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## Review: Mikhail Vaiskopf, Siuzhet Gogolia: Morfologiia, Ideologiia, Konteks

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the literary communication situation as such; it marks a site where the author tends to emerge and address a very specific addressee or set of addressees with authorial words" (5). Using Roman Jakobson's six-part model of communication, Finke looks particularly at addresser, addressee, and code as a framework for discussing metapoesis. Finke then turns, in the first chapter, to Nikolai Gogol's *Leaving the Theater after the Presentation of a New Comedy*, which doubles the Jakobsonian communication model: Gogol' has presented his readers with a play about an author who has presented his audience with a play. In chapter 2, on Pushkin's *Little House in Kolomna*, Finke demonstrates that this jocular, erotic poem is also an Aesopian polemic with Pavel Katenin's proposed Russian version of the *ottava rima*. Finke's perceptive reading of the fourteen stanzas that were omitted from the published version of the poem clinches his case. In his discussion of Fedor Dostoevskii's *The Idiot*, Finke argues that Prince Myshkin, who in Switzerland brought solace to the seduced and abandoned Marie, causes disaster when he tries to "author" a similar narrative in Petersburg. Western European narrative cannot be transplanted into Russian soil. For Finke, *Anna Karenina*'s Levin arrives at the meaning of existence only when he stops viewing life as a chronological narrative occurring at a particular time and interprets events outside of time, as parables. In chapter 5 Finke examines Anton Chekhov's "The Steppe," in which an apparently chronological chain of events is belied by scenes not belonging to the time line. Digressions, lyricism, and elipsis disrupt and undermine the smooth surface narrative, reflecting the story's message of "contempt for conventions of hierarchy" (146).

The interpretations offered in *Metapoesis* are of interest in themselves and in connection with the question of self-reflexivity in literature. This book is not, however, a work of critical theory. The discussion of Jakobson's communication model and the scant conclusion (four pages long), entitled "Metapoesis and Tradition," are apparently intended as theoretical supports for Finke's interpretations, but Finke is not concerned with large theoretical questions. We are asked to accept that a direct address to the reader automatically confers metapoetic status upon a passage without much consideration of the ramifications of this assertion. Nor does he make connections between the works. Although temporality is central to his treatment of *The Idiot*, *Anna Karenina*, and "The Steppe," one misses an overarching statement that would highlight the importance of his argument and link these three texts.

Finke's real talent is in close reading, and throughout his book he pieces together references and associations that reveal hidden meaning in the texts. Each chapter can be read profitably on its own. The discussion of *Little House in Kolomna* is full of rewarding insights and is essential reading for an understanding of that work. The chapters on *The Idiot* and *Anna Karenina* contain many astute and provocative observations, leading to plausible though not necessarily compelling interpretations. The chapters on Gogol' and Chekhov are more problematic. Why is a cyclical, seasonal version of time considered synonymous with timelessness? (139) Sometimes it is unclear what larger argument the many interesting details are meant to advance, and I often wished for a clear statement of the overall point. In a number of instances, too, the argument depends on tenuous connections that I found difficult to reconstruct after the fact.

Finke's strength is in mining details for meaning. On that level this book provides many enlightening moments.

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*Suzhet Gogolia: Morfologiia, Ideologiia, Kontekst.* By Mikhail Vaiskopf. Moscow: Radiks, 1993. 588 pp. Index. Hard bound.

Mikhail Vaiskopf probably knows as much about the works of Nikolai Gogol' as anyone alive today. His book *Suzhet Gogolia* is the product of years of intensive, even obsessive,

reading of Gogol's texts. Whatever one may think of its problematic methodology, this study will be an indispensable point of reference for all Gogol' scholars.

The guiding spirit of the book is Andrei Belyi, whose classic study *Masterstvo Gogolia* (1934) provides Vaiskopf with his most important methodological principle: "Imenno Belyi naibolee vnushitel'no prodemonstriroval skvoznoe vnutrennee edinstvo gogolevskogo tvorchestva, sopolstaviv rannie i pozdnie proizvedeniia Gogolia v ramkah edinoi siuzhetnoi struktury, poniatoi kak glubinnaia organizatsiia simboli-cheskikh detalei" (6). The title of Vaiskopf's book, with its implication that Gogol' has only one "siuzhet," reflects his acceptance of Belyi's approach. (One of the merits of *Siuzhet Gogolia* is the way it builds on and illuminates some of Belyi's more cryptic assertions). In part 1, Vaiskopf defines the "siuzhetno-morfologicheskaiia struktura" of Gogol's early texts, especially *Vechera na khutore bliz Dikan'ki*; in parts 2 and 3 he demonstrates the subsequent deformations of that structure, conditioned by Gogol's immanent artistic development as well as by the cultural situation of Gogol's time. Thus the accent is on understanding Gogol's corpus as a whole, rather than on treating individual works as self-contained entities. Vaiskopf's method is intertextual; he traces myriad parallels, influences, and typological similarities between Gogol's works and works of western and Russian literature as well as gnostic and masonic texts. The synchronic tendency of his approach can be illustrated by a typical section (245), which in the space of less than a page refers to eight different works published by Gogol' over an eleven-year period, from 1831 to 1842.

*Siuzhet Gogolia* is not easy to read. Vaiskopf provides little assistance to the reader in understanding where his arguments have been and where they are going. Even the chapter and subsection titles are unhelpful, since they are usually based on phrases that are incomprehensible until the chapter or section has been carefully read. Some examples from part I: "Kainov rod," "Pamiat' o nebe," "Grekhovnaia trapeza." Even when the titles are clear, the transition from one to the other is not. The problem is compounded by an inadequate index, which gives only proper names. A book like this, which is organized not around individual works but around recurrent structures and motifs, badly needs a thematic index. One should not have to leaf through the entire book to trace Vaiskopf's profound treatment of such themes as the hypostases of Sophia, or his brilliant analyses of the Gogolian devil in the context of folk, gnostic, and masonic traditions.

Vaiskopf's dogged tracing of intertextual connections can be of great value, particularly when it recreates the literary situation of Gogol's time, invoking the second- and third-rate works that shaped Gogol's literary sensibility as powerfully as the masterpieces that are recalled more easily and frequently in the scholarly literature. But one often wishes for more interpretive discrimination on Vaiskopf's part, more guidance concerning which parallels are truly significant and which are not. One gets a disturbing picture of a Gogol' who fanatically read everything he could get his hands on and then created his works out of bits gathered here and there, from a red nose on a character in I. I. Lazhechnikov's "Poslednii novik" to a Manilov-like hero in M. N. Zagokin's vaudeville "G——n Bogatonov, ili Provintsial v stolitse." To put it crudely, if Gogol' had really read as much as Vaiskopf has, he could never have written what he wrote.

For the reader willing to wade through the thickets of Vaiskopf's dense prose, there are many rewards. His discussions of such overstudied works as "Nos" and "Shinel'," amazingly, bring new insights to bear and suggest new avenues of investigation. The treatment of *Mertvye dushi* is rather skimpy compared with the treatment given some earlier works, but Vaiskopf's line-by-line exegesis of the end of the novel is a satisfying tour de force that brings together many of the disparate strands traced earlier. Vaiskopf's analyses of the relation of the bird-troika to Plato's chariot of the soul and of the ambivalence of the troika symbol (which combines aspects of divine inspiration and demonic illusion) must be taken into account in all future readings of the novel.

In his preface Vaiskopf expresses the hope that the material he has collected will serve as an impetus for further study by scholars who recognize "nasushchnuiu neobkhodimost' obstoiatel'noi revizii vsego, chto my znaem o kontekste Gogolia" (9). No

one studying Gogol' can afford to ignore the challenge posed by Vaiskopf's difficult, sometimes maddening, but deeply serious book.

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**Socialist Realism without Shores.** Ed. Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko. Special issue of *The South Atlantic Quarterly*. Durham: Duke University Press. Summer 1995 (vol. 94, no. 3): 657–979. \$17.00, paper.

Four years after their first special issue of the *South Atlantic Quarterly* on socialist realism (Winter 1991), Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko have put together a second. Its title echoes Roger Garaudy's famous book from thirty years ago, *D'un réalisme sans rivages*, and Lahusen, in his introductory essay, brings together Garaudy's revisionist approach with some of the late Soviet theoreticians of socialist realism, in particular Dmitrii Markov and Iurii Andreev, and with several western participants in the debate, notably Jochen-Ulrich Peters and Hans Günther. (The other hovering intellectual presence is Boris Groys, whose *Total Art of Stalinism*—an exciting if overstated interpretation of Stalinist culture—several authors argue with). Lahusen offers the paradox of simultaneous “openness” and “closure” as central to late Stalinist culture and as the link that connects the essays in this volume.

The essays themselves mainly focus on Russia, but there is an attempt to extend their scope. Geographically, they stretch to include Chinese socialist realism (by Xudong Zhang), east German fiction (by Julia Hell), and Lily Phillips's suggestive discussion of W. E. B. Du Bois's late fictional trilogy, *The Black Flame*. Aesthetically, they range from Soviet art and architecture, music, and craft to the archetypal socreal genre, the long novel.

A collection like this offers two kinds of benefits. The first is to fill in areas of ignorance. In my case, I learned a lot: from Greg Castillo's thoughtful essay on Soviet architecture and multinationalism, which mixes history, politics, and art to examine the odd blend of local folk art and Stalinist neoclassicism that characterized “fair-ground architecture,” from Antoine Baudin's essay on “Zhdanov Art” and its impact—and more interesting lack of impact—on the visual arts in the east bloc countries between 1947 and 1953, and from Yuri Slezkine's quasi-literary, quasi-sociological tracking of the permutations of the “noble savage” myth in Soviet fiction set in the far north.

The second is to challenge one's conventional patterns of thought about a familiar subject. Svetlana Boym's essay on “culturalization” (*kulturnost'*, as opposed to culture itself) in the form of mass song and Palekh lacquer boxes provocatively juxtaposes the “fairy tale” quality of each: the lacquer box, it turns out (to my surprise), was basically a postrevolutionary invention and became a target of the twin criticisms of “naturalism” and “stylization” in late Stalinist culture. When she describes socialist realism as promoting “the manipulation of consciousness, using the techniques that automatically secure specific emotional responses” (826), she attributes to Stalinist art qualities that more properly belong to melodrama in general, but she is right to emphasize the importance of emotion in popular response: “Stalinist magical commonplaces only became commonplaces,” as she writes, “when they were enacted in popular spectacular rituals.”

I would also single out Evgeny Dobrenko's “Disaster of Middlebrow Taste.” He wants to demonstrate that the culture of socialist realism was parthenogenically spawned by a “single creator,” the “power-masses”—by which he means a mix of mass taste and demand and state power interests. For evidence Dobrenko turns to the comments of the new “reader/viewer” of Soviet texts to see what they actually liked and disliked in the works on offer. The results are not surprising. A book should “instruct”; should “be accessible”; should be “realistic, yet optimistic and heroic”; should show “the guiding role of the collective and the Party”; should “not be obscene,” etc. It is extremely useful to have this side of the story so clearly spelled out;