

sectarians joined forces with populist revolutionaries against oppression and exploitation. Sectarians became agents of modernization, Zhuk explains, through their provision of literacy and the reading practice of Bible study, as well as their farming, markets, and trades. Zhuk thus draws direct parallels with the role of the Reformation in Western Europe, from expanding literacy to the “spirit of capitalism” and populist equivalents of the Peasant Wars.

Zhuk presents a convincing revision of Daniel Field’s classic study of peasant disturbances in Chigirin after the emancipation of 1861, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar* (1976), explaining that Stundist beliefs among the peasants of Chigirin had created a culture of millennialism, activism, and articulation of dissident views that was essential to their organized protest. He contributes to women’s history by highlighting the roles women assumed in the Shalaput and Stundist movements, which recognized some women as prophets, divine truth incarnate, and Mothers of God. They achieved this status after episodes of religious ecstasy. Zhuk fails to include Christine Worobec’s study of similar spirit possession among women at the same time in European Russia; this is a glaring omission from his bibliography.

Zhuk’s unadorned style assumes a deadpan tone when he describes the sexual practices of sects within sects. Explaining that some sectarian men convinced believers that their penises were channels for Divine Love, which women could receive through copulation after confession to them, Zhuk flattens his writing to avoid sensationalizing this theme; it becomes as effective as a straight man’s role in a comic act.

Stundists, Shalaputs, and Baptists did not disappear with the Bolshevik Revolution. They appeared as inmates in the gulag, where fellow prisoners noted their quiet ways. They populated Zhuk’s childhood in Ukraine, where he and his buddies attended their services to see how high school musician friends combined rock with evangelical church music. Their post-Soviet revival in Russia continues to generate anxiety among Russian Orthodox officials and figures in the Russian government. The legacies of empire haunt the Kremlin still.

CATHY A. FRIERSON  
*University of New Hampshire*

DAVID SHNEER. *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture, 1918–1930*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2004. Pp. ix, 300. \$45.00.

After the Bolshevik Revolution, many Hebrew writers fled the Soviet Union and some Yiddish writers joined them, but others stayed and continued to publish. While Yiddish writers in the rest of the world experimented with literary modernism, Soviet Yiddish writers, more or less, embraced the Socialist Realist precept that fiction needs to bring readers and their society closer to communism. Yiddish books, periodicals, theater, and schools flourished in the Soviet

Union through the 1920s and early 1930s. But the state’s support for Yiddish writers began to wane in the early 1930s, and they suffered in the Great Purges of 1936–1939. The Holocaust meant the death of many of the consumers of Soviet Jewish culture, and Joseph Stalin’s anti-Jewish campaigns of 1948–1952 culminated in the murder of the remaining Yiddish writers in prison on August 12, 1952.

Historians used to see the story of Soviet Jewish culture as an ongoing struggle between Jewish writers and the state, in which the commissars first banned Hebrew, then forced Yiddish writers and the Yiddish language itself to conform to draconian rules. Most obviously, they were blamed for forcing Soviet Yiddish literature to adopt a new orthography that eliminated the distinctive look of Yiddish words of Hebrew/Aramaic origin by spelling them out phonetically. Finally, in this narrative, the Soviet state decided that Jewish culture had little to offer the communist cause and eliminated it entirely. David Shneer is one of a number of recent scholars to question the division between Jewish cultural activists on the one hand and Soviet commissars on the other. Like Jeffrey Veidlinger in *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater: Jewish Culture on the Soviet Stage* (2000), or Yury Slezkine in *The Jewish Century* (2004), Shneer insists that Jews were not only the objects of Soviet policies but were subjects who sometimes authored and often had room to maneuver within those policies. Many of them, he reminds us, “had envisioned a new form of Jewish culture before the Russian Revolution and were now given access to state power to realize their dreams” (p. 99). He points out that the spelling reforms that visually “de-hebraicized” Yiddish were tried in New York as well as Moscow; he demonstrates the ever-shifting motivations of policy makers; and rather than blaming “the government,” “the party,” or even the Evseksiia (the Jewish Sections of the Communist Party), he traces each decision to smaller groups and individuals with their own agendas. He notes that even publishers who demanded political correctness maintained literary standards, quoting one who told an author, “Your play was rejected, not because it is ideologically problematic or dangerous. It was rejected because [it] has no plot, is terribly disjointed, and is boring” (p. 127).

Shneer provides a useful corrective to an outdated view, particularly since he is careful to point out the limitations of his own arguments. He recognizes the artificiality of ending his story in 1930 rather than later, but he notes correctly that by doing so, he can provide a more accurate picture of the development of Soviet Yiddish culture from the perspective of writers who, of course, had no idea how their story would end.

Shneer offers an innovative solution to the biggest challenge faced by historians of literary culture: how to integrate fiction and poetry into a larger narrative of intellectual history. Although five of his six chapters refer only glancingly to the poems, stories, and novels that his protagonists discuss, with few quotations or

plot summaries, he devotes the sixth chapter entirely to the life and work of a single author. In Izi Kharik's poems about the struggle to Sovietize a shtetl after the revolution, Shneer finds a record of the painful process of becoming a revolutionary, destroying and then rebuilding a part of oneself. When his lyric persona cries out, "pass on, you sad grandfathers!" (*fargeyt, ir umetike zeydes*), Shneer hears the voice of a youth who retains a tie to the past. The ambivalence in Kharik's poetry, according to Shneer, typified his generation of Soviet Yiddish writers. Even as they remade Jewish culture, they knew they might be losing something.

Overall, Shneer's book is enlightening and—though poorly edited by Cambridge University Press—enjoyable. As the works of Soviet Yiddish writers such as David Bergelson, Moyshe Kulbak, and Der Nister become available in English and in new Yiddish editions, this book should help readers orient themselves and help scholars reintegrate this literature, some of it brilliant, into the narratives of Soviet and Jewish cultural history.

GABRIELLA SAFRAN  
Stanford University

SEAN MCMEEKIN. *The Red Millionaire: A Political Biography of Willi Münzenberg, Moscow's Secret Propaganda Tsar in the West*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2003. Pp. viii, 397. \$32.50.

New evidence culled from Soviet archives in the last decade has uncovered the extent to which the Kremlin underwrote foreign communist parties, workers' organizations, spies, and agents. Hard liners in the West cite these findings to justify their warnings about the Red danger to Western democracies and to vindicate the tough military containment of the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Sean McMeekin's meticulously researched and stylishly written biography of Willi Münzenberg, one of the Comintern's top German operatives in Berlin after World War I, provides evidence that the Kremlin did not get what it paid for. Münzenberg's story reveals that the Comintern's promotion of scientific socialism was often crude, incoherent, and wasteful. Many of its agents, like Münzenberg, were crooked opportunists. Marxism-Leninism was a flawed end, but the means the Kremlin used corrupted its legitimacy anyway.

Münzenberg crossed paths with Vladimir Lenin and other "Old Bolsheviks" in Zurich during World War I. He made his name running the Communist Youth International and then headed the International Workers' Relief Fund (IAH) to combat the postwar famine in Russia. American Relief Administration (ARA) packages far outnumbered Münzenberg's contributions, but his talent for propaganda created the illusion that the workers of the world, through the IAH, had done more to feed starving Russians. He charged Herbert Hoover's ARA with a "counter-revolutionary" agenda. His expert lobbying kept his agency in good stead with Moscow, and he parlayed

the Kremlin's largesse into a complex network of agitprop organizations, newspapers, film distributors, and cinemas.

Münzenberg's Red enterprises were awash in red ink. He had an utter lack of concern for the financial viability of his empire, from relief efforts to "show-case" industrial enterprises in Russia. He distributed *Battleship Potemkin* in Germany, but Sergei Eisenstein's great film was a box office failure. Bloated bureaucracies and travel expenses burned much of Moscow's cash, and some outlays went straight into Münzenberg's pocket. It was good to have friends in high places, however, for as McMeekin comments, "[it was as if] the Kremlin had decided to let embezzlers be embezzlers, so long as they weren't caught re-handed" (p. 163). Detractors called him the "Communist [Alfred] Hugenberg" (the wealthy German financier of interwar right-wing newspapers), but Münzenberg himself liked "Red Millionaire," an open admission of his predilection for the luxuries of bourgeois life.

Münzenberg's unflagging loyalty to the Kremlin kept him in Joseph Stalin's good graces during the tumultuous period after Adolf Hitler took power in 1933. Münzenberg dutifully excoriated the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) until 1935, when the Kremlin finally approved of Popular Fronts to combat the growing fascist threat. The purges did not trouble the amoral Münzenberg either. He made a public declaration supporting the death sentence of his former mentor and benefactor, Grigori Zinoviev. That did not prevent his expulsion from the German Communist Party (KPD) Zentrale in 1938. Münzenberg finally mustered up the courage to condemn Stalin for the Nazi-Soviet Pact, which probably got him a death sentence.

McMeekin strains to cast Münzenberg as a key actor in the interwar German communist movement. In some lengthy passages on the political crises of the Weimar Republic in 1919, 1923, and 1933, however, Münzenberg is hardly mentioned. Münzenberg died while on the run from the German army in France in 1940; his body was found with a noose around his neck. McMeekin speculates that it was the work of the NKVD. The author's telling of the chase is captivating, but Münzenberg's death is certainly not "one of the great mysteries of twentieth-century politics" (p. 305).

The pace of the book slows in McMeekin's detailed coverage of Münzenberg's bureaucracies and connections to other communist organizations, but as a whole the author provides ample evidence that the international communist movement suffered from ideological disunity, profligacy, and tactical blundering. Some scholars have drawn parallels between the Communist front organizations and international terrorist groups today. If there are any lessons to be drawn from Münzenberg's case, it is that the terrorists will probably experience the same shortcomings.

The costs of Münzenberg's enterprises were small potatoes for the Kremlin in the interwar period, but