

from *The Lost Ones*. There are references to Beckett as obvious as “imagination is far from being dead, my friends, in spite of what has been rumored lately, imagination dead imagine” (*The Twofold Vibration*) or “In complete LESSNESSness my friend Sam would say where nothing is even less than nothing” (*Take It or Leave It*). Some are more obscure such as this embellishing of a line from *Murphy*, “MUST I BITE THE HAND THAT STARVES ME SO THAT IT CAN STRANGLE ME BETTER?” (*Take It or Leave It*). The sentences from *Double or Nothing*, “In fact I’ll change all the names eventually. Has to be” make us think of the monologuists’ odd gestures in Beckett’s trilogy. There is no doubt that Federman is one of Beckett’s genuine fictional heirs; the younger writer, to his credit, has never ceased to acknowledge his indebtedness. Beckett, one can say, has played a more crucial role in shaping Federman’s art than Wallace Stevens did with Sukenick’s.

Kutnik says interesting things about Federman’s fiction from *Double or Nothing* through *The Twofold Vibration*. It is too bad that he never mentions his 1985 *Smiles on Washington Square*, which is Federman’s most conventional novel thus far, as it avoids many of the earlier experiments with telling, typography, paragraphing, and punctuation; it is also, I think, his least Beckettian text.

A brief conclusion follows the Federman section. A useful twenty-page bibliography completes *The Novel as Performance*. One might mention that two items listed under the name Richard Pearce as “unpublished” (p. 265) are actually parts of Pearce’s excellent study, *The Novel in Motion: An Approach to Modern Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983).

Jerzy Kutnik is to be congratulated for defining so well what he has called “the antimimetic disposition of twentieth-century art” (p. 228). He has also commented on the subtleties and intricacies of the work of Ronald Sukenick and Raymond Federman in the most lucid and convincing terms.

George Steiner  
*TOLSTOY OR DOSTOEVSKY*  
Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985  
First published in 1959 by Alfred Knopf.  
Reviewed by Edward Wasiolek

Steiner wrote this book almost thirty years ago without knowing Russian, and without scholarly credentials for either Dostoevsky or Tolstoy, or for that matter, for Russian literature. It was a bold and hazardous task and one that he carried off with a mixture of bravado and deep passion. He did so not at the end of his career, but at the beginning, and he did it well. No one before him, or indeed after him, had placed Dostoevsky and Tolstoy in the matrix of the Western tradition and saw so keenly and sensitively how both were a product and coronation of Western art. He did it, too, at the dawn of scholarship and criticism of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy in America. Except for early criticism on Tolstoy at the beginning of the century and perhaps Hugh I’Anson Fausset’s slim work on Tolstoy in 1928, there was nothing of substance and any length on Tolstoy in the late fifties when Steiner’s work appeared. The situation was a little better on Dostoevsky, but not much. There were a half dozen books on Dostoevsky in English before Steiner (Fayer, Lavrin, Lloyd, Curle, Powys) but none with the sweep and depth of his book.

He called the study a work of “old criticism”, separating it from the then-reigning “New Criticism”, that is, from that procedure of microscopic examination of images and language and from that indifference, if not hostility, to literature’s relations with disciplines outside itself. Steiner defined the old criticism in these terms: “The old criticism is engendered by admiration. It sometimes steps back from the text to look upon moral purpose. It thinks of literature as existing not in isolation but as central to the play of historical and political energies. Above all, the old criticism is philosophical in range and temper.” He might have added, too, that the old criticism was one of taste, and personality, and of commitment and belief, as is Steiner’s study.

Much of the success of the book resides less in system and science and more in the learning of the man, in his ability to evoke the range and texture of western culture and literature, and in the ease with which he is able to go from Goethe to Homer, Faulkner, and Dante. Even today the book reads like an adventure. There are no topic paragraphs or plans, which are then followed to their deadly and predictable ends, no chronological charts systematically traversed. One is never quite sure as one goes from paragraph to paragraph where the mind will leap and what it will light on. Western literature from the Greeks to the Russians is one garden and roots of the flowers are intertwined. Steiner was practicing in criticism then what Joseph Frank later called "spatial form in literature." Western literature was a simultaneous whole for Steiner, and Dostoevsky and Tolstoy engaged in a living dialogue with Homer, Sophocles, Goethe, Shakespeare, and Dante. One realizes how much the criticism of today or since then has become a criticism of stricture and constriction, most of all of theoretical weight, and how foreign it is to personal belief and passion. If this is a work of old criticism, then old criticism never changes in its quickness, love, intelligence, and sensitivity.

For Steiner, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy demand more than knowledge; they ask for belief and passion. And he gives both easily, and most of all he gives admiration, if not awe. In a not uncharacteristic hyperbolic vein, he speaks of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy (as well as the literature of the nineteenth century in Russia) as one of the three greatest leaps of Western imagination, along with the Sophoclean and Elizabethan ages. If this is an exaggeration—and one's first impulse is to say it is—who would one put in the presence of the Greeks and the Elizabethans?

Marguerite Duras

*THE WAR*, translated from the French by Barbara Bray

Pantheon Press, 1986.

Reviewed by Germaine Brée

The title in French of Duras's book is *La douleur*. Wisely, Barbara Bray opted for *The War*. "La douleur" is the title of the first and most powerful of the six pieces in the book. Although in some measure all speak indirectly of the pain of war, only "La douleur" immerses its readers in the stark suffering of body and mind that the word communicates.

"The War," for Duras's generation, can only be World War II. In these pages it refers more specifically to the twilight zone between the allied landing in Normandy and the convoys of returning prisoners and deportees, Jews, and political prisoners—among these, Duras's husband Robert L. "La douleur" is the hour by hour account of the anguish of waiting in uncertainty, without news, as the unimaginable horror of the concentration camps is written large in the skeletal bodies of the returning victims. These pages, Duras tells us, were written in a quasi-hypnotic state and forgotten, to be discovered (rather too patly) in time for publication at the fortieth anniversary of the liberation of Paris: pages of a diary most certainly revised, a perfectly controlled transcription of intolerable anguish and uncontrollable emotions: hope, despair, images of Robert L's lonely agony flow through the text as if unmediated by language. After his return, these pages are followed by an obsessive, clinical documentary as Duras notes his physical plight and his slow return to life. Duras has given us one of the most unforgettable descriptions of the effects of the concentration camps' dehumanizing bestiality, a description stark in its restraint.

Three of the five following episodes describe incidents in Duras's life as a member of the Paris based Resistance network headed by one "François Montard," actually François Mitterrand, at present President of France. These, which antedate "la douleur," seem to be fragments of a journal. In March 1986, a new weekly in Paris—*L'Autre Journal*—ran a series of three conversations between President Mitterrand and Marguerite Duras, the first of which corroborates Duras's account of the events she was involved in. It fills in details and furnishes the broader frame that gives these apparently unconnected memories their coherence and significance as fragments of a broader historical moment, as details lived in an absolute present by the individual action. We are given dramatic glimpses of the amorphous confusion and ambiguous atmosphere of cafés, restaurants, and streets in Paris where Nazi informants,