

To the Editor:

Given the generally informative and evenhanded nature of book reviews in *Slavic Review*, I was surprised by Harriet Murav's assessment of Kathleen Parthé's *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past* in the Winter 1993 issue. The review states that Professor Parthé's book is "elegaic" and that it "[too] gently explores the relationship between village prose and Russian chauvinism" (which Professor Murav finds "objectionable"). She also objects that Parthé distinguishes between urban and rural writers (whereas one might have thought that it is a scholar's business to draw such distinctions); and fully one third of the review is devoted to Shafarevich, who has no connection whatsoever with village prose. The actual content and intent of the book is hardly touched upon. This is a misleading account of *Russian Village Prose*, and comes close to impugning the integrity of its author.

I was intimately connected with Professor Parthé's book as it moved through Princeton University Press, and privy to the debates that so sensitive and politicized a topic inevitably sets off. Parthé chose neither to sanitize her account of village prose by ignoring the later, grotesque manifestations of chauvinism and anti-Semitism associated with several of the movement's writers, nor to equate the literary movement wholly with them—as has been so often and carelessly done. Her book is about a literary movement that ended in 1976, not about a politics, although she does document the effects of the latter. She is very clear about this matter in her preface and throughout the volume. The *literary* typology she provides for the movement gets scant attention in the review on its own terms; in fact, readers of *Slavic Review* are left quite in the dark about the focus, topic and method of the book.

Village prose has been drawn so explosively into the darker side of Russian politics that the utmost care and expertise must be employed in discussing it. To be sure, authors as well as reviewers might find it gratifying to indulge polemic or innuendo and refer vaguely to "multiculturalism" in constructing their arguments—but Parthé chose instead to produce a scholarly work. Surely Professor Murav, a superb Dostoevsky scholar, is sensitive to such fraught considerations in her own area of research. A review in a leading professional journal becomes part of the history of a book and authors should be in a position to welcome that debate, not be ashamed of the level on which it is cast.

CARYL EMERSON
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Prof. Murav replies:

I am dismayed to have created the impression in Professor Emerson that my review of Kathleen Parthé's *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past* was meant in any way to impugn the scholarship of that study or the integrity of its author. I am truly sorry that this was the way my review was received.

I would like to point out that two out of its three paragraphs are devoted to a discussion of the book's content and method. I describe how the book under review presents the "parameters" of village prose. The longest section of the review compares Professor Parthé's work with that of Katerina Clark. Relying on Clark's analysis, I discuss the notion of mythologized time in socialist realism and suggest that the village prose writers share a similar concept of time. I do not think that I left readers in the dark about the topic and method of the book.

The last paragraph takes up the question of village prose and anti-Semitism. I would like to try to correct the suggestion made by Professor Emerson that I wrote the last paragraph finding it "gratifying to indulge polemic." Quite the contrary. I did not mean to indulge polemic and, far from being gratified, I was pained. Perhaps it is wrong of me to say this in a book review but as a Jew, as a scholar and as an anxious observer of the Russian scene, I am disturbed by the statement that given the history of anti-Semitism in Russia, if one were to remove Astafiev, Belov and Rasputin "the results would be the same." No doubt there is a better way to discuss this question. Perhaps I should have said that the problem requires more analysis. In any case, I am sorry to have given offense. The paragraph in question in my review mentions Shafarevich once and therefore I cannot agree with Professor Emerson that "fully one-third of the review is devoted to Shafarevich."

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