

DMITRI SERGEEVICH MEREZHKOVSKY AND THE SILVER AGE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A REVOLUTIONARY MENTALITY. By *Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975. viii, 248 pp. 52.50 Dglds.

The present volume is an interesting attempt to establish a close relationship between the "spiritual radicalism" of D. S. Merezhkovsky (and other Russian aesthetes at the turn of the century) and the "political radicalism" of the Bolsheviks. Professor Rosenthal argues persuasively that their common "revolutionary mentality" resulted in the Bolshevik coup d'état of 1917. In her account, she has skillfully utilized Merezhkovsky's early poetry, fiction, and his important critical, philosophical, and religious works. At times, however, the wealth of detail obscures the existing ties between Merezhkovsky and his colleagues and associates in Russian literature during the Silver Age. The book abounds in clear, concise, and illuminating interpretations, such as the passage on page 54, which deals with the didactic tradition in Russian belles-lettres, or that on page 78 concerning the Symbolists' interest in the occult, orgiastic theories, and astrology. The evolution of Merezhkovsky's mystical, religious, and political thought—from Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and aestheticism (1890–99), through a "new religious consciousness" and an organic synthesis of the flesh and spirit as the basic premise of a future Third Humanity (1899–1905), to the gospel of the religious and theocratic society after the abortive uprising of 1905—is well substantiated.

As far as factual information is concerned, however, the reader must be constantly on guard. Numerous errors can be cited: Merezhkovsky died in Paris, not in Biarritz; he and Hippius arrived in Paris in March 1921, not 1919; Lev Shestov, not Shestakov, was among the contributors to *The World of Art*; the Merezhkovskys' efforts to create a "new religious consciousness" and a new, apocalyptic church were called *Glavnoe*, not *Glavnyi* by Hippius. Furthermore, Zinaida Hippius never dressed as a man, with the exception of posing for Lev Bakst as a page. (As she stated in her diary *Contes d'amour* and in her correspondence, Bakst admired her beautiful, graceful legs and wished them to appear in the portrait.) At no time did she and Merezhkovsky, at least in public, wear peasant dress. According to the Merezhkovskys, the peasant lacked intuitive understanding of Christ and intuitive love; therefore, identification with the peasant was useless in inspiring their future Apocalyptic church. The intellectual, not the peasant, was important to the Merezhkovskys' philosophy. Moreover, with a few short interruptions, they spent the years 1906–12 abroad, where they endeavored to win new support for their church among the French Modernists, who would have hardly been impressed with the Merezhkovskys' peasant dress. Hippius wore a white dress with deep pleats lined with pink silk to the Religious-Philosophical Meetings not so much to shock the clergy as to symbolize the synthesis of the sinful flesh and pure spirit within the context of her notion of the "Third Humanity."

Professor Rosenthal seems to be seriously confused about the Religious-Philosophical Meetings organized by Hippius and Merezhkovsky (1901–3) and the Religious-Philosophical Society initiated by N. A. Berdiaev (1907–15), which the Merezhkovskys joined after their return from abroad in 1908. Hippius was not one of the delegates who went to Pobedonostsev to obtain permission for the Religious-Philosophical Meetings to take place. A. V. Kartashev never belonged to the Merezhkovskys' "inner church," but to that of Tatiana Hippius, Zinaida's younger sister. During their "agapes" Merezhkovsky and Filosofov wore red satin gowns, not red veils. The Merezhkovskys opened their literary salon to their eminent guests not only while they were living at "Dom Muruzi" (*Liteinyi prospekt*), but also after they had moved to Sergievskaiia Street, opposite the Taurida Palace. Hippius was not critical of "all Jews and Jewesses"; among her intimate friends were M. M. Vinaver, I. I. Bunakov-Fondaminskii and his wife Amaliia, the poets Dovid Knut and Iurii

Mandel'shtam, and many other Jews. The Merezhkovskys' shockingly simple [wedding] ceremony with no white gown, no flowers, and no music" (p. 25) in November 1888 was but one manifestation of those artificial poses and masks which were in vogue at the time among Russian writers, poets, artists, and musicians. There are many other dismaying factual errors, misleading and repetitive statements, misinterpretations, misprints, and other editorial lapses which, unfortunately, impair the quality of this insightful and original study.

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ESSAYS ON MANDEL'STAM. By Kiril Taranovsky. Harvard Slavic Studies, vol. 6. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1976. xii, 180 pp.

It is always a pleasure to reread intelligent, perceptive essays, and it is a rare pleasure to find those essays not merely collected and bound in some new expensive volume, but revised and organized in such a way as to enhance the art of reading poetry. The problem (and, indeed, the art) of reading poetry is a recurrent theme in Mandelstam's own prose essays and fiction. In the 1920s, when faced with the task of collecting and assembling his essays for publication (*O poezii*, 1928), Mandelstam revised and reorganized them in such a way as to emphasize the development of his own aesthetic and intellectual vision, focusing on his "love of the word" (his literal, Mandelstamian interpretation of "philology") as synonymous with the poet's cognition of history and culture. The quest of his essays might be reduced to a phrase used in "On the Nature of the Word," the key essay of that collection: to determine "what is perceptible to a mind seeking unities and connections."

Professor Taranovsky, in discussing his analytical approach to Mandelstam's poetry, refers to the poet's essays for a definition of the critic's function: "A critic does not have to answer the question: What did the poet want to say, but he is obliged to answer the question: Where did the poet come from . . ." ("Badger Hole"). Professor Taranovsky bases his critical method on a literal interpretation of Mandelstam's text, claiming that "to reveal all [Mandelstam's] literary subtexts is the fundamental problem which stands before the investigators of his poetry" (p. 114). Professor Taranovsky does not disallow more impressionistic approaches to Mandelstam's work, but he does favor the most systematic methods possible and tries to define and characterize his own approach. He assumes that everything Mandelstam wrote has a source which can be found and illuminated; that nothing was "just written" (*prosto tak*, as he quotes Nadezhda Mandelstam's comments at one point). Whether or not one accepts this assumption, Professor Taranovsky's book cannot be criticized for lack of clarity either in setting forth its author's aims, in carrying out his intentions, or in indicating that his is a valid method for approaching Mandelstam's difficult poetry. Whether or not this method would work as well for other investigators (who lack Professor Taranovsky's keen grasp of poetics, in general, and Russian poetry and poets, in particular) or for interpreting other poets less "cryptic" than Mandelstam, or whether it is the only approach is, of course, open to discussion. Although Nadezhda Mandelstam adds an invaluable dimension to Mandelstam criticism in her highly personal and nonscientific reading of her husband's life and work, her approach, despite the sensitivity and brilliance of her clues and comments, is primarily intuitive and impressionistic. Professor Taranovsky's "polemic" with her arises out of an attempt to justify his more systematic approach to poetry and poetics.