

Comptes rendus / Book Reviews 473

Finally, the book gives more weight to the Italian case than it does the German. Nazi Germany is often given only a ‘token nod’, with Mussolini’s Italy generally providing most of the evidence for points being made. *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* is an ambitious and admirable project, with much that could be useful to the general reader. Nonetheless, it suffers from extreme brevity, which appears to have required compromises that have weakened the book as a whole.

Lynne Taylor
University of Waterloo

James von Geldern and Richard Stites, eds. — *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays and Folklore, 1917–1953*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995. Pp. xxix, 492.

This pathbreaking book is a much needed introduction to Soviet mass culture for English-speaking readers. Richard Stites and James von Geldern, leading specialists in Russian and Soviet cultural studies, have assembled an anthology that spans the period from the revolution up to the death of Stalin. In contrast to the many studies that have concentrated on the institutions which formulated and administered cultural policies, this collection focuses on the content and reception of mass culture. The editors have collected poems, folk tales, comic sketches, film scripts, plays, children’s stories, and anecdotes to bring to life the richness and variety of cultural forms from a period all too often considered to be culturally barren.

The volume is divided chronologically into four sections. The first spans the years of revolution and Civil War to the end of the relatively free period of the New Economic Policy (NEP), featuring proletarian poetry, anti-war pamphlets in popular language, Red Army songs, agitational plays, excerpts from film scripts and novels, and underground songs. The second section, covering the late 1920s and 1930s, treats the more overtly official culture of Stalinism, illustrating the devastating impact of the cultural revolution of 1928–1932 on mass culture and the emergence of the optimistic mass culture of socialist realism, with its mythology of opportunity and social mobility. The more politically unconstrained and emotion-filled culture of the Second World War is presented in the third section, while the final one deals with the resurgence of a now stale socialist realism in the sombre postwar years. Von Geldern and Stites have included unofficial anecdotes throughout the book to provide a counterweight to the predominance of officially sanctioned culture, and these allow the reader a glimpse into the minds of ordinary citizens.

The selections are well chosen to illustrate the shifts in the changing mythology of Soviet culture under Lenin and Stalin, and they demonstrate the variety and complexity of a uniquely politicized mass culture. Each selection is given a short introduction explaining its historical context, and a cassette featuring recordings of popular songs makes the book a superb resource for teaching.

In his excellent introduction, von Geldern ties the various strands of the collection together, arguing that Soviet mass culture was shaped by the often conflicting

interests and desires of the Party, artists, and audiences. He paints a vivid portrait of the negotiations and accommodations that shaped cultural policy. After an outburst of state-sponsored experimentation in the Civil War period, political propaganda had to compete in the cultural marketplace of NEP with Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, and contraband Pinkerton novels. During the cultural revolution, the regime re-established its monopoly on cultural production and distribution, but by the mid-thirties the officially sanctioned socialist realism was forced to acknowledge audiences' taste for Hollywood-style musicals and comedies that promoted an ideal of social unity. The demands of popular mobilization behind the war effort gave rise in the forties to a wartime mass culture which resurrected patriarchal family values and traditional Russian patriotic motifs.

Far from being a monolith, official mass culture contained a surprising amount of diverse opinion, although it never entirely supplanted the unofficial jokes, anecdotes, and tales that continued to question officially sanctioned values. Yet what this volume suggests is the extent to which the changing political agenda of the Soviet state, rather than changes in mass taste, influenced shifts in the form and content of mass culture. To be sure, Soviet mass culture was indeed mass culture, in the sense that it was designed for, consumed by, and shared by the vast majority of Soviet citizens. Still, it was fundamentally different from the mass culture that emerged as a product of the capitalist market economy following industrialization and urbanization, beginning in the United States and Western Europe and more recently becoming global in scope. In the period covered in this book, Russia's nascent mass culture, originating in the pre-revolutionary period as a product of social change and market forces, was destroyed from above and replaced by a series of attempts to find a substitute which would be acceptable to the masses while serving the state's ideological goals. The commercial "culture industry" and the marketplace are absent from the Soviet experience after 1928.

Of course, von Geldern is right to suggest that Soviet cultural production was not a one-way street, something artificial and alien foisted on a supine population. More attention needs to be paid, however, to the question of audience reception. How can we know, for example, what audiences thought of the films, novels, and stories we read in this collection? Are there any reliable attendance or sales figures to suggest which offerings appealed most to the public? In addition to the richly expressive anecdotes that the editors have included, are there other sources, such as police records, which can fill the gaps in our knowledge of popular resistance to the messages promoted by the official culture? The burgeoning field of cultural studies offers a wealth of approaches to the study of mass culture: the Frankfurt School's emphasis on its maintenance of social authority, Gramsci's theory of hegemony and his idea that mass culture contained conflict by channelling it into politically safe outlets, feminist analyses of the "male gaze" and representations of gender, neo-hegemony theory's view of mass culture as a mixture of meanings negotiated from above and from below. Von Geldern seems to be pointing in the direction of the last approach, but there are many others which could prove useful in understanding Soviet mass culture. This volume paves the way for a broader, more nuanced understanding of Soviet mass culture and for more research that goes beyond the

study of texts and their producers to explore the ways in which cultural meanings were negotiated in a non-capitalist, non-market environment.

E. Anthony Swift
University of Essex

Neil Semple — *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996. Pp. x, 565.

Adding to a list of very good works by, among others, William Westfall, Phyllis D. Airhart, P. Travis Kroeker, and Robert K. Burkinshaw, McGill-Queen's University Press presents this fine book by Neil Semple, released under the auspices of its series entitled "Studies in the History of Religion". Semple's primary aim is to show that the Methodist Church, comprised of various groups that differed on non-essential points of theology, is nothing less than Canada's church. This does not mean that Methodism enjoyed any sort of official establishment, of course. Rather, by virtue of the dedication of those thousands of Methodists who gave time, money, energies, and prayers to the propagation of their faith in the Dominion, Methodism's roots permeate Canadian soil.

Semple reiterates his point often. In the introduction to his ninth chapter, "The Transformation of the Social Means of Grace", we read that "Canadian Methodist leaders viewed Methodism as the truly national church encompassing the full range of Canada's cultural identity" (p. 211). During the settlement of the West in the Laurier years, "Methodism was committed to Canadianize and Christianize ... settlers while providing familiar church worship for those from Methodist backgrounds" (p. 285). In the early twentieth century Methodists "felt a deep responsibility not only to nurture and protect their own members, but also to transform the entire nation into a highly moral social order" (p. 334). Canada's Methodists carried this temperament with them into the United Church (formed in 1925), which consequently also took itself to be Canada's "national church": "As such, it ... assumed that it had the right and the duty to reshape Canadian society in Christ's image and that its status empowered it to provide a tolerant and unbiased forum for diverse interests from both the religious and secular communities" (p. 450). In short, Semple wants us to know that the history of Methodism is not incidental to the history of Canada, but rather is inseparable from Canadian history. Thus, Semple joins that ever-expanding and increasingly formidable cloud of witnesses who are committed to reminding us that religion, theology, and faith really do matter.

Though Methodism's abiding influence might be unrecognizable to most today, this book maintains that it is nevertheless present. With other historians who have recently published works on Canadian Protestantism (Michael Gauvreau, for example), Semple sees Methodism's legacy everywhere in Canada's public life. Do you appreciate Canada's health care system and "social safety net"? Thank the Methodists, for they were at the forefront of the social gospel movement which did so