

Gerigk's analyses are generally competent, sometimes ingenious, and often stimulating. The analyses of Dostoevsky's "The Landlady," Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, and Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter* may be singled out as particularly interesting. Nevertheless, it is difficult to escape the impression that these analyses would have been no worse without Gerigk's modern jargon or his existential-structuralist constructs.

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DOSTOEVSKY: REMINISCENCES. By *Anna Dostoevsky*. Translated and edited by *Beatrice Stillman*. Introduction by *Helen Muchnic*. New York: Liveright, W. W. Norton, 1975. xxxiv, 448 pp. \$12.50.

Anna Dostoevsky's *Reminiscences* provide a remarkable document. The very act of chronicling her fourteen years of marriage to Dostoevsky became her *raison d'être*. On the first page of her manuscript Anna Grigorievna declares that she writes in order to live: "I began to feel a great gap in my life which had to be filled with some interesting kind of work—otherwise, I felt, I would not live much longer." Later, she reveals that she also writes to "unriddle" her husband for herself. Apart from this personal impetus to portray Dostoevsky, she wanted to restore his somewhat tarnished image in the eyes of the public.

Unlike Dostoevsky's own works, these memoirs are filled with objects—that is, the cumbersome and comforting paraphernalia of domesticity. The reader can thus glimpse a new side of Dostoevsky—a father sitting up all night while his son plays with a toy sleigh, or a husband with a questionable sense of April Fool's humor, insisting (oddly recalling Svidrigailov) that there is a mouse in his bed. Out of this confined world of pawned, stolen, and stained overcoats, furnished apartments, trunks of manuscripts, and bundles hastily assembled at the sound of a distant fire alarm, emerges an affecting portrait of Dostoevsky and, increasingly, of his modest wife. Included in the book, of course, are the famous anecdotes about Dostoevsky's courtship of the young stenographer, his visits to the gambling tables, and his reestablishment of relations with Nekrasov. But the real impact of the *Reminiscences* comes from the accumulation of observed detail, from the passing scene which grips the reader unawares.

For those who cannot read Russian but who are interested in considerations of genre and form, this welcome translation of the *Reminiscences* facilitates a comparison with Anna Grigorievna's *Diaries*, written in the first years of her marriage and already available in English. Aside from the obvious differences between the two (in *Reminiscences* Anna Grigorievna avoids mention of Polina Suslova; she softens some gruesome details of their misery abroad, and so forth), other contrasts leap to mind—the different shape of experience immediately recorded and that recollected in comparative tranquillity, the need to unburden oneself of the trials of a particular day, and the all too human need to enlist the past, however gently, in the causes of the present.

While reading Anna Grigorievna's description of Dostoevsky's death and funeral one automatically longs for Dostoevsky's pen to portray these sometimes scandalous, yet moving scenes. Yet the reader soon realizes that Anna Grigorievna has quietly depicted all of them for us. Her account of the often painful comedy enacted around the writer's body (strangers crowding Dostoevsky's study to spend the night by his coffin, a count reading psalms, artists and photographers at work, Anna Grigorievna's hysteria for which she was mistakenly given a bottle of ammonia to drink, a barely averted catastrophe in which the widow and her children are nearly barred from the

cathedral as impostors) reads like an unconscious imitation of a passage from her husband's own writings. This is not to ascribe literary pretensions to Anna Grigorievna; she does not, after all, attempt a critical biography. But once the reader accepts her obvious and self-proclaimed limitations, he can derive much pleasure and knowledge from her reminiscences. Beatrice Stillman has provided a proficient translation, has revised the notes to suit the needs of a non-Russian reading audience, and has included a useful biographical glossary.

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SMERT' VLADIMIRA MAIAKOVSKOGO. By *Roman Jakobson* and *D. Sviatopolk-Mirskii*. Series Practica, 70. The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1975. 48 pp. 16 Dglds., paper.

Mayakovsky's suicide on April 14, 1930 sent a heavy seismic shock wave through the Russian literary world. In the politics-obsessed USSR, where the motive for such an act was at once assumed to be political, an immediate cover-up was undertaken, designed to prove that *this* suicide had nothing political about it. Among Russian émigrés, who had always tended to confuse Mayakovsky's politics with his poetry, the common reaction was equally political, though with the value signs reversed: "Serves him right for siding with the Bolsheviks! Anyway, he was a Communist versifier, not a poet." Nowhere through the political din, it seemed, could be heard the genuinely nonpolitical, literary, human response: one of Russia's great poets was now silenced forever, and the world was the poorer for it.

As it turned out, this, the only valid response of Russian literature to the tragedy, was articulated not in the prestigious *tolstye zhurnaly* of either Moscow or Paris, but in two places only: the magnificent cycle "Maiakovskomu" by Marina Tsvetaeva, published in Prague in *Volia Rossii*, and in a little brochure published in Berlin in the last pre-Hitler year. Without introduction or explanation, the latter contained an unpublished variant from 150,000,000 and only two essays: "On a Generation That Squandered Its Poets" by Roman Jakobson, and "Two Deaths: 1837-1930" by D. S. Mirsky. Of Mirsky's piece the less said the better. Now terribly dated, it seems a pathetic effort on the part of that brilliant mind to manipulate the categories of what passed in those days for Marxist criticism—in this case, to define the "class contradictions" that rent the souls and ultimately caused the deaths of both Pushkin and Mayakovsky. Circuitous and wordy, it elaborately gets nowhere. Read retrospectively, Mirsky's piece seems as suicidal as Mayakovsky's bullet: an intellectual castration performed on himself by a man who afterward voluntarily put himself in the hands of Stalin's hangmen. Jakobson's essay, on the other hand, has become a classic. At once personal and clear-eyed, grief-stricken and profound, it expressed fundamental truths about Mayakovsky as man and poet and about the tragic fate of his generation of poets—one of the most extraordinary bursts of talent any country has produced—in an age of turmoil and revolution. It has been the infinitely fertile seed from which countless articles, dissertations, and books have sprung. It is a major milestone of Russian criticism, and it certainly needs no further praise or comment from me.

It is, however, a pleasure to take note of this reprint, forty-four years later, of the original Russian brochure. Those who knew the Jakobson piece only through the famous (abridged) German translation (in *Slavische Rundschau*) or, more recently, in Edward J. Brown's skillful English version (in *Major Soviet Writers: Essays in Criticism* [New York, 1973]) can now experience the immediacy and vigor of the Russian original, which no translation can fully recapture.