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# Song of the Forest: Russian Forestry and Stalinist Environmentalism, 1905–1953 by Stephen Brain

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*St. Petersburg: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1995). It also provides a counterpoint to political Petersburg, seen as the capital of revolution, deepening that view by reminding us of the victims, the suffering, and the human degradation underlying much of the anger and protest. Steinberg's portrait of the city is not entirely new, but usefully recreates the moralizing sketches of Petersburg's down-and-out population by social journalists such as V. Mikhnevich, A. Bakhtiarov, and A. Svirskii, and it draws together the work of Laura Engelstein, Louise McReynolds, Laurie Bernstein, Joan Neuberger, Susan Morrissey, and Olga Mattich. The use of these and other published works, together with the author's extensive examination of journals and newspapers, succeeds in bringing into a single volume earlier, separate studies of sex, pleasure-seeking, hooliganism, prostitution, suicide, and their literary representation. The result is a synthesis of evil, decay, and death that amplifies the importance of those studies but also outdoes them in the range and depth of its despair.

Whether this synthesis constitutes an intellectually unified interpretation of the city, however, is another question. It is at least debatable, for instance, whether the reflections on death by poets Aleksandr Blok and Zinaida Gippius shared the same spiritual space as journalistic or scholarly reflections on the city's actual deaths and suicides. This period of Petersburg's history was richer and more complex than is suggested by this study. Yet, although this mirror of the city's self-image may distort, it certainly adds to that richness and complexity by apprising us of the mood and the scope of public and private preoccupation with the city's crime, licentiousness, and violence.

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**Song of the Forest: Russian Forestry and Stalinist Environmentalism, 1905–1953.**

By *Stephen Brain*. Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies. Edited by *Jonathan Harris*.

Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011. Pp. viii+232. \$27.95 (paper).

We are used to thinking of industrialization as inhospitable if not inimical to environmental concerns, and as one of the major sources of environmental degradation in the modern world. Stephen Brain's account of Soviet forestry from 1905 to 1953 (the year of Stalin's death) presents us with a narrative that complicates and to some extent runs counter to that assumption: state-sponsored forest conservation in the years when Stalin ruled the Soviet Union ultimately led to the protection of vast areas of European Russia's forests. What drove "Stalinist environmentalism" was not "concerns about pollution [and] aesthetics" (169); nor did public support play any evident role in the protection of woodlands, although at key moments in state-led campaigns there were efforts to enlist the support of the populace. Rather, Stalinist environmentalism in forestry was driven instead by the unlikely marriage of three forces: the intellectual legacy of an early twentieth-century forest scientist whose work on highly localized forest ecology challenged the orthodoxies of his day; Soviet industrialization itself, with its desire to harness the water power of the great rivers of European Russia; and forest advocates who were able to make convincing arguments that forests were essential to healthy landscapes and that large-scale hydropower projects would be rendered futile without watershed forests.

Brain's book is a masterful study that combines an informed perspective on forest dynamics with a sensitive eye for the archival history of Soviet bureaucracies and

the long-lasting influence of cultural contexts. Early chapters establish the nineteenth-century background to developments in Soviet forestry: patterns of land ownership, increasing awareness of the dire state of the country's European forests, and—by 1917—strong advocacy among professional foresters for nationalizing the country's forests. Russian professional forestry, centered at the St. Petersburg Imperial Forest Academy, was heavily indebted (as were many other technical and intellectual disciplines) to German mathematical models, which assumed the desirability of low-diversity forests. Georgii Morozov, a German-trained Russian who shifted from “orthodox nineteenth-century forester to twentieth-century scientific radical” (31), emerges from the world of nineteenth-century forestry as the hero of Brain's book, a visionary whose system of “stand types” reflected “not merely a group of trees . . . in a given locality” but a complex of properties, including climate, soil and geology, human activities, “plus the changes wrought by the mutual interactions of all these factors” (32). Morozov's system, which he began to elaborate in 1901 and continued to work on until his death in 1920, was contested in his lifetime by his colleague Mikhail Orlov, who championed a system of *bonitet*, management guidelines based not on ecological complexity but marketing desiderata.

The remaining chapters of Brain's study track the impacts of revolution, civil war, and Stalinist policies of industrialization on Soviet forests, describing in meticulous detail the ways in which battles for industrialization and conservation were fought on ideological and bureaucratic terrain. Forests were nationalized in the early years of the Soviet regime, and two key ministries established, each charged with different aspects of management: the People's Commissariat of Agriculture (Narkomzem) with cultivation, the Supreme Soviet of the Economy (VSNKh) with provision of lumber for industrial needs. This bifurcation separated functions that Morozov's forestry had envisioned joining together in the service of long-term health and sustainable forestry. Instead, the institutional and ideological battles for the resources of Soviet forests became pitched. Accounts of what was actually happening in the forest, or allusions to ecological realities, became both contentious and dangerous. Sustainable forestry and any discussion of limits (or efforts at actually pricing timber) were repeatedly denounced as “bourgeois.” Orlov, who in 1924 became head of the Forestry Scholar Committee of Narkomzem, was later viciously harassed for purportedly standing in the way of Soviet exploitation of the country's forest resources; he died “officially of a brain hemorrhage, but in reality from fright and a broken heart” (102). Both Orlov's notions of *bonitet* and Morozov's stand types were discarded for “flying management,” a system adapted from German forestry that made it possible to offset clear-cutting in one region of the Soviet Union by conservation of forests thousands of miles away.

By the late 1920s VSNKh had effectively eliminated all brakes on exploitation of forest resources, putting an end to Narkomzem's jurisdiction in forest matters. The story Brain tells does not, however, end there: advocates of conservation regained the upper hand, in part because they successfully warned of “the danger to the state's canal and dam projects” (118) if deforestation were to continue unchecked. By summer of 1931 control of the forests was handed back to Narkomzem, and a process began by which all Soviet forests were divided into three categories, only one category of which could be extensively cut for industrial purposes. This meant, effectively, the return of many of Morozov's ideas (even when conditions in the mid-1930s mitigated against referring to him directly) and the transfer of jurisdiction over the forest away from an industrial bureaucracy to one charged with management and conservation. The Ministry of Forest Management “steadily expanded the size of protected forests throughout the country,” ultimately challenging the Soviet system of *zapovedniki* (closed nature pre-

erves), in what Brain rightly sees as a clash of “two different kinds of environmentalists . . . the preservationists of the *zapovedniki* versus the conservationists” of the Ministry of Forest Management (135). In a final battle that Brain suggests is emblematic of the larger history of Soviet forestry, ecologists struggled with the fanatic (and fantastic) agronomy of Trofim Lysenko, in a failed campaign to reforest the steppes of the southern Soviet Union.

*Song of the Forest* is a fascinating and important study. Stephen Brain combines patient and meticulous parsing of bureaucratic records and correspondence with vivid narrative and a nuanced sense of “the power of cultural continuity to influence and even trump political considerations” (169). The “cultural continuity” to which Brain refers here is both the “romantic and vitalist” forest ecology of someone like Morozov, with its overtones of Russian exceptionalism; but it is also the enduring role of the forest itself in national identity, an identity in which, as Brain puts it, the conservatism of the forest won out for a time over the radicalism of revolution.

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**Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931–1941.** By *Katerina Clark*.

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011. Pp. x+420. \$35.00.

In *Moscow, the Fourth Rome*, Katerina Clark reinterprets the great opposites of Soviet history: breaks and recurrences, intimacy and terror, proletarian internationalism and Russian nationalism, revolution and retreat, avant-garde and socialist realism. She refuses to privilege one or the other, instead holding these opposites in tension to argue for a heterogeneous Stalinist culture, which absorbed, transformed, and refracted contradictory trends. The book loosely follows the careers of four Soviet polyglot intellectuals, Eisenstein, Tret'iakov, Koltsov, and Ehrenburg, but also features key figures of European leftist culture.

The book challenges the Great Retreat thesis and the narrative of Soviet isolationism, cultural autarky, and an exclusionary turn toward the Russian past. In place of proletarian internationalism, Clark envisions multiple cosmopolitanisms, which incorporate violence and marginalization, patriotism and nationalism. Her intellectuals may be peripatetic, but they are not rootless, even when, as in the case of the German leftist diaspora, their home suddenly belongs to someone else. That is because home in this study consists of films, paintings, languages, and, above all, literature. If cosmopolitans are citizens of the world, then it is the world of culture that Eisenstein, Lukács, and others inhabit. In part, the unfolding drama of *Moscow* centers on rival claims to culture as home. In the face of Nazi book burning, Soviet intellectuals positioned Moscow as the guardian of “world culture.” The vehicle for permanently relocating “world culture” to Moscow was translation, which Clark calls the “Great Appropriation.” The 1930s were an age of remarkable (re)translation efforts ranging from the Renaissance to nineteenth-century classics to select contemporary modernists.

To understand the dream of Moscow ascendant, Clark draws on the old concept of Moscow, successor to Rome and Constantinople, as the center of Christendom, only in this case, Moscow's spiritual and political hegemony would come from culture. And there was more than manipulation and cynicism involved (the tired traditional view) in this blatantly political project, as Clark shows convincingly. She depicts an exhilarating world of inter-