ject, with Paul Gauguin’s painting of Breton Peasants worshipping, *The Yellow Christ* (1889). Parton states that Gauguin had painted himself in place of Christ on the cross (p. 88), and this misinformation and poor observation undercut what could have been a useful comparison of Russian neo-primitivism and the primitivist currents in French Symbolism two decades earlier. Although these errors occur in areas outside the author’s main interest, they should have been avoided. Other editorial slips, spelling mistakes and improper hyphenation appear in both English and Russian words. Nikolai Rerikh’s name is spelled correctly once, but as Ryurikh several times; Nikolai Meshcherin is sometimes spelled Mesherin; Marianrna Verevkina is given as Verefkina; first names are often skipped, especially in lists of participants in exhibitions. On the other hand, captions for the illustrations are clear and accurate, and the color plates are of high quality. The author clearly made efforts with the selection of photographs, and even the casual reader will learn much from the informative groupings of images, many of them previously unpublished.

The major value of the book, in addition to the correction of Larionov’s chronology, lies in the degree of detail with which Parton creates contexts for each development. Larionov’s role in the early avant-garde was central: he was the instigator of new ideas, the organizer of numerous exhibitions, publisher of important documents. His activities and declarations often had fortuitous effects on other artists, too. For example, Parton suggests that Larionov’s manifestoes on rayism and his use of the word *postroenie* to define the building process through which the intersecting rays of light create forms in space might have influenced Vladimir Tatlin, Liubov Popova, and Aleksandr Rodchenko in their conceptions of *konstruktia* and Constructivism. Parton’s references to Larionov’s intellectual interests, citing books and works of art owned by the artist, enrich his interpretations of major neo-primitivist works, such as the cycle *Seasons of the Year* (1912). Parton relates Larionov’s search for universal visual idioms derived from a melange of ancient roots to linguistic searches for universality by the poets Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh, and later, turning to rayism and its scientific and metaphysical sources, he emphasizes a quest for universality beyond barriers of geography and language aided by concepts of the “fourth dimension,” a goal shared by Malevich, Kandinsky, and many other Russian and Western artists. In the later chapters, too, especially in discussions of the ballet, Larionov emerges as an artist of many dimensions and many points of contact with other members of an international avant-garde. Parton’s presentation does much to belie the oversimplified image of a boisterous renegade, which the young Larionov had deliberately created, and replace it with a more reflective, multi-dimensional portrait of a complex and important artist.

Alison Hilton


Zoshchenko scholarship has taken a sharp turn toward the exciting in the past year. Russian and Western scholars met for the first time in Moscow in the summer of 1994 for what proved to be immensely successful discussions of each other’s work. A vibrant community of scholars has emerged to take on the task of renewed interpretation in light of recent developments in literary theory and the availability of new source materials. There is even talk of an academy edition of Zoshchenko’s works.
The first sign of this resurgence was the publication of Linda Scatton's excellent monograph in 1993. Scatton's goal is to remedy the situation in which Zoshchenko's short, humorous, skaz-dominant works of the twenties are accorded lavish critical (and popular) attention, while his longer, later, more serious works are disdained as inferior and atypical. Her book ably repairs both the division of the oeuvre and the neglect of its latter part, offering a thoughtful analysis and assessment of the longer, more problematic works and identifying them as typical of Zoshchenko's work as a whole. Scatton argues (against custom) for the fundamental unity of Zoshchenko's oeuvre, early and late, humorous and morose, satirical and introspective, "anti-Soviet" and "Soviet." Annoyed at the tendency to divide his work into "beastly nonsense" on the one hand and "tales for all posterity" on the other, Zoshchenko himself once commented that all his works were written "by the same hand." Scatton succeeds admirably in establishing this continuity.

In identifying the constants in Zoshchenko's work, Scatton also offers a corrective to the many considerations that have focused almost exclusively on his stylistic mannerisms. Scatton's study locates the essence and the unity of Zoshchenko's work in conceptual matters, in Zoshchenko's tenets, which she explicates in closely linked readings of both major and minor works chiefly from the thirties and forties. Most prominent in these discussions and most constant in Zoshchenko's work is his vision of human existence as an ongoing struggle to improve the quality of life. The most salient fact about Zoshchenko's heroes, argues Scatton, is not their strange way of speaking but their unstinting efforts to change themselves and make their lives more bearable. In the early works this means improvement of material conditions, while later, it is psychological well-being that is at stake. But Scatton has found a formulation that can hold, with some adjustment, for the most apparently disparate works, from the uproarious tale about the man who just wants to wash in the bathhouse to the sober autobiographical novel that explores the causes of and cure for chronic depression.

Just as constant as Zoshchenko's belief in individual self-betterment, Scatton avers, is his didactic intent to assure his readers that they, too, can take their lives in hand and fix what's broken. Scatton's definition of didacticism is broad, including as it does all satirical writing. But one might ask whether the persistence of themes such as life improvement necessarily indicates a strength of conviction or simply the urgency of the subject, a didactic certainty or a fervent hope?

Zoshchenko's quest, as Scatton represents it, is less for answers to nagging questions than for appropriate genres to embody existing beliefs. Thus it is Zoshchenko's ongoing experimentation with form that produces the eponymous "evolution of a writer" (the literary variant of self-improvement). Scatton's book traces Zoshchenko's growth and ultimate success in manipulating disparate genres and integrating diffuse material to achieve his conceptual ends.

Part I takes on the scant biographical data and combines it with critical responses to Zoshchenko's work to craft a background account of Zoshchenko, the "household word" of the twenties, without dwelling concretely on the already widely known short stories of the period. In Part II, the less discussed works are accorded real critical attention, and the treatments are both informative and persuasive. Scatton devotes a chapter each to the novellas, the biographies and "autobiographies," the children's stories, Youth Restored, A Skyblue Book, and Before Sunrise. Making works such as "Kerenskii," "Taras Shevchenko," and "The Black Prince" pivotal in Zoshchenko's evolution is a real inspiration on Scatton's part. Especially suggestive are her observations on Zoshchenko's use of source material, which she traces from the docu-