

ventional way. It is here that Symbolist, Formalist, and Structuralist criticism has opened vistas which do not appear in Stender-Petersen's book. Even in this portion of the book, however, there are many observations and formulations that are exemplary in their conciseness and precision; for example, his definition of the keynote (*Grundton*) of Pushkin's lyric poetry as "a serene and wise paganism, rooted in rationalist and classicist premises" (vol. 1, p. 111), or his description of Dostoevsky's "contrary" (*konträre*) method as one that involves "a tendency to confuse and to undermine, a dualism in plot design and character delineation, all of which made him one of the most captious (*verfänglich*) ironists of world literature" (vol. 2, p. 299). All in all, this may still be the best history of Russian literature available in any language (it is superior to Mirsky's classic work in everything but style and readability). Nevertheless, it will not do as a single source of information; too much has happened in the field since 1957. The bibliography (not updated from the second edition, where it was spotty) is quite inadequate.

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THE FORMAL METHOD IN LITERARY SCHOLARSHIP: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGICAL POETICS. By P. N. Medvedev and M. M. Bakhtin. Translated by Albert J. Wehrle. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978 [Leningrad: "Priboi," 1928]. xxvi, 191 pp.

The treatise under review has long been recognized as the most sustained and serious critique of Russian Formalism from an ostensibly Marxist perspective. First published in 1928 under the name of P. N. Medvedev, it has of late been attributed in large part to no less a figure than the distinguished literary scholar and theorist M. M. Bakhtin. This alleged dual authorship may account for the incisiveness and philosophical sophistication of *The Formal Method*—qualities which are not readily apparent in Medvedev's eclectic essays on Blok or his rather pedestrian volume *V laboratorii pisatel'ia* (1960).

The book opens with a knowledgeable and fair-minded account of the Formalist trend in West European studies of literature and art, and then embarks on a systematic survey of the salient concepts and tenets of Russian Formalism. Throughout, the stance is consistently—indeed relentlessly—critical, yet it is far from dismissive. The authors are prepared to meet the Formalists on their own ground: "Every young science—and Marxist literary scholarship is very young—should value a good opponent much more highly than a bad ally." The "good opponent" is credited with having sharply focused on important problems of literary theory which Marxist criticism, left to its own devices, was not yet ready to tackle. The confrontation often proves illuminating. *The Formal Method* shrewdly diagnoses some of the major drawbacks of Opoiaz poetics—its naïve empiricism, "one-sided orientation toward Futurism," and tendency toward aesthetic isolationism, especially apparent in the Formalist writings about prose fiction. On occasion, the Medvedev-Bakhtin strictures appear to me less than fair. I would be inclined to query their harping on the allegedly "subjectivist" implications of Victor Shklovskii's theory of "disautomatization" of perception effected by art, as well as their proclivity for assessing the Formalist doctrine in terms of its early, and avowedly immature, phase. Perhaps a more serious flaw in this otherwise impressive and cogent study is the relative thinness of the positive program it adumbrates. The concept of "sociological poetics" is strenuously postulated but not seriously implemented. If all cultural or "ideological" phenomena are ultimately "social" in nature, the ritualistic invocation of that adjective with relation to imaginative literature can hardly provide a clue to the specificity of literary art—

a matter which the authors of *The Formal Method* recognize as central to any poetics, sociological or otherwise.

It may be worth noting that, in 1924, four years before the appearance of *Formal'nyi metod*, Bakhtin had subjected Formalist literary theorizing to critical scrutiny within a framework that owed more to Neo-Kantianism than to Marxism. In deploring the narrowly technical emphasis of Opoiaz writings, Bakhtin's early methodological statement placed the problem of value and value orientation at the center of the creative act. In *The Formal Method*, the key term becomes "social evaluation" (*sotsial'naiia otsenka*), which is viewed as an integrating principle in the literary work of art.

If the 1924 essay could be termed an "idealistic" prelude to *Formal'nyi metod*, *Formalizm i formalisty* (1934)—signed and possibly written by P. N. Medvedev—was a revised and characteristically coarsened version of the 1928 tract. Some of the sections in *Formal'nyi metod* appear to have been transferred bodily to the later book. Yet the overall tenor of the argument became more hostile and strident with bona fide intellectual polemic frequently yielding to ominous name-calling. Conceivably, the Medvedev-Bakhtin ratio had shifted in the meantime; it is fair to assume, however, that relative authorship was not as crucial a factor here as relative chronology.

Albert Wehrle's translation is generally careful and workmanlike, though his handling of key terms is not always felicitous: "finalization" is much too bureaucratic an equivalent of *zavershenie*. His introduction, especially as it bears on the intricacies of the Bakhtin circle, is eminently helpful, but it is marred occasionally by a modish lingo and far-fetched analogies.

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RUSSIAN LITERATURE IN THE AGE OF CATHERINE THE GREAT: A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS. Edited by A. G. Cross. Oxford: Willem A. Meeuws, 1976. 229 pp. £4.50. \$9.00, paper.

Five of the essays in this collection are revised and expanded versions of papers given in a panel organized by the editor at the 1974 Banff Slavic conference. They are supplemented by two invited essays and a useful bibliography of English-language materials on eighteenth-century Russian literature. Four contributors (including the editor) are British, the others American, and most are young scholars in the early stages of their professional careers.

It is appropriate that the collection be dedicated to scholars in the Group for the Study of Eighteenth-Century Literature in Leningrad, since the essays rely heavily on Soviet scholarship—a debt that is fully acknowledged by the contributors. The essays are, for the most part, well written and carefully researched but tend to be of the "new light on . . ." variety, exploring further aspects of familiar topics quite well covered in the past, and are not likely to appeal to nonspecialists. Those who share the background and enthusiasm of the contributors will probably not find anything very new here, except for the bibliography mentioned above. Topics covered include the clumsy attempts at prose fiction by Fedor Emin, the Russian ode (as practiced by Lomonosov and Derzhavin), Radishchev, the Masons, and the use of terminology (classicism, sentimentalism, preromanticism). The parochialism and narrow focus of the essays perhaps result from the nature of the material, but one may regret that the quotient of originality is rather low and that broader questions were not addressed and possible new approaches not attempted. One cannot help feeling that a valuable opportunity to produce a volume that might have challenged our perceptions of the Catherinian period has been lost, particularly since, as the editor claims, this is the first collection of essays by British and American scholars "concerned solely with literature and ideas."