era (175–76). This thoughtful, deeply researched and engagingly written study will be of particular interest to scholars of music history and piano pedagogy, as well as historians of Russian and Soviet culture.

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The Joyous Science: Selected Poems. By Maxim Amelin. Trans. Derek Mong and Anne O. Fisher. Buffalo, NY: White Pine Press, 2018. 190 pp. Notes. Bibliography. $18.00, paper.

Reported Speech. By Pavel Arseniev. Anastasiya Osipova, ed. New York: Cicada Press, 2018. 203 pp. $16.00, paper.
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"Poetry has enemies, both external and internal." Thus Maksim Amelin began his "Short Speech in Defense of Poetry," delivered upon being awarded the *Novyi mir* Prize in 1998. Poetic speech should be elevated above the vernacular; it must return to the rich stanza forms, rhetorical figures, and complex syntax of the past. "Only then will it become invulnerable, only then will it fulfill its high mission" (*Novyi mir* 4, 1999).

Twenty years and several prestigious awards later, Amelin has since softened his antagonism toward the literary establishment. In his first book, *Cold Odes* (*Kholodnye ody*, Symposium, 1996), he had carved out a niche for himself as a poet at odds with his age, responding to the linguistic tumult of the immediate post-Soviet years with a philologist's enthusiasm for neoclassical pastiche. His latest book, *Bent Speech* (*Gnutaia rech'*, B.S.G. Press, 2011), revealed a poet who had developed his personal quirks into a poetic platform. His signature style—the turgid bombast of eighteenth-century Pindaric odes, occasionally undercut by an ironic intrusion of modern colloquial speech—was, in fact, nothing less than an attempt to keep (Russian) poetry alive. As the book's title suggests, he does not strive for clarity; indeed, for Amelin, difficulty and artifice are the *condiciones sine quibus non* of poetry. If easy translatability is a virtue in the game of world literature, Amelin is a lone heretic professing the true faith. He has no followers.

It is all the more surprising, then, that Anglophone readers get a reliable impression of the poet in *The Joyous Science*, a selection of Amelin's poetry translated by Anne O. Fisher and Derek Mong. For nearly a decade, Fisher, a Slavist and accomplished translator, worked together with her husband, a poet and English professor, to produce these renderings, many of which have appeared in journals. As they explain in their foreword, the translators struck a compromise between their opposing priorities: Fisher produced a literal crib that catalogues "every last reference and connotation," which Mong then used to craft a poem that can "stand on its own English feet" (11).

The translators deserve praise for capturing Amelin's Baroque contrasts in theme and register: sprit and flesh, high and low. They have keen ears for the disarming epigrammatic punchline, a recurring feature of the poems selected for the book. The revelation at the end of "A Scribe's Confession" has a striking effect in English: "I'd pore through all I've copied out, imbibe / the wisdom in words, if only I could read" (95). Earlier in the poem, they show their sensitivity to the sound effects of Amelin's "Cyclopean speech," rendering *vremia neshchadno napisannogo pesok / khrupkii skvoz' krupnoe seet sito* as "Time sieves the sand of what's written / through the wire

mesh of a riddle." Yet for all its merits, this translation smooths out the awkwardly inverted syntax, as if parsing the text for the reader. This is just one example of many from *The Joyous Science* in which the translators' choices neglect Amelin's deliberately archaic speech. Stripped of his difficult, mannered style, Amelin comes across as rather glib, and, ultimately, unremarkable.

In their translation of the title poem, a mock epic tracing the mythical escapades of Iakov Brius in Petrine-era Russia, Fisher and Mong transpose Amelin's freely adapted classical hexameter into a "loose ballad form." In their foreword, they claim this decision "did what good form paradoxically does: it freed [them] to focus on other parts of the poem" (12). This choice turns "The Joyous Science" into an entertaining tall tale, but at the expense of much of Amelin's playful antiquarianism. The narrator's dismissive description of the old capital brims with condescension for the common folk, as if channeling the author's own prejudices: *Temnyi v Moskve narodets prozhivaet: kuptsy / gorodovye, vory, prochie—ikh prisluga,—/* khera *nikto ne mozhet otlichit' oto* rtsy (64). Fisher and Mong's narrator is less refined, more colloquial: "Lackwits live in Moscow—/ merchants, sentries, thieves, and servants—/ and none knows ass from elbow" (65). Every translation is an interpretation, but this one, unfortunately, neglects one of the most salient features of the poet's works, leaving readers with a slightly distorted view.

If Amelin mounts a defense of poetry against the threat of modernity by digging into the roots of tradition, Pavel Arseniev, in contrast, questions why it needs defending in the first place. In Arseniev's view, the formal and institutional constraints of Russian verse have rendered it useless in articulating the present moment. His is an *engagé* poetry that articulates a leftist critique of the myriad forms of social and political alienation in contemporary Russia. The translations found in *Reported Speech,* executed by a collective of translators overseen by editor Anastasiya Osipova, effectively recreate the urgency and relevance of his project.

In both his poetry and his political activism, Arseniev attempts to overcome the futility of traditional methods of resistance. Civic verse and revolutionary discourse are no longer as meaningful as they once were, having been co-opted and commodified by state and commercial interests. Arseniev's answer is to subvert the role of the poet by acting as a field reporter, providing snapshots and snippets of speech from everyday life. In "Mayakovsky for Sale" (24–25), a list of hyperlinks from an online advertisement for a used volume of the poet's collected works becomes a statement on the market's power to subsume everything into its domain. Another poem, "Translator's Note" (38–43), consists of lines excerpted from a Russian translation of a philosophical tract by Ludwig Wittgenstein. In their transformed context, these disconnected scraps take on new meanings, challenging the reader to reconsider traditional notions of authorship and originality.

Arseniev's innovations are informed by his concerns about the viability of political poetry. Perhaps a poet in Russia should be less than a poet after all. At times he anticipates critiques of his approach by assuming the voices of his detractors, as in "Forensic Examination," which reads like a report by a state prosecutor indicting the poet with inciting political extremism:

We shall see the writer
Has attempted
To voice his political
Views and convictions,
Clumsily camouflaging them
In aesthetic window dressing.
Its objective qualities,

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According to many experts,
Are surely
Much poorer
Than if he had minded his own business
And simply written poems,
Looking for his own style
And his own place on the literary scene (45).

A similar satirical wit appears in "Poema Americanum," in which a visit to a west coast university prompts the poet to reflect on his own marginality: "in time you will stop being a person / whose acquaintance is sought out by the slavic studies professors / wishing to appear more radical" (133). In this poem, as throughout the entire volume, the translation deftly captures the contrasts between a multitude of voices and perspectives, allowing Arseniev's multifaceted authorial presence to appear starkly on the page.

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Devastation and Laughter: Satire, Power, and Culture in the Early Soviet State, 1920s–1930s. By Annie Gérin. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. xvii, 255 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Plates. Photographs. $60.00, hard bound.
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This valuable volume addresses the use of satire—as rhetorical mode, aesthetic technique, and ideological weapon—within early Soviet public culture, especially in the visual arts (advertising and poster art), cinema, theater, and the circus. Over six chapters preceded by a theoretically oriented introduction, Annie Gérin follows Soviet satire from its birth in post-revolutionary fervor, through its troubled adolescence in the 1920s, to its dissolution in a "humor" culture aligned with the dictates of Socialist Realism. Deploying both contemporary and historical theories of the comic, Gérin makes a persuasive case for the continuity of Russian humor culture through the centuries.

Underpinning her analysis is a deep engagement with the ideas of Anatolii Lunacharskii—erstwhile God-Builder, Old Bolshevik, and People's Commissar of Enlightenment from 1917 to 1929. Initially granted a great deal of latitude, Lunacharaskii was gradually pushed aside as Stalin consolidated power. Following his death in 1933, his Commission for the Study of Satirical Genres, created three years earlier as part of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, was shuttered. His magnum opus on satire remained unfinished, and in his absence, the specific vision of Soviet satire he had developed went into decline.

Gérin's in-depth treatment of Lunacharskii's theoretical works offers insight into the similarities between pre- and post-revolutionary humor culture in Russia. Russian rulers, in fact, had been co-opting satire for centuries before the 1917 revolutions. As Gérin points out, the Bakhtinian carnivalesque was never restricted to the "realm of the popular" in Russia; Peter the Great, for instance, was a master of weaponizing laughter against the disenfranchised as a means of cementing his authority. (22) After Peter, Russian popular genres like that *chastushka* and *lubok* became "didactic instruments and political tools" rather than expressions of popular sentiment (23). By the nineteenth century, satire had returned to the people—at least, to a small subset

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