

seldom probes beyond the oft-noted importance of silences and the musicality of structure. Too often his analysis lapses into plot description.

The bibliography typifies the many confusions the book exhibits. The only reference to Chekhov's works is to the twenty-volume Soviet edition, hardly the most useful source for a beginner in the study of Russia and Chekhov. Yet the section on works about Chekhov includes items in English and French only. In short, it is difficult to determine what kind of audience would find this book useful, if such an audience exists.

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THE ART OF ISAAC BABEL. By *Patricia Carden*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1972. xii, 223 pp. \$8.50.

Patricia Carden's study of Isaac Babel combines elements of careful, even creative, scholarship, many thoughtful, and sometimes arresting, readings of the stories, and a mass of interpretative material that is, at best, provocative, and, at worst, obstructive to an understanding of the very art the author has set out to examine. In the vacuum of criticism and scholarship that obtains regarding Babel, this book is a welcome pioneering effort.

Carden's first, biographical, chapter offers valuable data, much of which appears here for the first time in print. Although sources are not adequately provided, it is clear to this reviewer that the data are based on painstaking research, and, more, on personal interviews with many of Babel's surviving friends and relatives. (Carden's work has now been supplemented by the recent essay, "Babel' v 1932–1939 godakh," by his widow A. N. Pirozhkova, in *I. Babel': Vospominaniia sovremennikov*, Moscow, 1972.) The difficult distinction between Babel's biography and his fiction is drawn with exemplary prudence. Prudent too is Carden's sparing use of Paustovsky's vivid but questionable reminiscences and long verbatim reports of Babel's conversations, recalled some forty years after the fact. Perhaps only once does Carden err on the side of caution, when she writes that Babel's employment by the Cheka "has never been established." No doubt the sensibilities of some of his relatives and admirers have been offended by his brief involvement with the Cheka, although he held only a clerical job there. Babel's assertion to that effect appears in his autobiographical sketch, published in 1926. It is plain that a claim to have worked for the Cheka—and in its "heroic" period—would not have been left unchallenged by the Soviet authorities had it not been a demonstrable fact.

Carden's evaluations of Babel's qualities as a prose stylist are most often to the point. She notes his impulse to reduce and intensify, and his deliberate withdrawal of self and feeling from the presentation of brutality. In a fine passage, worthy of greater elaboration, she perceives much of Babel's work as an artful attack on the reader. Her more straightforward readings of the stories are moving by virtue of her ability—all too rare among critics—to celebrate a work of art. Her final chapter, "The Short Story as Contemplation," may stand as one of the most perceptive of critical essays on Babel. Her study falters, however, when she attempts to pry forth full-blown ideas and didactic intentions, of a virtually Tolstoyan cast, from the coolest surface in the history of modern Russian prose. She attempts to illustrate, for example, that "optimism" is the chief feature of Babel's

work, that he labored to render victims "heroic," and sought to elevate men to "sainthood."

Of course, any critic, and indeed any reader, is entitled to a personal response to an imaginative work—and especially to one whose ferocity, in substance if not in style, is bound to provoke a wide range of individual reactions. In this sense, Carden's view of Babel is valid enough, though scarcely persuasive to this reviewer, who is struck rather by Babel's inexorable fascination with violence *qua* violence. Carden's perception is also far removed from Lionel Trilling's brilliant observation that Babel's "apparent denial of immediate pathos is a condition of the ultimate pathos the writer conceives."

Carden's attempt to ascribe explicit motives for Babel's choice of heroes and victims, and their juxtaposition, may be the inevitable function of the kind of *examination de texte* that continues, alas, to make impossible demands on some doctoral candidates in literature. Beyond this, one suspects a simple misunderstanding of the creative process. In a letter cited by Carden, Babel wrote (about the story *Pan Apolek*): "I am still correcting the manuscript. Besides the wild Cossacks, common mortals have appeared. I am glad." As any imaginative writer knows, all sorts of characters appear and disappear, in that mysterious flux of creative experience that escapes beneath the artist's hand. Zamiatin has described the process: "As soon as they come alive to me, they will begin to act unerringly on their own. . . . I may try to re-educate them, I may try to build their lives according to plan, but if they are alive, they will inevitably overturn all the plans I may devise for them." Babel's art springs, not from some preconceived design (moral or other), but from the play between the sovereign rigor of his style and the irrepressible forces of violence that moved his universe.

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PARADOX IN THE RELIGIOUS POETRY OF ZINAIDA GIPPIUS. By
Olga Matich. Centrifuga, Russian Reprintings and Printings, no. 7. Munich:
Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1972. 127 pp. Paper.

This study is a revised doctoral dissertation presented by Mrs. Matich to the University of California at Los Angeles. It abounds in interesting and valid observations about the "very intense religiosity" (p. 7) of Hippius's poetry. The study is also an attempt "to disprove the poet's already legendary decadent reputation" (p. 7). The formal aspects of Hippius's poems are not discussed, but the description and evaluation of the major religious themes and the peculiar dialectic patterns, characteristic of Zinaida Hippius's poetry, are well done. Unfortunately, the first thirty-six pages of this short study are devoted to various anecdotes about the poet, circulated by her detractors. Mrs. Matich would have achieved a more balanced view of Hippius's complex personality and poetic universe if she had incorporated some of the statements by Hippius's contemporaries who knew her intimately, for example, Georgii Adamovich, Victor Mamchenko, Iurii Terapiano, Count Józef Czapski, and the Swedish artist Greta Gerell, to mention only a few. Furthermore, a critical attitude toward many often ludicrous statements, based on "hearsay" and passed from generation to generation without careful examination, would also have made Mrs. Matich's "Introduction to Zinaida Gippius" more credible and perhaps more valuable to the researcher.