

***The Russia Reader: History, Culture, Politics.* Ed. Adele Barker and Bruce Grant. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010. xiii, 769 pages. 100 illustrations (15 color). 3 Maps. Suggestions for Further Reading. Index. \$29.95, paper; \$99.95, cloth.**

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*The Russia Reader*, the editors write, “takes as its subject not just a place, but an idea, or better, a set of ideas that have long traveled by aid of the imagination of Russians and their observers over many years” (5). The Russia surveyed here is one that reveals the complex layers of history that have accumulated over time and the voices that Barker and Grant marshal in telling Russia’s history are engaging and innovative ones.

*The Russia Reader* contains 16 sections that delve into topics such as “From Kyiv through Muscovy,” “A Changing Countryside,” and “Life under Advanced Socialism.” The organization is mostly chronological, but also includes sections devoted to thematic topics such as reforms and revolutions, Siberia, and the Caucasus. In the first section, “Icons and Archetypes,” the readings provide a sense for how Russians have attempted to define their multicultural and multiconfessional space over time. Aleksandr Blok’s 1918 poem “The Scythians” opens the section. It is followed by Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s famous 1880 speech on Russian distinctiveness delivered at the opening of the Pushkin Monument in Moscow, Aleksei Khomiakov’s 1854 Slavophilic poem “To Russia,” and Aleksandr Herzen’s 1842 “Moscow and Petersburg.” Selections from Andreas Kappeler’s historical essay on the construction of differences between ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, folklore on Russian banyas that Vladimir Vysotsky used in his songs, and an excerpt from Susan Buck-Morss’s 2000 book *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* round out the section. Barker and Grant write in their short introduction that these readings furnish illustrations of famous Russian archetypes while also undoing them. Blok’s poem famously suggested that Russians are Asians who watch the West “gloating, through our slit-squint eyes” (13). Dostoevsky, just as famously, argued that “the mission of the Russian people is certainly all-European and worldwide” (18). Khomiakov urged readers to “Arise, O thou my native country, For thy brethren’s sake! God summons thee Beyond the waves of angry Danube” (20). In these three short selections, readers get a confusing yet profound mix of opinions on what it means to be “Russian”: Asian, European, or uniquely spiritual? These are precisely the debates that have raged for nearly two centuries on Russian nationhood and the editors have captured them well. This section highlights a technique the editors employ throughout: using disparate accounts to explore important, well-known issues associated with Russia’s history and identity.

The section on The Thaw, to take one more example, begins with Yevgeny Yevtushenko’s personal account of hearing about Stalin’s death and then moves to excerpts from

Khrushchev's 1956 Secret Speech. We can learn about the "sort of general paralysis" that came over the country after March 5, 1953 and how Yevtushenko "will never forget going to see Stalin's coffin" (537). The reader then immediately hears Khrushchev's exhortation to "consider this matter seriously and analyze it correctly in order that we may preclude any possibility of a repetition, in any form whatever, of what took place during the life of Stalin" (542). These two pieces are followed by Anna Zakharova's unpublished letter to *Izvestiia* defending her time spent working as a prison-camp official and criticizing Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. She writes that she "was angered to the depths of my soul" while reading it, for she worked "with what actually are the dregs of society—criminals" (546). Her letter is followed by Giuseppe Boffa's account of arriving in Moscow in 1959 as an Italian newspaper correspondent and how he experienced the Thaw. It is followed by Boris Shragin's 2000 reminiscence about taking a group of tourists to visit Aleksandr Gerasimov's art studio in 1957, during the All-World Youth Festival held that year in Moscow. Shragin describes the paintings as "shit" in French and a Japanese tourist asks him, "What was it that opened your eyes?" (562). Shragin uses the question to discuss the long-term process of de-Stalinization. Bulat Okudzhava's song "The Last Trolley" (1957), which contains a lyric that expresses how a midnight Moscow train "picks up everyone who in the night has suffered" only for the passengers within to "come to my aid" ends the section. "The Thaw" section captures a second aspect of the volume: while the Secret Speech and Yevtushenko's views are well known, Zakharova's letter and Shragin's account are translated for the first time. Both provide fresh, interesting, and challenging perspectives to our picture of the Thaw.

It is not an easy task to put together an overview of Russia over the centuries told through primary texts. Barker and Grant have succeeded in creating a history that can be read from beginning to end or through selected sections. In the end, the essays excerpted here are those written by and for Russians yet they also, as the editors rightly note, reach out to "the traveler who values considered insight and to the scholar and student who value pleurably clear writing" (7). *The Russia Reader* should interest any such traveler looking for a rich introduction into the history, culture, and politics of Russia.