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## Review: *Russian Science Fiction Literature and Cinema: A Critical Reader*

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heritage learners. This volume, in addition to honoring Olga Kagan's legacy, will help a broad audience of school administrators, foreign language curriculum designers and instructors, and researchers better understand the needs and strengths of heritage learners, as well as what foreign language programs can do to attract this group of language learners, potentially leading to an increase in the breadth of offerings in foreign language programs.

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**Banerjee, Anindita, ed. 2018. *Russian Science Fiction Literature and Cinema: A Critical Reader*. Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press. Index. 380 pages.**

Anindita Banerjee's critical reader provides excellent insight into the development of science fiction literature and cinema in Russia from the early nineteenth century all the way to the mid-2000s. The book features four sections, each of them comprising four articles by different authors, and an introduction from the editor. The latter provides a brief but brilliant overview of Russian *nauchnaia fantastika*, or "scientific fantasy," positioning it within the context of literary, social, and scientific life in the USSR, as well as outlining the existing scholarship on the topic. From the very beginning, when the genre first emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, through the entire twentieth century, and to its current metamorphoses, the author claims, "science fiction in Russia has been cocreated and coproduced by an astonishingly large community that included scientists and engineers, philosophers and policymakers, social and political activists, journalists, artists, illustrators and, above all, consumers" (xiv). Following this claim, the critical reader broadens the borders of the science fiction canon by adding essays about science and its perception in the USSR, the impact of electrification, cosmic societies, Soviet eugenics, media coverage of spaceflight, and many others. Together, these essays create an amazingly detailed picture and demonstrate that science fiction in Russia has never been limited to a few well-known names, but rather presents a complex literary and social phenomenon, heavily influencing everyday life and being influenced by

that same life. The structure of the book and close thematic and/or chronological connections between articles allow for a progressive complication of the material and gradually introduce the readers to an even more detailed perception of the genre and the period in general.

The four sections of the book deal with broad chronological periods and walk the readers through prerevolutionary time, the “roaring 20s”, the era of Stalin, and the Thaw, right into contemporary Russia. By carefully choosing the material, Banerjee manages to also incorporate thematic division and balance “the perspectives of the telescope and the microscope, interspersing articles that provide rich overviews of particularly instrumental times and themes with those that provide nuanced analyses of authors, directors and works that are most likely to be encountered in the classroom and revisited for pleasure” (xv), as she puts it in the introduction. Indeed, each section of the book starts with a broad and detailed overview of corresponding time period, which allows even the most inexperienced reader to get a clear idea of the major events of Russian literary, cinematic, and social life. Among these overviews are Darko Suvin’s pioneering “Utopian Tradition of Russian Science Fiction” (1971), Dominic Esler’s essay positioning science fiction of the 1920s within the political and social context (2010), and Elana Gomel’s overview of Russian postmodernism (2013). Extremely interesting and accessible, this collection fulfills its main goal by providing the reader with major names, titles, and events necessary to navigate the vast sea of the Russian science fiction and cinema. Thus, by the end of each introductory essay, the reader is prepared for the following articles, which are often focused on a particular author or theme, such as a closer look at professor Preobrazhenskii in Bulgakov’s *Heart of a Dog*, synecdoche in Zamiatin’s *We*, or fairy-tale paradigm in the Strugatskys’ science fiction. At least one of the essays in each section is dedicated to science fiction films from *Aelita* (1924) by Iakov Protazanov to *Night Watch* (2004) and *Day Watch* (2005) by Timur Bekmambetov. Since the period between the 1930s and 1950s is not particularly rich in science fiction books, a decent part of the third section is dedicated to the cinema. Following the telescopic-microscopic approach, this section includes not only essays on iconic movies by Tarkovsky but also Barker and Skotak’s article bringing from oblivion the Soviet director of space science movies Pavel Klushantsev.

Overall, the reader creates a rather detailed picture of the science fiction literature and cinema before and after the revolution, as well as throughout the entire Soviet period, and throws a glance at post-Soviet Russia. The collection of articles would be useful and entertaining for both academic and nonacademic readers interested in the history of science fiction and the modern state of the genre. Graduate students exploring Russian and Soviet science fiction, as well as film and history in general, would find it particularly valuable since the collection provides excellent introduction into the field and demonstrates numerous approaches to the literary and cinematic material, while providing a brief overview of various literary theories. The fine balance between the broader themes and specific names, titles, and motives allows significant freedom for using the reader in the undergraduate or graduate classroom and aims, as Banerjee notices, to “catapult” the students “into [a] further realm of possible strangeness” of Russian science fiction (xvii).

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