

Alexandar Mihailovic. *Illiberal Vanguard: Populist Elitism in the United States and Russia*.

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One of the reasons that Alexandar Mihailovic wrote *Illiberal Vanguard: Populist Elitism in the United States and Russia*, he says, is that some American conservatives “have a largely unreciprocated fascination with their Russian counterparts” (30). This fascination, as Mihailovic shows, is not always solidly based. Even if some American conservatives do indeed see Russia as a bulwark against political correctness and woke, as Mihailovic convincingly argues, they do not always understand the subtleties of Russian history and reality.

Illiberal Vanguard consists of five chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. The first chapter, specially written for this book, focuses on “the American appropriation of Russian cultural models that posit a notionally virtuous model of cognitive elites” (26). This goes beyond the book’s focus on American conservative fascination with Russia to investigate the whole question of the role of intellectuals and the intelligentsia, both in Russia and in contemporary America. The chapter discusses several American conservatives (Frederick Crews, Darel E. Paul, Patrick J. Deneen, and—above all—Rod Dreher) on whom there is less scholarly work than there perhaps should be.

Ch. 2, first published in a collected volume on Vladimir Lenin’s relevance today, compares Steve Bannon, a leading Republican activist and former advisor to President Donald Trump, and Lenin. The chapter concludes, inter alia, that “Bannon’s style of contestation has much in common with Lenin’s” (103). Ch. 3, originally written for a collected volume on *Digital Media Strategies of the Far Right*, presents in parallel the careers of the American antisemitic racist Kevin B. MacDonald and of the Russian nationalist intellectual Aleksandr Dugin. MacDonald and Dugin have in common a connection with academia, since MacDonald researched and taught in psychology departments at various US universities from 1976 until his retirement in 2014, and Dugin taught Conservative Studies at Moscow State University from 2008 to 2014. There are, of course, also major differences between the two men. MacDonald’s scientific work on evolutionary psychology proceeded in directions that drew him to the attention of American racists, whereas Dugin was primarily a political activist and thinker who briefly engaged with academia, and was never much interested in race.

The fourth chapter, originally written for the volume edited by Patricia Anne Simpson and Helga Druxes, *Digital Media Strategies of the Far Right in Europe and the United States* (2015), looks at Russian homophobia, especially at the digital media presence of the Union of Orthodox Banner-Bearers, and differs from other chapters in focusing on Russia without introducing a significant American counterpart. It is especially interesting, given that the Union of Orthodox Banner-Bearers is relatively unknown, and Russian homophobia relatively unexplored. The fifth and final chapter, written like the first chapter specially for this book, looks—again in parallel—at the removal of statuary in America and Russia, placing next to each other events such as the removal of Confederate statutes of General Robert E. Lee and the 1991 removal of the Russian Chekist Feliks Dzerzhinskii.

The book is valuable for placing American and Russian phenomena in dialog with each other. Given that, as its author says, the American conservative fascination is not generally

reciprocated in Russia. This book is generally more useful for those with an interest in American conservatism than those with an interest in Russia. An exception here is the chapter on the Union of Orthodox Banner Bearers and Russian homophobia. Mihailovic writes with force and conviction, which is one of this book's strengths. Sometimes, however, it may reduce the book's objectivity. To say, for example, that Dreher's *Live not by Lies: A Manual of Christian Dissidence* is a "willful distortion" of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's essay of the same title (57) perhaps does not get us very far, given that Dreher was never trying to fairly represent Solzhenitsyn in the first place. Inevitably, one small complaint: Mihailovic does not always define his terms. He makes frequent use of the term "traditionalist," for example, but it is not clear what he means by this.

Jacob Emery. *The Vortex That Unites Us: Versions of Totality in Russian Literature.*

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Despite clocking in at just shy of 170 pages of body text, this is an impressively and substantively sweeping book. Its chronological scope spans the eighteenth through twenty-first centuries. Its range of works, authors, genres, and movements match informative breadth with erudite depth. Its varied approaches to the book's central premise show the insightful agility of a seasoned scholar. That premise is expressed in the concise, yet menacing, term "totality" and developed in a series of chapters with tantalizingly suggestive titles ("The Epidemic," "The Panorama," "The Orchestra," and "The Market). In short, it is a book that uses a compelling number of examples to advance a singular idea about the place of Russian literature in broader social, political, cultural, and ideological contexts.

The Vortex That Unites Us is a study of the systems and structures that often operate in the background of literary production. More so, it is about how authors and the works they create interact, intersect, and align with those structures. The totalizing forces that Jacob Emery enumerates in his "conceptual anthologizing of the Russian canon" (2) are admittedly diverse and the works that are used to ground those discussions are intentionally disparate. Yet certain thematic and semantic threads help pull together these wide-ranging texts and ideas and combat the centrifugal forces that could potentially fragment the book into a half a dozen distinct versions of totality. The superimposition of the political, the social, and the cultural onto the literary serves as a repeated framework that provides consistency and an overarching cohesion to the different case studies presented here.

The twentieth century—so dominated by visions and versions of totality in utopian ideologies, universalizing art, and hegemonic capitalism—offers the most clear-cut and overtly ambitious comprehensive systems, and those are the subject matter of the final three chapters of *The Vortex That Unites Us*. Emery moves roughly chronologically through the century beginning with the Futurists' ambitions for international unity (with all of its linguistic, economic, and intellectual connotations) as seen in the common language of *zaum*. The