is represented by the least number of images, an editorial choice that unfortunately contributes to the general view of nineteenth century literature as being less engaged with the visual, a view recently challenged by work by Molly Brunson and others.

The authors have been extraordinarily thorough throughout in their generous engagement with the scholarship and secondary literature in both Russian and English. Important recent work in all periods is well-represented, and readers can easily find directions to works providing more extensive analysis. The index is wide-ranging enough to cover all but the most specialized topics. This volume will be tremendously useful for scholars and students alike, given that it provides the possibility of finding in one place both the general features and outline of Russian literary history of all periods and particular and more detailed information about genres, authors, cultural practices, theoretical and critical terms, literary debates, and so on. It will inevitably feature in the comprehensive exam lists of all graduate students of Russian literature. At the same time, it is readable and engaging enough to attract a more general audience looking for an overview of Russian literary history. In the short but rich introduction, the authors ask whether twenty-first century readers still need histories of national literatures in this age of obsession with global networks. Judging by this volume, the answer is a resounding yes.

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David Bergelson's Strange New World: Untimeliness and Futurity. By Harriet Murav. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019. xi, 343 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $50.00, paper.
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When, in his landmark 1926 poem "Vilna" the young poet Moshe Kulbak sought a single author to represent the new secular Yiddish culture, he settled not on the hero-figure of the Yiddish *moderna* Y. L. Peretz nor on Yiddish literature's answer to Anton Chekhov, Nikolai Gogol′, and Bocaccio Sholem Aleichem, but on a 42-year old novelist from Ukraine recently displaced to Berlin, one David Bergelson. In Kulbak's Vilna, the potential for a Jewish breakthrough to political self-determinaton was made visible in the "red tunic of the steely Bundist." But in a city where "gray Yiddish" was the "light that twinkles in the window. . . .," the prospect of a Jewish breakthrough to cultural self-determination was found in the intimate scene of "the blue student poring over gray Bergelson."[1]

What had Bergelson achieved in two decades of literary activity such that the encounter with his work could be the defining act of becoming a modern

Harriet Murav did not solicit this as a featured review; it was offered by the reviewer, and agreement was sought and received from the *Slavic Review* Editorial Board to publish it.

1. The translation is a modified version of Nathan Halper's in Irving Howe, Ruth R. Wisse, and Chone Shmeruk, eds., *The Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse* (New York, 1987).

Yiddish reader, and the author himself the very embodiment of the Yiddish language, down to their shared "gray" hue? Harriet Murav's remarkably ambitious and compelling *David Bergelson's Strange New World: Untimeliness and Futurity* is now the point of departure for readers wishing to make sense of a writer whose greatness is regularly affirmed but whom even many specialists find inaccessible.

Drawing on a decade of her own work on Bergelson and some fruits of a larger "boom" in Bergelson studies across Yiddish studies, Murav's *Strange New World* traverses in chronological order all of Bergelson's major texts (and many minor ones) in ways that should open this opaque writer up to a diversity of readerships. But this is no introductory "life and work." Murav argues forcefully for a new Bergelson: an author who, across the most wrenching shifts of the first half of the twentieth century, pursued a single literary project that was at once about aesthetic and linguistic experimentation, cultural-psychological renovation, and political-ethical problems of judgment and human possibility. For Murav, "the warp and woof of Bergelson's fiction" (246) was and remained "untimeliness and futurity" (1). Murav's book is both about "time as a central theme of Bergelson's writing" (12)—Murav's Bergelson is a writer of time and temporality, mood, and subjectivity—and about how Bergelson used his fiction to make sense of and try to intervene in his own fraught time(s), which were defined first by pan-European modernism's Janus-faced sense of crisis and possibility in relation to perception and experience, and then by his experience of revolutionary possibility, apocalyptic violence, and moral-political crisis and choice in the interwar period. In Murav's telling, Bergelson's evolving project was strained but never torn even when he made the fateful choice to yoke his work to the Revolution in the mid-1920s and become a Soviet Yiddish writer in the 1930s.

Murav presents the young Bergelson as a kind of literary experimentalist, using his fictions of provincial Russian-Jewish life to think about pan-modern problems of perception, routinization, repetition, and vitalization that we associate with Henri Bergson (a central presence in Murav's analysis). Bergelson's early work is full of temporal dilation, narrative deferral, "inactive heroes" (11) who are always coming too late to everything, and bewilderingly multiperspectival descriptive prose that dislocates consciousness and mood from people to things and back again. Murav sees throughout a guiding concern to illuminate how subjects living in their bodies, senses, and the flow of time make their own world (whether badly or well, unknowingly or creatively) through active perception, memory, and language.

But Murav complicates this account, which might suggest that Bergelson's is the cool gaze of the diagnostician, by arguing that he was also seeking from the first to help ameliorate a particular psychocultural problem of modernity—to help combat the crisis of the "loss of experience." To speak of confronting a "crisis" brings Murav's work into dialogue with traditional readings of Bergelson as a "Jewish writer" concerned with the specific problems of east European Jewish modernity. Bergelson spent his first literary decade writing works about Russian-Jewish characters in provincial settings who are unsuited to a modernity they cannot or will not grasp, gripped by a sense of belatedness and futurelessness, and sometimes suicidal, and earlier critics

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have understood this essentially as critical diagnosis of the east European Jewish condition. Murav does not so much reject this reading as deem it inadequate to understanding what Bergelson was trying to do—particularly why he was so passionate about writing difficult fiction, and about Yiddish itself. She strives to show us that Bergelson's sense of the problem was more universal, and so too were his hopes about what fiction might do. In his Bergsonian interests and Proustian gestures, Murav's early Bergelson was seeking new modes of literary expression that could "restore a fuller engagement with the world from which habit and routinized behavior remove us" (44). Even his characters' manifold woes are actually curative if read correctly: "the impeded and altered perceptive capacities of Bergelson's characters. . .impede and change the perception of his readers" and (here Murav invokes his contemporary Viktor Shklovsky) "the world is thereby made strange" (45).

Turning to the 1920s and beyond, the rest of Murav's book is just as concerned to give Bergelson's formal artistry its due, but shifts its focus to what we might call Bergelson's evolving ethical-political imagination. Murav argues that already in his pre-revolutionary writing, Bergelson's effort to help make experience possible again turned on the hope that the belatedness that haunted his characters was also the space in which the potential to enact a different and better future was preserved. After the monstrous experience of 1914–21, Murav argues in Parts 2 and 3, Bergelson shifted this concern to defend futurity from the intimate scale to the political one (both Jewish-national and revolutionary). Murav's analysis of his 1920s fiction excavates Bergelson's use of Jewish mystical tropes and Talmudic intertexts bearing on the relationship of judgment and mercy to elaborate something like a "political theology" that exalts *deferral* of vengeance, even right judgment: "Bergelson transforms his modernist aesthetic of mediation and slowed motion—and the literary effect of slowed and impeded perception—into a philosophical inquiry about delayed judgment, even in the terrible face of violent injustice" (201). When Murav turns in Part 4 to Bergelson's decades as a revolutionary and Soviet writer, she endeavors to show that Bergelson never fully relinquished this moral concern even as he proclaimed, with increasing explicitness, his faith in the Revolution and revolutionary justice. Even as he "adjusted" (she acknowledges) "his modernist belatedness to the aesthetics of 'petrified utopia'" (246) and had to accept ideologically the Bolshevik insistence that "history was over, because perfection had already been achieved" (246), Bergelson, Murav argues, found ways to thematize (encode?) doubts about merciless justice and dialectical necessity.

If I have any reservations about this truly fertile book, they pertain to Murav's treatment of Bergelson's embrace of the Soviet project and what this involved culturally, ethically, and literarily relative to Bergelson's previous commitments. As Murav recognizes, Bergelson's literary project was entwined with a deep commitment to a larger collective project of Jewish culture-building and national-cultural transformation, in which he played at times a leading role. Bergelson's passionate commitment to Yiddish as a literary language, which Murav highlights compellingly throughout the book, was bound up with the conviction that Yiddish, if properly cultivated, would be the medium of a new Jewish culture which could inherit what remained

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valuable in the Jewish past but also recast Jews as a nation of secular moderns whose Jewishness would pivot not on some set of beliefs but on the shared practice of open-ended individual creativity and aesthetic experience in Yiddish. I have argued in my *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* that Bergelson and his generation of Yiddishists shared the understanding, rooted in personal experience of Russian and central European literary culture, that this new culture would be both warped and ineffective, trammeled in its intrinsic attainments and unable to transform those who made up the potential Yiddish nation, *unless* it was created in conditions of freedom *from* external ideological demands, whether of nation or of Revolution. Murav is aware of this argument and seems broadly to agree that it is an accurate description of Bergelson's cultural habitus; but in this study, she devotes little attention to the younger Bergelson's views about how the new Yiddish culture was to give birth to a new kind of Jewish subject, both creative and intellectually free. And this means, I think, that her analysis does not do justice to just how much he gave up—and *knew* he was giving up—when he cast his lot with the Revolution in 1926. Famously, he declared his rapprochment with the Revolution by founding a journal entitled *In shpan*, "in harness." This might have been Bergelson's *least* opaque literary gesture ever: the Yiddish writer had to become the plow-horse of the Revolution, and it was precisely artistic and intellectual *freedom* that had to be sacrificed. This, from a writer who in 1919, watching the Revolution unfold in Ukraine and Russia, had expressed precociously sharp awareness in the essay "Dikhtung un gezelshaftlekhkayt" of how artists' mortgaging of their art to the Revolution's violent utopia of societal and human transformation might render impossible the creation of art true to actual human experience.

That said, however, Murav's revisionist account of the post-1926 and Soviet Bergelson is a powerfully-argued defense; her readings of his later socialist realist texts will compel interest even in skeptics. More generally, this generative and generous book helps us see Bergelson whole for the first time. It not only reintroduces us to an intriguing modernist voice but reveals Bergelson as a Jewish humanist searching—at least for a time, perhaps throughout his life—for ways to help preserve a sense of human possibility and open futurity in a time and place ever more defined by the radical right's war against humanity and the Revolution's inhuman subjection of futurity to dialectic and possibility to necessity. Murav ends her book on this hopeful note: Bergelson's was and remained "an inner world of imagination where there are no endings, only departures. Departures, leave-taking, and postscripts imply future meetings. The impossibility of determining in advance what form the future will take is the best guarantee that the future will be something new, not merely a rearrangement of what has already taken place" (320).

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