Angela Brintlinger and Ilya Vinitsky (eds.). *Madness and the mad in Russian culture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006, 331 pp., ISBN 978-1-904764-98-4, $70.00 (cloth)

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This book stems from a conference held in 2003 at Ohio State University under the heading “Those Crazy Russians.” The event brought together an international team of scholars that produced a handsomely packaged volume that should appeal to readers far beyond the Russian studies field where the project originated. Those familiar with the academe will know how much collaborative effort is needed to carry out such a vast undertaking and how much credit its organizers, sponsors, editors, translators, and participants deserve.

The collection is divided into three parts, each one illuminating a key facet of insanity as a socio-historical phenomenon. Essays gathered in the first section explore how mental illness was institutionally framed in 18th century Russia and redefined throughout the 19th century. Special attention is given to the parallel developments in the Russian and Western European legal codes and cultural discourses. Part II examines the bond between war, insanity and revolution, as well as the construction of mental illness, notably suicide, in the early Soviet era. Part III is devoted to the debate about the linkage between madness and creativity.

Angela Brintlinger introduces the volume with a helpful survey that highlights the long-standing ambivalence the Russians feel toward insanity. The phenomenon met with awe in medieval Russia where iurodivyi or the holy fool was celebrated as someone who dispensed with the ceremonial niceties and renounced conventional pursuits in exchange for the right to voice critical opinions which were certain to get into trouble anyone unprotected by the saintly halo surrounding the inspired madman. This archetypal figure makes frequent appearance throughout Russian history. It is instantly recognizable in literary characters like Count Myshkin, a hero of Dostoevsky’s novel provocatively titled *Idiot*, or Venedikt Erofeev, a soviet-style holy fool conjured up in Venedikt Erofeev’s beloved crypto-autobiographical novel.

In a key chapter, Ilyia Vinitsky demonstrates how the traditional attitudes toward insanity began to change under Catherine the Great. In the late 1770s, the Empress introduced to Russia asylums for the insane that would become known throughout the country as zhelyte doma or “yellow houses.” Holy fools who once roamed Russia’s countryside would find themselves increasingly committed to such institutions. Catherine the Great waged a bitter battle against melancholy, a seditious mood she banned from the court where her subjects were expected to display a cheerful disposition as a token of their loyalty to the throne. Any sign of disaffection, according to the new affective paradigm, was suspect. Melancholy types were judged to be trouble makers, morally corrupted beings harboring illicit sentiments injurious to the state.
Catherine's views were inspired by the Enlightenment's opposition to traditionalist forces, particularly in the church hierarchy, but its modernist agenda had a peculiarly Russian twist. When Aleksandr Radishchev wrote a pamphlet lamenting the wretched conditions of the nation's poor, Catherine promptly dispensed with Voltaire's advice, banned the book, declared its author a madman, and committed him to a mental institution. In her diagnosis she blamed the ideological transgression on the “hypochondriac,” “bilious” disposition of the author. Many Russians who showed an impious attitude or ventured critical opinions about the affairs of state would subsequently share Radishchev's fate—from Petr Chaadaev and certain Decembrists to Petr Grigorenko and Dmitri Prigov. Catherine the Great's campaign of enforced cheerfulness followed the path charted by Peter the Great's modernization, reminding us yet again that the very ruthlessness with which modern institutions were imposed on Russia undermined their liberal thrust.

Lia Langoulouva offers an overview of the legal and psychiatric definitions used in Tsarist Russia to circumscribe mental illness, tests designed to identify the legally insane, and state institutions set out to treat the disease. Elena Dryzhakova, Robert Wessling and Lev Losev analyze how insanity has been constructed in the Russian cultural discourse. Starting with the premise that mental instability was central to Dostoevsky's literary explorations, Dryzhakova argues that the author's interest in the subject might have been influenced in part by his own psychological abnormalities. Wessling shows how Vsevolod Garshin, a Russian popular author who committed suicide, emerged as a cult figure among the Russian intelligentsia. Wessling ties the Garshin cult to the intelligentsia's precarious status in the late 19th century. Losev acts as a literary sleuth as he traces Joseph Brodsky's poem “Gorbunov and Gorchakov” to the author's brief encounter with mental institutions in soviet Russia. It is noteworthy that Brodsky entered a mental hospital voluntarily, at the behest of his friends trying to save him from prison, but the horrors he experienced therein taught him that the conditions in the asylum could be worse than in prison. Ever since the French Revolution, scholars and popular writers sought to link madness with the riotous behavior threatening to topple the established regimes. Martin Miller cites Pinel’s 1806 Treatise on Insanity as a landmark study that introduced the idiom of revolutionary insanity and documents its impact on the Russian psychiatric movement and popular culture. As several contributors to the volume note, the idea made a strong impression on Dostoevsky whose novel The Demons pictures Russian revolutionaries as mentally disturbed, sometimes patently deranged creatures whose political passions are fed by their personal pathologies—the view shared by a prominent Russia psychiatrist Vladimir Chizh. The authors contributing to the famous turn-of-the-century publication Vekhi offered another influential account of the mental disturbances afflicting the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia. Declining to medicalize symptoms, the Vekhi authors drew attention to the fact that the Russian people in general and Russian intellectuals in particular sorely lacked what we would call today “emotional intelligence.” It is their chronic irritability, maximalism, over-confidence, and lack of follow-through, according to the Vekhi authors, that explains the Russian intelligentsia’s disastrous infatuation with revolutionary violence.

Irina Sirotkina investigates the role Russian psychiatrists played during World War II, making the case that Russian doctors were more sympathetic to war veterans' complaints than some of their Western ideologically-colored optics of suicide victims in the post-mortem reports where decisions to their non-proletarian life styles. Dan Healy about sexual crimes and the happened, the accused offered their criminal conduct while trial. The last section explores Angela Britlinger makes an doctors cast psychological physical and mental dysfunctional family life. Human nature of psychiatric diagnosis imagination in explaining the Odesskaya reviews Anton prominently, particularly Wa romantic trope about the death and Vladimir Efroimson, a Russian him on a collision course with picture painted by her colleague characters populating in the elegant literary-philosophical between Friedrich Hölderlin, according to Epstein, fell vict to the seminal writers over the last section explores comprehensive interdisciplinary working in diverse fields. Let exercise.

Not a single article in this issue written by an eminent sociologist gave a devastating account undergone in mental institution prison bears an uncanny resemblance to Goffman whose par my argument is the fact that mental illness and institutions played a part in the release of hospital in 1964, she commits
It's opposition to traditionalist mist agenda had a peculiarly phlet lamenting the wretchedensed with Voltaire's advice, ted him to a mental institution. the "hypochondriac," "bilious" impius attitude or ventured ity share Radishchev's fate figorenko and Dmitri Prigov. lowed the path charted by Peter very ruthlessness with which tional hospital voluntarily, at the horrors he experienced therein than in prison. I cannot do justice in my brief review to these fine essays, which form the most comprehensive interdisciplinary survey of its kind and which will be welcome by students working in diverse fields. Let me just single out one thing I found missing in this collective exercise.

Kenneth Pinnow presents interesting data on the ideologically-colored optics through which soviet psychiatrists viewed the "possible worlds" of suicide victims in the Red Army. The political agenda clearly comes though in the post-mortem reports where the experts strenuously sought to bind the victims' fateful decisions to their non-proletarian roots or their association with ideological malcontents and alien life styles. Dan Healy rounds up Part II with a study analyzing the expert testimony about sexual crimes and the manner these were interpreted in the early Soviet era. As it happened, the accused often pressed the narrative of mental illness to explain, if not excuse, their criminal conduct while the medical doctors insisted on the perpetrators' fitness to stand trial.

The last section explores the relationship between mental illness and creativity. Angela Britlinger makes an intriguing observation about differences in the manner Russian doctors cast psychological problems in men, whose abnormalities they tied to the latter's physical and mental exhaustion, and in women, whose difficulties they traced to dysfunctional family life. Helena Goscilo makes a kindred point regarding the gendered nature of psychiatric diagnosis and the propensity of Russian writers to privilege masculine imagination in explaining the linkage between madness and artistic genius.

Margarita Odesskaya reviews Anton Chekhov's stories where madness and madness figure prominently, particularly Ward No. 6 and The Black Monk. Yvonne Howell shows how the romantic trope about the deranged artistic genius in the biological morphed into a theory of Vladimir Efroimson, a Russian geneticist whose views on the bio-social roots of genius put him on a collision course with the Russian authorities. Daun Khaus updates the historical picture painted by her colleagues with a lively account of assorted pathologies and nutty characters populating in the post-soviet literature. And finally, Mikhail Epstein offers an elegant literary-philosophical meditation on madness and genius where he draws parallels between Friedrich Hölderlin and Konstantin Batiushkov, near contemporaries who, according to Epstein, fell victims to their over-abandoned artistic imagination which pushed the seminal writers over the brink.

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illness, acknowledging that it might have organic roots and intimating that he would have written a different book if he had a chance to rewrite it.

Here is the lesson I would like to draw from this story: There is more to madness than the excess of imagination, artistic or otherwise. The vast majority of exceptionally creative people are not insane, just as the vast majority of mentally ill are not exceptionally gifted. In the last few years of his life when Nietzsche lost touch with reality, he was observed dancing naked like the dancing god Zarathustra he extolled in his writings, but he was also given to the misogynist ranting, anti-Semitic slur, and plain gibberish. Whether he was “mad about” matters conjured up by his philosophical genius is far from clear. The genius as madness metaphor will continue to nourish artistic imagination, but this Romantic trope still popular in Russia is overdue for a sober bio-sociological examination.

Pride and Panic lays emphasis on Soviet Russian films. Despite psychoanalysis, cultural analysis of the last six years of Russia, derived from diverse films out a discussion of the consequences of Western cultural expansion through an unorthodox approach to the stages of development. The book is cogently trace the dynamic of the Soviet Union through the gap in immediate cinematic reaction largely unknown and there discussion shifts to fantasies of “wounded national pride.” glorious Russian past. After arguing in her fourth chapter communicating, and ultimate responsibility and/or its ant concluding chapter, where She Hashamova goes beyond the Psycho a portrait of the post-Soviet film is an enga elucidation of such well known stereotypes and/or images Hollywood norm, but still interpretations of such acclai (2003) and Balabanov’s “Brot sided and superficial. For indulging with, and exposing, stil indulging in them, as Hashamova ignores the way the film ac uncertainties through devices su