

A. I. KUPRIN: OCHERK ZHIZNI I TVORCHESTVA. By *Aleksandr Dynnik*.
Lansing: Russian Language Journal, 1969. 121 pp. Paper.

Although widely read and the object of considerable scholarly study in the Soviet Union since World War II, Kuprin has received little attention in the West. Dynnik's timely monograph, however, falls far short of its avowed aim—to provide an integrated view of Kuprin, the writer and the man. Quite the contrary, it approximates an uncritical, sketchy pastiche of quotations, assertions, and paraphrases taken from diverse sources.

A sparse chronological sketch of Kuprin's life up to 1914 (chap. 1) stresses the autobiographical origins of his fiction, mentions a few of his literary ties, and enumerates recurrent themes such as love, the sincerity, purity, and lack of artificiality in children and animals, and admiration for artists and circus performers. Many valid observations appear to be trite or even meaningless owing to the lack of amplification, an extreme example of which is the laconic paragraph (p. 26): "V 'Izumrude,' naprimer, mnogo obshchego s tolstovskim 'Kholstomerom.'" An idealized description of Kuprin's direct, unassuming, and compassionate nature (chap. 2) introduces an interesting discussion of his view that art must not only be based on the observation of real life but also should "adorn life" (the origin of Kuprin's phrase is not made clear). The seven works included in the subsequent discussion of Kuprin's language and style (chap. 3) well illustrate basic points such as Kuprin's increasing interest in social significance ("Molokh"), compositional maturity ("Olesia"), and individualized dialogue ("Poedinok"), but there is no extended critical analysis of an individual work, and the discussion concludes with the unsupported assertion that Kuprin was a "notable innovator" as a short-story writer. After a further examination (chap. 4) of prominent themes—art as the manifestation of life's eternal beauty, the evils of alcohol, the mysterious and inaccessible great love—there follows an uneven, cursory description (chap. 5) of Kuprin's emigration and return to the Soviet Union. The negative evaluation of Soviet critical literature (chap. 6) could have been greatly improved by the identification and discussion of Kuprin's works unacceptable to the Soviet press. The fifteen-item bibliography includes only one work not mentioned in the footnotes, but excludes many that were extensively used or praised by the author (Arsenieva, Miasnikov, Mikhailov, Paustovsky). The absence of prerevolutionary critics such as A. Bogdanov, A. Izmailov, and V. Kranikhfeld, as well as of the most complete Soviet edition of Kuprin's works (9 vols.; Moscow, 1964), is striking.

Although the stylistic inconsistencies in footnote references may be dismissed as simply annoying, the frequent errors in page references and dates prove to be indicative of the cavalier treatment accorded to quotations—punctuation and tenses change, adjectives become adverbs, some words disappear without ellipsis while others are inserted without brackets, even paraphrases are included! (See, for example, notes 1, 6, 31, 33, 44, 60, and 126, with the quoted texts.)

This study may be of some use to the casual reader seeking general information on Kuprin, but it will not satisfy the student or scholar of Russian literature.

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