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Editorial

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Editorial

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Over the last hundred and fifty years, Central and East European countries have undergone immense changes and many dramatic political events: Two world wars; the consolidation and collapse of Communist regimes; Cold War tensions; and finally, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Soviet bloc – these events had a profound and far-reaching effect on all spheres of life in this region. Radical political transformations are perhaps the best-known signals of change, but new ideas in literature, architecture and cinema have been equally important. At the beginning of the 21st century, the post-Soviet countries are still in the process of ‘re-inventing’ themselves. Their search for a new identity is reflected in many cultural trends, including the growing popularity of new genres in mass literature, attempts to portray a new ‘national hero’ in cinematic blockbusters, efforts to alter urban landscapes and other monuments of the totalitarian past, and the emergence of new political movements.

The contributions in this special issue examine the process of cultural and political change in Central and Eastern Europe from a variety of perspectives. The problem of change in recent Russian literature is developed by Joanne Shelton (University of Bath). Joanne’s article focuses on post-Soviet women’s fiction – the Russian equivalent of so-called ‘chick-lit’. By comparing different genres of mass literature, including female detective novels (particularly

popular in Russia in the mid-1990s) and *glamurnoe chtenie* or ‘glamour fiction’ (a genre that has become extremely fashionable in Russia in recent years), Joanne analyses the role these literary works play in Russian society. The article concludes that, besides providing entertainment, women’s fiction functions as a ‘survival guide’ for modern Russian women in a rapidly changing society.

A painstaking search for a new national identity is discussed in the article by Vanessa Rampton (King’s College, University of Cambridge). Vanessa’s article analyses two films directed by Aleksei Balabanov – *Brat* (Brother, 1997) and *Brat 2* (Brother 2, 2000) – which achieved unprecedented popularity in Russia. The article suggests that Balabanov’s films played a major role in the construction of national identity. Many Russian reviewers have expressed their fears that Balabanov’s portrayal of a new ‘national hero’ may have a detrimental effect on multi-ethnic Russian identity by encouraging extremist nationalism. The article challenges this interpretation: based on analysis of viewers’ responses, it contends that the core of Balabanov’s films’ appeal to audiences is not their apparent racialism but their depiction of the criminal hero as a sympathetic vigilante.

The article by Uilleam Blacker (School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London) addresses the problem of transformations in Central and Eastern Europe from a different perspective. The article explores the changing images of one city – the Western Ukrainian town of Lviv – as they are reflected in contemporary Ukrainian literature. Uilleam suggests that the urban environment can be read as a text expressed in literary works,

localized products and fragrances, and even architecture. He analyses various interpretations of Lviv by focusing on its physical features: the smells, tastes, buildings and topography of Lviv are viewed as structural elements of this supra-text.

The article by Raul Carstocea of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London also tackles the problem of confronting the past, although its focus is on how the past can be exploited by political actors. Raul provides a comprehensive overview of the new radical right groups in Romania in historical context and looks at their links with inter-war fascism, with a particular focus on the group known as the New Right. By analysing this group's statements, as published on their website, the author examines their links to the 'Legion of the Archangel Michael', Romania's inter-war fascist organization.

Earlier versions of these articles were presented at the post-graduate conference of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES) 'Reactions and Reinventions: Changing Critical Genres in Slavonic and East European Literature, Culture and Politics since 1840', which took place at the Centre for Russian, Central and Eastern European Studies, University of Glasgow on 8 December, 2007. The conference was organized in order to bring together research students working on various topics related to Eastern and Central Europe, and to encourage future collaboration projects. We feel justified in claiming that the conference successfully fulfilled these goals, and we hope that future BASEES conferences for post-graduates will continue this tradition.

The editors of this special issue would like to thank all the participants of the conference, including those academics who generously gave their time to chair the panels and lead discussions. All the articles printed here were peer reviewed. We would like to thank the anonymous but highly dedicated peer reviewers for their constructive comments. Moreover, we would like to acknowledge the generous financial support of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies and the Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences, University of Glasgow, whose contributions made the conference possible.