

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

forth . . . It is a prophecy, a political warning, a cryptogram, a preposterous movie, and a writing on the wall." The critics gathered together in *The Art of Malcolm Lowry* cover most of these aspects—and more. The prefatory essay to this collection could well make this book a *succès de scandale* in Lowrian criticism. In a piece entitled "Malcolm—A Closer Look," Russell Lowry, the author's elder brother, sets about the biographers and puts straight the record with iconoclastic vigor. "Malcolm is no hero to me," he writes, "never was, never could be." Pointing to inaccuracies by the hagiographers and in Lowry's fiction, Mr. Lowry presents his brother as an inveterate liar. Underlying these reminiscences there seems to be a deliberate attempt to discredit Douglas Day's critical biography. However fascinating these fraternal memoirs may be as gossip, they have very little to do with the art of Malcolm Lowry.

If Lowry's work is acutely personal, it is never merely confessional. As in the most authentic subjective writing, the closer the writer comes to his own truths, the closer he comes to his reader's. Brian O'Kill, in a perceptive essay on style, tells us that Lowry had copied out Keyserling's dictum: "There live in every man, in some stratum of his being, all conceivable types of man." At one level, the story of *Under the Volcano* is almost naturalistic; at another, it has the archetypal resonances of myth. In an early version of the novel, the description of a dying peasant suggests this aspect of the fiction: "The Consul saw that this was not only a man dying, it was a nation, it was mankind. And he saw too that these were not merely men talking, they too were nations, nations that argued over trivialities while mankind perished from the face of the earth." If the Consul is Lowry, then the Consul is also Christ, Prometheus, Faust, and Everyman. The soul-sickness that Dr. Virgil diagnoses is a sickness unto death: this is hell, nor are we out of it.

Of the critical essays in this collection, George Woodcock's piece on "Lowrian Topography" is the most illuminating. The significance of place for Lowry—both in his life and in his work—is vividly demonstrated, and the function of the symbolic geography of *Under the Volcano*—where the vision of British Columbia offers a paradisaical alternative to the Dantesque hell of Mexico—is finely analyzed. Woodcock's short exploration of recurrent images associated with Dollarton is a blueprint for

further research into that most intimate of relationships, the life to the art.

Several of the contributors touch upon this relationship. M. C. Bradbrook quotes from a letter written by Lowry in 1950: "Is man a sort of novelist of himself who conceives the fanciful figure of a personage with its unreal occupations and then, for the sake of converting it into reality, does all the things he does?" In much of his imaginative writing, Lowry faced directly what Miss Bradbrook calls "his own psychic turbulence," and his autobiographical fictions explore surrogate worlds and alter egos, alternatives to life's narrative. In his later work, there exists an uncertainty as to whether the creative protagonists are indeed authors of their lives, or if they themselves are being written.

One tells lies, then, in order to be truer to one's self, in order to define the self. In this exploration there are truths beyond the facts of Clio and Mr. Russell Lowry. Although the projected novel-sequence, "The Voyage that Never Ends," was to remain only a dream, there is a sense in which all Lowry's writing represents an unceasing search for meaning and identity. How to discover and articulate that meaning was Lowry's quest. His fictions are that voyage: the journey not the arrival matters, and the best essays in this collection help the reader on that difficult journey to Lowry's difficult truths.

Robert Chapman

GORDON S. HAIGHT, ED.  
*The George Eliot Letters*, Vols. VIII and IX  
 New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978. Pp. 491 and 593. \$60.00.

Professor Gordon S. Haight has "labored for more than forty years to establish a faithful text of George Eliot's letters," and one wonders if any other editor of a novelist's correspondence—or, for that matter, any other editor at all—has ever been more devoted and meticulous. As any