

employs Edward Said's concept of "beginning intention" (86), pointing out the seeds of many of Chekhov's subsequent texts in "Steppe."

Rylkova provides a great deal of excerpts from letters, diaries, primary texts, and critical and philosophical sources, almost too many, as they sometimes drown out the scholar's voice. Each chapter in the book might be read independently; they seem to be the products of years of careful reading (and teaching) the beloved texts that the author now assembled and brought under a theoretical umbrella. The theoretical apparatus is eclectic in a good way: from Edward Becker's *Denial of Death* to Arthur Schopenhauer, to Edward Said, to the *Chinese Book of Changes*, to Virginia Wolf's "Art of Biography." All this makes for a satisfying reading, an invitation to reconsider writers' relationship with mortality and our continuing relationship with them.

LYUDMILA PARTS  
McGill University

***Antisemitizm i upodok russkoi derevenskoi prozy: Astaf'ev, Belov, Rasputin.*** By Maxim D. Shrayer. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2020. 105 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$30.00, hard bound.  
doi: 10.1017/slr.2022.209

At the end of his book, Professor Shrayer explains that the group of writers known as the *Derevenskchiki* (Village Prose Writers) lost their legitimacy due to their inextinguishable thirst for antisemitism. They failed because they sacrificed artistic integrity and yielded to socio-political and personal anger. He writes, "Astaf'ev, Rasputin, Belov—the leading writers of the Village Prose Writers—themselves caused the fall of Russian village prose, having injected an antisemitic narrative of Russian and Soviet history into their literary works and public appearances.... Having permitted themselves to become instruments in the culture war (admittedly a small war) against Jews and Judaism, which was led by the 'Russian party,' toward the middle of the 1980s, the leading Village Prose writers nearly entirely crushed the original artists in themselves" (90). Thus, they are themselves to blame for their literary insignificance today.

I remember these writers. In Russian classes we were given texts that had a fable-like and naïve character. I personally liked Ivan Shukshin, who was a sophisticated satirist with a skaz narrator; there was something of Mikhail Zoshchenko in him and he resembled, to me at least, a mixture of Vasilii Aksionov and Vladimir Voinovich. I liked Vasilii Belov, Valentin Rasputin, and Aleksandr Afanas'ev, less because they emphasized their Russian nationalism and drew attention to the "other" among them who did not belong.

But there was something refreshing in them nonetheless, a grumbling hostility to the Soviet Union and disdain for the lie of ideological triumph that communists attempted to transmit. That was important because in their efforts western scholars discovered another group who could not stand the "system." And these people were seemingly above reproach. They had no ties to the west, no interest in profiting from the Cold War; they embodied authenticity and honesty. Moreover, their love for the village life, old-fashioned

Russia, and, especially in the case of Rasputin, the need to preserve the environment, only increased the sense that they represented something very positive. Recall how few in Russia had the guts to reprimand the government for unbridled industrialization and destruction of the ecology, alcoholism and break-up of the family, and the distrust of people and society.

However, these writers had their own flaws, with antisemitism at the head of their list. They disliked Jews and accused them of promoting evil, abstract intelligence over rootedness, diversity of people versus Russian purity, complexity over simplicity. Interestingly, although the Village Prose writers attacked the authorities, they actually shared antisemitism with them. The communist government also did not like Jews and considered them a problem. Maxim Shrayer tells us that the government appreciated anti-Jewish writings in the years of Jewish emigration (late-1970s and then again in the late-1980s) (84).

Although I agree with Professor Shrayer in much of what he writes, I wonder: did the “fall” of the Village Prose writers occur because they included among their characters stereotypes of scrawny and avaricious Jews? Is not that answer too limited? Is not it more likely that their fall was due to their dizzying success, which made them authorities on everything and encouraged them to turn to pontification rather than art. So they stood up for politically dubious causes, such as *Obshchestvo Pamiat'*, and were sympathetic at least ideologically with the future putshch-makers who attacked the Belyi Dom on October 4, 1993; in other words, with reactionary elements in the state security apparatus.

This book has many virtues. It is well written, clearly argued and documented with mountains of evidence. My only question is this: I remember a time when one could not talk in public about the Jewish question. Now one can write a whole book accusing leading Soviet writers of anti-Jewish bias. Who is the reader of such a book? I am waiting impatiently to receive reviews from Russia to see if—as I predict—some will come to the defense of the Village Prose writers and some will agree that these writers do not represent an exception, but merely follow a pattern that has its origins in the deep past: from medieval Russian literature, through Aleksandr Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol', Fedor Dostoevskii, Aleksandr Blok, Vasilii Rozanov, up to our day.

BRIAN HOROWITZ  
*Tulane University*

***Klassika, skandal, Bulgarin...: Stat' i i materialy po sotsiologii i istorii Russkoi literatury.*** By Abram Il'ich Reitblat. Nauchnoe prilozhenie, Vyp. CCXI. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2020. 576 pp. Notes. Index. €34.00, hard bound. doi: 10.1017/slr.2022.210

Abram Reitblat, Head of both the Department of Bibliography at *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* and the Department of Rare Books at the Russian State Art Library, has issued a stimulating collection of his essays on Russian literature as an institution. The essays appear at first to be separate pieces in uncertain relation to each other, but Reitblat weaves them into an integrated whole with