***Haunted Dreams: Fantasies of Adolescence in Post-Soviet Culture***. By Jenny Kaminer. NIU Series in Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies. Ithaca: Northern Illinois University Press (imprint of Cornell University Press), 2022. xvi, 204 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. $44.95, hard bound.

Jenny Kaminer's excellent new book, *Haunted Dreams*, turns our attention to fantasies of adolescence in post-Soviet culture by assembling an archive of literature, film, drama, and television in which the adolescent—that awkward state between childhood and adulthood—is made visible as a cultural construct. Kaminer's earlier work, *Women with a Thirst for Destruction: The Bad Mother in Russian Culture* (Northwestern University Press, 2014), broke new ground in its focus on the tropes of motherhood and maternity in Russian culture and the privileged position that motherhood occupies in the Russian cultural imagination. Kaminer's range as a scholar in *Haunted Dreams* is similarly notable: in the introduction, she moves easily through different kinds of Soviet myths, fantasies, and anxieties about youths, from the sacrifices of young heroes Pavlik Morozov and Zoia Kosmodem′ianskaia, to anxieties about children's homelessness and delinquency after the Russian Civil War and again after World War II, to adolescent state-sanctioned violence, both during the Stalin-era and in Vladimir Putin's Russia. She also attends to western scholarship on youths, which influenced Russian and Soviet educators, as well as the policies, decrees, and pronouncements of the state, and the larger cultural conversations taking place around the idea of the wayward (or, heroic, or sacrificial) teenager. Kaminer may be the first scholar to focus specifically on adolescents: while a number of scholars have written about the child in Russian and Soviet culture, their contributions generally stop where Kaminer begins: the youth (age 13–18) as a separate and valid category of analysis, a temporal gap of sorts, between the alterity of childhood and the recognition of the fully formed adult; a period of subjective flux that allows us to project fantasies of heroism, violence, sexuality, and innocence unto their changing selves.

As Kaminer shows, the "adolescent turn" (3) in contemporary Russian cultural production has its roots in the broader "romance with adolescence" (2) of Russian writers, dramatists, and filmmakers, who repeatedly turned to the adolescent protagonist in exploring the fissures running through contemporary Russian society. *Haunted Dreams* explores how the adolescent hero has become "a locus for a myriad of anxieties, as well as a background for the projection of fervent hopes, focusing specifically on the tumultuous years since the end of the Soviet experiment" (2–3). While numerous Russian writers took on the challenge of writing about children and childhood, the literature of the adolescent owes its beginnings to Fedor Dostoevskii's 1875 novel *Podrostok* (The Adolescent), narrated from the first-person perspective of its hero, nineteen-year-old Arkadii Dolgorukii. As Kaminer notes, Dostoevskii was perhaps the first author in the Russian literary tradition to explore societal fissures through the prism of an adolescent protagonist, setting his novel against the backdrop of pronounced historical change: the multiple upheavals occurring in Russia in the wake of the emancipation of the serfs and the Great Reforms, as well as industrial growth and the influx of capitalist values. In this way, Dostoevskii employed the figure of the adolescent to "represent Russia's own modernization, the troubling

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coexistence of the old and the new" (3) in a rapidly evolving society, anticipating the post- Soviet writers, dramatists, and filmmakers discussed in Kaminer's study.

In her book, Kaminer singles out the different fantasies of adolescence at work in contemporary Russian culture whose roots lie in the Soviet experience. Her study is focused around the categories of sacrifice, violence, temporality, and gender and the body, as they initially appeared in Soviet literature and film and their mutations in the post-Soviet culture. A close analysis of the different fantasies surrounding adolescence in contemporary Russian culture illuminates important aspects of the lingering influence of the Soviet heritage into the post-Soviet years, creating, what Kaminer terms "chronotopes of adolescence" (12). As she points out, the Russian language encodes this teleology linguistically, with the word for adolescent, podrostok, deriving from the verb "to grow (toward)" (*podrastat'* or *podrasti*), emphasizing progress rather than stasis. Soviet culture's relationship to adolescence was unstable and varied between celebrating their heroism and sacrifices to fearing their unbridled passion and capacity for violence. And yet, there was also an "invisibility of adolescence" (14) from official Stalin-era culture, as Catriona Kelly has detailed, noting, for example, that portraiture featured either children before puberty, admissible because of their proportionality, or young adults, often dressed and coiffed as if they were much older.

Moreover, as Kaminer points out, gender (or sexual difference) was also largely elided: in both Soviet and western discourse, the "adolescent" was largely coded as male, with the now thriving discipline of "girlhood studies" only taking shape in the 1980s and 1990s along with a renewed approach to girls as agents of their own fates. In Soviet children's literature of the 1920s and 30s, children were depicted as essentially genderless, with the same qualities—"strength, agility, long legs, and strong hands" (14)—valorized for both boys and girls. Reflecting broader trends in Soviet literature as a whole, masculinity assumed preference over femininity, and androgyny became the ideal. While these texts emphasized physicality and masculinity for boys, their uninterrupted readiness to fight if necessary, girls were presented as having boyish figures, short hair, and a lack of interest in their outward appearance. When they were allowed to dream, these fictional girls fantasized about being boys. And while in post-Soviet culture, the image of the athletic, militarized female lost its dominance in literature and visual culture for adults, the taboo on any mention of puberty or adolescent sexuality ensured a longer life for the androgynous ideal in culture produced for young readers.

*Haunted Dreams* explores the Soviet legacy of interweaving adolescence with violence, heroism, and self-sacrifice, and the temporal and gendered contours of this linkage. Chapter 1 focuses on Svetlana Vasilenko's 1998 novella *Durochka* (Little Fool) and Anna Melikian's 2007 film *Rusalka* (Mermaid), considering the specter of the teenage female martyr as exemplified by the death of the eighteen-year-old Zoia Kosmodem'ianskaia, whose courage in the face of torture and murder by the Nazis continues to haunt two works of contemporary Russian culture. Chapter 2 looks at Anna Starobinets's 2005 story *Perekhodnyi vozrast* (An Awkward Age), in which a young boy is colonized by ants and forced to commit unspeakable crimes for the sake of his "queen," along with Marina Liubakova's 2007 film *Zhestokost'* (Cruelty), and the 2016 film *Uchenik* (The Student) (dir. Kirill Serebrennikov, and the earlier dramatic production upon which it was based). For Kaminer, the three works recast the myth of heroic adolescence in the horror genre, foregrounding the teenager as the locus of an array of anxieties, ranging from the instability and vulnerability of the human body, to the preeminence of materialistic values and consumer culture, to the disappearance of moral codes. Each reconfigures the "romance with adolescence" into a distinctive vision of adolescence as nightmare.

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Chapter 3 considers the plays of three young, twenty-first century Russian dramatists—Vasily Sigarev, Iury Klavdiev, and Iaroslava Pulinovich—which together develop a "chronotope of adolescence" (23), in each case capturing their teenage protagonists on the edge of transformation from the innocence of childhood to the corruption (and perversion) of adulthood. Finally, in Chapter 4, Kaminer turns her attention to a controversial and highly popular television serial, *Shkola* (School, dir. Valeria Gai Germanika), which aired on state-run television in 2010; a show so scandalous it prompted President Putin himself to admonish the Russian public against falling victim to "hysteria." *School* takes place in a Moscow high school and follows the lives of one class, along with their teachers, over the course of several months, across sixty-nine episodes. Its documentary realist style (handheld camera, frequent reliance on close ups, use of confined and cramped spaces) as well its focus on sex, drugs, alcohol, and other transgressions, seemed to speak to the continuing disintegration of Russian society in its post-Soviet guise, its irrecoverable loss of values of family, education, and society. In her conclusion, Kaminer looks briefly at Russian media's representation of the climate activist Greta Thunberg, whose presence and speech to the United Nations "successfully united Russians from across the ideological spectrum, from pro-Putin to anti-Putin, from conservatives to liberals to libertarians" (128), in a moment of shared loathing. As Kaminer notes, the heated negative Russian response to Thunberg suggests that the "romance with adolescence," a belief in the extraordinary abilities of youth either to stabilize or to undermine society, has clearly survived into the present.

*Haunted Dreams* opens up a new Slavic field: adolescent studies. Moreover, Kaminer's ease in bringing together different disciplines—literature, theatre, cinema, and television—into a coherent whole, as well as her ability to work across centuries, allows her to keep the "big picture" in mind, even as she is providing excellent examples of close reading, synthesis, and analysis. This book is valuable for the contribution it makes to our understanding of the roots of contemporary Russian / Russophone culture in its current state of disintegration.

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