



Books of 1973

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Contribution to 'Books of the Year', *Observer*, 16 December 1973, 33a–b



I RECOMMEND three exceedingly different books. First, the second volume of Nadezhda Mandelstam's memoirs [to be published in England by Collins next spring under the title *Hope Abandoned*]. Virtually every other piece of prose that has reached us from the Soviet Union for I don't know how long, from the crudest 'socialist realism' to Solzhenitsyn, much of samizdat and even Pasternak, deliberately seeks to bind a particular vision of Russia upon the reader. Mrs Mandelstam's bitter reminiscences read like unvarnished reality itself. Her judgements about individuals may be disputed by their friends; her descriptions of events and circumstances and situations carry total conviction. In this respect the work seems to me literally unique.

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Secondly, the first volume of Sybille Bedford's biography of *Aldous Huxley* (Chatto/Collins). The fine detail of his life and personal relationships, his nobility and charm, the extraordinary range of his gifts and interests, as well as the somewhat didactic, monochrome, thin quality in his writing, and the frail, cerebral element in his humanity, are faithfully conveyed by this excellent writer and lifelong friend.



Thirdly, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* by Frances Yates (Routledge). This is a magnificent work of imagination and learning by a great scholar in a field more honoured in countries other than our own – the history of ideas.

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