broaches some important social issues, they are presented in a subdued and allusive manner, primarily through the prism of female sensuality and personal experience. Such an approach fully suits the generic requirements.

Unfolding the complex sensuous experiences of a contemporary woman on both the realistic and the fantastic levels, Chernikova's fiction does not offer easy solutions. Her protagonist's journey, unlike that of the adventurous and easy-going Lucius from *The Golden Ass*, is not concluded in joy and happiness. The character's attempt to reevaluate love as a significant human value, which can be interpreted in different ways, attests to this.

Generally, Chernikova's novel is dynamic, entertaining, and easy to read. It is free of the didacticism and heavy-handedness typical of many Russian and East European writers. Its major demerit lies in the loss of narrative smoothness near the conclusion. The novel's closing chapters would benefit significantly from a simpler plot, which currently incorporates features of several genres. Fantastic elements, social satire, and dystopia, to say nothing of intertextual insertions, are interwoven into an overly convoluted knot of strands, lines, and episodes which cannot be easily untangled by the reader. Still, even in its less successful chapters, the book remains provocative and thrilling. Representing an alternative female voice different from mainstream Russian women's writing, *Zolotaia oslitsa* undoubtedly deserves to be translated into English.

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Grigoriĭ Mark. **Ogliadyvaias' vpered**
St. Petersburg. Fond Russkoĭ Poėzii
1999 (released 2000). 120 pages
ISBN 5-89108-026-5

THE TITLE OF HIS latest collection (difficult to translate, it means literally "Glancing Back-Forward") aptly expresses the ethos of Grigory Mark's poetry. The volume contains poems from previously published collections, including *Sredi veshcheĭ i golosov* (1995; see *WLT* 69:4, p. 817) and going back to the 1980s, organized not chronologically but in fifteen groups according to their content, vaguely defined ("From the Life of Words," "Into the Depths of the Sky," "In Winter"). Mark is a remarkable poet in more ways than one, but most of all he strikes readers with the power of his bold paradoxes, as in these lines from an untitled twelve-line poem: "Recorded by genes / in our bodies since birth, / God's two eternal books / are open to us to read — / one reflected in the other, / Universe and Bible."

It is with the same bold poetic license that Mark resolves other questions: the living word, God's gift, becomes independent of things, and when holy prayers ascend to heaven, "sacred Grammar rises to heaven, / a metaphor of God, alive with the people." And elsewhere, would not a new pronoun, *tyia* (from *ty*, "thou," and *ia*, "I,") make for a blissful marriage? Whenever it is modern science's turn to provide subject matter to the poet, it comes off badly, as humanity's future is perceived not in terms of material progress but in those of rebirth of words like *sin* and *penance*.

It may well be said that Mark has added a new version of St. Petersburg to those of Pushkin, Blok, and Mandelstam: it is perceived as "its own negative"; the Bronze Horseman as an Imperial Chimera "flies over it, a bloody banner in hand, eternity flowing down the river"; and the city, no matter if it is Leningrad or Petersburg, is decrepit, and even the memory of its former greatness is dying, as a series of mostly nocturnal poems in the group "Having Forgotten Nothing" suggests over and over again in images that are nightmarishly real. In stark contrast to a Petersburg that seems forever dark and forbidding, the subsequent group of poems, "Luminous Roots," presents the land of Israel in broad daylight and full of hope. Here "synagogues grow stubbornly from the stony ground, / and in stuffy rooms one hears the words of life-giving books."

Very noteworthy too is the way in which Mark manages not only to express a postmodern sensibility in classical, almost Pushkinian verse, a Jew's belief to be standing at the Golden Gate "through which the Messiah will enter," but also to make a vivid presentation of what is happening in Moscow's financial district. Truly remarkable!

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Evgeniĭ Saburov. **Po kraiu ozera**
Moscow. OGI. 2001. 102 pages
ISBN 5-94282-010-4

THERE IS LITTLE in Yevgeny Saburov's collection of verse to justify its title, "Along the Lake's Edge." The book's first section, "Baudelaire: Invitation to a Journey," does suggest a content similar to *Les Fleurs du mal*: a journey, apparently imaginary, featuring Eastern scenery, beauty found in a bedroom, "where candles and perfume make the air heavy," a country which is really a body "in which live eyes and sharp-smelling shame." Then the journey is revealed as that of a "romantic wanderer on well-worn lines," who finds on one of his Eastern voyages a "Charles Baudelairovich Guido." The journey ends in a mixture of an awakening to a humdrum Russian reality and a lapse into outright "trans-sense" (*zaum'*): *myshemyshi* turn into *krysokrysy* (*mysh'* means "mouse," *krysa* is "rat"), as "steamers and nations / look into nature's mirror," where rhyme and rhythm clearly dictate the meaning.

The second section contains some sixty poems, which, with the sole exception of a cycle of five poems under the heading "Aleksandr," loosely connected to Alexander the Great, show no signs of unity or organization. Most of the poems leave an impression of a flash of insight, with an attempt to give it meaning or structure and, on occasion, a pointed conclusion. Topics include various aspects and degrees of erotica, the inevitability of death, the collapse of the old order and the birth of a new one, "tiny moments of faith," nature, a changing society — all in all, nothing special. But then come some pleasant surprises, like the poem about a "man-eating sheath-fish" (*som-liudoed*), which turns out to be a metaphor, as the poet urges his friends to grab it by the gills, drag it out from its hiding place, and liquidate the danger which this "unpleasant type" poses to all. There are several serious discussions about the meaning — or meaninglessness — of life.

The third and final section, "Iz 1991 goda" (From the Year 1991), contains five poems describing a Russian intellectual's fears, hopes, and doubts amid the whirl of events that has hit Russia in recent years. Saburov's style is colloquial, including extremes from *oikumene* (on the learned side), to *ob tvoiu mat'* (on the vulgar). His versification is conventional, but with many irregularities.

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Svetlana Vasilenko
Shamara and Other Stories
Helena Goscilo et al., eds. & trs. Evanston, Illinois. Northwestern University Press
2000. xxii + 245 pages
$49.95 ($15.95 paper)
ISBN 0-8101-1721-5 (1722-3 paper)

SVETLANA VASILENKO'S literary journey began with the publication of a poem in