one child by a serf woman). While he discusses Russian historical drama as important expressions of Russian national definition, he might have extended this topic to include Pushkin's Boris Godunov and to explain why it flopped upon its introduction and why it later became a staple of Russian and Soviet theater.

Besides his discussion of individual artists, such as the Irish pianist John Field (1782-1837) whose popularity spawned a virtual cult of Fildanstvo, Stites has fascinating things to say or speculate about audience reactions and the interplay of producers, performers, and recipients of artistic products. He makes frequent use of Priscilla Roosevelt's path breaking research on the arts as performed and produced at Russian country estates, and gives us a full-scale investigation of serf theaters in particular. (One unintentional elision seems, however, to imply that Russia had more than 172,000 serf theaters (p. 224) – a slight exaggeration!

Another strong point of Stites's presentation is his comparison of Russian artistic developments with those in Western Europe and Great Britain, an approach that strips away some of the exoticism sometimes attributed to the arts in Russia. He is not in awe of Russian creative artists and notes their frequent proclivity for drink and, in Glinka's case, his womanizing.

Stites does not contend that the arts sprang into prominence in Russia in precisely 1800, and he pays some attention to eighteenth-century predecessors. Nevertheless, he rather underplays the large role of state patronage and Empress Catherine II's huge contributions to popularizing the theater, music, and painting at the imperial court and how accessible the court was to a broad public over several decades. In this regard he neglects some recent contributions of Anthony Cross, Isabel de Madiagra, and myself. On the other hand, he underscores the contributions of the Imperial Academy of Arts to the flowering of painting in these decades. He also acknowledges the substantial role of foreign individuals to Russian arts, noting that John Field never learned a word of Russian despite many years in Russia. The study is deeply researched, cleverly conceived, and beautifully written. Bravo Richard!

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We have long been accustomed to thinking of Russian peasants in the context of opposition to the state or gentry and their respective administrations, mass uprisings, peasant wars, and revolution or, more recently and in less volatile times, as living lives of quiet desperation in which they defended themselves by utilizing "weapons of the weak." The assumption underlying such traditional approaches to the Russian peasant is, of course, also fundamental to the dominant, binary vision of Russian history as the story of a state in conflict with its people or society, a vision, not entirely incorrect, but nonetheless propagated by the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia and shared, in part, even by the state and its minions and most subsequent historians. Within this overall picture, peasant culture and society was seen as fundamentally "other," profoundly antagonistic to surrounding social classes or estates as well as the state and its representatives and their modernizing agenda or mission civilizatrice, as historians now like to term it. Peasant life, meanwhile, was supposedly ruled by a customary law that embraced the values of a
"moral economy" and rejected those of the market. All of which conveniently makes the Revolution of 1917 all but self-explanatory (at least now that most other explanations have been undermined by the careful work of historians during the last half century).

But how is it that this hoary vision of rural Russia and its inhabitants, now more than a century and a half old, still holds sway? In large part because the historical profession has been slow to go beyond the study of "resistance" and penetrate this admittedly opaque peasant world, though, indeed, a number of studies have appeared over the past two decades or so that have begun to break through this opacity, but without yet having significantly influenced the dominant paradigm. Probably the best explanation for the persistence of such a vision, beyond the intelligentsia's and then Soviet historians' vested interest in upholding the mythologies of peasant backwardness, benightedness, and custom, has been the lack of an easily accessible written record. Thus, we have been forced to "read" into the exceptional events that have projected peasants into the public, political arena without being able to juxtapose these events to the ordinariness of peasant daily life within the peasant family, village, or volost' (township).

Now, the appearance of Jane Burbank's long-awaited study of the township courts has made that juxtaposition possible. Focusing on the inadequately studied social history of the peasantry during the period between the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, Burbank has effectively mined an extensive and remarkably complete written record of small-scale peasant disputes at the most local level to reveal just what concerned peasants in their day-to-day lives. What is thereby revealed? Most important and most simply, that the traditional vision of the peasant as being voluntarily and deliberately isolated from the rest of society and the government and living in a world ruled by collectivist and egalitarian values, the primary goal of which is to preserve the unique peasant way of life, is fundamentally mistaken on all counts. Not that the author is quite so blunt. On the contrary, hers is a work of sound scholarship that seeks to base its conclusions solidly on the evidence, without trying to overreach what can actually be demonstrated. And while this evidence does demonstrate that in their daily lives peasants (she actually challenges the notion of "peasant," with all its connotations, as an appropriate term to describe Russia's rural inhabitants during this period) manifested considerable trust for the state and its institutions and struggled to develop a "well-ordered" society, she begs off from the larger question of whether these peasants were ultimately responsible for The Revolution, saying only that there seems to have been little sense of "imminent social breakdown" on the eve nor any evidence of peasant striving to bring about the overthrow of that very state which alone made possible the civil society they were creating. Above all, Burbank argues, the peasants' litigiousness can not be interpreted as a sign of underlying social dysfunction. Far from it. It was, indeed, the outward manifestation of a drive for order and stability.

Important as overturning the analytical categories established in the nineteenth century is, however, the substance of this book also presents a detailed argument about the nature of early twentieth-century rural life, based on the author's exhaustive examination of the township court records for both civil and criminal cases in seven volosts in Moscow province, two in St. Petersburg, and one in Novgorod, between 1905 and 1917. Her analysis is founded on 907 individual cases, which constitute the core of her database (see the book's two appendices), and a total of some 4,500 cases that she has examined first-hand. The book begins with a treatment of the historiography of the peasantry and its relationship to law. Chapter 2 studies a single, emblematic suit brought by an illiterate, unmarried, peasant woman, long resident in the city, who sought to claim what she believed was her rightful inheritance, then in the hands of her sister-in-law's husband, an