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The Structure of Vasco Popa's Poetry. by Ronelle Alexander

Review by: Vladimir Milicic

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SCIENCE-FICTION IN OSTEUROPA: BEITRÄGE ZUR RUSSISCHEN, POLNISCHEN UND TSCHECHISCHEN PHANTASTISCHEN LITERATUR. Edited with an introduction by *Wolfgang Kasack*. Osteuropaforschung, 14. Berlin: Arno Spitz, 1984. 150 pp. DM 25, paper.

This volume of articles on East European science fiction is the result of a conference held in 1982. In addition to essays on individual authors and general trends in science fiction, it contains an interview that Suzanne Plog-Bontemps conducted with Arkadii Strugatskii and a secondary bibliography of more than 700 entries compiled by Wolfgang van Kann and Erwin Puschkarsky.

In the first essay, "Nautschnaja Fantastika und Science Fiction. Ansprüche und ihre Realisierung in Kurzgeschichten," Christine Engel attempts to compare the self-image and the critical reception of science fiction and its Russian counterpart *nauchnaia fantastika* (NF). Unfortunately the textual basis of her article is simply too narrow—she discusses only some three dozen short stories taken from three anthologies—rather than "carefully limited" as Wolfgang Kasack maintains in his preface to the book. Engel, for instance, either fails to mention or is not aware of the fact that the United States science fiction magazine *Analog* is known to favor so-called hard SF. Her choice of the *Analog Yearbook* as one of the three anthologies therefore creates a distorted image of United States science fiction in the 1970s as predominantly concerned with space hardware.

Rolf-Dieter Kluge's "Alexander A. Bogdanow (Malinowskij) als Science-fiction-Autor" and Gabriele Leech-Anspach's "Phantastik—Wirklichkeitsflucht oder Bewußtseinsweiterung" cover Russian science fiction from the first half of the twentieth century. Kluge interprets Bogdanov's *Red Star* and *Engineer Menni* in the light of the author's political theories. Leech-Anspach provides an overview of Russian science fiction from Aleksei Tolstoi to Mikhail Bulgakov without, however, coming to a more relevant conclusion than "SF is not only escapist literature."

Eberhard Reissner ("Zwischen Utopie und Katastrophenphantasie. Ilja Ehrenburgs Roman *Trust D.E.*") and Wolfgang Kasack ("Ajtamows erster Versuch im Bereich der Phantastik") discuss novels by Il'ia Ehrenburg and Chingis Aitamov. Both articles offer biographical and historical background as well as incisive criticism concerning the lack of credible characterization in these novels.

Franz Rottensteiner's overview of Polish science fiction and Antonín Brousek's survey of Czech science fiction both concentrate on one major author. While Brousek demonstrates the decisive role of Karel Čapek for the development of science fiction in Czechoslovakia, Rottensteiner—as he has often before—emphasizes that in his opinion Stanisław Lem is not only the most important science fiction author in Poland, but a major figure in contemporary world literature. Rottensteiner regards Lem as a phenomenon *sui generis*, and his concluding words appear to be aimed at all scholars working the field of science fiction: "The fact that such a complex author could also become so popular is an encouraging sign; in the books of Stanisław Lem science fiction has become world literature."

With the exception of Rottensteiner, the contributors to *Science-Fiction in Osteuropa* do not seem to be familiar with recent international scholarship on science fiction. While the book offers valuable readings of individual works, it suffers from a lack of a theoretical foundation.

FRANK DIETZ  
Austin, Texas

THE STRUCTURE OF VASCO POPA'S POETRY. By *Ronelle Alexander*. UCLA Slavic Studies, vol. 14. Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1985. 196 pp. Cloth.

Vasko Popa is a leading Yugoslav poet, one of the more original poets living today. Popa's poems represent a rich combination of folkloric, surrealist, and classical-realistic features. The

uniqueness of his poetry also lies in the fact that his opus is thoroughly integrated, as though he had planned everything in it before writing.

Ronelle Alexander's study of the structure of Popa's poetry is based on his seven books that appeared between 1952 and 1981. Her book consists of seven chapters, covering the structure of Popa's poetry; individual works, such as *Dela* and *Vučja so*; and the cycle. A bibliography and appendix complete the book.

Alexander states that the overall goal of her work is to "demonstrate the existence of a strict hierarchical structure in Vasko Popa's poetry, and to describe the manner in which this structural organization contributes to the overall message of his poetry" (p. 140). She also writes: "As far as I am aware, my interpretation is the first to make explicit the link connecting all seven of these books" (p. 57).

The direction of Alexander's study goes from the most general to the most specific, that is, from the opus to the book, then to the cycle and finally to the individual poem. Of the seven books, she concentrates on *Vučja so*, and mainly on three poems from that book: "The She-Wolf Bathes in the Blue," "My Son I See Our Land Asleep," and "With Hammer, Fist and Head."

Alexander's analytical approach is mainly linguistic. A Jakobsonian, she describes the structures and searches out meanings through the game of the "latent drama of grammar" (p. 14). In her search for meaning, she is also successful in using Jakobson's concept of center and periphery, including the "framing" function of the peripheral units—lines, stanzas, poems, and cycles. Her stated intention is to discover the structure of Popa's poetry and her analysis is therefore basically descriptive, emphasizing the analysis of structural organization and the relation of the parts to the whole. It is surprising how such a straightforward and seemingly simple approach gives such exceptionally rich results. She is able to use a series of small systems, each consisting of two grammatical or other opposed units (e.g., imperative and nonimperative mood, regular and inverted sentence or phrase structure, central and peripheral), as analytical explanatory devices to interpret meanings successfully.

Alexander has brilliantly fulfilled her stated goals by giving us not only the best presentation of the structure of Popa's poetry that has so far appeared but also the best analysis of its meaning. Considering the relative opaqueness of Popa's work, his poems should be read either after or simultaneously with Alexander's book so that many hidden meanings could be revealed, understood, and enjoyed. She has also quite convincingly proven that Roman Jakobson's analytical principles can serve as powerful shortcuts towards meaning and her book, therefore, could be used as a textbook for that purpose.

VLADIMIR MILIČIĆ  
Western Washington University

RUSSIAN AND SOVIET SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND TABOO VARIETIES OF THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE (ARGOT, JARGON, SLANG AND "MAT"). By *Wilhelm von Timroth*. Translated by *Nortrud Gupta*. Slavistische Beiträge, Band 205. Munich: Otto Sagner, 1986. x, 164 pp. Paper.

This slim volume, ably translated from the German, is a slightly revised and expanded edition of the author's doctoral dissertation and represents a welcome contribution to the underresearched field of nonliterary varieties of the Russian language.

Roughly a third of the book is an overview of the work done on slang, *mat*, and jargon by Russian and Soviet linguists since the early nineteenth century until the 1980s. Others have covered this territory before, most notably Harlan E. Marquess in his introduction to *Soviet Prison Camp Speech*, which he published with Meyer Galler in 1972, but von Timroth's survey is more exhaustive and obviously the most up-to-date.

One of the book's virtues is the author's effort to shovel his way through the Augean stable of Soviet linguistic terminology related to nonliterary Russian. Von Timroth proposes discarding