

ihrer aller Blum und Vaterland!" (p. 172). Here the thistle expresses the only comfort left to the assembled poets in their political impotence: the consolation that they derive from metaphorical expression of their grief. As the narrator says of their "distelwüchsige[s] Deutschland," "Fast sah es aus, als seien wir nun zufrieden und auf deutsche Art froh über die Bildkräftigkeit unseres Jammers" (p. 172). Like Goethe's Tasso, the only comfort of poets then and now is: "Wenn die anderen in ihrer Qual verstummen gab mir ein Gott zu sagen wie ich leide." But how these baroque poets speak! Grass celebrates the glorious variety of their styles: Greflinger's Arcadian pastorals; Birken's visual figure poems; Spee's haunting condemnation of the Inquisition; Paul Gerhardt's well satirized, fanatical protestantism; Angelus Silesius's aphoristic mysticism; and most startling of all, misanthropist Gryphius's powerful expression of betrayal, evil, and futility on the stage of world history. For here is a novel which is rich in literary treasures as well as in political and religious problems.

David A. Myers

ROBERT M. HENKELS, JR.

Robert Pinget: The Novel as Quest
Birmingham, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1979. Pp. 277.

Mr Henkels's opening cluster of quotations draws back the curtain on the theme of genesis in Robert Pinget's work: all the obscure inner births, contradictory and unassimilable, to which the writer gives voice. Who begets what, and over what derisory kingdom does the would-be creator hold sway? A Pinget novel is a groping literary project which decomposes as it composes, curls back as it advances, interferes with itself as it reaches outwards. It is an ambiguous and inconclusive quest "qui se détruit elle-même au fur et à mesure," as Robbe-Grillet might say. It sets on stage, not the "man-in-his-acts" or *l'homme en situation* of the Sartrean moment, but "man-in-his-language": an embryonic being embedded in an intractable and paradoxical medium which makes a mockery of novelistic conventions, ordered chronology, and autobiographical stability.

Calling on the three broad cycles outlined by the critic Jean Roudaut, the "mystical," the "realistic," and the "mythological," Henkels suggestively traces the evolution of Pinget's novels (though it should be said that these pseudo-cycles act only as dubious markers largely alien to the fluency, overlap, and backtrack of the author's ongoing pursuit, just as to lean on Gide's distinction between *roman* and *récit* and to call *Quelqu'un* one and *Fable* the other is to invoke an already congealed criterion and to minimize Pinget's dissolution of the whole notion of genre). The first period, that of *Entre Fantoine et Agapa* (1951), *Mahu ou le matériau* (1952), *Le Renard et la boussole* (1955), *Graal Flûbuste* (1956) and *Baga* (1958), is characterized by a spirit of parody and surrealist fantasy, illogicality, and dreamlike effects, acrobatic leaps between the real and the imaginary. Here the reader is plunged into fragments and indirections, lacunae and outrageous metamorphoses. The second stage, less concerned with toppling the house of fiction in zany and capricious manner, becomes more densely (and yet perhaps more vacuously) introspective. *Le Fiston* (1959), *Clope au dossier* (1961), and *L'Inquisiteur* (1961) take the form of an infinite inquisition, a hide-and-seek of question and answer, pseudo-detective novels which lose their way at every intersection and solve nothing; while *Quelqu'un* (1965) focuses all the more on the evasive verbal process which can never be transformed into anything more than an increasingly involved and confused "preliminary hearing." The most recent period, comprising *Le Libera* (1967), *Passacaille* (1969), *Fable* (1971), and *Cette voix* (1975), moves further from time and space, real or imaginary, into the echo chamber of an inner tone, played and re-played until it is tantamount to silence. Henkels speaks of a "flirtation with verbal suicide" (p. 170). The novel itself seems almost uninhabited, the only characters being the endless verbal and aural permutations weaving their own plaintive and beautiful forms in frustrated anticipation of an ultimate *innommable*. Words here become, as Michel Butor has said of his own fiction, "de véritables personnages de roman, qui avaient des aventures."

Mr Henkels clearly appreciates a main critical problem in dealing with an author such as Pinget. It would require, he says, "the talents of a scribe both learned in the art of glossing complex tropes and willing to smudge the end of his nose on pages of black ink in order to get to the level

where the real action is taking place" (p. 16). It is the same conflict of interest between the panoramic and the microscopic, global pattern and evolving detail, shape and shapelessness, which Beckett's Molloy apologetically summarizes in these terms: "Je m'excuse de ces détails, mais tout à l'heure nous irons plus vite. Sans préjuger d'une rechute dans des passages méticuleux et puants. Mais qui à leur tour donneront naissance à des grandes fresques." In his anxiety to give a *résumé* of each novel in turn, something which a general introduction to Pinget's writings would seem to demand, Henkels has lapsed into too much renarration of the "events" of the books, events which, by their very nature, are inconclusive, formless, and opaque and force the study, for considerable periods, into a directionless accumulation of spare parts. The description of *Baga*, for instance, becomes turbid, and the convoluted paraphrases of "plot" in *Le Fiston* (what are called "a cursory summary of the content") seem counterproductive, for it is not the content which is Pinget's prime concern but the flight paths of its endless transformations.

Several issues could have been developed more widely. Although a major section is entitled "An Inventory of Invention," little is made of the notion of the inventory: the anguished groping of Michaux's *Mes propriétés* and the unfulfilled promise of Beckett's Molloy to "dresser l'inventaire de mes biens et possessions" would have made stimulating points of reference, to say nothing of the motif of the constantly rewritten "testament" in Pinget's own *Passacaille*. The "story-within-a-story" convention might have prompted a deeper analysis of the *mise en abyme* technique related to the major tensions of contemporary fiction: a passing reference to Gide's *Les Faux-monnayeurs* as a "novel about a novel" is the barest of contributions. In the chapter on Pinget's plays, seen essentially as an appendix to the novels, aspects more intrinsic to the nature of theater might have been highlighted. The theatrical problem implicit in Pinget's need to "strip away characterization in order to get down to the level of words as such" (p. 142) is akin to that of Marguerite Duras in, say, *Le Square* with its nondescript characters "que rien ne signale à l'attention." The device of playback and verbal "overprinting" points to Beckett's *La dernière bande* or to Duras's novel *L'Amante anglaise*, both of which exploit tape recordings. Even Nathalie Sarraute,

another practitioner of a form of *sous-conversation* and all the linguistic virtualities that stay on the verge of being made flesh, moves temptingly in the wings. And there is hardly a mention of Ionesco and the absurdities of language, despite an initial epigraph from *La Leçon* which offers so much.

Mr Henkels's book leaves crucial areas of Pinget's work still to be explored: the actual *form* of his novels as quest, the complexities and creative contours of his structural patterning, and the whole question of *tone* which lies at the source of his artistic developments and governs their equilibrium, placing Pinget not in the so-called "école du regard" of Robbe-Grillet but in a highly personal "école de l'oreille." But within the aims that it sets itself, this is a very valuable study, not least for its bibliographical diligence. It is the first systematic survey of the complete works of a novelist of rare attraction: frivolous yet grave, evasively formalistic yet full of the deepest human poignancy, lost in the swirl of uncontaminable time yet touching the bedrock of a universal mythology. Mr Henkels, through the irrepressible pyrotechnics of his phrasing and imagery, has caught glimpses of the essential spirit of Pinget's creative venture and given the reader an enthusiastic encouragement to enter its vitality.

Peter Broome

EDWARD WASIOLEK

Tolstoy's Major Fiction

Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978. Pp. 255. \$12.00.

Edward Wasiolek is widely known as the author of *Dostoevsky: The Major Fiction*. Since that book was received so favorably (it is quite possibly the finest general study of Dostoevsky written in any language), expectations were naturally quite high for the current offering. The reviews that have appeared so far, however, reflect a certain disappointment. The general opinion is that the second book does not live up to the first. Nevertheless, *Tolstoy's Major Fiction*, even with its occasional lapses and shortcomings, is still a significant contribution to Tolstoy scholarship and a worthy successor to the monograph on Dostoevsky.