

Chapter 10 moves from a theoretical discussion of the genre theories of Bakhtin and Lotman to a study of ‘generic interaction’ in *Brideshead Revisited* which (in an echo of earlier chapters) stresses the importance of the hagiographic element in the final ‘transfiguration’ of Sebastian Flyte.

*The Poetry of Prose* conforms to the generally high production standards of this series, although it would have benefitted from more rigorous scrutiny by a native speaker of English. It is a useful addition to the literature on Dostoevsky in particular, yet for all the excellence of many of its parts, it remains for this reviewer at least something less than a completely satisfying whole.

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J. Douglas Clayton (ed.), *Anton Pavlovich Chekhov. Poetics – Hermeneutics – Thematics* (Ottawa: Slavic Research Group at the University of Ottawa, 2006), vii + 319 pp.

The eighteen essays assembled here derive for the most part from papers presented at an international workshop marking the centenary of Chekhov’s death held at the University of Ottawa in December, 2004. According to the table of contents, the first eleven (representing in number of pages a little less than two thirds of the volume) constitute a section devoted to the writer’s prose, the remainder are grouped together under the general title ‘Chekhov’s Drama’, although in practice this division is ignored and many of the contributions cross the generic boundary. The overarching aim as defined by the editor is to reflect the current state of Chekhov studies by focussing on ‘revolutionary innovations in poetics’ (i) as the key to the writer’s achievement in both literature and the theatre.

Clayton in his introduction, and many of the contributors in their articles, acknowledge their debt Aleksandr Chudakov and the ‘structural-phenomenological approach’ (iii) of his ground-breaking study *Poetika Chekhova* (1971). The other major theoretical influence here is of course Mikhail Bakhtin, the inspiration for a number of studies of various aspects of language and (non-) communication in the Chekhov text. Of the prose works, most attention is paid to ‘Ward Number 6’, ‘Tonych’, ‘The Man in the Case’ and ‘The Lady with the Little Dog’, although there are also detailed analyses of ‘The Bishop’, ‘A Nervous Breakdown’ and, less

predictably 'Small Fry' ('Meliuzga'), examined as 'a nice little Easter story' by Robert Louis Jackson. Of Chekhov's drama, each of the major plays is discussed in successive chapters, while Vladimir Kataev's piece on 'the poetics of deceived expectation' offers a synoptic view of Chekhov's writing for the stage. The two final essays, Volha Isakava's account of Boris Akunin's sequel to *The Seagull* and Elena Siemen's report on recent adaptations of the same play staged by a Moscow 'experimental' theatre, conclude the volume on something of a tangent.

As the subtitle indicates, this is essentially a collection of close readings and interpretive analyses, from which one should expect individual insights rather than a sustained unifying argument. Readers and specialists will find much here that offers new perspectives on familiar aspects of Chekhov's art: the 'open endings' of his stories and plays (discussed by Valery Tiupa and Vladimir Kataev respectively), 'non-verbal' communication by means of nonsense-words and snatches of song (the essays by Vladimir Zviniatovsky and J. Douglas Clayton), 'rhythm' and 'action' and 'defamiliarization' in the plays (Yana Meerzon), the psychiatric subtext of 'A Nervous Breakdown' (Cathy Popkin), the religious subtext of 'Small Fry' (Robert Jackson), the philosophical and mythological subtext of 'Ward Number 6' (Anatoly Sobennikov). Nicholas Žekulin, in one of the shortest pieces, writes convincingly on intertextual links between *The Cherry Orchard* and *Fathers and Sons*; Yuri Domansky, in one of the longest, is less successful in tracing echoes of *Les Fleurs du Mal* and other 'decadent' texts in 'Ionych'. Some contributions are much narrower in focus: Irina Gladilina's 'lexicographical' analysis of *grey* in Chekhov, Wasilij Szczukin's numerological approach to *The Three Sisters*, Natalia Vesselova's essay 'The (*sic*) Flora and Fauna in The Cherry Orchard', Julie de Sherbinin's explication of 'above' and 'below' and 'the interior space of individual selfhood' (190) in 'The Lady with the Little Dog', Herda Smit's investigation of 'ephrastic devices'(176) in 'The Man in the Case'. Indeed, so few features of the Chekhov text are overlooked in the hermeneutical quest that some of the contributors are in danger of forgetting Chudakov's stricture to the effect that many of Chekhov's details are random and incidental 'and have no bearing on the text' (cited by de Sherbinin 182; see also 231, footnote 4).

While there are a few misprints and other infelicities and solecisms (*blaspheme* and *anguish* are used as transitive verbs: 188 and 104; and *incredulity* seems to have supplanted *incredibility*: 269), the editor is generally to be con-

gratulated; the extraordinary statement that ‘many plot lines found their way from *Uncle Vanya* into *The Wood Demon*’ (196) is clearly an oversight rather than an error. J. Douglas Clayton has also taken it upon himself to translate all the Russian (and Polish) contributions – eight out of the eighteen – into English. Inevitably, these lack the stylistic diversity, individuality and flashes of wit that make some of the English-language contributions a pleasure to read.

Published conference proceedings do not invariably succeed in recapturing the atmosphere and impact of the original presentations, and *Anton Pavlovich Chekhov. Poetics — Hermeneutics — Thematics* does not always avoid the pitfalls of the genre. It does succeed, however, in reflecting something of the state of contemporary Chekhov studies; one might call it a case study (as Cathy Popkin says of ‘A Nervous Breakdown’, 123), ‘for a number of interpretive practices’, reminding us that there is no end to reading Chekhov.

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Matthew Lenoe, *The Kirov Murder and Soviet History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 833 pp.

In the late afternoon of December 1, 1934 Sergei Kirov, the Leningrad Communist Party chief, entered the Smolny building and began walking up the stairs. Turning the corner on the third floor, a man came up behind him and shot him in the head. Kirov collapsed on his face. Within minutes the assassin was taken into custody. His name was Leonid Nikolaev, and he was a card-carrying member of the Communist Party. The Kirov murder sent shock waves throughout the Soviet Union. The very same night Stalin issued the Law of December 1, thereby legitimizing extrajudicial procedures against suspected terrorists. Within weeks mass detentions and executions ensued. As a result of the speed with which the dictator embarked on the Great Terror, scholars have often assumed that he ordered the killing himself, or if not that, was at least in some ways implicated in it. According to the most popular interpretation, Stalin ordered Kirov’s assassination for two reasons. First, he feared his comrade’s growing popularity based on the latter’s supposed espousal of a milder and more moderate version of Communism.