

## Book Review: To See Paris and Die: The Soviet Lives of Western Culture by Eleonory Gilburd

Chris Booth

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/issr>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Communication Commons](#), [Economics Commons](#), [Geography Commons](#), [International and Area Studies Commons](#), [Political Science Commons](#), and the [Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Booth, Chris () "Book Review: To See Paris and Die: The Soviet Lives of Western Culture by Eleonory Gilburd," *International Social Science Review*. Vol. 95 : Iss. 3 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/issr/vol95/iss3/8>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Social Science Review by an authorized editor of Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository.

**Gilburd, Eleonory. *To See Paris and Die: The Soviet Lives of Western Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018. vii + 458 pages. Hardcover, \$35.00.**

In Eleonory Gilburd's most recent book, *To See Paris and Die: The Soviet Lives of Western Culture*, readers are treated to an examination of Western cultural imports influence on a closed Soviet society and their diverse reception. Not limiting herself to any particular field, Gilburd, a well-respected Soviet historian, covers a wide range of the arts, including films, paintings, books, and even language itself—investigating nearly every cultural import into the Soviet Union from the Western world. While focusing primarily on 1950 till 1960, a period commonly referred to as the “thaw,” Gilburd does occasionally stretch to other eras during the Cold War to identify particularly significant cultural items. Throughout the book, Gilburd contends that the cultural imports from the Western world into the Soviet Union—while at first often a sensory shock—regularly intermixed into the overall tapestry of Soviet culture to the point that art, movies, books, and so forth were frequently seen as a Soviet possession.

Moving from topic to topic, Gilburd's allotment of a chapter to each cultural medium is both, simultaneously, a strength and a weakness of the book. Overall, the author's knowledge of every subject is beyond question, making the shift between cultural mediums almost seamless. Gilburd demonstrates an excellent fundamental grasp of every subject whether it is through her analysis of influential Western books in Soviet culture or the discussion of modernist paintings and how they impacted Soviet museum attendees in the capitol city of Moscow. The drawback from this chapter by chapter shift, however, is that there are instances where, in an apparent effort to move to the next subject, potential topics are left unrealized to the reader.

A primary example of the aforementioned issue can be seen in the sixth chapter, wherein Gilburd examines the cultural impact of tourism once it was opened up (albeit slightly) to the

Soviet population. Gilburd does not only do an outstanding job of denoting how Soviet tours abroad impacted the lives of the travelers, but also excels in detailing the intricacies of how difficult it was for a Soviet to even get the opportunity to travel abroad in the first place. In describing the necessary and complicated voucher system, the requirement to travel with a “trip leader” and in a group format, and the necessary briefing with state security personnel, Gilburd sheds light on just how difficult the process to travel truly was for the Soviet who was lucky enough to be given the opportunity. However, Americans and Western Europeans traveling into the Soviet Union are barely mentioned. Adding the impact that these visitors had through common interactions with Soviet citizens during the “thaw” and other similar such omissions in lieu of moving onto the next cultural medium could have been a potential benefit to the reader.

These limitations aside, *To See Paris and Die* is an excellent investigation into how cultural imports from the Western world impacted the citizenry of the Soviet Union. With an outstanding grasp of art, history, and Soviet perspective from her own experience, Eleonory Gilburd has crafted a book that is important to not only historians but to essentially all avenues of the social sciences. This book is a must read for anyone who is studying the “thaw” period of the Cold War but is also one that can be enjoyed by art historians, film aficionados, and enthusiasts of popular writers such as Hemingway and Remarque due to the in depth analysis of their influence on the Soviet culture. A superb overall piece, Gilburd has made a solid impact in the field of Cold War scholarship.

Chris Booth  
United States Coast Guard Officer  
Duluth, MN.