

have altered our perceptions a great deal. The book reads like a set of old lecture notes. The evaluation of Dostoevsky has been superseded by Mochulsky's fine book and many others. Masaryk was one of the earliest non-Russian intellectuals who recognized Dostoevsky's greatness, and for this reason alone his insights have some value as historical curiosities. But today his late nineteenth-century Protestant liberal views of Dostoevsky's ideas on suicide and religion seem irrelevant. This book paves over some old roads rather well, but it does not open any new avenues.

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ALEXANDER PUSHKIN. By *Walter N. Vickery*. Twayne's World Authors Series, 82. New York: Twayne, 1970. 211 pp.

With their dust-colored dust jackets and look-alike Baedeker bindings the books in Twayne's World Authors Series have a way of looking remaindered before they reach the bookstore. It is, consequently, a pleasure to report that the inside of Walter Vickery's contribution belies its outside.

Any short study of Pushkin intended as both an introduction to and a fresh reappraisal of its subject runs into the prickly business of establishing priorities. And it is here that the reviewer must register his only serious complaint. At the request (one conjectures) of the publishers Vickery has devoted a great deal of space (perhaps a quarter of the entire book) to plot summaries and verse translations. This is a pity. For if the uses of the précis are real, they are also very limited; and fifteen whole pages devoted to a detailed recapitulation of *Eugene Onegin* is patently excessive. As for the long tracts of accurately translated but prosy sounding poetry which do not give us a flavor of the original, will not stimulate anyone to learn Russian, and are not indispensable to Vickery's critical discussions—one can only ask *why*?

The cutbacks which these unnecessary inclusions require are real. Vickery's treatment of Pushkin's life (a subject on which he is an acknowledged authority) is perforce skimpy: the poet's amours, his many friendships, and his activities as a critic and editor are virtually omitted. These same restrictions are, presumably, the cause of the very meager treatment (seven pages in all) of Pushkin's important prose *oeuvre*.

This is all the more regrettable because when Vickery is not performing chores that are beneath him, he is practicing his *métier* very ably. Possessing a sound knowledge not only of Pushkin but of his contemporaries and relevant predecessors in both Russia and the West, and having at his command the critical literature on Pushkin in five languages, Vickery knows, as the saying goes, chalk from cheese. Moreover his general approach, if not notably original, is eminently sensible. Tackling Pushkin's life and works in roughly chronological order (the early St. Petersburg years, the southern exile, Mikhailovskoe, etc.), he avoids the three main temptations inherent in his situation: trying to ape (or outdo) the Formalists, sparring futilely with Soviet "falsifiers," or lapsing into that special kind of impressionistic criticism ("the icy, bell-like tones," "the dull metallic sheen," etc.) which the elusive beauty of Pushkin's verse too often elicits. Instead, having wisely decided to concentrate his energies on the verse most likely to yield optimal results—the narrative poems and the plays—Vickery poses the most fundamental of all

critical questions: What is the work in question *about*? And although one will, inevitably, disagree with particular judgments (is it really Pushkin's poetic personality that holds *Eugene Onegin* together?), the readings are independent, well reasoned, and often—as in the case of *Boris Godunov*, *Poltava*, and the “little tragedies”—stimulating. It is only when he tackles the all but impossible job of discussing Pushkin's lyrical verse with nothing but English texts at hand that—pardonably perhaps—he fails.

It is to be hoped that Vickery's success with Pushkin will prompt the people at Twayne to invite him to tackle another major Russian poet (Derzhavin? Lermontov? Blok?). But if they do, someone should tell them the good news that came out of New Haven some twenty-five years ago concerning the heresy—and the bootlessness—of paraphrase.

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THE CRITICAL PROSE OF ALEXANDER PUSHKIN, WITH CRITICAL ESSAYS BY FOUR RUSSIAN ROMANTIC POETS. Edited and translated by *Carl R. Proffer*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1970. xii, 308 pp. \$8.95.

Major criticism sheds light on the work criticized; minor criticism, on the critic himself. If there is any truth in this aphorism (it was the reviewer's; it now belongs to the ages), then Pushkin was a minor critic. It is true of course that his precepts for good prose have found favor with many critics, including Soviet scholars who view his demand for “precision and neatness” in prose as an early signpost pointing in the “Gogolian direction” (as Chernyshevsky was later to call it). But Pushkin's—in many ways *conservative*—ideal of “naked simplicity” found in point of fact few followers in Russia, certainly not among the nascent “Gogolian” school of writers, whose slow, detailed, and ample prose is in many respects the opposite of the terse and rapid Voltairean style which Pushkin praised and practiced. It is true, too, that Pushkin was quick to appreciate the genius of Baratynsky, Griboedov, and Gogol; but what he actually *said* about these writers seldom probed very deep (in this respect Belinsky was undoubtedly his superior). Finally, a critic who preferred Shevryev's poetry to Tjutchev's, Mérimée's fiction to Balzac's, and Sainte-Beuve as a *poet* to Lamartine can scarcely be considered an exceptional detector of literary talent.

Does this mean that Professor Proffer's handsomely produced anthology of articles, letters, and obiter dicta is without interest? By no means. For it is precisely because they illuminate the *critic*, who happens to have been the greatest imaginative writer of his age, that these writings are important. No one seriously interested in Pushkin's theater can, for instance, afford to ignore his reflections on Shakespearean versus Moliéresque drama, just as no student of his prose can overlook his theories on that subject. Moreover, his reflections on such varied subjects as Radishchev, Byron, and contemporary French literature (he had serious doubts about all three) shed important light on his own attitudes and prejudices.

An important reservation about the value of this volume has nonetheless been implied. Judiciously selected, eruditely annotated, and crisply (though not quite flawlessly) translated, the contents should indeed interest serious Pushkinists. But serious Pushkinists know Russian. And in that case one may fairly wonder—