

**MICHAELA PEŠKOVÁ: Vladimir Sorokin: The Future of Russia**

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Vladimir Sorokin is one of the key names in the Russian literary scene of the post-Soviet period. Creating works known for their stylistic and narrative “breakdowns”, he has achieved the status of one of the most shocking writers, whose work has elicited a wide range of reactions, ranging from rapture to accusations of pornography and coprophilia. By brutally murdering his characters, forcing them to perform absurd rituals and speak in newspaper clichés, by skillfully simulating different styles of writing, Sorokin actively deconstructed and demythologized hegemonic discourses of the past in his early works. With the rise of authoritarianism in Russia at the beginning of the 21st century, Sorokin’s attention shifted from the country’s past to its present state, but not in its synchronicity. The present is perceived by the writer as a prerequisite for the future of the country, culture, and language. It is to these “futurological” texts that Michaela Pešková has devoted her English-language monograph *Vladimir Sorokin: The Future of Russia*, published in Pilsen in 2022.

The author of the monograph has focused her attention on four of Sorokin’s books which form a kind of “prognostic” cycle: *Den’ oprichnika* (2007, *The Day of the Oprichnik*, 2010), *Telluria* (2013), *Manaraga* (2017) and *Doctor Garin* (2021). The choice of the works under analysis is justified because, as the author convincingly argues, all four of them share an ideological connection, through which they form a single fictional space at different fictional times (in the world of comics or fantasy literature, this would be called Sorokin’s “universe”).

As the title of the monograph implies, the key research aspect for its author is Sorokin’s vision of the future of Russia. There-

fore, the analysis at the thematic level prevails, but other aspects are also considered. These are first of all the ways and specificity in organization and functioning of literary space and time, as well as the language of the novels. Moreover, the latter is analyzed using rather effective quantitative methods, which, however, do not remain at the level of “dry” figures and are interpreted conjunctly with the analysis of the ideological dimension of the novels. The tables and charts, which contain data about the frequency of the use of relevant place names and examples of the transformation of real motifs into fantasy genre, are particularly useful (23). The author herself defines semiotic method and discourse analysis as her main research methods.

In the introduction and the first part of the monograph, the author introduces the reader to the issues, proposing a number of hypotheses (all of them are confirmed at the end of the book). According to one of the stand-out hypotheses, the starting point for Sorokin’s modelling of the future is the idea of Russia becoming extinct. Pešková also argues against the simplistic understanding of Sorokin’s novels as a satire on Russia’s current political order, since in her view they constitute “a genuine attempt to anticipate where Russia’s development is heading”, “a projection of general social and technological changes”, and are also “metatexts” exploring the nature of utopia and anti-utopia genres (8).

In the first thematic chapter, the author analyzes *The Day of the Oprichnik*, a book many have called prophetic, in terms of how Sorokin reinterprets and reintegrates Russia’s medieval past into an imaginary future world, through the transposition of realia, the use

of archaic language, and compositional techniques referring to the bylina genre. It also presents the structure of a fictional post-imperialist, isolationist society with its inherent mechanisms of power, noting that this novel “extends its interpretive potential to any form of totalitarian government, past or present” (48). In the chapter on *Telluria*, the novel with the most intense and extravagant spatial structure, Pešková discusses Sorokin’s approach to a subject which is atypical for Russian literature, that of Russia’s collapse: “the revival is only possible through diminution” (60). She also highlights the postcolonial character of the fictional micro-states created by Sorokin and the respective hybrid character of fictional languages.

The final chapter, on *Manaraga* and *Doctor Garin*, contains a valuable example of immersion into their novelistic worlds, through which the author has managed to reconstruct the internal chronology between all the novels in the cycle. Pešková notes that for the world of *Manaraga*, Russia as such does not exist, and even the contemplations over the reasons for its disappearance, although still present, are losing their relevance. In the monograph’s conclusion, which summarizes and recapitulates the content of the previous parts, one may be interested in a

table listing the attributes of “Russianness” contained in the novels and their gradual disappearance from novel to novel (98). It is noteworthy that the last “survivor” in this table turned out to be Russian literature.

Pešková’s monograph has no ambition to be an exhaustive resource on Sorokin’s body of work, but with its narrowed thematic focus and broader methodological focus, it could be useful for expanding the knowledge of the writer’s later work, particularly since the themes raised by Sorokin himself and analyzed in the monograph are more relevant in the present situation than ever. On a critical note, there are a few formal shortcomings, and the lack of translation of quotations from Russian into English seems like a missed opportunity for attracting a broader audience. I think that the monograph is a worthy addition not only to Czech and Slovak “Sorokinology” (among the already existing texts by Tomáš Glanc, Zuzana Močková-Lorková, Helena Ulbrechtová etc.), but also to the international body of analytical texts about this influential Russian writer.

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**MARKÉTA KRÍŽOVÁ – JITKA MALEČKOVÁ (eds.): Central Europe and the Non-European World in the Long 19th Century**

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The volume *Central Europe and the Non-European World in the Long 19th Century* edited by Czech historians affiliated with Charles University in Prague, Markéta Křížová and Jitka Malečková, is a contribution to the slowly growing literature on the relationship of the various regions of Central Europe to the non-European world. Although its

main thrust is historical, it also contains chapters devoted to art and literature.

There is already quite a substantial research literature on the topic in the regional languages. However, volumes synthesizing the scattered findings under the wider umbrella of Central Europe or a similar supranational term in English are quite rare.