

The selection, introduction, and commentary are the work of Vasilii Vasil'evich Novikov, professor of Russian literature at the Moscow Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. During the last decade at least three other compilers—M. Drozdov, M. Kuznetsov, and N. Bannikov—prepared Pil'niak's works for publication, but Novikov alone received official authorization to publish the long-forbidden author.

Novikov's introduction is uneven. It is weakened by reliance on critics of an anti-Pil'niak bias. His frequent use of emotionally charged labels and rhetoric ("Freudianism," "expressionism," "modernism," "naturalism," "decadent symbolism," "distortions of Soviet reality," "blatant contradictions") is evidently intended to obviate logical argument. Novikov too often depends on inaccurate secondary material, which results in errors that could have been easily avoided by consulting primary sources in the Lenin State Library. For example, he seriously distorts the controversies surrounding the publication of both "Povest' nepogashennoi lunny" and "Krasnoe derevo": in the latter case he upbraids Pil'niak for publishing abroad a work which had been rejected "at home" (although in the Soviet Union it had been accepted for publication by *Krasnaia nov'*). On the other hand, Novikov provides a reasonably good, though brief, description of *Golyi god* and Pil'niak's short stories. Nonetheless, a better introduction to Pil'niak is available to the Western reader in Evelyn Bristol's article, "Boris Pil'nyak" (*Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 41, no. 97 [June 1963]: 494-512).

In general, the comparatively objective notes and commentary following the texts are superior to the introduction. Here Novikov provides the publication history of each work and quotes the contemporary critics who reviewed Pil'niak's works when they appeared. For *O'Kei* Novikov supplies nine pages of commentary, beginning with Ivan Bunin and ending with Theodore Dreiser.

Most important, Pil'niak's texts themselves are accurate. *Golyi god* is printed according to the standard 1923 edition, and the stories are taken from collections of Pil'niak's works which appeared in 1930 and 1935. Contrary to Novikov's assertions, the stories from the 1935 volume are essentially the same as when first published, although occasional and minor stylistic changes were made.

GARY L. BROWNING
Brigham Young University

RUSSIAN MODERNISM: CULTURE AND THE AVANT-GARDE, 1900-1930.

Edited by *George Gibian* and *H. W. Tjalsma*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1976. 239 pp. Figures. Appendixes (Russian texts).

SNAKE TRAIN: POETRY AND PROSE. By *Velimir Khlebnikov*. Edited by

Gary Kern. Introduction by *Edward J. Brown*. Translated by *Gary Kern*, *Richard Sheldon*, *Edward J. Brown*, *Neil Cornwell*, and *Lily Feiler*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1976. 338 pp. \$4.95, paper.

The reader who turns to *Russian Modernism: Culture and the Avant-Garde, 1900-1930*, expecting a comprehensive study of the cultural history of that period, will be sorely disappointed. In fact, the volume is simply a collection of nine articles—seven on literature, and one each on art and architecture—based on papers delivered at a conference at Cornell University in 1971. This is a case where a slick packaging job belies the actual contents. A more legitimate approach to the material would have been to identify it as "proceedings" on the title page, rather than withholding that information until the fifth paragraph of the introduction. As George Gibian startlingly admits there, not even a consensus as to the meaning of modernism emerges from the

essays. The reader is left with largely unconnected impressions of "some artistic currents of the early twentieth century in Russia" (p. 10).

The first essay, "The Poison of Modernism" by Wladimir Weidlé, is the least integrated into the volume. Its treatment of Blok's negative attitude toward modernism, narrow in scope and casually presented, is hardly a promising start. Also unsatisfactory is H. W. Tjalsma's "The Petersburg Poets," a meandering overview of the Acmeists in contrast to the Symbolists and Futurists, which blends biographical and critical observations. Amid a plethora of names, one is never absolutely certain who in fact "the Petersburg poets" were. And how ironic that the most blatant typographical error in the entire volume (Pavola for Pavlova) should appear in the essay of a coeditor!

The remaining articles, by and large, address themselves to interesting questions. In his survey of Russian Formalism, René Wellek provides important historical background, outlines some attitudes of modernism, and briefly characterizes the main figures and theories of the "school." One's only criticism is that the unavoidable condensation of material leads to such an inaccuracy as the implication that Briusov was a metaphysical Symbolist (p. 45). Patricia Carden examines Russian prose, justifiably equating the concepts of ornamentalism and modernism in that genre. Readers who do not know Russian will appreciate her attempt to find English equivalents to describe the styles of Belyi, Remizov, and Khlebnikov. Those who do know Russian, however, will question her superficial treatment of post-Revolutionary developments. She rather patly dismisses Pil'niak, places Babel' in too central a position ("only [he] succeeded fully in comprehending the nature of the new prose structure and in making a convincing, independent use of it" [p. 62]), and completely ignores writers such as Zamiatin and Olesha, who are considered by some to be ornamentalists.

Three of the articles on literature treat more specialized subjects. In "Russian Modernist Poets and the Mystic Sectarials," George Ivask deals with the unusual and fascinating topic of the underground *Khlysty*, whose ideas to some extent influenced the lives and/or works of Rozanov, Bal'mont, Belyi, Kliuev, and others. Of special interest is the comparison of sectarian glossolalia with Futurist *zaum* (or, as Ivask calls it, "metalogical language"). "Mayakovsky's Futurist Period" consists of selections from Edward J. Brown's book on the poet, published in 1973. Although the analysis is excellent, its appearance here is anticlimactic. Perhaps it will at least bring Brown's book to the attention of the uninitiated. By far the longest and most erudite essay is John E. Malmstad and Gennady Shmakov's close reading of Kuzmin's long poem, "The Trout Breaking through the Ice." While it is definitely a valuable contribution to the study of modern Russian poetry, its focus is somewhat narrow for the volume at hand. In its place one would have welcomed a discussion of theater, music, or film.

In his essay on the Union of Youth, John E. Bowlt gives the first detailed account of an important organization of avant-garde artists on the eve of World War I. The material he has compiled comes almost entirely from primary sources, most not readily accessible, and forms a small but significant chapter in the history of Russian modern art. Finally, S. Frederick Starr traces the formation, development, and demise of O.S.A. (Union of Contemporary Architects), which was the "constructivist" faction of modern Russian architecture. His article is an appropriate conclusion, since the O.S.A. was active from 1925 to 1932, when socialist realism officially ousted the remaining vestiges of modernism. Unfortunately, one's confidence in the many dates he cites is badly shaken when the year of Mayakovsky's suicide is given as 1929 instead of 1930. Two appendixes give the Russian texts of the Mayakovsky and Kuzmin poems referred to in the book, but there is no general bibliography, which could have added to the usefulness of the volume.

Selected works of Velimir Khlebnikov, Russia's outstanding modernist writer, and a notoriously difficult one to translate, have at long last appeared in English, thanks to the editorial efforts of Gary Kern, aided by Vladimir Markov. In *Snake Train*, Kern has included his own and others' annotated renditions of long and short poems, experiments, dramatic works, prose fiction, and visions and theories ("pieces of wayward character," as Markov once referred to them). That the prose and drama work better in English than the poetry is understandable. Yet one feels that the spirit of the poetry could have been better conveyed if Kern had given either strictly linear translations or freely poetic renderings, rather than choosing a fatal compromise between the two.

Three appendixes provide a chronology of Khlebnikov's life, a memoir by his Futurist friend Dmitrii Petrovskii, and Russian texts of some of the poems. Translations of the shortest ones appear together with the translations. This unreasonable inconsistency constitutes one of the major shortcomings of the book. As is often the case with works published by Ardis, the intentions are laudable, but the execution unsatisfactory. For example, it is puzzling to find the translation of a single short poem ("I went, a youth, alone") at the end of the last section, "Visions and Theories," but its original in the middle of the Russian texts, apparently in place. The notes are quite valuable, but occasionally are not as helpful as they might be. In the case of excerpts from longer poems, it would be useful to have some description of the entire poem. One would also welcome a select bibliography of secondary material available in English.

ELENA SOKOL
University of Washington

K ISTORII RUSSKOGO AVANGARDA (THE RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE).

By Nikolai Khardzhiev, Kazimir Malevich, and Mikhail Matiushin. Edited by Nikolai Khardzhiev. Postscript by Roman Jakobson. Stockholm: Hylaea Prints, 1976. 189 pp. + 40 pp. plates. Sw.kr. 165. Distributed by Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm.

This book appears twenty years too late. Nikolai Khardzhiev must be praised for many achievements, but, because he has long been in possession of the documents presented here, he should be criticized harshly for his reticence, inertia, and silence on subjects that are of universal significance to all historians of twentieth-century art. Khardzhiev frequently emphasizes that recent studies of the Russian avant-garde by Soviet and Western scholars have been marred by inaccuracies and misattributions and have fallen victim to unfounded speculations. Many researchers in this area, such as Andersen, Bowlt, Karshan, Kovtun, and the Marcadés, are brought to task and cautioned by Khardzhiev in this volume. As his laconic comments and emendations demonstrate, Khardzhiev possesses vast published and unpublished resources pertaining to the Russian avant-garde; had he made these accessible even ten years ago, he would have facilitated the task of historical documentation and helped scholars to avoid many pitfalls. But it is highly questionable whether Khardzhiev, a friend of Mayakovsky, Malevich, and Matiushin, can rescue the "truth" from the dense mythology that now surrounds the Russian avant-garde. In any case, much of the information that Khardzhiev has guarded so jealously and that he now presents has already become available from the current research of other Soviet scholars.

The book is divided into four main sections: a version of Khardzhiev's successful study of Mayakovsky and the visual arts (which first appeared in *Maiakovskii: Materialy i issledovaniia*, Moscow, 1940; revised and republished in Khardzhiev and Trenin, *Poeticheskaia kul'tura Maiakovskogo*, Moscow, 1970); a partial autobiography by Kazimir Malevich; a fuller autobiography by Mikhail Matiushin; and Matiushin's