

Some of the judgments are extraordinary, if not always original. Gorky's play *Meshchane* dates from 1901, and "socialist realism" was proclaimed a third of a century and at least three revolutions later. But *Meshchane* is termed here "the first work of the dramaturgy of socialist realism" (1:77). The discussion that ought to follow this anachronism is simply not there.

A "correct" political approach to writing is no automatic guarantee of artistic excellence. One wonders what has happened to Friedrich Engels's idea that more could be learned about the changes in French society from the legitimist Balzac than from many technical volumes.

Despite their serious shortcomings, these books are worth consulting as reference material—particularly for the "Khronika" sections and for information about individual authors. Native critics always have a great advantage over the foreigner, because they are far closer spiritually and intellectually to the milieu they are writing about, and therefore often understand it much better. One wishes they could write all they understand.

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A GRAMMAR OF ASPECT: USAGE AND MEANING IN THE RUSSIAN VERB. By *J. Forsyth*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970. xiii, 386 pp. \$16.00.

Verbal aspect is a facet of the grammars of the Slavic languages that continues to attract the attention and efforts of linguists both within and without the various Slavic cultures. Aspect enables a language like Russian, which seemingly has a primitive two-tense system, to create verbal structures of great complexity and delicacy. In this solid work Forsyth addresses himself to the problem of defining, describing, and classifying Russian aspectual usage. After treating the theoretical problems of defining imperfective and perfective aspect, he considers the functions of procedurals (*Aktionsarten*) and the validity of aspectual pairs, and then examines in detail the functioning of the aspects in various grammatical categories: the past tense, present and future tense, negative constructions, infinitive expressions, and so forth. He provides a plentitude of illustrative examples with sufficient context to allow the reader to draw his own conclusions and match them with Forsyth's.

Much as I like this thoughtful and careful treatment I feel that Forsyth has "handcuffed" himself at the very beginning by subscribing to the notion of "private opposition" and defining the perfective aspect as the "marked" category, with the imperfective aspect emerging as the "unmarked" category. This concept of markedness versus unmarkedness, of something versus its empty reflection, is effective in dealing with low orders of abstraction, as in characterizing phonemes in terms of voice and lack of voice, but for higher orders of abstraction (e.g., grammatical concepts) the yes-no, plus-minus approach imposes severe and unrealistic limitations.

Forsyth thus overloads his definition of perfective aspect: "a perfective verb expresses the action as a total event summed up with reference to a single specific juncture" (p. 8). And his imperfective aspect practically vanishes in his definition or lack of definition of it: "The definition given above of the relationship between the aspects . . . makes no attempt to define the meaning of the imperfective verb

(which has been shown to be too indefinite and wide to be adequately covered by any combination of positive characteristics). It simply opposes the imperfective negatively to the single positive meaning of the perfective . . ." (p. 11). This cavalier treatment of the imperfective aspect forces Forsyth into tortuous interpretations in attempting to explain such contrasts as *Kto podavliial vosstanie?* "Who crushed the rebellion?" and *Kto podavil vse vosstaniia rabochikh?* "Who (has) crushed all the workers' risings?" Here it is obvious that the imperfective form *podavliial* is not simply a pale reflection of the positively-charged perfective form *podavil*, but rather that it competes with *podavil* on its own terms quite successfully. There is no room here for further defense of the maligned imperfective aspect except to say that the attribution to it of various meaning possibilities (continuous action, repetition, even single action) may make for an untidy definition, as Forsyth contends, but it will be a definition capable of covering the sometimes untidy operation of imperfective usage.

One important matter touched on only lightly by Forsyth is the phenomenon of biaspectuality—the existence of many verbs, such as *telefonirovat'* 'to telephone', which have both imperfective and perfective aspect, or (put another way) have no aspect. In her recent (March 1971) doctoral dissertation at the University of Minnesota, "Biaspectual -ovat' Verbs in Russian," Adele Donchenko points out the startling fact that of the 1,642 Russian verbs ending in *-ovat'* in the seventeen-volume Academy dictionary, 766 are biaspectual (p. 14)! Donchenko concludes that such "I/P verbs show no marked trend toward assimilation into the morphologically-marked binary 'aspectual pairing.' Not only does the acquisition of new borrowings extend the phenomenon of biaspectuality, but the paths taken by verb forms already adopted do not appear to be making any significant inroads on aspectual 'anomaly'" (p. 103).

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ARTS OF RUSSIA: 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES. By *Abraam L. Kagano-
 vich*. Translated by *James Hogarth*. Cleveland and New York: World, 1968.
 173 pp.

SPLENDORS OF MOSCOW AND ITS SURROUNDINGS. By *Vladimir
 Chernov* and *Marcel Girard*. Translated by *James Hogarth*. Cleveland: World,
 1967. 216 pp. \$29.95.

For the public interested in Russian art (which must be considerably larger than it was a generation ago, now that tourists may travel within the USSR), the publication of sound and sensible books on Russian art and art history would seem to be a worthy cause as well as a sound investment. Unfortunately all too often the venture falls between the horns of the familiar coffee-table dilemma: Which comes first, the text or the pretty pictures?

Not having had an opportunity to compare these volumes with the original texts, I cannot tell whether the clip-clop pace of the prose is the translator's or not. Probably not, if the texture of ideas, or what passes for them, has been faithfully conveyed. What is one to make—or what would anyone seeking artistic enlightenment make—of these statements about the baroque altarpiece in the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in the Fortress at Leningrad (I mention this monument because it is probably the most sumptuous altarpiece that English-read-