

ANDREI BELY: HIS LIFE AND WORKS. By *Konstantin Mochulsky*. Translated by *Nora Szalavitz*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1977. 230 pp. Paper.

This is the second of Mochulsky's series of monographs on Russian authors (including Solov'ev, Blok, and Briusov) to be translated into English. The first, *Dostoevsky* (Princeton University Press, 1967), was a major event; that book is often considered the single best book written on the great novelist. *Andrei Bely* is something less. The original book was published in 1955, after Mochulsky's death, by YMCA-Press (Paris) from unfinished manuscripts; thus the author cannot be held fully responsible for many of the faults of the book. The translator of the present book has minimized the organizational problems of the original by moving the several appendixes of the Russian edition to their proper chronological positions in the text and by moving the dislocated pages (pp. 45–46) to their correct place. A few additional notes have been supplied to aid the English reader, as has a brief introduction which includes a biographical sketch of Mochulsky's life. However, an index and set of notes giving the precise locations of Mochulsky's many citations to Belyi's writings would have been very useful as well.

The translation itself is reasonably good. There are some minor inaccuracies but few major errors. It reads smoothly and gives the impression of having been done with care and respect for both the original Mochulsky text and Belyi's quotes. However, the translator is being too respectful when she fails to correct obvious errors of oversight in the original: for example, on page 31, the quotation from "Pervoe svidanie" is identified as being from "Tri svidania" and translated as "Three Meetings"; and the date for Belyi's return to Russia is erroneously given as 1914 on page 161 but correctly as 1916 on page 165.

The major drawback of the book is Mochulsky's method of using Belyi's writings as biographical sources. In Mochulsky's defense, it must be remembered that when he wrote this biography he did not have the full scholarly literature available to him which he had had for his biography of Dostoevsky. It simply did not and still does not exist. Mochulsky's was the *first* scholarly biography of Belyi to be written. Belyi's own memoirs are valuable but nonetheless unreliable and incomplete. Facts *always* need to be checked. It is particularly unfortunate when Mochulsky uses a work like *The Notes of an Eccentric* (1922) as source material (and he does so heavily). Fictionalized, though largely autobiographical, *Notes* is chaotically organized, and in places actually demented; it is certainly unsatisfactory as an objective account. In addition, Belyi, heavily influenced by anthroposophy at the time, reinterprets events of his past in that light. Mochulsky ignores this and in chapter 1, for example, Belyi comes off looking like a mature anthroposophist *in utero*. Also, because Mochulsky uses confusing information from *Notes*, he falls into factual error, such as his placing of many events of 1913 in 1912 instead.

Although using material of this sort without cross-checking is unsound, one can sympathize with Mochulsky for depending on it, considering that Belyi wrote so much about himself and that there are few other sources for much of the information. Since 1955 a fair amount of new material has come to light and the brief but excellent biography by J. D. Elsworth, *Andrey Bely* (Letchworth: Bradda Books, 1972), incorporates these newer sources. Elsworth's book, however, does not offer much discussion of Belyi's writings, while Mochulsky's book does, and this is the major value of the book under review. In fact, Mochulsky's book remains the most complete analytical survey of Belyi's works yet to appear. Therefore, despite its defects, Mochulsky's study continues to fill a gap in the still scanty scholarly literature on Belyi.

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