aunt Aksin'ia. At first sight, it may seem that there is no connection between the famous legend and the Chekhovian story. Wächter's arguments, however, demonstrate in what a subtle and intricate way Chekhov used his source. Already at the beginning of the story the attractive but treasonous Aksin'ia is compared to a snake whereas the name of the murdered baby, Nikifor, means “victory-bearer” in Greek. Thus, the legend of St. George, killing and conquering the dragon, is inverted in Chekhov’s story into a snake like character, Aksin'ia, killing the “victory-bearer,” Nikifor. However, typical of the Chekhovian inversion, it is not complete because simultaneously there is also a parallel in the saint’s and infant’s fate. The former is also known as “the great martyr” whereas the latter, being an innocent child, becomes, because of his untimely death, automatically a martyr. And, as Wächter indicates, the inversion is not complete for the additional reason that the initially victorious snake, Aksin'ia, in the end does not gain anything. After all, the family lost all its money after Anisim’s counterfeit activities were discovered and the culprit sent to Siberia.

Lack of space prevents me from discussing the other stories, but one can conclude that Wächter’s close reading of the texts provides another proof of the exceptional intricacy with which Chekov applied the literary device of inversion. At the same time, the study also demonstrates that too close reading, pushing a certain point of view too far, may lead to the inversion of the acceptable.

A. F. Zweers

University of Waterloo

Symbolism and After: Essays on Russian Poetry in Honour of Georgette Donchin.

One of the first things a reader encounters in this book is a telling photograph of the scholar in whose honor it has been compiled: Georgette Donchin stands against a background of bookshelves filled with volumes of various sizes along with some small Russian-looking figures, perhaps matreshki. She bends slightly toward the camera, holding a cigarette in one hand, resting the other on an open book. Her expression suggests both a potential for kindness and the ability to hold her own in the face of difficulty — an impression that is borne out in the gracefully written biographical introduction by Professor McMillin.

For the sake of discussion, the thirteen essays comprising the volume will be divided into two groups, one devoted to essentially traditional forms of literary analysis, and one oriented more towards what is now called “cultural studies,” although the two areas obviously overlap. Among the articles with a more literary focus, Belyi and Mandel'shtam provide a large portion of the subject matter, with Boris Thomson writing on “Blok and Belyi: Divergent Readings of the Poetry of Vladimir Solov’ev”; Ada Steinberg, “Andrei Belyi’s Experimental Poetry”; Olga Muller Cooke, “‘Abundant Is my Sorrow’: Osip Mandel’shtam’s Requiem to Andrei Belyi and Himself”; and Diana Myers, “‘Hellenism’ and ‘Barbarism’ in
Mandel'shtam.” Other contributions in the literary realm include Cynthia Marsh’s “Decoding Voznesenskii’s ‘Goia’,” John Elsworth’s “The Poetic Vision of Aleksandr Kushner,” and Avril Pyman’s discussion of poetic translation in “Twentieth-Century Russian Poetry in Stand.”

While the titles of the literary essays tend to be self explanatory, those on more broadly cultural topics require some clarification. Wendy Resilience “Don Juan Feminised” and Jane Grayson’s “Rusalka and the Person from Porlock” represent particularly strong contributions in this area. Rosslyn will no doubt surprise many readers with her assertion that Akhmatova’s Poema bez geroia is a reworking of the Don Juan theme with a female protagonist. She builds her case piec by piece, noting Akhmatova’s claim that she had read Byron’s Don Juan in English over forty times, that the epigraph to the poema comes from Mozart’s Don Giovanni, that Akhmatova was especially interested in Pushkin’s Kamennyi gost’ and Blok’s Shagi komandora, and so on. Once this purposeful connection is established, Rosslyn moves on to an interpretation of the connection, the feminizing of the Don Juan myth, based on a broad range of cultural information and concepts of masquerade, wrongdoing, and retribution.

Jane Grayson’s “Rusalka and the Person from Porlock” begins with a brief treatment of Pushkin’s Rusalka, then shifts to the problem of Nabokov’s sixty-nine-line ending for Pushkin’s unfinished manuscript. This somewhat presumptuous gift from Nabokov to Pushkin was published shortly after Nabokov’s emigration to the United States in 1942. To the literary and psychological complexities of the Nabokov-Pushkin melange, Grayson adds “A Person from Porlock,” which is at one and the same time a reference to the visitor who interrupted Coleridge as he was transcribing his vision of “Kubla Rhan,” and to part of the working title for Nabokov’s own Bend Sinister, a novel in which the narrator is interrupted just as he is about to describe the hero’s death from a stray bullet. Moving from Coleridge to Nabokov to Pushkin, and back again to Nabokov, Grayson weaves an interpretation, partly literary and partly psychological (not, however, psychoanalytic, much to the sure relief of Nabokov’s shade), of Nabokov’s successive treatments of the mermaid theme in connection with notions of interruption, loss, and recovery, which is to say in connection with his own interrupted, lost, and yet ultimately recovered and re-created life as a fully functional man of letters.

In his article “The Nabis and the ‘Younger Symbolists’ in Russia,” James West demonstrates a link between visual and verbal arts by means of a common leaning toward the occult among both the second generation of Russian Symbolists and a group of painters affiliated with Gaugin who called themselves the “Nabis.” Donald Rayfield, likewise working across art forms and national cultures, makes particularly good use of Blok’s diaries and correspondence with Belyi in a study of Wagner’s role as a carrier of Celtic themes and Blok’s role as a receiver thereof, laconically entitling his essay “Celtic, Wagner and Blok.”

The award for the most entertaining metaphor of the volume must go to Professor McMillin, who opens his essay, “Poetry on the Periphery: Russian Verse by Byelorussian Writers in the Early Twentieth Century,” as follows: