Khrushchev: The Man and His Era, and: Kul'tura povsednevnosti v epokhu "ottepeli": Metamorfozy stilia, and: 58 10: Nadzornye proizvodstva Prokuratury SSSR po delam ob antisovetskoi agitatsii i propagande: Annotirovannyi katalog, mart 1953-1991 (review)

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William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. 876 pp. ISBN 0-393-05144-7. $35.00.

L. B. Brusilovskaia, *Kul′tura povsednevnosti v epokhu "ottepeli": Metamorfozy stilia* [The Culture of Everyday Life during the "Thaw": Stylistic Metamorphoses]. Moscow: URAO, 2001. 188 pp. ISBN 5-204-00276-6.

O. V. Edel′man, ed., with the participation of E. Iu. Zavadskaia and O. V. Lavinskaia, *58[10]: Nadzornye proizvodstva Prokuratury SSSR po delam ob antisovetskoi agitatsii i propagande. Annotirovannyi katalog, mart 1953–1991* [58[10]: Prosecutorial Oversight of Anti-Soviet Agitation and Propaganda. An Annotated Catalogue, March 1953–1991]. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 1999. 944 pp. ISBN 5-85646-41-3. Under the general editorship of V. A. Kozlov and S. V. Mironenko.

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Bombastic public speeches, lengthy sessions with foreign diplomats, volumes of memoirs—all these sources contribute to the impression of Nikita Khrushchev as a compulsively open personality. Khrushchev's garrulous nature and earthy language immediately distinguished him from his predecessor. Compared to the remote and secretive Stalin, Khrushchev was a font of opinions, especially in the later years of his rule when he combined a dangerous overconfidence with a weakness for alcohol. Although Khrushchev's behavior showed that he was hardly lacking in guile, his verbal outpourings made him seem remarkably knowable to Western observers. Outsiders' sense that they could understand Khrushchev's motivations and probe his psyche (as the CIA's psychoanalysts did) is also true more generally of Western attitudes toward Soviet society in the post-Stalin period. The relative openness of borders during Khrushchev's reign and the increasing candor of Soviet intellectuals naturally increased the perception of mutual comprehension between East and West.

William Taubman's magisterial study *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, however, reveals hidden depths to Nikita Khrushchev. Moreover, Taubman's depiction of the huge number of issues troubling Khrushchev during his decade in power reminds us of how many areas regarding even the relatively open period of the thaw would benefit today from renewed or extended scrutiny. This review considers the extent to which Khrushchev's life story reflects his times

and suggests other new sources that can refine our understanding of the complex and consequential years of his rule.

Taubman begins his biography by noting that, although Khrushchev's rise to the absolute top of the political hierarchy was unusual, the future general secretary was in many ways a typical Soviet man. Indeed, part of the merit of a biography of Khrushchev, Taubman argues, is that, "in its entirety, [Khrushchev's] life holds a mirror to the Soviet age as a whole" (xiii). With fascinating detail, Taubman follows up on this premise as he takes readers through Khrushchev's transition from poor peasant to industrial worker, from ambitious self-striver to ambitious but sincere public servant in the 1920s. Participation in the great processes of urbanization and industrialization, in the currents of labor activism, revolution, and battle, do in truth make Khrushchev's early life an invaluable microcosm of social transformation and political upheaval in Russia.

The young Khrushchev's dream of becoming a well-educated engineer made him typical of a generation that saw industrial training as a means to escape stultifying rural life and great poverty. We see, too, the roots of his fierce rejection of peasant ways, an attitude that shaped his thinking for years to come. Indeed, though dubbed a populist by some scholars, Khrushchev detested many aspects of common culture. In a telling anecdote, Taubman recounts how Khrushchev upbraided an Egyptian journalist who had written respectfully of Khrushchev's peasant status. When the surprised journalist pointed to Khrushchev's own statements of pride in his humble origins, the leader objected: "But you wrote I was like a peasant from a story by Dostoevsky—why didn't you say peasant from Tolstoy?" (611).[1] Khrushchev, no literary scholar, strove to distance himself from the "dark" ways of unambitious, conservative peasants. He was a revolutionary and, as he would have it, a self-made man. His disgust with backward-thinking peasants helps explain his often harsh plans to "improve" rural life—for instance, by encouraging Ukrainian collective farms to exile their less productive (i.e., elderly or invalid) members or by razing villages and building agro-cities.

In a clear demonstration of the possibilities for upward social mobility in the early years of Soviet power, Khrushchev climbed from provincial party worker to head of the Moscow party organization in six years. He epitomized a new type of poorly educated but tremendously active and committed bureaucrat. Taubman is careful to point out that Khrushchev's later ascription of his personal success to a "lucky lottery ticket," namely his acquaintance with Nadezhda Allilueva through their institute party cell, really masked a more typical and less glorious tale of advancement through patronage politics and ruthless adherence to the party line. Khrushchev, not surprisingly, preferred to "forget" his role in rooting

[1]Already at age 34 Khrushchev had in effect disowned his first 14 years of life, claiming to his mentor Lazar′ Kaganovich that he had little knowledge of agriculture—since he "ha[d] never spent much time in an agricultural area" (67).

out and condemning "Trotskyites" in the Stalin Industrial Academy and his reliance on Lazar′ Kaganovich.

Khrushchev's new status as a party leader—covered by Taubman in the aptly named chapters "Stalin's Pet" and "Stalin's Viceroy"—marked the end of most semblances of "typical" life for Khrushchev and his family. What follows is a portrait of life at the top, complete with terrible dangers and great privileges. With the possible exception of his years of wartime service at the front, Khrushchev's time was henceforth spent less with ordinary people and more with the unusual set of cronies that Stalin gathered around him. In the insular world of Stalin's making, efforts to grasp the extent of real social problems won scorn. For example, despite the seriousness of the agricultural situation in 1950, Stalin rebuked Khrushchev for "rattling around the countryside" (227). Taubman further recounts Khrushchev's unsuccessful efforts to find out what people were really thinking by reconnecting with a friend from his youth who had stayed in a low position in Iuzovka/Stalino/Donetsk—unsuccessful because his friend correctly understood the risks involved in playing informant (121–22).

Although Khrushchev's move to center stage deprives us of a glimpse of ordinary times, it does bring answers of a sort to interesting questions surrounding the life of the party elite. How did those at the top who were spared by the purges manage to reconcile their knowledge of injustices with their continued commitment to the regime? What was the impact of wielding great power and yet being totally vulnerable? Here Taubman's psychological detective work pays off with an insightful portrait of a man motivated by almost manic energy and fantastic belief but worn down by tremendous stress and genuine fear. The result at home, as one of Khrushchev's children would recall, was that "the atmosphere was heavy…. It was as if there weren't enough air to breathe" (232).

The complex character revealed by Taubman offers perhaps the best explanation yet for the puzzling question of what motivated the Secret Speech and dramatic de-Stalinization measures. Even now many scholars are quick to interpret Khrushchev's decision to speak out about the purges at the 20th Party Congress as solely a strategic move to consolidate power at the top.[2] Taubman shows Khrushchev as an able intriguer, but he also presents him as a man subject to great external and internal pressure—swamped with requests to aid former colleagues with rehabilitation and tormented by his own past. Taubman makes the case that Khrushchev, on the eve of the Secret Speech, felt "a kind of manic ambivalence, his consciousness streaming wildly from self-justification to guilt to pride" (276–77). Khrushchev's comments over the next decade on Stalin and

[2]This, for instance, is the conclusion of Aleksandr Pyzhikov's well-researched account of politics of the era, which ascribes the Secret Speech not to Khrushchev's conscience or to social pressure but purely to political motives (*Khrushchevskaia "ottepel′," 1953–64* [Moscow: OLMA-PRESS, 2002], 315, 322).

the dictator's legacy would show an appreciation of the fundamental duality of his own history—and his nation's—under Stalin. Memories of huge successes in industrialization and war would stand next to those of terrible losses and moral degradation. Was one the price of the other? Lecturing his Polish comrades shortly after the Secret Speech, Khrushchev said of Stalin:

> He wanted to serve society with all his heart and soul. I'm absolutely convinced of that. The whole question has to do with the ways and means. And that's a separate question. How to tie all this together? It's a hard question…. We're now recounting the negative side of history. But, comrades, Stalin—I wish I could describe the warm side, his concern for people. This was a person, a revolutionary. But he had a mania, a persecution mania, you understand. That's why he didn't stop at anything, even at executing his own relatives. (292)

Of course, for a person who had served at the top of the hierarchy dominated by Stalin, relations with the dictator would naturally be a topic of great importance. But in his unwillingness to condemn an entire epoch in which he personally had worked very hard to improve standards of living, Khrushchev adopted a view of Soviet history that remains quite common even today.[3]

It is impossible in a brief review even just to list all the areas of Khrushchev's life in power that Taubman examines. Suffice it to say that Taubman's interwoven narratives of Khrushchev's power struggle, conduct of foreign affairs, and experimentation with domestic policy initiatives leave an overwhelming impression of a tremendously difficult situation for any ruler. The Soviet Union of the 1950s was a superpower that could not remain aloof from world affairs, an economic behemoth, a bureaucratic machine, and the leader of a fractious communist bloc—quite the legacy for a barely educated "man of meager culture" (Molotov's words) whose knowledge of outsiders came largely from youthful interactions with foreign miners, not from hobnobbing with foreign ministers! The ultimate puzzle raised by Khrushchev's stint in power, then, may be not how he survived crisis after crisis, but how Brezhnev and company ever stabilized the system enough to muddle through for another 20 years.

Reading *Khrushchev: A Man and His Era* confirmed for Richard Pipes his belief that it is "futile … to study Soviet history 'from below,' as the 'revisionist' school of historians would have it. In the Soviet regime the population at large had as much influence on events as the chorus in a Greek drama."[4] Certainly Taubman does not depict Khrushchev as a slave to public opinion or even as

[3] I write about Russian President Vladimir Putin's adherence to this view in Kathleen E. Smith, *Mythmaking in the New Russia: Politics and Memory during the Yeltsin Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 182.

[4] Richard Pipes, "Man of Opposites, a Force for Good and Evil," *The New York Times*, 26 March 2003.

a politician who consciously strove to satisfy a variety of constituencies. But Taubman portrays the Soviet elite as often insecure and as almost desperately curious to find out about life behind the Potemkin villages routinely constructed for their alleged benefit. Khrushchev's extensive travels, his questioning of peasants, his attention to his son-in-law's impressions all evince a desire to collect more reliable information about the state of the nation. Moreover, the very political swings that came to characterize the thaw demonstrate the leadership's sensitivity to public sentiment, a mood heightened during the Khrushchev era by mass unrest in Tbilisi, Poland, Hungary, and Novocherkassk.[5] The story of the Soviet regime's survival after Stalin cannot be told without reference to the experiences of various social strata and political outsiders. Indeed, Taubman does provide short histories of dissent and cultural ferment during the thaw.

In this regard, however, two recent Russian books dealing with the period of the thaw make interesting supplementary reading to *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* precisely because they include more "voices from the choir." They do not address the lives of elite policymakers but rather examine elements of daily life, popular opinion, and political culture (in the sense of culture with political ramifications). L. B. Brusilovskaia's somewhat misleadingly entitled monograph, *Kul′tura povsednevnosti v epokhu "ottepeli,"* in fact lays out a series of important trends in high and mass culture. *58[10]: Nadzornye proizvodstva prokuratury SSSR po delam ob antisovetskoi agitatsii i propagande* offers tidbits of frank public opinion from the case files of those convicted of anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation. Brusilovskaia intends her book for Russian university students, but scholars can also find much of interest in it. By contrast, *58[10]: Nadzornye proizvodstva* is ostensibly meant for researchers at the State Archive of the Russian Federation (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, GARF), from whose files its contents were extracted, but I would argue that it could be enjoyed by a larger audience as well.

Cultural policies during the thaw received much Western attention at the time. Literature, in particular, came under the scrutiny of Sovietologists seeking both insight into the views of the liberal intelligentsia and signs of the limits of official tolerance.[6] More recently, our knowledge of the cultural upheaval of the 1950s–60s has been enhanced by studies of film and art and by the publication of document collections on Soviet cultural policies.[7] To this booming field,

[5]For details of mass disorder, see V. A. Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve (1953–nachalo 1980-kh gg.)* (Novosibirsk: Sibirskii khronograf, 1999), reviewed in *Kritika* 4, 1 (2003): 260–71.

[6]Two enlightening accounts are Priscilla Johnson, *Khrushchev and the Arts: The Politics of Soviet Culture, 1962–1964* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965); and Dina R. Spechler, *Permitted Dissent in the USSR: "Novy Mir" and the Soviet Regime* (New York: Praeger, 1982).

[7]For instance, Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000); Vitalii Troianovskii, ed., *Kinematograf ottepeli*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Materik, 1996–2002); Susan E. Reid, "Destalinization and the Remodernization of Soviet Art" (Ph.D. diss., University

Brusilovskaia adds case studies of selected cultural phenomena to illustrate broad trends in cultural transformation. She focuses, for instance, on the writings of Evtushenko and Voznesenskii, Akhmadulina and Brodskii to elucidate contrasting "extravagant" and "introverted" styles of poetry—each of which raised separate challenges to Stalinist norms. She analyzes the humanization of film heroes, the relocation of dramatic action in films from public to private spaces, and the appearance of a new realism that allowed for details of daily life and for ordinary characters with small ambitions. Brusilovskaia also explores some aspects of early television programming, the rise of the "bard" movement, and new forms of consumption.

Brusilovskaia treats cultural change as largely independent from state policies. She consciously eschews a political chronology and in so doing creates a vivid sense of a time of rapid cultural innovation in which new styles percolated up from below.[8] To this end she aptly cites Bulat Okudzhava, recalling the start of the trend of singer-songwriters: "Once these were the songs of small rooms, small circles, this was a confiding [*doveritel´nyi*] conversation among one's own, a means of communication not far removed from conversations in Moscow kitchens, conversations that once gave us so much" (151).

Brusilovskaia shows how several elements came together—more private apartments, the atmosphere of liberalization, increased access to Western fashions—to facilitate creative exchanges by urbanites of all ages. Her non-political approach fits with the themes she stresses: influence of Western culture; respect for intimacy; inspiration from private life; and a desire, especially on the part of young people, to represent their own real lives in art.

Kul´tura povsednevnosti is well written and full of acute observations that bring an interesting social perspective to bear on the Khrushchev era. In terms of scholarship, however, it is not up to the level of *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*. Brusilovskaia is not apparently familiar with foreign scholarship on the thaw and relies little on Russian analytical works. She uses a variety of primary sources and memoirs but provides only scanty footnotes and a brief bibliography of recommended readings. Most disappointing for a book that seeks to elucidate the culture of everyday life, *Kul´tura povsednevnosti* does not contain much information on cultural consumption. How popular were the romantic films she discusses? How many viewers could the new theaters hold? What was the

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of Pennsylvania, 1996). Document collections include: Z. K. Vodop´ianova et al., eds., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul´tura, 1953–1957: Dokumenty* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2001); E. S. Afanas´eva, V. Iu. Afiani, et al., eds., *Ideologicheskie komissii TsK KPSS, 1958–1964: Dokumenty* (Moscow: Rosspen, 1998), reviewed in *Kritika* 3, 2 (2002): 356–61; and V. I. Fomin, ed., *Kinematograf ottepeli: Dokumenty i svidetel´stva* (Moscow: Materik, 1998).

[8] For a fascinating contrasting approach that ties cultural developments to a sophisticated political chronology, see Nancy Condee, "Cultural Codes of the Thaw," in *Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. William Taubman, Sergei Khrushchev, and Abbott Gleason (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

level of ownership of television sets at the start and end of the thaw? How many Soviets were estimated to have access to foreign broadcasts? It is hard for readers to weigh the significance of cultural trends without some evidence about popularity and access.

Widespread listening to "foreign voices" during the postwar period is just one of the trends that surfaces in *58[10]: Nadzornye proizvodstva*. This book is an annotated catalogue of cases brought between March 1953 and December 1991 under the criminal code article prohibiting anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda, from which it takes its title.[9] The authors of this catalogue reviewed over 70,000 files, mainly from the department of the Procuracy responsible for monitoring investigations. This department made its files parallel to, or more often after, the creation of criminal case files. The oversight files tend to contain appeals from prisoners and their relatives and procuracy reports regarding the conduct of investigations and trials. Sometimes copies of interrogations and other investigatory materials are included. Given that investigations may not always have resulted in prosecutions and that many of those who were convicted may never have appealed or sought rehabilitation, the catalogue is an incomplete record of anti-Soviet prosecutions.[10]

Nevertheless, the catalogue's thumbnail sketches of individual cases make for compelling reading. A typical page for the thaw period might feature an anonymous letter-writer who had insulted party leaders; a religious believer who had conducted evangelical activities; a drunk who had sworn to side with the Americans in the inevitable next war; a Balt who was organizing against Soviet occupation; a worker complaining about his wages; and a student Marxist who had written unorthodox tracts. One finds evidence of the dangers of any extremism: antisemites' appeals stand next to Zionists'; Stalin's defenders and his critics suffer alike.

The catalogue is useful foremost as a sort of "complaint book" for the post-Stalin period of Soviet rule. One can see common causes of dissatisfaction and what drove citizens to despair—or at least what drove them to drink. In fact, it seems as if the appropriate aphorism for Soviet citizens would have been "in vodka veritas." The pages of *58[10]: Nadzornye proizvodstva* are full of plain truths from the mouths of drunks who had included some political comments in their public rants. Of course, the types of complaints recorded here have been filtered though the particular sensitivities of the regime at the given moment. One can find spates of arrests regarding praise of the Hungarian uprising or defense of the anti-party group. These trends, as well as changes in types of dissident activity—from anonymous letters and small numbers of leaflets to *samizdat* and collective letters, for instance—provide interesting food for thought regarding

[9] In some library catalogues the title is written out in Russian as *Piatdesiat′ vosem′, desiat′*.

[10] Based on KGB statistics for the years 1957–58, the compilers estimate that they have information on 60 percent of all relevant cases (6).

both the content of public opinion and levels of political engagement. Thus *58[10]: Nadzornye proizvodstva* lives up to its promise of filling a gap between works on Stalin's terror and histories of the dissident movement.

Readers should beware, however, of some shortcomings in the catalogue. First, the entries tend to focus on the most amusing or piquant details of cases. For instance, the paragraph describing one young man's case recounts in full a joke that he had copied out in his notebook: "Will private planes be necessary under communism? Yes. Why? Well, what if cutlets suddenly go on sale in Arkhangel′sk?" (272). To an extent, this amusing detail distracts from the tragedy of a first-year student reported by a hyper-vigilant informer for casual remarks on the Hungarian uprising.[11] Second, the authors' focus on politics can mask the complexity of some cases. For example, the entry on a student arrested at the same time as the one mentioned above notes only accusations of anti-Soviet comments regarding Hungary and excessive anti-Stalinism. The actual file shows that an aggressive and hostile prosecutor successfully added charges of speculation (for sending goods available in Moscow to relatives in the provinces) and homosexuality.[12] These details raise the question of whether relative wealth and/or lifestyle issues may have provoked the denunciation that sparked this case. Lastly, those unfamiliar with the names of prominent dissidents will be hard pressed to recognize them from the bare-bones accounts of their arrest.

The three works reviewed here all capture interesting dualities in their subjects. Khrushchev loathed the humiliations heaped on him by Stalin but as a leader became a bully himself. Cultural figures who took pride in creating ostensibly apolitical works knew that they were challenging political norms. Those convicted of anti-Soviet agitation for Stalinism and anti-Stalinism found themselves in the same camps. The very contradictions of the era make it a fruitful subject for even more research.

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[11] Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF) f. 8131, op. 31, d. 74158.

[12] Ibid, d. 74157. Researchers wishing to use these files should be aware that due to new privacy laws GARF places some restrictions on the use of personal materials contained in its *fondy*.