

# Reviews

Шульц, С. А. *Историческая поэтика драматургии Л. Н. Толстого (герменевтический аспект)*. Ростов-на-Дону: Издательство Ростовского университета, 2002. 238 стр.

While reading S.A. Shul'ts's *The Historical Poetics of L.N. Tolstoy's Dramaturgy (the Hermeneutic Aspect)*, the reviewer feels more and more strongly that he is confronted with a puzzle that he is not inclined to solve. First of all, there is a contradiction in the title. Although at present it is generally accepted that hermeneutics is an in-depth analysis of literary works, one has to assume that the author, using it in his title, must have been aware that originally a hermeneuticus would have limited himself to describing the specific structure of a literary work in terms of the work itself, without considering possible external influences. For this reason, the title of what is called in the contents "Historical Hermeneutics of the Genre Contexts and Genre Levels of Tolstoy's Dramaturgy," since historical hermeneutics do not exist, contains a *contradictio in terminis*.

Unfortunately, within the text of the study the references to the term hardly help the reviewer understand the author's concept. On page five we read: "Hermeneutic historical poetics is the synthesis of potentially realistic and empirically realistic [writings]." It remains unclear what the author has in mind. On page one hundred it says: "However, Hegel's interpretation of tragedy already included the concept of 'inner action,' and therefore his theory contains significant elements for the understanding of the new type of drama—with the necessary hermeneutic specifications." Please, Mr. Shul'ts, clarify what kind of hermeneutic specifications you have in mind. On page 169: "Although the older Tolstoy, unlike the younger, referred to Hegel with extreme skepticism (most likely under the influence of Schopenhauer's crushing criticism of Hegel), Hegel's philosophy can serve as one of the hermeneutic clues to the writer's [Tolstoy's] world." Again, the reader and reviewer are kept in the dark as to what kind of clues the author has in mind. And these are the three instances where Shul'ts makes use of the term "hermeneutics."

I want to give still another example of the unorthodox usage of a literary term. When a Russian literary

critic applies the terms "fabula" and "syuzhet," one expects him to do so in accordance with the definitions of the Formalists. Or, if not, to acknowledge the fact. Shul'ts, however, writes on page forty: "In order to understand that same Protasov [the main hero of Tolstoy's *The Living Corpse*], it is necessary to listen in on the multi-layered details of the undercurrent and context which do not so much point to something specifically, do not reveal the hidden fabula of the hero's life, as is the case in Chekhov, but rather urge [the reader] to compose the unique lyrical-epic syuzhet of his life (or even syuzhets, taking into account the constantly changing approach of author and hero to the past and the present)..." In Formalistic parlance "fabula" stands for the raw material of the story. Thus, when there is an undercurrent or context, then that is the result of the molding process by the writer of the fabula into the artistic syuzhet. By the same token, the syuzhet is not composed by the reader; that "lyrical-epic" transformation of the raw material into the completed artistic end product is the writer's creative act.

Based on the fact that there is only one reference to an article of the author himself in the notes, one is inclined to assume that, given the opportunity by the Rostov university to publish the volume under discussion here, Shul'ts could not resist the temptation to pour out onto the reading public the indeed impressive amount of information he possesses both in terms of Russian and of world literature. But, at the same time, the outpouring of this extensive knowledge also results in the book's downfall because it can be called a tissue of digressions. When mentioning Aristotle, the author feels the need to digress and discuss his *Poetics*; referring to Rousseau, he discusses aspects of Rousseau's philosophy; and the list is endless. But then he has to establish a link with Tolstoy's writings, and that path back is thorny because Shul'ts feels time and again the urge to make sweeping statements. The author concludes the fourth chapter, "The Theatre of Shakespeare (the Tragic Hero in Shakespeare and Tolstoy)," with the following observation: "The hero's metamorphosis, in accordance with the inevitable logic of changing value systems and changing historical epochs, takes place in Tolstoy's theatre under different circumstances and by different means [than in Shake-

spare's theatre]. But from a historical point of view, Tolstoy is the objective heir of Shakespeare (объективный наследник Шекспира)" (104). Although we may acknowledge both playwrights' keen awareness of the dramatic effectiveness of their writings on stage, in light of the well-known fierce criticism of Shakespeare in Tolstoy's essay of 1906 "On the Drama and on Shakespeare," it makes no sense to call Tolstoy especially the "objective" heir of Shakespeare.

Singling out one of Tolstoy's dramatic heroes, Fedya Protasov, helps demonstrate how sweeping and erratic Shul'ts's statements on Tolstoy's dramatis personae are. On page thirty-seven, Shul'ts claims that Protasov is a character that refuses to search for the truth. On page 119, we read: "...the situation that he [Protasov] is without family [Shul'ts uses the word 'бессемейность' which is not in Ozhegov] (it is not accidental that he cannot unite with either Liza or Masha) symbolizes 'man in general (человек вообще),' the kernel of mankind in its pure form [Shul'ts uses the adjective беспримесный, which is not in Ozhegov either]." Thus, we have to conclude that a character who refuses to search for the truth, and who is also incapable of maintaining a family, is the prototype of mankind. And then to realize that Protasov is a creation of Tolstoy who claimed that his greatest hero was the truth. But even more incomprehensible is the fact that Protasov, according to Shul'ts, is a divine figure. On page 161, we read: "'Atonement,' the fact that Protasov takes upon himself the sins of the whole world, urges us to remember not simply a saintlike type [again the word 'архетипика' is not in Ozhegov] but immediately the type of the suffering Christ, naturally differently interpreted." As so often, the reader is left on his own to figure out how to understand "differently interpreted." But much more puzzling is the comparison with the suffering Christ and the taking on of the sins of the entire world. After all, the dying Protasov, as the result of his self-inflicted shot, confesses to Liza (and thus indirectly to Karenin, to whom she is married) that his suicide is for his own sake, and not hers.

Finally, and totally incomprehensible, is Shul'ts's statement on page 192: "Fedya's character is endowed with a basic inner conflict: notwithstanding his 'love of gypsy life [цыганщина],' he honored the law—even by imitating suicide because in this manner he acknowledged its power and rightfulness (because real non-abidance by the law would make such contrivances

unnecessary)." Well, simple common sense dictates that simulating suicide is unlawful.

In conclusion then, notwithstanding the author's impressive amount of information on Russian and world literature, the reader and reviewer is not even so much unwilling to solve the puzzle of Shul'ts's study, but is simply incapable of doing so.

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**Порудоминский, В.И. О Толстом. С. Петербург: Алетейя, 2006. 416 стр; 225 руб. (softcover).**

This new book by a veteran of Soviet and post-Soviet literary and cultural criticism came out in a highly respectable Russia Abroad: Sources and Investigations series founded and formerly headed by the late Sergei Averinstev.

For over three decades now, Vladimir Porudominsky has been a household name with lovers of popular biographies on important cultural figures, primarily of the Russian nineteenth century. I remember my own acquaintance with Porudominsky's prose, his book on the painter Nikolai Ge, which came my way some time in high school or early in college, still during the Soviet rule. The book was craftily written, succinct, and short on ideology. And it really spoke of the painter more than of Marxist aesthetics or class struggle, while also managing not to skirt issues in explaining Ge's fascination with religious topics. This was a pleasant surprise, and it led me to explore other books by the author.

During his long and fruitful career, Porudominsky has published more than fifteen biographies, which came out in prestigious series, such as *Жизнь замечательных людей* and *Жизнь в искусстве* of Vladimir Dal, Vsevolod Garshin, Nikolai Pirogov, Nikolai Ge, and Ivan Kramskoi. He also authored numerous essays that often appeared in thick journals and popular magazines – *Октябрь*, *Огонек*, *Звезда*, and many others. His first book of prose, *Wakeful Sleep (Пробуждение во сне)* was published by Aleteia in 2004. Since the 1990s, Porudominsky has lived in Germany. There he published his study of colors in *War and Peace: Цвета Толстого: Война и мир—колорит портретов: наблюдения и заметки* (Köln: Pastor Zond, 1997).