

baffling coruscation of his style. By a characteristically Gogolian exercise in synecdoche, the Belinsky tradition let one side of his work stand for the whole; later, the symbolists did the same for the other side. The recent vogue for discussing the grotesque in Gogol is a sign of a new attempt to find a single concept that can accommodate his contradictions and hold his ambiguities up for inspection without simplifying them. In one sense at least, Dr. Günther's work is the most thorough effort of this kind to date.

Following the traditions of his form (this is a dissertation, photomechanically reproduced), the author is a long time getting to what is most original in his perception of Gogol's art (in part 3). In part 1 Günther surveys existing theories of the grotesque—accepting, rejecting, modifying. The grotesque, he concludes, is not a generically limited concept; best spoken of in the plural, it falls into two main categories—*Kompositionsgroteske* (subcategories are the comic and fantastic grotesque, representing the dominant elements of unstable compounds that contain as well the "tragic" and "real," respectively) and *Stilgroteske* (characterized by alogism, animation of the inanimate and vice versa, expanding and "realized" metaphors, etc.).

In part 2 Günther considers the grotesque in Gogol's fiction, with an abundance of close analysis and copious citation of disparate scholarly opinion. After a look at the beginnings of the grotesque in *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*, he details in four chapters the workings of the comic grotesque in *Ivan Fedorovich Shponka and His Aunt*, *Old-World Landowners*, the story of the two Ivans, and part of *Nevsky Prospect*. In three more chapters, he analyzes the fantastic grotesque in *The Nose*, *Notes of a Madman*, and *The Overcoat*. A final chapter treats the grotesque style of *Dead Souls* under the heading of "Realistische Groteske."

In part 3 the author abandons the adjustment and application of reasonable but generally familiar distinctions to confront the import of what we have seen Gogol doing. Günther rejects the notion, advanced by Merezhkovsky and Tschizewskij, that Gogol's work is the expression of a "dämonische Weltgefühl" and suggests instead that the playful (*spielerische*) function of the grotesque is related to its satiric function, which in turn is directed (albeit in predominantly moral terms) to the exposure of a widespread feeling of social alienation that existed in the 1830s and 1840s. Particularly refreshing in this connection is the discussion of *poshlost'*, based on a conviction that "Die konkreten Erscheinungsformen der 'poshlost' in der Darstellung Gogol's werden nur dann sinnvoll erschlossen, wenn man die 'poshlost' in ihrer historisch-gesellschaftlichen Vermitteltheit begreift." This attempt to recognize all the oddity of Gogol's writing (so persistently undervalued by Russian "social" critics) and still see him as practically engaged with the Russian society of his time is highly interesting as far as it goes, and makes one miss all the more keenly that analysis of the literary-cultural context which its full development would require.

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ANTON P. ČECHOV: DAS WERK UND SEIN STIL. By *Petr M. Bicilli*.
Translated from the Russian and edited by *Vincent Sieveking*. Forum Slavicum,
vol. 7. Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1966. 252 pp. DM 36.

This work, published in a Bulgarian journal of small circulation in the war year 1942, has been known to most students of Chekhov only as a bibliographical item. After a quarter of a century it has been made available, not as a photomechanical

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.

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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