

of Epifanii Premudryi (p. 50). Most of the time, however, it is the other way around: the reader will get an impression of unnecessary verbiage. The author uses many words and much jargon but tells us little that is new. His enthusiasm for Kochanowski brims with evaluative terms like "absolute peak," "the greatest," "true masterpiece," "most prominent," "most outstanding," and "unsurpassed" (pp. 58–60). Yet for all these superlatives, Birnbaum offers us no fresh perception of Kochanowski's art; the whole passage could have come from some second-rate literary encyclopedia.

The reader will be disappointed if he expects to find major theses and original conclusions in this book. When dealing with a topic which has provoked scholarly disagreement, Birnbaum hovers gingerly over both "thesis" and "anti-thesis," finally coming down as gently as possible on one side or the other. Rarely does he offer a clear, independent "synthesis"; rarely does he give us new insights or thought-provoking ideas.

There is no denying Birnbaum's erudition. Footnotes sometimes take up over half the page. We only wish he could present his material in a clearer, more stimulating fashion.

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JAN KOCHANOWSKI. By *David Welsh*. Twayne's World Author Series, no. 330. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974. 160 pp. \$7.50.

Jan Kochanowski (1530–84) was Poland's greatest Renaissance poet. He was also a reformer of verse in his own time and a seminal influence on Polish poetry down to the present. This book is the first English-language account of Kochanowski's poetry and his contribution to Polish literature. As such, it is certainly welcome, because Renaissance Poland is simply too interesting and worthy of study to remain so poorly known in this country. Anything that contributes to an expansion of knowledge about the Polish Renaissance performs a real service. What makes the appearance of Professor Welsh's book on Kochanowski additionally noteworthy is that it comes at a time when the culture of both the Polish Renaissance and the Polish Baroque are attracting more attention—especially among younger scholars in the Polish field—and translations are making some of the more significant literature available in English. The time is not far off when it will be possible to teach courses in Old Polish culture to students who do not yet read Polish and, perhaps more important, it will be possible to introduce more Polish material in courses on general European history and civilization.

Professor Welsh's brief study draws on all the major literature about Kochanowski and offers in turn an unpretentious, almost deceptively simple, and always very readable survey of Kochanowski's achievements as a poet. All the major—and, indeed, some minor—works are described and critically assessed in an admirably concise manner that never ignores relevant or interesting details, yet at the same time successfully avoids the kind of minutiae that would only encumber the easy narrative pace of the book.

Despite this conciseness and the book's modest size, Professor Welsh has been able to work in a considerable amount of literary history. Kochanowski is consistently viewed within the framework of contemporary Polish culture, enabling the reader to gain some insight into the overall scope of sixteenth-century Polish

literary development. The experience is even more intellectually rewarding because of the frequent parallels drawn with other literatures—above all with English literature—and because of Welsh's thumbnail histories of the genres which Kochanowski cultivated, genres that go back to classical antiquity and, in a few cases, beyond.

The Twayne World Author monographs are intended to be short introductory surveys of the lives and works of major authors of world literature. They are aimed at the general reader who presumably knows little (if anything) about the subject. In the Slavic field, few of the Twayne books succeed as the popularizations they are meant to be. For its conciseness, readability, and yet sound scholarship a book like David Welsh's *Jan Kochanowski* can justifiably be held up as a model of what the Twayne volumes should be like.

It is regrettable, however, that the rigidity of the Twayne format did not permit Professor Welsh to include more complete translations of Kochanowski's poetry. Because Professor Welsh is a good translator who works quickly, he could easily have added (and probably was tempted to add) another 25 to 50 pages of translations to the 129 pages of actual text. The only collection of Kochanowski's poems in English (by George R. Noyes et al.), was published in 1928, has long been out of print, and is often difficult to find. In one sense, the Twayne *Kochanowski* was a lost opportunity to rectify the problem of available translations.

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THE ORAL EPIC OF SIBERIA AND CENTRAL ASIA. By G. M. H. Shoolbraid. Uralic and Altaic Series, vol. 111. Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, 1975. xii, 176 pp. \$12.00.

In his preface, the author describes this small work as "a survey and a bibliography." These two parts comprise about 70 and 30 percent of the volume, respectively. The first three chapters touch lightly and generally on epics and their historical underpinnings, the Buryat-Mongol epics, and Turkic epics. Considerably more space is devoted to analyzing a few Buryat *uligers* (epics) than to all the epics of the Turkic nationalities of the Soviet East.

Stories for a selection of epics found in Soviet Asia occupy the remainder of the text. Short synopses of the main action are provided for nine out of the ten oral epics represented in the book. For the tenth, "Kor-oghli," a verbatim reproduction of one chapter is presented. The Buryat and Yakut offerings will prove strikingly alien, but interesting, to persons familiar primarily with the Muslim Turkic epic traditions. Most, if not all, of these brief retellings derive not directly from the originals or translations of them but from summaries published previously in English, German, or Russian. For nonspecialists, it is useful to find the material all in English in one source book. This is particularly true, when such a rich, extensive bibliography is supplied along with the sketches of the epic plots. Although the book's title specifies Siberia and Central Asia for regional identification of these epics, an Ossetian work, "The Narts," from the Caucasus, is included without comment. The author might also have explained why he avoided treating the important south Siberian epic poems of, for example, the Turkic Altay (Oyrot) or Khakass people. This omission is puzzling, because texts in the original Altay and some translations from Khakass into German and English are readily accessible in North American research libraries.