

Book Reviews

Harvey Klehr, *The Millionaire Was a Soviet Mole: The Twisted Life of David Karr*. New York: Encounter Books, 2019. Xi + 257 pp. \$25.99. Paper.

A professor emeritus of Politics and History at Emory University, Harvey Klehr tried to pull together enough material to write a biography of a businessman who boasted that he had worked for the FBI and who was named as a KGB agent by a Russian journalist in 1992. Although Klehr was able to examine some FBI files, he did not succeed in gaining access to archives in Russia and Israel that might have shed light on his often mysterious subject. As a result, this unsatisfactory book is based primarily on newspaper and magazine articles, supplemented by extensive speculation (“perhaps,” “possibly,” “probably,” “most likely,” etc.). It does nothing to enhance the reputation of Klehr.

Born as David Katz to wealthy Jewish parents in Brooklyn in 1918, David Karr died in Paris in 1979 after having been married four times. What he did in the intervening sixty years is often unclear, though he appears to have accumulated a lot of money through a variety of deals. As a young man, according to Klehr, Karr “was close to the Communist Party of the United States” (p. 4), though the main evidence for this is that Karr wrote a handful of articles for the *Daily Worker* as a freelancer in 1938 (p. 11). During the Second World War, Karr worked for a time for the Office of War Information, then helped gather information for columnist Drew Pearson. In the following decades Karr worked in public relations and as a deal-maker.

While arranging deals between businessmen in the West and Soviet officials in the 1970s, Karr “was recruited by the KGB,” according to Klehr (p. 157). However, the evidence for this boils down to one document quoted by journalist Yevgenia Albats in *Izvestiia* in 1992, corroborated by an anonymous “former Soviet intelligence operative” who communicated with Klehr (p. 158). What information Karr provided to the KGB is unclear.

The credibility of Klehr’s highly speculative account is damaged by his confusion on a rare occasion when he becomes specific. According to Klehr, when Senator Edward Kennedy met with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in March 1990, he “complained that the results of the Geneva Summit [of 1985] had allowed Reagan ‘to slow down the process of movement to any positive results

in negotiations with the U.S.S.R.” and stressed the importance of increasing pressure on the Reagan administration (p. 167). Klehr appears to be unaware that Reagan and Gorbachev achieved positive results with the signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in December 1987 and that Reagan was no longer president in 1990. (The source he cites for his grossly misleading account is an article by Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky and Pavel Stroylov in *National Review* in 2006.) Klehr then proceeds to indict Kennedy for having sought “to undercut the foreign policy of his own country” (p. 168). It escaped Klehr’s attention that by March 1990 President George H. W. Bush had finally agreed that the Cold War was over and that it was very much in the U.S. national interest to engage with Gorbachev on issues such as the reunification of Germany.

Was David Karr murdered in 1979? Klehr concedes that “there is no hard evidence” of that (p. 230). Earlier he writes that it was “the stress on his heart that killed him” (p. 226). Yet Klehr cannot resist closing his book with the assertion that if Karr was murdered “it was most likely at the hand of the KGB” (p. 230).

In his long scholarly career Harvey Klehr published a series of books about alleged connections between the Soviet Union and Communists in the United States. His attempted biography of David Karr raises serious questions about his judgment and reliability.

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Alison Rowley, *Putin Kitsch in America*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019. 162 pp., plus notes, index, etc. \$27.95 Hardcover

Alison Rowley’s compact book is a delightful romp through the world of Putin kitsch – the material objects and virtual representations of Russia’s comically macho president that have flooded popular culture over the last several decades. Her examination includes traditional kitsch, such as action figures and puppets, but also examines more recent genres of kitsch, such as “fake fiction,” memes, apps, and games. Finally, Rowley also looks specifically at Putin-centered pornography. Her focus is American-made and American-consumed Putin kitsch so, in the case of pornography, the object of Putin sexual dominance is usually President Donald Trump. Her study is well-written and often funny, but there is much here to be digested.

Rowley explains that while the Russian Government could control the image of its leaders for most of the twentieth century, that power disappeared with the widespread use of the internet. In the age of the internet and social media, anyone can take the image of anyone else and transform it and manipulate it into social commentary, political satire, or straightforward humor. This reality combined with a growing focus on the masculinity of political leaders over the past few decades created an atmosphere ripe for the exploitation of Putin’s image. Rowley also argues – correctly, in my opinion – that the rise of sensational journalism, twenty-four hour news coverage, and the competitiveness for ratings meant that

American journalists cast off the polite limits of media coverage usually reserved for the president and other top officials, thereby opening the door for stories with sexualized content. (Imagine the media talking about the size of Jimmy Carter's hands/penis.) Rowley also points to the significance of companies like CafePress, that allow customers to create their own kitsch with print-on-demand options for t-shirts, mugs, and other objects. The advent of this affordable and easy-to-use tool created the possibility for the explosion of politically-motivated kitsch of all kinds. Rowley is particularly interested in the participatory nature of Putin kitsch, citing objects for sale in a variety of popular online markets, such as etsy.com, and argues that these items demonstrate the desire for young people for political engagement, albeit in this modern and often humorous way.

Rowley also examines the cult of the bare-chested Putin, a necessary part of any discussion of Putin's public image. She points out – much to my amazement – that the first photo of Putin without a shirt only appeared in 2007, but it has become the central popular image of the Russian president ever since and one of the most manipulated. Previous photos of American or Russian presidents rarely showed skin, and those that did were private family snapshots. Putin himself enjoys projecting an image of masculinity and strength, a human representation of Russia's power as a nation, so the various photos of Putin in exaggerated macho settings and poses are ripe for satire. The focus on Putin's qualities as a physical specimen of manhood quite naturally create the foundation for pornography or sexually-suggestive kitsch, as well. Rowley focuses her discussion of this type of kitsch on the popular juxtaposition of Trump and Putin which began with the "pornographication" of the 2016 U.S. presidential election and has continued ever since. In the wake of the Cold War, it should come as no surprise that the leader of Russia would be used a yard stick against which to measure the strength of the American president, and Donald Trump's self-aggrandizement, hyperbolic language, and fragile sensitivity about his image make the hyper-masculine Russian leader the perfect foil. Rowley examines the fake fiction and pornography that has emerged to mock and critique the Trump-Putin "bromance," noting that even the most sexually explicit examples are not meant to arouse, but to undermine the credibility of political leaders. The majority of these pornographic stories and images feature Putin as the sexually dominant partner with powerful pecs and a "magical penis," while Trump is in a subordinate role, sometimes openly requesting the action that is occurring. Rowley also notes that in the case of "slash," a type of fan fiction that focuses on an imagined homosexual relationship between two outwardly heterosexual men, the sexual power-play often takes place in political sacred spaces, such as the White House or the Kremlin, or uses the imagery of the national flag, thus intensifying the forbidden nature of the described interaction. Rowley repeatedly argues that all of these satirical and critical manipulations of Putin's image by Americans are an indication that there is a greater interest in political engagement than we might think, particularly among younger people. She readily admits, however, that it is hard to know the intentions of those who create these items.

Rowley's book is easy to read and packed with photographs, a critical element in a study such as this. Both its topic and its readability would make it a good selection for classroom use; many of the images will be familiar to students, even if they do not know exactly what they are satirizing. There is a lot to chew on in this little book. The subject is one that touches on many avenues for discussion and debate – the intersection of politics and popular culture, the focus on masculinity in political leaders, the shift in culture that allows for the public discussion of president pees and penises, and the explosion of politically-themed kitsch in the age of the internet. I highly recommend this book for scholars, students, and those interested in popular culture.

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Eric Haseltine, *The Spy in Moscow Station: A Counterspy's Hunt for a Deadly Cold War Threat*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2019. Xix +264 pp. \$29.99. Hardcover

A Vice President of Disney Imagineering in the 1990s who became Director of Research at the National Security Agency (NSA) during the George W. Bush administration, Eric Haseltine decided to write a book that focuses on one NSA officer, Charles Gandy. From 1978 into the 1980s Gandy worked at the US Embassy in Moscow, attempting to discover how the KGB was learning the identities of American spies in the Soviet Union. Gandy found that the KGB had placed bugs in many typewriters in the embassy that allowed the Soviet intelligence agency to read many embassy documents. According to Haseltine, that permitted the KGB and the Kremlin to gain insights into US arms control negotiating positions and to learn the sources of the embassy's information (such as dissidents and Warsaw Pact ambassadors). However, Haseltine never establishes that KGB typewriter bugs led to the deaths of Soviet citizens who spied for the United States. Under Secretary of State George Shultz, the State Department in 1985 issued a statement that there was no evidence that the Soviet Union ever took action based on information from the compromised typewriters. As a result, the ending of the book is anticlimactic.

The Spy in Moscow Station may be of some interest to students of Russian-American relations for its description of the intense friction and suspicion between NSA officers, who often had very high regard for Soviet technical intelligence capabilities, and Central Intelligence Agency officers, who tended to believe that the Soviet Union was technologically backward. It is also of interest for what it reveals about the persistence of a Cold War mentality among intelligence officers. In Chapter 13, "Lessons About the Russians for Today," Haseltine conveys Gandy's view that the KGB actually never stopped working against the United States and that in the post-Cold War era the Russians continue to "do to us what the Russians always do" (p. 233). That rather simple view of eternal competition

and enmity between the United States and Russia unfortunately appears to be widely held in the United States, not only in US intelligence agencies.

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Fyodor Lukyanov, ed., *Russia and the Middle East: Viewpoints, Policies, Strategies*. Minneapolis: East View Press, 2019, xii. 341pp. Index. \$49.95, Paper.

Fyodor Lukyanov introduces his collection of articles from the respected journal *Russia in Global Affairs* (of which he is editor-in-chief) by quoting Russian president Vladimir Putin's response to a question about the wisdom of getting involved in Syria: "If a fight is inevitable, you have to strike first" (ix). Lukyanov then proceeds to discuss the importance of the fact that this quote was first stated about the Middle East. After all, the Middle East was not only one, but perhaps the most important Cold War hotspot from which the Soviet Union withdrew in Gorbachev's time (x). America's ascendancy and overreach in the region, intended to make it the birthplace of a new post-Cold War global order, ultimately led to the disintegration of the political status quo in the region exemplified by the chaotic transition from the Arab Spring to the Syrian Civil War, the disintegration of Iraq, and the rise of ISIS (x-xi). As America's Icarus spiraled, Russia's largely successful military and diplomatic campaign to prop up the Assad regime signaled the return of a "full-fledged superpower and top player" (x).

This narrative, presented in Lukyanov's preface, is an important glue holding together the vast and diverse articles plucked from the last 15 years of the journal's English-language publication. Approaching this text is not for the faint of heart, as it seems that the motivation for this volume is two-fold: to offer perspectives on how to imagine Russia's approach to the Middle East and to showcase the breadth, depth, and quality of articles published in *Russia in Global Affairs* pertaining to this topic. As a result, Lukyanov has chosen a thematic organization of the book, dividing it into three parts (Strategy, Tactics, and The Middle East as a Factor of World Order), each of which contains 2-3 (for a total of 8) sections, with each section containing 3-4 (totaling 28) articles. The sections each follow a chronological organization, which may serve as a workable model for political scientists, but for any historian reading this book it means creating and recreating the historical context in which these articles were written (2003-2018) 8 different times.

The articles range dramatically in their relevance to the topic as well. While most topics deal with Russia's relationship to Islamic terrorism, some articles touch on the Middle East tangentially, such as Aleksandr Novak's "Old Goals, New Tasks," which only mentions the Middle East on its last page (112). When discussing energy and natural resources though, it adds prestige and authority to include an article by the Minister of Energy if its relevance can be stretched to

touch the topic. The balance between prestige and topical precision is consistent issue throughout the book. The first two articles were written by former prime minister and foreign minister (and one-time presidential hopeful) Yevgeny Primakov, which establishes the credibility of the text early and sets a strategic vision for Russian foreign policy as it relates to the region and globe. Subsequent sections consist of luminaries such as UN disarmament advisor Vladimir Orlov or current Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov flanked by more specific articles by individual commenters or teams of graduate students from the Higher School of Economics.

While the vast array of perspectives presented here do reflect the diversity of Russian thought on the Middle East, some of which are even critical of the current Russian government, certain themes emerge as threads running throughout the book. From the first article, the theme of multilateralism, preferably through a strengthened United Nations, is juxtaposed against the undesirability of American unilateralism by both Primakov (5-13) and Lavrov (269-277). Even the authors who look to America as a global leader (2010) challenge it to guide global governance away from a unipolar toward a multipolar world (31-33). Lavrov offers a predictable critique of NATO and the EU as relics of an obsolete world order based on the Cold War and suggests movement toward a new world order based on contemporary issues, which offers insight into Putin's foreign policy approaches aimed at disrupting the international liberal order. Andrej Krichovic and Yuval Weber try to assess the origins of the "new Cold War" by positing a disagreement between the US and Russia about when the new international order began—1989 or 1991 (306). This article sees both Russia's brinkmanship and American neo-containment policies as problematic and suggests that, if the US and Russia do not resolve their differences soon (2016), the primary victims will be in Syria and Ukraine (314).

Another core theme of the book is what Pyotr Stegny calls the "democratic fundamentalis[m]" (283) of the United States. Consistent with Russian foreign policy narratives under Putin's leadership, several authors ascribe the American failures in Iraq, as well as the inconsistencies of American responses to the Arab Spring, to a desire to support democracy wherever it arises but only insofar as it conforms to American values-laden understandings of democracy. Lavrov refers to this problem as the need to eradicate "double standards" in the name of democracy and respect the fact that other cultures have their own political traditions (270). More regionally specific examples include Yevgeny Satanovsky's argument (2011) that suggests US foreign policy is following theoretical (pro-democracy) dogmatism in response to the Arab Spring rather than Realpolitik, and in doing so is betraying its regional allies, such as Mubarak in Egypt and Israel in general. An article by Aleksandr Aksyonok and Irina Zvyagelskaya suggests that the Americans fell into the same idealistic trap when handling the transitions of power in the Ukraine as in the Arab Spring (254-265). This narrative is neatly summarized by Andrei Kortunov when he suggests that Russian foreign policy in the wake of the Arab Spring proceeded on the assumption that the American

juxtaposition of democracy against authoritarianism is a relic of the past, while the real global conflict is between “order” and “chaos” (335).

Lukyanov’s compilation of articles certainly paints a picture of both the complexity of Russian views pertaining to the Middle East and the coherence of perspective that informs them. However, the prevalence of members of the Valdai Discussion Club and the Russian International Affairs Council among the authors suggests a strongly governmental perspective. The diversity presented here is probably best considered a diversity within limits, thus making the text itself a good example of the narrative constructions behind Russian soft power efforts.

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Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019. \$27.95. Hardcover.

This is a striking and beautiful book. An environmental history of the Bering Strait, it is at the same time a poignant reflection on place, history, and ecology that uses Beringia’s modern history to question basic narratives and concepts of modernity. Demuth has been a regular visitor to Beringia since she was eighteen, when she “first heard the cranes, standing on the runner of a dogsled eighty miles north of the Arctic Circle” (1). Her book draws on both this personal experience with the region as well as research in a remarkable range of archives across Russia and the United States. She explores 150 years of Beringian history—native, Russian, Soviet, and American—with a consistent focus on “the relationship between ideal and material, between human and not.” “What power,” she asks, “do human ideas have to change their surroundings, and how are people in turn shaped by their habitual relationships to the world? Put another way, what is the nature of history when nature is part of what *makes* history?” (3). The question is, of course, basic to the field of environmental history. But Demuth’s keen knowledge of and respect for the particularities of Beringia as a place, expressed in vivid prose, make her book crackle with wonder and insight.

The book’s five sections tell the story of the encounter between Beringia and its peoples—the Inupiat, Yupik, and Chukchi who called it home—and the “foreigners” who came to the region over the course of the past century and a half. These foreigners, Demuth writes, “came to make energy predictable and enclose space” and “to make Beringia part of a linear, progressive idea of time” (309). It is by situating the more familiar human histories of capitalism and communism within the frames of ecology and energy flows that Demuth makes her most important contributions. She captures the encounters of an extraordinary and diverse cast of outsiders, capitalist and communist alike, with Beringia: hunters of whale, walrus, and fox; miners of tin and gold; bringers of domesticated reindeer from Chukotka to the wild caribou country of Alaska. Whether they pursued capitalist profit and thought in terms of “growth,” or whether they aimed to fulfill

a socialist plan and usher in a workers' utopia, these foreigners brought ideas that both transformed the region and were frustrated by it. Each of the book's five sections—"Sea, 1848-1900" "Shore, 1870-1960" "Land, 1880-1970," "Underground, 1900-1980," "Ocean, 1920-1990"—is a story of the meeting of modern visions and the material realities of Beringia that in their own, varying ways, exposed those modern visions as inadequate and limited.

Demuth is particularly effective in showing how Beringian nature has been an agent in the region's history. Fundamental to her story is that Beringian ecosystems were no mere backdrop against which human history and ideas took shape, but were themselves both products of and agents in that history—and shapers of those ideas. Demuth emphasizes that capitalism and communism alike seek to "ignore loss, to assume that change will bring improvement, to cover over death with expanded consumption." But "neither markets nor plans proved innately more rational. . . or better able to convert Beringia and its people to a shared, single future" (134, 310). Collapsing whale numbers undermined the assumption that greater efficiency brought growth. Wolves and climate fluctuation thwarted state efforts to control reindeer. Disturbed earth leached toxins. Humans who sought to improve the world by selling it the products of whales increasingly faced people who "wanted not just to save whales, but to save people *with* whales" (298). Foreigners came to Beringia with teleological visions of time, with notions of history that separated human from nature. But, writes Demuth, the "nature of history when nature is part of what makes it is cacophony" (314).

That memorable line is suggestive of the wonderful prose with which *Floating Coast* brims, the many turns of phrase that bear re-reading. Demuth's descriptions of time and place are carefully tuned and vivid: "swarming zooplankton in their many-splendored forms, from tiny shrimp and fish larvae to mythology rendered in miniature: hydras, tentacled crowns, things made of spines and sacs and jelly" (16); the rangifer migration that "is the tundra respiring, an oscillation of energy rather than air" (169); the work of a whaling crew to "transform the fat piled waist-deep in the blubber room and a deck fringed with baleen into salable goods" and polish off "gummy flesh with sand—no woman wanted a corset smelling of rancid leviathan" (35). Yet no less memorable than her conjuring of place and time is the urgency and clarity of the lessons, reminiscent of those of classic nature and ecology writing, that the story she tells about this place and time makes so clear. This is a book that deserves to be read widely.

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