

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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Olga Mesropova

Iowa State University
Email: olgames@iastate.edu

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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.

A number of the volume's articles provide in-depth analyses of some of Gaidai's most successful comedies from the 1960s and 70s. Mark Lipovetsky's chapter explores the evolution of the "trickster trope" in Gaidai's works, starting with the comedic trio ViNiMor (an abbreviation of the surnames of the three actors, Georgii Vitsin, Iurii Nikulin and Evgenii Morgunov) who first appeared in the 1961 short film *Pes Barbos* and *Neobychnyi kross* (The Dog Barbos and The Unusual Race). Lipovetsky reads the ViNiMor characters, dubbed by some film scholars as a Soviet version of the Three Stooges, as a hybrid "collective personage" that combines features of diverse Soviet social strata and historical eras (86). Another trickster character analyzed in this article is George Miloslavsky from Gaidai's *Ivan Vasil'evich meniaet professiiu* (Ivan Vasil'evich Changes His Occupation, 1973), a comedy that Lipovetsky interprets as "a film about power crisis," in which any character occupying a position of authority is, ultimately, an "imposter" (100).

Ivan Vasil'evich Changes His Occupation features prominently in other chapters. In this vein, Stephen Norris delves into the historical contexts and subtexts of this comedy, while Svetlana Pahomova offers a nuanced juxtaposition of Gaidai's *Ivan Vasil'evich* with Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan Groznyi* (Ivan the Terrible, 1943–45). Vsevolod Korshunov provides a taxonomy of character types in *Ivan Vasil'evich* and in *Brilliantovaia ruka* (The Diamond Arm, 1969). Another Gaidai "blockbuster," the 1966 comedy *Kavkazskaia plennitsa, ili novye prikliucheniia Shurika* (Prisoner of the Caucasus or Shurik's New Adventures), is the subject of Ilya Kukulin's discussion of the film's play on Soviet ethnic stereotypes and xenophobia, as well as the concept of *druzhba narodov* (friendship of the peoples).

Several of the volume's articles focus on the director's major tropes, signature themes, and narrative models across a broad spectrum of his films. For example, long-time scholars of Gaidai's oeuvre, Elena Prokhorova and Aleksandr Prokhorov, provide a wide-lens view of the filmmaker's work as "metanarrative comedies" (121), while also exploring Gaidai's treatment of such themes as patriarchy, insanity, and the cults of war and aggression. As the authors trace the topos of "eternal war as the absurd norm of life" (132) in such films as *The Diamond Arm*, *Ivan Vasil'evich Changes His Occupation*, and the director's last feature film, *Na Deribasovskoi khoroshaia pogoda, na Braiton Bich opiate'idut dozhdi* (The Weather Is Good on Deribasovskaya Street, It's Raining Again on Brighton Beach, 1992), one cannot help but sense the timelessness of Gaidai's comedies, especially in light of Russia's current war against Ukraine. The prescience of Gaidai's work is evoked in the volume's introductory essay by Russian film critic and TV host Andrei Shemiakin, who invites readers to re-watch Gaidai's films because the "genius" Soviet filmmaker "foresaw many things before the others did" (17).

Comedic insights of Gaidai's final two films are the subject of Irina Kaspé's, Tat'iana Dashkova's and Boris Stepanov's essays that consider the above-mentioned post-Soviet comedy *Weather Is Good on Deribasovskaya Street* and the perestroika-era *Chastnyi detektiv, ili operatsiia "Koooperatsiia"* (Private Detective, or Operation "Cooperation," 1989). Dashkova and Stepanov also explore the Ukrainian city of Odesa as a symbolic locale that Gaidai chose for his last films. Cécile Vaissié places Gaidai's work in the context of global film distribution markets (and Soviet cinema exports) and discusses French press and audience responses to the filmmaker's comedies. The volume's closing chapter features an interview with a Russian film scholar and historian, Evgenii Margolit, who addresses Gaidai's role in the Soviet film industry. The afterword (*Prilozhenie*) features a concise biography of the director written in 2000 by film scholar and award-winning filmmaker, Evgenii Tsymbal, who also released a four-part documentary about Gaidai in 2001.

As is perhaps common with any collection of articles, the essays in the present volume vary in their methodological and analytical approaches. To provide a more cohesive overview of the somewhat disconnected *kinoteksty*, this first book-length study of this iconic Soviet film director would have benefited from a stronger and more theoretically grounded introductory chapter. However, the volume's richly detailed empirical data, solid theoretical observations, and nuanced discussions of individual films make *Chelovek s brilliantovoi*

rukai an important contribution to the fields of Slavic cultural and film studies. The volume is likely to appeal to students and scholars, as well as to a general reader and Gaidai aficionado alike.

Elena Pedigo Clark. *Trauma and Truth: Teaching Russian Literature on the Chechen Wars.*

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Przemysław Adamczewski

Polish Academy of Sciences
Email: adprzem@politic.edu.pl

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The Caucasus is my main area of research, so it was with great interest that I accepted an offer from the editors of *Slavic Review* to write a review of the book *Trauma and Truth: Teaching Russian Literature on the Chechen Wars* by Elena Pedigo Clark. Upon reading the work, any reader expecting a scientific approach to the issue may feel quite disappointed. Nowhere does the author present a research hypothesis, nor does she present any research questions that she hopes to answer in her text. In some sections, it is evident that the author wanted to write an academic book, but in reality, we get a summary of four works by the individuals treated by the author: *A Dirty War* by Anna Politkovskaya, *The Sky Wept Fire* by Mikail Eldin, *One Soldier's War* by Arkadiy Babchenko, and *Patalogii: Roman* by Zakhar Prilepin—along with a surface discussion of each work.

I have significant doubts regarding the inclusion of Mikail Eldin's work, *The Sky Wept Fire*, in the category of Russian literature. Clark justifies this and refers, for example, to the fact that Eldin received his education in Russian and that he used Russian in his writing (6, 59). I, however, remain unconvinced. Mikail Eldin has lived outside of Russia for twenty years and, to the degree that he can, distances himself from this country, stating publicly that he is not a Russian, among other things. With that being the case, the fact of his using the Russian language does not imply that he feels himself to be a Russian author or a part of Russian culture. We ought to respect his identity, given that he positions himself so explicitly and unambiguously. The fact that the work in question is written in Russian is, in my view, an insufficient reason to classify it as Russian literature. Not every work written in the English language is treated as if belonging to English literature. We have, after all, Indian English literature, thus by analogy, I would classify Eldin's work as Chechen Russian literature.

The Conclusion disappoints with its shallow insights. Ascertainments like "For all four of the writers . . . the wars in Chechnya were Hell" (243) are hardly revelatory. In the history of literature, there are few examples of writers who had experienced war and reveled in it, considering it some sort of Paradise. The book's title I also find problematic, the first part of which reads "Trauma and Truth." Trauma is treated in one minuscule chapter, spanning a mere four pages. Further on, said "trauma" appears only incidentally. With "truth" the matter is even worse, given that it appears practically nowhere aside from the title. This is puzzling treatment, considering that the question of truth in literature is the subject of thorough studies by literary scholars. What "truth" is the author alluding to? Where does Clark see the boundary between it and interpretation? This, unfortunately, the book leaves unanswered.