

BEZYMIANNAIA STRANA. By *V. Weidlé*. Paris: YMCA Press, 1968. 166 pp.

There may be nothing more Russian than the quest to identify and savor one's Russianness, and this impulse, understandably, is all the stronger in expatriates like Weidlé. In this latest book he re-explores a favorite theme (Russia in terms of the West), but develops a special aspect of it—one based not solely on the wish "to identify and savor" but on the urge to apprise young Soviets of a rich cultural heritage only partially "remembered" in the USSR. In his essays, several of which appeared previously as separate articles, he writes of a "nameless country," treating (part 1) its cultural past and identity, and (part 2) cultural realities of the present century. "It is time Russia became Russia again," says the author in his final section, at once voicing the unifying theme of this book and explaining its title.

Weidlé speaks not only of language, literature, and art, but of the deeper ideas that underlie and nourish Russian culture: the general concepts of humanity and compassion, and the untranslatable combination of warmth, sincerity, and simplicity which in Russian is *zadushevnost'*. He shows convincingly how such Russian-Christian spiritual traits give us essential clues to the meaning of the culture which produced Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Blok, and many others. Soviet Russia has been turned away from these feelings, and from herself. "It is time to return home," says the author, addressing not his fellow exiles but Russians in the Soviet Union itself. Less subjective in substance are two outstanding essays on the sad erosion of the Hermitage Museum's wealth during Stalin's rule, and on the development of Russian art during this century.

This is an important book for those interested in Russian culture, and it is a pleasure to read, partly because Weidlé is such a master of the Russian language. Few writers these days remember the diverse demands that may be made of it and exercise it so fully. And his text bristles with the life and wisdom of Russian literature—a deeply internalized culture, as it were, peeking out.

It is just as unlikely that we will ever again see the Russia Weidlé recalls as a young man as it is that the Rembrandts sold abroad by Stalin will be returned, or that Leningrad will ever again bear Peter's name. But this book is not really a call for the re-establishment of the past. It is the offering of part of a cultural legacy long held in the memories and unique experience of people like Weidlé in hopes that one day Russian hands will stretch out from "over there" to receive it.

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RUSSKIE PISATELI: BIOBIBLIOGRAFICHESKII SLOVAR'. Editorial board: *D. S. Likhachev, S. I. Mashinsky, S. M. Petrov, and A. I. Reviakin*. Moscow: "Prosveshchenie," 1971. 728 pp. 3.01 rubles.

This dictionary, "the first publication of this kind, prepared by Soviet literary scholars," as the preface states, is intended as a reference book for teachers. It is divided into three sections: early Russian literature, literature of the eighteenth century, and literature of the nineteenth century. Each section contains in alphabetical order articles of varying length (about three hundred on the whole) on writers and poets, composed by different authors, among them distinguished scholars such as B. Ia. Bukhshtab, K. V. Pigarev, and Iu. M. Lotman. The prerevolutionary period of the twentieth century is represented by a few writers who began to publish

in the nineteenth century, but this selection seems rather arbitrary. We find, for example, Bunin, but there is no Gorky. Kuprin has a long article, but Artsybashev is not mentioned. Perhaps a second volume will close the gaps and provide continuity.

According to the preface the articles try "to determine and to stress those aspects of the life and literary activity of a writer which had a substantially important significance [*sushchestvenno vazhnoe znachenie*] for his time and left their imprint upon the further development of Russian literature." This significance and these imprints of course turn out to be such slogans as "realism," "democratism," and "humanism" in their usual Soviet interpretation. As a result nearly all writers appear more or less as precursors of the humanitarian Communist revolution, if not for the whole of their lives so at least during some crucial period. The evaluation of their work consists mostly of quotations from Belinsky, Dobroliubov, Chernyshevsky, and Pisarev, whose opinions always supersede those of the author himself. We learn further that Rosa Luxemburg rightly considered Dostoevsky's works "one of the most wrathful accusations in the whole of world literature against capitalistic class society, built on inequality and exploitation" (p. 308), that Lenin called Tolstoy a "evropeiski obrazovannyi pisatel'" (p. 625), and that *Pravda* once described *War and Peace* as the *Iliad* of the Russian people (p. 630). In a concise dictionary one could easily forgo quotations of this kind no matter how profound they may be!

Since all psychological, let alone metaphysical, aspects are carefully avoided, Anna Karenina's suicide becomes a protest against "cruel aristocratic society" (p. 633) and Gogol's "Overcoat" a "passionate example for the defense of the dignity of the 'malen'kii chelovek'" (p. 258). This attitude makes the "indispensable literary-historical commentary," the presence of which is stressed in the preface, rather useless.

It is interesting to note that the same amount of space is accorded to the discussions of Dobroliubov and Dostoevsky (eight pages); Saltykov-Shchedrin gets thirteen pages as opposed to Tolstoy's fifteen, and Belinsky eight as opposed to Pushkin's ten. Only a few articles, such as Pigarev's on Tiutchev or Bukhshtab's on Fet, put the stress on literary achievements. Apart from this disturbing but apparently unavoidable bias in interpretation, the dictionary has its merits: it provides factual information about the life and works of a great number of little-known writers and poets, and it offers in each case a brief but helpful bibliography, which opens possibilities for further investigation. If consulted for only such factual information, this weighty, well-printed, and illustrated volume may be useful.

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SOLZHENITSYN: A DOCUMENTARY RECORD. Edited and with an introduction by *Leopold Labedz*. Foreword by *Harrison E. Salisbury*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. xxiv, 229 pp. \$7.95.

This is a meticulously annotated compilation of material on the career of Solzhenitsyn from his literary debut in 1962 to the furor over the Nobel Prize in the fall and winter of 1970. Most of it had previously appeared from time to time in Western newspapers and journals—most prominently *Survey* and *Problems of Communism*.