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Review Of "Igor' Severyanin: His Life And Work: The Formal Aspects Of His Poetry" By L. Lauwers

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Review

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pean poetry (chaps. 1 & 2), to close readings of several poems by Gumilev (chaps. 3 & 4) and concludes with a chapter on the end of the neoclassical modernist tradition in Russia and France. Eshelman uses the term neoclassical modernism to describe a modernist style which preserves the triadic hierarchy of high, middle and low style in order "to achieve an ideal balance between order and disorder, between stasis and dynamics, between tradition and innovation." Although his analysis of the conservative trend represented in Russian post-symbolist poetry by Annenskii, Kuzmin and Gumilev is illuminating, Eshelman's decision to analyze neoclassical modernism exclusively through an analysis of the three styles of neoclassical rhetoric is unfortunate. A broader analytic and historical focus could have resulted in a deeper insight into the poetry. For example, the post-1917 generation of St. Petersburg poets, many of whom were students of Gumilev's, also attempted to recover a transcendent value and principles of order in past literary traditions. In fact, much of Eshelman's argument may seem to repeat terms familiar to students of the neoclassical poetics of Saint Petersburg. In this regard it is surprising and regrettable that Vladimir Veidle's well known essay "Peterburgskaia poetika" is missing from Eshelman's bibliography.

ANTHONY ANEMONE
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Igor' Severjanin: His Life and Work—The Formal Aspects of His Poetry. By Lenie Lauwers. Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Orientalistiek, 1993. xxiii, 289 pp. Indexes. Tables. 2450 BEF, hard bound.

Sometime leader of the ego-futurists, Igor' Severianin was called "Valerii Briusov's ape" by Ziniada Gippius and "the genius of camp in Russian poetry" by Vladimir Markov. Severianin was a popstar of poetry, one of the most colorful and popular figures on the prerevolutionary Russian literary scene. In emigration he continued writing and became a distinguished translator of Estonian poetry, while his reputation as an original poet declined.

Lenie Lauwers's book is volume 49 in the Belgian series *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta*, so far the only one in that series on a Russian topic. The book consists of two parts, as the subtitle indicates, and each is elaborately subdivided according to content. Thus the author thoughtfully allows the reader who needs Severianin for his poetry's formal characteristics to skip the section on "life and works" and go right to the meat of the book: 70 pages of appendixes on use of meter, rhyme, neologisms and genre, with tables and lists. Several entire poems are cited to exemplify short genres; these prove Severianin's formal mastery and are chosen from his best work.

The book's structural anchor is these painstakingly explained, computer-driven numerical data, while the preliminary chapters serve to introduce the notorious but neglected poet. Indeed, there has been no complete edition of his poetry to date. Lauwers, who wrote one of the first dissertations on Severianin, at times hesitates in the book's justification: her own belief (and Alexis Rannit's urging) that Severianin should be taken more seriously as a poet and a talent never finally overcomes Vladimir Markov's assertion that *he* would stop loving Severianin if he began to read him without a smile. The book has not quite gelled, no doubt due to Severianin's unsettled status as a writer and a scholarly topic.

Despite the careful outlining of contents, organization is often jumpy, with both chapters and paragraphs suddenly interrupted by intriguing but not wholly assimilated information. Some readers may be put off by capricious punctuation and occasional infelicities of English such as "started to related," "Brandt too doubted about the meaning of this neologism," "Fofanov's nor Loxvickaja's metrical typologies were available." The poems given at the end are not dated but identified only by volume and page number in original publications which Lauwers laboriously collected from

many libraries; dating would have recalled simply each poem's place in Severianin's development. Some of the book's less central sources are cited from old or odd editions. Once roused by these more important questions, I also began to wonder what criteria indexed some of Severianin's female addressees as "girl-friends" and others as "lady-friends."

The book is strong in its practical recognition of the importance of studying influential but problematic poets; in particular, camp and humor in Russian literature are often ignored in favor of profundity, which creates some distortion. Many western readers and scholars have practiced a nabokovian highbrow scorn of *poshlost'*, although reading the questionable stuff gives a nuanced sense of an era's context, and controversial careers cast light on the schools or writers we now read as canonical. Lauwers also gives illuminating quotations from her correspondence with such experts as Mikhail Gasparov, Markov and Rannit. Therefore, though the book is not the last word on Severianin, it will be a valuable source in English for some time to come and advanced students of twentieth-century Russian poetry should consult it.

SIBELAN FORRESTER
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Contemporary Russian Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology. Ed. and trans. Gerald S. Smith. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993. 353 pp. Indexes of first lines in Russian and in English. Paper.

The aim of this bilingual anthology is to bring together under one cover the work of about two dozen contemporary Russian poets, written or published over the last two decades. The poets represented in the collection differ in their ages, outlooks, personal histories and approaches to poetry. Gerald Smith, who has written on Russian poetry before, is unapologetic about his choices and preferences. The criteria for the selections are two: poems or poets not included in similar anthologies, poems and poets Smith finds representative and personally appealing. The result is a collection which includes some émigré poets (Joseph Brodsky, Lev Loseff, Dmitrii Bobyshev, Aleksei Parshchikov, Bakhyt Kenzheev, Iurii Kublanovskii, Aleksei Tsvetkov) and a handful of women poets (Nataliia Gorbanevskaia, Bella Akhmadulina, Iunna Morits, Ol'ga Sedakova, Elena Shvarts). Overall, the volume favors those male poets who lived or are still living in Russia (Boris Slutskii, Boris Chichibabin, Bulat Okudzhava, Vladimir Kornilov, German Plisetskii, Evgenii Rein, Aleksandr Kushner, Oleg Chukhontsev, Dmitrii Prigov, Ivan Zhdanov and Aleksandr Eremenko).

To be sure, a collection such as Smith's cannot be comprehensive, exploring as it does a broad field of literature while simultaneously narrowly targeting Anglophone students in need of help with the intricacies of the Russian language. To this latter end, Smith provides serviceable translations of each poem, claiming neither elegance nor literary merit for his efforts. Most translations, however, do manage the balancing act of retaining some linguistic features of the original while adequately conveying the poet's general intent.

Poems chosen for inclusion tread the familiar thematic ground of modern Russian poetry: nature, love, history, Russia and the west, and the poetic craft itself. Each poet brings his/her own interpretation of these themes, elucidating in the process the continuities and discontinuities with the past in recent Russian writing. To assist the student in understanding the political and literary context for the changes that have occurred over the last twenty years, Smith provides a brief introduction—a succinct and useful outline of recent developments in Russian literature and society. In addition, each poem is carefully, if selectively, annotated, with short biographical summaries and a bibliography concluding the volume.

Smith's anthology can be used in a variety of teaching contexts, from narrow