

Lessing's indebtedness to other ancient cultures by demonstrating how the ideal city described in *Canopus in Argos* "incorporates cross-cultural ancient, medieval, and Renaissance conceptions of the sacred city" (168). Nor is Lessing's borrowing without controversy, for she has taken from "Babylonian and Iranian sources" what Sprague regards as "her most startling borrowing"—that is, the "endorsement of the doctrine of astrological fatalism" (169).

Sprague concludes her study of this remarkable twentieth-century writer (whose twenty-first novel, *The Fifth Child*, has just come out) with an assessment that echoes and gives new meaning to the complaint of one of Lessing's heroines that she is haunted by the "monster repetition": "If Lessing's diction and syntax have been simple, her repetitions and her explorations of language—its silences and sounds—have not been simple. The transformation of the monster repetition into something sacramental and desirable represents a complex journey" (183). For readers of Doris Lessing it has also been a complex, often difficult journey, one that Claire Sprague has made at once more accessible and more rewarding.

Read—and reread—this book.

David Lowe

RUSSIAN WRITING SINCE 1953: A CRITICAL SURVEY

New York: Ungar, 1987. viii + 208 pp. \$18.95

Reviewed by Victor Terras

To produce a critical survey of forty years of a major literature in a mere 200 pages is a precarious and thankless task. A large number of works, many among them of no great appeal, must be read and placed in their proper context, their salient features identified and their relevance and value stated in a few pithy sentences. The author does not enjoy the privilege of the scholar who has chosen a favorite author, school, genre, or theme. He must react even to those works which he finds boring or distasteful. If he wants to bring his survey up to the present, more or less, he faces the further difficulty of working against time, since whatever he may observe may become outdated within a few years.

David Lowe has met the challenge of his undertaking most creditably. I have noted no very significant omissions. Among Soviet writers, I missed Rimma Kazakova, Lev Kassil, and Boris Polevoi (upon a random check of the index). Emigre literature poses more of a problem. It is difficult to keep track of, difficult to classify and organize, and often difficult to evaluate due to its exotic (from a Russian viewpoint) context. I would consider Lidia Alekseeva, Olga Anstei, Boris Filippov, Gaito Gazdanov, Yury Ivask, Dmitry Klenovsky, and a few others at least as important as some of the writers or poets whose names do appear in the index.

Of course no reviewer will agree with all of Lowe's value judgments. I find his opinions, on the whole, sound and well informed. They tend to be stated lucidly and with concision. For instance, the essay on *Doctor Zhivago*, though

short, makes some interesting observations and does so eloquently. There are some inevitable letdowns. To say that "Zinovev has been compared to Jonathan Swift and Joseph Heller, but it is doubtful that posterity will find his characters as universal as Gulliver or Yossarian" (111) is simply gauche.

I do have some disagreements with Lowe. He summarizes his evaluation of Tvardovsky in these words: "Western critics have failed to evince much enthusiasm for Tvardovsky's poetry, finding it hackneyed and at times even mendacious, but many Russian readers insist that Tvardovsky is a fine poet whose qualities simply are lost on non-Russians" (150). This ignores Tvardovsky's forte: his rhythms, whose easy lilt and irresistible drive have no equal this side of Blok.

Lowe is one of those many Western critics who have their reservations about Solzhenitsyn. I believe that he, like others, is inclined to disregard the inspirational and prophetic quality of Solzhenitsyn's work. I find it pointless to mention the opinion of those who assert that "Matryona's Home" "merely demonstrates Solzhenitsyn's blindness to the realities of village life, where all the Matryonas have long since become cynical crones" (85), for Matryona obviously does not belong to the genre of "the most unforgettable character I ever met," but is an ideal figure.

Lowe's apotheosis of Yury Trifonov may be premature. To place this writer with Dostoevsky and Chekhov, and to proclaim that "in his mature works he achieved a singular power of characterization and gift for composition that rendered his death a major loss for contemporary Russian and world literature" (100) seems too bold.

Lowe's presentation is excellent so long as it remains factual and to the point. His generalizations are less felicitous. For example, the long introductory paragraph on "the image of the Russian poet as a profoundly tragic figure" (125) is eloquent, but facile and perhaps misleading, as it throws together accidents of personal nature, such as Pushkin's death in a duel, with those resulting from political involvement (the Decembrist Ryleev or the counterrevolutionary Gumilyov) and the wholesale terror of the Stalin era. But altogether, this is a good and valuable book which provides a much-needed service to the profession.

René Godenne

ETUDES SUR LA NOUVELLE FRANÇAISE

Paris/Geneva: Slatkine, 1985. Pp. 312

Reviewed by John Taylor

For those who (like myself) have ascribed to the view that the short story is a comparatively impoverished genre in French literature, René Godenne's *Etudes sur la nouvelle française* is the book to peruse. In this collection of twenty-seven articles the author amply proves the contrary. Whereas his au-