

ABSTRACTS

How *Nauchnaia Fantastika* Was Made: The Debates about the Genre of Science Fiction from NEP to High Stalinism

MATTHIAS SCHWARTZ

Based on a detailed analysis of published and unpublished sources, Matthias Schwartz reconstructs the making of Soviet science fiction in the cultural context of Soviet literary politics. Beginning in the 1920s, *nauchnaia fantastika* (scientific fantasy) became one of the most popular forms of light fiction, though literary critics and activists tended to dismiss it because of its origins in popular adventure, its ties to the so-called Pinkerton literature, and its ambiguous relationship to scientific inventions and social progress. Schwartz's analysis shows that even during high Stalinism, socialist realism's norms were far from being firmly established, but in the case of *nauchnaia fantastika* had to be constantly negotiated and reconstituted as fragile compromises involving different interest groups (literary politicians, writers, publishers, readers). A cultural history of Soviet science fiction also contributes to a better understanding of what people actually wanted to read and sheds new light on the question of how popular literature adapts to political changes and social destabilizations.

Aleksei N. Tolstoi and the Enigmatic Engineer: A Case of Vicarious Revisionism

MUIREANN MAGUIRE

In this article, Muireann Maguire examines the cultural construction of the trope of the engineer-inventor in Russia during the 1920s and 1930s, focusing on the changing representation of this archetype in three science fiction novels by Aleksei Tolstoi: *Aelita* (1922–23), *Soiuz piati* (The Gang of Five, 1925), and *Giperboloid inzhenera Garina* (Engineer Garin's Death Ray, 1925–26). Tolstoi's fiction portrays engineers as misguided and self-centred at best and as amoral, megalomaniacal, and irredeemably un-Soviet at worst. This increasingly negative portrayal of the engineers in these novels, and in their later redactions and cinema versions, helped to prepare the way for the alienation of engineer and technical specialist within Soviet society, providing cultural justification for Iosif Stalin's show trials and purges of both categories in the 1930s. Tolstoi's alienation of the engineer-inventor, the traditional hero of early Soviet *nauchnaia fantastika* (science fiction), prefigured the occlusion of science fiction as a mainstream literary genre. As a trained engineer, former aristocrat, and returned émigré whose own status in Soviet Russia was deeply compromised, Tolstoi's literary demonization of engineers effectively purchased his own acceptance within the Stalinist literary hierarchy.

One Billion Years after the End of the World: Historical Deadlock, Contemporary Dystopia, and the Continuing Legacy of the Strugatskii Brothers

SOFYA KHAGI

The importance of Arkadii and Boris Strugatskii in Soviet science fiction has been thoroughly examined. A less-explored question concerns how they have continued to inspire post-Soviet authors who muse on an environment that differs drastically from the one that gave rise to their works. Sofya Khagi explores how prominent contemporary writers—Garros-Evdokimov (Aleksandr Garros and Aleksei Evdokimov), Dmitrii Bykov, and Viktor Pelevin—examine the Strugatskiis to dramatize their own darker visions of modernization, progress, and morality. They continue the tradition of science fiction as social critique—in this case, a critique of society after the collapse of socialist ideology with its modernizing projects of historical progress, technological development, and social improvement. According to their parables a contrario to the Strugatskiis, the dreams of modernity embodied by the classics of Soviet *fantastika* have been shattered but not replaced by a viable alternative social scenario. As they converse with their predecessors, contemporary writers examine stagnation, not just in post-Soviet Russia, but in global, postmodern, commodified reality.

Dancing the Nation in the North Caucasus

SUFIAN ZHEMUKHOV and CHARLES KING

In the north Caucasus, collective dance has long been an expression of communal identity and a forum for political dissent. In this article Sufian Zhemukhov and Charles King examine the emergence and transformation of a communal dance form known as *adyge jegu* (roughly, “Circassian festival”) in the Russian republics of Adygeia, Karachaevo-Cherkesia, and Kabardino-Balkaria. They chart the history of the *adyge jegu* after 2005, elucidate debates over the meaning of authenticity in contemporary Circassian nationalism, and provide a detailed archaeology of the specific decisions that enabled this cultural artifact to get constructed in one way but not another. While attention typically focuses on elite-driven narratives of border security and terrorism, the *adyge jegu* highlights grassroots debates over the meaning of right behavior, the boundaries of communal identity, and alternatives to Russianness in either its *russkii* or *rossiiskii* varieties.

Stories States Tell: Identity, Narrative, and Human Rights in the Balkans

JELENA SUBOTIĆ

Jelena Subotić explores how the states of the Balkans construct their “autobiographies”—stories about themselves—and how these stories influence their contemporary political choices. By understanding where states’ narratives about themselves—stories of their past, their historical purpose, their

role in the international system—come from, we can more fully explain contemporary state behavior that to outsiders may seem irrational, self-defeating, or simply, inexplicable. Subotić specifically addresses ways in which states of the western Balkans have built their state narratives around the issue of human rights. She explores, first, how a particular narrative of state and national identity produced—or made locally comprehensible—massive human rights abuses. She then analyzes why contemporary identity narratives make postconflict human rights policies very difficult to institutionalize. The article focuses specifically on the human rights discourse, practices, and debates in Serbia and Croatia.

Socialist Popular Literature and the Czech-German Split in Austrian Social Democracy, 1890–1914

JAKUB BENEŠ

By 1911 it was clear that multiethnic Austrian Social Democracy could no longer resist the currents of ethnic nationalism that had already fragmented most of the late Habsburg political scene. The exit that year of most Czech Social Democrats to form their own party, along with Austrian Germans' insensitive reactions, signaled that workers were not immune to nationalism. The relevant historical literature has either viewed workers' nationalism as the product of elite manipulation and "bourgeois" influence, or, more recently, has questioned the extent to which nationalism actually resonated with ordinary people at society's grassroots. Jakub Beneš's article attempts to avoid the oversimplifications of both approaches and calls for more precise engagement with workers' own discourse. To this end, it highlights an important dimension of working-class political culture—socialist popular literature—in which proletarian authors articulated increasingly ethnic nationalist positions of a class-specific sort. Examining this influential but neglected genre illuminates how and under what circumstances workers found meaning in nationalism.