

## **Gunnar Lenz. *Das andere Sozialismus. Narrative Modelle der sowjetischen Literatur zwischen 1928 und 1953.***

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Gunnar Lenz's book aims to open up a new perspective on Soviet literature from 1928 to 1953, including its tendencies, dynamics, and lines of development. In contrast to previous research (especially by Katerina Clark, Evgenii Dobrenko, and Hans Günther), the author subsumes under the term Soviet literature not only the iconic texts of socialist realism, but also various others that did not follow the ideological-aesthetic principles of this doctrine or did so only partially. This non-essentialist, heterogeneous understanding of Soviet literature from the 1930s to the 1950s is used to show that this literature actively participated in the process of establishing and disseminating the narratives of Soviet culture, and that it is therefore wrong to see it merely as an ideological instrument to illustrate top-down Soviet propaganda. Lenz argues that there is no such thing as "Soviet literature," and that the texts that can be understood as such were interested in both confirming and reproducing central terms and concepts of the Soviet era, as well as reconfiguring or even challenging them altogether. For this reason, the book also discusses texts by programmatically anti-Soviet writers and scholars such as Mikhail Bulgakov and Mikhail Bakhtin, arguing that they too were shaped by Soviet contexts and therefore cannot be isolated from them. By adopting a broad understanding of Soviet literature, Lenz succeeds in making it more dynamic: It is no longer analyzed in terms of its conformity to patterns (both ideological and poetological), but rather as an actor in the communication processes of the time, as a projection screen on which the discourse of socialist realism was simultaneously reproduced and shaped. Ivan Makarov's 1936 novel, *Misha Kurbatov: Roman*, can be seen as one of the many examples of this dual orientation discussed in the book, which, through the unreliable narrator, exercises a subversive critique of the practice of Five-Year Plan literature, even though this text must undoubtedly be seen as a Soviet novel in the narrow sense. It is not, therefore, a question of defining the typical structures of Socialist Realism in the literature; rather, it is one of linking it to the narratives of the Soviet era.

The book is divided into three main parts, in which the three main narratives of Soviet literature are first elaborated and then analyzed: 1) the narrative of the Five-Year Plan and transformability, 2) the narrative of the 1930s: social advancement and betrayal, and 3) the narrative of the post-war period: idyll and lack of conflict. This structure also outlines a chronological progression: reflections on the first narrative cover the years 1928–34, the second chapter deals with the period 1935–45, and the last chapter focuses on the post-war period of 1946–53. Lenz argues that the literature of each phase can be explained by the main narrative chosen, and that the main characteristics of each narrative are largely overcome in the next phase. For example, it becomes clear that the production novel of the 1930s, which showed the changes in people and literature, expressed the ideas of the Five-Year Plan in an exemplary way. While in this phase both Soviet man and the concept of Soviet literature were regarded as a kind of changeable raw material, in the second phase the protagonists are shown on the right ideological side, and thus the focus is on the fight against class enemies, which served, among other things, to legitimize the terror of 1937 as part of a positive narrative. One of the strategies of undermining norms during this period was

to change the temporal perspective of the Soviet historical novel as a genre. The interpretive section is preceded by a theoretical chapter on the concept of narrative, in which Lenz impressively and skillfully discusses the debates on the various levels of meaning of the concept of narrative from a structuralist and post-structuralist perspective. His book opts for a contextual understanding of narratology: “collective narratives” are understood here as narratives: structures that refer not only to the text but also to the cultural memory of the respective culture—in this case, Soviet culture.

Gunnar Lenz has written an important book on Soviet literature, the aim of which is to interpret and contextualize literary texts from around 1928 to around 1953 in a different way than has hitherto been done. They are no longer read ironically as “bad,” “ideological” and “instrumentalized” literature per se. Instead, the aim is to see them as meaningful texts of the time, without trying to hide their schematic character or the propaganda they conveyed. This goal has been achieved, even if some of the author’s interpretations ultimately coincide with the classical interpretations. The book will be of interest to anyone who wants a fresh perspective on Soviet literature. My only criticism is that Lenz only acknowledges the debates surrounding the Soviet variant of socialist realism. If he were to look at Poland, for example, he would see that since the beginning of the twenty-first century there have been intense debates about the possibilities of rewriting the literature from the Stalinist era. Taking this into account would enrich the book.

## **Ed. Yan Levchenko. *Chelovek s brilliantovoi rukoi: K 100-letii Leonida Gaidai.***

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*Chelovek s brilliantovoi rukoi* is a wide-ranging collection of Russian language scholarship (original and translated) dedicated to the oeuvre and legacy of director Leonid Gaidai (1923–93), whose “eccentric comedies” became some of the most popular and profitable films in Soviet history. The volume under review was released as part of the *Kinoteksty* (Cinema Texts) series by *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* (NLO, New Literary Review) as a centennial celebration of the filmmaker’s birth.

This somewhat loosely structured book brings together twelve articles organized chronologically around the director’s filmography, beginning with Mariia Mayofis’s and Galina Orlova’s explorations of Gaidai’s formative, yet lesser-studied, early Thaw-era works. The two opening pieces focus on the tropes and aesthetic choices in Gaidai’s directorial debut *Dolgii put’* (Long Journey, 1956), chronicle the filmmaker’s encounters with Soviet censors during his work on *Zhenikh s togo sveta* (Fiancé from the Netherworld, 1958), and discuss the “ideologically loyal,” (38) historical-revolutionary film *Trizhdy voskresshii* (Thrice Resurrected, 1960) as an early form of grotesque, “cathartic laughter” (42). While detailing the circumstances surrounding the production of *Fiancé from the Netherworld*, Orlova’s chapter also offers fascinating examples from the archival transcripts of the 1957 and 1958 Mosfilm *Khudsovet* (*khu-dozhestvennyi sovet* or artistic council), sessions that demanded significant cuts from the film.