

intellectual currents that were in the air during Blok's lifetime and includes many stimulating guesses (clearly labeled as such) as to how the poem might be interpreted. Disappointing for two reasons: (1) much of the information the author presents seems gratuitous and only marginally—if at all—relevant to the explication of the poem, and (2) the author has chosen largely to ignore the poem's technical, aesthetic characteristics.

Viewing the poem as an artifact of Russian history and a document of the revolution, Hackel examines a wide range of its antecedents and possible sources in Russian spiritual and ideological tradition—chiefly Slavophile in nature. He discusses, for example, medieval iconography, the Old Believers' concept of Christ, and the Symbolist poets' preoccupation with an apocalypse. More immediate influences, such as the ideological trends in Blok's poetry before "The Twelve," his previously expressed mystical feeling of the need for a purgative revolution, and possible "catalysts" in the writings of a number of his contemporaries—Remizov, most convincingly—are explored.

Hackel's primary concern is the identity and significance of the twelve Red Guards who march through the poem, their victim, the prostitute Kat'ka, and, above all, the enigmatic figure of Jesus who appears in the last lines of the poem. He discusses the Bolshevik attitude toward the Red Guards, considers their possible connection to the *golyt'ba* tradition of Sten'ka Razin, and speculates at length (sometimes quite tenuously) on their relationship to the twelve apostles.

The discussion of the elements combined in the complex feminine image of Russia as represented by Kat'ka—focusing on Blok's concept of the Beautiful Lady and its predecessors in Russian thought—is particularly rewarding. Hackel quite logically devotes the largest share of his attention, however, to the figure of Jesus. He discusses its possible derivation from a wide variety of sources. Much of the mystery in this image, the author shows, comes from Blok's own complex, ambivalent attitude toward Christ and Christianity. This is the best part of a book which often seems overly ingenious in its highly conjectural search for sources and associations.

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A VOICE FROM THE CHORUS. By *Abram Tertz* [Andrei Sinyavsky]. Translated from the Russian by *Kyril FitzLyon* and *Max Hayward*. Introduction by *Max Hayward*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976 [1973]. xxiv, 328 pp. \$10.00.

At first glance, this amazing *document humain* does not seem to possess any structure or intrinsic logic. It appears to be a string of aphoristic comments on man's plight on earth; allusions to the struggle for life under harsh prison conditions; shreds of talk engaged in by other inmates of the concentration camp and jotted down by the author for their raciness, shrewdness, or weirdness; apothegms concerning the arts, literature, and history; pieces of religious introspection and mystical absorption; parts of folk songs and ballads of non-Russian nationalities settled in the Soviet Union; and, finally, occasionally revealing and touching glimpses into the intimate emotional world of Sinyavsky himself. It is not that the author had no literary model for his "diary of the soul." V. V. Rozanov, of course, established in Russia what now appears to be a brilliant tradition of this kind of free outpouring in complete immediacy and spontaneity. Although Rozanov's works have never been reprinted in the Soviet Union—he remains a strict taboo—it is interesting to see how Rozanov's handwriting becomes visible behind Sinyavsky's effusions, as in a palimpsest. This does not mean that Sinyavsky slavishly imitates his illustrious predecessor. Stylistically and "structurally" he merely follows a pioneering example, a new way of direct expression of inner experience. He enriches this mode of writing, however, by making use of his own unique

experiences and by interrupting the flow of the "interior monologue" with the free and untrammelled utterances of his comrades in distress, thereby achieving a new dimension and a broader perspective for what he saw and suffered himself. Thus, one could say that he develops creatively a workable tradition for which the groundwork was laid early in this century.

The history of this text—mainly Sinyavsky's communications to his wife—clarifies the lack of any discussion of the political and moral implications of his imprisonment. But the very absence of all such reflections puts the cruel absurdity of the author's incarceration into an even more somber and stark relief. There are no political reflections to detract the reader from the inner forces keeping Sinyavsky not only physically but also morally, spiritually, and psychologically alive: superior insight, a transcendent sense of beauty in nature as well as in art, and the conviction of an ultimate meaning of existence (his own dire fate included), which is distilled from religious illumination and a mystical awareness of the basic unity of all created and divinely ordained things. These constitutive elements of the spiritual training by means of which the author morally overcomes the horrors of his situation link him, of course, with Dostoevsky (on page 324 the reader finds a reference to the celebrated *House of the Dead*). And even if Sinyavsky with some ironic resignation states that the living, alas, are bored by the "dead," even if they are "dead" only temporarily, this reviewer certainly was not bored for one minute when listening to "the voice from the chorus." The volume is a remarkable testimony to what goes on in large parts of the globe in this century, all enlightened, progressive, and humanitarian posturings notwithstanding. It imparts many things to the reader, particularly a sense of humility and a deep skepticism with regard to all purely man-made attempts at self-redemption.

Max Hayward's sensitive introduction furnishes an adequate background for the reader who is unfamiliar with Soviet Russian conditions. His explanations of little-known Russian terms, turns of speech, and specific realia of Soviet Russian life in its less publicized, largely unexplored aspects prove to be a useful aid to the Western reader. The English version, on the whole, reads well. Rarely does the reader feel that he is dealing with a translation from a foreign idiom, even though here and there one could have wished for a little more color.

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HERE'S TO YOUR HEALTH, COMRADE SHIFRIN! By *Ilya Suslov*. Translated by *Maxine Bronstein*. Foreword by *Maurice Friedberg*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1977. xviii, 204 pp. \$8.95.

*Here's To Your Health, Comrade Shifrin!* produces a strong sense of *déjà vu*. We have read it all before: some of it in Gogol, some of it in Il'f and Petrov or Zoshchenko, some of it in Voinovich or even Pliushch. Maurice Friedberg's foreword accurately and sympathetically places this book where it belongs in a long and honorable Russian and Russian Jewish satirical tradition.

The techniques of satire being what they are, and Russian life being what it is (or what it seems to be), it is probably inevitable that the major pleasure provided by this book is the pleasure of recognition. But discovery is also an important element in comedy, and it is, I think, fair to say that *Here's To Your Health, Comrade Shifrin!* does not advance the satiric tradition in any direction—not even by the eminently unpredictable knight's move, so justly a favorite of satirists. *Here's To Your Health* is therefore not in the same league with such complex creations of the literary imagination as *The Master and Margarita* or even *The Trial Begins*, and certainly cannot bear comparison with Alexander Zinov'ev's extraordinary *Gaping Heights* (*Ziiaishchie vysoty*).