As is appropriate in a work written by a musicologist and appearing in a music series (California Studies in 20th Century Music), a significant portion of each chapter is devoted to a detailed description of each work’s sources and a technical discussion of its construction, supplemented by extended extracts from the scores. The details of these latter portions of the text may prove daunting to non-experts, but these portions will be invaluable in their broader outlines to colleagues in Slavic who seek to teach these operas in survey courses of Russian culture.

While literature scholars will thus discover much of considerable interest in Morrison’s text, they may also wish at times for greater chronological precision and clarity. For instance, Morrison does not devote attention to the crisis and generally perceived end of Symbolism as a movement in 1910, thereby potentially leaving a reader with the impression that the Symbolist movement endured until the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, an assertion arguably more applicable to the broader term “Silver Age” (which Morrison seems at times to conflate with Symbolism). It would also have been useful for Morrison to clarify certain points about the writers he discusses. For example, Vladimir Solov’ev’s philosophy of “Godmanhood” is characterized as “taken from” Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy (pp. 177-78, n. 25), without the clarification that Solov’ev distinguished “Godmanhood” from what he saw as Nietzsche’s “Mangoodhood,” and alternative arguments can be made about Briusov’s and Blok’s respective stances toward the revolution, as well as the latter’s cause of death. These caveats aside, as readers delve into Morrison’s welcome study, they will find in his wide-ranging and ambitious treatment of an understudied and thoroughly enticing topic much to learn and to enjoy.

Judith E. Kalb
University of South Carolina


The decade leading to the outbreak of World War One generated rapid social changes and drastically affected the Jewish communities in the Pale of Settlement in Russia. It also resulted in the most creative and productive period in the history of Yiddish literature. Mikhail Krutikov subjects the literary works of that decade to a close scrutiny, deliberately and pointedly applying an eclectic methodology (structural, semiotic, socio-political, psychological approaches) and analyzing works written in Yiddish not only in the Pale and in Poland, but also in the United States. Prose works of the best known writers (Mendele, Sholem Aleichem, I. L. Peretz), of their lesser known contemporaries (Y. Dinezon, Mordke Spektor, and S. Ansky), of younger authors (Sholem Asch, David Bergelson, Itche-Meir Weissenberg, and others), as well as works by American Yiddish writers (e.g., Leon Kobrin, David Ignatov, Isaac Raboy, Joseph Opatoshu) are discussed against the broader literary background of modernity and both European and American realism.

Krutikov refers to the crucial historical events (the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, the abortive revolution of 1905 in Russia with its
promise of universal brotherhood, the subsequent pogroms) and highlights the new literary responses to them, noting the evolution of Yiddish writers, who are forced to adapt the familiar nineteenth-century representational models and reach for new artistic means in order to reflect the changing times.

In his chapters titled "The Economic Crisis," "The Crisis of Revolution" and "The Crisis of Immigration," Krutikov makes persuasive connections between social trends and the new plots and character-types emerging in Yiddish fiction, arguing that as a result of the social upheavals, the dashed hopes, and the massive emigration from the shtetl to the big cities and to America, such concepts as fictional time and space, as well as the construction of character, underwent radical transformation in the direction of more openness to, and integration into, external reality. The manifestly closed Jewish time and space of the extended shtetl metaphor gave way to open and universal time-space continuum where Jews had to live and function side by side with Gentiles. The new situation forced Jewish characters to search for their place in the rapidly changing world, and to reexamine constantly their individual and collective identity. (p. 115)

While the plots in the works of the older masters (Mendele, Sholem Aleichem, or I. L. Peretz) were cyclical and reflected the inextricable connection to the rituals and the calendar of Jewish holidays, younger Yiddish authors abandoned this formula, relying on a linear organization of their plots. They emphasized the transformation of their characters, poignantly documenting the dilemmas and disappointments in the characters’ search for the iker, the meaning of life that can change the world.

Himself an emigré from the former Soviet Union, Mikhail Krutikov is very sensitive to the psychic strains and generational as well as ideological conflicts immigrants confront, and addresses these issues very insightfully in his analyses of the representative literary works of the period in question. He distinguishes among writers who underwent the process of immigration themselves, writers who stayed in Eastern Europe, and those who, like Sholem Aleichem or Sholem Asch, spent considerable periods of time in both Eastern Europe and America. Krutikov also pays attention to the important distinction between fiction and historical writing concerning immigration.

Although the Yiddish novelists who wrote about the challenges of immigration differed in age, ideological orientation and first hand experience, Krutikov notes the essential unity of Yiddish literature of the period and points to Sholem Aleichem's The Flood as perhaps the earliest example of "a novel of national imagination," which contained "a grand representation of the reality of the Old World through the literary medium of the New World" and offered "a new 'imagined community' of the Jewish nation that united all parts of the Jewish Diaspora." (p. 107)

Krutikov's book has many strengths. It updates the analyses of literary works by Yiddish writers by relying on critical approaches and concepts derived from a variety of theorists (Bakhtin, Yuri Lotman, Umberto Eco et al.) typically not referred to by the older generation of academics. It includes and makes frequent reference to scholarship mostly overlooked by American critics, i.e., the writings of Russian and Soviet scholars, or Polish Yiddishists. Moreover, while drawing on fertile previous critical and biographical scholarship about Yiddish writers and their works, he does not shy away from defying it and offering revisionist analyses, thus providing meaningful