

Soviet rule. Although the approach appears to be straightforward and basically chronological (part 1 covers the years 1917–28; part 2, 1929–46), the actual structuring of the book results in somewhat erratic and uneven emphases on the materials. An opening chapter on Marxism and Bolshevism is followed by one called “The Other Tradition: Two Writers,” which couples a rather general discussion of Alexander Blok with a quite specific discussion of Zamyatin’s *We*. An admirably succinct survey of social and political history through the NEP period precedes a curiously unfocused chapter (“Intellectual Life”) devoted mainly to trends in scientific and humanistic studies; this is followed by a lucid, though necessarily brief, description of the main literary groups of the first postrevolutionary decade. The author then turns to drama and the cinema, inserts a chapter on the peasantry which eventually returns to a discussion of literature (here, the peasantry in literature), and completes part 1 with a separate chapter on Mayakovsky. The second part has a similar though not identical design: a chapter on social and political history, one on the cultural scene which covers literature, the theater, and the cinema, and a chapter on the peasantry, again with a section on the peasantry in literature. As in the first part, certain authors are singled out for special attention: Gorky is given a separate chapter, evidently because, in the author’s view, he wielded considerable influence on the cultural life of the 1930s; Leonov, because the author considers him the major novelist of the Soviet period; and Pasternak for reasons that remain obscure; at least if one accepts the author’s judgment that Pasternak not only stood outside official literature but “wrote no works which succeed in catching the spirit of an age, or are universally accepted.”

This study in some ways achieves both more and less than the promise of its title. It is more than a survey of literature and literary developments, and at the same time much less than that: though necessarily abbreviated and condensed, the unnecessarily uneven and checkered presentation of subject matter produces something less than a connected and coherent general view of the main cultural and literary trends. (Yet the accounts of social and political developments are, for all their compression, remarkably comprehensive and clear.) Another disappointment is that the “premature revolution” of the book’s title, which may seem to intimate an underlying theory of Soviet cultural development, turns out to be little more than a catch phrase which at best gives the study a superficial thematic unity but does not develop into a serious thesis about the subtle and complex linkages between political, social, and cultural change.

Whatever its shortcomings, this volume should prove useful as supplementary reading in basic courses on Soviet literature or Soviet culture.

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SELECTED POEMS. By *Joseph Brodsky*. Translated by *George L. Kline*. Foreword by *W. H. Auden*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973. 172 pp. \$5.95.

“My consciousness whirls like a spinning fanwheel / about the steady axis of my past,” writes Brodsky (“To a Certain Poetess”) in an image that hits off the distinguishing characteristic of his mind: a restless, passionate, but perfectly controlled awareness which, reaching out to a thousand things, is never permitted to wander on its own, firmly reined in as it is by a quality of philosophic insight that unifies its diverse adventures. There are no loose edges in Brodsky’s work, no

random perceptions or passions that have got out of hand. If in his "Elegy for John Donne" a catalogue of disparate objects—from plates and socks to a cathedral dome, from mice and wild beasts to forests, seas, and rivers, to heaven itself, God, angels, and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse—serves him to build an infinite and eternal universe, it is that his vision, in a magnificent sweep, stretches beyond the limits of matter and even spirit to a realm of values that encompasses them all. Objects of ordinary life are neither debased nor made to stand for something other than themselves. Sometimes, as in "The Tenant Finds His New House Wholly Strange," a melancholy irony attaches to them. Sometimes, as in "When I Embraced These Shoulders," there is a terror of soullessness. But each thing, complete and real, exists in its own sphere, and without being symbolic is neither meaningless nor isolated, for its specific reality is part of a vaster, unifying one of concepts and poetic intuition.

Brodsky is a metaphysical poet, whose affinity with the English metaphysical school derives from kinship of intellectual attitudes and emotional susceptibilities as much as of taste. This allies him in the twentieth century with T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden, who were also practiced in the sharp observation and disciplined thinking of the seventeenth century. Brodsky's imagination, like theirs, is capable of extraordinary leaps, as, for example, that of the remarkable conceit of "Refusing to Catalogue All of One's Woes," where the spell he casts on a woman he has loved—a spell made of the alleys, backyards, and fences that are the backdrop of their rift—is compared to a dying, drunken tailor's patching the garment of a nobleman. He is always restrained (compare his "New Stanzas to Augusta" with the Byronic poem to which his alludes), sometimes humorous (as in "Two Hours in an Empty Tank"), sometimes brilliantly epigrammatic, and often witty—with the serious, unfrivolous wit of his metaphysical forebears. And his experience of tragedy has lent his voice a poignant gravity that is extremely moving.

George Kline, collaborating with the poet, has translated most of his published work. He has done this with exemplary modesty and sensitiveness, and as successfully as anyone I know. The introduction he has supplied is an admirable piece of criticism, and his "Note on the Translation" is a model of good sense.

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RUSSIAN-ENGLISH IDIOM DICTIONARY. By *Alexander J. Vitek*. Edited by *Harry H. Josselson*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973. x, 328 pp. \$19.95.

Students, teachers, translators, researchers, and many others who have worked with Russian have lamented the lack of an extensive, reliable Russian-English idiom dictionary. Even the best lexicons available are marred by serious shortcomings. Most have been oriented toward British English, often providing obscure, antiquated, and even bizarre equivalents. Americans have often turned to *A Phrase and Sentence Dictionary of Spoken Russian* (a reissue of the old War Department Technical Manual), based on the Ushakov dictionary, which, as the title indicates, is intended primarily for a different purpose. Most recent efforts to meet the need have failed on a number of counts. The most serious of these are (1) the failure to differentiate true idioms from other word sequences, proverbs, and complex lexical items, (2) inadequate, incorrect, misleading, and sometimes nonsensical