

they enhance or denigrate a reader's belief in a character. Employing black and white moralistic criteria seems too simplistic for explaining Dostoevsky's complex portrayal of human nature.

The unfinished piece by the late V. V. Vinogradov assigns several anonymous feuilletons to Dostoevsky. B. L. Bessonov's criticism about attribution of an unsigned letter to Shchedrin reveals how cautious one must be in ascribing authorship. I. P. Smirnov, in an article which represents one of the more successful expressions of present-day structuralist theory, applies Tomashevsky's concept of *motivirovka* to lyric verse. Although he offers insights into the early poetry of Akhmatova, Pasternak, and Mayakovsky, he overemphasizes theory and jargon. K. M. Butyrin makes an historical survey of studies about the symbol, chiefly in the works of Potebnia, A. N. Veselovsky, and Vinogradov; however, he by-passes the Symbolists.

The quality of the contributions varies greatly; those by Tunimanov and Smirnov are the most informative.

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ANTON CHEKHOV. By *Siegfried Melchinger*. Translated by *Edith Tarcov*. World Dramatists Series. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1972. v, 184 pp. \$6.50.

Professor Melchinger apparently intends his study as an introduction to Chekhov's dramatic work: one-third of the book deals with biography and background on the period, the remainder is devoted to brief essays on individual plays, including a section on stage productions in Europe and America. It contains many statements about Chekhov, his work, and his times which are either highly debatable or misleading. Thus, in speaking of the growth of cities in the 1870s the author notes that "there were only four cities in Russia [*sic*] that had more than 100,000 inhabitants: Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Warsaw, and Odessa" (p. 16). In a paragraph devoted to revolutionary activity of the sixties and seventies he refers to the tsar's amusement (presumably Nicholas I in 1836!) over Gogol's *Government Inspector*.

A similar problem results from the absence of documentation in the book. Melchinger notes an incident in which, astonished by the complaints of a group of literati and journalists over the difficulty of finding material to write about, Chekhov exclaimed, "What, no material? Here is an ashtray—tomorrow you'll have a story about it!" (p. 18). Melchinger offers no details about the source of this remark. The only such incident with which I am familiar comes from Korolenko's reminiscences, which refer to the presence only of Chekhov's mother, brother, and sister.

Melchinger frequently states as facts opinions of highly debatable character. He seems to assume that Lydia Avilova accurately described Chekhov's love for her, though several recent biographers have raised serious doubts about the accuracy of her account. Speaking of the early nineties he says, "These were happy days" (p. 44). Compare Chekhov's remark to Suvorin in 1892: "I have aged not merely in body but in spirit. I have become somehow stupidly indifferent to everything in the world. . . ."

Melchinger's remarks on the plays, particularly *The Seagull*, are occasionally illuminating. However, his general discussion of Chekhov's concept of drama

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