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Yiddish Fiction and the Crisis of Modernity, 1905-1914

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ony, and answerability, Alan Jacobs, Graham Pechey, Ruth Coates, and Charles Lock lay out the essential elements of, in Pechey's elegant formulation, Bakhtin's "theologically inflected aesthetics" (47). Although on occasion the authors do not distinguish sufficiently between religious concepts used as metaphors and instances of religious ideas actually influencing Bakhtin's thought, the larger point that theological concepts played a critical role in Bakhtin's thinking is quite compelling. Alexandar Mihailovic and Randall A. Poole are particularly successful showing how "theological metaphors in Bakhtin's work operate more as structural paradigms than as philosophical or piously hortatory precepts" (125). In "Bakhtin's Dialogue with Russian Orthodoxy and Critique of Linguistic Universalism," Mihailovic moves beyond the familiar territory of his *Corporeal Words: Mikhail Bakhtin's Theology of Discourse* (1997) to a fascinating reading of Bakhtin's "Speech Genres" essay as a response to the Marxist linguistics of Nikolai Marr and Iosif Stalin himself. Mihailovic is particularly good at suggesting how Bakhtin's theologically influenced dialogical vision of language can be read as an ethical critique of Stalinism. In "The Apophatic Bakhtin," Poole goes beyond a brilliant exploration of the relevance of so-called negative theology for an understanding of Bakhtin's philosophy, to the most lucid discussion I know of Bakhtin's debt to, and his difference from, Immanuel Kant and neo-Kantianism. This essay covers so much ground that it is impossible to summarize in a few sentences: it must be read in its entirety, and several times, to be fully appreciated.

My only criticism concerns the editors' decision to include Sergei Averintsev's "Bakhtin, Laughter, and Christian Culture" in the collection. Although it is, of course, helpful to have this well-known work (previously published in Russian in 1988 and 1992) available at last in English translation, Averintsev's corrective to naive and overly optimistic interpretations of carnival laughter should, by now, be entirely familiar to Bakhtinians, even those with no Russian.

In her beautifully written afterword, "Plenitude as a Form of Hope," Caryl Emerson moves beyond her collaborators' more or less narrowly focused textual and thematic analyses to make a powerful and convincing case for Bakhtin as that rarest of literary theorists, a guide not only to reading but to living. Not everyone will agree with Bakhtin that "only religion can bring about completely unlimited freedom of thought" (191), but many readers will be convinced by the grace of Emerson's writing to engage in a dialogue on the topic.

The appendix, containing an introduction, translations, and annotations to Lev Pumpianskii's notes on Bakhtin's lectures of the early 1920s, will be of particular interest to students of Bakhtin's early philosophical development. A special word of acknowledgment should be added here for the excellent work by the translators, Vadim Liapunov, Leonid Livak, and Alexandar Mihailovic, in rendering some extremely difficult and technical Russian into clear, precise, and quite readable English.

ANTHONY ANEMONE
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Yiddish Fiction and the Crisis of Modernity, 1905–1914. By Mikhail Krutikov. Stanford Series in Jewish History and Culture. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001. ix, 248 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$55.00, hard bound.

Mikhail Krutikov's study takes a Marxist approach to economic and political issues surrounding Yiddish literature during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this he continues the laudable tradition of Soviet critics such as Max Erik and Meir Wiener, while adding some of the insights associated with current cultural studies. His book also shows broad awareness of contemporary scholarship on Yiddish literature.

Methodologically, Krutikov expresses dissatisfaction with most Yiddish criticism, which "has usually preferred the diachronic, or 'vertical,' approach to the subject, that is, the chronological study of a particular writer or theme" (6). He contrasts this diachronic method with that of "synchronic, 'horizontal' studies that attempt not merely to describe but also to analyze and interpret the state of the entire Yiddish literary system or its part in a relatively short period of time" (6). In some respects, then, Krutikov views literary pro-

duction as a symptom of historical processes. This context takes precedence over aesthetic forces in a single author's development.

Focusing on the motif of money, Krutikov's initial (and best) chapter on "The Economic Crisis" subjects the works of Yankev Dinezon, Sholem Asch, and David Bergelson to careful scrutiny. This has the advantage of clarifying certain issues that were previously occluded. For example, Sholem Asch's novella *A Shtetl* has often been presented as an idealized portrayal of small-town Jewish life. Krutikov moves beyond this cliché to show how "even the most natural economy cannot exist without money, and Asch pays close attention to the financial aspects of his shtetl idyll" (29). David Bergelson's *In a Backwoods Town* is often read in terms of his innovative, modernistic techniques, but Krutikov shows that economic interests lie just below the surface of the plot. Hence Bergelson ultimately "demonstrates that neither the old nor the new economic mechanism can function in the shtetl anymore" (47).

The main shortcoming in Krutikov's account is that it tends to diminish the role of literary influences. He argues that Bergelson's "atmosphere of uncertainty . . . is an expression of his initial artistic response to the challenge of modernity" (49). But if his characters "withdraw from the harsh reality into the subjective world of nostalgic feelings, impressions, and fantasies" (49), this also reflects Bergelson's literary milieu. Many of the most interesting features of Bergelson's prose, stylistically, respond to modernism in other languages.

In a subsequent chapter, "The Crisis of Revolution," Krutikov turns to Sholem Aleichem's novel *The Flood*, which describes Jewish characters who are caught up in the revolutionary events of 1905. Although interesting, the topical dimension of this political novel does not compensate for its "many artistic flaws" (102). This weakness perhaps underscores a limitation of Krutikov's methodology: its principles of selection do not always lead us to an author's major literary accomplishments. Indeed, one might draw the conclusion that when Yiddish literature became most concerned with political and economic forces, the results were overly ideological and literarily unimpressive.

Another of Krutikov's chapters analyzes works of Yiddish fiction that present stories of immigrants. One of the successful sections, on Joseph Opatoshu's *From New York Ghetto*, shows how "the American reality is represented through the consistent use of satirical defamiliarization and desacralization" (146–47). Yet Krutikov concludes that "American-Yiddish prose before 1914 was still incapable of creating a fully developed Yiddish novel of immigrant life" (159).

Krutikov elucidates historical and cultural forces surrounding Yiddish fiction during a key period in its evolution. At the same time, he shows how certain themes in Yiddish literature reflect its time and place. This study will interest historians who wish to acquire a clearer sense of Jewish culture in Russia, and it may provide scholars of Yiddish with a worthwhile reorientation toward economic forces.

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Erlebte Rede bei Andrei Platonov: Von V zvezdnoj pustyne bis Čevengur. By Robert Hodel. Slavische Literaturen: Texte und Abhandlungen, vol. 23. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001. ix, 451 pp. Bibliography. Figures. Tables. \$68.95, paper.

The peculiar uses to which Andrei Platonov subjects the Russian language in his literary works, an object of enduring interest, undergo one of their most thorough examinations yet in this study by Robert Hodel. Hodel's focus is the phenomenon of "erlebte Rede" or "free indirect discourse" in the novel *Chevengur*, which for him clearly represents the pinnacle of Platonov's oeuvre (he discusses some of the earlier writings, but *Kotlovan* and later works receive scant attention). At stake ultimately is the relation between the idiosyncratic uses of contemporary Russian one finds in Platonov's texts and those texts' expressive intent—that is, the extent to which the implied author, the ultimate utterer, of these works promotes their peculiar language as one fully adequate to his worldview, rather than