painfully aware of the profoundly ambiguous, contradictory nature of the Soviet project. As Scott writes, Magnitogorsk was built both “with a disregard for individuals and a mass heroism seldom paralleled in history.”

In this regard, Scott’s book stands at a kind of a temporal mid-way point in the literature of what might be called the moral history of the Soviet Union: it looks back to the short stories of Isaac Babel’s Konarmiia, which in the 1920s explored the gray areas of the October Revolution in ways unmatched by any prose writer, and forward to the quasi-journalism of A. Siniavskii/A. Tertz, whose Trial Begins explicitly pursued the very question of means and ends that underlies Behind the Urals. Like Gedali, the old rabbi in Babel’s stories, Scott’s book leaves one pondering the “wonderful” revolution that cannot help but kill because it is wonderful.

While Scott’s book has earned its broad appeal, the memoirs of Zara Witkin, notwithstanding the outstanding editorial research by Michael Gelb, will likely satisfy a far more restricted audience. Witkin, the son of Russian-Jewish immigrants, achieved considerable success in Los Angeles as a construction engineer. (He in fact supervised the building of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple and the Hollywood Bowl.) His decision to work in the Soviet Union grew most immediately out of a desire to meet the beautiful Soviet film star, Emma Tsesarskaia, with whose image he had fallen in love in the City of Angels. After arriving in the Soviet Union, Witkin recounts his heroic efforts to meet and court Tsesarskaia and simultaneously disseminate modern construction methods. Habitually irritated by bureaucratic ineptitude, not to mention the absence of first-class accommodations on trains and in hotels, Witkin is ultimately foiled in work and love; he blames both failures on the “dark forces” unleashed by Stalinism. In other, more self reflective hands, the interconnections of the personal and political have provided rewarding insights. Regrettably, Witkin’s ruminations rarely go beyond a self-serving song of himself. For those interested in the memoir literature of the 1930s, nevertheless, this volume, with the thorough introduction by Gelb, provides useful information.

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In the late 1980s, as a result of the rapid social changes in Soviet society, scholars were bewildered by what topics to study and how to study them. Hence, much scholarship in Soviet studies focused on similar themes, themes which were possible to study either because data was available or because investigation of such topics was allowed by the Soviet government. In retrospect, it is clear that in the glasnost’ era, scholars in the Soviet field were slow off the mark, missing many new research opportunities because of widespread skepticism about the
reality of changes in Soviet society. Even as late as 1989, many still clung to the myth of Soviet Union as a “closed” society which could not be penetrated even by the mostimaginative of Western scholars. Soviet studies “as usual” trudged on while glasnost’ and perestroika marched triumphantly forward, forever changing Russian history. Stephen Catkins research was an exception to all of this. He was bold enough to go to Magnitogorsk, a closed city, to study its way of life. The result of his trip to Magnitogorsk is this finely detailed overview of life in a typical Russian city. It is a book which will stand as a classic precisely because it opened the eyes of the Western scholarly community to two important facts: that glasnost’ was for real and that the Soviet Union was no longer “closed.” In this respect, Kotkin is to be commended as a pioneer.

Kotkins book relies on a documentary method to present the story of glasnost’ and perestroika from the “inside.” The book covers a wide range of topics: economic restructuring; the rise of cultural pluralism; the attitudes of Russians toward their past, present and future; and changes in political procedures. From an empirical standpoint the book represents a rich source of information from what is, arguably, the most important source of all — the minds of the people who make history and who are made by history. What is best about Kotkins account is that it relies almost exclusively on people’s thoughts, feelings and observations. This is refreshing in a field which has always accepted newspapers and journals unproblematically as data.

In spite of this empirical depth and richness, though, the book suffers from a lack of methodological rigor. Kotkin’s ability to get into Magnitogorsk and talk with its people is impressive. Yet it is a shame that Kotkin did not draw on any of the methodological strategies from sociology or anthropology in order to provide a more sophisticated interpretation of Magnitogorsk society and culture. Of course, Kotkin is an historian and historians are not obligated to be sociologists or anthropologists. Yet the center of the latter disciplines is comprised of studies of communities and cities. One wonders if the account presented in the book might have been more sophisticated if Kotkin had taken some time to learn some elementary aspects of ethnographic fieldwork.

The lack of methodological rigor in the book can be excused because the stories which Kotkin relates do provide a detailed overview of the life of Magnitogorsk. What is less excusable — at least from an academic standpoint — is the overtly journalistic quality of the book. Kotkin’s is not an academic book. There are no references or footnotes. There is no need to document the thoughts and feelings of the individuals whose lives comprise the book. But the sophisticated historian will be disappointed by the lack of any references to the history of Magnitogorsk, the history of Russian urbanization, or the more general literature on social reform in late socialist society. Now that Russia is open to practically any kind of research, regardless of the discipline of the researcher, what is needed more than anything in Russian studies is a movement away from the journalistic type of history and political science of which Kotkin’s book is a prime example. Kotkin no doubt is a master of this particular locale, but