reader who has not yet learned that reading Gogol' is fun. On the one hand, reading Gogol' as if we have never read him before provides a bracing dose of ostranenie: "It is frustrating to read Gogol. It is annoying to be perpetually derailed by diversions of no apparent significance. ... I am not suggesting that we necessarily read Gogol for the plot, but only that we should not lose sight of the sensation of being unable to do so." (p. 132) The danger here is that we succumb to a kind of higher philistinism, that of Sean O'Faolain, who considers that Gogol's stories are not "skillfully written" (did he read them in Russian, by chance?, p. 133, fn. 249), or of Frank Kermode's Lucinda, who can't read poetry because the words "sort of get in like Lucinda's way" (pp. 157, 196). Popkin repeatedly alludes to the risk Gogol' runs that readers will get fed up with his "distended discourse" and stop reading. How does she account for the fact that in over 150 years they haven't stopped? Part of the problem lies in Popkin's approach to Gogol's language. As Boris Eikhenbaum and other scholars have shown, the richness of Gogol's verbal texture can be taken not as annoying prolixity but as a positive source of enjoyment, delight, pleasure — all those things that Popkin claims Gogol' denies us. She makes a scandal of the fact that Gogol's words are not things: "The plenitude here is entirely discursive" (p. 206). Is this not the most important kind of plenitude that a work of verbal art can offer? One might say that the disagreement between Popkin and those who sincerely find Gogol "fun to read" comes down to a matter of taste. But when her theoretical scheme leads her to imply that Chekhov's "Death of a Clerk" is a more successful work of art than Gogol's "Overcoat" (p. 215), we begin to see the distorting effect of a purely pragmatic approach to interpretation.

Popkin is precisely the kind of scholar our field needs: she reads texts with care and sensitivity, and she deploys a wide range of theoretical approaches with discernment and ease. The Pragmatism of Insignificance is the work of a person who is intellectually alive, constantly questioning, and in no danger of stagnation. We can only hope to welcome more such contributions from Popkin in the future.

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This is a timely and useful introduction to Shestov's thought, for even though most of Shestov's major works have been translated, there is relatively little about him in English. Andrius Valevicius contends that Shestov "formulated his ideas writing against the experiences of others" (p. 5), and lucidly describes his "encounters" with the writers named above.

Chapter 1 focuses on Shestov's first book, Shakespeare and his Critic Brandes (1898). In this work, Shestov protested against positivist literary criticism and accused Brandes of trivializing Shakespeare, objecting to Brandes' argument that Shakespeare sought the meaning of life in his tragedies but failed to find it. More important, in terms of Shestov's future development, he lambasted science's "cold indiscernibility" to, and inability to explain, great misfortune and suffering. "A brick falls on a man's heads and kills him. So What! That is natural science." (p. 15) In his view, the suffering of Hamlet and King Lear had a purpose — their spiritual resurrection. A few years later, however, Shestov changed his mind, for he had come to believe that great suffering is unexplainable. The "brutal harshness of the facts of existence" (p. 57) became one of his central themes.
Chapter 2 treats Shestov's essays on Tolstoi, Dostoevskii, Chekhov, and Ibsen. In *The Good in the Teaching of Tolstoi and Nietzsche: Philosophy and Teaching* (1900) and *Dostoevskii and Nietzsche: The Philosophy of Tragedy* (1903), Shestov compared the two Russian giants with one another (and with Nietzsche) and argued that their views stemmed from their own experiences. Tolstoi, he argued, was truly horrified by the suffering of the Moscow poor but escaped into moralism. In Tolstoi's "rational religion," God was good and goodness was God. In subsequent essays, Shestov modified his view of Tolstoi and described him as a great psychologist, but he continued to reject "rational religion" in any form as false. As for Dostoevskii, according to Shestov, he found upon his return from Siberia that the ideals of his youth left him cold, that he did not care whether the entire world "goes to pot" as long as he can have his pot of tea. The "underground man" spoke for Dostoevskii at that stage of his life. In his essay on Chekhov (in *The Apotheosis of Groundlessness*, 1905), Shestov emphasized the loneliness and hopelessness of Chekhov's characters and claimed that Chekhov was rebelling against "the idea," against all consoling metaphysics. In his essay on Ibsen (in *Great Vigils [Velikie kanunyi]*, 1911), he traced Ibsen's progression from grand themes to elemental mistrust of everything, and praised Ibsen's exposure of the mendacity of all great proclamations.

Chapter 3 is entirely devoted to Nietzsche. Shestov described him as a former idealist who learned, through terrible pain and suffering (Nietzsche's illness), that great ideals are empty and that virtue is helpless. But later on Nietzsche built a new idol—the Superman—in order to escape from the horrors of reality. In *Sofiaide* (1911-14), Shestov linked Nietzsche's "beyond good and evil" with Luther's justification "by faith alone," for each man rejected the idea that salvation can be achieved by "acts" (good works). According to Shestov, Luther was more courageous than Nietzsche. "But destiny gave him a role to play in history and he lost his courage." (p. 85) To battle the Catholic Church, this rebel against all authority created a new Church and a new authority—scripture.

Chapter 4 discusses Shestov's responses to Husserl's Phenomenology. In "Memento mori" (1917), he vehemently attacked the rational substructure of phenomenology and argued that philosophy is not, and should not be, a science; truth, the essence of things, cannot be found by reason. In addition, he faulted Husserl for ignoring religion. But Shestov appreciated Husserl's boldness and his opposition to relativism and psychology. In "What is Truth?" (1927) Shestov softened his criticism, but he continued to insist on the inadequacy of reason. At Husserl's initiative, the two met in 1928 and became close friends. In his eulogy, "In Memory of a Great Philosopher" (1938), Shestov admitted that Husserl's philosophy had had a powerful appeal to him, which is why he struggled so vehemently against it. Again praising Husserl's boldness, he described the latter's "Either/Or" (self-evidence or madness) and contrasted it with Kierkegaard's, whose works he had read at Husserl's urging.

In the conclusion Valevicius discusses the "Russianness" of Shestov's thought and surveys critical responses to him. He does not, however, fully grapple with the charge, made by many critics, that Shestov's writings were more about himself than about his subjects.

I wish that Valevicius had gone into more detail. For example, he does not document his claim that Husserl was a major influence on Shestov with textual comparisons. I also wish that Valevicius had discussed the Jewish element in Shestov's thought. Throughout his life, Shestov was asking Job's question about undeserved suffering—why? He could not accept the Christian answer that reward or retribution will come in the afterlife. In "demanding" an explanation of suffering, Shestov was following the Jewish tradition of arguing with God. Living at a time