

BELENTSCHIKOW, VALENTIN, *Russland und die deutschen Expressionisten 1910-1925* (Book Review)

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Z. Slaw. 38 (1993) 3, 496-497 BELENTSCHIKOW, VALENTIN, *RuBland und die deutschen Expressionisten 1910-1925: Zur Geschichte der deutsch-russischen Literaturbeziehungen*. 1. Teil. Frankfurt a. M.[ua]: Peter Lang, 1993. 284 S. (Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe XVIII; 73) The title and the subject of the book under review cannot astonish specialists. It is well known that the precursors of German expressionist art and mentality are to be found not only in the national traditions, but in Russian, American and Scandinavian cultures as well; the intellectual climate that begot the tendency consisted of diverse features. The German expressionists' contacts with Russian culture are self-evident, but they needed special philological investigation. Now research of this kind is offered to scholars and students. Valentin Belentschikow has thoroughly studied various aspects of Russian impact on the development of expressionist literature and aesthetics in Germany. His work adds vivid and important pages to the written history of Russian-German literary relationships of the twentieth century. As for the methodological foundations of the research, the approach may be defined as a comparativist one. The author based his analysis upon the works of some prominent Russian comparativists (MP Alekseev, ML Tronskaya others), following mostly the theoretical views of VM Zhirmunsky. One of the monograph's main merits is that it represents a very wide scope of literary facts. As far as the chosen problem is concerned, the scholar reviewed the history of two literary circles of German expressionists which had grouped around the magazines "Die Aktion" ("The Action") from 1911-1932 and "Die Weissen Blätter" ("The White Leaves") from 1913-1920. The problem of the reception of Russian culture by the writers of these circles is a central one in the book. Of considerable interest is the second chapter devoted to the elucidation and interpretation of Russian philosophical and social thought by the two literary groups of German expressionists. Special attention is paid to Vladimir Solovyov and this outstanding Russian thinker's popularity among the expressionists. It is rather unexpected for the readers that a "protagonist" of the paragraph 2.3. 2 is Th. G. Masaryk, a famous Czech philosopher and statesman, the first president of Czechoslovakia. But the appearance of this unexpected name is not accidental at all; his essay on Pobedonostsev appeared in "The Action" ("Die Aktion") in 1913, and two months later another expressionist periodical "The White Leaves" ("Die Weissen Blätter") published Max Scheler's review on Masaryk's two-volume work "On Russian Historical and Religious Philosophy", which had been written in German and printed in Jena in 1913. In the context of V. Belentschikow's book Masaryk's work itself is not of principal interest, but the German expressionists' reaction to it is quite relevant. Of course, Vladimir Solovyov is not the only figure in Russian philosophy, which was of real importance for the German writers of the above-mentioned trend, and their reception of Russian Slavophiles, Leo Tolstoy, F. Dostoevsky, P. Kropotkin are considered and reviewed as well. Dostoevsky's contribution to the expressionist mentality and his impact on the aesthetical programme of German expressionism are considerable. That is why the reception of his personality and fiction by F. Pfemfert, L. Rubiner, R. Schickele and their circles is the focus of the author's attention in the third and fourth chapters of his monograph. The former deals with the problems of Russian literature in the weekly "The Action" ("Die Aktion") and embraces a rather wide scope of facts and names ...