

The book is dominated by the Formalists, who occupy 40 percent of the total space, though it should be noted that Zhirmunskii's article on Blok and Jakobson's essay, "On a Generation that Squandered its Poets," are not noticeably Formalist in their approach. (Nor, for that matter, is either of the two Symbolist essays on Gogol particularly Symbolist.) Bitsilli's chapter on Chekhov and Aldanov's essay on Tolstoy clearly lose by being taken out of context; Sinyavsky's famous essay on Pasternak has been reduced to a mere twelve pages. A surprising omission is the work of the new Tartu school, although, as the editor says, "it may well turn out to be one of the most vigorous intellectual manifestations of the current structuralist trend in literary studies."

The book is apparently aimed at students taking courses in "Russian Literature in Translation" or "History of Literary Criticism." As such it should be successful (though the price is prohibitive), since few students are likely to be worried by the errors which will disconcert the specialist: Viacheslav Ivanov's date of birth (1866) is given as 1886 on page 7; the date of the Congress of Soviet Writers (1934) as 1939 on page 21; *Rubka lesa* appears somewhat alarmingly on page 98 as "A Wood Feeling"; Babel's character, Kurdiukov, is regularly misspelled in Voronskii's essay; Azef (p. 208) had been unmasked many years before his death in 1918; and, despite the footnote on page 276, Leonov's play *Metel'* was indeed published in 1939, though it was suppressed in the following year and substantially revised before being reissued in the 1960s.

Despite these reservations the selection is a good one, providing pleasure as well as instruction. Not every essay will appeal to every taste, but they are all well written and provocative, and retain their focus on literature. By contrast, the editor's introduction, with its attempt to grade the class for "perceptive *aperçus*" and "informed responsiveness," judiciously qualified by the occasional "to be sure," is a glum piece of mandarinese. It is a relief to turn to the essays themselves and salutary to be reminded by Belyi and Shklovsky that criticism cannot be scientifically objective: "We measure an author by *our* aesthetic standards."

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THE SEEKER: D. S. MERZHKOVSKIY. By C. Harold Bedford. Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1975. x, 222 pp. \$12.50.

Recently there appeared two books devoted to aspects of the work of D. S. Merezhkovsky, an author not spoiled hitherto by too much flattering attention. These studies are: Ute Spengler, *D. S. Merezhkovskij: Versuch einer religiösen Begründung der Kunst* (Lucerne, 1972), and B. G. Rosenthal, *D. S. Merezhkovsky and the Silver Age: The Development of a Revolutionary Mentality* (The Hague, 1975).

Merezhkovsky, although through his entire long creative career a controversial as well as a widely-read author, has remained an underrated and underanalyzed writer and thinker. What was wanting was an intelligent and knowledgeable synopsis of the many facets of his literary and philosophical endeavor. Professor Bedford has now provided such a badly needed summary. In addition to being distinguished for its extraordinary stylistic refinement and suppleness, this presentation—though not devoid of critical detachment when appropriate—excels in thoroughness, sound information, and empathy as well as sympathy.

Bedford's study gives the reader insight into Merezhkovsky's childhood and family background, and deals with his conversion from populism—with its attach-

ment to poets such as Nekrasov and Nadson—to symbolism—under the impact of classical antiquity, Baudelaire, and Nietzsche. These mental processes were accompanied by attempts to rescue contemporary Russian literature and intellectual culture from stagnation, provincialism, and a one-sided preoccupation with social concerns by extolling its great traditions which pointed toward a more idealistic and “symbolistic” interpretation of life and history. The two sections entitled “Christ and Antichrist” and “The Second Coming” contain both a highly perceptive, intelligent, and lucid exposition of the celebrated *Trilogy* (Merezhkovsky’s abiding triumph in the field of the philosophical novel masked as historical romance) and a sensible probing into the formation of his most cherished religious and philosophical intuitions. Interestingly, here is the discovery of an affinity between some of Kierkegaard’s theses and Merezhkovsky’s inner religious experience. The following chapter deals with attempts to translate these inner experiences into the social realities of his time—spiritual campaigns which led him into much literary, political, and ecclesiastical conflict. Within this context, Bedford clearly outlines Merezhkovsky’s struggle with the Christian commandment of universal charity, as opposed to his innate intellectual and moral aristocraticness, nonconformity, and rebelliousness. The last section is concerned with the author’s career in exile, the period following the irreconcilable stand he had taken with regard to bolshevism. In Paris he assumed a role, not so much of the writer and thinker, but, rather, of the prophet warning Western mankind against its moral and spiritual flabbiness, against imminent disasters of unprecedented dimensions, and general spiritual bankruptcy. Merezhkovsky sincerely and passionately believed in this role, even though it generated much friction with others who were by no means inclined to follow him onto the paths of the religious and moral visionary.

A painstakingly compiled bibliography adds to the value of this highly commendable study, despite the absence of several important works in languages other than English or Russian. The book will undoubtedly render a most valuable service to the student of the labyrinthine intellectual, literary, and spiritual currents and crosscurrents so characteristic of the Russian cultural scene during the first half of this century.

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LETTERS TO THE FUTURE: AN APPROACH TO SINYAVSKY-TERTZ.

By *Richard Lourie*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975. 221 pp. \$8.95.

The risks inherent in writing about the *personae* of living authors are, one would think, self-evident. Yet every so often scholars and journalists cannot resist temptation, particularly since such biographical data (supplemented, to be sure, by generous doses of hearsay and conjecture) cannot—unless the critic’s allegiance to the Formalist creed is truly fundamentalist—be entirely separated from an examination of the texts themselves. Some years ago we were told about the hapless Soviet scholar whose dissertation on Howard Fast, the Fighter for Peace, was retroactively rejected and her degree revoked. Solzhenitsyn’s recent arrival in the West had less drastic but, one suspects, still painful consequences for several authors of book length studies of the novelist, which are now being remaindered or worse.

Richard Lourie’s book, a *Leben und Werke* type of study, is partly salvageable. Certainly, the *Leben* part is to a large extent useless now that Sinyavsky is in the West, as are several other persons who figure in this section of Mr. Lourie’s book.