



2015

Review: *Teaching Nineteenth Century Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Belknap*

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Recommended Citation

Weil, Irwin (2015) "Review: *Teaching Nineteenth Century Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Belknap*," *Russian Language Journal*: Vol. 65: Iss. 1, Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/rlj/vol65/iss1/9>

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useful preview for the type of work required to achieve Superior proficiency.

Notwithstanding these minor issues, I commend the authors for their work in creating a comprehensive textbook for this level of study. Given the variety of activities and texts, instructors are able to easily work with a range of student levels, a common problem in such courses.

References

ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (2012). Alexandria, VA: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

Cori Anderson
Rutgers University

Deborah Martinsen, Cathy Popkin, and Irina Reyfman, eds.,
Teaching Nineteenth Century Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Belknap. Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014.
336 pages.

The late Robert L. Belknap was clearly one of the finest individuals and most creative teachers and scholars in the American profession of Slavic studies. His whole professional life encompassed both the academic and administrative sides of a long and outstanding professorial career at Columbia University. It is therefore entirely appropriate that the present volume consists of articles in the field of Russian literary criticism by some of the best and original literary critics, many of them Belknap's former students. Not only do the articles demonstrate a high level of literary insight—they also show the example of Belknap's remarkable creativity in methods of teaching.

The above remarks are perhaps most clearly shown in words written by the master himself in an article entitled "Text and Context." Belknap starts by immediately diving into the red hot polemics between those who demand concentration only upon the text itself, and those who want to douse it also with relevant considerations of biography, history, politics, psychology, and so forth. With characteristic Belknapian humor, he describes his work in a core curriculum including dozens of authors from the ancient Greeks to the moderns: "For Slavists it can become a course on

the two thousand years work it took to produce Dostoevsky" (Martinsen 2014, 34).

The various chapters of the Festschrift cover a wide range of Russian authors from the nineteenth century, although there is an unsurprisingly extensive concentration on Dostoevsky, especially *Crime and Punishment*. Out of twenty-two separate articles, at least five of them are devoted to this murderous work. Several of their titles show a kind of humor which I think the master himself would highly appreciate: "Getting away with Murder, Teaching Crime and Punishment" (162–174); "Dostoevsky's Notes From the Underground Revisited, Plus a Few Thoughts about Winnie the Pooh" (186–198). One might conceivably ask what connection could possibly exist between A.A. Milne's charming children tales and a novel of murder and the highest degree of psychological dialectics.

Ellen Chances opens her arguments with a quotation from Winnie the Pooh which ends with, "which would be a Good Thing, because we might find something that we WEREN'T looking for, which might be just what we WERE looking for really" (186). Those who have pondered the depths of Fedor Mikhailovich's paragraphs can probably appreciate Professor Chances's jump from the A. A. Milne's English fantasy to the Russian writer's creative imagination.

Olga Meerson handles this problem of "finding what we were looking for" in Pulkheria Raskolnikova's interpretation of Luzhin's rather nasty indication of how he sees his future happiness as a spouse to the protagonist's sister, Dunya: "The husband should owe nothing to his wife; rather it is better when the wife regards the husband as her benefactor" (46). The Mother's correct interpretation and Raskolnikov's further interpretation of this sentence by the openly nasty Luzhin illustrate Winnie's finding what we're looking for through what we're not looking for.

In considering the novelist's privilege as a creator of his own fictional world, Gary Saul Morson gives a theoretical example of an author, Lev Tolstoy, possibly giving that privilege to Dolly Oblonskaia in *Anna Karenina*: "What if she could have overheard, as we the readers did, her husband's thoughts about" — "she, the worn out woman, no longer young or good looking, in no way remarkable or interesting, merely

good mother'" (151). Professor Morson gives us an example of the kind of moral condemnation that would result in such a situation.

The festschrift is loaded with articles that look at Russian literature from a deeply felt and original point-of-view. It represents some of the best in contemporary American critical thinking.

The one weakness in the collection is an occasional over-indulgence in abstract writing which can make legitimate critical points rather hard to understand. As an example, "What is relevant for us in hermeneutics is that it focuses on the prism of perception relevant for the perceiver, a prism conditioned by the context relevant for him or her—a context that may be cultural or personal depending on the perceiver's sore spots or points of reference, etc." (48). But these occasional weaknesses do not lessen the overall impact of this marvelous collection.

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Charles E. Gribble, *The Forms of Russian*. Bloomington, Indiana: Slavica, 2014. 195 pp.

The Forms of Russian is a traditional approach to the fundamentals of Russian morphology based largely on the work of Jakobson, Levin, Lipson and Townsend. It is essentially the introductory course on Russian morphology that many, if not most, working North American Slavists took in graduate school. The work arises from such a course taught over many years by the author. The book is clearly intended for future teachers of Russian. The two main goals of the book are (1) to make working with and using Russian easier and (2) to explain how to establish a systematic description of Russian. As stated by the author, "the goal of the book is to improve your Russian, not to teach linguistics" (5). With these goals in mind—a basic description of the structures of Russian and an attempt to use this systematic approach to help students better understand the functioning of the language—the book is successful. The material is thoroughly covered, but the presentation does not get mired in excessive details and exceptions. The examples are largely presented with Cyrillic characters, which is important if the goals are not strictly linguistic but partially focused on learning to use Russian better. This allows future