

shifted from students in Britain — the students whom colonial officers once had hoped would be models for new relationships between Britons and Africans — to people in West Africa. West African students were transformed from being leading critics of colonial oppression to one group of foreign students among many. Emblematic of that change was the effective end of WASU as a political organization in 1958, when it joined the Committee of African Organisations, an umbrella group aiming at general pan-African concerns.

Hakim Adi's work shows a willingness to see ambiguity — and maybe even failure — in the success of WASU. The deftness of Adi's touch shows through in two key differences between his history and the sort of group hagiography that one might expect in this kind of work. First, the West African students' experience confounds the usual trajectory of success: rather than being catapulted into power, their success in challenging colonialism resulted in the loss of their authority as critics of colonialism. Second, their trajectory of success was also considerably flattened by the continuous oppression the West African students faced in their daily lives. As I noted above, students formed WASU in 1925 to try to counter the colour bar and endemic racism they faced in Britain; yet, by the early 1950s, the colour bar had changed very little, if at all, and the changes may well have been for the worse. Despite having played an important role in bringing about the end of colonial rule in West Africa, West African students in Britain may have been worse off personally in 1960 than they were in 1925. They had succeeded in their global struggle against colonialism, but they had not yet succeeded in their struggle against oppression.

Hakim Adi's book is well-written and very accessible to any reader, and it is likely to serve two important roles. It is, of course, an introduction to West African student politics in Britain during the first half of the twentieth century. It will also prove to be a crucial research tool for historians striving to understand better both the nuances of colonial oppression and the aims of those people and groups who opposed that oppression.

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Denise J. Youngblood, *The Magic Mirror: Moviemaking in Russia, 1908-1918* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).

Denise J. Youngblood's survey of pre-revolutionary Russian film-making could be described as a sort of prequel to her two earlier and justly admired books. *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era, 1918-1935* (1985) was a trenchant analysis of the Soviet film canon. *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and*

Soviet Society in the 1920s (1992), was a path-breaking study of Soviet popular film, employing neglected sources such as audience surveys, viewing returns, and fan magazines to prove that audiences shared many of the tastes of their counterparts in Western Europe and America, and preferred Mary Pickford to *The Battleship Potemkin*, and melodrama to political agitation.

Rather than move her research forward into the 1930s and 1940s (an area being mined by other scholars, notably Maia Turovskaia), Youngblood has now gone back to look at the national tradition from which Soviet film developed. *The Magic Mirror* deals with its hesitant beginnings — evanescent film companies producing films on historical subjects and farces — and traces its development into a sophisticated and flexible medium in the 1910s, aided by the difficulties in importing foreign films, and the upsurge in nationalist feelings, that marked the onset of the First World War. A short introduction and outline conclusion frame compressed sections on film production (studios, directors); film actors; the “search for respectability” among film makers; and the circumstances of consumption (the composition of film audiences and the conditions in which films were shown). There follow brisk summaries of selected film texts (with particular emphasis on the work of Evgenii Bauer). All this adds up to a helpful and concise summary of crucial points in the evolution of the Russian cinema; once again, Youngblood makes excellent use of material from film journals, particularly *Sine-foto* and *Teatr i kino*. To be sure, one occasionally wishes that she had broadened her source-base a little (for instance, a wider trawl of memoirs would have produced interesting material about audience reception, particularly among children, and gone some way to filling the gap left by the paucity of audience surveys in this period). And in a book with so much emphasis upon social identities and upon cinema as an instrument of modernization, more precision about the terminology of social stratification and the processes of modernization might have been helpful. For instance, Youngblood refers in her Introduction to “the breakdown of the old caste (*soslovie*) system” (5), but does not explain for the uninitiated what, in practical terms, this meant, or even interpret the *soslovie* categories themselves. *Meshchanstvo* is glossed only as “petty bourgeoisie” (unhelpfully abstract) and *kupechestvo* only as “merchant caste” (inaccurate, since the *kupechestvo* was not in fact a “caste” at all, but a system of taxes and privileges imposed upon entrepreneurs and traders according to income). Equally, discussion of modernization is limited to generalizing comments about the growth of the urban population (5-6): nothing is said about the expansion of the Tsarist education system, or the growth of low-level white collar jobs that went with industrialization, both of which were essential factors in the emergence of a type of consumer eager for intellectual and social self-betterment, and no longer satisfied with traditional entertainments such as the Shrovetide fair side-shows. But the account Youngblood gives of “selected highlights” of film history is vivid, interesting, and at times entertaining — at

least one early film director, Evgenii Bauer, died in a manner as lurid as anything he thought up for a fictional character, “tumbling some thirty-five feet (five *sazhen*) down a cliff while shooting the film *To Happiness in the Crimea*” (159, n.57).

My reservations about this admirably concise and lucid book concerned less what it did cover than what it did not. I found myself, to start with, wishing that Youngblood had risked more frequent imaginative leaps in her analyses of the films themselves, which are generally commonsensical statements of the immediately obvious. Though she rightly emphasises “the role intertextuality plays in interpreting [literary] sources” in film adaptations, and points out that Chardynin’s version of Dostoevskii’s *The Idiot* “was a cinematic *illustration* of the novel” (121: emphasis original), her own summaries of films based on literature are oddly insensitive to nuance. For instance, she says nothing about the liberties taken by Iakov Protazanov in his brilliant adaptation of Tolstoi’s story *Father Sergius* (1918). The ordination scene, dismissed by Tolstoi in a single sentence, is turned by Protazanov into a glorious feast of ceremony and orchestration of monochrome. It slightly over-simplifies even the original story to say that Sergius “becomes a monk, not because of any religious conversion but to purge himself of sexual feelings” (123). In the case of the film, the resonance of the ordination scene is such that it completely undermines any attempt to understand Sergius’s motivation in such simplistic terms.

Though Youngblood points out that a viewing of pre-revolutionary films without intertitles “lays bare the visual elements of the film” (144), it is only in an account of one text seen by her in this form, Evgenii Bauer’s *Iurii Nagorny*, that she really evokes how “image has become meaning” (145). Otherwise, accounts are usually plot-based, with brief asides on technical points (for instance, “the use of crosscutting [in Protazanov’s *The Queen of Spades*] is equally sophisticated for the time,” [125]). Youngblood’s summary of Bauer’s *Child of the Big City* refers simply to the “beautifully decorated sets” and “painterly compositions” (83), rather than tracing the precise visual imagery used by Bauer — for instance, the offsetting of wrought-iron grilles and dark patterned fabric in the restaurant scenes against the clear pale light of the heroine’s private apartment. And the skeletal summary of Protazanov’s film about the death of Tolstoi, *The Passing of a Great Old Man*, completely misses the wonderful overhead shot as Countess Tolstaia arrives at the station, in which converging railway lines are used to suggest that the great writer’s resting place is the heart of Russia’s spiritual circulatory system.

Also missing is much sense of cinema’s cultural context (the fact that *The Magic Mirror* is, as the back cover proclaims, “based almost exclusively on Russian primary sources” is in some ways a handicap rather than a strength). Other domains of Russian popular culture are not considered: Youngblood’s reference to “the persistent high culture biases in the academy” in her Introduction (7) has been made in apparent ignorance of the crop of recent

studies on the Russian popular theatre by specialists such as Anthony Swift, Gary Thurston, and Al'bin Konechnyi, or the work on Russian lower-class identities by Stephen Frank, Mark Steinberg, and S.A. Smith (at any rate, material by these historians is not cited in her Bibliography). A command of material relating to popular entertainment in a broader sense would have helped Youngblood to relate cinema activists' "search for respectability" to the long-running campaign for recognition conducted by members of the *narodnyi teatr* (people's theatre) movement. The anxiety that theatrical spectacles for the mass market might, if made too entertaining, be associated with the supposedly "vulgar trash" offered to the public in fairground theatres (*balagany*) preceded the invention of the cinema by at least three decades.

Limited knowledge of secondary sources seems also to have hampered Youngblood's consideration of the high-cultural background to the development of the cinematograph (to use the contemporary term). Given the exceptionally rich literature on the modernist movement, it is rather strange to be referred (15, n.7) to a couple of chapters in a general book by a political historian, W. Bruce Lincoln's *Between Heaven and Hell: The Story of a Thousand Years of Artistic Life in Russia* (New York, 1998). Perhaps reliance on a nonspecialist account of this kind explains why Youngblood's generalisations sometimes incline towards cliché ("[Russia's] artists, like artists everywhere, scorned riches," [63]) or are actively misleading — "With few exceptions (Gorkii and Tolstoi being chief among them), the great artists of the day were almost defiantly apolitical. Art for arts sake reigned." (5) To be sure, the manner in which early twentieth-century Russian artists involved themselves in politics was often oblique and idiosyncratic, taking the form of flirtation with "mystical anarchism," say, rather than active participation in the franchise movement. But major poets from Akhmatova to Blok and Maiakovskii all made contributions to civic verse, and even the espousal of "art for art's sake" had a political resonance (it's no accident that some of its strongest advocates, such as Konstantin Somov or Mikhail Kuzmin, were also pioneers in the expression of a gay sensibility in art). It is also odd to state of a country with such a formidable history of repressive censorship that "Russian culture had never been particularly puritanical or 'Victorian.'" (64) — the banning of Tolstoi's *Kreutzer Sonata* in 1889 had proved that the guardians of Russia's morals could be as "Victorian" as those anywhere else in the world at the time. More to the point than transcendental national characteristics was the fact that the period Youngblood deals with was one when artists were enjoying the relaxation of censorship that had come with the brief political liberalisation conceded by the Tsarist regime after the 1905 Revolution.

To be sure, high culture is not Youngblood's main concern, and *The Magic Mirror* is, as its subtitle suggests, a survey of "movie-making in Russia," rather than a cultural history of early Russian cinema. No doubt the existence of Yury

Tsivian's brilliant semiotic study, *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception* (trans. Alan Bodger, 1994), cited in her Preface as a "companion" to *The Magic Mirror* (xiv), made Youngblood opt for a less ambitious treatment of the pre-revolutionary era than she gave to the post-revolutionary era in *Movies for the Masses*, and dictated her emphasis upon production and producers rather than products and consumers. At its own level, in any case, *The Magic Mirror* succeeds well enough. It draws on interpretations of the Western *fin-de-siecle* (for instance, Bram Dijkstra's *Evil Sisters: The Threat of Female Sexuality and the Cult of Manhood* [1996]) to make some sharp points about social anxieties in early twentieth-century Russia. And it offers an engrossing portrait of a group of under-rated, but talented and hard-working film enthusiasts, whose work, as Youngblood rightly argues, was fundamental to the development of the Soviet cinema, most particularly the "contemporary melodrama and historical costume drama" of the 1920s (145). Though historians of Russia are now more ready to accept arguments about long-term continuities than they were, the 1917 divide is still seen as a Rubicon, and Youngblood's attempt to cross it was an act of commendable courage.

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Colin MacCabe, *The Eloquence of the Vulgar: Language, Cinema and the Politics of Culture* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999).

The Eloquence of the Vulgar is a wide-ranging collection of essays and speeches that Colin MacCabe has written over the last fifteen years, on the history of the English language, the development of British cultural studies, the evolution of English television, the role of the British Film Institute, the nature of English universities, the importance of media education, and, above all else, the complex interrelationships of these various fields. MacCabe has a strong historical sense, and most essays, although clearly about literature, communication, or education, are presented as parts of larger cultural histories. He also has a clear allegiance to the left, writing that "anyone who struggles to understand the relationship between cultural and economic forms in the belief that a better understanding will lead to real possibilities of social emancipation" (153) remains deeply indebted to Marxism.

Each piece is interesting in its own right, since MacCabe is not only an articulate and intelligent human being who knows a great deal about the culture and education industries, in both of which he has worked, but is also a passionate activist who wants to change what they do. "Let there be no mistake about the radical proposition I am advancing here," he writes. "My argument is that there can be no sense to a teaching of literature which is not a branch of