

From the *Slavic Review* Editorial Board:

*Slavic Review* publishes signed letters to the editor by individuals with educational or research merit. Where the letter concerns a publication in *Slavic Review*, the author of the publication will be offered an opportunity to respond. Space limitations dictate that comment regarding a book review should be restricted to one paragraph of no more than 250 words; comment on an article or forum should not exceed 750 to 1,000 words. When we receive many letters on a topic, some letters will be published on the *Slavic Review* Web site with opportunities for further discussion. Letters may be submitted by e-mail, but a signed copy on official letterhead or with a complete return address must follow. The editor reserves the right to refuse to print, or to publish with cuts, letters that contain personal abuse or otherwise fail to meet the standards of debate expected in a scholarly journal.

To the Editor:

I thank Robert J. Donia for reviewing my book, *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (vol. 69, no. 3). However, the review contains significant factual errors.

Donia criticizes my book for omitting various facts, such as the French president's support for western intervention in Bosnia in 1995, and U.S. ambassador Warren Zimmermann's denial that he scuttled peace talks in 1992. In reality, the book cites both points (284–85, 264), and Donia is mistaken. And he refers to "Prime Minister" Tony Blair with respect to the 1995 intervention; Blair did not become prime minister until 1997.

Donia's main criticism is that my book is marred by left-wing bias, and its facts are slanted to suit this bias. To sustain his point, Donia uses emotionally charged adjectives (e.g., variants of the words "leftist" or "ideological" are repeated many times throughout the review). Yet Donia fails to quote any ideological-sounding lines from the book or to substantiate his claims in any serious way.

And finally, the review is self-contradictory. In the same paragraph, Donia admits that "the author cites an impressive array of western opinion and commentary" but then reverses himself and states, "the author follows a pattern of using shallow and dubious evidence" (754). He repeatedly claims that my arguments are weak and my tone shrill. Then in the concluding paragraph, he reverses himself: "The arguments and evidence in this book are well constructed, and the account is eminently readable" (755).

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Professor Donia chooses not to respond.

To the Editor:

In the acknowledgements to his "Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied: Magical Historicism in Contemporary Russian Fiction" (vol. 68, no. 3), Alexander Etkind thanks me, among others, for my "comments and questions" (631). Had I actually seen his article prior to its publication, my comments would have been that this expression of "appreciation" should be replaced by a full set of references to my book *Goticheskoe obshchestvo* published in 2007 (Dina Khapaeva, *Goticheskoe obshchestvo. Morfologiya koshmara* [Moscow: NLO, 2007; 2d ed., 2008]).

In *Goticheskoe obshchestvo* I suggested that post-Soviet fictional monsters reflect, in a

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specific way, the memory of Stalinism and that fiction, despite its fantasy motifs, could be used as a source for understanding post-Soviet historical memory: “Witches, vampires, nonhumans—these are the true heroes of the national nightmare born out of the dark obsessions of suppressed memory and materialized in post-Soviet fantasy. . . . The authors and their readers take the experience of horror and atrocities as a moral example because historical amnesia has left no other alternatives” (37; also 35–41; on post-Soviet historical amnesia, see Dina Khapaeva, “L’Occident sera demain,” *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 50, no. 6 [1995]: 1259–70; D. Khapaeva, *Vremia Kosmopolitizma: Ocherki intelektual’noi istorii* [St. Petersburg, 2002], 124–38; Khapaeva, *Goticheskoe obshchestvo*, 79).

Etkind develops my argument when he writes that monsters “embody the horror, not the truth, of the Soviet period better than either humans or animals” (658, same argument on 643–44) and states that “[g]hosts, vampires, werewolves, and other beasts help authors and readers discuss history that is not comprehensible by other means” (657, same argument on 653–54). While I saw in the monstrous horrors of post-Soviet literature a symptom of the “fundamental opaqueness of norms and rules of social behavior . . . due to the failure of conventional explanations of social actions be it religion, moral or science” (Khapaeva, *Goticheskoe obshchestvo*, 39; see also Dina Khapaeva, “Historical Memory in Post-Soviet Gothic Society,” *Social Research* 76, no. 1 [Spring 2009]: 371–72), Etkind adds that “[t]he uncanny scenery” of post-Soviet literature “signals the failure of other, more conventional ways of understanding social reality” (657). Etkind also agrees that memory of the terror is best incarnated, not in a superman, but in the nonhumans (657; Khapaeva, *Goticheskoe obshchestvo*, 39) and that post-Soviet fiction with its vampires and monsters broadly reflects the state of mass post-Soviet culture (651; Khapaeva, *Goticheskoe obshchestvo*, 35–36). In his article in *Constellations* (2009), Etkind describes the 2004 movie of Sergei Luk’ianenko’s novel *Nochnoi dozor* (Night Watch), saying that humans “are entirely deprived of self-control and political life” by “vampires and other supernatural beasts” as if they were “in a camp”; that humans are reduced to “the position of the vampires’ cattle” (Alexander Etkind, “Post-Soviet Hauntology: Cultural Memory of the Soviet Terror,” *Constellations* 16, no. 1 [2009]: 196, 197). And I wrote about Luk’ianenko’s novel that humans “appear on the periphery of the plot’s actions as passive objects for monsters to exercise their power” and as “monsters’ natural prey” (Khapaeva, *Goticheskoe obshchestvo*, 36, 40–42; my analysis of *Night Watch* was acknowledged by Mark Lipovetsky, Etkind’s co-author, “V zaschitu chudisch,” *NLO*, no. 98 [2009]). The transformation of “zona” into the matrix of post-Soviet society that can be traced through fiction is also an important thesis of my book (Khapaeva, *Goticheskoe obshchestvo*, 126).

It is flattering, of course, to see one’s ideas reflected in another’s work, but care should be taken to show how these ideas are being developed or why they are being reinterpreted. To my mind the proliferation of “monsters” in contemporary culture is the most important point. In my book, I proposed concepts of “Gothic aesthetics” and “Gothic society” to designate contemporary social and political developments that resemble neofeudal practices and cultural trends that I traced back to the gothic novel.

As the abstract of his article states, Etkind “coins the concept ‘magical historicism’” to deal with memory and monsters (same argument on 655, 657). Magical historicism first appeared in his book of 2001 but only in a short paragraph that did not address memory of the terror or post-Soviet fictional monsters (Alexander Etkind, *Tolkovanie puteshestviy: Rossia i Amerika v travelogakh i intertekstakh* [Moscow: NLO, 2001], 414). In his first article on the topic (2008), magical historicism is entirely absent: instead, Etkind spoke then about memory of the terror as “a monstrous fantasy of a Gothic kind” (Alexander Etkind, “Bare Monuments to Bare Life: The Soon-to-Be-Dean in Arts and Memory,” *Gulag Studies* 1 [2008]: 28). Etkind’s use of the term *gothic* thus raises the question of reinterpretation. Why does he drop “gothic” from the abridged version of the same passage that he included in *Slavic Review* to replace it without explanation with “grotesque” (638, 648)? Since prior to the publication of his *Slavic Review* article, I responded to his publications with a piece of my own in *NLO*, his vacillation between “gothic” and “grotesque” may have had something to do with this unacknowledged exchange (Dina Khapaeva, “Neludi i kritiki,” *NLO*, no. 98 [2009]).

One also wants to question Etkind’s interpretation that “recent studies of the post-

Soviet 'occult revival' tend to see it as a new religious movement . . . rather than as a cultural response to political pressures and historical memory" (645) for the latter interpretation is precisely the one I have advanced.

The influence that the distorted memory of Stalinism exercises on post-Soviet culture and society, central both to my work and to Etkind's, clearly has broader theoretical and social importance. I therefore sympathize with his complaint that fictional monsters have "barely been noticed by critics and scholars" (644–45), even though my work appears in his *Slavic Review* article only once in a late footnote (650n57). Perhaps if he had addressed the themes that I raised in my work more directly, however, his article would have better advanced the discussion.

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Dr. Etkind responds:

I am surprised that Dina Khapaeva feels a lack of appreciation of her work in my article. As a quick search demonstrates, I mention her name five times in my essay, second only to Walter Benjamin's. A year ago, Khapaeva expressed a similar dissatisfaction in a letter to *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* that addressed a different publication of mine, a dialogue with Mark Lipovetsky on post-Soviet prose. Lipovetsky and I responded to that letter in detail and all three letters were published in *NLO*, no. 98 (2009). Even earlier, Khapaeva criticized me in her book, *Gertsogi respubliki* (Moscow: NLO, 2005), which proclaimed the end of humanities and social sciences on a worldwide scale; I was guilty of trying to perpetuate the dying tradition. I did not respond to that claim.

The polemics in *NLO* were substantial and I think that the readers actually benefited from a demonstration of the polar difference between Khapaeva's views and mine on the theme of post-Soviet memory. In her current letter, however, Khapaeva employs those very ideas that she had attacked in her letter to *NLO*. Her central statement in the current letter, that "In *Goticheskoe obshchestvo* [she] suggested that post-Soviet fictional monsters reflect, in a specific way, the memory of Stalinism" is wrong. She did not suggest that. When discussing post-Soviet fictional monsters, she invariably emphasized moral issues of global import, such as disappointment in humanity, the crisis of rationality, and the confusion between good and evil. In her book and elsewhere she denied the connection between literary monsters and the memory of the Soviet past. Moreover, her work indicates that she does not believe in the existence of this memory. I cannot agree more with her current statement that "fiction, despite its fantasy motifs, could be used as a source for understanding post-Soviet historical memory." She did not say anything close to that in her book, however, and she did not use fiction as a source for this purpose.

Khapaeva accuses me of having failed to acknowledge the use of her book, *Goticheskoe obshchestvo. Morfologiya koshmara* (Moscow: NLO, 2007). This slim book leaps from one astonishing statement to another. Khapaeva claims that J. R. R. Tolkien was "the founder of the gothic aesthetic," as she understands it. Then she says that this gothic aesthetic "floods our life," "generates the new, gothic morality," and also lays the "social foundation of the gothic society" (all from 13). From Tolkien, Khapaeva moves to the Russian film and novel by Sergei Luk'ianenko, *Nochnoi dozor* (Night Watch). We do overlap in our interest in this cultural product, but I am glad to confirm that Khapaeva's reading is the opposite of mine. While I interpret certain vampires in this film as remembrances of the Soviet past, Khapaeva states that its "nightmare is not in the vampires" but "in the collapse of the distinction between good and evil" (38). Khapaeva then goes on to speculate about astrophysical black holes and the nature of time (48–76). Next, Khapaeva makes some observations about post-Soviet memory. Reasonably, she argues that the propaganda surrounding the victory in World War II figures as a myth that blocks a broader awareness of the Soviet past (86–87). But she also blames the intelligentsia for the "massive idealization of the west" which somehow (I did not understand the logic) leads to the same historical amnesia (89–91). She mentions some classical studies of cultural memory in Germany and France to conclude that "these attempts . . . have not given astonishing results and interest in them