stigmatized as the kind of bourgeois, commercial entertainment the Bolsheviks hoped to eliminate, it underwent ideological makeovers after the Revolution and at the end of the 1920s. Both of these were quickly abandoned in favor of more traditional performances now relabeled as uniquely "Soviet." The most substantive and enduring shift in content came with World War II as the circus mobilized for war, depicting Germans as inhuman beasts, asserting the inevitability of their defeat, and providing comic relief that allayed fears and fortified morale. The war also witnessed a significant change in circus acts involving animals, with an emphasis on fierce beasts submitting to the will of courageous trainers replacing the long-standing portrayal of kind relationships between human and animal performers. Positive training methods returned to vogue after 1945. In the 1950s the circus promoted two stories, one focusing on international issues (advocating for peace while preparing for the next war) and the other on Soviet individualism. These interpretive arcs held without significant revision until the Soviet Union collapsed.

This is a thought-provoking book. The inherent contradiction Niereck finds in the circus' cultural work both invites and precludes deeper analysis: The circus was popular because its "meaning" was ambiguous and malleable, yet it offered a constant in terms of entertainment and diversion. It satisfied the needs of audiences and the state because its meaning was "indeterminate, flexible," and "polyvalent" (p. 216), while at the same time it consistently propagated political messages, ideological lessons, and legitimating myths. Niereck's use of the conditional voice in the chapter conclusions acknowledges the inherently speculative nature of this analytical framework. Given the conceptualization of the circus as a liminal space of play, illusion, and ambiguity, as well as the importance of animals to the circus' acts and symbolism, one might also consider the circus ring as a hybrid realm in which humans and animals work together and both exercise agency. This finely crafted study will be accessible to students and scholars in a range of fields.

Amy Nelson, Virginia Tech

Harris, Steven E. *Communism on Tomorrow Street: Mass Housing and Everyday Life after Stalin*. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. xxii + 394 pp. $60.00. ISBN 978-1-4214-0566-7.

Yuri Pimenov's Socialist Realist painting "Wedding on Tomorrow Street" animates the cover of *Communism on Tomorrow Street* and highlights the complex and hopeful history behind the production of mass housing in the Soviet Union that Steven Harris brings to life in this fascinating work. Considering that the 140,900,000 individuals who acquired new housing between 1953 and 1970 represent a staggering 66 percent of the average Soviet population during those years (according to my calculations), Harris's argument that "moving to the separate apartment was the way most ordinary people experienced and shaped Khrushchev's Thaw" makes perfect sense (p. 1). Harris masterfully shows through extensive research and analysis that many different people and groups contributed to the creation of a "distinctly Soviet version of mass housing" (p. 5). He also gives voice to "ordinary people" who did extraordinary things in the quest to solve their own housing problem—from moving into units before they were completed, to squatting in units that were not theirs, or writing insistent letters of complaint and concern about defects in the process.

Harris's work is organized in three parts around the production, distribution, and consumption of mass housing. In the first part, "Making the Separate Apartment," Harris situates the mass-housing movement as an international phenomenon that, in Russia, started with the 1917 revolutionaries who promised people adequate, evenly distributed housing. In response, radical architects who thought that socialism required a new way of living designed "house communes" (*doma kommuny*) (p. 56). Stalin swept aside these ideas in the early 1930s and reaffirmed the separate apartment as a legitimate socialist housing form, but in practice only the intelligentsia and party elites lived in them. Ordinary people had to make do with barracks, dormitories, and communal apartments, with multiple families in separate rooms sharing the toilet and kitchen. As Harris explains, Khrushchev built on these earlier housing ideas, but put major state resources behind the promise to solve the housing question and, in contrast to previous Soviet regimes, did so without mobilizing mass violence to achieve his goal, thus fundamentally changing the relationship between the people and the state.

Harris innovatively attributes the excessively small size of the Khrushchev-era housing units not to save money, but to the disjunction between the production (design) of the housing and its distribution. Local housing departments influenced by party members and enterprise leaders controlled who received the housing and doled it out on the basis of square meters of living space per person—never on a per apartment basis. Architects who had come to accept the concept of separate apartments wanted to prevent the distributors from putting multiple families in a single apartment and so reduced the area of the living space (that included only living and sleeping rooms) per person to the bare minimum. However, the cost of housing was based on the relationship between the amount of living space and auxiliary spaces (toilets, baths, corridors, and kitchens), so auxiliary spaces were also reduced in area to maintain this cost ratio—leading to the complaints about the inadequacy of the living space and ultimately to the reconsideration of apartment layouts.

Part 2, "Distributing Housing, Reordering Society," covers Soviet attempts to distribute housing equitably while maintaining the privilege of better housing for the elites. Getting on the waiting list and finally getting off it into better housing seemed to obsess everyone in this period. Many of the people involved in the design, construction, and distribution of living space were also trying to solve their own housing problems. Harris shows that a system that Khrushchev had intended to depoliticize and make egalitarian, transparent, and objective was anything but that. Alternatives to the waiting list existed in the form of "people's construction," in which workers contributed labor to build their own housing; and "cooperatives," through which people with the means could fund housing projects and acquire their unit. Harris carefully presents the complex and interesting machinations of the various players and shows the persistence of class differences under socialism. Through the extensive use of quotes, Harris demonstrates that the power to control policy did not rest only in the top leadership in Moscow, but was also manipulated by many key enterprise leaders and the people who worked for them.

Part 3, "Living and Consuming the Communist Way of Life," shows the disjunction between what was conceived and promised compared to what was built and lived-in and the ways that ordinary people participated in this process. Early on, Khrushchev tried to equate solving the housing question with achieving a true "communist way of life" (p. 22), but, as Harris shows, both these ideas remained works in progress. People were invited to meet with architects and visit furniture exhibitions, but the housing did not meet their needs and products were not available for them to purchase. Beyond the construction defects that were ubiquitous, people often moved into buildings with unfinished neighborhoods at a distance from good transportation infrastructure. Combined with enterprise-built housing that was not well coordinated with state housing, this contributed to the dissatisfaction that many felt with the actual housing after the elation of finally getting into a new independent apartment wore off.

The only fault I find is in the discussion of Aleksei Müürisepp (Miurisepp as Harris has it from the Russian transliteration) (p. 176). It is very subtle, but Harris's narration gives the impression that Müürisepp was in Estonia while serving in the Red Army in the 1920s, but as Harris knows, Estonia was an independent Republic at the time. Müürisepp *was* born in Estonia in 1902, but his family moved to Krasnoiarsk in Siberia in 1907–8. He only became party secretary in Estonia after World War II when the Soviet Union occupied the country. I would have let this go, except I think it is important to note that architects in the Baltic States had a different relationship to the Thaw exactly because of their distinct history. Harris has found much that is distinctively "Soviet" in the development of mass housing, and how this played out in the Baltic States would present an interesting counterpoint. The quality of the editing and writing and the many direct quotes from people in every sector make *Communism on Tomorrow Street* particularly engaging to read. It should prove worthwhile for anyone interested in the history of the Khrushchev era, everyday life in the Soviet Union, and the development of housing.

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Brown, Kate. *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. x + 406 pp. $27.95. ISBN 978-0-19-985576-6.

Nearly all Americans know the name Chernobyl, but very few are aware that two other nuclear sites—Russia's Maiak facility and the Hanford nuclear plant in eastern Washington state—each released more than twice as much radiation into the environment as their more famous counterpart. This volume is a vivid and compelling comparative analysis of the "atomic cities" that were constructed to support the Maiak and Hanford facilities—Ozersk, Russia, and Richland, Washington. Based on extensive archival work and on interviews with dozens of people, *Plutopia* tells the story of these two communities, detailing a series of sometimes surprising similarities between the two cities while painting a detailed—and often chilling—portrait of an irresponsible culture of nuclear safety.

The title of Kate Brown's book refers to one of its central ideas: that the American and Soviet governments won the loyalty of Richland and Ozersk residents by giving them a life of "orderly prosperity" and privilege, "embed[ding] plutonium operators safely within nuclear families living in well-heeled, exclusive atomic cities" (p. 5). Workers at the Hanford and Maiak plutonium plants came from the working classes, but viewed themselves as middle-class and benefited from government efforts to promote strong schools, healthy families, and a tangible sense of community, despite the serious health risks of life in Richland and Ozersk. Brown highlights a number of telling similarities between the cities of Ozersk and Richland, including their location in remote regions, the division of their low-level and high-level workers into distinct communities (often divided by race or class), and the culture of secrecy that concealed a poor safety record in each location. (Some of these similarities resulted from Soviet efforts to copy the successes of the American nuclear program, while others were driven by the similar needs of the Soviet and American regimes.) *Plutopia*

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