



W. F. Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight: An Historical Survey of Magic and Divination in Russia*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing; University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999; Russian Edition: *Bania v polnoch': Istoricheskii obzor magii i gadanii v Rossii*. M.: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006. 720 pp. Ill.¹

What Can You Find in the Banya If You Go There at Midnight?

W. F. Ryan's study, carried out at the Warburg Institute, University of London,² was first published in English a decade ago, but the book has retained its scholarly value and, what is rather more rare, its topicality. One might indeed say that the book has become a classic. At the same time, the study of folk culture and Slavonic antiquity is developing so fast, and the number of new publications in the recent past has been so significant, that one could now name dozens of items that one way or another act as supplements to Ryan's work.

¹ This review article was written as a contribution to 'Russian Culture in World History', a Programme of Fundamental Studies of the Department of History and Philology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, as part of the project 'Russian Folklore in its Closest Ethnic Surroundings'. [We would like to thank W. F. Ryan for his help with the translation of this review into English. Editor].

² In September-October 2006, I myself was able to spend a month working in the library of the Warburg Institute, thanks to the kind invitation of Professor W. F. Ryan and Professor Charles Hope. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to them, and also to the staff of the British Academy and the Russian Academy of Sciences, under whose exchange agreement the visit took place.

The significance of the original English edition lay mainly in the fact that it was and remains the fullest and most systematic compendium in the language of information about magic, sorcery, and divination in Russia (and more broadly, among the Eastern Slavs, since Ryan does draw, albeit only to a limited extent, on Ukrainian and Belorussian materials). Western historians, folklorists, and anthropologists had for the first time at their disposal a systematised codex of information about these subjects, which acts at one and the same time as a scholarly analysis, a reference book, and an anthology of hugely varied source material that can be used for commentaries on Russian literature and particular events in Russian history, and for the purposes of comparison with other traditions of magic and sorcery. One can be confident in predicting that Ryan's book will long remain the canonical source of comparative material for Western scholars of European magic, divination, and sorcery.

It is much to be regretted that until Ryan's book appeared, Eastern Europe had remained essentially *terra incognita*. Generalising works on European magic and sorcery to all intents and purposes ignore the traditions of Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia. Certainly, the work of such US scholars as Russell Zguta, Paul Bushkovich, Valerie Kivelson, Eve Levin, Christine Worobec, and Linda Ivanits does include some observations on Russian magic, while Faith Wigzell's *Reading Russian Fortunes* (Cambridge, 1998), addresses the topic of divination books. All the same, nothing as thematically broad and as all-inclusive in terms of source material as Ryan's study was or is available.

It has to be said that one feature of this book which strikes the Russian reader as slightly odd is that Ryan tends to cite English-language secondary literature even in cases where a given theme has been fairly fully explored in Russian-language materials, while these latter, on the other hand, may not be mentioned by him. Certainly, this is explained by the fact that the first edition was precisely aimed at an English-speaking readership, but specialists may well wonder why Ryan has ignored these studies in the Russian edition as well – was he simply not aware of their existence, or was this a conscious reluctance to cite these materials because he had reservations about their quality?

The Russian edition of Ryan's book has landed in a decidedly peculiar cultural situation, which might be described, in a word, as totally polarised. On the one hand, there is the body of scholarly work on magic and sorcery, as represented in monographs, collections of essays, articles, and works of reference by ethnographers, folklorists, and historians. On the other is a colossal volume of mass-market publishing, both by Russian and by foreign writers, including introductory guides to magic and sorcery, collections of so-called

spells and magic remedies, and other books addressing the subject of magic from a practical point of view. Scholarly publications come out in small print-runs and have almost no circulation outside a small readership of scholars and university teachers; the generally dry manner of discussion makes this material completely uninteresting for the mass readership that actually believes in the existence of extra-sensory perception, clairvoyants, telepathy, sorcery and magic. Works of popularising scholarship – which run the gamut from perfectly respectable and even fairly original works to cut-and-paste jobs and instances of actual plagiarism – have rather more chance of success. Equally, reprints of such nineteenth-century collections as I. P. Sakharov's *Tales of the Russian People*, A. N. Afanasyev's *The Poetical Outlook of the Slavs on Nature*, or M. Zabylin's *The Russian People: Its Customs, Rituals, Traditions, Superstitions and Poetry* are exactly what the doctor ordered, so far as this public is concerned. Not 'scholarly' in the customary modern meaning of the word, these books slake the modern reader's thirst for what is 'our own', 'authentic', 'time-honoured', as well as 'mysterious' and 'supernatural'.

Unable to track down modern, accessible collections of 'real' Russian mythology (like the ones you find of Greek, Roman, or Scandinavian myths), readers turn to books published 150 years ago and find plenty of black magic, myth, and the devil only knows what else¹ in them. Against this background, the Russian translation of Ryan's book comes across as quite an idiosyncratic publication. No-one could miss Ryan's extraordinary erudition, but at the same time he seems rather distant from the tradition that he describes, is describing it sideways-on, so to speak. Rather than fixing on what makes superstition so dear to the heart of those who believe in it, he concentrates on what the believer has in common with the superstitious Englishman or indeed the superstitious European from wherever else. This sense of alienation is increased by the style of the book, which is written in a Russian that has all too obviously been translated from the English. However, the book is full of clever and apt observations, and a few odd mistakes in the rendering do not come in the way of that. In places, Ryan lets the reader sense his own, fairly ironic, attitude to magic and sorcery, and also to those Russian scholars of the subject who have at times displayed credulity and lack of critical distance (see e.g. p. 291).

So far as the **content** of the book is concerned, Ryan, in my view, has a holistic concept of traditional culture, so that magic is not seen by him as an isolated sphere, but as one that infuses the whole culture (albeit to different degrees). For example (p. 327), he emphasises the

¹ Literally, 'the devil in a mortar' (as in 'pestle and mortar'). [Editor].

artificiality of the distinction between magic and religion, pointing to the lack of logic in the practices of those Christian denominations that have at once forbidden magic, yet permitted and even encouraged traditional rituals that large parts of the population have actually seen as magical.¹ This standpoint means that Ryan analyses some practices and beliefs sanctioned by Russian Orthodoxy, such as wonder-working icons and various types of cross (pp. 328–339), and the so-called ‘passports [to Heaven]’.

All in all, the book – which has as many as 16 chapters – is striking both in terms of its bulk and in terms of the variety of topics examined, which are by no means limited to ‘magic and divination’. Chapter One, ‘An Outline’, and Chapter Sixteen, ‘Magic, the Church, the Law, and the State’ act as a kind of frame to the book. The remaining chapters can be grouped in three large sections. The first comprises folk magic and divination (see Chapter Two, ‘Popular Magic’, Chapter Three, ‘Wizards and Witches’, Chapter Four, ‘Popular Divination’, Chapter Five, ‘Signs, Omens, Auguries, Calendar Predictions’, Chapter Six, ‘Predictions from Dreams and the Human Body’. Four chapters on spells and amulets follow. In the third part, the focus is mainly on divinatory texts of an alchemical or astrological variety: ‘Magic of Letters and Number’ (Chapter Eleven), ‘Geomancy’ (Chapter Twelve), ‘Alchemy and the Virtues of Stones’ (Chapter Thirteen), ‘Astrology: The Byzantine Tradition’ (Chapter Fourteen), ‘Astrology: Post-Byzantine Influences’ (Chapter Fifteen). It has to be said that the logic of this organisation is slightly off-beat and even, one might say, ‘inverted’, since it means beginning with a discussion of folk culture (based on sources from the nineteenth century) and working up to a discussion of the written tradition of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries – which is placed at the end of the book.

The Russian translation also contains a ‘Preface to the Russian Edition’ and an introductory note by A. V. Chernetsov, the editor of the Russian translation.

Some of the chapter subsections in *The Bathhouse at Midnight* are comparable in size and the quantity of material cited with entire separate studies, for instance, ‘Types of Spell’ (pp. 255–292), or

¹ One might compare the fruitful ruminations of A. I. Beletsky on the relationship between ‘devilish’ pagan magic and ecclesiastical magic: ‘If magic is in the hands of the church, it is not seen as criminal; if it is in the hands of the church’s enemies, it is instantly condemned. Yet the miracles performed in both magic traditions are identical. One could say that sorcery is an illegitimate form of miracle, a miracle a legitimate form of sorcery’. See his ‘Legenda o Fauste v svyazi s istoriei demonologii’ [The Legend of Faust in Connection with the History of Demonology] // *Zapiski Neofilologicheskogo obshchestva pri S-Peterburgskom universitete*. 1911. Issue 5. P. 66. Cf. V. M. Zhirmunsky, ‘Istoriya legendy o Fauste’ [The History of the Faust Legend] // *Legenda o doktore Fauste*. Ed. V. M. Zhirmunsky. 2nd, rev. edn., M., 1978. Pp. 258–9.

‘Christian Religious Objects Used as Talismans’ (pp. 327–365). Some individual excursions, for instance ‘Magic Books’ (p. 325), ‘Magic Dolls’ (pp. 325–6), ‘Serpent Amulets [*zmeeviki*]’ (pp. 344–352), ‘Sisinius and King Herod’s Daughters’ (pp. 352–63) are also packed with information. Footnotes often also grow into mini-essays (see e.g. note 167 on the so-called ‘giants’ bones’ [*volotovye*, in fact mammoth’s], pp. 300–301, or note 190, pp. 302–3, on the uses of a dead man’s hand [the so-called ‘Hand of Glory’]). The careful structuring of the book means that it is easy to use it as a work of reference, especially given the excellent name and subject indexes.

The monograph overlaps to some extent with articles published earlier by W. F. Ryan, though these also contain material that is not included in the book.¹ Alongside the book and after it was published, Ryan has also published other articles that develop certain themes.²

A further characteristic of Ryan’s discussion, alongside his holistic approach, is that the author draws both on ‘folk’ and ‘high’ culture, moving easily between the written and the oral tradition, from practices that are known from translated or Russian written texts to ritual practices. It is, regrettably, rare for Russian scholars to make transitions of this kind, depending as they do not just on a knowledge of Russian tradition, but on the traditions that shaped this (as found in Byzantine Greek, Jewish, Latin, etc., sources).

Ryan’s discussion has two different cultural domains in focus, therefore: folk culture and its rituals, beliefs, spells, and divination practices, and the written texts that are in one or another way concerned with magic, geomancy, astrology, and alchemy. This breadth of scope gives the book a particular interest, as readers will surely feel. Studies such as Ryan’s do much to restore the lost unity of Russian culture, which no longer looks like a weird and unnatural hybrid of two warring traditions – ‘written’ and ‘oral’, ‘bookish’ and ‘folk’.

Yet at the same time, one has to bear in mind that in real life, these two spheres often were to a large extent separate: for many centuries the vast majority of those who resorted to magic and divination, consulted sorcerers, and told stories about wood demons and water sprites, were illiterate and knew nothing at all about written traditions. On the other

¹ W. F. Ryan. ‘The Old Russian Version of the Pseudo-Aristotelian “*Secretum secretorum*”’ // *The Slavonic and East European Review*. 1978. Vol. 56. No. 2. Pp. 242–260; idem. ‘Solomon, Sator, Acrostics and Leo the Wise in Russia’ // *Oxford Slavonic Papers*. New Series. 1986. Vol. 19. Pp. 46–61; idem. ‘The Witchcraft Hysteria in Early Modern Europe: Was Russia an Exception?’ // *The Slavonic and East European Review*. 1998. Vol. 76. No. 1. Pp. 1–36.

² W. F. Ryan. ‘Eclecticism in the Russian Charm Tradition’ // *Charms and Charming in Europe*. Roper J. (ed.). NY, 2004. Pp. 128–144; idem. ‘Ancient Demons and Russian Fevers’ // *Magic and Classical Tradition*. Burnett C., Ryan W.F. (eds). London, 2006. Pp. 37–58 (*Warburg Institute Colloquia*, 7); idem. *Russian Magic at the British Library: Books, Manuscripts, Scholars, Travellers*. London, 2006 (The Panizzi Lectures 2005).

hand, the manuscripts dealing with geomancy and esoteric knowledge that have come down to us from Muscovy (the *Rafli* [a primarily geomantic text], 'Gromnik' [divination by thunder], 'Lunnik' [lunar divination], the *Tainaya tainykh* [The pseudo-Aristotelian Secret of Secrets], and so on), were, to judge by the small numbers that have survived, never particularly popular. So, did the two spheres have contact with each other, and if so, to what extent? There is as yet no single, generally accepted answer to this question.¹

Following standard Western practice, W. F. Ryan attributes even some features of folk culture to the influence of 'high' culture. For instance, he convincingly describes the process of interaction of 'high' and 'folk' culture at the level of the manuscript tradition ('Spells, Divinations, and False Prayers', Chapter Seven; 'Talismans and Amulets', Chapter Eight, 'Texts as Amulets', Chapter Ten, 'The Magic of Letters and Numbers', Chapter Eleven). The most cogent cases are ones (e.g. the false prayers against personified fevers – *tryasovitsy* – or the text called *The Mother of God's Dream*) where the original text was not merely translated into Russian, but adapted in line with the prevailing conventions of magical practice among the Eastern Slavs, and then attained wide dissemination. (Incidentally, not long ago W. F. Ryan dedicated a separate study to the transmutation of the so-called 'Sisinius Legend' in Russian spells against fever.)² So far as the tradition of books, iconography, and certain objects of material culture (e.g. amulets) are concerned, there is reliable evidence for translation, borrowing, and migration across time and space, and these processes may be documented as part of the general history of culture.

In general, Ryan's approach to the relationship of 'bookish' and 'folk' elements could be characterised as extremely cautious. For instance, he warns against taking the correspondence between certain folk beliefs in omens and portents and those in written tradition as evidence that the former are 'late' or 'literary' in origin, while at the same time suggesting that in the atomised world of magic, 'bookish portents' could in due course emerge as 'folk' ones (see p. 218).

Yet the very assumption of 'bookish' sources for some beliefs strikes the reader as forced. For example, phenomena such as the belief in the 'evil eye', divination of one's future husband's identity, healing practices, etc., are so easily explicable and natural and so widespread across cultures, that the attempt to explain them in terms of external influence seems, to put it bluntly, artificial.

¹ D. M. Bulanin, in his thorough and interesting review of *The Bathhouse at Midnight* (original English edition), has paid particular attention to this point. See *Russkaya literatura*. 2001. No. 1. Pp. 249–57.

² See Ryan. 'Ancient Demons and Russian Fevers'.

Additions to the bibliography

Ryan's bibliography is strikingly full and might itself profitably be consulted for the purposes of reference. In particular, one notes the large number of rare and hard-to-find Russian editions that have been consulted. The Russian reader will also much appreciate the extremely detailed bibliography of publications on Russia by Western scholars.

At the same time, there are a few lacunae. For instance, it would have been in order to cite N. M. Galkovsky, whose two-volume collection of Old Russian strictures against pagan and superstitious beliefs, *Borba khristianstva s ostatkami iazychestva v Drevnei Rusi* [The Struggle of Christianity with the Remnants of Paganism in Old Rus]. Kharkov, 1913–1916, was reprinted in 2000. It is regrettable that Ryan was not able to consult O. D. Zhuravel (Gorelkina)'s recent detailed study of the Russian version of the Faust theme (*Syuzhet o dogovore cheloveka s dyavolom v drevnerusskoi literature* [The Subject of the Pact with the Devil in Old Russian Literature]. Novosibirsk, 1996). It would also have been useful to mention the study by A. V. Gura of Slavonic rituals and beliefs associated with animals, which provides a broad comparative context (*Simvolika zhitovnykh v slavyanskoi narodnoi traditsii* [The Symbolism of Animals in Slavonic Folk Tradition]. M., 1997). Since Ryan does draw on lexical materials, it would have been useful to make a study of dialect dictionaries and the multi-volume *Slovar russkikh narodnykh govorov* (Dictionary of Russian Folk Idioms) in particular.

In the foreword to the Russian edition, W. F. Ryan names a few studies directly relevant to his theme that have appeared since the English version of *The Bathhouse at Midnight*. These include, in particular, A. V. Lavrov's *Koldovstvo i religiya v Rossii, 1700–1740* [Sorcery and Religion in Russia, 1700–1740]. M., 2000, and E. B. Smilyanskaya's *Volshebniki. Bogokhulniki. Eretiki. Narodnaya religioznost i "dukhovnye predstupleniya" v Rossii XVIII veka* [Magicians. Blasphemers. Heretics. Popular Religiosity and 'Crimes of the Spirit' in Eighteenth-Century Russia]. M., 2003. I would like to add a few more names to that list. The five-volume dictionary *Slavyanskie drevnosti* [Slavonic Antiquities, M., 1995, and continuing; so far three volumes have appeared] includes discussions, with references to Slavonic cultures generally, of many of the themes that Ryan includes. The multi-handed collection *Otrechennoe chtenie v Rossii* [Forbidden Literature in Russia], M., 2002, includes a large number of manuscript spells and divination texts. In M. V. Korogodina's study of confession in Russia (*Isповед v Rossii v XIV–XIX vekakh* [Confession in Russia from the Fourteenth to the Nineteenth Century]. SPb., 2006, there is a special chapter on sorcery. The current state of thinking on 'double faith' and 'popular Christianity' is dis-

cussed in one of V. Ya. Petrukhin's recent books (*Iz istorii russkoi kultury* [The History of Russian Culture]. Vol. 1. M. 2000. Pp. 288–323). A. B. Strakhov's monograph *Noch pered Rozhdestvom* [The Night Before Christmas]. Cambridge, Mass., 2003, considers a rich range of materials on 'popular Christianity'. With regard to the magic of numbers, one should now consult V. M. Kirillin's specialist study, *Simvolika chisel v literature Drevnei Rusi* [The Symbolism of Numbers in Old Russian Literature]. SPb., 2000, and with regard to astrology in the bookish tradition of Rus, P. A. Simonov's studies, 'Estestvennonauchnaya mysl Drevnei Rusi' [The Scientific Thought of Old Russia, in his *Izbrannye trudy*, M., 2001], and *Russkaya astrologicheskaya knizhnost* [Russian Astrological Books, M., 1998]. N. I. Tolstoi, S. M. Tolstaya and other members of the Moscow school of ethno-linguists have given detailed consideration to the links between magic and language, a subject barely touched on by Ryan (see e.g. the Tolstois' 'Imya v kontekste narodnoi kultury' [The Name in the Context of Folk Culture], *Problemy slavyanskogo yazykoznaniiya*. M. 1998. Pp. 88–125, or N. I. Tolstoi's *Ocherki slavyanskogo yazychestva* [Studies of Slavonic Paganism, M. 2003], and also the bibliography, *Slavyanskaya etnolingvistika* [Slavonic Ethnolinguistics]. 2nd edn. M., 2004. Wonder-working icons and the popular veneration for icons generally have also now been the subject of specialist studies (see A.M. Lidov (ed.). *Chudotvornaya ikona v Vizantii i Drevnei Rusi* [The Wonder-Working Icon in Old Russia]. M. 1996; K. V. Tsekhanskaya. *Ikonopochitanie v russkoi traditsionnoi culture* [The Cult of Icons in Russian Traditional Culture]. M., 2004).

One of the problems that Ryan was faced with concerned the fact that he necessarily had to make clear where he stands with reference to the various global reconstructions of Slavonic paganism that have been undertaken in Russia at different points – to decide to espouse one of them that he considers most convincing, or simply to ignore them all.

Ryan has managed to negotiate this tricky issue very successfully. Despite the respect that he feels for Russian scholarship, he has been able to keep his distance from it where necessary. His book includes some fairly critical remarks on such studies as those by A. N. Afanasyev, B. A. Rybakov, and others. (See e.g. note 2 on p. 99, or the comments on p. 114). He quite rightly objects to the employment, as evidence of pagan beliefs, of folk culture recorded at a late date (p. 66). He also knows his way round modern conceptual works on Russian culture, such as the works of the Moscow-Tartu school (above all the writings of V. V. Ivanov, V. N. Toporov, B. A. Uspensky), and the ethnolinguistic school of N. I. Tolstoi (see pp. 16–17). We should recognise Ryan's achievement in that he is able to pay his dues to the various schools that prevailed at different times in Russia

during the nineteenth and twentieth century without falling victim to the blandishments of the various attractive, but rather shaky hypotheses that have been constructed in turn by the mythological, archaeological, structuralist and other schools. Sad though it may be for Russian scholars to hear, the only way that this foreign scholar has been able to stick to the firm ground of attested fact has been to reject completely the use of scholarly reconstructions such as the extrapolation of the cult of Volos/Veles from the cult of St Nicholas, or of Slavonic initiation rites from beliefs about werewolves and other shape-changers, and so on. Yet at the same time, the absence of any governing conceptual framework means that *The Bathhouse at Midnight* essentially remains a piece of descriptive history.

Problems of sources

One more problem that W. F. Ryan had to resolve concerns the state of the source material. How to distinguish reliable and unreliable data, and to what extent can one safely make use of the compilatory works on Russian ethnography, beginning with the compendia put together in the mid nineteenth century and moving on to the works on Russian magic and demonology of the present day – from the scholarly to the semi-scholarly and the completely unscholarly? Ryan himself points out (p. 19) that he often had to glean material from works that are now outdated in terms of their methodology or that had no pretensions to scholarship, some of which are now very hard to get hold of.

It is regrettable that Ryan did not, however, provide a detailed characterisation of these sources, confining himself to occasional observations in passing and to a short commentary in a single footnote (note 2, p. 99). This is perfectly understandable when one is writing for an English-speaking audience, since they will not be able to access most of the material in any case. However, for a Russian audience, such a characterisation would definitely not have come amiss.

When it comes to ethnographical and dialectological materials, Ryan mainly depends on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sources (in particular, V. I. Dal's defining dictionary of the Russian language). He also uses other, very varied, sources, some of which come from works of popularising scholarship such as M. N. Vlasova's *Russkie sueveriya: Entsiklopedicheskii slovar* [Dictionary of Russian Superstitions]. SPb. 1998, or T. A. Novichkova's *Russkii demonologicheskii slovar* [Russian Demonological Dictionary]. SPb., 1995. With works of this kind, checking the information provided is often impossible, because there are either no notes at all, or notes that cite sources which are difficult to locate. Sometimes an infuriating system is in operation when there are few if any annotations, but a round-up bibliography at the end of the article, and the reader

is left with the difficult, or at times unmanageable, task of relating this or that fact cited by the author to the list of sources.¹

Given this situation, any author may well be left face-to-face with an enormous torrent of facts that he is quite unable to check. But even if an author does not accept responsibility for the actual information that he cites, he cannot escape responsibility for the selection and interpretation of the material. Phrases along the lines, 'if one is to trust Solzhenitsyn, then...' do not absolve him of responsibility for citing the information that is quoted from Solzhenitsyn.

The problems involved in checking data about folk beliefs extrapolated from secondary sources of different kinds are particularly acute. Ryan certainly recognises this (see e.g. his remarks on p. 57), yet the absence of any explicit source criticism does have negative consequences.

Rituals and beliefs are a fluid kind of material and they exist in many variants. Distinguishing typical and individual features is complicated, and sometimes impossible. But there is an underlying rule: particular ritual actions and superstitions are generally much more stable than the ways in which these are motivated, which can vary considerably depending on locality and individual informant. Unfortunately, W. F. Ryan's book does not always distinguish strictly between a phenomenon and its interpretation. For instance, in a section devoted to the mirror, he writes, following V. I. Dal, that when someone in a household dies, the mirror has to be covered, so that the soul of the departed does not take fright as it leaves by looking in the mirror and realising it is dead (which it does not otherwise know) (p. 325). But what Dal actually says is slightly different: '*The mirrors in a household where someone has died are covered so that the departed cannot look in them*' (*Tolkovyĭ slovar zhivogo velikorusskogo yazyka* [Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language]. M., 2000. Vol. 2. Pp. 680–681). The ritual action is described quite accurately by Ryan, but the interpretation is open to doubt.

Elsewhere Ryan writes that the death of a sorcerer is usually preceded by a long death agony, because the sorcerer's horns stop his soul leaving his body easily (p. 121). There is no doubt that the belief it was hard for sorcerers to die was very widespread, but this explanation of why that should be is highly doubtful. Ryan also observes that sorcerers would sit at table in their hats because they had no manners (p. 123). But the fact that sorcerers left their hats on was ritually necessary and was certainly not a breach of etiquette in the usual sense.

¹ Regrettably, exactly this practice is adopted in the recent encyclopaedia *Slavyanskĭe drevnosti*, taking us back to the worst practices of the nineteenth century.

Generally, Ryan is able to fulfil his ambition of sticking to attested fact, but there are occasional cases where doubts creep in. It should be emphasised that these are rare and that they have no impact on the general value of the book. For instance, the report that in 1881 a criminal was starved for three days, by order of the Academy of Sciences, so that it could be established whether the action of the 'evil eye' was involved, reads like an invention by journalists working for the 'yellow press'. It is as well to be cautious with reports that one cannot check when they have the character of salacious anecdotes, as here.

Ryan cites Solzhenitsyn as a source when he says that an icon of the Vision of the Mother of God to St Sergius, and painted on a panel of the wood used for the saint's coffin, used for three centuries to accompany Russian troops into battle (p. 340). Here he repeats Solzhenitsyn's own confusion between two icons painted by Estafy Golovkin (died 1602), cellarer at the Monastery of the Trinity and St Sergius. Golovkin is known (in 1591) to have painted the *Icon of St Sergius with his Life* on a panel from the saint's coffin. However, it was another icon, a diptych with images of the Vision of the Mother of God to St Sergius, St John the Baptist, and Archangel Michael that actually went with the troops.¹

Other small errors or misprints in the book include a strange statement in the section on church bells and harness and livestock bells, which appears to suggest that the Russians living in Karelia were herders of reindeer: it is said to have been a bad omen when the lead reindeer lost his bell (p. 343). But in the source cited, the animal named is actually a cow: *'If the lead cow lost her bell, then much ill was thought likely to overcome the herd.'*

It is also inaccurate to state that the first Slavonic version of the Legend of Sisinius appears in the Glagolitic Euchologion of the eleventh century (as on p. 355 here). In the Euchologion of Sinai, there are indeed several prayers against fever, but none of them mention Sisinius, and there are no prayers here that build on themes from the Legend of Sisinius.² As a matter of fact, this was pointed out by D. M. Bulanin in his review of *The Bathhouse at Midnight*, published in 2001 (see above), and one can only regret

¹ See T. V. Nikolaeva. 'Troitskii zhivopisets XVI v. Evstafy Golovkin' [Evstafy Golovkin, Painter of the Trinity Monastery in the Sixteenth Century] // *Kultura Drevnei Rusi*. M., 1966. Pp. 177–83. *Drevnerusskaya zhivopis Zagorskogo muzeya* [Old Russian Paintings in the Zagorsk Museum]. M., 1977. *Prepodobnyi Sergii Radonezhskii v proizvedeniyakh russkogo iskusstva XV–XIX vv. Katalog*. [St Sergius of Radonezh in the Works of Russian Artists of the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries. A Catalogue]. M., 1992. P. 8.

² See R. Nachtigal (ed.) *Euchologium Siniaticum. Starocerkvenoslavanski glagolski spomenik*. 2 vols. Text with commentary. Ljubljana, 1942. Vol. 1. Pp. 104–24. '

that his comments were not taken into account in the Russian translation.

One small slip is that the feast of St George is not the 13 May (p. 79), but the 23 April Old Style.

‘The Werewolf’s Spell’

Regrettably, a number of the spells borrowed by Ryan from I. P. Sakharov’s collection are, in my opinion, falsifications. In the second half of the nineteenth century, folklorists, ethnographers, and historians of literature all expended a good deal of energy on demonstrating that Sakharov was a shameless literary fraud. It is known for certain that he passed off his own inventions as folk tales, using folk epics from Kirsha Danilov’s collection and referring to manuscripts that had never existed, and that he ‘improved’ the texts of the spells and riddles that he published; he also inserted material of his own into the Old Russian texts that he edited.¹ Despite all this, by some paradox Sakharov’s book continues to be reprinted again and again, and Russian and foreign scholars continue to mine it for material.

As an example of Sakharov’s work, let me quote one of the texts that was published by him, one to which he gives the heading ‘The Werewolf’s Spell’:

On the sea, on the ocean, on the island of Buyan, in an open glade shines the moon on an ash stump, in the greenwood, in a broad dale. Round the stump walks a shaggy wolf, in his teeth are all the horned cattle, but the wolf doesn’t walk into the woods, the wood doesn’t walk into the glade. Moon, moon, golden horns! Melt the bullets, blunt the blades, break the truncheons, make the beast, the man, and serpents afraid, so that they don’t capture the grey wolf, so they

¹ See e.g. A. N. Pypin. *Istoriya russkoi etnografii* [History of Russian Ethnography]. SPb., 1890. Vol. 1. Pp. 276-313; idem, *Poddelki rukopisei i narodnykh pesen* [Forgeries of Manuscripts and Folk Songs]. SPb., 1898. Pp. 24–30; N. N. Vinogradov. ‘Sakharov i ego “Russkie narodnye zagadki i pritchi”’ [Sakharov and His ‘Russian Folk Riddles and Tales’ // *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniya*. 1905. Pt. 359. No. 6. Section 2. Pp. 229–65; S. V. Savchenko. *Russkaya narodnaya skazka* [The Russian Folk Tale]. Kiev, 1914. Pp. 123–34; M. K. Azadovsky. *Istoriya russkoi folkloristiki* [The History of Russian Folklore Studies]. M., 1958. Vol. 1. Pp. 355-62; N. V. Novikov. ‘Russkaya skazka v zapisi pervoi poloviny XIX veka’ [Recordings of the Russian Folk Tale, 1800–1850] // *Russkie skazki v zapisyakh i publikatsiyakh pervoi poloviny XIX veka*. Ed. N. V. Novikov. M.-L., 1961. Pp. 43–5. E. V. Pomerantseva. *Sudby russkoi skazki* [The Fates of the Russian Folk Tale]. M., 1965. S. A. Tokarev. *Istoriya russkoi etnografii* [History of Russian Ethnography]. M., 1966. V. P. Kozlov. *Tainy falsifikatsii. Analiz poddelok istoricheskikh istochnikov XVIII-XIX vekov* [The Secrets of Falsification. An Analysis of Forged Poetic Texts of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries]. 2nd edn. M., 1996. See also my own notes in A. N. Afanasyev. *Proiskhozhdenie mifa: Statyi po folkloru, etnografii i mifologii* [The Origins of the Myth: Articles on Folklore, Ethnography, and Mythology]. M., 1996. Pp. 573-75, p. 580, p. 581, p. 590, p. 591, p. 603; F. I. Buslaev. *Dogadki i mechtaniya o pervobytnom chelovechestve* [Riddles and Dreams about Primal Humanity]. M., 2006. P. 651. Note 63. P. 652. Note 88.

*don't flay his warm pelt. My word is strong, stronger than sleep, than the power of bogatyrs.*¹

This text is very well known and has been quoted many times. It was cited by, among others, F. I. Buslaev² and A. N. Afanasyev.³ As early as 1872, it was translated into English and published by William Ralston in his *Songs of the Russian People* (London, 1872).⁴ 'The Werewolf's Spell' is also cited regularly by modern scholars, mostly those working on 'shape-changers' as a theme, if they are not bothered about treating their sources critically.⁵

One can well understand why this text should have attracted the attention of the pioneering scholars of Slavonic mythology and why it should continue to attract attention. It is the only 'werewolf spell' that has ever been recorded in Russia, or any other Slavonic culture. Therefore, one has either to cite the spell, or to eschew citing the genre of 'werewolf spells' at all; substitution of another, less doubtful, text is not an option.

F. I. Buslaev not only cited the spell, but accompanied it by an extended commentary.⁶ In his essay, 'Epicheskaya poeziya' [Epic

¹ I. P. Sakharov. Skazaniya russkogo naroda, sobrannye I. P. Sakharovym. Bk. 1. Russkoe narodnoe chernoknzhie. Russkie narodnye igry, zagadki, prislovyia i pritchi. [Tales of the Russian People. Russian Folk Black Magic. Russian Folk Games, Riddles, Sayings and Fables]. SPb., 1885. P. 28.

After the Russian version of this review was published, I learned that I. P. Sakharov in fact lifted 'The Werewolf's Spell' from Orest Somov's 1829 story *Oboroten* (The Shape-Changer). The fact that he did not credit the source of the spell then led his contemporaries to think he had made it up himself. While Somov's story plays on folkloric motifs, it is in no sense an authentic recording of folklore. The fact that the text of the spell is organically linked with the main plot line of the story and artfully integrated into the narrative inclines one to suppose that it was an invention of Somov's own. So, while it is correct to see the spell as a work of literature, rather than a piece of folklore, the creator was Somov, rather than Sakharov. See A. V. Korovashko. *Zagovory i zaklinaniya v russkoi literature XIX-XX vekov* [Spells and Incantations in Russian Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries]. M., 2009. Pp. 10–11.

² See his *Istoricheskie ocherki russkoi narodnoi slovesnosti i iskusstva*. Vol. 1. *Russkaya narodnaya poeziya* [Historical Sketches of Russian Folk Literature and Art. Russian Folk Poetry]. SPb., 1861. P. 35. Buslaev's article 'Epicheskaya poeziya' was first published in 1851.

³ A. N. Afanasyev. *Poeticheskie vozzreniya slavyan na prirodu* [The Poetical Outlook of the Slavs on Nature]. M., 1865. Vol. 1. P. 737. (Reprinted M., 1994).

⁴ On Ralston, see M. P. Alekseev, Yu. D. Levin. *Vilyam Rolston – propagandist russkoi literatury i folklore* [William Ralston, Propagandist of Russian Literature and Folklore]. SPb., 1994; W. F. Ryan. *Russian Magic at the British Library: Books, Manuscripts, Scholars, Travellers*. London, 2006 (The Panizzi Lectures 2005).

⁵ While it is only just to point out that there are authors working on this topic who do not cite this spell, it is taken at face value in, for example, V. G. Bashulok. 'Initsiatsii drevnikh slavyan (popytka rekonstruktsii)' [Initiation Rituals of the Early Slavs: An Attempt at a Reconstruction] // *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*. 1993. No. 4. P. 60. Idem. *Obriadi initsiatsiy ukrainsiv ta davnikh slov'ian* [Initiation Rituals of the Ukrainians and Ancient Slavs]. Lviv, NY, 1998. P. 147; idem. "'Volk' i 'volkolak' v slavyanskoj traditsii v svyazi s arkhaiskim ritualom' [The 'Wolf' and 'Were-Wolf' in Slavonic Tradition in Connection with Initiation Rituals] // *Etnolingvistyka*. Lublin, 2001. Vol. 13. P. 222. N. A. Krinichnaya. *Russkaya narodnaya mifologicheskaya proza* [Russian Folk Mythological Prose]. Vol. 2.. Petrozavodsk, 2000. P. 348.

⁶ On F. I. Buslaev as an outstanding scholar of folk poetry, see e.g. A. I. Balandin, *Mifologicheskaya shkola v russkoi folkloristike: F. I. Buslaev* [The Mythological School of Russian Folklore Studies: F. I. Buslaev]. M., 1988. A. L. Toporkov. *Teoriya mifa v russkoi filologicheskoi nauke XIX veka* [The Theory of Myth in Russian Philology of the Nineteenth Century]. M., 1997.

Poetry], Buslaev wrote: ‘*The werewolf’s spell included by Sakharov in the first volume of his ‘Tales’ has a high epic style. It is evidently the werewolf himself who is speaking – one of the number of vampires and werewolves now lost in the mists of time.*’¹ The author went on to cite the opening of the spell, then paraphrased the second half, and explained: ‘*In this spell, an ash stump is mentioned because it is what is used to push the werewolf into his grave, and the expression “in his teeth are all the horned cattle” can be directly linked to the proverb, “it’s in the wolf’s teeth, what Egorei gave” (Snegir. 410);² and finally the warm pelt of the shaggy werewolf chimes with the very name volklodlak [werewolf], from dlaka (shaggy fur).*’³ A number of the statements here excite one’s scepticism: for instance, it is not at all clear how the ash stump around which the wolf is walking is linked with the ash paling (not stump!) with which the walking dead are speared. Be that as it may, this commentary was to play a vital role in later interpretations of the text.

Through the reference to the link between the ‘hairy’ pelt of the wolf and the etymology of *volklodlak*, the identification of ash stump and ash paling, and the assimilation of the wolf’s teeth in the spell and in a proverb, Buslaev’s commentary connected the ‘Werewolf’s Spell’ directly with archaic beliefs among the Slavs in werewolves and shape-changers.

In turn, Buslaev’s commentary was to become the key to later interpretations as well. It is no accident that when Ralston translated the spell into English, he included Buslaev’s interpretation as well (see *The Songs of the Russian People*. P. 406). The spell was then reprinted from Ralston’s book by Montague Summers in his 1966 book *The Werewolf* (pp. 109–110). Ten years later, Richard Ridley cited the text with reference to Summers’s book in his article on the wolf and werewolf in Slavonic and Baltic tradition in *The Journal of Indo-European Studies*. 1976. No. 4.

It should be borne in mind that Sakharov was one of the first people to publish Russian spells at all, and that it remained in essence the only large-scale collection for nearly three decades (until L. N. Mai-kov’s *Velikorusskie zaklinaniya* [Great Russian Spells] appeared in 1869). Because of this, Buslaev and Afanasyev simply had nothing to compare the material with. But modern scholars, who have at their disposal the huge corpus of material published over the last 170 years,

¹ Buslaev, *Istoricheskie ocherki*. P. 35.

² F. I. Buslaev is citing I. M. Snegirev. *Russkie narodnye poslovitsy i pritchi*. M., 1848. P. 410. Cf. the modern reprint, ed. E. A. Kostyukhin. M., 1999. P. 258. I have corrected an obvious slip by Buslaev, who has *dom* (house) instead of *dal* (gave).

³ Buslaev. ‘Istoricheskie ocherki’. P. 35. [Emphasis original – Editor].

should not experience difficulty in deciding which of Sakharov's texts fit into tradition, and which do not.

Just to begin with, the 'werewolf's spell' is decidedly anomalous in terms of content, lexis, and poetics. The address to the moon – '*Moon, moon, golden horns! Melt the bullets, blunt the blades, break the truncheons, make the beast, the man, and serpents afraid*' is both curious and inexplicable. We have no other examples in existence of an address to the moon requesting defence from weapons and the instillation of fear. The moon does occur as an addressee for spells – against toothache. Equally, the idea of the moon illuminating an ash stump crops up nowhere else but in this one spell.

The setting of the spell is also extremely odd. The wolf walks round and round a stump in a glade, but enters neither the woods, nor the dale. So where, in that case, is the stump, given that the woods and the dale are the only places mentioned?

The opening and closing formula of the spell are certainly based on actual prototypes from folklore, but as usual with I. P. Sakharov, have been 'improved' from a stylistic point of view. For example, at the beginning we find the completely authentic, '*On the sea, on the ocean, on the island of Buyan*', but this is then followed by the peculiar formula '*in an open glade*' which is not at all characteristic of actual folk tradition.¹ Just so, while '*My word is strong*' is authentic, the phrase that follows, '*stronger than sleep, than the power of bogatyrs*', should give us thought, being quite alien in its floridity. Other phrases that are simply not found in genuine spells include '*ash stump*', '*greenwood*', '*broad dale*', '*shaggy wolf*', '*horned cattle*', '*warm pelt*', and '*the power of bogatyrs*'.

The use of syntactic parallels combined with rhymed formulae – '*volk mokhnatyi/skot rozhatyi*' [shaggy wolf/horned cattle] and '*ne zakhodit/ne zabrodit*' [doesn't enter/doesn't walk into] – is also highly uncharacteristic of the folk spell tradition.

Strikingly, too, the wolf is evoked in the third person throughout, which conflicts with the title that Sakharov gives the text – 'The Werewolf's Spell'. We have to assume that the wolf is speaking about himself in the third person. Yet there is a large number of spells in folk tradition that are actually spoken by wolves, though these texts have nothing to do with werewolves – they are spells aimed against the powers that be and against figures such as judges. The person

¹ The original Russian is *polaya polyana* (the word *polyi* can mean 'open', 'flat', 'empty' etc. depending on context). A rendering that captured the style, rather than sense, of the phrase might be 'clear clearing'. It seems likely that Sakharov was trying to imitate a type of echolalic formula – *gore gorkoe*, 'miserable misery', etc. – which is characteristic of folk song. [Editor].

uttering the spell is identifying himself with the wolf metaphorically, rather than in a real sense, speaking in the persona of the wolf, rather than suggesting he is actually transformed into one. As a rule these wolf figures are found in spells that were uttered before a person made a court appearance or visited some important figure, and were intended to confer strength and fearlessness on him. I cited various examples in my own study of manuscript spells.¹ The earliest spell that has come down to us dates from the fifteenth century and begins with the words, ‘*See me, a young beast, my eyes are beastlie and I am terrible as a tsar. Fear me, ye peasants, as a herd of silly sheep doth the wolf.*’²

All in all, admirers of I. P. Sakharov’s collection should be aware that in future the ‘Werewolf’s Spell’ should be quoted with an important correction: ‘*Round the stump walk I, the shaggy wolf, in my teeth are all the horned cattle...*’ This would at mean that the text at least vaguely resembled authentic tradition.

One should also emphasise once more the unique character of Sakharov’s recording. This particular text is found in no other independent version, whether written or oral, though Sakharov’s recording has often been reprinted (e.g. by Zabylin). Yet Russian spell tradition is extremely rich and productive and it is practically unknown for texts to exist only in one version. In the vast majority of cases, we can find parallels to a given text, if not close variants of it.

Someone of antiquarian bent might well object that an esoteric text of this kind is likely to be of very ancient origin and that parallels to it have simply been lost over the centuries. But the text itself does not seem ancient, since archaisms and dialect words are totally absent. The language is that of the nineteenth century. The ubiquity of rhyme is also highly uncharacteristic of spells dating even from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, except for the special case of spells against bleeding.

Another spell cited by Sakharov which I think should be considered a forgery is the long spell that W. F. Ryan cites on pp. 262–3 of the Russian edition (here the note refers to Blok’s article, ‘The Poetry of Spells and Incantations’, where it is cited without reference to Sakharov). W. F. Ryan is, I think, quite wrong to describe this as a ‘*wonderful defensive spell*’ (p. 262). Ryan in fact remarks in a note (p. 298, note 110) that the spell is unusual in its elegiac and patriotic character.³ He has in mind the following section of the text: ‘*And*

¹ See A. L. Toporkov. *Zagovory v russkoi traditsii XV-XIX vv.: Istoriya, simbolika,, poetika*. [Spells in Russian Tradition of the Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries. History, Symbolism, Poetics]. M., 2005. Pp. 80-94.

² Ibid. P. 46.

³ A. V. Chernetsov has added an editorial footnote here – ‘*Indeed, it is possible that I. P. Sakharov adapted the spells he published to bring them into line with the poetics of the folk epic and the folk tale – Ed.*’

when the hour of your death shall approach, remember, my child, our most affectionate love, our luxurious hospitality, turn towards your glorious motherland, beat the ground with your forehead seven times seven times, say farewell to your relations and those bound to you by blood, fall down on the damp earth, and fall asleep in a sweet and unbreakable sleep’ (p. 263). This continuation is completely alien to the genre conventions of the spell, since it imagines an event taking place in the hypothetical future. In no other spell yet recorded is there anything resembling this passage. The text is also full of the kind of purple passages that are highly characteristic of Sakharov, but not at all of folk style: for instance the references to ‘*our most affectionate love*’ ‘*our luxurious hospitality*’, the ‘*glorious motherland*’, and ‘*sweet and unbreakable sleep*’.

This spell was described by Ralston as the most interesting and poetic of spells,¹ and Alexander Blok, before quoting it, mused in the following vein: ‘*real pearls of primitive poetry shine in circumstances where some unexpected event has fallen on the head of man*’.² It is indicative that this text, so remote from the poetics of genuine spells, should have provoked such enthusiasm in turn from Ralston, Blok, and now Ryan – the attraction lying precisely in the fact that it manifests poetic features which are unknown in genuine folk spells.

It is now more than 130 years since Sakharov’s forgeries started being translated into English. W. R. S. Ralston was, as noted above, the first British student of Russian magic tradition, and an entire chapter of *The Songs of the Russian People* was devoted to various aspects of sorcery. There is a substantial excursus on spells here. Though Ralston was writing at a stage when L. N. Maikov’s collection had already been published (it appeared in 1869), and listed it in his bibliography, it would appear that he had not actually managed to consult the book. Accordingly, the majority of the spells that he cited were taken from Sakharov. In my view, alongside the ‘Werewolf’s Spell’, three other spells that Ralston published, ‘Spell to Take Away Grief When a Mother is Separated from Her Dear Child’ [Sakharov no. 30; Ralston: 371–2], ‘Spell of the Military Man Going Off to War’ [Sakharov no. 24; Ralston: 362], and ‘Spell Against Binge-Drinking’ [Sakharov no. 40; Ralston: 406] are all certainly forgeries.

Incidentally, I. P. Sakharov would no doubt have been delighted if he had known that British scholars would continue trustingly quoting the texts that he invented nearly two centuries after he confected them, taking them for pearls of genuine folk poetry. Sakharov himself,

¹ *The Songs of the Russian People*. P. 372.

² A. A. Blok. ‘Poeziya zagovorov i zaklinaniya’ [The Poetry of Spells and Incantations] // *Sobranie sochinenii v 8 tomakh*. M.–L., 1962. Vol. 5. P. 59.

as befits a patriot, had a savage hatred of all foreigners. His memoirs of the time when he lived in Tula include the following passage: ‘*I thank the Lord that not a single Gallic creature touched a lock of my head. I take pride in the fact that not one German tramp ever appeared alongside me [...] The Stinksteins and the Bastardbergs, those foreign tramps of the highest class, had never showed their noses in Tula; I was to meet them for the first time in Moscow*’.¹

Towards a conclusion

W. F. Ryan’s book has succeeded admirably in presenting a generalised, integrated, yet dynamic, picture of a broad area of Russian culture relating to magic, sorcery, and divination; it captures the inter-relations between the changes in material culture and those in genre conventions, and gives a compelling sense of the unity of language, actions, and objects. What strikes one when comparing the many Russian studies of this material is above all the thorough and deeply scholarly character of Ryan’s analysis, and the way in which he has been able to combine historical analysis with analysis of texts. He presents the historical evolution of magical and divinatory practices and folk beliefs, with close attention to the way in which these have been recorded in a variety of sources, including texts by foreign travellers (traders, physicians, military men, diplomats) as well as the natives of Muscovy themselves. An unusual feature, among studies of Russian magic, is the close attention to comparative material from other European cultures, which draws parallels between phenomena and practices that on the surface might have seemed purely local and those elsewhere. Many of these are taken from England (as one would expect, given Ryan’s nationality), but they also come from Scandinavia, Greece, the South Slavonic countries, Hungary, etc. Ryan constantly emphasises that Russian divinatory rituals, magical techniques, and spell types usually have parallels with those found in other parts of Europe. In this respect, the book spells out a particular ideological and, one might say, humanist message: presenting Russian culture not as something alien and ‘other’ to the Anglophone reader, but as an organic part of the European cultural landscape.²

¹ ‘Dlya biografii I. P. Sakharova (Soobshcheno P. I. Savvaitovym)’ [Materials on the Biography of I. P. Sakharov (Published by P. I. Savvaitov)] // *Russkii arkhiv*. 1873. No. 6. Col. 284. Sakharov’s memoirs are, all in all, eminently colourful. I strongly advise those who would like to understand the man’s mentality to read them either in this edition or in the paraphrase given by A. N. Pypin.

² Interesting comparative material on Russian and English superstitions is offered by the Russian edition of Edwin and Mona Radford’s *Encyclopaedia of Superstitions* (M., 1995). E. V. Minenok has added to this material on the Russian superstitions that correspond to the English ones detailed in the original edition.

It should be admitted that in most Russian studies to date, folk culture is presented as an enclosed, self-sufficient world without links to anything external. If this culture is compared with anything, then it is usually Belorussian or Ukrainian materials, or at most those of other Slavonic peoples. This underdevelopment of the comparative dimension means that to this day Russian ethnography remains to a large extent thoroughly provincial in character; the study of magic, divination, and sorcery is hived off from the dominant conceptual traditions in European and American scholarship. In this sense, the abundance of parallels that Ryan deduces in English, Scottish, Danish, Greek etc. practices – i.e. in the non-Slavonic traditions of Europe – is especially valuable.

These parallels ought also to provoke reflection at a deeper level. The still unexamined heritage of Romanticism has brought with it a conviction that it is precisely at the level of popular customs and beliefs that the specific features of the national character are expressed. In the famous words of Alexander Pushkin: ‘*There is a cast of thought and feeling, there is a multitude of customs, beliefs, and habits, that belong exclusively to a given people*’.¹ What Ryan demonstrates, quite the contrary, is that exactly this sphere of ‘customs, beliefs, and habits’ is deeply international in character and that it has remained remarkably stable over a large number of centuries.²

It should also be said that the translation of a book of this kind demands a great deal of hard, thoughtful, and in many respects thankless, effort from the translator and the editor (I speak here from personal experience of rendering English-language texts into Russian). All the materials from Russian originals have to be checked and all the quotations (including those from archive sources) have, obviously, to be given in translation from the original, and not in back-translation from the quotations in the English edition.

The editor of the Russian edition, A. V. Chernetsov, the various translators (who include a number of well-known specialists in Russian history and folklore) and the ‘New Literary Review’ publishing house (in whose well-known series ‘*Historia Rossica*’ the book appeared) should be given due credit for their work, therefore. The Russian edition of *The Bathhouse at Midnight* has a large number of illustrations, a detailed subject index, a revised bibliography, and new forewords by W. F. Ryan and by A. V. Chernetsov. At the launch of the book held at the Russian State University for the

¹ A. S. Pushkin ‘O narodnosti v literature’ [On narodnost (National/Folk Character) in Literature]. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 17 tomakh*. M.-L., 1949. Vol. 7. Pp. 39–40.

² On this issue, see also Konstantin Bogdanov’s work on the superstitions linked with sneezing: in his *Povsednevnost i mifologiya* [Everyday Life and Mythology]. SPb., 2001. Pp. 181–241.

Humanities, Moscow, on 23 May 2006, W. F. Ryan acknowledged that the Russian edition was better than the original one. Let us hope that the next English edition will be even better than the Russian one.

Many of the topics that Ryan has looked at have far more than a scholarly interest, particularly for the Russian reader. *The Bathhouse at Midnight* will certainly play its part in the dissemination of the very divination rituals and magic practices that Ryan himself regards with a rather jaundiced eye, as something which deserves regret and condemnation, rather than celebration and encouragement.

There would, of course, be nothing to stop an English-speaking reader using this book as a manual of Russian magic practices too. When, in the company of W. F. Ryan himself, I visited a number of London bookshops specialising in literature about magic and occult practices, I was able to see for myself the vast quantity of parascholarly books in the area, which quite put in the shade the number of publications of a strictly scholarly kind.

I would like to think that my review might bring to a halt the triumphal progress of I. P. Sakharov's forgeries across the pages of Russian and foreign publications on magic, though, to be honest, there is little hope of that. The extraordinarily interesting and rich tradition of Russian spells, with a corpus of many thousands of texts, is still not known to foreign scholars, and even in the most authoritative works, these 170-year-old forgeries continue to be published and analysed.

Until such time as a thorough study of the sources and textological procedures employed by Sakharov and Zabylin has been carried out, it would be as well for scholars simply to refrain from citing the materials they published. The fact that some – very few – of those forgeries have also made their way into Ryan's book brings out the fact that this study, for all its many merits, is still an accurate reflection of the state of current scholarship about folklore and Russian cultural history. One would dare to hope, however, that W. F. Ryan will correct further editions of his valuable work so as to halt the insidious spread of these forged materials in publications by foreign scholars.

Ryan's book also presents kind of a challenge to Russian scholars. Both the merits and the demerits of the book are perfectly obvious. The only question is whether anyone in Russia – singly or in collaboration with others – can put together a study as authoritative as this one, while also drawing on the new materials and interpretations that have appeared over the last years.

Andrei Toporkov

Translated by Catriona Kelly

I am very obliged to Professor Toporkov for his detailed and serious review and for his kind words about my book. I am also grateful to him for his critical remarks and corrections, and in particular what he has written about the falsifications of Sakharov and Zabylin. I can only say on the latter point that the convincing work of Professor Toporkov in the matter of fake folklore was not available to me at the time when I was gathering the material for this book¹ and that illustrative material cited from these two authors is not a prominent part of my book.

I should like to reply to one or two of the individual points in the review.

With regard to the reproach that some Russian books and articles were omitted from my references Professor Toporkov is certainly right that I did not quote all books which might have been quoted, but one must bear in mind that information on the appearance of new Russian books and journals, especially if they were published outside Moscow and St Petersburg, sometimes took some time to reach Britain, and such books were not always easily obtainable at the time the book was being written. Moreover, as Professor Toporkov correctly notes, my book in its English original was intended for an English and American readership, and the English publisher was concerned about the size of the book and the quantity of quotations and notes – the book was eventually published at twice the size originally stipulated by the publisher. The book is a survey for English-speaking readers, with explanatory references to English or West European comparative literature where it exists; where I used Russian source material I gave the necessary references. The book was not intended to provide a complete bibliography for Russian specialists in the field. *The Bathhouse at Midnight* is a translation of an English book, and although much was added

¹ I have recently paid tribute to Professor Toporkov's successful research in unmasking these pieces of faked or 'improved' folklore, and in particular the 'werewolf spell', in my presidential address to the Folklore Society in 2008, published as 'W. R. S. Ralston and the Russian Folktales', *Folklore*, 120, 2009, pp. 123–132 (128)

and corrected in the Russian version, we did not set out to publish a completely new book according to Russian conventions.

One omission mentioned is the multi-volume *Slavianskie drevnosti* – it is not cited because, although it is a most valuable work, its first volume came out only at the end of my work on my own book. Moreover, the *Slavianskie drevnosti*, despite its title, is essentially a synchronic ethnographic work – the bulk of the material, although described in the past tense, is rarely presented in a historical or literary context, the sources of individual examples are usually not given, and there are almost no comparisons with non-Slavonic material. The book is therefore not very useful for a historian looking for historical information or seeking to place a belief, practice or artefact in a wider European or even world context.

There are also, as Professor Toporkov observes, some inaccuracies of translation from English in the Russian version of my book, but the team of specialists who translated the book nevertheless deserve praise – the text was very difficult, with many obscure words and expressions in both English and Russian, and a few other languages. I am very grateful to them and apologise if I missed some errors of translation in the proofs.

In the matter of the reindeer this is indeed an error, but it results from a puzzling mistranslation – in my English original there were no reindeer – I wrote simply ‘head of the herd’.

Professor Toporkov also reproaches me for quoting an article from a newspaper of 1881 which described an experiment allegedly conducted by the Academy of Sciences to discover if the Evil Eye had any physical effect. I agree with him that this is just an anecdote, but such anecdotes are also material for the folklorist. Moreover, in both the English and Russian versions of my book the paragraph ends with an ironical exclamation mark.

In the section of his review dealing with the relationship of ‘folk’ and ‘high’ culture, Professor Toporkov talks about the rarity of manuscripts of magic and divinatory texts such as the *Rafli* geomancy and suggests that this means they did not reach the level of popular culture. This is indeed so in the case of the *Rafli*, for which there is only one extant manuscript, but thunder divination texts [*brontologia*] and lunar divination texts [*lunaria* and *selenodromia*] are not at all uncommon in florilegia and calendrical manuscripts, and even the ‘high-culture’ pseudo-Aristotelian *Secret of Secrets* exists in some twenty copies or fragments, not to mention long excerpts included in practical medical compilations. For a non-religious Russian text of the 15–16th century this is a substantial presence.

With regard to the *Euchologium Sinaiticum* and the Sisinnios prayer charm Professor Toporkov’s objection is justified. The misinformation

arose from a hasty conflation of two separate, though closely linked pieces of information. The Sisinnios prayer, originally a protection from the Gylou, a child or foetus-stealing demon with twelve and a half names, became in Russian a protection from the twelve *triasavitsy* fever demons, whose names were derived from the twelve names of Gylou. This is not in the *Euchologium Sinaiticum* – what is there is the prayer against another personified womb illness, the *dna* (in the Greek versions *hystera*). This appears also in later Russian manuscripts, and the *dna* is also found on some of the snake amulets (*zmeeviki*) which frequently invoke St Sisinnios. This is a complicated topic, which I seem inadvertently to have made more complicated, but I think there can be no doubt that there was a conflation of elements from *zmeevik* amulets for protection from the *hystera*, the Greek Sisinnios legend, and a reinterpretation of childbirth charms as anti-fever charms which normally invoke St Sisinnios. This topic is more correctly described in the detailed article to which Toporkov refers in his review.¹

In the matter of the poet Blok's admiration, which I am alleged to share, for the 'poetry' of a charm for a child, a charm which in Toporkov's opinion is no more than an invention of Sakharov (probably rightly, although he gives no evidence for this), I fear I may have been misunderstood through a quirk of translation in the Russian version. In my original English text I described this as a 'remarkable and elaborate protective spell'. Unfortunately the word 'remarkable', which was intended to emphasise the unusual character of the spell, has been translated as 'zamechatel'nyi', which in Russian also means 'wonderful, marvellous', and would suggest that I was equally enraptured. My footnote to this passage, however, runs:

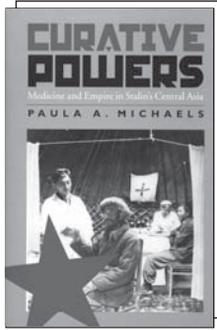
'Quoted from Aleksandr Blok, "Poeziia zagovorov i zaklinanii", p. 101. Blok gives no source and says this is not the end of the spell. The last sentence of the spell is unusual in its patriotic and prematurely² elegiac sentiment and one must hope that the eminent poet was not gilding the lily.'

For some reason the hope expressed in the last phrase was omitted in the Russian translation of the book and my delicately expressed scepticism over the charm's authenticity was lost. In other words I had my doubts about this spell even without knowing about Sakharov's duplicity. My regret is that my suspicion should instead have been directed against Blok, who may well be blameless.

William F. Ryan

¹ 'Ancient Demons and Russian Fevers', in *Magic and the Classical Tradition*, C. Burnett and W. F. Ryan, (eds), London, 2006, pp. 37–58).

² 'Prematurely' because the spell is ostensibly designed to protect the child from multiple dangers but concludes by lamenting its death.



Paula A. Michaels. *Curative Power: Medicine and Empire in Stalin's Central Asia.* Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003. 239 p.

A Curative Empire?

In a recent review of a book by another American scholar about the history of ‘national construction’ in the Soviet Union during the 1920s and 1930s,¹ I alluded to the growing interest among US historians, and Russian and Soviet specialists generally, in the question of whether the Soviet state should be termed an ‘empire’ (whether ‘typical’ or not is a secondary issue), or a quite specific political formation – one of the variants of a new kind of post-imperial, modernised society. Paula Michael’s book, *Curative Power*, is also a study that belongs to this general direction – though here we have ‘the view from Kazakhstan’ of Soviet history, and the topic is medicine, rather than ethnography.

The history of medicine offers a fruitful field for the theorisation of power-knowledge relations, and some standard conceptual lines have emerged. Michel Foucault’s analysis, in *The Birth of the Clinic*, of the development of modern medical practices and ‘biopolitics’, suggests an approach according to which the recent history of medicine becomes primarily a chronicle of the rationalisation of knowledge and the creation of new kinds of disciplinary authority. On the other hand, studies of non-European countries (which Foucault ignored) discuss the history of medicine as the dis-

¹ See S. Abashin. Review of F. Hirsch. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union.* Ithaca, 2005 // *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie.* 2006. No. 2. Pp. 165–8.

semination of specifically imperialist, explicitly European/Western forms of knowledge into other parts of the world – that is, they see recent medical history in terms of the subjugation and resistance of the non-European ‘other’. This latter tradition has emerged out of post-colonial studies (as can be seen, for example, in David Arnold’s work on medicine in British India).¹

It is not hard to grasp that these discussions have direct relevance to the issue of whether the Soviet state should be perceived as a ‘modernising’ state, or as a form of imperial rule. Foucault’s methodology would point to the universal character of Soviet power, which used special means to achieve the same ends as European/Western countries – modernisation programmes, the imposition of control over the population, the use of science, technology, and scholarship (including medicine) to impose domination over minds, behaviour, and bodies. The advocates of post-colonial theory, on the other hand, would see such universalist interpretations as themselves manifesting a veiled form of Eurocentrism and imperialism. Discarding any pretensions to universally valid generalisations, such post-colonial approaches would attempt to identify and analyse the different social and cultural contexts in which modern society came into being. The modernising, technocratic, and internationalist rhetoric of Soviet power itself becomes, from this point of view, only a sophisticated form of disguised colonial domination, and a means of justifying and legitimating such domination with reference to the laws of history and the natural world. Michaels’s Introduction (pp. 1–13) and Conclusion (pp. 177–82) strongly suggest that she inclines to the second of these two interpretive approaches, and that the framework for her study of the politics of medical science in Kazakhstan is the assumption that the Soviet Union represented a local, Russian, variant of European imperialism; the deployment of new discourses, institutions, and practices across Soviet territory had the exclusive aim of subjugating non-Russian ‘others’ and making it possible to exploit them. Specifically, Michaels is interested in issues such as the intensification of state power that went with the creation of a public health-care system, the language that was used to support this politics of health-care expansion, the reflection of centre-periphery (Russian, Muscovite) domination in the world of health care, and the ways in which the Kazakh population resisted this dominance.

In the three sections of the book, Michaels meticulously examines a vast corpus of materials from archives and published works in order to explore these issues. ‘Kazakh Medicine and Russian Colonialism,

¹ D. Arnold. *Colonizing the Body. State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India*. Berkeley, CA, 1993.

1861–1928’ (pp. 21–45), ‘Medical Propaganda and the Cultural Revolution’ (pp. 46–70), the two chapters which make up Part I of the book (‘Discourse’), Michaels gives a sketch of the traditional ‘ethnomedical’ practices found among the Kazakhs and characterises the reactions to these (which for the most part were negative) among Russian Orientalists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She also outlines the rise of Soviet biopolitics up to 1928 and the shift to a new biopolitical model and new methods and rhetorical strategies of medical propaganda in the following years, distinguished by the figure of the ‘doctor hero’ and so on. She then describes the difficulties and obstacles that this new biopolitical model faced when confronted with Kazakh society in the 1930s. In particular, she concentrates on the understanding in pre-revolutionary Russian Orientalist ethnography, and later Soviet medical propaganda, that Kazakh traditional ways of life, customs, and hygienic practices represented a threat to health, and sees the expression of such views as a discursive instrument with the aid of which the Soviet authorities underlined the ‘backwardness’ and inferiority of Kazakh culture and society and pressed for reforms on Russo-European (universalist?) lines.

The second part of the book deals with institutional history. In the two chapters here, ‘Medical Education and the Creation of a New Elite’ (pp. 73–102) and ‘The Construction of Socialism: Medical Cadres in the Field’ (pp. 103–26), Michaels dwells in detail on the historical of bio-medical education in Kazakhstan. Much of the discussion is based on the archive of the Kazakh Medical Institute, founded in 1931. Michaels describes how those who underwent a Soviet medical education acquired Soviet perceptions of loyalty, pride, and patriotism, and how Kazakh students also underwent an education in the Russian language. She devotes especial attention to the participation of Kazakhs in medical education, for example, the absolute proportion of Kazakhs in the student body, inter-ethnic relations in the institute, and different types of conflict and surveillance. Michaels goes on to trace the development of a network of medical institutions in Stalinist Kazakhstan and the role of nationality (and gender) in the cadre politics of the Soviet administration, underlining the difficulties caused by shortages of equipment, skilled personnel, and adequate accommodation for medical staff etc. She then draws conclusions about the successes and failures of biomedical policies in the Stalin era.

The third part of the book comprises a further two chapters: ‘The Politics of Women’s Health Care’ (pp. 129–52) and ‘The Medical and Social Politics of Health Care for Nomad Kazakhs’ (pp. 153–75). Here Michaels talks about the role of women in the Soviet programme of social transformation, the successes and problems of the ‘Protection of Mother and Child Health’ drive. The final chapter

addresses Bolshevik attitudes to the nomad way of life and the 'Red Yurt' campaign bringing medical care and other manifestations of state power to nomad populations; it also discusses the collectivisation and sedentarisation campaigns, in which medical professionals were also actively involved as activists and administrators.

Michaels's book has many merits: scrupulous and close attention to archival materials, sensitivity to the nuances of the regional and local perspective, awareness of post-colonial theory. At the same time, there are some questions that the author's conceptual framework has not allowed her to address. The space of a review is not sufficient to consider all of these, but I would like to mention a few significant examples.

For instance, one wonders why Michaels chose to limit her study of the Soviet system (which, after all, lasted for more than 70 years) to just two decades, the 1930s and 1940s? Why has precisely this period been selected, and not the 1920s, or the post-Stalin era? In the latter case, Soviet society continued to exist – albeit in rather different forms – and at this period Kazakhs (and the other 'colonised' populations) were actively involved in the process of Soviet modernisation, in which they managed to realise interests of their own. By now, the Kazakhs had developed a tenacious and effective Soviet identity that was based on customs, practices, habituses formed in the Soviet period. One is led to suspect that Michaels's concentration on the 1930s and 1940s derives precisely from the fact that a broader chronological framework would fit the framework of 'empire' less neatly, and thus call into question the validity of 'empire' as a concept for the analysis of Soviet history.

Even the Stalin era, as a matter of fact, was less straightforward than might at first seem. Despite the vigorous repression of dissent, the politics of the 1930s and 1940s cannot be seen simply in terms of the 'repression and resistance' model. A level of compromise or consensus between different groups in the elite and the general population has to be recognised. This multi-faceted, silent, and not always symmetrical social understanding depended on shared understanding and desire for reform and social change, which in turn were expressed in the many and varied trajectories of group and individual biographies among politicians and ordinary members of the public. Moving back to medicine, the subject in hand, we can pose a question to ourselves and Michaels: were there really no members of Kazakh society who approved of what they saw as the rationalisation of medical practices and who were the enthusiastic advocates of reform? Even if we accept that all or most of what was known in Kazakhstan about modern medicine had been transmitted from Russian sources, it is still of interest to examine the issues of how medical knowledge was passed down in Kazakh culture, of the extent to which there were already

perceptions in existence that could have acted as harbingers of 'modern' perceptions, or at the very least, as pre-conditions creating the need for 'modern' practices. One wonders what other cultural influences shaped Kazakh experience when modern medicine demonstrated its effectiveness and became part of Kazakh culture and an instrument for the expression of the Kazakh self. If we do not produce answers of some kind to these questions, we cannot assert that the very fact of Russian impact on the process of the formation of modern medicine (and knowledge in the broad sense) is a sign of the imperial nature of the Russian state. Yet Michaels does not provide any answers, despite the impressive run of statistics relating to biopolitical expansion.

The statistics themselves raise further issues. Michaels often points to the fact that Kazakhs were only the second biggest ethnic group among students at the medical institute as evidence of the imperial nature of medicine in the republic. But it seems over-hasty to accept these statistics as *prima facie* evidence of discrimination. The best represented ethnic group, certainly, was Russians. But it is not clear whether this derived from some conscious or unconscious desire to impose a quota on ethnic grounds, or because, back in the 1930s and 1940s, the Russian applicants were simply better qualified for entrance to institutes of this kind? Once again, this question is not addressed. In addition, the student body also included large numbers of Ukrainians, Jews, and Germans. Many of the students – including some of the Russians – came from socially marginal groups, including former exiles, *dekulakised* peasants, gentry or intelligentsia families, or refugees from political pressure in other parts of the Soviet Union.. They could themselves be described as the victims of Stalinist terror. So who made up the privileged group in whose name imperial expansion and the exploitation of local resources took place? The Soviet/Communist elite? But this was highly diverse in ethnic terms and also subject to repeated purges.

Of course, Michaels is right to emphasise that Russian customs, Russian language, and Russian culture were supposed to be at the heart of the Soviet, socialist identity (p. 6), and that resources from the periphery were creamed off in order to benefit development at the centre. But is a centre/periphery asymmetry and the domination of the public sphere by a single language enough to indicate that a given country is an empire? Was a Kazakh from Alma Ata with higher education or a Kazakh Party official automatically a 'colonial subject' simply because he expounded on his Kazakh identity in Russian? Michaels is deeply concerned to make out the voices of the colonised, to learn what they really thought of Soviet governance. But one should perhaps not take evidence of hostile comments about Soviet power recorded in secret police reports or Party documents to signify mass dissatisfaction with Soviet power on the part of large parts of the

population. If one starts to select material from such sources not on the basis of ethnic identity, but on the basis of other factors, it rapidly emerges that pretty well every group in Soviet society was capable of emitting grumbles of this kind – which were probably less a sign of ‘resistance’ than an inevitable side-effect of shock modernisation.

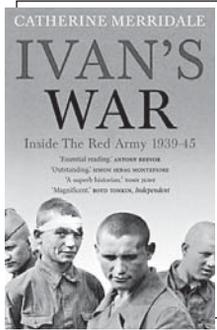
A final point is that, obedient to the canons of post-colonial criticism,¹ Michaels refers to ‘ethnomedicine’ as expressing an alternative way of thinking about humanity, distinctive from European/Western/Russian perceptions in terms of its interpretations of the causes of illness and the ways of treating this. Establishing such an alternative would be an important step to recovering a non-colonised Kazakh sense of selfhood, the basis for extrapolating differences from the European/Russian/ ‘universal’ model. But was Kazakh ethnomedicine really so distinctive, and did it really undergo no changes in the Soviet era and under the influence of Soviet medicine? No answers to this question are given. Michaels makes no special study of ‘ethnomedicine’, presenting it simply as a subject constituted by the knowledge and practices of the early twentieth century.

For all its considerable strengths, therefore, Paula Michaels’s book leaves many open questions for future researchers and leaves us, its readers, to ponder further the contradictions of the Soviet period, of *homo sovieticus*, and of Soviet identity.

Sergei Abashin

Translated by Catriona Kelly

¹ See e.g. D. Chakrabarty. *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, 2000.



Catherine Merridale. *Ivan's War. The Red Army 1939–1945.* L.: Faber and Faber, 2005 (paperback edition). 396 p.

Existential Empathy

Exploding, you stir up the springs.
 Feed on them – and be silent!
 Tyutchev, *Silentium*.
 Then silence sets in
 Like it or not, not simply.

Olga Berggolts.

From My Notebooks.

The first sensation one has on reading Catherine Merridale's book is how familiar all this is – even for someone whose only experience of war was 'Russians against Germans' games as a child. You took in a lot subconsciously – from the distorted bodies of war veterans, the Land Lease tools lying round at home, the bits of old newspapers used to wrap things up, from the fragmentary reminiscences and verbose expressions of disinclination to say more. Books had a pseudonymous relation to the inexpressible – the proud and shameful realities of the last war. People hoped they would give guidance in how to grieve, how to remember the war and interpret it, how to relate the past to the enforced conformity of the present, how to make sense of the senselessness of suffering. And also vice versa – if the individual life (or more often death) possessed something resembling simplicity and wholeness, the broader meaning of the individual sacrifice proved elusive, being suffused with all the hues of inevitability, the triumph of the state and collectivist ideology.

This impossibility of combining personal and general meaning, inner truth and outer significance, of recognising the flood of endless variants of a single fluid theme, may act as some kind of explanation for the fact that there is no narrative in the Russian language like Merridale's book – a deeply humane narrative that goes beyond the bounds of an artistic testimony on the one hand, a documentary account on the other. When attempting to capture the essence of the last war, Russian society has been unable to get past its glorifying epithets – Great Patriotic. In the mass consciousness, the conflict still acts as the highest form of justification for the absence of collective freedom, the culminating point of history for an entire generation, the summit of modern history, a source of patriotic pride and a demonstration of Russia's missionary destiny. It is a kind of George Cross awarded by the nation to itself.

Catherine Merridale's book breaks with the tradition of glorification of the war, which in its ideological heritage and social functions might well be described as 'fascist'. Step by step, she recovers the reality of the 'life and death' of the Russian soldier (these words were included in the title of the book's first edition). 'Ivan's War' is a continuation of Merridale's investigation of the Soviet attitude to suffering and death, memory and historical memory.¹ For all this background of previous experience, however, the task that she has set herself here places staggering demands on her. More than 35 million men and women, swept into action by vast waves of conscription, fought in the Red Army between 1939 and 1945. The army included both fathers and children (and the generational distinctions had been heightened to the utmost by the changes that took place after 1917). For many young people, war became their first acquaintance with their homeland in a broad sense; it offered others a crucial opportunity to acquire technological expertise. Almost everyone who first entered the war in 1941 was to endure injury, imprisonment, or death – or all three; the losses borne by the Red Army during the first six months of the war afflicted a full four-fifths of the total numbers of troops in service on the eve of 22 June 1941. Catherine Merridale demonstrates how the war absorbed the huge diversity of Soviet society and how it acted to shape this, assigning every social unit across the huge spaces of the country its own crazy chess-board of experience, forcing people to create rules where there was only lawlessness, creating a special space of individual choice for all participants –

¹ C. Merridale. 1) *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia*. N.Y., 2000; 2) 'The Collective Mind: Trauma and Shell-Shock in Twentieth-Century Russia' // *Journal of Contemporary History*. 2000. Vol. 35. No. 1. P. 39–55; 3) 'Redesigning History in Contemporary Russia' // *Ibid*. 2003. Vol. 38. No. 1. P. 13–28. См. также вышедшую после публикации «Ивановой войны» статью в том же журнале «Culture, Ideology and Combat in the Red Army, 1939–45» (2005. Vol 41. No. 2. P. 305–324)

or on the other hand leaving them no chance either to live or to die with a shred of dignity. In Merridale's own words: 'the war created a landscape where every choice was potentially deadly, for soldiers and civilians alike' (p. 329).

But however varied life experiences may have been, the clarity of the collective goal, Merridale argues, was unprecedented. However, this did not unite society, or even the part of society (the dominant one) that was actually conscious of the goal. 'The war created hierarchies, winners and losers, millions of dead. And physical separation, hunger and violence do not unite communities' (p. 196). The vehement belief in solidarity of the war years, a solidarity that is now so often fondly remembered, was grounded in strict control of what people were permitted to know beyond the boundaries of their own direct experience (p. 196). 'Whatever Stalin said about the whole nation's collective work' Merridale sums up from large numbers of eye-witness accounts, 'by 1943 most front-line soldiers valued only combat and the comradeship of risk. By setting soldier against civilian, by raising fears of spies and stool pigeons, by setting the *frontovik* against the whole community of military "rats" who did not fight, the war had shattered, not united, the Soviet people. Worst of all, combat had exiled front-line soldiers from themselves' (p. 202).

The social history of self-destruction is inconceivable without the capacity for existential empathy combined with professional sensitivity to falsehood. The eye-witness testimony of the war years was expressed in the language that the Soviet regime imposed on people in its striving for totalitarian power. Texts were adjusted to censorship norms and to the expectations of those who would read them. Certainly, historians have grown used to dealing with factors like this, but perhaps not to dealing with circumstances where time and the gap between life and death are condensed to the utmost (otherwise they would be less likely to judge the participants of revolution and war by the standards of modern office managers). It is hard to espouse Cartesian clarity and logic, or Kantian ethical detachment, when you have not slept or eaten properly for months. As Merridale frequently emphasises, citing letters of the war years, moments of life-and-death tension were elided as a form of self-defence. One cannot 'sympathise' with those who commit rape, but Merridale has traced the gang-rapes that took place in Eastern Prussia (and by no means only there) to the communal and personal experience of the Soviet troops, the specificities of their existence (pp. 270–7).

Only the living can remember, and, of course, their memories are shaped by later life as well. The habit of remembering itself gives memory a ritual character. "The men's culture, the bedrock of the

soldiers' fighting spirit and morale, would vanish with the settling wartime dust' (p. 167). Yet Merridale has still taken much from her two hundred meetings with veterans. 'When the last veteran is dead, there will be no limit upon the words and deeds that the heirs to Russia's victory can attribute to its heroes, but for a little longer there remains a check. While the soldiers are still alive, they can speak out for themselves' (p. 332).

The ever-increasing temporal distance from the War has not ruptured the taboo of the 'state secret'; access to the Ministry of Defence archives, which contain hugely important materials for social historians, remains impossible. We can only guess whether they include evidence of cruelty on the part of the high command, cowardice, or even cases of insubordination and mutiny (p. 9). Like others working on the period, Merridale has worked hard to assemble materials from other archives, such as those in Moscow and Kursk, to act as a partial substitute for those that are not now available.

The few studies that have been carried out in Russia dealing with the anthropology of the war (including those by Elena Senyavskaya, which Merridale cites with respect) tend to espouse a structuralist paradigm that is hard to combine with historical analysis and sensitivity to change over time. Merridale's book, on the other hand, is written with enough narrative intuition to be able to combine attention to the trajectories of individual destinies and quantitative generalisations, and to subordinate both these aspects to the general historical dynamic of her analysis. 'Words and ideas that seemed quite clear in 1945 often began the war with other connotations and darker prospects' (p. 328). Patriotism had been fervent, enthusiastic, even revolutionary in character, back in the summer of 1941; during the course of the War, it changed, hardened, moved towards the idea of an all-out response to the atrocities committed by the invader. Merridale's account is an expansive, in-depth exploration, sharing the dynamic of the War itself; but there is always a sense of authorial control, and the topics and individuals described are carefully chosen. Given all this, it would be unfair to reproach the author for having referred only in passing to the Kiev disaster or the Leningrad Blockade, or for not attempting to explain why thousands of Soviet troops were still crossing to the German side even as late as summer 1943.

There are certainly some factual mistakes and misleading over-simplifications to be found in the book. I shall, however, ignore the usual requirement for reviewers to identify points of disagreement; the small errors and over-simplifications one comes across by and large do not undermine the book's arguments or disrupt its overall structure. There is only one questionable passage that I think does demand closer attention. On the Great Terror of 1937–1938, Merri-

dale writes: ‘Piles of bodies appeared in city-centre cemeteries, each one of which had been shot at close range with a police gun. The purges, the process by which tens of thousands of innocent people were arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and ultimately, in unnumbered cases, shot without trial, cast a shadow across all areas of public life’ (p. 39). This strange mish-mash of foggy rhetoric and citation as gospel of Arch Getty’s polemically-inspired underestimate of the numbers of victims of the Terror cries out for a proper explanation. Why did this sensitive and knowledgeable historian of Soviet everyday life and the Soviet regime have to resort to the hackneyed (if still shocking) images of dictatorship or ‘tyranny’? I think the reason is that Merridale’s resort to the time-honoured image of the Soviet people groaning under the tyrant’s yoke is essential to her empathetic understanding of, even love for, those she writes about – both those who perished, and those she met in the course of interviewing and poured cups of tea for. It is no doubt for the same reason that the NKVD troops are represented in the book exclusively as an instrument of repression and control. But how does one classify the frontline troops and brigades of the NKVD, the tank-drivers of the battle of Kursk (Kurskaya duga) incinerated as they fought, while wearing the insignia of this organisation of melancholy renown? Merridale has much material which might allow her to create an alternative picture, of a continuum running between the abstractions of ‘regime’ and ‘people’ (see e.g. p. 330), but she does not conceptualise the relationship that seems to emerge from isolated observations. If the entire system of views and values, if every means of self-expression, was imposed on ‘the people’ by ‘the regime’, then we have a clear conceptual problem about how and on what basis the ‘regime’ came to constitute itself – a question that is of significant importance to the understanding of Russia’s role in the Second World War.

Catherine Merridale’s book is addressed to a Western reader, but one hopes that it will find a wide readership in Russia also. Will readers here be able to muster enough breadth of imagination and responsiveness to be able to react to *Ivan’s War* without prejudice? Or will they feel a sense of unease at the inherited detachment felt for the War by ‘soldier John’ – in this case, Philip Merridale, to whom his daughter has dedicated her book about the Eastern front?

Oleg Ken

Translated by Catriona Kelly



Muzhskoi sbornik. Vypusk 1. Muzhchina v traditsionnoi kult'ure. [The Male Collection. Issue 1. Men in Traditional Culture] Edited by I.A. Morozov. M.: Labirint, 2001. 224 pp., 40 b&w illustrations, music notation, notes and index.



Muzhskoi sbornik. Vypusk 2. 'Muzhskoe' v traditsionnom i sovremennomobshchestve [The Male Collection. Issue 2. Men in Traditional and Modern Society]. Edited by I.A. Morozov. M.: Labirint, 2004. 265 pp., 104 b&w illustrations, music notation, notes and index.



Muzhskoi sbornik. Vypusk 3. Muzhchina v ekstremalnoi situatsii [The Male Collection. Issue 3. Men in Extreme Situations]. Edited by I.A. Morozov. SPb.: Indrik, 2007. 264 pp., 97 b&w illustrations, tables, graphs, notes and index.

Men's Tears and Other Extreme Situations

Muzhskoi sbornik comprises three weighty volumes of articles in the field of masculinity studies. The contributions are largely – though not exclusively – focused on Russian masculinities. Scholarly interest in this subject has been increasing steadily during the last decade, and the emerging body of work is characterised by its interdisciplinarity and theoretical diversity. Russian masculinities have been analyzed from the perspective of literary and cultural studies, history, history of art, gender studies, anthro-

pology, political science, sociology and psychology. *Muzhskoi sbornik* is similarly eclectic: between them, the three volumes include articles in all of these disciplines. Moreover, they cover a grand historical sweep – from the medieval period to the present day – and utilise a wide variety of methodologies ranging from historical anthropology to Jungian psychoanalysis to Butlerian gender theory.

The first volume has the narrowest remit of three. As an analysis of masculinity in traditional culture, most of its contributions focus on pre-industrial societies, folk culture, or remote modern-day societies in Siberia or the Far North. The methodology used is typically historical, ethnographic, or anthropological, and there is little evidence of Western theoretical paradigms from gender or masculinity studies being adopted. Volumes II and III show much more variety in methodology and a willingness of scholars both to utilise and challenge recent Western theories. This change probably reflects the fact that a number of significant studies on Russian masculinity were published in the early 2000s which allowed new theoretical paradigms to filter into Russia (e.g. [Oushakine 2002]; [Clements, Freedman, Healey 2002]). The latter two volumes of *Muzhskoi sbornik* aim to explore ‘traditional and modern society’ and ‘extreme situations’. These are bewilderingly broad terms which are deliberately left open to exploration and interpretation; the result is that these volumes cover a much wider range of material and are much more experimental.

Each volume comprises a general introduction and over twenty essays which are grouped thematically into four or five sections. The titles of these sections are often as broad as the titles of the volumes themselves: ‘Sila i vlast’ [Power and Government]; ‘Muzhskoi folklor’ [Male Folklore]; ‘Muzhskaya atributika i formy povedeniya’ [Male Attributes and Forms of Behaviour]. The strength of this approach is that it potentially allows for the juxtaposition of themes, approaches and historical periods that one would not normally think of comparing. Some of the sections are well-integrated and manage to achieve this: for example ‘Muzhchina i zhenshchina: dialektika pola’ [Man and Woman: The Dialectics of Gender] (v. II), begins with a short article by M.M. Valentsova which explores how binary oppositions operate in the construction of gender in the Slavic world. This aptly sets the tone for the other contributions in that section, which analyze more deeply how gender differences operate in specific Slavic societies and historical moments. However, it is often difficult to see the rationale of why the editors have chosen to group certain articles together, particularly when they depend on very different interpretations of a term used in the section title. For example, Kon’s article on *dedovshchina* [institutionalised bullying in the army] and Ostroukh’s article on the emergence of the metrosexual both deal with inherently interesting subjects, but the decision to group them

together under ‘Grani ekstremalnogo’ [Borders of the Extreme] (v. III) is questionable as they depend upon two very different conceptions of what ‘extreme’ means. As with any broadly-conceived interdisciplinary project, the danger here is that the collection as a whole may lack cohesion and disintegrate into a series of disconnected monologues rather than a constructive dialogue between scholars. Many of the individual articles in *Muzhskoi sbornik* are innovative and valuable, but the collection as a whole reads more like three volumes of an academic journal made up of individual articles, rather than an edited collection of essays on a single theme.

The strongest contributions in *Muzhskoi sbornik* tend to be those which utilise data that Western scholars have had difficulty accessing. This is most obvious in the first volume: while there is much existing anthropological scholarship on Russian folk culture and the non-Slavic peoples of the Russian Federation, very little of this has been conducted through the lens of masculinity. Familiar topics in anthropology such as the function of magic in society and the role of the *pastukh* [herdsman] are re-visited with a special emphasis on gender concerns, and less-researched areas such as *seminaristskaya poeziya* [the poetry of students at religious seminaries] are also explored. Some articles in Volume I do tend towards description and narrative rather than analysis, and one gets the impression there is still work to be done in analyzing how gender operated in traditional societies.

At the other end of the historical timeline, Volumes II and III contain a number of articles on masculinity in contemporary Russian subcultures, another type of data difficult for non-Russian scholars to access. For example, V. P. Khalikova delves into the subculture of extreme sport in her article ‘Ekstremaly goroda’ [The Extremes of the City] (v. III), trying to uncover the reasons why young people engage in such high-risk behaviour. T.B. Shchepanskaia’s study of “‘Telo” i “sila” v politicheskom diskurse’ [The ‘Body’ and ‘Power’ in Political Discourse] (v. III) is also timely: she discusses the role masculinity plays in the self-fashioning of politicians. While her analysis of the National Bolshevik Party is sound and instructive, this reader was a little disappointed that she did not discuss the obvious candidate, President (later Prime Minister) Vladimir Putin.

It is refreshing to see scholars beginning to analyse fatherhood in *Muzhskoi sbornik*. Two articles in Volume II – those by V.G. Kholodnaya and A.N. Kushkova – examine fatherhood in the Russian peasantry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and take rather different approaches. Kholodnaya focuses on paternal punishment as a method of maintaining social order, while Kushkova’s article is a cogent account of how property operated as a source of intergenerational conflict. Both articles avoid the pitfall of treating

fatherhood as synonymous with patriarchy rather than lived experience, and hopefully more work will emerge in this vein over the coming years.

Many of the more captivating articles in the collection are microhistories which focus on the particular and which refrain from making sweeping judgements. Although treading familiar ground, B.S. Gladaryov's short article on masculinity and fishing (v. III) is enjoyable: he conducts interviews and analyzes the responses from a gender studies perspective to understand the importance of angling as a male homosocial experience. I.A. Morozov's takes a somewhat more original theme in his analysis of 'muzhskie slezy' [Male Tears] (v. III). He juxtaposes representations of male tears from an interesting selection of texts from saints' lives to Hollywood blockbusters and examines the various symbolic resonances that they have. There are surprisingly few readings of masculinity in literary texts in the collection, but E.A. Samodelova's analysis of how the changing political climate affected Sergei Esenin's conception of masculinity is both insightful and original.

The less successful contributions are those which tread on territory which has already been well-covered by previous scholars, and those which make broad claims about how masculinity operates globally or transhistorically. For example, in the introduction to Volume II, I.A. Morozov attempts to identify how norms and stereotypes of masculinity are transmitted between cultures and generations. He devotes several paragraphs to developing the now-familiar argument that epic films such as the *Star Wars* franchise and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy owe their success to the fact that they represent a 'digest of male stereotypes and values' (v. III, p. 8). However, there has been ongoing scholarly debate about Tolkien and masculinity for quite some time, and more nuanced readings have been offered than Morozov's. Lianne McLarty (2006), for example, argues that multiple masculinities are articulated in the films, including radical masculinities opposed to patriarchy. In the follow paragraphs, Morozov offers role-playing societies as an example of closed male groups that transmit norms of masculinity across cultures and generations. Once again, the real picture is more complex. There are a growing number of women in role-playing, few role-playing societies are exclusively male, and the imaginary worlds created arguably offer a space for gender experimentation and play.

Morozov's introduction is immediately followed by E.A. Okladnikova's article on 'Aksiosfera muzhskogo' [The Axiosphere of the Masculine], which also runs the risk of over-generalising. She aims to reveal the similarities between constructions of masculinity in 'traditional' and 'modern' societies, but never clearly defines what these terms denote. Following Foucault, she reads the body as a social

text and a site on which social power is exercised, but her examples of how power operates are somewhat hackneyed. Laughter certainly can be a weapon of assault and defence in hierarchical male societies as she suggests (v. II, p. 22), but does it not also have the power to break down these hierarchies and liberate, following Bakhtin? Similarly, when Okladnikova repeats the familiar feminist argument that the pathologisation of obesity is a new form of social control over the body (v. II, p. 17), her argument would be more convincing if she addressed some of the counter-arguments put forward by the medical community and looked at possible compromise strategies that could be used to build a working public health policy.

Several other articles in *Muzhskoi sbornik* also have this tendency to leave certain questions unasked or unanswered. To take just one example, I.G. Ostroukh's article on the metrosexual (v. III) offers an interesting analysis of how the metrosexual identity has been exported to Russia and how it intersects with social class in the Russian context. However, some of the broader questions about the metrosexual are not raised: what is the relationship between consumerism and the metrosexual? Does metrosexuality break with traditional conceptions of masculinity and what new possibilities does it offer men? What is the relationship between the new emphasis on male body image and the rising number of men suffering from eating disorders?

There are a small number of typographical and other errors in *Muzhskoi sbornik*. 'Exception' is misspelled as 'expection' (v. III, p. 36, Note 18), the preposition 'na' is erroneously repeated in one sentence (v. II, p. 9), and 'Muscovite' is misspelled as 'Moscovite' (v. III, p. 35). The key on a graph comparing risk-taking behaviour among different groups of men (v. III, p. 64, Diagram 2) appears to be labelled wrongly. A number of contributors include citations of websites as their sources, which is inevitable when researching aspects of contemporary culture which have not yet percolated into mainstream publications. Most of these citations refer to established websites which are unlikely to close, but unfortunately a few are invalid already (v.3, p. 92). Dr. Hank Nuwer's website, www.hanknuwer.com, is erroneously cited as an e-mail address, hnuwer@hanknuker.com (v. III, p. 88). The URL 'www.skateboarding.ru' should presumably read 'www.skateboarding.ru' (v. III, p. 253, Note 39). The collection is to be praised for its rich use of visual sources – photographs, film stills, and drawings – but often the contributors do not exploit these as well as they might in the text, and occasionally they are left completely unreferenced in the body of the articles. However, these are minor irritations which do not detract from the overall quality of the collection.

It is difficult to form an overall judgement of a project as large and diverse as *Muzhskoi sbornik*. While the standard of the scholarship is

uneven in places, one must remember that masculinity studies is still an emerging field in Russia. At the very least, this collection will hopefully provoke debate, inspire other scholars, and provide a foundation for future research to build upon. Few will want to read these three dense volumes from cover to cover, but many will find individual articles stimulating and provocative. If the editors decide to continue publishing *Muzhskoi sbornik* – and this reader hopes that they will – those future volumes would benefit from greater editorial scrutiny and tighter organisation. Intellectual diversity is valuable in itself, but the production of meaningful interdisciplinary work depends on scholars finding some common ground, be that thematic, chronological, or methodological.

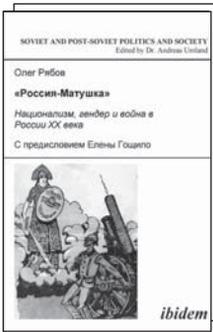
References

- Clements, B., Friedman R., Healey D. (eds.). *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*. Basingstoke, 2002.
- McLarty L. 'Masculinity, Whiteness, and Social Class in *The Lord of the Rings*' // *From Hobbits to Hollywood: Essays on Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings*. Jackson P., Mathijs E., Pomerance M. (eds.). Amsterdam, 2006.
- Oushakine S. (ed.). *O muzhe(N)stvennosti*. M., 2002.

Connor Doak



Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux (eds.), *Gender and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture*. De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006



Oleg Riabov, *«Rossiia-Matushka»: Natsionalizm, gender i voina v Rossii XX veka*. Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2007.

Mother Russia

The above volumes explore connections between constructions of ‘gender’ and ‘the nation’ in Russian twentieth-century culture, making a persuasive case for the need to include such an analysis in the understanding of both Soviet and Russian nationalist ideology and practice.

The multi-authored volume edited by Goscilo and Lanoux continues in the wake of Sarah Ashwin’s *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia* (2000), but focuses specifically on the interweaving of gender and national identity in a variety of cultural media, from film and TV to memorial literature and war songs. For their conceptual framework, Goscilo and Lanoux also look for inspiration to Susan Gal and Gail Kligman’s *The Politics of Gender after Socialism* (2000), applying to Soviet and post-Soviet Russia the latter study’s broad take on gender, family and reproductive politics in socialist and post-socialist East-Central Europe.

Riabov's book is presented as a 'sequel' to his earlier work, which bears a (confusingly) similar title — '*Matushka-Rus*' (2001). The most important conceptual revisions to his former, 'socio-philosophical' analysis of the gendering of national identity in Russia include the introduction of a purportedly more powerful analytic tool — Foucault's notion of 'discourse', and the narrowing of focus onto a more specific historical context — namely, times of war.

Both of the reviewed volumes operate within a similar theoretical and methodological framework. Helena Goscilo is, in fact, the author of the English-language preface to Riabov's book, introducing Western readers to his earlier work as well as to the present volume. Riabov, in turn, makes some use of Goscilo and Lanoux's collection in support of his own analysis, and, if abbreviated, his study could easily have formed one of the chapters in the latter volume.

Both books explore the intersection of gender and national identity primarily in representational and discursive practices. The bulk of their analysis therefore deals, on the one hand, with the way gender tropes are used in (emotively charged) metaphorical representations of the Russian/Soviet state and nation (for example, in wartime propaganda or in intellectual writings on the national question); and, on the other, with the way men and women are portrayed as constituent parts of the Soviet/Russian nation in terms of their distinct (gendered) social roles (for example, in state legislation on the family, in political, artistic or popular representations of 'exemplary' males and females, in debates about demographic problems, in attitudes towards homosexuality, prostitution and abortion, etc.). Following Foucault, both studies imply, of course, that 'discourse' is not limited to the sphere of 'representations', but is inextricably tied to fundamental relations of power in a society and that it therefore directly shapes the lives of actual men and women. However, as exercises in cultural history, both books tend to deal predominantly with the realm of cultural production, symbolic representation and collective imagination.

In both books there is a certain tension between, on the one hand, the classical understanding of gender as a binary polarity (masculine vs. feminine), which is primarily about gender identity, or more precisely, about gender difference and gender power-relations; and, on the other, the strategy of dissolving the problem of gender into a much broader and more complicated question of how the dynamics of particular *social systems of reproduction* structure power-relations in a given society (and, by extension, how reproductive relations, which include questions of gender difference but are not reducible to them, are articulated symbolically and organised institutionally). The metaphor of 'the family', for example, is abundantly analysed in both studies, and is shown as crucial to the figurative linking of gender

and nationhood. It is especially through the hierarchies entailed in particular family models (whether traditional, modern or post-modern), and through the (actual or figurative) incorporation of these models into the wider structures of state and society, that gender relations become part of a more encompassing metaphor of a *social order*, and are then used in figurative representations of ‘the nation’.

And yet, since both of the above books emanate from the framework of Gender Studies, gender binarism continues to operate as their ‘default point’ of analytical reference. In other words, although there is a clear openness to the broadening of the scope of interest to the much wider concern with the social, symbolic and institutional organisation of reproductive systems, in these two studies gender is not fully re-theorised as a *function of reproduction*, or, more precisely, it is not explicitly *subordinated* to the much more complex (non-binary) structure of *reproductive relations* as key to the full understanding of the workings of power in a specific society. As a consequence, most of the analysis in these two books revolves around deconstructing gender stereotypes and critically exploring various ‘cults’ and ‘crises’ of masculinity or femininity in Soviet and post-Soviet society.

Nonetheless, one of the virtues of the Goscilo and Lanoux volume lies in the diverse and balanced coverage of gender that it provides, tackling very different aspects of both female and male identities in Russia across the entirety of the twentieth century, as they manifested themselves in different spheres of cultural production. The introduction, penned by the editors and entitled ‘Lost in the Myths’, articulates the volume’s conceptual framework and provides an overarching historical narrative of the changing mythology through which the Russian nation was gendered in the twentieth century – from the traditional union of the Batiushka-Tsar (the patriarchal ruler of the empire-state) with the Matushka-Rus (a motherly embodiment of the nation’s soul) to the post-Soviet declining birth-rate and rising prostitution as complementary metaphors for a ‘nation in crisis’; from the Bolshevik utopian model of a ‘gender-equitable’ collaboration of the New Man and the New Woman to the Stalinist USSR as a ‘big family’ headed by the Father of All Peoples; from the supposed masculinisation of the Communist Party nomenclature to the alleged feminisation of stagnation-era dissidence.

The ten (chronologically-ordered) chapters in this collection cover an extremely wide range of topics. Valentina Zaitseva offers an overview of ways in which national identity is gendered in the Russian language – in everyday usage as well as in the discourse of political propaganda. She places this analysis in the context of some more general ‘sexisms’ (grammatical and socio-cultural), which cha-

racterise the Russian idiom. Helena Gosciolo deconstructs the trope of ‘the widow’ in Russian literary and memoir writings, focusing especially on its role in simultaneously symbolising national sacrifice and national survival. Elizabeth Jones Hemenway examines the hagiographies of model female Bolsheviks and analyses the place of this memorial literature in the construction of the new Soviet identity in the 1920s. She argues that, despite the rhetoric of gender equality, women revolutionaries continued to be portrayed in terms of traditional images of femininity, especially as mothers and sisters, or as embodiments of the spiritual side of the Revolution, while the utopian ideal of a ‘free loving’, sexually independent, New Woman remained suppressed.

Two other contributions focus on the Stalin era Lilya Kaganovsky views Nikolai Ekk’s 1931 film *Putevka v zhizn’* as an ambiguous narrative of the disciplining of both Soviet masculinity and Soviet nationhood, represented through the transformation of a group of *besprizorniki* into ‘new Soviet men’ in a Makarenko-style colony. Suzanne Ament refers to the well-documented shift in Stalinist discourse onto traditional family and nationalist values during the Second World War and explores its manifestation specifically in popular war songs, in which she catalogues the (rather predictable) gendered idealisations of Russia and Stalin, as well as of the heroism and sacrifice of ‘ordinary’ Soviet men and women.

The remainder of the contributions deal with the more recent past. Elena Prokhorova dwells on the crisis of masculinity in the post-Stalin era, which she traces back to the destruction of the traditional family model in the 1920s-30s and to the replacement of the family ‘patriarch’ institutionally by the state and symbolically by Stalin. She then looks at some ambiguous Brezhnev-era attempts at re-establishing Soviet masculinity in several cult TV series of the 1970s, namely *Semnadtsat’ mgnovenii vesny*, *Teni ischezaiut v polden* and *Vechnyi zov*. Michele Rivkin-Fish unpicks late-Soviet and post-Soviet discourse on the Russian demographic crisis, offering a useful historical account of the incorporation of this issue in Russian nationalist rhetoric, while exposing the remarkable lack of involvement by women’s associations in the reproductive politics of this era. Eliot Borenstein is interested in the image of ‘the prostitute’, especially during perestroika and the early 1990s, analysing it as a metaphor of ‘Russia on sale’, in which lie intertwined Russian male anxieties about masculine prowess as well as national pride. Yana Hashamova offers a survey of new cultural constructions of both female and male identities in the Russian cinema of the 1990s, arguing that in post-Soviet films, male identity is represented as far more traumatised and destabilised by the new socio-economic conditions than its female counterpart. She interprets this as a consequence of a certain double-bind of ‘patriarchy’ – the unnerving

combination of both a dependence on and a distrust of the (Lacanian) symbolic ‘Father’ which Russian masculinity had to confront after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Finally, Luc Beaudoin analyses contemporary constructions of homosexuality in Russia (by homo- and heterosexuals alike), arguing that the latter is still an ‘unquantifiable entity’, which keeps referring to an idealised ‘literary’ past, embodied by the Russian Silver Age, while simultaneously remaining highly dependent on Westernised sexual mass-marketing and still very much in search of a ‘proud’ voice of its own.

Riabov’s book covers the same time-frame as the Goscilo and Lanoux’s volume. The frame of his analysis is the deconstruction of the image of ‘Rossiia-Matushka’ as emblematic of the gendered nature of Russian nationalist discourse (both of the ‘banal’ and of the not so ‘banal’ kind), although his study ranges well beyond this in scope and ambition.

The first section of Riabov’s work is methodological, usefully defining the author’s take on some of his key concepts, such as ‘discourse’ (with reference mostly to Foucault), ‘gender’ (using the definitions of Joan W. Scott and R. W. Connell) and ‘nationalism’ (deferring especially to Anthony Smith). This section also offers an informative account of ways in which discourses of nationhood and gender have been historically intertwined in the context of wartime violence.

In the second section Riabov highlights the importance of the strategy of ‘gendering’ a particular nation as *‘the other’*. Finding inspiration in postcolonial theory (e.g. Edward Said’s notion of ‘Orientalism’ and Stuart Hall’s idea of ‘The West and the Rest’), Riabov stresses the importance of the gendered ‘other-ing’ of Russia *by the West*, on which Russia’s own gendered self-image appears to be crucially dependent. The third section of Riabov’s study is a chronological account of the role of gender stereotypes in Russian nationalist discourse, from the writings of the philosophers of the Silver Age, such as Rozanov and Berdyaev (Riabov’s specialty) right up to recent examples of nationalist machismo characteristic of the Putin era. The focus of this section is, however, specifically on the context of war (with individual subsections being devoted to the First World War, the Civil War, the Second World War and the Cold War). Riabov is here not just interested in textual representations but also in visual images, especially those used in propaganda posters or newspaper cartoons. His deconstruction of gender stereotypes from one war to the next is informative and interesting, but the attempt at historical exhaustiveness makes this section somewhat repetitive and the metaphors analysed rather predictable.

This mild criticism on grounds of predictability perhaps ought to be extended to both of the reviewed books. Both studies clearly offer rich analyses of the way in which articulations of gender differences

structure both the Russian nationalist rhetoric and the everyday imagination of Russian national identity. They provide valuable insights into the way Russian identity is gendered both by the Russians themselves and by the West. They reveal the significance of the gendering of nationhood both in extreme and traumatic events, such as war, and in the most trivial of peace-time phenomena, such as popular TV dramas.

And yet, after finishing with the two books, this reviewer could not help continuing to feel still somewhat lost in the mythology of gender stereotypes, and in their endless and ultimately rather tiring cultural recycling from one era to the next. The crucial question that remains open is whether an analysis that thrives on the binary logic of its governing concept is actually capable of dialectically escaping this logic or whether it is doomed to remaining trapped by the very same mythology of binary difference that it seeks to deconstruct.

Andy Byford