

his stories. Political connotations, Kucherskaia shows, imbued even the legends and parables Leskov stylized in imitation of various folk genres.

Perhaps the most revealing analysis in Kucherskaia's book is her interpretation of Leskov's renowned "legend"—"The Steel Flea"—which she reads as a disguised response to the assassination of Alexander II. Interpreted by Soviet and many post-Soviet readers as a eulogy for the savvy blacksmith Lefty, an embodiment of Russian patriotism, the story questions rather than celebrates his deeds. Leskov wrote it soon after the regicide to address, as Kucherskaia argues, the issues then haunting society: "why and for what the tsar was killed" (421). In the story, English blacksmiths have produced a tiny dancing steel flea to give as a gift to the Russian tsar. Lefty manages to shoe the flea to prove the superiority of Russian artisanship. His mission succeeds, but Lefty perishes and the flea is no longer able to dance. Kucherskaia reads this nearly absurdist plot as a mockery of Russian anti-British propaganda from the time of the Crimean War—an expression of official patriotism that, in Leskov's view, had damaged Russia and ushered in the revolutionary terrorism that ended Alexander II's life. This is an eye-opening reading of the canonical story.

Kucherskaia's book delivers far more than it promises. A famous fiction writer herself, she uses her belletristic talents to introduce readers to the diverse cultural contexts that propelled Leskov's creative impulses and animated his masterpieces. The life of poor provincial clergy, the cultural vibrancy of Kiev, the literary gatherings and spiritualist *séances* in St. Petersburg, religious movements across Russia, the debates about the Jewish question—these are but a few of the many subjects that Kucherskaia explores to reconstruct the background of Leskov's works. At times, such protracted excursions into the world around the writer seem too digressive, but most of them help Kucherskaia to unravel enigmatic aspects of his works and grasp the driving forces behind the changes in his views, including his break with the creed and practices of the church.

Performing a systematic examination of Leskov's life and literary corpus, this outstanding book identifies his salient features as a writer and traces the changing reception of his works during his lifetime and in the twentieth century, when his stories gradually made their way to the literary canon. This book is critically important reading for specialists in Russian culture and in nineteenth-century literature in particular.

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***The Culture of Samizdat: Literature and Underground Networks in the Late Soviet Union.*** By Josephine von Zitzewitz. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. xii, 248 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Figures. Tables. \$115.00, hard bound.  
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Samizdat, the underground Soviet practice of self-publication and distribution of texts, has received serious scholarly attention in recent years, enriching our understanding of the phenomenon. Much attention has been paid

to the texts themselves, whether their contents or their material form. *The Culture of Samizdat* offers an interesting new approach to samizdat by focusing in detail on the people involved, tracing their interconnections to explore their networks and foregrounding their voices through the use of interview and survey data.

Focusing primarily on the Brezhnev period and mainly (though not exclusively) on the Leningrad scene, Josephine von Zitzewitz offers detailed case studies of the various agents and groups involved in samizdat in order to show samizdat not just as a means of subverting the control of censorship, but also a vibrant and complex “alternative culture sphere” (4), albeit one that retained links to official Soviet culture and, in some ways, modelled on its structures.

Chapters 1 and 2 set the scene for the focused chapters that follow, with Chapter 1 offering a set of definitions and approaches to the topic. Von Zitzewitz emphasizes here that samizdat was a practice, a product, and a process at one and the same time, involving textual reproduction but also engaging shifting networks and groups. Chapter 2 explores the results of a detailed online survey that allowed participants in the samizdat culture to speak for themselves. This in itself is a highly valuable exercise, preserving voices that risk being lost or never excavated. While it would perhaps have been useful to offer more reflection on the potential risks of using this kind of source (memory being fallible), foregrounding the words of samizdat participants is nonetheless immensely interesting and useful to future scholars.

The following chapters zoom in on the agents who made up the samizdat networks. Particularly fascinating and original is Chapter 3, which studies the activities and positions of the hitherto anonymous typists who produced the texts. Heavily female, this group has an almost unique position within samizdat culture, with their professional and administrative positions seeming to keep them in some ways on the outside, although they incurred significant risks in their work. They were also subject to the oppressive gender norms of “official” culture, with their skilled work sometimes devalued or ignored. I could not help but feel that this “bottom up” approach that foregrounds the administrative and practical could be usefully applied to many other contexts and the author lays the ground for such developments here.

Chapter 4 moves on to discuss samizdat “libraries,” which did not, of course, exist as physical buildings, but as constant circulating sets of texts. Nonetheless, there seems to have been a surprising amount of record keeping (particularly given the risks of identifying consumers and producers), showing that samizdat production began to professionalize and even borrow from the practices of the official culture. Chapter 5 builds on this idea in its discussion of samizdat journal editors, tracing the development of journals into increasingly professional undertakings. Interestingly, this development also saw editors begin to borrow from the repertoires of the official “thick” journals, highlighting the often intertwined relationship between the underground and official culture. The author also highlights the relative importance of journals as a way of supporting the editors’ networks, with readers sometimes being a secondary consideration.

Chapter 6 and the conclusion take a more theoretical turn, assessing the relationship between official and samizdat culture. Defining samizdat

networks as “communities of practice” (149), von Zitzewitz emphasizes the social importance of samizdat for Soviet citizens not only to obtain new information or be free from the restricted, censored official literature, but as a means of establishing an alternative community for oneself. The complex interactions and links between samizdat agents (producers and readers) complicates the idea of samizdat as a so-called dissident phenomenon, and establishes it as particularly rooted in the late Soviet context. *The Culture of Samizdat* is immensely valuable not only for its preservation of the voices of participants in the underground publishing scene and use of personal testimony, but also for its focus on the agents and their role(s) within the system. This is a pathbreaking work that enriches our understanding not only of the late Soviet period, but of the concepts of the “underground” and “dissidence” in themselves.

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***All Future Plunges To The Past: James Joyce in Russian Literature.*** By José Vergara. NIU Series in Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies. xvi, 270 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Ithaca: Northern Illinois University Press, an imprint of Cornell University Press, 2021. \$54.95, hard bound.  
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José Vergara’s study makes a compelling case for persistent attention to the legacy of James Joyce within Russian literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. “Russian literature” here figures in its multiple valences—pre-Stalinist Soviet, émigré, post-Thaw Soviet, and post-Soviet—in a series of case studies in intertextual influence whose theoretical framework derives principally from Harold Bloom’s notion of the “anxiety of influence.” What Vergara convincingly shows is that for Russian writers in the twentieth century, Joyce figured as the pre-eminent modernist writer of prose, the standard to emulate, adapt, or rebel against. He “permeated the air of the time” (17) in the 1920s before becoming a figure writers were obliged to condemn then, essentially, “anathema” (73) in the Stalin era—only to resurface as a distant memory of modernist freedoms in the Thaw-era’s atmosphere of partial rehabilitation.

Vergara traces an abundance of reverberating Joycean motifs in Russian texts, but ultimately finds the central thread for his inquiry in the overtly Bloomian theme of fathers (he avoids the simplistic Freudian connotations), which appears in Joyce’s own *Ulysses* in Stephen’s project for rejecting his biological patrimony in order to create himself as a writer descended more essentially from Shakespeare. In the case of Yuri Olesha’s *Envy*, Vergara finds the work’s obsession with the themes of food, sex, and death to coalesce around a response to Joyce’s *Ulysses*, which comes to Olesha’s service as he navigates ambivalently among nostalgia for a literary past, intimations of mortality, and the emerging claims in his culture for “the Soviet non-biological family” (36). A still more obvious interlocutor with Joyce is Vladimir Nabokov, who actually met Joyce in Paris in the 1930s and, as Vergara argues, *competed* with him as a writer. Both *The Gift* and *Bend Sinister* portray poignant father-son