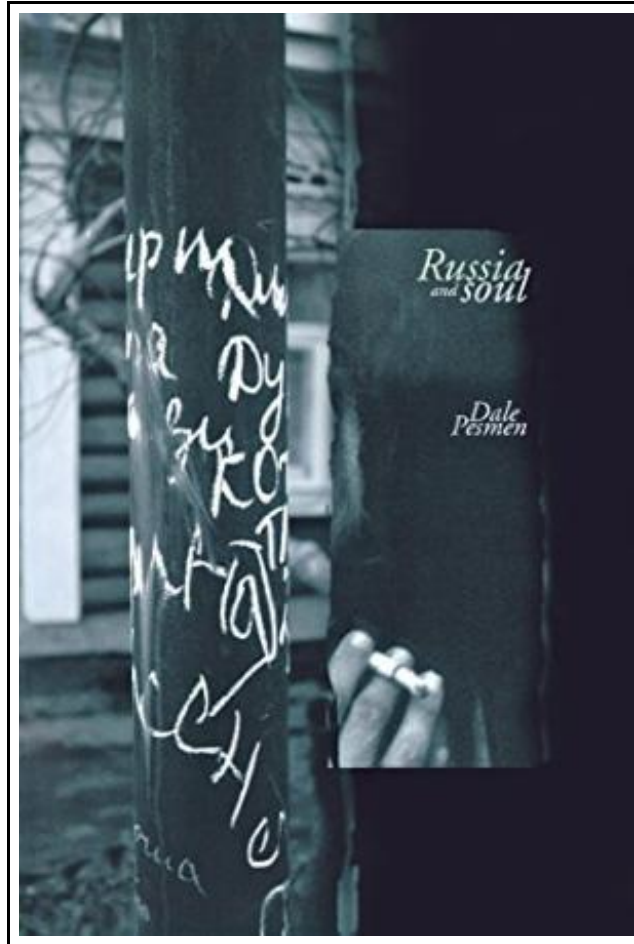


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Reviews

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Cornell University Press, United States, 2000. Paperback. Condition: New. Language: English . Brand New Book. This ethnography of everyday life in contemporary Russia is also an examination of discourses and practices of soul or dusha. Russian soul has historically appeared as a myth, a consoling fiction, and a trope of national and individual self-definition that drew romantic foreigners to Russia. Dale Pesmen shows that in the 1990s this soul was scorned, worshipped, and used to create, manipulate, and exploit cultural capital. Pesmen focuses on soul in part as what people chose to do and how they did it, especially practices considered definitive of Russians, such as hospitality, the use of alcoholic beverages, steam baths, Russian language, music, and suffering. Attempting to avoid narrow definitions of soul as a thing, Pesmen developed a new way of structuring ethnographic interviews. During her stay in a formerly closed military industrial city and surrounding villages, Pesmen spent time on public transportation and in kitchens, steam baths, vegetable gardens, shops, and workplaces. She uses stories from her fieldwork along with examples from the media and literature to introduce a phenomenology of russkaia dusha and of related American and other non-Russian metaphysical notions, exploring diverse elements in their makeup, examining and questioning the world created when people believe in the existence of such deep, vast, enigmatic, internal centers. Among theoretical issues she addresses are those of power, community, self, exchange, coherence, and morality. Pesmen's attention to dusha gives her a multifaceted perspective on Russian culture and society and informs her rich portrayal of life in a Russian city at a historically critical moment.



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