

or actually assimilated these values. He seemed to exhibit sincere enthusiasm about his Cultural-Educational work in the camp. On the other hand, Johnson tells us that Formakov had written “anti-Soviet” novels, which were discovered in the search prior to his 1949 arrest. Moreover, Formakov provided eye-witness testimony to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn for his *Gulag Archipelago*. One wishes that Johnson had offered more analysis of the significant question regarding his attitude toward the Soviet authorities, which was at best, ambivalent. That caveat aside, this collection offers powerful testimony to the influence of the state on the individual, and is a notable addition to Gulag survivor accounts.

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Besieged Leningrad: Aesthetic Responses to Urban Disaster. By Polina Barskova.

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Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. \$49.00, paper.

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This is an absorbing study of ways that the urban space of the Leningrad Siege was represented in texts produced by those who inhabited it. Polina Barskova identifies a distinctive aspect of the Leningrad Siege: “The inhabitants of Leningrad lost virtually everything in the disaster except their place, and this place served them as an inexhaustible source of contemplation and writing” (4). This book explores aesthetic responses to the catastrophic loss and destruction visited on the city, concentrating on representations of urban space. Barskova sets out to question the view that the Siege space, a site of mass death, was unrepresentable other than as dark and enclosed. Her study reveals multiple representations of Siege space, which include, alongside confinement and darkness, space endowed with light, color, beauty, and possibility. It explores the representational challenges faced by the authors of Siege texts and analyzes the means by which their aesthetic approaches enabled them to set their own pain at a distance.

The texts that are investigated range across genres, including prose fiction, poetry, and diaries, and across the line dividing texts approved by the censorship as fit for propaganda purposes and those which were not, and could not have been put forward for publication at the time they were written. The author states as one of her aims the wish to bridge the gap between these two categories of texts, and to explore what connects them as well as how they differ from one another. This aim is certainly achieved: what emerges is an unfolding panorama of the Siege space produced by texts that are united by the demands made on them by the site and the time of their creation. Crucially, Barskova shows that Siege spatiality, rather than being static, was constantly changing, often suddenly and radically as a result of enemy bombardment. Her analysis shows how the ruins served “as a metaphor for the trauma of the city’s inhabitants,” while writers who witnessed the distressing metamorphoses of the city, its inhabitants, and themselves, used aesthetics “as a way to anaesthetize the experience” (8).

Following an Introduction that lays out the book’s aims and scope with impressive clarity are six chapters which focus on ways that the representation of Siege space can be understood as aesthetic responses to the disaster of starvation, enemy bombardment, and cold. The first three consider representations of Leningrad citizens’ everyday relationship with space in terms of movement, corporeality, and visibility,

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