

Embodied Differences: The Jew's Body and Materiality in Russian Language and Culture. By Henrietta Mondry. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021. xxii, 268 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. \$109.00, hard bound. doi: 10.1017/slr.2022.205

The topic of Henrietta Mondry's publication can give pleasure to those scholars in Slavic Studies who are interested in how themes of Jewish corporeality are ingrained in Russian societal politics and cultural discourses. The Jew's body in western, Christian, and Russian normative discourses is known to be a product of centuries-old anti-Semitic imagery that is echoed nowadays if not with conviction then with laughter. One such example is the recent 2020 comic extravaganza of the *Borat-2* cinematic contemplation. In this mock documentary the actor Sacha Baron Cohen (himself Jewish) in a truly lampoonist costume that includes a huge prosthetic nose, long nails, and huge bag of money enters a synagogue in Georgia, US with the words "Nice weather we are controlling."

Embodied Differences continues Mondry's series of original and groundbreaking research published in books and articles centered on the notion of the Jewish Other in Russian literature and culture, where she treats the interconnected topics as the manifestation of the Jew's essentialized alterity that has been employed to discriminate, entitle, and negotiate the everyday. Thus, her previous book, *Exemplary Bodies: Constructing the Jew in Russian Culture Since the 1880s* explored the Jew's body as an important biological and cultural site for the Russianness to utilize with its frequent goal to assert itself through epitomizing the Jewish Other's negative physiological and ontological differences. The current publication further details the controversial dynamics between body politics and the politics of materiality with the aim to "analyze the ways in which literary works and cultural discourses employ the construct of the body in relation to the material world in order either to establish and reinforce, or to subvert and challenge, dominant cultural norms and stereotypes" (xii). For example, the author examines popular post-Soviet beliefs in Judeo-Masonic conspiracy in Aleksandr Prokhanov's literary collages that recycle the macabre mythology from previous epochs and ideological formations evoking the blood libel, rudimentary drives, and atavism that threaten to contaminate the Russian ethnos, and as Mondry rightly warns, "making his readers respond to the cultural signs, motifs and images" and also "laying a foundation for further recycling" (111).

The author embarks on an ambitious journey—to bridge high and popular culture through bringing a large range of sources to the readers' judgement. She relies mainly on literary sources but expands her analysis to museum practices, social media, and traditional material culture such as culinary heritage.

As with her previous books, this volume is slim, lucidly written, and has plenty to offer when discussing how imagining the Jew's often repugnant and degenerate physiognomy served Russian materiality in upholding the positive imagery of their own radiant physical health and straightforward, nicely sized bodies. The introduction sets a clearly structured, accessible, and promising agenda for the study, divided into two parts consisting of twelve chapters and an overarching conclusion. Part One examines the texts by non-Jewish

Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet writers who represent the dominant culture, including but not limited to writers such as Nikolai Gogol', Fedor Dostoevskii, Anton Chekhov, Vasilii Rozanov, Andrei Belyi, Ivan Shevtsov's scandalous Soviet art-themed novel *The Aphid*, and postmodernist conspiracy writing of Aleksandr Prokhanov. Part Two addresses the reactive writing of Jewish women writers such as Marina Paley, Dina Rubina, Ludmila Ulitskaya, Inna Lesovaya, and Margarita Khemlin, and of Jewish men such as Isaac Babel, Osip Mandel'shtam, Lev Trotskii, Aleksandr Goldshtein, and Yuri Karabchievskii. This part of the book introduces understudied but important contemporary women writers and shows their gender-specific responses to constructs of the Jewish woman's body and visceral interactions with materialities.

Having grounded her approach in a posthumanist paradigm that accepts the mutability of the body through its interaction with other matter, Mondry shows a dynamic and complex interrelation between homes, bodies, and objects that are presented in cultural discourses as sites of connections between history and the everyday. Especially topical is Mondry's analysis of the use of food and dietary practices as stable markers for ethnic difference or collective identity. Mondry's argument is driven with interdisciplinary vigor to bring scientific and philosophic writing (such as Jacques Derrida's schema of the carno-phallogocentric subject) to support her conclusions and present a nuanced picture in which she treats a Jewish physical "type" as a construct whose elements were utilized in Russian literary and cultural imagination. Contrary to the often stereotypically imagined "Jew's body" as frozen in time, Mondry arrives at the overarching conclusion that the "inscribed and described body of the Other is an exemplary material-semiotic interface which simultaneously attracts and struggles to escape essentializing" (204).

There is much terrain to cover when addressing a complex nexus of fiction, objects, museum displays, and heritage food, so through reading Mondry's study one is getting a feel that the author is treading a visceral minefield. Thus, for example, the fact that the Russian literary landscape is so much inhabited with Jews who have felt on a mission to address negative Jewish stereotypes in their work through responding, reclaiming, or self-hating complicates any arguments about the extent to which fictional constructions can embody real life materiality or vice versa. Yet while no study can address all the issues on the subject, *Embodied Differences* exemplifies best practices of scholarly questioning of broad generalizations in a scrupulous, innovative, and highly individualized fashion.

ELENA KATZ

University of Helsinki

The Akunin Project: The Mysteries and Histories of Russia's Bestselling Author.

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The Akunin Project is a compelling collection focusing on the work of Grigory Chkhartishvili—Boris Akunin, a bestselling contemporary Russian author of