

In all stages of her socialist apprenticeship, at school, at home, in the shoe factory, in the reform institute, etc., Sabine always retains the same characteristic: she discovers that the conventional norm is based on hypocrisy and she insists on ostentatiously telling the truth, on exposing the sham. We all know from Ibsen's plays what happens to the delicate fabric of social order if a truthsayer insists on continuously testing the strength of the thread. But Kruschel refuses to share Ibsen's pessimism and attempts to demonstrate that Sabine's truth is a breath of fresh air for the stale, bureaucratic monolith of East Germany.

The novel is constructed on a formula well known in the West: two thirds sensationalism mixed poorly with one third moralizing. Perhaps it is even daring by East-German standards that the heroine feels it to be her ethical duty to shock the staid conventional population by wearing squalid, foul smelling clothes, and by pulling up her jumper and exposing her bosom to anyone in the local pub who offends her delicate sense of honesty and frankness. When some of the local regulars become incensed at this moral outrage, Kruschel feels it is the right time to introduce his deeply philosophical, titular question "Just how friendly is the world really?"

Kruschel is aware of such techniques as shifting narrative perspectives and point of view and interior monologue, but his attempts to utilize such methods end in glib, superficial imitation. For example, as in Heinrich Böll's recent novel, *Gruppenbild mit Dame*, he attempts to draw the character of the main female figure through the testimony of various witnesses who tell their version in the first person. For example, "Mrs. Peggy Sandkorn to the witness box please" (p. 18). But instead of providing a penetrating new point of view, Mrs. Sandkorn produces an erotic and tasteless anecdote.

On the positive side one should note that occasionally Kruschel overcomes his earnest didacticism and captures in Sabine's youthful slang her need for freedom, for joy, and for experiment. One also feels his love for his heroine vibrating through his inadequate clichés. But it is this very love which inspires him to wander off into sentimentality and melodrama. Some of the melodrama—oddly enough in classless East Germany—is of an eminently

bourgeois type. For example, when Sabine Wulff returns home after a night on the town smelling of alcohol and cigarette, her mother drags her off immediately to a gynaecologist to determine whether she has or has not indulged fully in the "Egyptian fleshpots." It would also seem that hashish and indiscriminate promiscuity feature just as strongly in East as in West Germany as "beat" ways of protesting against civic authoritarianism and hypocrisy.

There were evidently, however, enough compulsory mentions of antifascism in the novel for it to be passed by the censor. There are references to Nazi concentration camps and to the young boys in the "Edelweißpiraten" who died there for having beaten up two leaders of the Hitler Youth Movement. There are references to the idealistic school teacher who wants his pupils to do voluntary community work and send the money earned as a donation to Vietnam, to the workers in the shoe factory who work an extra shift on Sunday to buy milk powder for the innocent victims of the fascist coup in Chile, and to the vicious cowards who desert their two little children in socialist East Germany, thereby causing the death of the baby, in their cynical rush to flee to capitalist West Germany and earn enough money to buy a Mercedes Benz. Such incidents serve only to illustrate the sad truth that even well-intentioned propaganda is seldom compatible with art.

David A. Myers

## JOSEPH FRANK

*Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849*

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976. Pp. 401. \$16.50.

It is a well-known fact that childhood and early years are of utmost importance for any artist. Some draw on early experiences throughout their artistic career, either exclusively or to a large degree. And for some, the unhappy events in early life constitute the source from which their tragedy-filled creations and pessimistic attitudes spring, shaping their entire artistic outlook. Fyodor M. Dostoevsky is a case in point.

Like all great writers, Dostoevsky has been written about so much that no new approach seems possible. And yet, Joseph Frank's combination of a literary biography and analysis, *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849*, does exactly that. The first of the projected four volumes, it offers many new insights while threading the old paths; it dares to suggest new views where the old seem immovably entrenched; and it sheds light on many aspects of Dostoevsky's writings which have been considered settled once and for all or fallen into oblivion. To do all this while writing an exceedingly lucid book, of interest not only to specialists in the Slavic field or Western literature, but also to those interested in general literature, is no mean accomplishment. It is no wonder that the book has met with praise and has already received awards.

The study follows Dostoevsky's life chronologically: from his humble beginnings and uncertainties of his childhood, through the fermenting years of adolescence and first literary efforts, to the ripening of artistic, cultural, and ideological views that would stamp his main works in his mature years. Literary influences—of Hoffmann, Schiller, Hugo, Balzac, and others—are discussed, although not at great length. Dostoevsky's early enamoration with both German and French Romanticism is well treated in a separate chapter, as is his attraction to a leading writer of his age, Gogol. By far the largest portion of the study is devoted to various literary and political circles, which shaped not only Dostoevsky's views but his future life as well. One often wonders what his fate, both as a man and as a writer, would have been had it not been for that tragic coincidence of being associated with the Petrashevsky circle at a very unstable point in Russian history. One of the greatest merits of Frank's study is his ability to interrelate the outside factors with Dostoevsky's inner world and growth. He does it without overemphasizing their significance yet searching for, and finding, relevant points.

The fact that the author is not a specialist in the Slavic field has contributed significantly to the value of the study, for he has brought into it a broader point of view, which is often lacking in narrow specialists. While there is a danger of overgeneralization—and there are signs of it in this book also—it is still a valuable

contribution to the never-ending research of Dostoevsky. So much so that, when Frank's study of Dostoevsky's entire life and opus is completed, it may turn out to be one of the most refreshing books on this great Russian writer.

Vasa D. Mihailovich

## LLOYD FERNANDO

### *Scorpion Orchid*

Singapore: Heinemann, 1976.  
Pp. 147.

In spite of its unimpressive length, *Scorpion Orchid* is one of the most significant Singapore/Malaysian novels to have appeared in recent years. Set mostly in Singapore in the early 1950s, it vividly captures the spirits of that multiracial society during the stormy years shortly before both Malaya and Singapore became independent.

The novel, in the main, deals with the relationship of four young men, an Indian, a Chinese, a Malay, and an Eurasian. It traces their friendship from their care-free high school days through their youthful idealism as they entered university, where they "seemed in microcosm a presage of a new society, a world of new people who would utterly confound the old European racist ways of thinking" (p. 67), to the breakup of their friendship in the final year of university. It shows the fragility of human bonds in the face of social and political pressures, and deals with the problems of identity, both individual and national, in a time of drastic change.

The texture of the story is enhanced by the four major characters' involvement with two enigmatic figures; the old medium Tok Said—apparently a symbol for man's fear and confusion in a time of social agitation and unrest—who is said to have predicted violence and bloodshed for the country, and whose identity is never clearly established in the novel, and Sally U, alias Salmah binte Yub, a character who is fully portrayed as a good natured woman who gives love freely;