

1969 book, on the other hand, should have been included as essential for understanding not only Dostoevsky's early works but also the great novels of his mature years, since the versatile, often ironic, modes of presentation the mature writer used originated from his early stylistic experiments.

Jane Marcus, ed

VIRGINIA WOOLF: A FEMINIST SLANT

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. Pp. 281.

\$24.95.

Reviewed by Annis Pratt

One encounters quite a few people these days who have read a Virginia Woolf novel or two, but who would like to reread her with some kind of a guide in hand. These same people often are curious about feminist criticism, but apprehensive that it may entail mere ideological sanctification of a figure "canonized" as major for her modernist style. Jane Marcus, whose explosively witty essays have clarified Woolf's art and politics during the past ten years, has edited a collection which approaches Woolf's fiction and nonfiction from a variety of "slants," using biographical, historical, and manuscript studies as well as accounts of Woolf's interaction with her contemporary women writers.

Simply put, feminist criticism applies the experience of gender to the explication of texts. Art and life, politics and aesthetics are interbraided with each other; feminist criticism unravels the strands so that an author's psychological and historical context illuminates such textual phenomena as characterization, imagery, narrative structure, and theme. Let me illustrate how the authors of these essays achieve this goal. Critics have noted that many Woolf characters debate with each other about the relative merits of singlehood and marriage, to the extent that a number of novels are structured upon conflicting attitudes to this question. Marcus explains Caroline Stephen's theories about "celibate mysticism," theories to which Woolf was undoubtedly exposed while recovering from an earlier "nervous breakdown" at her Aunt's residence, as the context within which such characters as Lucy Swithin, Eleanor Pargiter, and even Clarissa Dalloway have their being. Indeed, in one of the striking details which often illuminate Marcus's scholarship, she mentions that Stephen's history of sisterhoods includes an account of an order of married but celibate nuns called Clarissans. Stephen's theories of "inner illumination," derived from her Quaker persuasion, not only clarify Woolf's use of light imagery but also account for the symbol of the lighthouse which appears both in her work and in her aunt's.

What a young woman experiences as a fifteen year old, and what a mature woman experiences in her fifties, surely contribute to what she writes about and how she writes it. Starting with this simple truth of feminist criticism, Louise de Salvo illustrates the way works written long after the dreadful year of 1897, when Woolf's half-sister died and she was forbidden study and meaningful activity, express attitudes about sexuality as well as literary influences which have their origins in this traumatic adolescent year. Beverly Ann Schlack probes into the way Woolf's experience of Sir Leslie Stephen's vagaries (noted by his sister Caroline during Woolf's crucial visit to her) effects her characterization of fathers and other male authority figures throughout her opus. At the end of her life, in a much misunderstood body of works created in the 1930s, Woolf focused on the interplay of the personal and the political in novels and essays on the lives of women. Carolyn Heilbrun's assessment of Woolf's final and "eloquent rebellion" sets the background for Susan Squier's study of the typescript draft of *The Years*, Brenda R. Silver's fascinating account of the scrapbooks and correspondence surrounding *Three Guineas*, and Naomi Black's essay on Woolf and the women's movement.

For the reader who has heard of Virginia Woolf as a politically disengaged and "subjective" author, her social commentary during the 1930s may come as a surprise. Before 1970 she was most often presented as solitary among writers, the only woman read in many university courses, acceptable because of a charming aesthetic although ideologically suspect because of an alleged "elitism." Since her gender was either overlooked or used as a veiled excuse for

her peculiarities, it did not occur to us that her works sprang as much from the context of twentieth-century women's fiction as from the modernist movement. Diane Filby Gillespie and Ann L. McLaughlin, in articles comparing Woolf to Dorothy Richardson and Katherine Mansfield, show how a woman author can be understood in her interaction with her female contemporaries. Gillespie demonstrates the influence of Dorothy Richardson's theory of male and female realism on two key Woolf essays, "Modern Fiction" and "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown"; and McLaughlin illuminates by comparison Mansfield's "Prelude" and Woolf's "The Mark on The Wall" and Mansfield's "The Garden Party" and *Mrs. Dalloway*.

The essays in Marcus's collection consistently return from the context to the text, providing fresh insights helpful to her reader. After rereading Woolf in the light of such careful critical analysis it is disconcerting to pick up a summer 1984 issue of *The London Observer* (by Hilary Spurling, June 24, 1984) and read that Woolf's works lack "emotional or structural complexity," show "defective architectural sense, immaturity of feeling [and] above all her fundamental incuriosity about human nature." Let us hope that Jane Marcus's volume will go into paperback so that as many readers as possible have access to a criticism and scholarship whose multifaceted "slants" provide a more balanced perspective.

H. C. Chang

CHINESE LITERATURE 3: TALES OF THE SUPERNATURAL

New York: Columbia University Press, 1984. Pp. 169.

Reviewed by Robert Joe Cutter

Book stores have seen the repeated appearance of slight books full of trivial observations on China for some time now. Frequently these works are made up of someone's not particularly inspired insights into Chinese society and the Chinese psyche. I have no way of knowing whether the multiplicity of such works has had a limiting effect on the publication of more substantial and ultimately more informative works on various aspects of Chinese civilization, but I cannot help but suspect that in a finite world it has. Happily, excellent works have continued to come out on Chinese literature in both its traditional and modern representations. In many ways, H. C. Chang's new book *Chinese Literature 3: Tales of the Supernatural* is a recent example.

Tales of the Supernatural, as I shall refer to it here, is the third in a series of books by Chang about the Chinese literary tradition. It is the second to deal with some form of fiction. An earlier volume, *Chinese Literature 1: Popular Fiction and Drama* (1973), was very well-received and won the coveted prize bearing the name of the distinguished French Sinologist Stanislas Julien (1797-1873). In the present volume Chang turns his attention from vernacular fiction to tales written in the literary (or classical) language.

The English rubric "classical Chinese tale" can generally be applied to two types of works known as *chih-kuai* and *ch'uan-ch'i*. *Chih-kuai*, which may be translated as "recording anomalies," is a name for the kind of short account of extraordinary or supernatural happenings which preceded the appearance of the more mature classical language tale (*ch'uan-ch'i*, or "tale transmitting the marvellous" in Chang's translation) around the beginning of the T'ang dynasty (618-907). The more mature tales transmitting the marvellous continued to be written on into the Ch'ing dynasty (1644-1912). Of the twelve such stories translated by Chang, seven are from the T'ang, one from the Sung (960-1279), and four from a single famous collection dating from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. They include stories about fox-fairies, disembodied souls, ghosts (2), metamorphoses (2), dragons, were-tigers, immortals, a visit to a kingdom of swallows, flower spirits, and a religious conversion and enlightenment. In order to offset any mistaken impression Chang's work might give, it must be noted here that there are other types of classical tales. For instance, there is a considerable number of love stories and chivalric stories. Other groupings are also possible and there is often a good deal of overlap among groups due to the complexity of the stories and the vagaries of such classificatory schemes.