

ABSTRACTS

Desiring the Other: The Ambivalent Polish Self in Novel and Film

ELŻBIETA OSTROWSKA

In this article, Elżbieta Ostrowska employs categories of postcolonialism to examine two novels by Henryk Sienkiewicz, *With Fire and Sword* and *Fire in the Steppe*, and their filmic adaptations by Jerzy Hoffman. Her aim is to reconstruct their ideological discourse regarding Polish national identity and its positioning within Europe. Located between east and west, Poland was both a colonizing power (of Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belorussia) and a colonized country (by Russia, Prussia, and Austria-Hungary). These two novels, written during the time of partitions, offer a nostalgic vision of the country's past power and its colonizing aspirations. Ostrowska argues that various textual efforts aimed at solidifying the notion of national identity and its positioning within a geopolitical order of Europe are disrupted by structures of female desire implicitly present in both the novels and films. These structures puncture the solid fabric of the national historical epic and undermine the hegemonic notion of Polish masculinity.

Bureaucracy of Dreams: Surrealist Socialism and Surrealist Awakening in Ismail Kadare's *The Palace of Dreams*

ANI KOKOBOBO

Ani Kokobobo addresses the novel *The Palace of Dreams* (1981) by the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare, with a particular focus on the larger significance of the novel's dream project. Through fictional processes of dream collection, selection, and interpretation, Kadare meditates on two twentieth-century movements that either overtly or covertly incorporated dreams in their ideological platforms: surrealism and socialism. Kokobobo posits that as a political and aesthetic category the dream serves Kadare as the ideal epistemological vessel for investigating the interrelatedness of socialism and surrealism. Throughout the novel, Kadare emphasizes socialism's utopian inclinations, the dislocation of political decisions from political realities in this system, and the mutual disturbance of both reality and the imagination that such a dislocation produces. At the same time, the dream narrative helps him launch a surrealist poetics and metapoetically counter the damage dealt to the imagination by political realities.

No More Horsing Around: Sex, Love, and Motherhood in Tolstói's *Kholstomer*

RONALD D. LEBLANC

By giving us a horse's perspective on human life, Lev Tolstói's *Kholstomer* (1886) has usually been recognized in the west as a stellar example of the author's use of "defamiliarization." Most of the critical attention the

story has received in Russia, by contrast, consists of Soviet-era studies that examine the creative history of the text and/or remark on its satiric elements. In this article, Ronald D. LeBlanc examines instead the treatment of the themes of sex, love, and motherhood in Tolstoi's story about a castrated horse. In particular, he explores the significance that castration—with its accompanying cessation of sexual desire—appears to have in this story about a selfless gelding, a tale that may be read as the expression of a desire on the author's part to be unburdened of the affliction of sexual lust and thus to be freed to pursue a more spiritual, less carnal existence on earth.

The Aesthetics of Disaster: Blok, Messina, and the Decadent Sublime

JENIFER PRESTO

In this article, Jenifer Presto argues that the 1908 Messina-Reggio Calabria earthquake had an impact on Aleksandr Blok no less significant than that which the 1755 Lisbon earthquake had on writers of the Enlightenment and proceeds to demonstrate how it shaped Blok's aesthetics of catastrophe. This aesthetics can best be termed the "decadent sublime," an inversion of the Kantian dynamic sublime with its emphasis on bourgeois optimism. Following Immanuel Kant, Blok acknowledges the fear and attraction that nature's forces can inspire; however, unlike Kant, he insists that modern man remains powerless in the face of nature, owing to his decadence—a decadence endemic to European civilization. The decadent sublime is manifested in a host of Blok's writings, ranging from "The Elements and Culture" to *Lightning Flashes of Art* and *The Scythians*; it is intensely visual and is indebted to images of ruin by artists such as Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Luca Signorelli.

The Poetics of Peat in Soviet Literary and Visual Culture, 1918–1959

ROBERT BIRD

One of the sites of socialist construction that grabbed Soviet public attention in the 1920s and 1930s, peat also dramatized the difficulties faced by Soviet artists in devising representational modes appropriate to their new tasks. In the mid-1920s stories by Mikhail Prishvin, Aleksandr Peregudov, and Aleksandr Iakovlev granted a voice to peat workers by augmenting existing literary forms with documentary and agitational methods. In the 1930s, artists (including Peregudov and Arsenii Tarkovskii) focused on peat's role in the powering of socialism, dissolving the stuff of peat in the imaginary map of social and cultural forces. Analogous strategies of mechanics and energetics can be seen in film and graphic art of the 1920s and 1930s. Later works on peat by Prishvin and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn register the resistance of nature—including language and other artistic media—to engineered or speculative solutions, calling into question the very possibility of representing Soviet political, economic and social values.

History Done Right: War and the Dynamics of Triumphalism in Contemporary Russian Culture

GREGORY CARLETON

So far in the twenty-first century, triumphalism has dominated Russian culture. As manifest in popularized history and film, this wave has often been described by recourse to interpretive paradigms derived from a neo-Soviet or neo-socialist realist orientation, particularly when the subject is war. While understandable, this interpretive practice cannot account for salient productions that upstage Soviet conventions by reconfiguring the Russian historical experience along a narrative trajectory anchored by two scenarios that constitute the alpha and omega of national achievement and pride: Aleksandr Nevskii and the Time of Troubles. Tapping into deep structures of myth, contemporary reproductions of these two tie their significance explicitly to the post-Soviet period. Supported by the state and church, their increasing traction in war narratives facilitates a new discourse of nationalism that supersedes Soviet precedent, reconfigures traditional domains of triumphalism, and sets a standard for future constructions of Russian history that eclipses key problems of the real or imagined past.

What Is the Leninist Legacy? Assessing Twenty Years of Scholarship

JODY LAPORTE and DANIELLE N. LUSSIER

In this review essay, Jody LaPorte and Danielle N. Lussier examine the “legacies” paradigm dominating postcommunist scholarship in the social sciences. The legacies paradigm has produced a growing list of factors that qualify as historical antecedents to contemporary outcomes without establishing a set of shared standards to guide comparative analysis. Scholars have paid less attention to developing a conceptual definition of legacy, thereby limiting our ability to evaluate the importance of historical factors versus more proximate causes. This critique presents a thoughtful analysis of the communist legacy, develops a typology that can be used to categorize legacy variables for meaningful comparison, and brings the concept into discussion with the broader literature on historical institutions and path dependency. By suggesting tools to aid comparative study, LaPorte and Lussier’s goal is to stimulate both conceptual and empirical analysis in evaluating the effect of communism on contemporary outcomes.