

in folk material, while embracing Russian classical traditions and the techniques of 19th-century western music. Such music was absolutely central to Soviet culture and, while much of it was “blandly generic work and downright incompetent,” there was also fine music and even “hidden gems” (180–81).

In lieu of a conclusion, Frolova-Walker engages in a discussion of socialist realism in light of her study. She claims, convincingly, that the Prizes and discussion around them offer a working definition of this aesthetic ideology. And contrary to the views of many scholars, she argues that there is a there there; the socialist-realist canon was made up of pieces that realized Stalin’s prescription “national in form, socialist in content.” These were works in a national style based on folk music, and were often cantatas, concertos, or middlebrow works like symphonic suites that had patriotic or historical themes. (290) This examination of the Stalin Prizes “allows us to see socialist realism within a coherent narrative framework, evolving slowly, never changing beyond recognition, with demarcations between core works, acceptable but marginal works and the unacceptable” (292). She concludes that both the Stalin Prizes and socialist realism lost momentum in the early 1950s, prompting a push to artistic quality and independence after Stalin’s death.

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Terror and Pity: Aleksandr Sumarokov and the Theater of Power in Elizabethan

Russia. By Kirill Ospovat. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016. xviii, 316 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$72.00, hard bound.

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Terror and Pity: Aleksandr Sumarokov and the Theater of Power in Elizabethan Russia arrives just in time for Sumarokov’s 300th birthday. Ospovat’s monograph contributes to renewed interest in the “father of Russian theater” by Marcus Levitt, Joachim Klein, and myself, among others. More broadly, it richly complicates arguments about ideals, public, and power initiated by Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter’s *The Play of Ideas in Russian Enlightenment Theater* (2003) and integrates key concepts from Richard Wortman’s *Scenarios of Power* (1995) and other scholarship on court symbolism as a means to display and affirm autocratic power.

Terror and Pity weaves a compelling story about Sumarokov’s first tragedies as recasting events from Elizabeth’s reign—royal travels, weddings, and political show trials—to reveal to her courtly public the subtle mechanisms of power that rely, among other things, on acts of erratic and unlawful cruelty, occasionally tempered by unexpected clemency; in other words, acts that elicit Aristotle’s tragic “terror and pity.” As Ospovat succinctly explains in the introduction, “cultural patterns of domination and submission . . . were not only the historical context for Sumarokov’s tragedies, but also made up the very fabric of their drama” (xiv). The plays served to elicit and maintain courtiers’ loyalty during an era where lawful succession to the throne was repeatedly upended by palace coups and intrigue.

The book includes an introduction, three major subsections, an epilogue, and a conclusion. The introduction contextualizes the study historically and outlines the theoretical approach, which, in addition to Walter Benjamin’s work on tragedy, incorporates “Max Weber’s theory of charisma, Carl Schmitt’s revival of Machiavelli and Hobbes, and Michel Foucault’s discussion of public punishment” (xiii). The introduction concludes with a brief summary of each major section of the book. The five brief chapters of Part I, “Political Theater and the Origins of Russian Drama,” trace the

roots of Russian tragedy to court ritual and visiting foreign troops. This section also reviews the basic patterns of symbolic power, positioning Russia within a broader European conversation about tragedy at the service of absolute monarchy. Section II, “*Khorev*, or the Tragedy of Origin,” includes four chapters on Sumarokov’s first tragedy, connecting the playwright’s choice of historical subject matter to Elizabeth’s recent ascension to the throne and efforts to cement her legitimacy. Ospovat makes a compelling case for the “poetics of political allegory,” arguing that pastoral allegories of love, gallantry, and eroticism in fact function to signal political power and submission. Section III, “Poetic Justice: Coup d’état, Political Theology, and the Politics of Spectacle in the Russian *Hamlet*” consists of five chapters that continue to explore court politics, this time analyzing Sumarokov’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s masterpiece. Arguing for *Gamlet* as a celebration of Elizabeth’s 1741 coup d’état, Ospovat reads the play through a specific early modern understanding of “melancholy” along with “Machievellian (or ‘Tacitean’) apprehensions of ruthless violence” (183). *Gamlet*’s denouement is examined against the background of Elizabeth’s reign of terror and clemency. The three chapters that constitute the book’s epilogue, “The Theatre of War and Peace: The Miracle of the House of Brandenburg,” feel somewhat out of place, as they largely ignore Sumarokov to focus on Frederick the Great’s self-fashioning as a tragic hero and Peter III’s sudden withdrawal from the anti-Prussian alliance as an act not of weakness, but rather an ill-received gesture intended to project strength through clemency. The final chapter, “Conclusion: Tragedy, History, and Theory,” reviews the theoretical framework and major claims, adding a fascinating political interpretation of the idea of “fate” in eighteenth-century Russian tragedy and arguing for the “polyphony of tragedy”—its lack of a single authorial voice—as making possible the airing of discourse that in other contexts would be considered outright seditious.

Ospovat’s *Terror and Pity* contributes richly to our understanding of Sumarokov’s dramatic practice, situating it within a complex interplay of history, political power, and art in eighteenth-century Russia. The theoretically-dense prose can be challenging and even distracting, but attentive readers willing to slow down and untangle the arguments will be rewarded. The book can be appreciated as a single study, read cover to cover, or—as its origins in a series of articles suggests—approached section by section in isolation. Perhaps put off by years of Soviet literary scholarship that cast Sumarokov and some of his contemporaries as would-be *frondeurs*, scholars in recent years have largely avoided political approaches to Sumarokov’s work. Ospovat’s book demonstrates the benefits of returning to historical and political interpretations, but with a nuanced and theoretically-sophisticated framework.

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Axiome der Dämmerung: eine Poetik des Lichts bei Boris Pasternak. By Christian Zehnder. Bausteine zur Slavischen Philologie und Kulturgeschichte. Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2015. 478 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. €60.00, hard bound. doi: 10.1017/slr.2017.221

In his comprehensive study of the “poetics of light” in the work of Boris Pasternak, Christian Zehnder takes as a starting point Marina Tsvetaeva’s oft-cited essay “A Downpour of Light.” His analysis of the “metaphysical poetics” (73) of light throughout Pasternak’s oeuvre draws from several theoretical streams: post-Symbolist Sophiology, continuing Samson Brojtman’s work, here linked to the theological