

in Robert A. Maguire's recent anthology of Gogol criticism, and, according to Victor Erlich, the "insights and images" of *Tolstoy and Dostoevsky* "have reverberated well into recent Western criticism." Lesser-known critical works, such as *Vechnye sputniki* (parts of which have been published in English), are interesting for the insights they offer on the greats of world literature. Thus a study of Merezhkovskii as a literary critic can add a vital dimension to our understanding of him and of his place in Russian history and culture.

Ute Spengler's study of Merezhkovskii traces the development of the religious foundation of his work, concluding that his literary criticism was the fulfillment of his religious philosophy. She argues her thesis persuasively, showing that his literary activity was motivated by his search for a unifying philosophy of life, and demonstrating how his concerns with existential questions—the meaning of life, the reason for suffering, and the nature of freedom—evolved into an explicitly religious world view. Her treatment of topics such as Thomas Carlyle's influence on Merezhkovskii (Jesus as the prototype of the hero), Merezhkovskii's verse-drama "Sylvio," and his reception by literary critics adds to our knowledge of the man and his times. Spengler also draws interesting parallels between Merezhkovskii's search for unity and the *Lebensphilosophie* of the German writer Wilhelm Dilthey, who, similarly disillusioned with positivism, rationalism, and bourgeois values, and similarly occupied with the problems of newly self-conscious modern man, sought "transcendence," she claims, in myth rather than in Logos. Her discussion of influences on Merezhkovskii, however, fails to mention the influence of Vissarion Belinskii, on whom Merezhkovskii modeled himself—Merezhkovskii hoped to use literary criticism to change the consciousness of his contemporaries, just as Belinskii did.

Although Merezhkovskii attacked the didactic tradition of Russian literature associated with Belinskii, he was never, as Spengler points out, a believer in art for art's sake. Calling for the development of a literary language capable of expressing great ideas and emphasizing art and beauty as values, he always insisted on the unity of form and content. Unfortunately, Spengler's study includes no analysis of Merezhkovskii's form (the way he used the language, the tone and texture of his prose, alliteration, repetition, sound patterns, plays on words, choice of words, use of quotations), aspects that could cast new light on his perception of the world, his religious sensibility, the message he wished to communicate (and actually did communicate) in his literary criticism, and his influence on Russian Symbolism. To omit these "formal" aspects of his work is to omit a vital dimension of Merezhkovskii as a literary critic.

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BULAT OKUDŽAVA UND DIE KRITISCHE LITERATUR ÜBER DEN KRIEG. By *Karl-Dieter van Ackern*. Arbeiten und Texte zur Slavistik, 11. Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner in Kommission, 1976. 196 pp. DM 20, paper.

The theme of war occupies an important place in contemporary Soviet literature. Most works depicting the Second World War are written in the spirit of *partinost'* and emphasize the dedication of Soviet man to the objectives of the party. In the post-Stalin era, however, there has been an evolution in the treatment of war in literature: the glorification of the Soviet war effort is often replaced by a more realistic portrayal of the fears and anguish of solitary man in the face of mortal danger. A number of writers, including G. Baklanov, V. Bykov, and B. Okudzhava, began to describe the war in unheroic terms and to expose its brutality and its devastating effect on man.

The book under review is a doctoral dissertation accepted at the University of Cologne. The author analyzes the creative activity of Bulat Okudzhava, particularly

the story "Bud' zdorov, shkoliar" (1961), which he contrasts with Boris Polevoi's *Povest' o nastoiashchem cheloveke* (1946). The main character in Polevoi's novel is a positive hero in whom the war brings out the best human qualities. The novel is didactic; it has a positive ending and it conforms to the criteria established for the literature of socialist realism. Okudzhava, on the other hand, concentrates on the depiction of the everyday life of a young inexperienced soldier who is faced with the horrors of war and not afraid to admit that he is scared to death. Okudzhava's story lacks ideological or political motivation; it is, rather, a subjective study of the fate of a teen-ager who is placed in unusual conditions with which he is completely unprepared to cope.

Van Ackern covers a great deal of ground in his study and offers a number of interesting insights. He attempts to investigate the creative evolution of Okudzhava, the writer and poet, with particular reference to the works dealing with war. He also gives attention to the general development of the war theme in contemporary Soviet literature, emphasizing the period ending in the early 1960s. The breadth of the subject matter is, unfortunately, one of the major shortcomings of the book: the reader is given only a partial picture of Bulat Okudzhava, and a fragmentary treatment of the evolution of the war theme.

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NABOKOV: HIS LIFE IN PART. By *Andrew Field*. New York: The Viking Press, 1977. xiv, 285 pp. + 8 pp. photographs. \$15.00.

NABOKOV TRANSLATED: A COMPARISON OF NABOKOV'S RUSSIAN AND ENGLISH PROSE. By *Jane Grayson*. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1977. xii, 257 pp. \$21.00.

On the positive side, Andrew Field's latest book gives us a wealth of fascinating information, much of it new, most of it apparently quite reliable. Where Nabokov himself disagreed with Field's declarations, the latter openly says so but sticks to his guns. What emerges is a vivid and instructive picture of Nabokov's life, personality, opinions, and interests. Perhaps it is unfortunate that the whiff of betrayed confidence about the book seems to intensify its credibility. Field's style, though self-conscious, is generally felicitous: boldface and italics contrive a lively orchestration of comments by Nabokov, his wife, and others.

Field also offers well-researched and worthwhile discussions of Nabokov's family background, his life as an émigré in Berlin, and several parallels between Nabokov and Pushkin. (But is Nabokov's poem *Lilith* really "nothing if not a parallel to Pushkin's *Gavriliada*"?) Especially enlightening, if occasionally erroneous, is Field's presentation of the numerous interconnections between Nabokov's life and art—although this was apparently one of the latter's major objections to the book (which "does not come with the recommendation of Vladimir Nabokov"). But we are treated to many revealing and entertaining probabilities, including Nabokov's 1928 visit to a lung specialist while writing about the heroine in *King, Queen, Knave* ("I have to kill her," I said to him. He looked at me in stony silence").

On the negative side, Field's book seems proudly haunted by the fear that the author is "too much like Vladimir Nabokov to judge him" (although Field grants that the resemblance may exclude "virtues"). We repeatedly learn how well, and how much like Nabokov, Field looked in one of Nabokov's jackets. Field states that both "do not like biographies," Nabokov is "my competitor," and so on.

The book is further tainted by a fascinatingly brazen self-assurance. Field fancies himself as Nabokov's "Boswell," but one may detect, alas, an unwitting hint of Shade's