The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions (review)

Slavica
Publishers

PROJECT MUSE

Erik Landis

Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History, Volume 3, Number 1, Winter 2002 (New Series), pp. 152-163 (Review)

Published by Slavica Publishers
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/kri.2002.0013

For additional information about this article
https://muse.jhu.edu/article/18732

[172.71.254.68]   Project MUSE (2025-04-07 04:28 GMT)

Arno J. Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. xvii + 716 pp. ISBN 0-691-04897-5. $37.50.

Erik Landis

In recent years, some of the more successful narratives on the subject of revolution have emphasized the tragic contours of the events in question.[1] Much classical Greek tragedy features three sisters – Megæra, Alecto, and Tisiphone – collectively known as the Furies. They are unleashed on the human characters in the plot, bringing suffering and often death in response to decisions made by those very humans. While the merciless Furies are the divine agents behind the undoing of the hero or heroine, it is the nature of classical tragedy that the ultimate focus is not on the Furies themselves, but on the spectacle of the downfall of the mortals in the play. Such a spectacle is intended to arouse empathy among the audience.

While in this sense the work of the Furies makes for a good story, at very least, the recent work of the distinguished historian Arno Mayer emphasizes the elemental, impersonal quality of the Furies. As Mayer makes clear in his prologue, his inquiry into the controversial subject of violence and terror in the French Revolution of 1789 and the Russian Revolution of 1917 was born at the time of a curious historical coincidence, the bicentennial celebrations marking 1789 and the simultaneous process of disintegration of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe. The legacy of the French Revolution, and particularly of the Terror, was the subject of intense public discussion, and the confluent events in the East only made more salient the comparisons and continuities found with the Russian Revolution and its legacy. In France at the time, there were those who trumpeted the achievements of 1789 – the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, for instance – as the true legacy of the revolution, turning a blind eye to the political violence that so characterized the short epoch. These advocates were flanked on either side by those who accepted and glorified the revolution, warts and all, and by those who condemned the brief period as a destructive,

---

[1] The most recent example is Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891–1924* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996). With the final words to his history of the French Revolution, William Doyle writes: "Inspiring and ennobling, the project of the French Revolution is also moving and appalling: in every sense a tragedy." See *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 425.

Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 3(1): 152–63, Winter 2002.

[172.71.254.68]   Project MUSE (2025-04-07 04:28 GMT)

murderous interlude in France's history, which, worse still, had enabled the realization of even more gross crimes over a century later. The identification the Bolsheviks themselves occasionally found with the Jacobins only invited such comparisons in retrospect.[2] The crimes of the Soviet state, which in the context of 1989 appeared to be fatally consuming the regime itself, were but one facet in the extension of this continuity.[3]

It became Mayer's task to write an account of political violence in the French and Russian revolutions without recourse to overdrawn causalities involving ideological systems or traditions, or effectively marginalizing the violence in revolutionary moments by identifying terror with particular historical agents. Instead, in drawing his comparisons between the French and Russian experiences, Mayer seeks to demonstrate not only how integral violence was to both periods, but also how political violence is ultimately impersonal and elemental in these contexts, almost in spite of the efforts of politicians and leaders to "domesticate" and "instrumentalize" it. Violence, as such, in these contexts, is neither political nor anti-political.[4] But neither does it have its own solid place between these two concepts.

In Carl Schmitt's depressingly realist conception of politics, contenders for power find themselves on an illocutionary gradient that tends toward the demonization of opponents. Appeals to mobilize support and identify opponents can move very easily from the realm of concepts and ideologies, to the appeal to myth, and finally, to a sort of demonization. This final stage in the "friend-enemy divide" behind Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* opens the possibility for the most extreme inhumanity, a progression kept in check only by certain concepts that remain "above" politics, as it were, such as God, the world, and humanity itself.[5]

This concept of the friend-enemy divide, and an overall "Schmittian" outlook on politics, informs much of the structure behind *The Furies*. For Mayer, to understand how the revolutionary projects in 18th-century France and 20th-century Russia degenerated into such destructive episodes in human history, it is important to observe how violence and terror unfold as a characteristic part of political contention in revolutionary moments, and how this collective *process* (which Mayer calls, in a telling alteration of the Schmittian concept, the "friend-enemy *dissociation*") ultimately outstrips the control of individual leaders and participants alike. Once the Furies are unleashed, it would seem, they must run their course.

---

[2] Michel Vovelle, "1789–1917: The Game of Analogies," in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, ed. Keith Baker (Oxford: Pergamon, 1994), 4: 349–78.

[3] Stéphane Courtois et al., *Le livre noir du communisme: Crimes, terreur, représsion* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1997).

[4] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 19.

[5] Jan Meuller, "Carl Schmitt's Method: Between Ideology, Demonology, and Myth," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 4: 1 (1999), 77.

There are three basic levels at which Mayer addresses the mainsprings of violence during revolutionary episodes. Drawing on his previous research on counterrevolution,[6] Mayer acknowledges that revolution in general – and the two in question here certainly are exemplary – fundamentally challenges the prevailing world system. As such, they are immediately internationalized. Speaking from the heart of Europe, the French republicans offered a vision of government that stood in stark contrast to the prevailing systems of the Old Regime monarchies. Russia's revolution, in its day, represented a radical alternative to the dominance of capital perceived to mark the politics of modern Europe and America. Its place on the periphery of Europe made its impact perhaps less dramatic than that of the French example, but the influence of the Russian Revolution was in no way minimal as a consequence.[7] That counterrevolution can immediately find a home, if not within the borders of a revolutionary state then outside of it, makes for an immediately accessible frame for mobilizing active support for a revolutionary regime and for maintaining vigilance.

When, in September 1792, Parisian crowds set upon the prisons in one of the most infamous scenes of collective violence from the French Revolution, one of the few accessible rationales for the slaughter was the search for foreign agents of the counterrevolution among the capital's swelling prisoner population. Not one month before, Prussia had initiated hostilities with Republican France, and Marat was issuing warnings to the Parisian sections, with his usual gusto, of the threat from enemies among their number. As Richard Cobb wrote several decades ago, with an insight which would form a central tenet of liberal historiography of the French revolution: "From 1789 onwards, the average revolutionary lived in an almost physical fear of a counterrevolutionary coup: moreover, plots and conspiracies were not merely figments of popular imagination and of official propaganda, there *were* plots, there *was* collusion between ultra- and counterrevolutionaries."[8]

If there is a difference between Mayer's treatment of the counterrevolutionary threat and those of the "neo-conservative" line in the historiography (of which François Furet is the most frequently-mentioned representative), it is in keeping with Cobb's emphasis on the actual, as well as the imagined, nature of

---

[6] Arno J. Mayer, *Dynamics of Counterrevolution in Europe, 1870–1956: An Analytic Framework* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

[7] Noel Parker, *Revolutions and History* (London: Polity, 1999), chap. 5.

[8] Richard Cobb, "The Revolutionary Mentality in France, 1793–4," *History* 42 (1957), 195 (emphasis in orig.).

[172.71.254.68] Project MUSE (2025-04-07 04:28 GMT)

the all-pervasive "plot." This is not a radical departure, nor is it one that neo-conservatives would find particularly misguided, but it is a point of emphasis that shifts attention away from a discourse-centered analysis of politics in the period of the French Revolution.[9] There is a certain dialectic which fuels the escalation of conflicts, both civil and international (themselves complementary in this process of escalation), in which the imaginary and the actual work to radicalize the state of siege which produced such atrocities as those committed in Paris in 1792, the Vendée in 1793–94, and in the course of the federalist revolts in the south of France in 1793. What is more, in one of Mayer's more original contributions in the book, this peculiar *mentalité*, in which conspiracy achieved such prominence, is a shared phenomenon of the era, and not something that solely characterizes the embattled partisans of the revolution. As Mayer writes in one of his introductory essays:

> While historians dissect the counterrevolutionary world and categorize its major components, the actors of the time are driven to see it as a single whole, blind to their internecine discords concerning intentions, ends, and means. Not only are revolution(aries) and counterrevolution(aries) interlocked, but so are their reciprocal misperceptions, which are fired by mutual suspicions and hostility (53).

A second of the three lines of inquiry brought to the subject of violence in these two revolutions is the fact that both France and Russia were profoundly rural societies. This is hardly a groundbreaking insight, but Mayer does his best not to associate the savagery of these respective periods with the "savages" of the villages and hamlets of the countryside. Rather, it is the cultural chasm, and the attendant misperceptions and expectations that most profoundly affect the nature of the conflicts arising in the course of revolutionary events. His overall section covering the urban-rural dimensions of the respective civil wars is entitled "Metropolitan Condescension and Rural Distrust," a notable hedging of historical emphasis. Here, as distinct from his treatment of the conflict between revolutionary regimes and the émigré/Old Regime-dominated counterrevolution, is the analytically distinct realm of the "anti-revolution," the tooth-and-nail resistance by traditional society to the modernization that so characterizes the impulses of major revolutionary regimes. In the case of Russia, the appearance of this anti-revolution – which embodies the major rural insurgencies that broke out in Western Siberia, Central Russia, and the lower Volga – came conveniently at the moment when the White-led counterrevolution was in its death throes. Whereas in the case of France's Vendée *militaire*, it is difficult to draw a distinction between the anti-revolutionary impulses and those that can be classified as distinctly reactionary, the phenomenon of popular rural insurgency in Russia points to the conclusion that there was a coherent "second civil war," which made its appearance in 1920.

---

[9] In contrast to Furet's previous emphasis on the immanent nature of conspiracy-oriented thinking to the political culture of the revolutionary epoch, his entry on the Terror in the *Critical Dictionary* makes more allowances for this actual realm of counterrevolutionary threat. See François Furet, "Terror," in *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, ed. Furet and Mona Ozouf, trans. A. Goldhammer (Cambridge: Belknap, 1989), 137–50. On the extent of the "actual" counterrevolution, see Donald Sutherland, *France 1789–1815: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

This fact has led some observers to portray the resistance as cohesive, not to mention severely disadvantaged, when facing the full force of the Soviet state. Rather than developing the theme of the cohesiveness behind rural resistance, Mayer's objective in treating the peasant wars, both in France and in Russia, is to demonstrate the extent to which violence marked the conduct of both sides in these clashes, and how the violence possessed a fierce tit-for-tat dynamic that favored escalation rather than moderation. While the conduct of the peasant armies can be cast as savage in an archaic way – seemingly ritualized murders and tortures – the corresponding terrors perpetrated by the representatives of the state were no less cruel, in part (but by no means exclusively) because of the modern weaponry they possessed. (A prominent example is the use of poison gas against rebels holed up in the forests of Tambov province by the Red Army in 1921.) The "metropolitan condescension" was in evidence throughout these conflicts, but as the insurgencies dragged on past the moments when the *grandes guerres* were finished, the suppression/pacification campaigns became even more cruel as pressures on military commanders mounted from the political capitals. The most notorious episodes of state violence in this context were committed in the final phases of the peasant wars of the French and Russian revolutionary periods. In a remarkably similar fashion (and one, unfortunately, not fully appreciated by Mayer), General Turreau in the West of France and General Tukhachevskii in central Russia were given one month by their political superiors to effectively pacify their respective insurgent regions. In the case of the former, this pressure from Paris led to the realization of the *colonnes infernales*, whose wanton destruction of villages and local resources, not to mention the human costs inflicted, are "Exhibit A" for those claiming the assault on the Vendée to be tantamount to genocide.[10] In the case of the latter, the one-month deadline handed down by Moscow produced the notorious orders nos. 130 and 171 in Tambov province, and also the "flying columns" of Red Army patrols, curiously

---

[10] Reynald Sécher, *La génocide franco-français: La Vendée-Vengé* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1986).

[172.71.254.68] Project MUSE (2025-04-07 04:28 GMT)

reminiscent of Turreau's own strategy, but in no way analogous in terms of conduct.[11]

The third major thread running through Mayer's study is the overarching role of religion in these revolutions. The old regimes of both France and Russia were inextricably tied to the Christian church, Catholic and Orthodox. A revolution in either country could never be limited to the realm of the state, for the institutions of throne and altar were far too intertwined. As such, the challenge of revolution would inevitably be met with opposition animated by the legitimacy of these timeless institutions of faith and providence. In such developments, the antinomy of "sacred" and "profane" is transformed into a particularly radicalizing frame for the mobilization of opposition to the desacralizing drives of revolutionaries in France and Russia, fueling the friend-enemy dissociation. As Mayer puts it:

> It is difficult to imagine a more intractable and divisive issue than the abrupt desacralization and laicization of political and civil society. Eventually it engages opposing true believers as it turns into a main battleground between, on the one hand, the religion of revolution and, on the other, first the religion of the status quo and then the religions of counterrevolution and resistance (144).

The framing of opposition in terms of the sacred, whether it be in the name of revolution or providence, has the effect of transforming military conflict into crusade, enemy into infidel, even if it is always the other who is the *fanatique*.[12] The Jacobins may well have initiated their misguided twin projects of the Cult of Reason and the Cult of the Supreme Being with an eye to countering the obvious mobilizational capacity of "religious" fervor, as they witnessed within their borders in the shape of the Catholic and Royal Army of the West. It was the appearance of the latter resistance that effectively radicalized the Paris revolutionaries, whose initial innovation, the Constitutional Church, was most strikingly rejected in the West of France. When this rejection turned into military insurgency, deputies and politicians in the capital, who had previously advocated the Constitutional Church, were transformed into advocates of radical dechristianization throughout the Republic.[13]

---

[11] Were a case to be made for a link between Turreau's *colonnes infernales* and Tukhachevskii's *letaiushchie kolonny*, one could do worse than begin with Clausewitz, who had studied the Vendée. Lenin, at the very least, is known to have consulted Clausewitz's writings on the Civil War in France, and Tukhachevskii (who later would become one of the preeminant exponents of *voennaia nauka* in the USSR) would be expected to be familiar with these writings as well. See Peter Paret, *Internal War and Pacification* (Princeton: Center of International Studies, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, 1961).

[12] In certain contexts, religion was the point of conflict in the high time of political terror in France during the reign of the Committee for Public Safety. According to Richard Cobb, in his study of the *armées révolutionnaires*, "'[t]he Terror in the village' above all meant dechristianisation." See Cobb, *The People's Armies: The Armées révolutionnaires, Instrument of the Terror in the Departments, April 1793 to floreal year II*, trans. M. Elliott (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 443.

A comparable manifestation of religious-like zeal in the context of revolutionary Russia was notably absent from the Bolshevik project, even if there were similarly intriguing religious-like symbolic and ritual innovations which surfaced to commemorate or celebrate the revolution. While the anti-Church campaigns were a constant feature of early Soviet practice, it is difficult to draw parallels between the French case and the Russian one, as Mayer tries to do. Although it is far from the only factor, modern secular culture, it is fair to say, was steadily felt in Russian society more than one century down the road, at the time of the 1917 revolution. Religious devotion did not provide the same focus for political mobilization that it clearly did in the case of 18th-century France.[14]

A major part of the religious dimension, of course, lays somewhat outside of the grand conflict between Revolution and official church. In the South of France, in particular, the consecutive waves of terror, White and Red, were episodes in a political struggle which largely fell along secular lines, adding a tribal dimension which saw Protestants associated with the Convention and the revolutionaries, and Catholics who were largely removed from the Paris radicals. Despite the Edict of Toleration in 1787, and the previous decades' measures dismantling large parts of the regime that came into being with the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), the Protestants of France remained largely second-class citizens by the time of the revolution.[15] The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, in addition to the array of measures dismantling feudal privileges and religious discrimination, all favored the Protestant population as a religious community and as a socio-economic group. In areas such as Montauban and Nîmes, the dominant textile industry was owned and managed by Protestant businessmen, but was largely staffed by Catholic laborers and artisans. The newfound liberties of emancipation meant, for the Protestants, the opportunity to break the political monopoly enjoyed by the Catholic-dominated town councils

---

[13] Sutherland, *France 1789–1815*, 210–11.

[14] This despite the popular association of the new regime with "godless Communists." The political aspects of popular piety during the course of the revolution and Civil War in Russia, particularly in the countryside, remains an inadequately researched subject. On the dynamics of church-state conflict in the early Soviet period, see William Husband, "Soviet Atheism and Russian Orthodox Strategies of Resistance, 1917–1932," *Journal of Modern History* 70: 1 (1998), 74–107.

[15] Protestants only accounted for some three percent of the French population at the time of the revolution, with one-third being Lutherans in the Alsace region, and another large portion being Calvinists settled in Languedoc, the traditional territory of the Huguenots.

[172.71.254.68] Project MUSE (2025-04-07 04:28 GMT)

and churches, political power that was so disproportionate to the economic stake held by the Catholic majority. The fate of the Protestant community became inextricably bound to the fate of the new regime in Paris, as mass politics in the contexts of these provincial towns took on an increasingly tribal-like hue. While several contingencies can be documented which worked to bring the situation in these respective towns to a boil, the resulting *bagarres* remained firmly cast according to these traditional religious identities. That Paris effectively condoned the violence of these local conflicts, because they saw the pro-revolutionary faction ascend to power, only served to add weight to the counterrevolutionaries' portrayal of their battle with the Protestant minority as only a local manifestation of a much larger struggle with the Protestant-engineered revolution throughout the country (and perhaps Europe) as a whole.

In the case of Russia, Mayer likens the emancipation of France's Protestants to that of the Jews in the Pale of Settlement. Mayer here is primarily concerned with the innocent victims who were not the major players in the dramatic events of the revolution. These were Jews who found themselves, perhaps, formal beneficiaries of the new regime with its radical new policies eliminating religious discrimination, and also those who may have translated these liberties into small gains within the community at large. But the Jews of the Pale were, most profoundly, victims in the Russian Civil War.[16] Areas of the former Pale and beyond to the east, which had seen destructive pogroms in the 19th century, became battle grounds involving the Red Army and the Whites, as well as Ukrainian "nationalists." The mobilization of support, particularly by the latter, involved the identification of eminently accessible enemies, and the ready-made association of the Communists with the "killers of Christ" was pursued with a savage single-mindedness by the hetmans competing for preeminence in the Ukrainian heartland. While the rise of the White armies may have, to some small extent, managed to tame this elemental violence against the Jews of the former Pale, anti-Semitism remained central to their world-view, and to their most lucid characterizations of their mortal foe, the Bolsheviks. As such, the violence continued, even if the White leadership was more circumspect in allowing for open advocacy of these atrocities.

The challenge of the international system, urban/rural distanciation, and the desacralizing dimensions of revolutionary projects – these three themes emerge as the most prominent in Mayer's study of collective violence and terror. The three threads are not easily disentangled. Rather, all three are steeped in the single overarching quality that Mayer frequently highlights: vengeance. Friedrich

---

[16] Not to mention victims of World War I, with which there is great continuity in the case of anti-Semitic violence. See Eric Lohr, "The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportations, Hostages, and Violence during World War I," *Russian Review* 60: 3 (2001), 404–19.

Nietzsche (whom Mayer cites) wrote that vengeance, which lurked behind much of the high-minded egalitarianism of the Enlightenment, was the most debilitating impulse in human society, and his own idealized vision of humankind centered around the deliverance of man from vengeance. The modern state, however, far from effecting a transcendence of this impulse, works to rationalize, or monopolize it, particularly through its judicial system. In Mayer's words: "To be successful, this system requires a strong political authority. Indeed, any major breakdown of this authority necessarily entails a decline and collapse of the rationalization of vengeance" (136). The relevance for the study of revolutions is clear:

> The paralysis of centralizing sovereignty entailed the disintegration of the legitimate and independent administration of justice. This dual breakup was all the more fatal because the return of traditional vengeance coincided with the surge of founding violence mixed with wild vengefulness. In turn, government sought to reclaim the monopoly of all violence by reestablishing an effective judicial system … Since the agents of this "violence to end violence" were self-styled avengers driven by a burning belief system and missionary zeal, it was both fierce and unconditional. (137–38)

Thus vengeance tinges most manifestations of violence and terror described in Mayer's book, whether those episodes represent terror "from above" (instrumental) or "from below" (elemental). There is not much explanatory value to such a conceptualization, but there is the implication that, by emphasizing vengeance, Mayer is underscoring the participatory aspect of collective violence and the placement of each episode in a context of some other act or perceived act of harm committed, which required concomitant (and often overcompensating) response. The sway from Jacobin Terror to the reprisals that animated the Thermidorean reaction represents only the most obvious manifestation, on a macro-level, of this dialectic of violence. The movements of the fronts in the Russian Civil War, which in many cases amounted to a similar form of regime change, were characterized by alternating waves of political terror, Red and White, which were so integral to the logic of political consolidation at the time. That the fronts in the Russian Civil War proved to be so seemingly fluid is not only a peculiar strategic fact of the Red-White conflict; it is the overarching dynamic behind those terrible statistics of thousands upon thousands of victims of the conflict.

In its treatment of the revolutions and accompanying civil wars, Mayer's *Furies* is at its most effective. When the author then tries to extend the narrative to include the Napoléonic wars, and the Stalin-era Terror (and Cold War), respectively, he begins to lose the plot, as the avenging Furies can no longer

[172.71.254.68] Project MUSE (2025-04-07 04:28 GMT)

provide the fulcrum for his argument. With regard to the French case study, Mayer has another polemical target squarely in his sights: those historians who fail to treat foreign war as an essential extension of the internal dynamic of revolution, and those who, in addition, fail to treat the horrors of foreign wars on equal footing with those of civil strife. The internal mainsprings of foreign war have long been a subject of interest to Mayer, who devoted a chapter to the subject in his earlier study of European counterrevolution.[17] But in this current project, Mayer is more focused on what he calls the "dyadic violence" of the period 1792–1815, "when internal and external wars were intensely intertwined, with the discords of domestic politics conditioning and causing foreign war as much as the vicissitudes of foreign war bore upon the heart of violence back home" (541). While this is certainly an approach well-suited to the description of the early years of the First and Second Coalitions, the dynamic changes considerably when the Consulate period of Napoléon Bonaparte begins, and the expansionist campaigns of the French *armée* effectively work to channel domestic tensions.

Following Marx and Engels, Mayer calls this the "externalization" of the French Revolution. But extending his analysis to include this period only serves to change the tack of the narrative. It moves away from the dialectical nature of political violence, with its intimate relationship between internal and external enemies, to a more straightforward description of the horrors of military combat. Here, Mayer is concerned with placing the destructiveness of international conflict on an equal footing with that of civil war. This is, in part, a well-placed critique, for students of revolution often emphasize the human suffering that accompanies state breakdown and civil war, but then treat the international dimension of revolutionary campaigns squarely in terms of military strategy and state-centered power politics. But this shift in emphasis, for the French side of Mayer's study, is largely out of tune with the more trenchant and provocative thesis that focused on the various dimensions of internal political violence in the pre-Napoléonic period of the revolution's history. Mayer, on occasion, does try to draw in references to the spirit of vengeance and even the "friend-enemy dissociation" animating the Napoléonic campaigns. But these (particularly the rather vague allusions to the savagery of the conflict with Spanish partisans) emerge as token references to the guiding theses that no longer hold true once the foreign campaigns of the empire take center stage.

Likewise, Mayer's extension of the narrative of political violence in the case of the Soviet Union to include the Terror of the 1930s, as well as the tensions that marked the post-1945 Cold War, only serves to dilute the main theses that structured the earlier parts of the book on the Russian Revolution proper (which I would narrowly confine to 1917–22). Nevertheless, in his attempt to cut a middle ground between those who cast Stalin as the master directing developments, and those who see the Terror as a decentralized, almost elemental phenomenon in its own right, Mayer succeeds in persistently emphasizing the role of context, primarily geo-political, in the unfolding of the political violence of the 1930s. Sometimes this can seem overdrawn. For example, the author refers to the interwar period as "Cold War I," in order to underscore the extent to which tensions on the world political stage influenced Kremlin decision-making. On the whole, the emphasis on international context in the account of the major events of the Stalin years is valuable, even if these considerations are quite well developed in the historical literature. Still, such considerations can only serve as a starting point for understanding political repression under Stalin, a phenomenon that was often out of control and eventually tantamount to "self-destruction."[18]

---

[17] Mayer, *Dynamics of Counterrevolution in Europe, 1870–1956*, chap. 6 ("Internal Causes and Purposes of War in Europe, 1870–1956").

That the French Revolution would "externalize" in the Napoléonic period, and the Russian Revolution would turn inward in the interwar years, is an interesting point of comparison, but one which invariably favors simple explanations over more detailed consideration. Noel Parker, in his recent book on world revolutions in history and historiography, more than once marvels at just how unique 1789 was: a revolution which took place in the heart of Europe – at the center of "modernity" – toppling the political order of the strongest, most advanced continental power.[19] The revolution, while in certain ways damaging France's image (and, yet, in other ways bolstering it), largely left this power intact, particularly in the military sense.

In contrast, the Russian Revolution toppled the autocracy of Europe's most "backward" power. It was an event that staked its challenge to the world system from the periphery of the European continent, at the relative "margins" of modernity. Regardless of what one may believe about Russia's backwardness, it is undeniable that it was a characterization that obsessed its new leaders. The turn inward, while borne in part by the geopolitical situation and perceptions of the USSR's leaders, can hardly be said to be completely novel, in that the obsession with backwardness and Western modernity have a fairly long history beyond the great break between autocracy and proletarian dictatorship. That the shape of the turn inward, with its two-pronged attacks on industry and agriculture, would prove to be so monumental and traumatic, and accompanied by the odd phenomenon of mass purges within the elite, has much more to do with the peculiarities of the USSR's leaders at the time – the "realm of the possible" that informed their thinking – than it does with the objective and subjective geopolitical situation confronting the USSR. This is not to deny an international dimension to the Great Turn and Stalinist Terror. It is only to give it a proper degree of emphasis.

---

[18] J. Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

[19] Parker, *Revolutions and History*, chap. 3.

There is, unfortunately, no formal conclusion to Mayer's tome. While one may be able to distill some fairly obvious targets in *The Furies*, the book is too rich and ambitious to be considered singularly polemical. There is much in this book that is suggestive and thought-provoking, and it represents a contribution to the growing body of literature on violence, particularly political violence, in modern history.[20] But Mayer's book is also highly idiosyncratic, stretching this way and that, and defying simple summary. As with all books of comparative history, the author occasionally gets his facts mixed up; but the ambition of such an undertaking should always be met with a certain amount of charity on the part of the reader.[21] While the spectacle provided by the work of the Furies can be molded into the stuff of bestsellers, it is a brave historian who tackles the internal dynamics of their handiwork. For this, Professor Mayer should be commended.

All Souls College
Oxford University
High St.
Oxford OX1 4AL
United Kingdom
erik.landis@all-souls.ox.ac.uk

---

[20] See, for example, the work of Berndt Weisbrod, including Weisbrod and Pamela E. Selwyn, "Military Violence and Male Fundamentalism: Ernst Jünger's Contribution to the Conservative Revolution," *History Workshop Journal* 49 (2000), 69–94. An outstanding example of recent scholarship specific to the case of Russia, and one which has parallels with Weisbrod's work, is Vladimir Buldakov, *Russkaia smuta: Priroda i posledstviia revoliutsionnogo nasiliia* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1997), reviewed in *Kritika* 2: 3 (Summer 2001), 675–79.

[21] It is too close to home, however, for this reader to overlook the error on page 389, in which the author situates the province of Tambov as part of Penza *guberniia*.