

incidentally, Oblomov sees himself reclining in a meadow and being served food by a servant girl with "bare, round, and soft elbows" (part 1, chap. 8), a curious prefiguration of bliss later attained, but also an idyll that is rather pedestrian.

Ehre's book is comprehensive; it deals not only with the entire body of Goncharov's work, fictional and nonfictional (only eighty pages are actually devoted to *Oblomov*), but also offers quite extensive studies of his life, artistic personality, and creative method. The book seeks to bring all this together—avoiding, however, both the "biographical fallacy" and the *Leben und Schaffen* formula. A synthesis is attempted, toward the end of the book, in a short chapter entitled "Goncharov and His Trilogy." Ehre is fully aware of the complexities, ironies, and contradictions pertaining to both art and life, and wisely refrains from offering any single formula that would define both the Man and the Artifact.

Certain themes, however, would seem to invite some further effort toward synthesis and definition. One of them is the theme of passion and fear of passion in its numerous recurrences—thus Oblomov's terror when he observes an awakening of desire in his "casta diva," and his panicky "disengagement"; his contentment in his retreat to widow Pshenitsyna's house and to childhood (his landlady, and later his wife, is motherly, she brings him food, and she is passive: she stands "motionless, like a horse on which a collar is being put" when Ilya Ilyich ventures his first kiss—on the nape of her neck); the curious, if extraliterary, fact that Goncharov graced her with a name and patronymic almost identical with those of his mother; and Stolz's recovery of his childhood and discovery, in Olga, of a replica of his mother.

Ehre is certainly aware of the inferences that can be made, but he prefers to discuss Oblomov's emotions and predicaments using Goncharov's symbolically poetic language and his imagery. (It is curious, incidentally, that the static idyll and the threat of awakening passion are symbolized as Summer and Autumn. Wouldn't one rather expect Spring and Summer?) This treatment hardly provides any valid explanations, but then real-life causality does not apply to the world of the literary artifact. And it is not here suggested that Ehre should have attempted to "reduce" Oblomov (or his creator) to an unsublimated Oedipus complex, a castration fear, or whatever. The reader, after all, can "do it himself" if he so chooses. The book provides all the materials, and many will find the temptation quite strong.

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RUSSIAN SYMBOLISM: A STUDY OF VYACHESLAV IVANOV AND THE RUSSIAN SYMBOLIST AESTHETIC. By *James West*. London: Methuen, 1970. vii, 250 pp. \$9.50, cloth. \$4.50, paper. Distributed by Barnes & Noble, New York.

One of the most bedeviled aspects of the enormous legacy of Symbolism to modern Russian literature remains the problem of Symbolist aesthetics. We badly need a book like *The Symbolist Movement* by Anna Balakian or *The Symbolist Aesthetic in France* by Andrew G. Lehmann to do for the Russian writers what these two scholars have done for the French. Despite the impressive range of the book under review, the need remains.

Chapter 1 offers a "brief and selective survey of the aesthetic theories which were the common heritage of the Russian symbolists and their detractors." Chapter

2 focuses on the aesthetic theories of Viacheslav Ivanov. The center of attention is meant to be Ivanov's famous "Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism," but West often bogs down for long stretches in tedious summaries of peripheral essays by Ivanov. He concludes the chapter with a comparison of Ivanov's theories with those of Ernst Cassirer. It is a clever but misguided tactic, inasmuch as the comparison works more to Cassirer's advantage. Ivanov had moments of brilliant critical insight; and more than the other Symbolists, with the possible exception of Bely, he developed these insights into a theory of art. But he was no systematic thinker in any accepted sense, as Cassirer was, but an often great, never less than magisterial poet. West is to be congratulated for doggedly grappling with the notorious vagueness of Ivanov's central ideas and for his clear exposition of them, even if he occasionally distorts or oversimplifies. Still, one wishes that he had not been so modest in his refusal to point up the many contradictions in Ivanov's thought, as he does in his treatment of the much better known nineteenth-century critics in chapter 1.

This same reluctance to evaluate and criticize, and the inevitable overreliance on exposition and description, weaken chapter 3, which reviews the theoretical writings of the other Symbolists in the light of the topics raised in chapter 2. The chapter, entitled "The Symbolist Debate," also exposes a flaw in the structure of the book as a whole. Although it ostensibly treats Ivanov's aesthetic theories in relation to those of the other Symbolists, it actually contains very little of Ivanov. For the most part, it is left up to the reader to compare Ivanov's ideas with those of his fellow Symbolists. Given the spate of seriatim quotations from a wide range of authors, this is difficult and requires far too much flipping back and forth between chapters 2 and 3. The result is impressively encyclopedic but hazy and unfocused. We require a point of view, something to sift through the clutter (fascinating though it may be) of the Symbolists' contradictory pronouncements on art and set their most important achievements in high relief, as Balakian and Lehmann have done in their books. This and some attention to the Symbolists' theories in the light of their poetry (which, after all, is why we continue to read them) would have been appropriate. West's cautious forays into both areas in the book's conclusion touch on the matter; but it is a case of too little too late.

West is obviously in command of a vast body of material. If I am complaining of shortcomings in this study—among them a very sketchy index—it is because it will be much consulted by those interested in the wranglings about aesthetics in Russia between 1890 and 1917. Every writer should, of course, have the privilege of defining his subject; but when he (or his editors) entitles the result "Russian Symbolism"—in bold letters on the cover and dust jacket—readers have the privilege of questioning the narrowness of the approach even while admiring the attempt to grapple with a most difficult topic.

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THE PREMATURE REVOLUTION: RUSSIAN LITERATURE AND SOCIETY, 1917–1946. By *Boris Thomson*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972. vii, 325 pp. £3.95.

This volume is broader in scope than its title suggests: it attempts a survey of Russian culture, with an emphasis on literature, during the first thirty years of