

and hold to their reality with a conviction that is properly religious. There are others for whom the impulse to believe may exist without formal religious motivation. Why do so many people put themselves through a hell far less hospitable than Dante's by reading the unreadable novels of Stephen King—reading them willingly, that is, by lamplight rather than at gunpoint—or the fevered oeuvre of Anne Rice, which is not merely unreadable but unspeakable? The need to encounter good and evil plainly marked, in their local, regional, and cosmic varieties, numbs all aesthetic sense in these folks. Why have angels become such a hot commodity in recent years, after languishing for so long on stained glass windows and greeting cards? What's going through people's heads when they dial "psychic hot lines"?

All this is trivial evidence, perhaps. But the figures on how many Americans still believe in God are not trivial. Nor is the strong,

and growing, fundamentalist presence in the country. There are people who know evil all too well when they see it, and they see it all too often. Americans—*some* Americans—have not entirely given up on the possibility of transcendence, even if they're looking for light (and darkness) in all the wrong places. Delbanco insists that the old language of evil has become a collection of dead metaphors and that you can't get back a sense of evil in ways that have been superseded by history. I wonder. Rationality might argue so, but will its low and even voice carry over the noise of stubborn conviction and irrational faith? To those who want to set tombstones atop the graves of transcendence and the Devil, the prudent advice may be "Hold off carving the dates."

—James Morris is the director of the Wilson Center's Division of Historical, Cultural, and Literary Studies.

The Stately Homes of Russia

LIFE ON THE RUSSIAN COUNTRY ESTATE: A Social and Cultural History. By Priscilla Roosevelt. Yale. 384 pp. \$45

Russian literature from Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman* (1833) and Gogol's *Overcoat* (1842) to Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) seems preoccupied with the agitations of urban life, especially those of Peter I's capital, St. Petersburg. But the literature has a rural side as well, concerned with the gentry's country residences and the worlds of nature and the peasantry in which those estates were immersed. For the century and a half before 1917, this second locus of Russian literature was the more important of the two, as Priscilla Roosevelt makes clear in her excellent book. By turns literary history, sociology, econom-

ics, art history, and architectural history, *Life on the Russian Country Estate* has something for everybody. Indeed, in its sheer inclusiveness lies one of the book's greater appeals.

The world into which Ivan Turgenev and Leo Tolstoy were born, and whose passing Anton Chekhov later mourned, was, like so much in Russian culture, created "from above" by the will of the tsars. Russia's rulers cut a simple deal with the gentry. In effect, they commanded, "Serve the crown, and in return the crown will reward you with land and control over your farm labor." Thus was Russian serfdom born at the beginning of the 17th century. By the late 18th century, the grantees were no longer required to serve in the government, though serfdom continued and the gentry still exercised many state functions locally.

For a few hundred of Russia's elite, the deal with the crown brought immense wealth, allowing both the architectural extravagance of the great rural estates and the establishment of notable amenities—domestic theater companies and orchestras, for example. The wealth bought lesser luxuries too, such as foreign tutors and foreign travel. The travel stimulated Russians' imaginations and challenged and intensified their sense of self. These disparate multicultural contacts—on the one hand with the culture of Western Europe, and on the other with the rough-talking peasants in the village just beyond the copse—were the fertile soil in which a great literature grew.

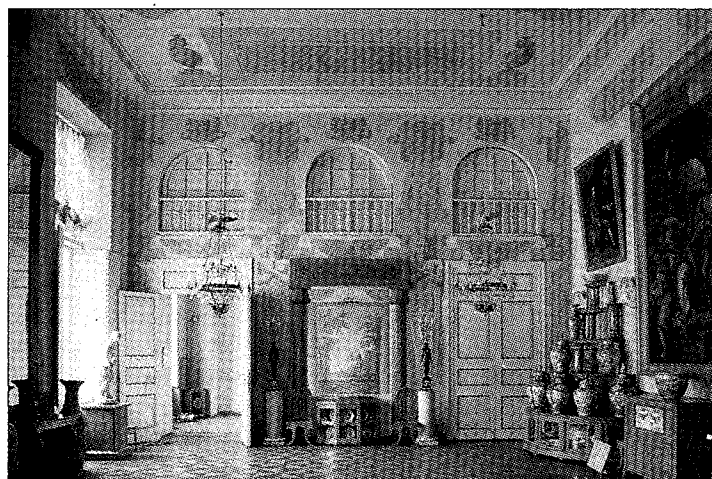
Roosevelt, a fellow of the Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies at George Washington University, frequently contrasts her portrait of this world with the more rooted English country life of the same period. More telling still would be a comparison with the life of the great Elizabethans, who were the direct beneficiaries of royal benevolence and built their palaces so as to receive the British queen on her periodic peregrinations around the country.

In several absorbing chapters, Roosevelt summarizes recent scholarship on the system of serfdom that underlay Russia's estates.

Though the Russian system differed significantly from slavery in the antebellum South, it gave to Turgenev's novels a social mood reminiscent of a plantation in Virginia's Tidewater. But comparisons geographically closer to Russia are readily at hand. A similar form of serfdom continued in Germany until the Napoleonic wars in the early 19th century, and much later in the Austrian Empire and Russian-ruled Poland.

To a far greater extent than the country houses of England or France, the great landed estates of Central Europe provided the immediate model for Russian grandees as they created their bucolic nests. When Count Razumovsky tried to hire Franz Joseph Haydn for his Ukrainian estate, he was consciously imitating the composer's Hungarian patron Prince Esterhazy, at whose great estate Haydn had spent many years. The many early-19th-century literary-philosophical circles that sprang up at the country houses of Russian aristocrats have their immediate antecedents in the world of the Brothers Grimm in Westphalia, and in country seats in Bohemia and locations farther east. The sprawling Baltic estates in what are now Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were also well known to Russian aristocrats. Thanks to this rich array of models based on serf labor, a fashion such as the natural and informal "English Garden" could be passed from Western Europe to Russia through several national and cultural stages.

The number of Russians who owned or resided on landed estates was minuscule. Most Russian "aristocrats" lived no more grandly than many farmers in 19th-century Indiana. Moreover, the age of the theatricalized superestate, with its army of liveried servants, was fading even before Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812. During the last years of serfdom before its abolition by



Alexander II in 1861, Russian estate owners fell even deeper into debt, tried to cobble together rural factories staffed with serf workers to recoup their losses, and simply sank into a genteel lifestyle amid Russian-made furniture patterned after Biedermeier originals from Central Europe.

However few Russians participated in this world, the insistent reality of country life left a profound imprint on the larger culture in art, literature, and music. When the tsars of Soviet culture lauded Russians' passionate love of the Russian land, they were in fact echoing the lyric effusions of 19th-century Russian gentry writers such as Turgenev. The anarchic strain that coexists with Russians' supposed subservience to authority also traces in part to these same gentry, who were accustomed to thumbing their noses at the

bureaucrats in St. Petersburg. Indeed, Mikhail Bakunin, the founder of European anarchism, was just such a rural aristocrat. Finally, the sense of a lost golden age that permeates Russian culture from Chekhov to our own day is a direct legacy of the long, slow death of the Russian estate in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Despite their passion for modernity, Russians still fear the sound of the ax in the patrimonial cherry orchard.

It is no criticism to say that Roosevelt's richly illustrated book is not the last word on these subjects. Rather, it is the *first* word for a very long time, and, as such, should be heartily welcomed.

—S. Frederick Starr, president of the Aspen Institute, is the author of *Bamboula! The Life and Times of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*.

OTHER TITLES

History

REPORTING WORLD WAR II: American Journalism 1938–1946 (2 vols.). *Library of America*. Vol. I: 912 pp.; Vol. II: 970 pp. \$35 each

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, the *Library of America* has made a rare break with its normal practice of publishing the work of a single author and issued two volumes of reports and reflections on the war written by American journalists between 1938 and 1946. It's an inspired memorial, likely to be valued even when the war's anniversaries are no longer routinely tallied.

The "reporting" in these volumes generally consists of feature stories and essays rather than "breaking news" about events. For the most part, the authors try to recreate the experience of being there—on battlefields and bombing runs, in villages, cities, and concentration camps

during the war and as the fighting finally came to an end. And, for the most part, they succeed.

The 150 or so pieces are the work of gifted and important writers—among them William L. Shirer, A. J. Liebling, Edward R. Murrow, Margaret Bourke-White, Walter Bernstein, E. B. White, John Hersey, James Agee, Ernie Pyle, and Vincent Tubbs. (Brief but helpful biographies of all the contributors are included.) Cartoonist Bill Mauldin's book *Up Front* appears in full and may be the best thing in the collection. By contrast, Gertrude Stein's account of life in a rural village in France is notable mainly for its silly punctuation. Reports from the home front are also included, but they are mere counterpoints to the principal action, which is elsewhere. Battle stories, life-on-the-line stories, and refugee stories crowd these pages.

The volumes follow standard *Library of America* editorial procedures. In other words, the texts are accompanied by less explanatory