

As in the case of Kluge's book, the question of the audience for this study remains open. The abundant translations make it clear that it is intended for the nonspecialist. But its painstaking analyses and dryness of subject matter make it questionable that a nonspecialist will have the enthusiasm to work his way through the mass of repetitive Soviet clichés, or to digest Lenin's simplistic pronouncements on literature. Although James's enthusiasm for his subject is admirable, his final deductions seem hardly worth the energy expended on reaching them.

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MAYAKOVSKY: A POET IN THE REVOLUTION. By *Edward J. Brown*. Studies of the Russian Institute, Columbia University. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973. ix, 386 pp. \$16.50.

This is the first full-length biography of Mayakovsky in English. (*The Life of Mayakovsky* by Wiktor Woroszyński, recently translated from the Polish, is a valuable and comprehensive montage rather than a coherent narrative.) Moreover, it is truly a *critical* biography, predictably free from the pieties and the taboos which hamstring V. O. Pertsov's three-volume account, shuttling deftly, and "without embarrassment" (p. 7), between the poet's life and his work. In urging the legitimacy, indeed the indispensability, of this procedure, Professor Brown takes issue with the "well-established dogma that the facts of a poet's biography must never be deduced from his poems." In Mayakovsky's case, he maintains, this dogma is subject to radical modification: "Indeed, the structure of his poetry as a whole . . . was shaped by the events of his life as a piece of bronze statuary is shaped by its mold" (p. 7).

One may be inclined to qualify this "modification" either by invoking the third force which visibly affected both Mayakovsky's life and his work—the myth of the Revolutionary Poet—or by suggesting that the events which "shaped" his poetry were transmuted into it through the medium of a recognizable "symbolic system" (Lawrence Stahlberger). But Brown scarcely needs to be reminded of such verities. What makes his book so thoroughly satisfying is a felicitous synthesis of a keen sense of personality and of history with a modern structural sophistication.

Brown's adeptness at literary analysis, at identifying the work's commanding images and disentangling its thematic and ideational strands, is evidenced by his dissections of Mayakovsky's long poems such as "The Cloud in Trousers," "The Flute Spine," "Man," and, most notably, "About That." The critic-biographer is equally successful in charting his hero's tortuous path from the early Bohemian rebellion through short-lived revolutionary euphoria to the frustrations and ordeals of the final years. To a student of modern Russian literature much of this tale will have a familiar ring: the plight of the immensely gifted poet, caught between lyrical rage and total commitment, had been shrewdly diagnosed and eloquently evoked by the best Mayakovsky scholars, especially by Roman Jakobson, whose contribution is fully acknowledged here. Brown's unerring good sense proves a consistently reliable guide to Mayakovsky's contradiction-ridden career. He is too fair-minded to deny the irrepressible verbal inventiveness of Mayakovsky's most blatantly propagandistic output, which he terms "one of the finest examples of didactic verse in the world's literature" (p. 304). By the same token, he is too clear-eyed to ignore the appalling cost of the frenzied *engagement*, to overlook that

desperate straining toward conformism, so disconcerting in the congenital rebel, which accounts, one suspects, for the palpable coolness toward Mayakovsky on the part of some latter-day Soviet iconoclasts.

Though, on the whole, Brown does a careful and lucid job of locating Mayakovsky among the literary-artistic crosscurrents of his era, some of his generalizations are more persuasive than others. I share his uneasiness over the excessively inclusive notion of "futurism" which informs Vladimir Markov's excellent study. But his own attempt at definition whereby "futurism" is subsumed under the primary concern with the medium, "color, line, form . . ." (p. 71), endemic in all artistic endeavor and especially pronounced in modern art, does not come significantly closer, I feel, to defining that "ism's" distinctive place within the modernist spectrum.

Yet abstractions such as these clearly are not the stuff Brown's *Mayakovsky* is made of. It is first and foremost a richly textured *story*—a story of a major poet and a remarkable human being, told with authority, grace, and acumen.

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EVGENIJ ZAMJATIN: AN INTERPRETIVE STUDY. By *Christopher Collins*. Slavistic Printings and Reprintings, 282. The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1973. 117 pp. 30 Dglds., paper.

Christopher Collins sensibly avoids giving us yet another survey of Zamiatin's life and work, which Alex Shane's competent and thorough study (1968) has rendered unnecessary. He instead sets out to deal with the "central literary puzzles in Zamiatin's major works."

Collins sheds light on a number of areas of Zamiatin's art, and the reader will find his book suggestive. He also obscures much, and here the theory that guides his work, or his use of it, is at fault. In his introduction Collins disclaims commitment to a theoretical principle, preferring rather a multiplicity of approaches. His most frequent approach, however, is to refer the work at hand to a context outside of it, which he finds in literary tradition, folk rituals, and, most often, in the psycho-analytical theories of Jung.

Every artist has at hand a storehouse of received values, ideas, images, forms, symbols, and myths. The interest of literary criticism lies in uncovering the ways in which the individual artist shapes his cultural inheritance into unique visions and forms. In Collins's book we are treated instead to manifestations—of Gogol, of Dostoevsky, of the *anima*, the "maternal monster," the "Great Man Within," the mandala. The author indulges in a new scholasticism, until recently very fashionable, which treats every tree not as a part of the forest but as the incarnation of some hidden mystery obscure even to the artist who painted it. Collins quotes Zamiatin from the essay "Back Stage" ("Zakulis") to support his thesis that the "ultimate source of the characters and the structure" of *We* is the unconscious. He makes little of the latter part of Zamiatin's statement, which speaks of the "consciousness" that "carefully guides" the dreams of which art is made. It is the conscious Zamiatin—the Zamiatin who wrote at a particular moment in literary and human history and shaped what he had inherited, seen, thought, and felt into the forms of art—who is largely absent from Collins's study. Fortunately, Collins