

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

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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

suitcase is likely to be stolen. Perhaps. But when a suitcase contains a body, there are certainly other reasons for wanting to hold onto it. The fact that it is stolen does not, in this case, seem to have much to do with Soviet actuality.

The bibliography lists all the major articles on Kharms and Vvedensky, but there are a couple of curious omissions. After going to the length of listing some Polish and Czech translations of works by Kharms, Gibian neglects to mention two of the three stories by Kharms that were published in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 1967, no. 47. He also fails to note that the article by Flaker which he lists includes three works in Russian, two of which do not appear here in translation.

Though it is perhaps too early to judge the literary value of the Oberiuty, I think it safe to say that Gibian has performed a valuable service in introducing Kharms and Vvedensky, and that their work will prove to be of some interest to specialists and nonspecialists alike.

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THE MATURING OF YIDDISH LITERATURE. By *Sol Liptzin*. New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 1970. xii, 282 pp. \$6.95.

The second part of a projected three-volume history of twentieth-century Yiddish literature, this book deals with the period between the two world wars. The title is apt, for the interwar years are by far the most interesting in the annals of Yiddish writing, particularly in poetry, and much of it compares favorably with the better works of modern East European prose and verse, where most of Yiddish literature is rooted and where the bulk of it was actually created. Sol Liptzin, formerly of the City College of New York and now at the American College in Jerusalem, is the author of several books on various aspects of German and Yiddish literature. The present volume is a competent enough study of its subject, though somewhat old-fashioned and expository rather than analytical. There is no questioning Professor Liptzin's credentials as a scholar in Yiddish literature as such. He also is more than adequately equipped to deal with its roots that go back to the Bible, to rabbinic writings, and to Jewish history and lore. It goes without saying that he is similarly at home with the Germanic background of the Jewish Enlightenment which begot Yiddish letters. Unfortunately Liptzin's book suffers from a serious handicap—namely, the author's relative lack of familiarity with the modern Slavic literatures that often exerted a powerful influence on this century's Yiddish writers. And little wonder: a Yiddish writer, after a traditional religious education in a *cheder* and then in a *yeshiva*, usually received his first taste of secular writing in a Russian or Polish school. The influences were both good and bad. The great Slavic classics were imitated, but so were some of the second-rate symbolists, not to speak of such celebrities as Artsybashev and Przybyszewski. Consequently, Yiddish literature cannot be seriously examined without frequent reference to its Slavic background. Similarly, its most important component in this century, Soviet Yiddish literature (Liptzin's book includes separate chapters on its three major centers: Kiev, Minsk, and Moscow), must be viewed both as part and parcel of Yiddish literature as a whole (chronologically and geographically) and as a part of Soviet literature in general. Thus some Soviet Yiddish writers (e.g., Emmanuil Kazakevich) wrote in both Yiddish and Russian. Others wrote in Yiddish only, but were read primarily in translations, much as Isaac Bashevis Singer is in the United States. These