

Ed. Jillian Porter and Maya Vinokour. *Energy Culture: Work, Power, and Waste in Russia and the Soviet Union.*

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In the current climate crisis era, the history of energy has attracted abundant scholarly attention, especially in the historical research of science, technology, and the environment. Interest toward literary and other cultural representations of energy has concurrently been studied in the field of ecocritical research. These developments have given rise to a new field of study called energy humanities. *Energy Culture: Work, Power, and Waste in Russia and the Soviet Union*, consisting of thirteen chapters, is the largest scholarly work so far that engages in this discussion by examining Russian and Soviet energy as a cultural product. As the editors Jillian Porter and Maya Vinokour note in the introductory chapter, the volume aims to address the pressing need to comprehend Russia's role in the social, political, and economic forces that pose a threat to life on Earth (4).

The volume follows a chronological arrangement that starts from the early 1860s and continues until the end of the 2010s. Within a culture with such a remarkable emphasis on the exploitation of energy resources as Russia's, a period of more than one and a half centuries is indeed quite extensive, and challenging to address in a single collection of articles. However, the editors and their twelve co-authors do a commendable job accomplishing this feat by encompassing various energy forms, cultural genres, time periods, and relationships with and understanding of energy. The outcome provides a comprehensive overview of the diverse cultural representations of energy throughout Russian history.

Most of the central sources of energy are handled in at least one of the chapters. Molly Brunson studies how the energy from coal is made visible in Nikolai Kasatkin's late nineteenth-century visual art. As intensely dark places, coal mines are particularly challenging to paint, and Brunson shows how Kasatkin's work depicts not only coal but also its miners as energy resources. Polina Dimova's chapter on the aesthetics of Valerii Briusov's symbolist literature from the turn of the twentieth-century does not study any particular energy source, but concentrates on utopian and dystopian dimensions of electricity. Robert Bird examines early Soviet poetics of peat, which grew to be the most important source of energy in the 1920s, but soon lost its significance due to its nature as an inefficient energy source that was not considered prestigious.

Oil is the quintessential energy source of Russia, which Ilya Kalinin handles in his chapter on Russian petropoetics. His close reading of the poetics of oil in Andron Konchalovskii's *Siberiade* (1978) shows how the oil industry in the film can be understood in different ways: either as being more harmonious with both natural and cultural legacies than other sources of energy—the state-sponsored idea—or as an industry that uproots people from their native land—the view that the director years later claimed that the film had adopted. Oil and gasoline also play a role in Meghan Vicks's analysis of Tatiana Tolstaia's novel *The Slynx* (2000), but the chapter also studies literature as a source of energy and delves into the dystopian tropes of nuclear power, connecting the novel to posthumanist discourse. Nuclear power is also central for Kate Brown's chapter on how HBO's internationally successful miniseries

Chernobyl (2019) repeated old Soviet propaganda, for instance by highlighting the masculine heroism of the “liquidators.”

The most significant concrete energy source missing from the volume is water. It is a pity, because since early Soviet times harnessing rivers for energy production was celebrated as an important part of modernization in the Soviet Union. Hydropower and dams have been recurring themes in numerous literary and cinematic works. They have significantly shaped the Russian landscape through their creation of reservoirs, and therefore sparked fervent and influential opposition, particularly within the literary sphere, calling for ecocritical readings from the point of view of energy.

Many chapters approach energy from a more creative or metaphysical perspective. Konstantine Klioutchkine studies Nikolai Chernyshevskii’s classic *What Is to Be Done?* (1863), which involves energizing social change via women’s neurophysiological power. It is an apt opening chapter for the volume (after the introduction), illustrating the importance of energy in Russian cultural production, even though the socialist reality of the Soviet Union failed to fulfill the novel’s “ecofeminist fantasy,” as the editors note (12). Jillian Porter’s study of *Anna Karenina* (1875–77) shows how Lev Tolstoi’s novel manages to advocate values that enabled fossil fuel capitalism and socialism to flourish, even though it was essentially critical of both. Maya Vinokour examines the biocentric visions of Russian Cosmism, especially in Nikolai Fedorov’s philosophy, arguing that nineteenth-century utopianism actually actively contributed to the later excesses of Stalinism.

William Nickell’s chapter studies the revolutionary energy of the 1920s, when many of the heroes of revolution became exhausted due to overwork. This led to very specific recommendations from health authorities to emphasize the importance of rest from work that requires brainpower. Joy Neumeyer studies the efforts of Soviet science to prolong human life, which was particularly and curiously visible to the public in Leonid Brezhnev’s increasingly fragile body and mind during the last years of his reign. Finally, Jessica K. Graybill’s, Yang Zhang’s, and Isobel Hooker’s contribution is an interesting look at the energy aesthetics of the Russian Arctic village of Teriberka, which has become a popular place to visit by people seeking, for instance, spiritual powers.

This edited volume is an important opening for studying the history of energy culture in Russia and the Soviet Union, serving as a good introduction to the theme of energy humanities and Russia. It not only complements international scholarship on energy humanities but also enriches the discourse on energy politics and the historical trajectory of energy production in the region.