

RUSSIAN FORMALISM AND ANGLO-AMERICAN NEW CRITICISM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY. By *Ewa M. Thompson*. De Proprietatibus Litterarum, Indiana University, Series Maior, 8. The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1971. 160 pp. 30 Dutch guilders.

This is, to the best of my knowledge, the first comparative study of the Russian Formalists and the New Critics. It is seriously defective in several areas, especially that area which Jakobson calls "metonymy," Shklovsky "stepped form," and Tolstoy "linkage." From beginning to end, the book remains a series of set pieces. Thus in chapter 1 we read comments on Kant, Bely, Potebnia, Baudouin de Courtenay, Veselovsky, Futurism, Opoiaz, Zhirmunsky, Shklovsky, Tynianov, and so forth. The material remains too raw—insufficiently processed, coordinated, and subjected to some palpable overall design. One might add that the first chapter essentially retraces the ground covered by Erlich in the first two chapters of his book. As for the set pieces themselves, many are well done. The author is particularly adept at discussing philosophical matters, such as the role of Kant's thought in the formation of both movements. And the book is useful for anyone seeking a thumbnail sketch of a certain critic or a specific article. But there is too much summary and juxtaposition of summaries.

The treatment of Shklovsky is seriously deficient in both facts and interpretations. It is not true that Shklovsky never mentions Bergson in his writings (p. 67): he appears in both *Literatura i kinematograf* and in "Chaplin—politseiskii" (1923). The author's statement that Shklovsky's contribution to Gorky's *Letopis'* and *Novaia zhizn'* illustrates his full sympathy for the cause of social justice (p. 27) is certainly dubious. Her assertion that Shklovsky believed the aim of poetry to be a precise description of the finite world (p. 39) is dead wrong. Erlich said it right: "The real aim of art was, according to Shklovsky, the creative distortion of nature by means of a set of devices which the artist has at his disposal." Professor Thompson would have written a better book had she paid more attention to Erlich's book.

In speaking critically of Shklovsky, the author several times alludes to his central aphorism: "The content of the literary work equals the sum-total of its forms," which she summarizes as "form is content" (pp. 57, 60, 65, 66). She then says that Shklovsky took this aphorism from Bely but disregarded Bely's context and "thus introduced a great deal of confusion into his own work and that of the other Formalists." The aphorism in question goes like this in Russian: "Soderzhanie (dusha siuda zhe) literaturnogo proizvedeniia ravno summe ego stilisticheskikh priemov." To summarize this sentence as "form is content" is—to say the least—highly inaccurate. Moreover, the word *soderzhanie* here is used figuratively. Shklovsky is just saying that a work of literature does not exceed the sum of its stylistic devices. *Soderzhanie* meant one thing to the Symbolists and something entirely different to the Formalists.

In the final chapter, then, when the principal figures discussed are divided into two major tendencies—idealistic and neopositivistic—Professor Thompson puts Shklovsky in the idealistic camp ("those who maintain that the function of the literary work is to convey a specific type of cognitive message"). That statement may apply to Belinsky, but it is a curious way of viewing Shklovsky. The central fact about Shklovsky is not his debt to the Symbolists but his repudiation of them, yet he emerges from this study as an illegitimate offspring of Kant and Bely.

Finally, this book is badly written, and for this the editors must take part of the blame. The author is, I assume, not a native speaker of English. Articles and prepositions are frequently misused. There are such things as "akinness," "principleless," "conscience-struck," "mediatorship," "detailedly," "scientifize," and "cognize." Most serious of all is the awkward diction that frequently garbles meaning, such as "If one remembers, however, from what philosophical argument it [Shklovsky's slogan on form and content] derives, its meaningfulness is by all means surpassed by the less complicated statements about the necessity to study concrete linguistic forms." Or "They [the steps of Shklovsky's staircase structure] lead to no didactic end, however, but contain their own content, being the only possible form to say what is being said." Sentences like this are not unusual. Also, some key Formalist terms are translated badly. *Priem* is rendered as "strategy"—clearly wrong, too modish and chic; *ostranenie* is rendered as "defamiliarization," which is not a translation of the term but a definition; *zatrudnenie* is "defacilitation," several steps backward from Erlich's "impediment." All in all, it is good to have this book, but much work in this area remains to be done.

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THE OXFORD RUSSIAN-ENGLISH DICTIONARY. By *Marcus Wheeler*.  
Edited by *B. O. Unbegaun* with *D. P. Costello* and *W. F. Ryan*. Oxford:  
Clarendon Press, 1972. xiii, 918 pp. \$18.00.

The tradition of dictionary-making is so well established that almost any dictionary produced by reasonable people is bound to be a contribution. Wheeler's bilingual dictionary is that kind of reasonable and careful work, and, given the publication date of 1972, it automatically becomes a contender for the title of best available Russian-English dictionary. The principal rival is, of course, Smirnitsky's *Russko-angliiskii slovar'*, produced in the Soviet Union and now in its ninth edition (1971) under the editorship of Smirnitsky's widow, O. S. Akhmanova. In compiling his dictionary, Wheeler made use of the third edition (1958) of Smirnitsky's dictionary along with other lexicographical resources. Lexicography is a type of cannibalism, the later dictionary feeding on the earlier ones, and thus it is not surprising to find identical or nearly identical entries in both works; see, for example, *pomët*, for which the six meanings "dung, excrement, droppings, litter, brood, farrow" are given in both dictionaries and in the same order. Wheeler is sometimes more helpful with the English glosses and will tell us, for example, that *iaz'* is "ide (fish of carp family)," while Smirnitsky feels that "ide" is enough.

The Wheeler dictionary is superior in giving related forms, usually providing us with nonobvious oblique forms. Thus the user with an imperfect grasp of Russian will learn from Wheeler that the genitive singular form of *kotël*, "kettle," is *kotlá*, and that the key forms of *vestí*, "to lead," are present forms *vedú*, *vedësh'* with past forms *vël*, *velá*, a type of information which can sometimes be extracted from Smirnitsky's examples but oftentimes not. Obviously a dictionary is not a reference grammar, but it is not reasonable to expect, for example, that the average user would know that *melíú*, *mélësh'* are present forms of the entry *molót'*, "to grind"; Wheeler provides this and similar information, Smirnitsky does not.

Both dictionaries attempt to present the basic Russian vocabulary along with colloquial expressions, idioms, and those technical words which might be encoun-