almost exclusively on Russian primary sources. Numerous Western studies recommend themselves (those by Mike McFaul and Marcia Weigle, for example). Kosach’s fine study of Orenburg could benefit from Mark Bassin’s work on the construction of Russian geographical self-understanding. Closer proof-reading would eliminate the not infrequent mistakes and typos. The illustrations should be more closely integrated with the argumentation and analysis.

This is an interesting and substantial collection of articles. What it is not, however, is a post-Soviet primer on post-modernism. While the oppositions evident in the topics discussed above fit the current popular framework of conflicting “constructed identities,” for the most part this interpretive matrix can either be replaced by older interpretive frameworks with no less, and probably more, explanatory power or is not actually practiced in the articles. The arguments about “constructed identity” by Schleifman and Holquist could just as easily be recast as pursuit of economic self-interest by locality, center, and Cossackry respectively in an explanatory matrix that predates Marx. Engel presents a case for inclusion of women, using post-modernist terminology – “problematic the narrative” – but otherwise not distinguished from longstanding arguments of feminists. The articles on the Orthodox Church and multiparty politics are straightforward historical narratives with barely a nod to post-modernism. Kosach’s article most comfortably assumes the contours of post-modernist argumentation. This is not accidental. The post-modernist approach works best when its subject is un-self-conscious. In both Mozhaisk and with the Cossackry folk are pursuing the time-honored practice of naked self-interest, so pointing out that the emperor has no clothes is not particularly revelatory. That does not mean that post-modernism is inapplicable to either Mozhaisk or Cossackry, but it does mean that the sources utilized should come from ordinary people who are un-self-conscious representatives of the Mozhaisk sacredotal vision or the Cossack claim for ethnicity.

This collection is valuable because of the content of the articles, and it would have been better had it not been stretched to fit a post-modernist mold.

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Elena Hellberg-Hirn’s interpretive essay on Russianness both stresses the irrational elements in Russian culture and embraces the irrational as the key to understanding it. The “Russian Idea,” she explains, “is emotional, not rational. Poetic, not prosaic” (p. 247). As an emigre looking at Russia from without while being called upon to explain her native culture, Hellberg-Hirn insistently and explicitly places personal intuition before scholarly analysis as the source of her authority on the subject. Her approach to Orthodoxy is characteristic: “I am not concerned with the competing scholarly interpretations of historical data and documents. . . . My focus is on common ideas about Orthodoxy that are deeply embedded in the contemporary secular Russian consciousness: mine, for example” (p. 81). A closer scrutiny of historical
data might have spared her such mistakes as attributing the founding of the Russian Academy of Sciences to Catherine the Great (p. 46).

Not only the irrational and the personal define her approach and conclusions. A distaste for the constraints of any defining structure equally informs her methodology. As a methodological principle, Hellberg-Hirn proclaims that “an awareness of the impending disorder is no excuse for reducing complicated matters to simplicity by an over-ordered interpretation... Rather, I propose to offer it to you with all its uncertainties: not as the final word, but as an invitation to reflect on the polymorphous, evasive nature of national dreams, myths and utopias” (p. 195).

Hellberg-Hirn betrays her putative freedom from scholarly constraints through her equally frequent references to post-modernist theory, with Foucault especially evident, and references to recent trends in culture studies. Even with this effort to place her work in a recognizable scholarly framework, Soil and Soul reads in the main like a combination of lecture notes by a Russian emigre teaching an introductory course on Russian culture, a guidebook for tourists, and the transcript of a monologue at a kitchen table in Moscow—complete with obligatory recitation of beloved poems and lyrics of popular songs. This is a performance.

There is, as the author warns, little that is new in this book. She has drawn on existing studies to piece together her own guide to Russia, acknowledging that “Russianness is created not only by what is encoded in the national supertext, but also by what is hidden or left out. By the same token, this applies to my own presentation as well. Out of the multitude of rejected, forgotten or, to me, unknown fragments of fact and fiction, another picture of Russianness might emerge, a different collage, or bricolage, one that is perhaps more comprehensive and comprehensible” (p. 253). The bricoles she has gathered to make up her collage (like a display in the emblematic glass-front cases Svetlana Boym has identified as the individualized narratives composed by Soviet communal apartment dwellers) are familiar to any student of Russia.

The question is whether this book might serve as a good introductory text for students first encountering Russian culture. Might it be a successor to Billington’s The Icon and the Axe, which almost no student of this generation has the willingness to read because of its size? Certainly its organization lends itself well to a standard Russian culture course, opening with the issues of space, territory and empire, and concluding with reveries on the meaning of Russianness and nationhood at the end of the twentieth century. Hellberg-Hirn has also incorporated some recent scholarship, such as Wortman’s Scenarios of Power; Likhachev’s Reflections on Russia; Hilton’s Russian Folk Art; and the recent anthologies focusing on women in Russian culture edited by Goscilo, Holmgren, Costlow, Sandler, and Vowles. There are glaring absences in her sources, however. Freeze, Kollmann, Engelstein, Wagner, Bethea, and Valkenier are among the most obvious for the relevance of their research to the topics she has chosen.

Two of her themes serve as useful entry points to understanding Russia: the contradictory impulse toward unfettered “intoxication by total freedom” (whose expression may be binge drinking or reckless driving) and the embrace of concrete constraints such as national borders, fences, walls, “the control of entrances and openings” (p. 232); and consistent with this contradiction, the insistence in Russian history