When does an academic inquiry into indeterminacy begin to follow an all too determined, all too narrow path? With *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, *Lolita*, *Pnin*, and *Pale Fire* in its crosshairs and plenty of implications for the entire canon, this study may be said to echo that Nabokovian character who queries: "don't you think" that "practically in all his novels he" tries "to express the fantastic recurrence of certain situations?" Metaliterary trickery aside, what is the price of our newly gained ability to distill a writer's body of work into a pithy definition of the ambition that guides it? What if the subtextual significance of a rare Russian term *vypolzina*, by way of Nabokov's aborted attempt to Russianize *Hamlet*, leads us nowhere else but to Aleksandr Pushkin's accidental prophecy recorded by Vladimir Dal′; what if the overlooked *absence* of a knight from John Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" as Nabokov knew it permits us to catch a glimpse of literary determinism in action?

To accept that Nabokov "creates wormholes. . .that make it impossible to determine what has. . .occurred in the apparently obvious plot line" (123) is to admit that that guiding light of so many affirmative elucidations of this writer's thought, his promise of "a synthesis of poignant artistic delight" (*Speak, Memory*), is a joke. Surprisingly, however, at this juncture Meyer demurs from engaging interpretations her reading implicitly challenges. Brian Boyd's *Nabokov's "Pale Fire": The Magic of Artistic Discovery*, with its determined explication of one instance of poignant synthesis is mentioned yet bypassed, missing a chance to respond to Boyd's counterargument to Meyer's own pathbreaking *Find What the Sailor Has Hidden: Vladimir Nabokov's "Pale Fire"* (1988).

Circular, not spiral-like, in its logic, Meyer's *Nabokov and Indeterminacy* explores and quite possibly exhausts the potential of a persistent and influential response to this writer. As such, and as a compendium of stimulating close readings and enlightening observations, this book is here to stay.

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***The Literary Field under Communist Rule***. Ed. Aušra Jurgutienė and Dalia Satkauskytė. Brighton, Mass.: Academic Studies Press, 2018. xvii, 239 pp. Notes. Index. $119.00, hard bound.
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Key to understanding this book is the term "the field," which builds off the theoretical language of Pierre Bourdieu. In Bourdieu's world, the field is a set of shared cultural conditions, which shape a writer's creative possibilities, but cannot be reduced to institutional control. To select the lens of *the field*—in the context of Soviet literature—is an important claim in and of itself. It is to propose that Soviet literature arose from a complex creative process involving multiple dynamics that include but also exceed the pressure of party guidelines and censorship. Others have made this core claim before, especially when discussing post-Stalin Soviet culture. Here one can feel the influence of Alexei Yurchak, whose work *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More* (2006) is cited in this volume. Yurchak's proposal that the very rote, ritualistic layer of public Soviet speech coexisted beside a level of play and creativity reappears in this volume through the notion of Aesopian or double-coded language. In the essay by Dalia Satkauskytė, Aesopian language in Soviet literature "provides for the possibility of heterodox thought" (23).

In distinction to Yurchak and other scholars, however, this volume goes beyond Russocentricism and asks how different lingual and geographic contexts shaped

literary dynamics in the Soviet era. Indeed, the articles show that we cannot merely speak of *the* Soviet literary field in the singular, but that each cultural habitus added different pressures and resources. Evgeny Dobrenko presents this argument in his essay, "Soviet Multinational Literature." He explores how Central Asian literatures developed along a very different trajectory than did east European literatures, because of their pre-Soviet traditions and because different aspects of eastern versus western culture were deemed valuable under Stalin. Comparisons among the different essays in this volume also support the notion of cultural particularity. Whereas Valentyna Kharkhun shows how Ukrainian writers activated postmodernist gestures like Bu-Ba-Bu (burlesque, balagan, and buffonada), irony, and punk invective in order to rebel against Soviet formulas, rebellion in Lithuania seems—according to the essays in this volume—to be almost always about defending national identity.

The discussion of Lithuanian literature deserves extra consideration, since over half of the volume is dedicated to the topic. These essays are valuable in that they inform the English-speaking world about Soviet Lithuanian writers, like Justinas Marcinkevičius and Eimuntas Nekrošius, whose work deserves to be better known outside the region. As a shortcoming, some of these essays reify an ethno-nationalistic historical narrative, without subjecting it to sufficient intellectual or ethical scrutiny. For instance, Dalia Satkauskytė describes the desirable, authentic, or subaltern topics of Lithuanian Soviet Literature—that which the writer seeks to express but must hide from the censors—as follows: "The nation, its history, Lithuanian statehood, the occupations of the country in 1940 and 1944, the postwar anti-Soviet resistance" (26). Given that Satkauskytė shows such subtlety of thought in other arenas, it is jarring to encounter "the nation" as an unproblematized staple of her language. Even more jarring, this compact national narrative erases the Holocaust, the Nazi occupation, and the role of some Lithuanian nationalists in these events as well, entrenching a timeline that skips from 1940 to 1944. In a similar vein, Donata Mitaitė writes an eloquent essay full of graceful translations, "The Experience of One Generation of Soviet Poets, Their Illusions and Choices," about a cohort of writers who grew up in the 1930s. Focusing on how these writers were "a product of pre-war Lithuania," her narrative moves from their memories of the 1930s to their negotiations with Soviet authorities after World War II. Mitaitė conducts interviews with several writers. Seemingly, a personal interview would provide an opportunity to foster self-questioning, to press cultural leaders on uncomfortable topics, rather than echoing euphemisms about "the spiritual trauma of the war and postwar period" (119). The avoidance of direct discussion of the Holocaust in these essays, and the position of Lithuanian writers towards it, is not a marginal factual oversight: it affects the very conceptual underpinnings of these essays, heroizing rather analyzing one's national history. Aušra Jurgutienė, another scholar in this volume, paraphrases the approach of one rebellious literary critic: "Good criticism should disable the fossilized conventions of aesthetics and disrupt the Soviet author's tranquil life" (151). Indeed, the essays on Lithuania could have done more to "disable the fossilized" literary-national narratives of their current environment. Especially in a volume that investigates the very notion of intellectual defiance, this feels like a missed opportunity.

There are some exceptions to this point of critique. Nerija Putinaitė summarizes a scene in the "atheist autobiography" of Jonas Ragauskas in which he remembers the "execution of Jews during the Second World War" (64). She could have taken this analysis further and clarified whether this startling segment falls under her rubric of "atheist propaganda," as Ragauskas's book becomes, as a whole, a valuable "deviation with respect to doctrinal truths" (77). The essay by Vilius Ivanauskas makes important strides towards modeling a multi-ethnic literary field. He dedicates a section of his essay to "Other Ethnic Groups" within Lithuania, Jewish, Polish,

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and Russian writers among them (49). It seems that this multi-ethnic awareness, challenging the homogeny of the nation-state, could have been better integrated into the rest of the volume.

The essay by Pavel Arsenev, "State of Emergency Literature: Varlam Shalamov vs. 'Progressive Humanity'" stands out, in that it broaches questions relevant far beyond the Soviet or Russian literary spheres. Arsenev explores literature that "establishes a state of emergency" (193), literature that strips down the rules of style and consumption in order to act as a material object, proof of its own existence. He weaves playfully through sentimentalism, realism, and literature of fact before arriving at the work of Varlam Shalamov, the Soviet convict, who attempts to turn his writing into "'life itself' taking on the features of *naked life* (Agamben)" (199). Arsenev writes in a poet's prose and I found myself captivated by his own "pragmatics" of writing. On the whole, this volume is a worthwhile read, in that it maps new literary territory and cultivates important conversations that deserve further debate.

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***The Filmmaker's Philosopher: Merab Mamardashvili and Russian Cinema***. By Alyssa DeBlasio. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019. ix, 203 pp. Appendix. Bibliography. Index. Figures. €75.00, hard bound.
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The Soviet philosopher Merab Mamardashvili has been called the "Georgian Socrates" and "a lighthouse of the Late Soviet intelligentsia." His dazzling lectures in the 1970–80s in the higher institutes of Moscow and Tbilisi attracted packed, standing room only auditoriums of academics and ordinary citizens alike. With his breathtaking intellectual range and exploration of borderline subversive ideas, his lectures became a beacon of free thought to which some "went the way people go to church" (2). While careful not to challenge official ideology too directly, Mamardashvili's emphasis on such ideas as individual freedom and consciousness, the transcendent, phenomenology, and the absurdity of the human condition, intrinsically challenged Soviet-Marxist orthodoxies and led to a marginalization of his published work and a nomadic lifestyle moving between various institutions in Moscow and Tbilisi before his death in 1990. For much of his career, however, Mamardashvili taught philosophy at the two leading film schools of the Soviet Union, the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) and the Higher Courses for Scriptwriters and Directors in Moscow, where he had a significant influence on the generation of late-Soviet and post-Soviet filmmakers whom he taught. The influence and philosophical affinity between Mamardashvili and this generation of filmmakers—what the author calls "the generation of Merab"—is the subject of Alyssa DeBlasio's thoughtful and well-written book.

In contrast to most studies of Russian cinema, which typically engage in analysis of particular themes or auteurs, DeBlasio takes the novel approach of crafting an intellectual history and philosophical portrait of a generation. Film here is discussed primarily as a window into philosophical thought rather than a formal study of the medium itself. In each of the book's seven chapters, DeBlasio examines a different philosophical concern of Mamardashvili and its influence on a particular film of a former student. With the exception of Andrei Zvyagintsev, who was merely influenced by Mamardashvili's writing and legacy, all of the directors discussed studied directly under the philosopher. Chapter 1 traces connections between Aleksandr Sokurov's early film *Demoted* (1980) and Mamardashvili's lectures on metaphysics and