

reprint but in a quite adequate German translation, augmented with two short notes on Chekhov by the same author, additional footnotes, and an updated bibliography. Also added is a list of publications by Petr Mikhailovich Bicilli (Bitsilli), a Russian émigré of Italian descent who, roughly between 1925 and 1950, wrote a series of philological and literary studies. The editor and translator, Vincent Sieveking, has done a great service to the large number of Chekhov admirers by publishing this volume, the work of a remarkable connoisseur of Chekhov and of Russian and European literature.

Bicilli had his own view of literature. On the first page he writes, "When that which is shown [by the author] is well shown, it indicates that his means are also good; for the impression produced by a literary work of art is the only and absolute criterion of its artistic, that is, linguistic perfection." He pursues his own ideas and completely ignores the extensive critical and scholarly literature on Chekhov. His main strength lies in his ability as a comparatist. With amazing ingenuity he establishes numerous undeniable similarities (indicating conscious or subconscious imitation) between passages in Chekhov's works and in the prose of Turgenev (by whom he says Chekhov was "permeated," p. 31), Lermontov, Gogol, Tolstoy, and other Russian writers. Striking examples are the comparison of passages from Chekhov's "Eger" and Turgenev's "Svidanie" and other works (pp. 22 ff.), of Chekhov's "Step" and Tolstoy's *Otrochestvo* (p. 98), Chekhov's "Rasskaz neizvestnogo cheloveka" and passages from Turgenev and Dostoevsky (pp. 189 ff.).

Equally illuminating are the parallels Bicilli draws between some of Chekhov's stories, for example "Muzhiki" and "V ovrage" (p. 105), "Gusev" and "Palata No. 6" (p. 148). Bicilli calls Tolstoy and Chekhov "the two greatest men in the art of presenting life" (p. 169); among Chekhov's works, he considers "V ovrage" and "Arkhieri" the highest achievements (p. 152). In his view Chekhov's prose is impressionistic (a term used after him by various other Chekhovists) and in some respects symbolistic. Bicilli admires Chekhov so much that the comparison with other authors is invariably in Chekhov's favor. The only exception is "Rasskaz neizvestnogo cheloveka," which is not Chekhov's best story but contains many typical Chekhovian traits and provokes the strong melancholic feeling characteristic of many of his writings. Bicilli, although he considers it "a key to the understanding of Chekhov's whole work" (p. 200), presents it as a complete failure.

Bicilli shows the same uncompromising attitude in his analysis of Chekhov's drama, which he discusses only in chapter 7. To prove his point (which was also Tolstoy's) that Chekhov was not a dramatist, Bicilli is constantly intent on demonstrating the inferiority of the plays. His fervent enthusiasm leads both to an inspired lucidity and an exasperating one-sidedness. However, it is not difficult to recognize the shortcomings of Bicilli's view of the Chekhovian drama, and we should be thankful for the new insight he gives us into Chekhov's prose.

THOMAS EEKMAN

*University of California, Los Angeles*

NIKOLAJ NEKRASOV: HIS LIFE AND POETIC ART. By *Sigmund S. Birkenmayer*. The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1968. 204 pp. 35 Dutch guilders.

There are few studies of Nekrasov's poetry in English. His extra-aesthetic commitments, which he attempted to implement through literature, have made him suspect

to analytically oriented scholars in this country and in England. Hence Birkenmayer's study promised to be a welcome attempt to introduce Nekrasov to English-speaking readers. However, in many ways it is disappointing. The book's aim, as its subtitle indicates, is to present Nekrasov's life and art. Though it more or less manages to cover the first subject (although I don't know why a textual analysis of poetry has to be done in the context of superfluous and frequently doubtful biographical minutiae purified of Nekrasov's frequent adverse behavior), it fails in its presentation of the second. What is supposed to be an analysis of poetic language, structure, and the like turns instead into a monotonous paraphrasing of plots and themes coupled with occasional quasi psychologizing about the emotional make-up of Nekrasov's protagonists. Chapter 7, presenting Nekrasov in Russian criticism, is mostly a collection of quotations which either hail or denounce his poetry. The attitude of Russian criticism toward Nekrasov could have been given in a few pages without such an exuberant technical apparatus, which gives the impression of a freshly prepared doctoral dissertation.

Of the critical reactions to Nekrasov's art, the most interesting are those of Tynianov and Eikhenbaum. In fact, what Tynianov offered in his short article could have become the gist of Birkenmayer's study. But Birkenmayer fails even to appraise the position of these two formalists. Instead, he solicits Professor Victor Erlich's support on the subject. It seems to me that Tynianov's view on Nekrasov's extensive use of prosaisms, on *govornyi stich* (speaking verse), on poetic parody, on *skaz*, and on feuilleton is valid today and gives us a clue to Nekrasov's poetic novelty. But Birkenmayer makes no attempt to examine closely the affinity between Nekrasov's poems and Russian folklore, specifically fairy tales, and has left out the problem of his metaphors, symbols, meter, rhyme, and syntax. These elements are part of any poetic structure. Birkenmayer's notion of poetic structure is limited to a division of the poem into parts. "Structurally speaking," he states, "the poem is divided into two parts and each part is subdivided into sections of two or three stanzas" (p. 118). What he says about Nekrasov's *Red-Nosed Frost* and *Who Is Happy in Russia?* differs little from the sociological criticism of the past. Few readers could quarrel with him over his treatment of ideological intent in these and other compositions. This intent is monothematic and does not yield to different interpretations. Yet in literary analysis it is not central. The central problem is *how* this intent is transmitted into art. In his conclusion Birkenmayer quotes Mirsky that Nekrasov "was essentially a rebel against all the stock in trade of 'poetic' poetry, and the essence of his best work is precisely the bold creation of a new poetry unfettered by traditional standards of taste" (p. 201). This is a correct observation and should have been the point of departure for this study. As it is, this work does not enlighten us on the boldness of Nekrasov's poetic art.

The last chapter, "Nekrasov's Mother in His Poetry," stands somewhat outside the overall scheme of the study. In it Birkenmayer limits himself to the overt message of Nekrasov's poems devoted to his mother. Instead of this chapter, the book could have concluded with a chapter on Nekrasov's influence on the subsequent poetic generation, particularly on Bely and Blok, who, as Renato Poggioli aptly observed, "sedulously imitated his attempt to make poetry out of the prose of life, to find a bewitching melody even in the discord of the world."

It is puzzling that some quotations from the poems are in Russian and some in English. In a study supposedly concerned with the "folksong-like melody" of poetry, English renditions are definitely out of place.

The bibliography is inadequate. It lists sources that have only a cursory relation to the subject and omits those of primary importance, such as Dostoevsky's article in the *Diary of a Writer*, the articles of Eikhenbaum, Rozanov, Tynianov, Gippius, and Corbet, and Mahnken's article on Nekrasov's poetic technique.

Regretfully, I find Birkenmayer's study insufficient both conceptually and methodologically.

JOHN FIZER  
Rutgers University

SOBRANIE SOCHINENII. By *Osip Mandelshtam*. Edited by *G. P. Struve* and *B. A. Filippov*. 2nd ed. Vol. 1: *Stikhotvoreniia*. Introductory essays by *Clarence Brown*, *G. P. Struve*, and *E. M. Rais*. Washington, D.C.: Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1967. cv, 553 pp.

Mandelshtam, often called a poet's poet, has enjoyed a faithful but small audience both in Russia and among the Russian émigrés. Now, some thirty years after his death in a Vladivostok concentration camp in 1938, he has become a leading poet for a large group of Soviet youth, particularly in Leningrad, while the number of his admirers continues to increase in the West as well as in the USSR. *Kamen'*, Mandelshtam's first book of poetry, appeared before the revolution and was followed in 1922 and 1928 by *Trostia* and *Stikhotvoreniia*. Between 1928 and 1933 his poems appeared only on occasion in various Soviet journals.

Although the poet at one time belonged to the Acmeists, he never accepted the Parnassian canons of Gumilev, the leader of the "school." Rather, Mandelshtam's poetry possesses a greater affinity with that of Kuzmin, even though it lacks the mannerism and stylizations of this Russian "Alexandrian" poet. During a later period Mandelshtam was involved in the bold experimentalism typical of the Futurists. This modern strain, however, should not be attributed to any direct influence of Futurist poetic philosophy, for even his early poems had their own peculiar diction.

Mandelshtam became master of a great, personal style marked by a rhetorical solemnity and the spontaneity of a child toying with geographical, historical, and cultural topics that ranged from the map of Europe to the Pseudo-Demetrius, from the Acropolis to Venice. And in the course of these forays he may be perceived constantly searching for "a blissful, senseless word" (*blazhennoe bessmyslennoe slovo*)—for instance, to name his Lady Beautiful (Solominka). This search for the "blissful, senseless word" extends to the Decembrist movement in Russia as well: "Rossiia, Leta, Loreleia" all emphasize the patriotism of these noble revolutionaries and the futility of their unsuccessful rebellion in 1825. The often encountered repetition of three words (triads, such as Rossiia, Leta, Loreleia) suggests incantations and attaches some magical quality to Mandelshtam's lyrical poetry. I disagree with the Soviet critic Selivanovsky's remark, quoted by Professor Clarence Brown in his illuminating essay included in this volume, that Mandelshtam's poetry is "not a reflection of life, but a reflection of its reflection in art." Mandelshtam was often, to be sure, inspired by books or edifices, but nevertheless his experience is always genuine, based on a unique lyrical *Erlebnis*. His poetry is neither a reflection of life nor of art, but a transfiguration of both into something completely different, something that exists on another plane of being, as if in a paradise, where play is a norm and imagination has unlimited freedom. This childlike paradisaical