

While the inclusion of some of the other works would have broadened the discussion of the Strugatskys' "cosmologies of hell," the choice to limit the scope of the book to those works that feature astronomer-characters leads to many productive readings. In each chapter, Reese deftly weaves close readings of the particular text with biographical, scientific and cultural context to expand the critical understanding of the Strugatskys' works, and their place in the science fiction tradition in general. As a result, *Celestial Hellscape*s serves as valuable, engaging reading for students, scholars and Strugatsky fans alike.

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Eliot Borenstein. *Plots against Russia: Conspiracy and Fantasy after Socialism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019. ISBN 978-1501716331. 288 + xviii pp., \$24.95 (paper).

In *Plots against Russia*, Eliot Borenstein surveys the role that paranoid fantasy and conspiratorial modes of thinking play in Russia today. Treating conspiracy as narrative, Borenstein considers the enduring popularity of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the belief that Russophobia motivates an ever-expanding list of evil-doers, foreign and domestic, to try to harm the motherland, as well as paranoia about "gender ideology" and other perceived "Western" threats to "traditional Russian values." He also analyzes pervasive rhetoric about potential attempts to brain-wash or "zombify" part of the populace and the way in which the conflict in Ukraine has been recast as the latest example of the "never-ending struggle between Russia and the United States" (29). In Russia (and indeed in other countries such as the US), Borenstein suggests, conspiratorial modes of thinking and ideas move freely between the news cycle, other forms of non-fiction, and fictional works and therefore can be understood as pop-cultural phenomena as much as political. Dystopian fantasy novels and alternate histories often, Borenstein suggests, rely on world-building strategies and plot points that are markedly similar to those that characterize the paranoid fantasies that we dismiss as full-blown conspiracy theories. So why not consider them all together as part of a single cultural phenomenon?

This is a daring idea that requires Borenstein largely to set aside, as he acknowledges, the consideration of whether or not a particular example of conspiratorial thinking may be grounded in reality. "By the end of this book, the reader will, I hope, have learned many things. But 'the Truth' is not among them," Borenstein writes at the end of his introduction (29). Certainly, wading into debates about who fired what rocket when can be an unproductive undertaking for literature scholars that leaves us rehashing "evidence" that is often better presented elsewhere. Borenstein's book helps us think about conspiracy and paranoia in fundamentally new and more literary ways and to explore the common features that link real news stories about supposed international machinations and films and novels with plots that revolve around similar themes; conspiratorial thinking and its playful satiric reflection. However, as I read this book amidst a global pandemic, wading through daily news reports colored by fear and characteristic notes of paranoia and conspiratorial thinking, I struggled to let go of the distinction between fact and fantasy even provisionally as part of engaging with Borenstein's groundbreaking argument. The "Truth" (even if ultimately in some sense always elusive) seemed to matter too much in our current circumstances; I found myself, by extension, unwilling to set aside efforts to ascertain it in other contexts as well.

*Plots against Russia* challenged me to think more deeply about popular culture and news cycles in my home country of the United States as well as in Russia. Throughout the book, Borenstein acknowledges that Russian culture is not unique in its propensity for conspiratorial thinking; we can find similar notes in Western works by authors with a variety of ideological views. Key events in US domestic politics since the 2016 election often sprang to mind as I was

reading, even when not directly mentioned in the text. Borenstein reminds us in *Plots against Russia* that segmentation in media markets allows American citizens to wall themselves away and hear only a specific subset of messages. “Consumers in the United States,” Borenstein suggests, “recreate for themselves the equivalent of” a Russian-style “information monopoly by remaining within their own carefully walled gardens,” and, in this situation, conspiratorial thought flourishes (240). Just as Putin has used conspiratorial thought to maintain and expand his power, Trump, Borenstein notes, “owes a significant portion of his platform and rhetoric to the alt-right and the more extreme elements of Fox News” (240). At the same time, American liberals have become obsessed with counter-conspiratorial theories of their own. Borenstein argues that we are, in effect, witnessing “a rapprochement between Russia and America on the discursive level”: “Plots against Russia find their reflection in plots against America and every-one basks in a good story well told” (240–41).

*Plots against Russia* will interest anyone who works on contemporary Russia culture and indeed on contemporary political culture in general. It is an engaging, challenging, and witty read that includes a sophisticated overview of current theory on paranoia and conspiracy. It also will introduce readers to a wealth of popular culture from both the 1990s and the first two decades of the post-Soviet period. Borenstein weaves into his larger argument sophisticated analysis of a diverse range of cultural phenomena: the meta-apocalyptic rhetoric of Maria Devi Khristos and the Great White Brotherhood, pseudo-documentary TV shows such as *Sobranie zbluzhdenii*, novels by Gregory Klimov and Sergei Norka, and tracts by writers such as Igor Shafarevich. As always, the breadth of Borenstein’s interests and knowledge is impressive. Readers will learn about many corners of Russian culture that have never been discussed before in an English-language publication and certainly have never received this kind of detailed critical treatment. *Plots about Russia* is an important book and will be an essential purchase for academic libraries.

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Nicholas S. Racheotes. *The Life and Thought of Filaret Drozdov, 1782–1867*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019. ISBN 978-1498577595. 305 pp., \$115.00 (hardcover).

Nicholas S. Racheotes’s intellectual biography of Filaret Drozdov engages the controversial metropolitan’s nearly sixty-year career in light of the latter’s twenty-first century mobilization in service of Russian nationalism. The book is arranged thematically; each chapter draws on an impressive array of Filaret’s homilies and other writings to explore this singularly influential figure’s perspectives on questions of clerical and lay education, schism and heresy, warfare, Emancipation, and monarchical absolutism.

After a brief introductory biographical sketch (“Early life”), Racheotes moves, in the second chapter (“A Man of the Word”), into an extensive discussion of Filaret’s involvement in the Russian Bible Society, with the attendant disputes surrounding the publication of the metropolitan’s “scripturally-based” catechism and of a vernacular translation of the Scriptures intended for private use. Substantial attention is given to Filaret’s responses to allegations of European and Western Christian influence on the translation project, which were seen by him as a potential “threat to both religious purity and monarchical legitimacy” (30). Also included in the chapter are a brief refutation of the attribution to Filaret of an anonymously penned response to Chaadaev’s “First Philosophical Letter” and commentary on Filaret’s role in imperial censorship.

The third chapter, “Metropolitan of Moscow,” overviews various dimensions of Filaret’s activity in that position: after identifying the metropolitan’s most significant patristic influences, it details his views regarding certain aspects of reform in monasteries as well as seminaries and

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