

personal difficulties that her strong sense of mission have inevitably entailed. But these are passing shadows. For the most part his approach is sympathetic and indulgent; justifiably so, since he is writing for the benefit of those who share his admiration for the composer and who seek new perspectives on her art rather than anything deeper. Those unfamiliar with the story of music in the late- and post-Soviet era, will surely find much of interest in the quid pro quos that many of Gubaidulina's colleagues (but not she herself) struck with higher authorities, in the networks that supported unofficial/underground music, in the infrastructural chaos that precipitated her emigration to Germany in February 1992, and so on.

From a publishing house of such repute it is surprising to find a large quota of minor gaffes, mainly concerning German and Russian terms. Even household musical names are not immune: Peter David Maxwell for Peter Maxwell Davies, (Paul) Griffith for Griffiths, and Glen for Glenn Gould each deserve at least one reviewerly exclamation mark. Yet we are lucky to have to such a book at all. Given that the only comparable study is seventeen years old and in Italian (Enzo Restagno, *Gubajdulina*, 1991), what we have here certainly meets an urgent need. Kurtz's diligence and devotion, and the efforts of his translator and editor, place us in their debt.

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Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture. By Eliot Borenstein. Culture and Society after Socialism. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008. xv, 265 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. \$69.95, hard bound. \$21.95, paper.

"Overkill" is a strong label for the sex and violence that, according to Eliot Borenstein, preoccupies contemporary Russian culture. Not entirely satisfied even with this term, Borenstein experiments with colorful Russian words, such as *chernukha* and *bespredel*, as accurate descriptions of the post-Soviet condition. In many ways, Borenstein's work is illuminating. He combines an exemplary knowledge of Russia's popular culture with a genuine interest in its politics. He has read, watched, and interpreted a plethora of pulp fiction, soap operas, and glossy magazines. His pioneering work responds to the emergent interest in contemporary Russian culture, which, strangely enough, seems less comprehensible to many scholars than the times of Aleksandr Pushkin. Cultural Studies are akin to mining; to make a new layer of culture accessible to scholars is a major achievement.

Borenstein's definition of popular culture, however, excludes important and well-known phenomena. He characterizes Vladimir Sorokin's sophisticated prose as simultaneously pornographic and impenetrable. Borenstein prefers authors such as Viktor Dotsenko, whose twenty volumes of his "Mad Dog" series are overflowing with violence and sex, and Aleksandra Marinina in whose (truly popular) detective novels Borenstein finds narrative complexity and psychological depth. Equally numerous books by the urbane Boris Akunin are mentioned only in the conclusion, where they are dismissed as "air-plane reading for educated readers" (234). Akunin's and Sorokin's obsession with history, a prominent feature of post-Soviet literature, appears particularly foreign to Borenstein. The truth is, however, that Akunin is no less popular than Marinina and Sorokin is no less readable than Dotsenko. I suspect that Borenstein dislikes those authors whose popularity presents problems that have remained unresolved within his "overkill" framework. Many Russian authors are more interested in history and politics than in sex and violence. Some of these writers are highly successful among Russian readers. Do we have any reason to believe that the more primitive layers of culture reflect more fundamental truths about a culture than its more sophisticated layers? In Russia, where so many changes, good and bad, have come "from above," that is, from the highest echelons of the bureaucracy and intelligentsia, the exclusive focus on "the popular" is particularly misleading.

In a bold attempt to contextualize the violent character of post-Soviet fiction, Borenstein states that Vladimir Putin's administration was not the prime mover of Rus-

sian popular culture but rather its product. In this vision, culture is primary to the state, provided that this is a truly popular culture. Since this culture, as Borenstein describes it, has presented human life as a war of all against all, the emergence of a despotic leader was unavoidable. The problem with this Hobbesian model is that it operates within a very short time frame. Borenstein projects his favorite themes, violent sex and sexy violence, onto the 1990s. He retells post-Soviet history, as it began in the 1990s, as if it were an entirely fresh start, a Hobbesian "state of nature." The chaos of that decade, however, was an unfortunate response to the multiple traumas of the previous Soviet decades. This is the reason why so many authors of contemporary Russian fiction focus their narratives on the historical past rather than on the political present. Borenstein's brief summary of the late Soviet period sounds strangely idealistic. Relying on works by Igor Kon, Alexei Yurchak, and others who explore the complexity of this period, Borenstein deemphasizes the boredom and horror these authors took for granted. With appropriate irony, Borenstein describes the restorative decade of Putin's rule as a time of pacification and sentimentality: films and novels still show random sex and violence but now they also emphasize "order, structure, and domestic harmony" (238); programmed by the Kremlin, the television screen preaches family and consumption; popular groups sing about their love of the leader. This is all true. But Borenstein knows that only the naive or the bribed take the consumption boom for civil peace.

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Non-Fiction po-ruski Pravda: Kniga otzyvov. By Aleksandr Etkind. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie," 2007. 332 pp. Notes. Hard bound.

It is an experience shared by every Russian specialist who came of age during the Cold War: on the recommendation of friends you are invited to the cramped and smoky apartment of some *intelligent*. You sit around the kitchen table with him and a few of his buddies and you marvel at the quantity of vodka that disappears while you are gamely trying to keep up with the amazingly wide range of the conversation, which flits from politics to literature, history to sex. You are stunned by the sheer number of things these people seem to know, and you wonder where, given the blank shelves in the bookstores, the closed stacks in the library, and their inability to read any foreign languages, they were able to absorb all of this information, let alone synthesize it into coherent strings of assertions. Late at night you stumble back to your miserable room and wake up the next morning badly hung over, unable to remember any specific thing you heard the night before, but sure that you had a fulfilling intellectual experience.

Aleksandr Etkind's book is a twenty-first-century analogue to these late-night conversations, with the virtue (or is it the vice?) that reading it will not expose you to second-hand smoke or cirrhosis of the liver. This collection of forty essays originally published between 1988 and 2005 and ranging in length from 3 to 20-odd pages, alternately dazzles and annoys the reader but ultimately impresses with the sheer erudition and range of Etkind's intellect. Indeed, after putting down this volume, I found myself hoping that Etkind's is not the last generation that will be able to engage in this kind of intellectual pyrotechnics.

To be sure, this volume is not merely a nostalgic rerun of 1980s kitchen-table semi-underground intellectual life. It demonstrates that despite the widespread belief that the Russian intelligentsia is dead and gone, some things have actually changed for the better since the end of communism. In the first place, all of these essays were actually published, most in Russian periodicals, which means both that they were available to a larger audience than could fit into Etkind's apartment and that they had the benefit of reasonably careful editing. Second, Etkind is aware of work published and ideas circulating not only in Russia but in western Europe and the United States as well. Indeed, for most readers of this book residing in the United States, the most interesting sections will probably be Etkind's reviews of books, mostly devoted to Russian issues, by non-Russians including Slavists Neil Cornwell, Katerina Clark, and Eric Naiman, historians Laura Engelstein and Igal Halfin,