

“bistro,” another meaning—one that would have been well known in Antwerp, since it comes from the Walloon dialect spoken in Belgium—is “manger.” In a later line (“The word within a word, unable to speak a word”) in the poem, Eliot borrows the language of the Elizabethan bishop Lancelot Andrewes and “doubles the image of Christ in the manger.”

Julius saw none of that, Passaro says. “A universe in which a horrifying, hostile, contemptuous image of a ‘jew’ can also be made to suggest God, in his most tender moment of Incarnation as well as in his terrifying justice, is a universe in which Anthony Julius and many other critics steeped in comfortable assumptions would prefer not to live. Literature is not the game for them.”

OTHER NATIONS

Russia: Transition to Nowhere?

A Survey of Recent Articles

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Westerners writing about Russia have probably used no word more often than transition—as in, “transition from totalitarianism to democracy and a free-market economy.” Scholarly appraisals of how much progress Russia has made in this endeavor have varied widely—ranging, on the economic front alone, as Duke University economist Jim Leitzel points out in *Problems of Post-Communism* (Jan.–Feb. 1997), from Anders Åslund’s *How Russia Became a Market Economy* (1994) to Marshall Goldman’s *Lost Opportunity: Why Economic Reforms in Russia Have Not Worked* (1995). Now, some commentators are suggesting that the transition hobbyhorse be set aside in order to get a better grasp of Russia’s situation.

All the *transition* talk in Washington and academia—where “transitionology” represents “a new paradigm . . . for securing funds, jobs, and tenure”—obscures the full extent of “Russia’s unprecedented, cruel, and perilous collapse,” contends Stephen F. Cohen, a professor of politics and Russian studies at Princeton University. The truth is, he says in the *Nation* (Dec. 30, 1996), “that Russia’s new private sector is dominated by former but still intact Soviet monopolies seized by ex-Communist officials who have become the core of a semi-criminalized business class; that inflation is being held down by holding back salaries owed to tens of millions of needy workers and other employees; that a boom has been promised for years while the economy continues to plunge into a depression greater than America’s in the 1930s; that President [Boris] Yeltsin’s re-election cam-

paign was one of the most corrupt in recent European history; that the Parliament has no real powers and the appellate court little independence from the presidency; and that neither Russia’s market nor its national television is truly competitive or free but is substantially controlled by the same financial oligarchy whose representatives now sit in the Kremlin as chieftains of the Yeltsin regime.”

The oft-repeated transition phrase “is profoundly misleading and betrays Western arrogance and ideological blindness,” asserts Anatol Lieven, a Senior Fellow at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C. in the *Washington Quarterly* (Winter 1997). He is a former Moscow correspondent for the *Times* of London. Russia, like many countries in Latin America, he says, is today a “weak, quasi-liberal” state, and may well remain so indefinitely.

Since the Soviet Union expired, Stephen Cohen maintains, “the great majority” of Russian families have experienced “an endless collapse of everything essential to a decent existence—from real wages, welfare provisions and health care to birth rates and life expectancy; . . . from safety in the streets to prosecution of organized crime and thieving bureaucrats.” The murder rate is twice that in the United States, and, at last official count, some 8,000 criminal gangs were operating in the country.

Economist Leitzel paints a less stark picture. One reason for the wide disagreement about the economic reforms’

efficacy, he notes, is the inadequacy of the data for the period before the Soviet Union collapsed. In recent years, however, “measured average real consumption has been consistently higher than in early 1992, when the marketization reforms were introduced,” he says. The proportion of the population below the poverty line has *fallen*—from 34 percent in 1992 to 22 percent in April 1996. “The most dire predictions of famine and economic collapse . . . have not been borne out, nor have there been riots or similar manifestations of deep social discord. In the two main instances when the Russian electorate was called upon to determine the direction of economic policy—the referendum of April 1993 and the 1996 presidential election—modest majorities preferred reform.”

But in voting for Yeltsin last year (rather than Communist Gennadi Zyuganov), what many Russians wanted, despite their expectations of further economic hardship, was not so much more reform as stability, argues Dmitri Shlapentokh, a professor of Russian and world history at Indiana University, South Bend, writing in the *Washington Quarterly* (Winter 1997). Although disgusted with politics and politicians, many Russians viewed Yeltsin as representing “the relatively predictable and secure

status quo—as opposed to the risks inherent in change.”

That the election was held at all is a sign of progress toward democracy, Amy Knight, author of *Spies without Cloaks: The KGB's Successors* (1996), notes in the same issue of that journal, but “democracy still appears to be far away.” One of the biggest obstacles, she says, is Russia’s failure to attempt to come to terms with its communist past. “If a new regime simply glosses over past abuses because of either vested interests within the government or the continued influence exerted by the old political leadership, then it takes on the corruption of the old regime. This is what has happened in Russia.” Despite the dissolution of the KGB in 1991, she says, the successor security services “still play a larger-than-life role in politics,” exerting a “pervasive influence” on domestic and foreign policy.

“Russia should not be mistaken for a democratic state,” agrees David Remnick, author of *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* (1993), writing in *Foreign Affairs* (Jan.–Feb. 1997). Nevertheless, he has not given up hope that Russia will become a democracy one day. Americans are too impatient, he believes. “A new era has begun. Russia has entered the world, and everything, even freedom . . . is possible.”

History's Revenge

“Dateline Sudetenland: Hostages to History” by Timothy W. Ryback, in *Foreign Policy* (Winter 1996–97), 2400 N St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037–1153.

It was a day that will long live in the annals of folly. On September 30, 1938, in Munich, British prime minister Neville Chamberlain tried to appease Adolf Hitler by agreeing to Nazi Germany’s annexation of the Sudetenland. Six months later, Hitler seized the rest of Czechoslovakia. During the seven years of Nazi occupation that followed, thousands perished in death camps. And then, in 1945—in what until recently has been just an ugly historical footnote to the larger tragedy—Czechs took their revenge. They expelled three million ethnic Germans from the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia, slaughtering tens of thousands—men, women, and children. Now this “footnote” has been elevated to the center of a dispute

that could impede the Czech Republic’s entry into the European Union (EU).

It was the Czechs themselves who first brought up the issue after the “Velvet Revolution” of 1989, notes Ryback, director of the Salzburg Seminar, a forum for international dialogue based in Salzburg, Austria. Just days after his election as president of Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel denounced the expulsions as “deeply immoral.” But Czech attempts at reconciliation with the displaced Sudeten German population, now located mainly in Bavaria, ended in 1991 after the Czechoslovak prime minister and Franz Neubauer, head of the Munich-based Sudeten German Heritage Union, exchanged bitter words.