

## LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR:

In his review of *Medieval Russian Culture* (in the *Slavic Review* 43 [Winter 1984]), edited by H. Birnbaum and M. Flier, Horace W. Dewey writes: "The contributions by Riccardo Picchio . . . and Boris Uspensky . . . both emphasize the dominant role of the church in Old Russian culture. Yet how differently these two scholars write and think! In contrast to Picchio's abstract, jejune meandering, Uspensky comes right to the point, with specific insight supported by well-selected corroborative evidence." This is all Dewey has to say about my contribution. I not only agree with this evaluation of Boris Uspensky's outstanding scholarship, but I also recognize the reviewer's democratic right to dislike and even deride my own way of writing and thinking. What cannot be tolerated, however, is Dewey's failure to comply with the elementary rules of review writing. The reviewer should first have told his readers what my article is about and then he should have explained why he thinks that my presentation is either wrong or poorly written, or both. The readers are led to believe that Uspensky and I discuss the same, or similar, problems. This is not true. In my paper only two out of thirty-three pages deal with the linguistic interrelation of Church Slavic and Russian, which is Uspensky's only concern. My article deals with *literary techniques* and their dependence on rules and principles established by the ecclesiastic power in Old Rus'. In particular, I discuss the place of Old Russian civilization in the cultural context of Orthodox Slavdom, the foundations of Old Russian "literary doctrine," textual transmission, the nature and function of the written language, formal structures and devices, and levels of meaning and semantic markers. It is worth noting that some of the arguments and theses that I recapitulate in this paper are not new. I presented them on various occasions in the last two or three decades. I discussed them with scholars of different countries and also revised them by accepting constructive criticism. It seems to me that the reviewer should have at least tried to show that he is familiar with problems to which a growing number of Slavists, besides me, are devoting their attention. Some of Dewey's readers, both here and in Europe, may not be persuaded that these are "abstract" and sterile fields of study.

RICCARDO PICCHIO  
Yale University

TO THE EDITOR:

I have never before written in response to a review of one of my books because it's a mug's game. But since Eugene K. Bristow saw fit to use my *Serf Actor: The Life and Art of Mikhail Shchepkin* as an example of abuses in Russian studies, I am compelled to reply (*Slavic Review* 44 [Summer, 1985]). His bill of indictment rather irresponsibly charges that because I did no work in Russian archives my work is wholly derivative, a crib from T. S. Grits and A. P. Klinchin; therefore, it parrots the Soviet party line on Shchepkin and his times; and, consequently, is of no value to "English-speaking students who know Russian."

When I began my research on Shchepkin, as far back as 1973, I ascertained that there were no caches of important material in the archives that had not yet been published, either before the revolution or since. The occasional source that was unavailable to me in libraries in the United States was procured for me by friends in the Soviet Union. My book's bibliography contains 149 items in Russian and Ukrainian, 65 of them prerevolutionary in origin and content; it does not include newspapers, which are cited in the footnotes and which I consulted on microfilm at Widener Library.

My debt to Grits is conspicuously acknowledged at the beginning of my book, for he had put together a chronicle of materials on Shchepkin's life. But he never wrote a

biography or extended study of the actor, so I could copy neither his structure nor his emphases. His angle of vision was not, as Bristow suggests, Marxist; in fact, he wrote a scathing review of the standard edition of Shchepkin's memoirs and letters that attacked the shortcomings that derived from narrow political and artistic vision. As for Klinchin, four of whose works are cited in my bibliography, he was merely one predecessor among many.

In fact, my biography is fuller than, and organized differently from, any in Russian, precisely because I used both nineteenth century material published in journals but suppressed or neglected by Soviet biographers and the researches of Soviet scholars, many of them writing in the 1920s when political arteriosclerosis had not yet set in. For instance, I quote extensively Shchepkin's letter to Herzen deploring his radical activity, a letter which is pointedly omitted by Soviet biographers. No previous biographers sought out and quoted Annenkov's letters on Rachel or many of the valuable memoirs in the year-books of the imperial theaters. Throughout, I am at pains to explode the Soviet myth of Shchepkin the protoliberal and to indicate the essential conservatism of his views. At no point does the word *Marxism* rear its head that so alarms Bristow.

As evidence of my slavishness to Soviet sources, he says that I refer to Ostrovskii as a Slavophile. But a careful reading of that chapter will reveal that I am describing the way Ostrovskii was regarded by the acting company of the Malyi Theater, using their terminology, and not subscribing to or endorsing that view. (In my *Russian Dramatic Theory from Pushkin to the Symbolists* [1981], I discuss in detail the misnomer of Slavophile as applied to Ostrovskii.)

I cannot begin to speculate on Bristow's motives for this misrepresentation, for he had already given this book a favorable critique in the May issue of *Theatre Journal*. He incidentally tars with the same brush such reputable scholars as Edward Braun (who did his research on Meierkhol'd in Russian libraries). I shall leave them to reply in person to what amounts to a libel on their *modus operandi*. In my own case, the welcome my book has received from Slavists who are familiar at firsthand with research on the nineteenth century Russian theater suggests that it is neither jejune nor supererogatory.

LAURENCE SENELICK  
Tufts University

#### TO THE EDITOR:

I must object to two points of criticism implied in Eugene K. Bristow's review of *Serf Actor: The Life and Art of Mikhail Shchepkin* by Laurence Senelick (*Slavic Review* 44 [Summer 1985]). Bristow rightly calls attention to "basic problems in research, translation and biography of concern especially to scholars in Russian studies who work solely with published research by Russian and Soviet scholars." For, as he says, western scholars who base their work on that of Soviet historians inadvertently take over the suppressions and adjustments required in the USSR to fit the facts within the Marxist framework. He goes on to note the long dependence of English-speaking students "on biographies of Meierkhol'd by Marjorie Hoover and Edward Braun, who, in turn, had based their studies on the magnificent work of K. L. Rudnitskii. Not until Rudnitskii's seminal biography *Meyerhold the Director*, translated by George Petrov and published by Ardis, appeared in 1981 was the significance of the scholarly source for the works by Hoover and Braun apparent to everyone." First, neither Braun's first book nor mine on Meierkhol'd depends at all, and certainly not solely, on Rudnitskii's. Second, far from taking over Soviet suppressions and thus unconsciously propagating the party line, my work, on the contrary, aims at correcting the approximately two-decade-long "illegal repression" of Meierkhol'd.