Lutzkanova-Vassileva's main thesis is announced early on, but receives clarification only close to the end of the book, in an endnote to chapter 7. She describes postmodernist texts as representing "psychic trauma," adding that she uses this term in a similar vein to Fredric Jameson when he used the term "schizophrenia" to describe them, namely "not in the sense of a clinical diagnosis, but as an aesthetic model for the cultural condition" (266n41). The book would have benefited from an extensive theoretical introduction; instead, the current introduction reads like a dissertation prospectus. In a counterproductive move, the theoretical argument is fragmented; for instance, engagement with the legacies of Russian futurism is repeatedly mentioned cursorily, and finally pursued only very late in the volume.

These numerous problems notwithstanding, readers interested in contemporary writing, especially experimental poetry, in its relationship with wider sociocultural issues, will find a number of potentially helpful insights in Lutzkanova-Vassileva's book. The chapter on Bulgarian poetry is illuminating and concise, and the chapters on Russian Conceptualism and Metarealism help the readers appreciate how innovative poetry from the 1970s–1990s responded to the traumas of Soviet daily experience and later to the collapse of Soviet civilization. The parallels the author draws between Russian and American poetic responses to psychosocial traumas deserve to be explored at greater length. Hopefully, the appearance of this book will stimulate more comparative scholarship on innovative Slavic and Western writing.

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Degeneration, Decadence and Disease in the Russian fin de siècle: Neurasthenia in the Life and Work of Leonid Andreev. By Frederick H. White. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014. xiv, 290 pp. Figures. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. €75.00, hard bound.

At a time when Leonid Andreev and his works are barely mentioned in literary studies, Frederick White's monograph represents a welcome contribution, insofar as Andreev was a figure of unquestioned importance during his lifetime. Using Andreev's letters, diaries, and psychiatric studies available during the author's lifetime and present, and an interpretation called "the illness narrative," White examines Andreev's works and life, particularly his suffering from acute neurasthenia, through the prism of his medical condition. On the one hand, Andreev permeated his texts with themes of madness, degeneration and criminal behavior, clearly inviting his critics to find parallels between fictionality and biography. On the other hand, as White illustrates, Andreev felt compelled to mask the effects of his various illnesses through performance. Because of Andreev's abundant symptoms, such as insomnia, depression, fear of going insane, and anxiety of death, no matter how often he sought treatments in mental institutions, one cannot help but be dismayed by the inadequate care that Andreev received. The psychiatric profession of the day offered him no cure.

Like many other writers of the twentieth century, Andreev's star rose with the help of his mentor, Maksim Gor'kii, who encouraged Andreev to become a member of the Znanie literary group, drawing many admirers and fans. The more Andreev achieved success, however, the more his personal life entered in the public arena. Accounts of his drinking bouts, his depressions and outbursts, not to mention suicide attempts, led the public to believe that his characters' experiences were Andreev's own. At the time of his heyday, medical science believed that neurasthenia was not simply a medical ailment, but also a reflection of societal degeneration.

White's readings of Andreev operate according to two strategies. The first involves

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Max Nordau's theory of degeneration. Before Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Nordau's *Degeneration* was one of the most popular books at the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Nordau attempted to explain all modern art, music and literature by pointing out the degenerate characteristics of the artists involved. Although now discredited, Nordau's attack on degenerate art stemmed from the societal convolutions of fin de siècle thinking, a topic upon which White spends a great deal of time. This second strategy, namely of associating Andreev's illnesses with decadence, operates on the premise that Andreev's literary works "should be understood as important signposts of anxiety over the decline of civilized Russian society" (265). Thus, the "illness narrative" is an apt explanation of what ailed Russian culture at the turn of the twentieth century. In the history of Russian literature, no writer before (or after) Andreev suffused his texts with more madmen, criminals and alcoholics. Indeed, among the best of White's analyses are Andreev's "Thought," *The Red Laugh*, *He Who Gets Slapped*, and *The Seven that Were Hanged*.

In his conclusion, White argues that the role of neurasthenia in Andreev's life and works was not the determining factor of Andreev's immense popularity; instead, "he was immensely popular because he wrote about the moral decline of Russian society, interacting with the other decadent strains of modernist culture" (267). This book is well worth reading by not only Andreev enthusiasts, but all students of various disciplines in the twentieth century. It is rare to find Russian literary scholars as well versed in psychiatry and medicine as Frederick White.

White has convincingly shown that Andreev's struggle with mental illness must be understood in the context of the cultural discourse of pathology at the turn of the century. Clearly, Andreev made a therapeutic attempt to, if not cure his ailments, than at least to relieve them considerably through writing. What emerges from reading White's thoroughly researched and fascinating study is a reexamination of a neglected writer, who deserves renewed attention.

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The Imperative of Reliability: Russian Prose on the Eve of the Novel, 1820s–1850s. By Victoria Somoff. Evanston, Il: Northwestern University Press, 2015. x, 238 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $79.95, hard bound.

In *The Imperative of Reliability*, Victoria Somoff revisits the territory of Russian literature most famously explored in Richard Freeborn's *The Rise of the Russian Novel: Studies in the Russian Novel from Eugene Onegin to War and Peace* (1973). Drawing on a variety of critical theories from the likes of Mikhail Bakhtin and Fredric Jameson, she examines the literary landscape from the 1820s to the 1850s with a probing eye from a distinctive critical angle. She covers prose works by a wide array of authors, some familiar, notably Aleksandr Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Ivan Turgenev, Nikolai Gogol′, Ivan Goncharov, and Lev Tolstoi (curiously, not Fedor Dostoevskii), others not, such as Aleksandr A. Bestuzhev-Marlinskii, Nikolai Nekrasov, and Vladimir Odoevskii, while also drawing lines to west European authors.

Through these works she traces what she calls the portrayal of "character consciousness" (10), from an "external" to an "internal" perspective, by which she generally means a shift from a non-fictional to a fictional standard of truth. She argues that such a shift comes with the change in an author's use of language from external "referentiality" to internal "reliability," that is, from language that verifiably refers to extra-literary reality to language that does not, having "no need of being verified, con-

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