Platonov – the subject of the final two full-length chapters – simultaneously undertakes and undermines the creation of an all-male comradely society in his novel-length Chevengur. Here the architects of the all-male utopia must face up to the negative consequences of the creation of a society based on the principle of gender exclusivity. Their attempt to exclude women from the New World backfires; what emerges is a collective organized around ideas of both sexual difference (men are haunted by the absent “other”) and the pre-revolutionary patriarchal family.

Finally, in his concluding chapter, Borenstein moves into a discussion of the fiction written during the period of Stalin’s first five-year plan. His emphasis adds a new twist to the now familiar story of the re-emergence of traditional values under Stalin’s tutelage. Women at the close of the decade are freed from the constraints inherent in the striving for a gender exclusive utopia; they return as active agents in their own destinies, albeit in their double role as workers and wives. By this time a masculine utopia no longer seemed viable and femininity no longer elicited hostility. Instead, classical paternalism returns with Stalin as the father.

Although for a long time historians have written about whether or how the Bolsheviks attempted to create equality between the sexes, scholars have now begun to look again at this Soviet project by focusing on the emergence of a distinctive Soviet masculinity or masculinities, from the overtly masculine project of Soviet state building to the creation of the “Soviet closet” in later decades. Whereas recently there has been a consensus forming, which highlights the continuity of patriarchal values (however transformed) before and after October, Borenstein finds an emergent manhood freed from old patriarchal constraints but plagued by new understandings of comradeship. In fact, Borenstein’s most significant contribution to the scholarly conversation about gender in the early years of Bolshevik power resides in his challenge of the recent emphasis on continuity. By turning our attention to the emergence of fratriarchy, Borenstein marks a significant shift in literary ideology. To make this claim Borenstein invokes Sigmund Freud and John Remy, who separate patriarchy from “male domination”. Rather than the patriarchal assumption about the “supremacy of the father,” which reserves a marginal place for women, an assumption about the primary relationship being among “young, unmarried men” – or fratriarchy – underpins revolutionary social relations (p. 22). Overall, this extremely complicated (too complicated to do justice to here) and often witty study of Soviet fiction is a provocative and welcome addition to the literary and gender history of Russia’s first revolutionary decade.

Rebecca Friedman

Florida International University


The second book in Evgeny Dobrenko’s meticulously researched study of the genesis of Socialist Realism, The Making of the State Writer presents a fascinating and convincing thesis about the literary movement’s objective. As the author argues in
his first monograph, *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), Socialist Realism was not aimed at producing its much studied and often derided exemplary texts, but more importantly at reforging the human material—readers and writers—that consumed and produced the Socialist Realist canon. Through an impressive and painstaking examination of mass literature, journalism, and memoirs spanning the last two hundred years, Dobrenko makes a solid case for Socialist Realism’s successfully realized goal of transforming the Russian writer from an outsider peasant or raznochintsy into a compliant self-censoring citizen in the hands of the Soviet state. Along the way, Dobrenko lays to rest the long-standing debate about the literary movement’s imposition “from above,” as opposed to its evolution “from below,” by affirming both sources. In *The Making of the State Writer*, Dobrenko vividly illustrates how Socialist Realism arose out of the shared ideological and aesthetic vision of the mass writer and the Soviet state.

Dobrenko’s study builds upon the ground-breaking work of scholars such as Katerina Clark, Boris Groys, and Hans Günther, all of whom have demonstrated Socialist Realism’s uncanny amalgam of the avant-garde impulse towards a Gesamtkunstwerk with a popular literary aesthetic. However, Dobrenko focuses his attention on an unusual body of material that has been virtually absent from previous scholars’ studies of Socialist Realism. Instead of examining the “the products of this culture (the canon),” Dobrenko takes on “the process of production” (p. xv) as seen in the immense corpus of second-rate writing that not only anticipated the movement, but also constituted the bulk of its output. His study begins with an examination of “natural Russian poets” (p. 7) of the early nineteenth century, who prefigure Russian radical poets of the 1860s, the poets of revolutionary populism, and the autodidactic “Surikov poets” of the century’s end. By showing Socialist Realism’s roots in the writings and biographies of pre-revolutionary mass poets, Dobrenko identifies the sources of “Russian mass graphomania” (p. 2) and illustrates clearly the preexisting cultural impulse not simply to write, but more important to become a writer, which figures at the center of his study.

After setting the stage with a survey of pre-revolutionary poetry, Dobrenko tackles the complex and ever-changing cultural scene of the 1920s in the three central chapters of *The Making of the Soviet Writer*. He traces several key organizations and movements of the 1920s, which allowed for the consolidation of Socialist Realism as the country’s official literary movement at the first congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934. Of primary interest to the author are the journal Young Guard (Molodaia gvardiia) and the writers who gathered around it; the mass movement of workers, village, and military correspondents; the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP); and the call of shock workers into literary production at the decade’s end. Dobrenko charts the rapid twists and turns in the discussion of how best to recruit and train new cadres of Soviet writers, demonstrating how party-minded literature of the 1920s came to replace pre-revolutionary political literature, as well as how the “voice of the masses [which] can then be reproduced only via authority’s coding of it” (p. 114) supplanted the outsider’s voice in Russian literature.