the prevailing romantic attraction to mystery, secret societies and political opposition. Post-1825 texts are filled, he suggests, with allusive stylistic devices used to evade the censor and convey to the sophisticated or initiated reader a political message. Bestuzhev's seemingly innocent romantic story is, he argues, an allegorical version of the author's own participation in the Decembrist revolt and its aftermath. Seen in this light, Kodjak's elaborate study of Pushkin's *Tales of Belkin* and in particular its brief introduction will not seem as bizarre.

Kodjak argues that all earlier readings and interpretations of the *Tales* have been deficient. Rather than a parody on Romantic clichés, the work is in fact an elaborate coded message on the Decembrists and related events, the key to which lies in the Introduction by the fictional editor A. P. The tip-off is in the two phrases—"having undertaken the struggle to publish" (vzivshis' khlopotat') and "curious researchers" (liubopytnye izy-skateli) tucked away in a footnote, which urge the cognizant reader to search for clues which the author has managed to slip by the censor. Never did Le Carré's Mr. Smiley examine a message from an agent in place more meticulously than does Kodjak the editor's Introduction and accompanying letter from Belkin's neighbor. Every work, every phrase is important, but just as significant is what is not there: what Kodjak thinks might have been or should normally have been there is considered a deliberate omission. *Non sequiturs*, apparent irrelevancies, and contradictions are all treated as part of the "elaborate cypher" in which numbers also have meaning. From these bits and pieces Kodjak fashions an elaborate biography of Belkin as a political liberal, a member of the Southern Society in Kishinev and a Decembrist sympathizer. The stories and particularly their sequence are also of import in this scheme.

If this theory were a new Soviet interpretation, many would, no doubt, reject it out of hand; for there is much speculation here, and what is taken as proven as Kodjak painstakingly puts the many pieces together will not convince everyone. While Pushkin was not above obfuscation and political allusions, he was usually more direct in his target ("There [the Neva's banks] formerly I too promenaded—/but harmful is the North to me" *Eugene Onegin*, 1:II). Whether everything which Kodjak brings up is intentional or merely a parody of many such letters and "explanations" from editors and naive correspondents which fill the pages of the numerous journals of the time will depend upon one's interpretation of Pushkin and his work and one's attraction to this type of analysis of otherwise straightforward literature. Kodjak's thesis should provoke some interesting discussion and, if true, will most certainly produce a drastic re-evaluation of Pushkin's post-1825 work, as well as revealing new facets of Pushkin's personality. Whatever one might think of the central hypothesis here, Kodjak has written a serious study which certainly intrigues the reader even if it does not always convince him; for a book on someone as well researched as Pushkin this is no small achievement in itself.

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"We still do not know what Gogol is," wrote his most perceptive critic, Andrei Belyi, in 1909. If today we still do not know what Gogol is, it is surely not for want of trying to find out, as the spate of recent works by Karlinsky, Fanger, Rowe, Sinyavsky, Maguire, and others will testify. James Woodward and Jesse Zeldin have also joined in this effort to explain Gogol, and each has taken a very different approach to this complex
and very contemporary writer: Woodward looks very closely at just one work, *Dead Souls*; Zeldin steps well back to produce a broad treatment of all of Gogol’s writings.

Zeldin begins with the thesis that “Gogol was primarily interested in the nature of reality, which he identified with beauty” (p. ix). He makes a chronological survey of the entire body of Gogol’s fiction from Hanz Kuechelgarten to Part Two of *Dead Souls*, making extensive use along the way of Gogol’s own pronouncements about his work and referring briefly to his essays and journalism as well. Three closing chapters discuss Gogol as Artist, as Christian, and as Russian; a conclusion restates the thesis in more general terms and applies it to Gogol’s life as well.

The thesis that the central issue in Gogol’s the quest for beauty is least fruitful when applied to the Dikanka and Mirgorod stories. Too often it means simply pointing out the beauty and the ugliness in these stories and saying little more than that beauty is good, ugliness bad. But when Zeldin turns to the later, more complex writings and allows himself a more detailed and leisurely analysis, the results are far more rewarding. His thesis is broad enough to allow for a detailed reading that produces some real insights into the works examined, even though one can quarrel with some of his conclusions. For example, some very interesting things are said about “The Overcoat,” that most interpreted of Russian stories. Zeldin argues that the story is about loss of innocence: Akakii Akakievich is Everyman who is tempted and seduced by materiality and enters into “physical life” (which, Zeldin argues, Gogol identifies with triviality and ugliness) when he acquires his overcoat. Yet this implies that before his “fall” Akakii Akakievich was somehow dwelling in the realm of truth and beauty simply because he was unattached to physicality, ambition, and material pleasure. It is difficult to make such a case.

Some new contributions are also added to our understanding of *Dead Souls*, beginning with the perennial problem of the genre of the work. Zeldin argues persuasively that Gogol followed the Italian Renaissance model of the *romanzo* and so created not a novel but a comic romantic epic. He also maintains that Chichikov is not a demonic figure nor even a seducer; Chichikov is himself a victim who cannot corrupt the landowners and townspeople because they are already thoroughly corrupt. But even though Chichikov may be “of a different order” (p. 101) from the other characters in the book, to argue that he has cheated no one presses the point too far. In a narrowly legal sense he may not have cheated anyone, but Chichikov’s ultimate intentions are thoroughly larcenous.

The last three chapters are particularly good (indeed, “The Artist,” Chapter 8, is the best in the book), for they draw together the various threads that have been picked up in the course of study, place Gogol firmly within a literary and religious tradition, and clearly show how closely Gogol’s conception of the artist was bound up with his Christianity and his nationalism.

Zeldin’s study is as broad and encompassing as Woodward’s is narrow and exclusive. Woodward views *Dead Souls* as an “allegory of the perversion of the Russian soul” (p. 252), “a work of art, in which as vision of moral decline is translated into an autonomous, coherent, fictional reality governed by its own unique system of laws and relationship” (p. 252). This seems a reasonable view of *Dead Souls*, and in itself is scarcely novel. What is new is the argument that Gogol portrays spiritual perversion as “divergence from the symbolic ideal of ‘pure femininity’” (p. 252), an ideal most prominently represented by the governor’s daughter. Each of the five landowners Chichikov visits illustrates a different kind of spiritual perversion which is conveyed by a cluster of recurrent symbolic motifs. Woodward focuses his attention on these motifs. Woodward focuses his attention on these motifs and argues that they are woven into the later chapters describing the townspeople and their town; they also occur in Chichikov’s own portrait, so that the inhabitants of the town of N. are also manifestations of the hero’s own spiritual rot. Manilov is a “superficially feminized” male, Korobochka a masculi-