in forester's language as "old forests," but these are not "old forests" at all, merely different ecosystems. She asserts that on the Ygan River, elk (moose) and wild reindeer were extinct because of overhunting, without taking into consideration the large-scale fires that burned out most of the Ygan forests in the second half of the nineteenth century. She also reproduces one of Sirelius' photographs (p. 51), clearly a middle stretch of one of the tributaries of the Ob', which she describes as "The river Ob after flooding."

The book suffers from a number of editing errors that include mistranscriptions of place names (Horompaal for Saranpaul', Lombomos for Lombovosh) and of Russian language words (polagan for balogan (p. 45); the author's lack of Russian shows here when she refers to the latter as "a special kind of shelter"). These inaccuracies may have been original in Sirelius, but the value of the Snellman's work for contemporary ethnographers is diminished by not rectifying these errors.

This book may be of value to ethnographers who cannot have access to Sirelius because they do not read German, but even they would have to work very hard to locate and identify data of interest. All of it has been recontextualized. Even the photographs - for many, the most accessible aspect of the book - have their value diminished by inaccurate or uninformative captions. It is difficult to imagine the audience for whom such a book would prove useful.

Andrew Wiget

New Mexico State University


Swift uses the case of popular theater as a means to illuminate social and cultural conflicts in late imperial Russia. Various state ministries, intellectuals, early industrialists, and workers themselves each brought their own preconceived notions and agendas, and they forged a "uniquely democratic social space" that attracted a broad spectrum from the lower and middle classes in the rapidly expanding urban environment. (p. 168) Primarily focusing on activities in St. Petersburg and Moscow, Swift also points to developments beyond the capitals, including comparisons to trends in Western Europe. Ideas of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Wolfgang Iser, and others judiciously inform the work.

The argument begins with a chapter that contextualizes popular theater both chronologically and horizontally across Russian culture in late imperial era. With a brief nod to early Russian traditions, Swift focuses on the development of Western forms of theater introduced in the mid-seventeenth century and expanded in the eighteenth. Under the influence of Enlightenment ideas, Russian rulers came to regard theater as a means for education, rather than mere entertainment. A variety of theatrical spaces emerged by the nineteenth century, including Imperial theaters for the elite and broadly popular carnivals, fairgrounds and summer gardens that featured performances of circuses, puppet shows, and melodramas.
In these milieux, social groups contested the function and content of theater for popular audiences. In the aftermath of the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, theater provided one of several means with the potential to educate and hence reduce the perceived gap between the relatively uneducated peasants and workers and intellectuals who sought to create a unified national culture based on its own values. Such efforts were sometimes undermined by the state which sought to maintain the Imperial theater monopoly and feared the subversive potential of theater. When the monopoly was abolished in 1882, new opportunities arose for theaters; but a tension remained between the need to remain commercially viable and the more admirable goal of “people’s theaters”: to introduce the masses to intelligentsia culture, “civilize” spectators, and protect them from crass commercial theaters.

The rapid increase in industrialization and the effort to encourage temperance among the masses resulted in a broad expansion of popular theater in the 1890s. Theaters were sponsored by factory owners and the Ministry of Finance’s Guardianships of Popular Temperance organizations that viewed theater as “rational recreation” that would increase productivity by diverting workers from more destructive pastimes such as fistfights and drinking. Swift concludes that, contrary to stated goals, these activities failed either to lower alcohol consumption or to instill intelligency tastes in the spectators, who continued to prefer productions’ entertaining aspects, such as costumes and melodramatic plot twists, rather than their messages or aesthetic qualities. Organizers often sacrificed enlightenment to entertainment in order to entice viewers.

If the social and intellectual elite had differing goals for popular theaters, government officials were no more unified. The Interior Ministry viewed popular theater with both fear that it might incite the masses to political action and a paternalism, shared with some intellectuals, that these audiences needed guidance in their moral development and recreational choices. As a result, once the imperial theater monopoly ended, the monarchy established a two-tier censorship system that led to greater restrictions on theaters with tickets prices meant to attract broad audiences. Although the burden of censorship was onerous since many troupes performed numerous plays, they nonetheless staged a considerable diversity of both classic and contemporary drama and sometimes duplicated, when permitted, repertoires of theaters for the elite.

In addition to the analysis of elite attitudes and initiatives, Swift is equally interested in the experience of workers in theaters. Especially after 1905, skilled and educated workers created their own theaters in order to demonstrate respectability and foster self-improvement. The troupes relied on elite texts and expertise, but offered a desired alternative to factory and temperance theaters. For spectators of all types of popular spectacles, according to Swift, the creative process inherent in the consumption of theater and other cultural activities allowed for meanings that challenged elite and middle class hegemony. But not all workers embraced oppositional interpretations. Responses corresponded to expectations: theater did not transform spectators; they used performances to confirm their attitudes.

Swift resists any oversimplification into easy dichotomies of state against society or elite against masses. For the most part he meticulously defines his terms, except when he assumes that Russians were actively engaged in building “civil society” at the time, a debate in scholarship that remains unresolved. Since the development of