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Review of How Russia Shaped the Modern World: From Art to Anti-Semitism, Ballet to Bolshevism

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This study of elites, commercial, intellectual and legal, reveals the effects of governmental restrictions on individual choices. Nathans' exposition of the lives of Russian Jewish university students evokes the difficulties these students faced and the promise they expected would help them to integrate into Russian society outside the Pale. According to Nathans, Russian Jewish students did not face the same anti-Semitism that their peers encountered at German universities. Thus, when quotas were introduced in the universities, described as the most significant retreat from selective integration during the late imperial period, Jewish students felt the shock of betrayal. The most compelling part of Nathans' narrative concerns the experiences of Jewish law students and Jews' participation in the legal system. As Nathans explains, when Jewish lawyers challenged the Russian state regarding restrictions on Jews in court, they made possible the "articulation" of a civic identity, an important prerequisite for the development of a civil society within the context of the Russian empire (339).

Though the selective integration Nathans describes was far from an unqualified success, the entrance of Jews into Russian institutions of higher education and to the legal profession opened up the possibility of the development of a "voluntary Jewish community" (377). Nathans' well-founded arguments convince. By drawing attention to the methods Russian Jewish leaders employed to improve their status as subjects of the Empire, he encourages the reader to evaluate anew how Jewish leaders responded to government discrimination. Most importantly, Nathans highlights the potential for the development of Jewish civil society, even in a repressive empire. The title promises a more sweeping view of Jewish life outside of the Pale, but this tightly constructed work highlights groups within Russian Jewish society who began to change the boundaries of the Jewish and Russian communities. Nathans' superb study will long encourage scholars of Jewish and Russian history to examine further the contacts between the two communities on all levels.

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Steven G. Marks. *How Russia Shaped the Modern World: From Art to Anti-Semitism, Ballet to Bolshevism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003. xii, 393 pp. \$29.95.

Steven Marks has written a sweeping, compelling work about the influence of Russia and Russians on the twentieth century. Ironically, this influence on the modern world began as a reaction against it. In the 1800s Russia found itself in the throes of modernization – economic, political, and cultural. The experience elicited varied responses from radical thinkers who feared that Russia was losing its traditional bearings and sacrificing its soul to the West, which they abhorred as the source of evil. Marks is careful to point out that, while the ideas these people embraced did not necessarily get their start in Russia, the country's unique circumstances placed it in a position to shape them; in this way, "Russian thought has had a profound effect on the course of modern history" (6). Similarly, the author emphasizes that his work essentially breaks no new ground; an indication is his battery of sources, which are drawn

from published literature, not archives. Furthermore, he makes no attempt to be encyclopedic in his coverage. Broadly speaking, most of the movements examined here fall into the categories of art or politics, although the impact of any one of them has been multifaceted. Science, to cite an example provided by the author, receives no attention.

Marks's account begins with anarchism, the first Russian intellectual movement that sent shock waves around the globe. Anarchism acquired links with both socialism and revolutionary terror (the latter popularly thought of as the "Russian method") long before those terms became synonymous with Bolshevism. Typical of the author's approach, after describing the movement within its Russian context (with appearances by Bakunin, Nechaev, and Chernyshevsky), he examines the spread of its ideas abroad; to his credit, the survey includes not only Europe and the United States but also the world outside of the West. Books about Russian terrorists, for example, acquired a large readership in China, while India became a major center of anarchist and terrorist activity based on Russian models. Even after anarchism collapsed as a movement in the 1930s, its influence lived on in works by writers such as Camus, Sartre, Fanon, and Marcuse. Marks also sees its legacy in the notorious activities of Al-Qaeda. Giving equal time to non-violent anarchism, the author devotes a separate chapter to Prince Kropotkin, whose modern influence is manifested in environmentalism, the Arts and Crafts movement, and ecoradicalism.

Both Dostoevsky and Tolstoy receive individual treatment as well. Dostoevsky applied a psychological approach to characters in an urban setting while conveying the notion that freedom was to be found in spirituality, a notion deeply in accord with Russian Orthodoxy. Tolstoy was "one of the fathers of the modern counterculture" (102) whose ideas lay behind several twentieth-century movements, such as pacifism, vegetarianism, and sexual liberation, not to mention the peaceful nonresistance associated with Gandhi and the U.S. civil rights movement. While opposed to Western modernizing trends, the literary models they helped to create paradoxically undermined resistance to Westernization by bringing "non-Western cultural norms into alignment with what would soon be the European Modernist mainstream" (100). In addition, like many of the influential Russians examined by Marks, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy exerted an appeal on people and movements that would seem to have been opposed to one another (for example, communitarians and individualists) but nevertheless borrowed from these literary giants what suited their purposes.

Of all of the major ideas that fall under the author's scrutiny, anti-Semitism is singular in its hatefulness. According to Marks, the Russian Black Hundreds came close to evolving a form of National Socialism well before similar groups in other countries. Much of the attention in this chapter logically goes to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The work fueled anti-Semitism around the world, often with the help of Russian émigrés who targeted the new Communist rulers of Russia along with the Jews, often equating the two groups. Hitler's anti-Semitic thinking was inspired in part by Alfred Rosenberg and Dietrich Eckart, two Baltic Germans who used the *Protocols* as their foundational text.

Perhaps the chapters most "artistic" in emphasis are those dealing with, on the one hand, ballet and theatre and, on the other, abstract art. In the case of the former Marks

dwells in particular on the figures of Diaghilev, Stanislavsky, and Meierkhol'd. Diaghilev, in fact, exemplifies the interrelationships of some of the luminaries in the book, having been influenced by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky and their concept of artistic freedom. The performance tradition established by Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* had an impact on culture both high- and lowbrow, extending into the fields of music, visual design, clothing, and even mass entertainment. For the chapter on abstract art, Marks focuses only on those individuals who had the greatest effect on modern art, namely, Kandinsky, Malevich, Rodchenko, and El Lissitzky. He sees links between their work and the ideas of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Russian folk art, theosophy, the *Ballets Russes*, the Moscow Art Theatre, and Meierkhol'd. This Russian avant-garde "gave twentieth-century humanity a new way of seeing and interpreting reality" (274), reaching into outlets as mundane as advertising and packaging.

The last part of the book deals, inevitably, with Russian Communism. Its most direct influence, says Marks, was on European and Third World authoritarian movements that welcomed its challenge to Western capitalism and imperialism. The author singles out the one-party dictatorship and command economy as Russia's most notable contributions to twentieth-century history, a legacy of truly dubious value. In conclusion Marks notes that contemporary phenomena such as Islamic radicalism, neo-Nazism, and the militant arm of the antiglobalization movement suggest that the sentiments accounting for the earlier fascination with Russian ideas are still alive: Russia, however, has ceased to be "the icon of anti-Westernism, and nothing as vibrant, inventive, or capable of global appeal seems likely to replace it" (335).

At the outset Marks declares that his book is for a general readership, and it is true that specialists in Russian history are likely to be familiar with much of the material here. Nevertheless the author has brought together ideas and personalities in a way that enlarges our understanding of them and their influence on each other. He is careful not to overreach himself in his claims, and his arguments tend to be sound. Nevertheless, at times the reader might wish for more convincing evidence linking Russian phenomena with their effects and legacy around the globe. The prose occasionally gets a little thick, too. These, however, are relatively minor reservations. On the whole, Marks deserves respectful applause for tackling a large and provocative theme with care and insight. Instructors of courses on Russian and modern European culture will want to add his work to their syllabus.

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Rolf Hellebust. *Flesh to Metal: Soviet Literature and the Alchemy of Revolution*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003. 179 pp. \$42.50 (cloth); \$18.95 (paper).

Rolf Hellebust has struck upon a topic that seems an obvious avenue for scholarly inquiry – once someone has the ingenuity to point it out. In this work, Hellebust creatively explores Soviet culture's emphasis on the metallization of the body. While the metalworker's omnipresence in Soviet iconography has been previously noted by