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But the Literature Does Not Fit the Theory: A Critique of the Teleological Approach to Literature

ZHITIINYE POVESTI RUSSKOGO SEVERA KAK PAMIATNIKI LITERATURY XIII–XVII vv.: EVOLIUTSIIA ZHANRA LEGENDARNO-BIOGRAFICHESKIKH SKAZANII. By *L. A. Dmitriev*. Akademiia nauk SSSR, Institut russkoi literatury (Pushkinskii Dom). Leningrad: "Nauka," 1973. 304 pp. 1.57 rubles.

This monograph on North Russian hagiographical works is long overdue. Like Kliuchevskii's seminal study, *Drevnerusskie zhitiia sviatykh*, it is packed with interesting information that cannot be found elsewhere in print. The book is divided into two main parts according to the dictates of geography and chronology. The first part is entitled "Legendary-Biographical Stories [*skazaniia*] of Old Novgorod" and includes studies of the *Life of Varlaam Khutynskii*, the "Story [*skazanie*] of the Battle of the Novgorodians with the Suzdalians," the *Life of Ioann Novgorodskii*, and the *Life of Mikhail Klopskii*. The second part is called "Traditions of the Novgorod Legendary-Biographical Stories in North Russian Life-Tales [*zhitiinye povesti*]" and treats four remarkable and undeservedly little-known works of North Russian provenance: the *Life of Adrian Poshekhonskii*, the "Story [*skazanie*] of Ioann and Loggin Iarengskii," the *Life of Varlaam Keretskii*, and the *Life of Artemii Verkol'skii*. The focus of part 2 shifts from old Novgorod to sixteenth and seventeenth-century North Russia which, Dmitriev feels, developed the hagiographical traditions formulated in Novgorod in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries.

There are a number of things which make this a good and very useful book. Dmitriev, a senior scholar in the Old Russian literature section of the Institute of Russian Literature in Leningrad, has expertly done all of the exhausting textological work that really must be done before one can say anything authoritative about a text. He has taken great pains to establish the literary history of each work studied, separating the many manuscripts (carefully listed in the appendix at the back of the book, pp. 271–92) into redactions, establishing the sequence—he is particularly good and often ingenious at datings (see, for example, pp. 83–86)—and interrelationships of these redactions, and correlating them to the historical background. Whenever necessary, he discusses pertinent events of local and general Russian significance and pays particular attention to the ideological factors which both motivate and are in turn reflected by the various reworkings. Part 1 in particular will be important for all scholars interested in fourteenth and fifteenth-century Novgorod-Moscow relations.

What makes this book rewarding for the student of Russian literature (medieval and modern) is Dmitriev's careful and methodical identification of those features of his texts which are essentially features of narrative fiction in the modern sense of the term. Although, as was the case in *Istoki russkoi belletristiki*, far from all such features are examined—things like the author's voice and point of view, his use of distancing and narrators, the structure of each life as a whole, and satire are rarely touched upon—Dmitriev writes very well indeed about the features he does treat, to wit: reflection of real life and *byt*, striking details with emotive overtones, attempts to reflect the psychology of the individual and to give distinct personalities to characters, dramatic presentation, use of vernacular and folkloric language, and, finally, points of contact

with legend, the oral story, the fairy tale, and folklore in general, all of which help to make the various works vivid, expressive, and captivating.

Rather than expand on and illustrate the above-mentioned merits of the book, I would like to proceed directly to examination and criticism of certain aspects which seem to me to be rather serious methodological and theoretical shortcomings—partly but not solely occasioned by the regrettable neglect of all non-Russian literary scholarship (one article in *Revue des études slaves* is mentioned and that completes the picture)—namely: the antireligious tendency, the restrictive literary theoretical overview, and the problem of genre and the development of the genre. I should like to preface my negative remarks by pointing out that it may well be the last and greatest merit of this important book that it brings us to the point where we must inevitably confront these questions head on theoretically. My comments are simply intended to raise questions about and draw closer attention to these problems, none of which can be solved without much careful thought.

The Problem of Religion. The first page of the book offers a sort of apology for the “religious form of the majority of works of art and literature of the feudal period,” pointing out that “behind this religious cover stood facts of historical reality, the battle of social and artistic tendencies, [and] the reflection of the medieval world view” (p. 3), the implication being, incredible as it seems, that the medieval world view itself was not fundamentally religious! Not inappropriately, Dmitriev quotes Adrianova-Peretts who during her late phase wrote that “the goal of the historian is to reveal the real meaning of the content clothed in the mandatory religious form” and that medieval readers “turned to [religious literature including lives of saints] by no means only insofar as it was related to cult: it helped solve questions of personal and public morals, trained one to understand the psychology of himself and others, to ponder his own motives, [or] ‘intentions’ [*pomysly*], standing behind a man’s behavior, [and] it cultivated artistic taste” (pp. 3–4). While Adrianova-Peretts may be right that the goal of the *historian* is to reveal the “real” meaning of the content, this is *not* the only goal of the *literary critic* of medieval literature; and while Adrianova-Peretts is right that medieval readers did learn about themselves and others in this literature and did not relate to it *only* in terms of “cult,” they certainly did relate to it primarily in terms of cult since the medieval mind—as Adrianova-Peretts well knew—was quite incapable of even perceiving, let alone comprehending, these works divorced from their religious essence. Any approach which—whatever the reasons—attempts to treat medieval saints’ lives as if the religious element were an unfortunate, superficial veneer which can simply be stripped off and laid aside, thereby allowing one to see and analyze the “real product,” is going to be at best simply inappropriate and inadequate for anything approaching a total reading of the texts. This approach, an example of what might be termed the reductive fallacy, is all the more surprising in a critical era which is bent on multiplying the “signifiers” to a maximum rather than reducing them in any way.

Let me illustrate this reductive approach with a concrete example. Speaking of the “Story of the Miracle of the Novgorod Icon of the Mother of God,” which he rather consistently calls the “Story [*skazanie*] of the Battle of the Novgorodians with the Suzdaliens,” thereby perhaps unwittingly shifting the stress away from the religious event that the Old Russian bookmen saw at the center of the story and toward the secular battle theme as we have it in the earliest annal accounts, Dmitriev writes: “In the ‘*Skazanie*,’ where the central motif is the religious miracle, the story of the miracle does not have an ecclesiastico-religious character, but a structured narrative fictional one [*siuzhetno-povestvovatel’nyi*], moreover sometimes with a more clear publicistic coloration, sometimes with a somewhat obscured one” (p. 147). It seems strange to claim that a story, whose central motif is religious, does not have a religious character. The story has an inescapably religious character. This does not in any way

suggest, of course, that it does not *also* have a structured narrative fictional character. The two are by no means mutually exclusive. Religious miracle stories that are set forth in any detail at all are quintessentially *siuzhetno-povestvovatel'nyi* (and not just the marvelous apocryphal ones) while ineluctably of religious character. The fictional aspects which Dmitriev reveals so successfully in the many miracle stories he discusses in no way annul or even diminish the religious meaning of the stories themselves. The two aspects blend, counterbalance, and sometimes even counterpoint each other. The necessity to convince generates the *siuzhetnaia povestvovatel'nost'* which, in turn, functions so as to complement and underscore the religious meaning it is intended to help convey.

Much of the pathos and charm of these religious miracle stories for the modern reader comes from his knowledge of the medieval reader's naïve faith in the miracle, from the knowledge of the author's expectation that his account—fantastic as it may be—will be believed, and from the knowledge that the contemporary reader did believe and was deeply moved. Without this religious element, regardless of where one may stand on religion, the semantic of the text—its meaning, in Eric Hirsch's sense of the word (*Validity in Interpretation*) as opposed to whatever significance this meaning might have for Dmitriev or any other critic—is inescapably distorted and the overall reading unnecessarily impoverished. In approaching a text from the medieval Russian tradition, one simply cannot play down the religious dynamic of the entire cultural system of which the text is a literary manifestation.

Dmitriev's antireligious bias has led him to attempts to prove both that works of high literary quality are less religious than they seem and, as we shall see, that the least religious redactions of a work are the highest in literary quality. This critical approach is a teleological one and results from the general Soviet aversion to and mistrust of things religious: if the Christian religion itself is a negative phenomenon, then obviously its artistic products are of greater or lesser worth depending upon the degree to which they reflect their religious provenance; the less "canonical" and religious a text is, the better the work of art. Unfortunately, this view permeates the whole book. It not only lies behind Dmitriev's preference for the simple and folkloric redactions of saints' lives over the high-style rhetorical ones which are more overtly religious, but also wittingly or unwittingly influences his evaluations and views on genre, and shapes his very theory of literature.

Questionable Theoretical Assumptions. Dmitriev's "primary and basic aim" in this book was "to establish in each concrete case what makes a work of the saint's life type [*zhitiinoe proizvedenie*] a monument of literature, a text of structured narrative fiction [*siuzhetnoe povestvovanie*] . . ." (p. 7). Basically his answer is the non-religious, noncanonical elements: "the literary nature of saints' lives manifests itself most distinctly in those features of texts of the saint's life type which are in conflict with the canons of the hagiographical genre" (p. 7; by "hagiographical genre" he presumably means saints' lives, since hagiography is not a genre in the strict sense but a collective concept covering such *widely* divergent genres as the saint's life, the martyrdom, the patericon story, and the miracle tale). This being the case, and since "the goal of the book is the study of saints' lives as literary monuments, . . . more than the usual amount of attention is devoted to the elucidation of the *siuzhetnye* sides of all the episodes of a saint's life, to determining folkloric motifs reflected in a life, [and] to the establishment of the oral legendary basis of the episodes of a saint's life" (p. 11). Among the *siuzhetnye* sides upon which Dmitriev concentrates in particular are the reflection of contemporary life and manners and the psychological and realistic depiction of the heroes. Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether all these features really do contradict the canons of the "hagiographical genre," let us examine the validity of the theoretical view behind this.

It seems to me that there are two assumptions in this view with which we should

not agree. First, Dmitriev identifies realistic narrative fiction with literature itself, whereas in fact the two are by no means identical. He clearly implies that saints' lives or for that matter any prose works which lack realistic narrative fictional and folkloric character are necessarily the less literary for it, if literature at all, and conversely that the more a work reflects realistic fictional and oral legendary elements, the more fully it qualifies as a work of literature. It is this view that allows Dmitriev to consider "folkloric redactions" of saints' lives to be more literary than their high-style counterparts. This assumption, which runs through the entire book, is frequently illustrated explicitly, as for example in the following statement: "the artless, vivid story—close to oral legend—of a miracle or vision gives much more valuable and interesting material to the contemporary investigator than the bookish, artful [*iskusstvennyi*] story" (p. 10). A logical extension of this line of thought is that saints' lives which are fully canonical or closer to the "canon," such as the *Life of Saint Theodosius* or the *Life of Kirill Belozerskii*, must be less literary than the works treated in this book—which is obviously not so. This view, then, seems particularly out of place in a book dealing with medieval saints' lives.

The second assumption with which we must disagree is that, even within the area of structured narrative fiction, realistic narrative fiction is intrinsically more literary than other types of narrative such as nonrealistic narrative told in lyrical-expressive prose or the medieval romance, a genre with which the saint's life has very close ties, as has frequently been pointed out, most recently by Northrop Frye in *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*. Dmitriev seems to posit realistic narrative fiction as an ideal goal—literature in its fullest sense—toward which medieval writing was slowly progressing, freeing itself from its shackles, religious and otherwise, as it went. The closer any given work was to realistic fiction in the modern sense, the more literary it was; the farther from this ideal, the less literary. This is an example of what could be called the ameliorative evolution fallacy. Dmitriev seems to view medieval narrative forms as imperfect novels and, unfortunately, he is by no means alone in this widely prevalent view. Kellogg and Scholes observe that "the greatest obstacle to an understanding of narrative literature in our day is the way notions of value have clustered around the word 'novel' itself" and that now "in the middle of the twentieth century, our view of narrative literature is almost hopelessly novel-centered. The expectations which readers bring to narrative literary works are based on their experience with the novel" (*The Nature of Narrative*, p. 8).

Dmitriev seems to feel that good literature must be mimetic. When he tells us that the miracle story, with its inclusion of real people and its interest in vivid, entertaining situations, and the sixteenth and seventeenth-century North Russian saints' lives, with their simple, mortal, ill-starred heroes whose torments are true to life, are steps on the way to the development of the tale of life and manners (*bytovaia povest'*; pp. 54 and 269), he is clearly positing an ascending hierarchy of genres moving up toward the realistic novel. Similarly, when he tells us that the "extensive" and "special" redactions of the *Life of Varlaam Khutynskii* are "the most interesting from the literary point of view," it turns out that he believes this because "precisely in these redactions all the legends and traditions about Varlaam Khutynskii *vividly reflecting the medieval life of Novgorod* were collected" (p. 87; italics mine). It seems to me that mimetic qualities in fiction—*pace* Eric Auerbach and V. P. Adrianova-Peretts—are by no means an intrinsic literary merit per se (let alone a *sine qua non* of good literature), but are meritorious only if they harmoniously contribute toward the work as a functioning whole. It could be further argued that we have here one of the basic differences between literature and history. Whereas in history, facts and reflection of realia are fundamentally desirable and meritorious per se, in literature, where we have an aesthetic structure in conflict with the cognitive structure (see Jan Meijer, "The Limits of Literature in Old-Russian Literature," *Poetyka i stylistyka*

słowiańska, p. 138), more than the mere presence—as opposed to the nonpresence—of the reflection of reality needs to be demonstrated before any evaluation of a work as literature can be ventured.

In Dmitriev's case, the Auerbachian novel-centered view of narrative literature is doubtlessly and understandably compounded by the Marxist critical assumption that history is more important than fiction—the latter improves in value the more it reflects the former, and through grappling with and organizing “real life” comes to resemble history. This view tends to place literature (and art for that matter) in a position inferior and subservient to history and is fundamentally hostile to literature as an autonomous entity. To give a hypothetical example: measured by this standard, some redaction of, say, the *Life of Stefan of Perm'*, with all kinds of later *bytovye* accretions, interesting in themselves but poorly integrated into the *Life*, would have to be considered more literary than and of superior quality to Epifanii's original.

The mimetic view of literature not only obscures our ability to appreciate medieval narrative literature in general but the lives of saints in particular, since any novel-oriented approach is hardly going to be the best one to use on a genre like the saint's life, which has much closer ties with the romance than the novel. In any case, while it may be true that the features upon which Dmitriev concentrates in this study, and which he feels are canon-breaking, make the various works closer to novelistic narrative fiction and perhaps more pleasing to modern readers trained on the novel, they do not in any way make these works *more literary*, or make the simple redactions of these works more literary than their higher style, more rhetorical and abstract counterparts.

The main practical result of this theoretical bias is that Dmitriev consistently concentrates his analysis on the forms of the works which best reflect oral legend and real life and which are the farthest from what he considers to be the canon, giving short shrift to the “higher” style, more rhetorical and religious redactions, which he frequently uses (albeit with great skill) only to bring out the qualities he is seeking in the redactions that interest him. Dmitriev's bias against the higher style but less folkloric redactions can perhaps best be illustrated by the following quotation from his conclusion: “Official hagiography strove to channel the hagiographical genre [*sic*] back into the demands of the canon, to subordinate saints' lives first and foremost to their ecclesiastico-liturgical purpose. In this case, works of the literature of the saint's life type [*zhitiinaia literatura*] ceased their existence as live literary phenomena, becoming narrowly ecclesiastical texts” (p. 270). Such a view must be regretted not only because “official” “bookish” saints' lives were often of very high literary quality but also because, despite Dmitriev's disclaimer (pp. 12 and 269), these works were really literature intended for reading purposes (*chet'ia literatura*). They were not meant simply to glorify a saint and his church during a service but to entertain, impress, and influence the behavior of the reader as well. For narrow “cult purposes,” there were service menaea and prologs adapted especially to this end. To conclude, while I in no way wish to downgrade the high quality of Dmitriev's analyses of the various simpler, more folkloric redactions, I have tried to draw attention to what I feel is an unfortunate neglect of the high-style redactions which have their own charm and qualities *as literature* even though Dmitriev does not turn his considerable critical insight to these matters.

The Problem of Genre. Dmitriev's first task should have been to define the saint's life in detail, particularly in its Russian form. At present, the term has extremely vague contours, and even works that are clearly *not* lives, such as the so-called *Life of Avvakum*, are considered to be highly original examples of the genre (see, for example, Dmitriev's article in *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury*, 27:202). Instead of a much needed, exhaustive definition of the saint's life, including all of its distinctive features, formal *and* nonformal, Dmitriev—like Skripil' in the *Istoriia russkoi*

literaturny v desiati tomakh—simply summarizes and repeats Loparev's famous definition of the typical canonical structure of eighth and ninth-century Byzantine lives, which Dmitriev claims was "just as typical and mandatory for works of Russian hagiography" (p. 4). I think it is imperative, however, to confront the fact that Russian saints' lives right from the very beginning were almost as different from Byzantine lives as the annals (*letopisi*) and the *Kievan Caves Patericon* were from their generic cousins the Byzantine chronicles (*khroniki*) and translated patericons.

Before any acceptable statements can be made on the canons of the genre we need a full generic study of both the Byzantine lives and the Old Russian original lives, which would include *inter alia* a Proppian or Raglanesque morphology of both the Byzantine and Old Russian lives. In the absence of such a study, it seems to me that throughout this book Dmitriev is essentially measuring the distance of the original Russian works he is studying from a Byzantine canon that I suspect was *never* the accepted form in Kievan Rus'. Even Dmitriev himself, speaking of later works, makes the point that, "*as in the age of the origin of Russian hagiography, the canon was broken under the influence of stories of real events, folklore, and other literary genres*" (p. 265; italics mine). In his article in *Puti izucheniia drevnerusskoi literatury i pis'mennosti*, he rightly points out that in North Russian lives the images of people and human passions were "*not less vivid*" than in the Kievan period (p. 75; italics mine), and in general he is well aware of Adrianova-Peretts's many works demonstrating the originality of the Old Russian saint's life in the Kievan period. Yet throughout the book the presence in fourteenth to seventeenth-century Russian lives of such *siuzhetnye* features as use of folklore, details of realia, and lyricism—all of which were present in pre-Mongol saints' lives—is viewed as something new that contradicts the "canon" of the old period as defined by Loparev, who, as we have seen, was speaking exclusively of Byzantine lives.

In terms of evolution of the genre in Russian literature, we should be comparing the later lives to the early Russian models of the genre in the Kievan period, which must be considered to represent the "canon" as it was understood in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. Surely the Russians had a canon of their own and lives such as the *Life of Saint Theodosius* and the *Life of Avraamii Smolenskii* should give us an idea of what it was. The approach I am suggesting might significantly alter the picture. For example, would such things as the episodic structure of the work on Mikhail Klopskii—a work Dmitriev considers remarkable for its "glaring lack of correspondence to the canons of the saint's life genre" (p. 185)—seem noncanonical and original if seen in the light of the clearly episodic structure of the *Life of Saint Theodosius* (especially in the second part after he enters the monastery where episode after episode is strung together often with no transition of any kind)? Dmitriev writes that "the influence of oral legendary traditions, of narrative fictional [*siuzhetnye*] motifs on hagiography violated generic canons, gave the hero of the narrative characteristics which contradicted the purely abstract ideal, and transformed the life into a structured narrative [*siuzhetnyi*] story" (p. 6). But, because we have widespread evidence of the influence of oral legendary traditions and narrative fictional motifs enlivening the Old Russian hagiographic tradition—martyrdoms, princely lives, patericon stories, and last but not least saints' lives—can we not assume that this is an essential "canonical" feature of hagiography and the saint's life in particular, in the Kievan period and later (and perhaps even in Byzantine lives though this is a different question), so that what would be significant and what we should be measuring is the *degree* of *siuzhetnost'* in later saints' lives and not the *fact* of its presence, which is neither novel nor canon-breaking in itself?

How far can a work go from Loparev's canon or any other canon that we intuit for Kievan saints' lives and still be a saint's life? Can the work about Varlaam Keretskii be a saint's life or even hagiography when its hero was never officially

canonized and his main claim to fame was having murdered his wife and undertaken a difficult sea voyage with her corpse? If it is not a saint's life, as Dmitriev himself suggests it may not be (p. 249), then it cannot be said to represent any breaking away from the canons of the genre; to the contrary, it might be an example of the imitation of a saint's life by an altogether different more popular narrative genre. If the work on Adrian Poshekhonskii, which features the brutal murder of a terrified abbot (who is killed by thieves in spite of his ignominious attempt to hide and his craven promises to go away and never come back if he is spared), is not a saint's life, as Dmitriev himself again suggests (p. 213), then what is it? Is it a literary offshoot of the martyrdom to which it obviously has far closer ties than to the saint's life? Though Dmitriev rightly points out in passing that some of the works studied in this book are not saints' lives at all but are "essentially works of a different genre" (p. 270), he unfortunately never develops the notion of what this different genre might be, though this is of central importance. Throughout the book, Dmitriev uses such terms as *zhitiinaiia povest'* (tale of the saint's life type), *poves'* (tale), *skazanie* (story or legend), *legendarno-biograficheskoe skazanie* (legendary-biographical story), and at the end of the book *zhitie-legenda* (legend-life) and *legendarno-zhitiinyi zhanr* (the legendary life genre; p. 262), but he defines none of them—not even the two used in the title and the subtitle—and sometimes uses them interchangeably. The reader is further confused when Dmitriev begins his "Conclusion" by telling us we have examined seven saints' lives (p. 262), a fact not reflected in the table of contents, by the title, or throughout the book.

Let us examine the problem using the example of the work about Ioann and Loggin, whose official recognition as saints was brought about by their veneration as miracle workers in spite of the fact that nothing is known about Loggin before his posthumous miracle appearances and all we really know about Ioann is that the corpse of a drowned man found on the ice and buried by the seashore was apparently his, the name only later being miraculously made manifest. Though he names the work the *Skazanie [story] ob Ioanne i Loggine Iarengskikh*, Dmitriev continually speaks of it as if it were a saint's life and sees it as an example of "further freeing of the genre from the mandatory story about the saint's path in life. . ." (p. 213). It seems to me that in a case like this, where absolutely nothing is known or invented about the life of a saint, we must simply be dealing with a different genre. Indeed the work was never even conceived as a life. Varlaam wrote the original part as a description of the transmission of the relics (a well-known genre) of Ioann to Iarenga and included a few miraculous traditions about the drowned man's grave. The many other miracles are all later accretions. What we have here is a short account of the transmission of some relics and a large collage of miracle stories and accounts from different times—some of which are highly pleasing examples of this minor genre—which is why Sergii Shelonin called his redaction of the work *Skazanie o chudesekh sviatykh pravednykh Ioanna i Loggina*. Sergii knew very well that he was not working on the life of a saint but on a distinct genre-ensemble made up of a number of mini-genres, or "small forms" as Likhachev calls them. That Dmitriev should have provided a thorough definition of the miracle story (*zhitiinoe chudo*) goes without saying.

If one were to insist on talking about such a work in terms of the genre of the saint's life as Dmitriev does, then it seems an inescapable conclusion that we are simply dealing with a case of decay and near total decline of a genre, the quaint rustic vernacular of the work being just one more proof of the lamentable ignorance and lack of education of the authors who simply were unable to meet the standards of the genre. In terms of the saint's life genre, the decline into quasi-folklore—which Dmitriev calls the "folklorization" of the genre (p. 270)—would have to be considered a steep one. It is this angle of vision which forced Kliuchevskii to conclude about the *Life of Adrian Poshekhonskii* that the compilers of the "life" were barely literate and

that “trying to express themselves in a literary manner [*po-knizhnomu*], they continually fall into grievous grammatical errors and lapse into colloquial language” (p. 200).

If, however, we approach this collage of miracle stories in terms of its own genre—as we should—and not in terms of the saint’s life genre, with which it has far fewer ties than it does to the patericon miracle story, then we are on safer ground and can treat these miracle stories as more or less successful examples of this genre and as interesting and colorful examples of the invasion of folklore into literature in the sixteenth century. An approach to such a work as a collage allows us to evaluate its parts separately, some of which are rather primitive accounts of typical traditional miracles—especially the documentary accounts of miracles recorded in connection with the official investigations of sainthood which Dmitriev claims are structured narrative fiction and the most interesting part of North Russian lives “in the literary respect” (p. 225)—and some of which are indeed highly fictionalized narratives, without forcing us to evaluate the whole work as some kind of patchwork quilt thrown together from highly disparate parts.

Let us focus now on the evolution of the genre of the saint’s life. Dmitriev views the problem in the following manner: “From the very beginning and throughout the full length of the existence of the hagiographical genre [*sic*] in old Rus’ . . . a battle between two tendencies is taking place in this genre [which was] ecclesiastico-religious in its purpose: on the one hand the hagiographer strives for strict observance of the canons of the genre; on the other, he experiences the influence of real life, of other literary genres, of oral creation, and this influence destroys the canons of the genre [and] contradicts them” (p. 7; see also p. 269). Did the Russian writer of saints’ lives really strive for strict obedience to the “canon” of the genre? Did the North Russian and Novgorodian writers really try to write canonical saints’ lives and simply fail miserably in their aim? Could they not surely have done a better job? Could they not have invented or borrowed all the necessary detail about the origins and life of their respective saints as did the earlier writers of saints’ lives (Greek, Latin, and Russian)? Must we really assume that they either did not know the canons or simply were not talented enough to adapt their “new” influences to the genre whose canons they were striving to observe? Pushing this line of questioning still further, and returning to the beginning of the existence of this genre in Rus’, are we supposed to assume that Nestor—who knew Byzantine models very well—was trying to follow strictly the Byzantine canon in his *Life of Saint Theodosius* but somehow got off the track and failed in his attempt? It seems to me that Dmitriev’s original formulation, though attractive at first glance, distorts the true picture and that there are two main reasons for this distortion. The first is his unduly narrow picture of the canons of the genre; the influence of real life and oral creation are not contradictory to the canons of the genre even in the Kievan period. The second is his comparison of saints’ lives with works that are not saints’ lives; as we have seen, some of the later works Dmitriev uses to measure the evolution of the saint’s life seem to be examples of other genres.

Speaking strictly of works that can be considered saints’ lives, would it not be more accurate to see the history of the genre as one of varying realization of certain features which were always intrinsic to the genre but which tended to come to the fore in different patterns and with different degrees of intensity in different periods? The evolution of the genre reflects the fact that the various writers took great advantage of one of the original fundamental features of the Old Russian genre, that is, an extreme looseness and freedom which allowed much leeway for such things as reflection of real life, the influence of other genres (particularly the patericon story), and the influence of folklore. It would be very difficult to fit the sharp swing toward “canonicity,” bookishness, and full-blown rhetoric in mid-sixteenth-century saints’ lives into any kind of overview which claimed a slow but definite “progress” over

the period as a whole in the direction of the "tale of life and manners" and oral creation. Dmitriev's view that the later "folk redactions," as he calls them, "continually interacted with rhetorical bookish hagiography and influenced the evolution of the hagiographical genre [*sic*] in general" (p. 10) further distorts the picture. Some of the "folk redactions" are not saints' lives and those which are saints' lives, rather than *influencing* the evolution of the genre, may well be a *result* of the evolution of the genre. Were it not for the extreme freedom of the genre and its openness to the influence of real life and folklore, the simple "folkloric" lives might never have arisen at all.

There is one more problem that should be mentioned. Dmitriev sees the works—both saints' lives and others—treated in his book as evolving toward structured narrative fiction. It seems to me, as I have suggested, that all these works *are* structured narrative fiction, just like the miracle stories they contain. It matters little that the authors claimed to be writing history and biography. The medieval saint's life was a crypto-romance, with Christ as the loved one and object of the quest, and it was, therefore, clearly in the category of fiction. If this is the case, then we can hardly present the various authors of the works in this book as striving to "free themselves from the fetters of hagiographical etiquette" (p. 264). The opposite might even be true, particularly of the works that are not saints' lives: the writers often seem to be trying to force legendary materials *into* the "fetters" of hagiographical etiquette, thereby likening their products to a type of literature where one could write interesting and imaginative fiction with the sanction of the canons of the genre—something one could not do so readily in any of the purportedly historical genres of the epoch. I do not think, therefore, that the literary history of the works discussed in this book bears witness to a striving toward narrative fiction; rather, *being* narrative fiction, these works simply show us various examples of the exploitation by saints' lives and related genres of the inherent properties of the genre of the saint's life, a genre in which, as John Fennell recently pointed out, "there was infinite room for variety and invention, for vivid description, for fantasy and legend interwoven with historical fact" (*Early Russian Literature*, p. 11).

In conclusion, I would like to stress one more time that my critical remarks are not intended to be definitive in any way, nor above all are they intended to discredit this stimulating and worthwhile book. They are intended to raise doubts and to bring into focus certain problems that should be mulled over by scholars working in the area. One thing this much needed and long awaited book on Novgorodian and North Russian lives does is arouse the reader's intense hope that somebody—hopefully Dmitriev himself—will soon provide us with critical editions of the works studied, few of which are available in satisfactory form. In spite of the fact that Dmitriev's book is a very honest one and every attempt was made to give the reader as much information as he needs to judge for himself, nothing can take the place of having critical editions of all the primary materials at hand. As Ilarion so succinctly put it: "Da razumeet izhe chtet."