about politics and literature and Jews with the productivity of a major industry; and yet his scores of books and hundreds of essays not only met the demanding scholarly standards of the academy but were written with an analytical sharpness, polemical bite, and lethal irony that raised them above the level of what was (and is) generally found in journals of literary and cultural opinion."

An additional strength of Howe's criticism, astutely explored by Alexander, is his extraordinary ability to hold opposing ideas in creative tension—a kind of negative capability produced by years of dialectical thinking—which resulted in richly fertile discussions of aesthetics and politics, Judaism and "Jewishness," and socialism and tradition.

Short of reading Howe himself, especially his moving autobiography *A Margin of Hope* (1982), those (likely younger) readers in need of an introduction would do well to begin with Alexander's biography. Perhaps the book's greatest virtue is the extent to which it amplifies Howe's distinctive voice through generous quotation. Such solicitude is all the more admirable given that Alexander is a conservative. (Howe once referred to him as "my favorite reactionary.") Unlike so many contemporary biographies and works of literary criticism, this one does not suffocate its subject in a miasma of theory or specious psychoanalytical diagnosis.

Not that Alexander fails to criticize Howe. He censures his subject for misguided views of World War II and his (and the New York intellectuals') abject neglect of the Holocaust and his own Jewish identity. Only occasionally do Alexander's opinions become obtrusive, as when he repeatedly rebukes Howe for his views on Zionism, Israel, and the Palestinians. Anyone interested in Howe's varied career, and the historical context that has given it its particular shape—American radicalism, the Cold War and anticommunism, the New Left, literary modernism, Jewish life—will profit handsomely from reading Alexander's respectful book.

—Harvey Teres

THE FACE OF RUSSIA: Anguish, Aspiration, and Achievement in Russian Culture.

By James H. Billington. TV Books. 269 pp. $29.95

"Now we have hope," a Moscow woman quietly commented in August 1991 as it became clear that the Communist coup attempt against the fledgling Russian democracy had failed. Today, economic and institutional collapse continues to threaten the young democracy, yet Russian artists and intellectuals remain free to create without fear of political repression. Never before, in fact, have Russians been so free to explore human experience through artistic expression. Their persistent belief in an art that seeks to transform rather than merely to entertain may offer the greatest hope for preserving their democracy.

In *The Face of Russia*, Billington, the Librarian of Congress, seeks to tell "the story of the Russian people as seen through their art." Conceived as a companion volume to a PBS series, the book identifies three fundamental forces in the development of the Russian arts: Russian Orthodox spirituality, closeness to nature, and the habit of borrowing from the West—the "recurrent tendency to take over, lift up, and then cast down new forms of creativity," from icon painting to constitutional democracy. The author traces this pattern in the religious culture of the 15th to 17th centuries, represented by wooden churches and the icon painting of Andrei Rublev; the aristocratic culture of the 18th and early 19th centuries, represented by the imperial palaces of Bartolomeo Rastrelli and the literary legacy of Nikolai Gogol; and the mass culture of the later 19th and 20th centuries, represented by the music of Modest Mussorgsky and the films of Sergei Eisenstein. Through each of these art forms, Russians transformed foreign models into radically innovative original works in what Billington describes as "a culture of explosive revolution rather than gradual evolution."

While not purporting to be a comprehensive guide to the Russian artistic experience, this is an informative and highly readable essay. By avoiding some of the more obvious choices of artists and art forms, Billington has produced a personal book, conversational in tone and enlivened by his reminiscences. Few would argue with the author's belief that, in order to understand the Russian people, their history, and their future, it is both important and infinitely rewarding to study their art.

—Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter