

But one should not quibble over minor deficiencies in a book that is the finest study of Chekhov's plays available to us today.

KARL D. KRAMER  
*University of Washington*

LEONID ANDREYEV: A STUDY. By *James B. Woodward*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969. xi, 290 pp. \$8.25.

J. B. Woodward's is the first significant Andreyev study to appear in English since Alexander Kaun's in 1924. The forty-some year hiatus between monographs should raise no eyebrows, since Andreyev's literary reputation and colossal popularity had been swept into "the abyss," along with the epoch he epitomized, even before his own death in 1919. Nor does an Andreyev renaissance appear to be in the offing: the centenary of his birth, in August 1971, has been commemorated—to the best of my knowledge—by a mere half-page spread in *Literaturnaia gazeta* in the East and this book review in the West.

If Kaun's study, appearing in the early twenties, was probably inspired by the still potent residue of the Andreyev legend, then Woodward's, appearing in the late sixties, can obviously dispense with any form of shadow-boxing with Leonid's ghost. At this point in time one would expect an Andreyev study to be informed by a sense of historical distance, by thoroughness and objectivity: a kind of *Leben und Werke* based on all the available information.

And that is just about what Woodward sets out to offer us—with one crucial qualification: "Questions of style and technique," he says in his preface, "are discussed only in so far as they contribute to this central purpose," the central purpose being "to determine the mainsprings of his [Andreyev's] art and to provide an interpretation of his major works." Accordingly, Woodward analyzes Andreyev's writings almost exclusively in terms of intellectual and biographical factors; in addition he elucidates the philosophical and societal background as well as Andreyev's relations with contemporary *littérateurs*.

Comprehensive and impressive though it may be, Woodward's compendium of Andreyev's ideas proves only one thing, namely, that Andreyev did indeed think and that his mind and heart were basically in the right spot. But so what? What good are ideas to a writer when he lacks the ability to integrate them artistically in his fiction? It is precisely on this point that we can observe the consequences of Woodward's decision to declare style and technique incidental to his discussion of literature: he has placed the cart before the horse and finds himself in the position of having to defend artistically indefensible works on the grounds that they contain ideas or autobiographical elements of importance.

The last thing Andreyev needs at this late date is any vindication or defense for having blighted, as Woodward himself admits, most of his works with the curse of "ideas." The fact is, of course, that the less Andreyev thought, the better he wrote, and the few things of his that can still be read without too much gnashing of teeth are readable precisely because they are not overburdened with *Weltanschauung*. Woodward's failure to make that clear constitutes, in my opinion, the Achilles' heel of a book which otherwise is highly recommended to everyone interested in Leonid Andreyev's cometlike appearance on the Russian literary firmament.

As usual for Clarendon Press books, this one is beautifully printed; regrettably the editors have not seen fit to equip it with a bibliography.

PETER A. FISCHER  
*Amherst College*

RUSSIA'S LOST LITERATURE OF THE ABSURD: A LITERARY DISCOVERY: SELECTED WORKS OF DANIIL KHARMS AND ALEXANDER VVEDENSKY. Edited and translated by *George Gibian*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1971. ix, 208 pp. \$6.50.

The Russian literary heritage of the 1920s and 1930s continues to grow as significant works are uncovered that were long forgotten or never published. The most recent find is not a single work or author, but an entire literary movement—the Oberiu (Ob'edinenie Real'nogo Iskusstva). Until recently this group was so little known that A. Turkov in his introduction to the 1965 *Biblioteka poeta* edition of Zabolotsky's poetry not only presented a distorted version of its doctrine but also stated its full name incorrectly and even misspelled Oberiu. Knowledge of the movement has improved since then, but there has been very little written on it in the West.

Thus Professor Gibian's book is most welcome, for he has not only provided translations of works by Kharms and Vvedensky (who were, along with Zabolotsky, the leading members of the Oberiu), but has also included a critical introduction, a translation of the Oberiu manifesto, and a useful bibliography. It is gratifying to note that he is also preparing a Russian edition of the Oberiu writings. With the exception of the manifesto and a few of the stories by Kharms, none of the material in this book is currently easily obtainable in the original.

Among the works in the present volume the single item by Vvedensky—a play entitled *Christmas at the Ivanovs'*—and Kharms's long story, *The Old Woman*, are of more than passing interest. Though quite different from each other in most respects, they both create an absurd world in which the laws of logic have been abrogated. My feeling is that the "mini-stories" by Kharms are less significant; a few of them are small gems, but more often they seem to be working too hard to create their effect. The translations, insofar as I have been able to check them, are quite good. They are accurate and sensitive to the style of the original.

The introduction contains a wealth of information on Kharms, Vvedensky, and the Oberiu in general. Unfortunately it is not without imperfections. In addition to some trivial errors, such as identifying the key numbers in "A Sonnet" as 6 and 7 instead of 7 and 8 (p. 27), there are a few statements that are either inaccurate or incomplete. For example, Nikolai Oleinikov is included among the Oberiuty (p. 10). Although he was friendly with them, he did not belong to their movement. It could also have been mentioned that Oleinikov was an editor of *Ezh* as well as *Chizh*, since both his own career and the Oberiu reached their peak while he was still editor of *Ezh*. "Kharms, Zabolotsky, and others" are said to have written the Oberiu manifesto; true enough, but several critics have pointed out that the most important sections are apparently the work of just Zabolotsky. As for the actual literary criticism, some good points are made about both writers, but not always as concisely and effectively as they might be. Also, there is at least one comment which I find unfortunate. The reluctance of the narrator in *The Old Woman* to part with his suitcase is said to show "unglossed-over Soviet actuality," in which a neglected