

The Poetics of Early Russian Literature. By D. S. Likhachev. Ed. and trans. Christopher M. Arden-Close. Introduction, Milena Rozhdestvenskaya. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014. xi, 363 pp. Notes. Bibliography. \$100.00, hard bound.

Dmitrii Sergeevich Likhachev certainly needs no introduction, particularly to the readers of *Slavic Review*. The book under review is one of two major works by the great Russian intellectual on Old Russian literature, the other being his 1958 *Chelovek v literature Drevnei Rusi*, an area that was considerably neglected under Soviet rule due to its link to religion (although medieval literature is generally undervalued in other cultures as well). However, we can only welcome the tardy translation into English of *The Poetics of Early Russian Literature*, published in Russian in 1967 and translated into Serbo-Croatian in 1972 and Czech in 1975 (a partial French translation appeared in 1988), although the present work is based on the 1979 Nauka edition. It thus preceded Paul Zumthor's *Essai de poétique médiévale*, first published in 1972, as well as S. S. Averintsev's *Poetika drevnegrecheskoi literatury* (1979) and V. V. Bychkov's *Vizantiiskaia estetika: Teoreticheskie problemy* (1977), as Likhachev's preface to the 1979 Russian edition points out. This is important to bear in mind because Likhachev in many ways pioneered this type of approach TO early literature, considering it on its own terms, as it were, and attempting simultaneously to define its specific aesthetic value. This contrasted sharply with the dominant Marxist approach to literary study, which, in much Soviet literary criticism, confined itself to identifying "realistic" elements.

Rather than risk repeating in a less eloquent manner the thoughts of Norman W. Ingham, who reviewed the original Russian edition for this journal at the time of its publication, I will not analyze the work so much as concentrate on the particulars of this English-language edition and its translation. First, it comes with a very informative introduction by Milena Rozhdestvenskaya, professor in the Faculty of Philology at St. Petersburg State University, who insists on Likhachev's view that Old Russian literature is in fact not old but young (with the corollary that our contemporary literature is in effect old). However, Likhachev's influence does not confine itself to early literature. In fact, his study throws a new light on the pantheon of classical literature by identifying motifs and filiations from early literature in the works of Lev Tolstoi, Fedor Dostoevskii, Nikolai Gogol', Nikolai Leskov, and Aleksandr Blok.

His best-known concept, "literary etiquette," is central to understanding early literature and, although not particularly spectacular, it enables identification of an essential trait of medieval art. Likhachev's focus on genre and aesthetics, thus inscribing his study in a formalist tradition, opened the way for the study of early Russian literature, taking into account its symbolic value and not confining itself exclusively to its ideological and historical content. The *poetics* of the title indicates this legacy, as does the detailed attention to orality and specific words used. Viktor Shklovskii, Boris Tomashevskii, and Iurii Tynianov are all included in the extensive bibliography, a noteworthy fact considering their status in the 1960s. But while Likhachev might share a certain scholarly approach with the formalists, he writes limpid prose and manages to convey complex ideas without oversimplifying them. He thus succeeded in making early Russian literature familiar to the lay reader. This accessibility made him a well-respected intellectual who addressed an audience outside the narrow boundaries of his field as well as experts in the subject.

In this regard, it is important to praise Christopher M. Arden-Close's translation, which reads very easily and maintains a balance between conversational and academic styles. One can only regret that the translator has remained so "invisible," as in a work of this scope there must have been some difficult and interesting translation choices, a discussion of which could have enlightened the Anglophone reader. This

work constitutes an invaluable resource to Russian studies students but will also be fascinating for any educated reader with a particular interest in medieval literature. To quote Likhachev, "The great task of cultural historians of different specialties lies in widening our horizon, in particular of the aesthetic. The more intelligent a person is, the more he can comprehend and assimilate, the wider is his horizon and ability to understand and accept cultural values, both of the past and present" (346). One can only hope that more of the works of this great intellectual will become available in translation in years to come.

KARINE ZBINDEN
University of Sheffield

Dostoevsky and the Epileptic Mode of Being. By Paul Fung. Oxford: Legenda, 2015. xii, 148 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Figures. Maps. £55.00, hard bound.

This book continues the philosophical discussion of Fedor Dostoevskii started by Friedrich Nietzsche, Lev Shestov, Alex de Jonge, and many others. Paul Fung describes existential experiences of caesura (suspension), timelessness, and anticipation of death, which he attributes to some of Dostoevskii's characters and, possibly, to the writer himself. Apart from Dostoevskii, he draws on Mikhail Bakhtin, Emmanuel Levinas, Walter Benjamin, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Maurice Blanchot. What he terms "the epileptic mode of being," after Robert Lord, is "the quixotic desire to experience the impossible and its continual failure." Fung also describes it as "the alternation between the continual desire to seize upon the moment and the annihilation of that desire," or "an infinite postponement" (20). Whether this desire has to be called *epileptic*, with its medical connotations, is another matter. The author, in a footnote, confesses to using the term as a metaphor. But once uttered, the word may create confusion rather than clarity.

In a short introduction, Fung treats the history of epilepsy and what could be considered its symptoms: an intense experience of the suspended moment and "mystic terror" (14). He then suggests that Dostoevskii attempts, in his post-Siberian novels, to "write the impossible" (18): the moment when consciousness is interrupted and the near-death experience is both terrifying and orgasmically pleasurable. In the chapters that follow, he considers the novels chronologically, starting with *The Humiliated and Insulted*. The problem Fung focuses on is "the egoism of suffering." Bringing to the discussion the Marquis de Sade, Freud, and Lacan, he argues that the Kantian categorical imperative "has repressed the sadistic/masochistic relationship between the subject and the law" (33).

The author next turns to *Crime and Punishment* and continues to find ambivalent patterns in the characters. Thus, in the mare-beating dream, "Raskolnikov is stepping over the father's law by looking at the beating [and, presumably, doing the beating] and seeing himself being punished for transgressing the law at the same time" (67). However, the role of creating "the epileptic mode of being" in the novel belongs rather to the Petersburg cityscape, which is "deaf and dumb," in the manner of the "dumb and deaf spirit" that Christ drove out from an epileptic child (Mark 9:17–27). Yet Fung calls the city "schismatic by nature" (67), thus evoking the image of schizophrenia, not epilepsy.

Further chapters treat *The Idiot*, *The Devils*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*. Fung interprets Prince Myshkin's epileptic world as a mixed experience of ecstasy and death, with the limitation that one cannot experience one's own death. He finds in it