The Stony Dance is filled with interesting insights and, overall, makes an entertaining, informative read. The complex structure of the book does, however, at times lead to some awkwardness. Langen seems to see each section of his monograph as a free-standing analysis and hence frequently repeats both basic facts and critical observations in a way that may seem tiresome to those who read the study cover-to-cover. Moreover, in what perhaps represents a conscious attempt to imitate the narrative structure of Bely’s novel, Langen breaks each section of The Stony Dance into many shorter subsections and shifts frequently and often very abruptly between discussions of very different problems and materials. References to Bely’s biography, the reception of his work in various periods, the history of Russian symbolism, and current critical theory alternate in such quick succession with passages of close textual reading that some may find Langen’s writing unnecessarily choppy.

These problems are not, however, substantial enough to diminish Langen’s achievement. The Stony Dance clearly represents a major contribution to scholarship on Andrey Bely’s work and as such is likely to attract considerable attention from Slavists. Langen’s monograph will prove particularly useful to anyone who teaches Petersburg to undergraduates: his focus on the problem of unity and his persuasive vision of the coherence of Bely’s novel help to make this modernist classic seem more accessible and hence more teachable. This alone represents a tremendous service to the field.

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This volume represents a newly introduced translation of the first chapter of the author’s 1999 study Formirovka sovetskogo pisatel’ia: Sotsial’nye i esteticheskie istoki sovetskoi literaturnoi kul’tury (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii Prospekt). Not included in the revised, English-language version of Dobrenko’s book that Stanford University Press issued in 2001 under the title The Making of the State Writer: Social and Aesthetic Origins of Soviet Literary Culture, this material will read as new to most Western readers. As one might perhaps expect given its origin, Aesthetics of Alienation makes most sense when viewed as part of Dobrenko’s larger project. The survey of early Soviet literary theories that it contains complements both the author’s work on the formation of the Soviet writer and his earlier efforts to chronicle the emergence of the Soviet reader (published in Russian by Akademicheskii proekt in 1997 under the title Formirovka sovetskogo chitatelia: Sotsial’nye i esteticheskie predposylnki retseptsi sovetskoi literatury and in English, in the

In Aesthetics of Alienation, Dobrenko aims to provide a new perspective on the literary polemics of the immediate post-revolutionary era and the 1920s. He rejects as “unproductive” the largely “estimative” approaches that, he argues, both Russian and Western specialists on the period have traditionally favored. Efforts to identify “victims” and “perpetrators,” strident condemnations of Socialist Realism, and, for that matter, studies that depict key players in the literary conflicts of the 1920s as the “puppets of an all-powerful Party,” ultimately, Dobrenko suggests, have done little to advance our understanding of this complex historical era. In many cases, he notes, it seems “as if scholars were still carrying on the ideological debates that remained unsettled in the 1920s, playing roles and seeing in the material they are analyzing a convenient opportunity either to affirm their own political views or refute the views of their opponents” (p. xv). In order to move beyond this impasse, Dobrenko argues, we must learn to look back on this turbulent chapter in Russian cultural history from “the position of the outsider.” We must overcome our naïve faith in theory and consider the role that material interests played in the cultural processes of the early Soviet period (pp. xv-xvi). Often, Dobrenko argues, ideological skirmishes masked power struggles between rival cultural elites, all of which desperately wanted to gain influence and access to scarce resources: the opportunity to publish, control over concrete cultural institutions, and financial subsidies.

Starting from this general thesis, Dobrenko analyzes, in sequence, the theoretical statements of Proletkult, RAPP, LEF, and Pereval, noting similarities as well as differences. All of these groups, he argues, operated within the same essential cultural frame; “they were united by the ‘boundaries of freedom’ assigned in revolutionary culture” (p. 89). As they struggled to define themselves in relationship to this fundamentally alienating framework, each group contributed something significant to the emerging norms of Soviet culture. In its aesthetic statements, Proletkult emphasized collectivism and hence tended to depict both art and artistic creativity as essentially impersonal; RAPP, although it rejected many Proletkult ideas as extremist, in its advocacy of Party-mindedness advanced a creative theory that was equally anti-individualistic; LEF stressed engagement with the everyday and professionalism; and Pereval sincerity and organicity. Long after these groups themselves had disappeared from the scene, these aspects of their aesthetic programs, because they suited the tenor of the age, continued to exert an influence on the development of Soviet literature. Brought together in the early 1930s, they formed the basis for Socialist Realism, which, Dobrenko argues, is properly understood as “the result of the mutagenesis of all of revolutionary culture. . . . a synthetic and composite culture” that represented “a natural and historically inevitable phase of development,” the culmination of all the aesthetic experiments that had preceded it (p. 58, p. 110).