

exploring the mechanism of “rhetorical substitution” that offered authors ways of mitigating the “direct representation of the Siege reality” (11) by drawing on imagination and memory. The three chapters that follow explore ways that texts aestheticized the horror encountered by Leningrad’s inhabitants. There is a fascinating discussion of what Barskova terms the “Siege Sublime” (94): a reconstruction or replacement of the horrific with the beautiful, as well as exploration of writers’ appropriation of other authors’ earlier texts for use as models for writing about the Siege space.

Readers already familiar, to some degree, with the textual legacy of the Leningrad Siege will find stimulating ways of conceptualizing the work that these writers were engaged in. This reader took particular satisfaction in the new perspectives on offer in Barskova’s analysis of representations of the body in Ol’ga Berggol’ts’s account of a blockade bathhouse. Barskova applies an array of tropes and concepts to Siege texts, including allegory and defamiliarization, to explain how writers used aesthetic devices to establish a certain distance between themselves and their troubling present. On the creative effects of defamiliarization, produced by a changing cityscape in which movement and vision were often impeded, she writes: “The Siege sharpened the perception of Leningrad as a vessel of multiple temporalities, where the new and often disorienting seemed to be superimposed upon the habitual and familiar” (16). Barskova is right to remind us that the Siege took place not just in any city, but in a city which had a long history of a parallel existence in textual form. In her chapter on the “Siege Sublime” she shows how the city’s eschatological mythology was reactivated in wartime Leningrad. The aesthetic responses to the Siege that are investigated in this study emerge not as a dark, closed-off dead end but as a particular chapter of the “Petersburg text,” founded, as Barskova aptly puts it, on “the paradoxical combination of peril and beauty” (112).

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Performing Femininity: Woman as Performer in Early Russian Cinema. By Rachel Morley. London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017. xv, 288 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Filmography. Index. Photographs. \$120.00, hard bound.
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Meticulously researched, elegantly written, and bristling with fascinating insights into pre-revolutionary Russian cinema and Russian women’s history, Rachel Morley’s excellent book joins the many seminal studies from I.B. Tauris’s authoritative *Kino* series. As the volume’s title suggests, the author sets out to explore archetypes of fictional female performers in early Russian cinema, 1908–18. *Performing Femininity* does much more, however, than create a systematic catalogue of Russian female protagonists. Through close and detailed readings of several dozen films, Morley adds nuance to the study of the narratological, aesthetic, and theoretical contexts of early Russian cinema, while presenting a thorough exploration of Russian female protagonists far beyond their appearance in film.

As Morley’s book demonstrates, women playing performers within a film’s diegesis were stock characters since the beginning of Russian cinema. Indeed, Russia’s very first feature film, Vladimir Romashkov’s *Stenka Razin* (released by Aleksandr Drankov’s St. Petersburg production studio in 1908), featured a Persian princess *cum* “exotic” veiled dancer. The first feature film released by Aleksandr Khanzhonkov’s Moscow studio, titled *Drama in a Gypsy Camp Near Moscow* (dir. Vladimir Siversen, 1908) similarly presented the story of another “exotic” (this time Gypsy) “dancing

beauty” (115). In subsequent years, as early Russian filmmakers began experimenting with a more sophisticated cinematic language, images of female performers would undergo a significant transformation. Through a subtle and lucidly-argued analysis of a wide range of cinematic texts and their socio-historical contexts, Morley traces the metamorphosis of Russia’s first female performer-protagonist (the erstwhile object of the “male gaze” in *Stenka Razin*) to characters who acquired the ability to express a certain sense of agency.

Morley’s volume is structured thematically and (to a lesser degree) chronologically: each of the book’s seven chapters is dedicated to a specific type of a fictional female performer as portrayed in early Russian films. For example, Chapter 1 (“The Oriental Dancer”) explores the anonymous heroine of the aforementioned film *Stenka Razin*. Chapter 2 (“The Peasant Girl and the Boyar’s Ward”) discusses ways in which Russian filmmakers began shifting their films’ narrative focus to the female protagonist, thereby encouraging the viewer to identify with the heroine. Of particular interest is Morley’s compelling discussion of the 1912 film *The Incestuous Father-in-Law* (*Snokhach*, director unknown) and her comparison of this film to the earlier production, *Stenka Razin*. Like the Oriental princess in *Stenka Razin*, Lusha in *The Incestuous Father-in-Law* is a young female protagonist-dancer who suffers at the hands of the male protagonist. Unlike the Persian dancer, however, whom a vengeful male counterpart “triumphantly” murders at the end of the film, Lusha becomes an agent (of sorts) of her fate as she takes her own life rather than endure her father-in-law’s continued sexual abuse.

The volume’s remaining chapters are dedicated to female protagonists created by several influential Russian directors, including Evgenii Bauer, a key filmmaker of the early silent era. Chapter 3 offers a close reading of a fictional opera singer-protagonist in Bauer’s earliest surviving work, *Twilight of a Woman’s Soul* (1913); Chapter 4 explores images of cinematic tango-dancing women as an emblem of the “New Age” in several films released in 1914, including Bauer’s *Child of the Big City* and *Silent Witnesses*. Various forms of female dance performance remain the focal point of Chapters 5 and 6, which trace images of a dancing gypsy girl, a ballerina and a modern dancer in films by Bauer, Petr Chardynin, Iakov Protazanov, and others. Finally, Chapter 7 offers a case study of the fictional actress-protagonist in Bauer’s 1915 film *After Death*.

While discussing the theoretical framework of her study, Morley states that her preferred approach is that of “bricolage” (8). Indeed, the author punctuates her discussions with insights from a wide range of disciplines (most notably film, literary criticism, dance, and gender theories) and draws from critics’ responses and memoirs of both film directors and women dancers from the era (such as Isadora Duncan). The result of this approach is a fresh and intriguing look at pre-Revolutionary Russian cinema and its fictional female protagonists that offers useful insights for scholars and students investigating Russian cultural history, film, and gender studies.

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Storytelling in Siberia: The Olonkho Epic in a Changing World. By Robbin P. Harris. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2017. xv, 234 pp, Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Tables. Maps. \$60.00, hard bound. doi: 10.1017/slr.2018.356

Reading this delightful book evoked memories of the first time I heard a singer of the dramatic epics the Sakha call *olonkho*. At a Museum of Music and Folklore conference