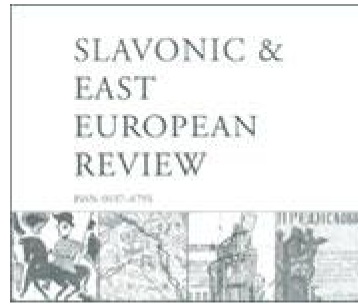

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Drawing the Curtain: The Cold War in Cartoons by Khrushchev, Sergei; Benson, Timothy S.; Jones, Polly; Smirnov, Igor and Borhi, Laszlo. and Frank Althaus and Mark Sutcliffe.

Review by: Seth Graham

Source: *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 92, No. 2 (April 2014), pp. 379-381

Published by: the Modern Humanities Research Association and University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5699/slaveasteurorev2.92.2.0379

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms

Modern Humanities Research Association and *University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Slavonic and East European Review*

This content downloaded from
78.33.29.103 on Wed, 16 Oct 2019 12:03:15 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

broadcasting tower at Ostankino was built, and the nightly news broadcast *Vremia* was introduced, did Soviet TV realize its potential to be the primary source of news and culture for Soviet families.

By the 1970s, Soviet film and television, and to a lesser degree radio, had become the vast cultural-building and profit-making enterprises that their progenitors had envisioned. As this story concludes, Roth-Ey throws two more surprising twists at her readers. First she chides scholars who have villified the two men who brought cinema and television to institutional maturity in the 1970s, mostly by shunning great artists for more popular (read vulgar) fare. The first is Filipp Yermash, Soviet movie-boss from 1972, and Sergei Lapin, TV chief from 1970. Scorned for turning these media from art forms into mindless mass entertainment, Yermash and Lapin symbolize the vitality stifled by the 'stagnation' of the 1970s. But, as Roth-Ey shows, if scholars and intellectuals despise them, audiences certainly did not; this was the era when Soviet TV and cinema reached their greatest viewing public. That phrase, the 'viewing public', contains the second and most bitter irony. The Soviet mass media were developed to enlighten, entertain and unite the Soviet collective, and to broadcast its virtues to other lands. It finally achieved that capacity in the 1970s through radio and television. If culture had previously been consumed in public, together, in concert halls, movie theatres and on the streets, viewers now consumed it at home, alone. Even movies, ballets, concerts arrived in homes over the broadcast waves. The viewing public had become the viewing private.

No review can do justice to the rich research and acute insights of this book. It takes an important episode of Soviet history that has been neglected, and shows why it should be at the centre of that history. Roth-Ey has done all the requisite research to reveal how mass media institutions were shaped by Soviet reality, and how their goals were thwarted by their methods. But more so, Roth-Ey shows how the mass media were an integral part of the lives of Soviet people, and how this shaped their view of the world.

Russian Studies Department JAMES VON GELDERN
Macalester College

Khrushchev, Sergei; Benson, Timothy S.; Jones, Polly; Smirnov, Igor and Borhi, Laszlo. *Drawing the Curtain: The Cold War in Cartoons*. Edited by Frank Althaus and Mark Sutcliffe. Fontanka, London, 2012. 192 pp. Illustrations. Index. £27.50.

THE corpus of books in English about the Soviet political cartoon is not large (and certainly smaller than the body of works on the medium's cousin, the

This content downloaded from
78.33.29.103 on Wed, 16 Oct 2019 12:03:15 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

propaganda poster), but it has a long history, beginning probably with Sir James Purves-Stewart's *A Physician's Tour in Soviet Russia, with Reproductions of Four Russian Cartoons* (London, 1933) and including the well-known Cold-War-era volume, *Out of the Crocodile's Mouth* (Washington, D.C., 1949), as well as another, perestroika-era collection of work from *Krokodil*. *Drawing the Curtain* not only adds to this literature a large number of cartoons never before published in the West, many of them in full colour and large format, but also the most thorough and insightful analysis of the medium to date. It is also distinctive for its comparative approach: cartoons from the Soviet Union (which comprise the majority of cartoons here) are reproduced and analysed alongside British and American examples from the same period.

The book is very much a collective effort, from Sergei Khrushchev's fascinating preface that features an anecdote about his father, Nikita (whose resemblance to Eisenhower caused him to mistakenly take personal offence at a Yugoslav caricature of the American president), to the excellent essays by Timothy S. Benson and Polly Jones, and the brief piece by Igor Smirnov, himself a cartoonist who began publishing in Soviet newspapers in the 1970s. The commentaries on the cartoons themselves, by Benson, Lazslo Borhi, Frank Althaus, Dmitri Antonov, Elena Antonova and Mark Sutcliffe, are equally impressive.

Benson's opening essay, 'The Cartoonists' Cold War', juxtaposes the art and profession of political cartooning in the Soviet Union and in the UK and US from the immediate post-War period until perestroika. He points out some of the obvious differences between the cultural politics of East and West, and also makes some valuable and not-so-obvious points, for example about the surprisingly mild depiction of Stalin in the mainstream Western press right up until his death, and the personal views of Boris Efimov, the era's best-known Soviet cartoonist and caricaturist.

Jones's essay, 'Reimagining the Enemy: Soviet Images of the West after the Second World War', expertly situates the Soviet political cartoon in the larger cultural and political atmosphere of the time. In addition to giving a concise account of many of the international events and contexts that inspired particular topical cartoons, the essay also gives justifiable attention to the aesthetics of visual satire in the late- and post-Stalinist periods, in particular the decades-old 'tensions between figurative and abstract representations of Soviet ideology' (p. 28) that continued to be played out on the pages of *Krokodil* and other venues for the cartoonists' art. Jones also acknowledges the visual genealogy of post-war Soviet representations of Western leaders, which are traceable directly to wartime depictions of Nazi leaders.

Smirnov's brief contribution, 'Cartooning under Communism', gives an insider's account of the world of Soviet political cartooning. His anecdote about how he once jokingly drew a 'millionaire imperialist' with the characteristic

This content downloaded from
78.33.29.103 on Wed, 16 Oct 2019 12:03:15 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

bushy eyebrows and 'prominent upper lip' (p. 31) of Leonid Brezhnev and his surprise when it was actually passed for publication gives a nuanced snapshot of the workings of Soviet cultural production. Smirnov also considers another kind of 'tension' that ran through Soviet cultural politics before and during the Cold War: the difference between 'pure humour' and 'political satire' (p. 31). He doesn't elaborate on this dichotomy, but the mention of it suggests that an area for further research might be those Soviet cartoons and caricatures that were not overtly political, in which the artists did strive for 'pure humour'.

The remaining 150 pages of the book are devoted to the cartoons themselves, with detailed and illuminating commentaries. In a truly innovative format, the commentaries are printed on small, yellow, interleaved pages among the large, album-sized pages containing the colour reproductions of the Soviet cartoons. What's more, even the interleaved pages are used for images: British and American cartoons based on the same events or themes as the Soviet ones. The book's visual abundance and generosity to the reader is also apparent in the inclusion of half a dozen fold-out pages reproducing particular cartoons in an extra-large, A3-size format. The editors' determination to maximize the number of images presented is also shown by their inclusion of a cartoon or fragment on virtually every surface of the book, including the front and back covers, the title page and the contents page.

The study of the cultural production of (and about) the Cold War is an area of scholarship that has in recent years produced a wealth of fascinating and valuable historical and cultural analyses. *Drawing the Curtain* is an important contribution to that study, and is also a handsome edition, at a remarkably affordable price.

UCL SSEES SETH GRAHAM

Gill, Graeme. *Symbolism and Regime Change in Russia*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 2013. vii + 246 pp. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. £55.00: $95.00.

As Graeme Gill's book contends, the sudden and traumatic collapse of the Soviet regime and its attendant metanarrative created the need for a new narrative and symbolic values to explain the collapse, give meaning to the present and point the direction for future development. Gill's central argument is that the new Russian regime has markedly failed to generate this new symbolic structure, thereby jeopardizing its legitimacy and long-term stability.

The book is structured across seven chapters. In the first two, Gill introduces his methodological approach and the historical background to the dissolution of Soviet ideology, with the discussion largely based on this book's prequel,

This content downloaded from
78.33.29.103 on Wed, 16 Oct 2019 12:03:15 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms