

GEOFFREY C. KABAT  
*Ideology and Imagination: The Image  
of Society in Dostoevsky*  
New York: Columbia University  
Press, 1978. Pp. 201.

A detailed examination of the complex interrelationship between the imaginative work of a great writer and the social and historical milieu of his creations is always a welcome event. The current book by Geoffrey C. Kabat represents a valiant attempt to establish just such a connection between the artistic genius of Dostoevsky and the social problems of post-reform Russia in the nineteenth century. The most informative and useful sections of his study are unquestionably those chapters which might be subsumed under the subtitle, *The Image of Society in Dostoevsky*. There the reader will find a wealth of information on the role of the Petrine reforms in the development of Russian society, on the dire consequences of the liberation of the serfs in 1861, and on the economic and cultural stratification of Russian life in Dostoevsky's time. While most of this information is available in other sources—especially in historical and sociological studies—it is refreshing to find it in a book written primarily for the student of literature. Of special interest is the comparison between the Marxist concept of a classless society and what Kabat refers to as the "supernationalism" of Dostoevsky's world view. The reader will also be struck by the similarity between Dostoevsky's reaction to the city of London as the center of the capitalist world and that of Friedrich Engels. Indeed, such parallels suggest a second area of study which is yet to be fully exploited.

The greatest shortcoming of Kabat's book is his treatment of the subject implied in the main title: *Ideology and Imagination*. It is his principal contention that Dostoevsky had two modes of thought: the ideological, best illustrated in his notebooks and journalism, and the imaginative, characteristic of his fictional work. Since this is hardly a new or striking notion (Sir Isaiah Berlin might have summarized it by saying that Dostoevsky was simultaneously a hedgehog and a fox), it is difficult to understand why so much space is devoted to it or in what sense the author's discussion of such novels as *Crime and Punishment*, *The Possessed*, and *The Brothers Karamazov* confirms it. For the same reason it is impossible to feel excited

by the announcement on p. 150 that "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" is not merely a flashy philosophical digression from the main events of *Karamazov*, but a story "intimately connected with the rest of the novel." Has this not been widely recognized since the publication of Vasilii Rozanov's book, *F. M. Dostoevsky's Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, in the 1890's? Moreover, it seems extremely odd to me that a book dealing with Dostoevsky and Russian society barely mentions the novelist's views on religion or the religious content of his major works.

There are, to be sure, several excellent and instructive chapters from which everyone will benefit. The first three are particularly strong. But the weakness, or, rather, the obviousness of the author's central thesis, leaves the impression that the book lacks focus and perhaps even purpose.

David Matual

ANNE SMITH, ED.  
*The Art of Malcolm Lowry*  
New York: Barnes and Noble,  
1978. Pp. 172. \$17.50.

In 1957 Malcolm Lowry died in a quiet Sussex village. To those who knew his work, he was a writer of genius; to the world, he was an alcoholic in his late forties who had succeeded in drinking himself to death. Today, there is no disputing his status. Critical orthodoxy on both sides of the Atlantic recognizes Lowry as the author of one of the great novels of our time: the appearance of this collection by divers hands testifies to his eminence in the eyes of academe.

As with all complex writing, Lowry's fictions work on many levels and offer particular temptations to those academic critics who practise cabalistic exegesis. Lowry's letter to Cape's Reader suggests the inclusiveness he intended to bring to *Under the Volcano*: "It is hot music, a poem, a song, a tragedy, a comedy, a farce, and so