

Edward Wasiolek, ed.
CRITICAL ESSAYS ON TOLSTOY
Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986. Pp. 200, \$35.00
Reviewed by Vasa D. Mihailovich

Relatively modest in size yet containing some of the most important essays on Leo Tolstoy, both translated from Russian and written in English, this collection offers a wide spectrum of opinions on the great Russian master, both the man and the writer. The book is divided into five uneven sections: Biography, Reminiscences, and Reception; Early stories; *War and Peace*; *Anna Karenina*; and Late Novels. The biographical segment, as well as those on early stories and late novels, are overshadowed, understandably, by the critical examination of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. Each section of criticism contains full-length articles and essays as well as reviews. Some of the latter are brief or extracted, yet the editor has skillfully selected pertinent passages that touch upon the most salient features of the work in question. The choice of the authors represented shows an equally wide spectrum that illuminates Tolstoy from many angles. In one section, for example, we find pieces by Henry James, Lenin, Virginia Woolf, and Maxim Gorky—juxtaposed in that order. Even though such eclecticism may give the impression of artificial versatility, it nevertheless affords a multi-faceted picture of a writer of such stature as Tolstoy that is the only satisfactory one. Other notable critics included are Chernishevsky, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Merezhkovsky, Eikhenbaum, Percy Lubbock, E. M. Forster, Isaiah Berlin, George Steiner, Matthew Arnold, Lionel Trilling, and the editor of the book himself, Wasiolek. Undoubtedly, some other notables could have been included or used as substitutes, but that is the fate of a collection of this kind. As it is, the book offers an ample selection of critical views in general and evaluations of Tolstoy in particular.

It would be very difficult, perhaps even impertinent, to evaluate in a limited space these critical writings, some of which have withstood the test of more than a century. Each contributes in its own way a piece toward a kaleidoscopic portrait of Tolstoy. If there is room for criticism, it is in the fact—undoubtedly dictated by the scope of the book—that some essays had to be abbreviated, such as Berlin's long essay "The Hedgehog and the Fox." All in all, this is an extremely valuable collection, expertly and sensitively selected and edited.

One may question the necessity of yet another book of criticism of Tolstoy, especially when it is composed of reprints. It is never enough, however, when giants of world literature are concerned. Some of the included essays have been barely accessible lately; others that are considered classics *sui generis* should be reevaluated by every new generation of readers. If for no other reason, that alone makes this book a valuable tool in the further study of Tolstoy and Russian literature in general.

Bridget Connelly
ARAB FOLK EPIC AND IDENTITY
Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. Pp. 328
Reviewed by Issa J. Boullata

Based on fieldwork done in Egypt and Tunisia and on meticulous research that took cognizance of all available scholarship, this book is an interpretive study of the Arab epic known as *Sirat Bani Hilal* which tells the story of the migratory trek of the Hilal tribe in the 10th and 11th centuries out of Arabia to Egypt, Sudan, and the Maghrib.

Bridget Connelly has recognized the importance of this epic, not merely as a written text, but as a living oral tradition still popular in Egypt and North Africa where, for generations,

it has been recited and sung in coffeehouses by poet-musicians to audiences in urban and rural areas who have been primarily poor and usually illiterate or semilliterate.

Despite negative judgments by the learned men steeped in the religious or literate Arab-Islamic tradition, this folk epic has persisted and has overcome the prejudice against its heroic narrative art. Connelly uses the most recent theories and methods in the fields of comparative literature, rhetoric, folklore, and oral tradition to bring out the significance of this epic in Arab culture. She views her work as a study in contrasts and ambivalence, noting the conflictual themes in the epic opposing Berber to Arab, sedentary agriculturalist to nomadic bedouin, arrival to departure, love to hatred, and peace to war. Her analysis of the epic in oral performance shows that audiences continue to be moved because the epic symbolically reenacts their conflicts and tells of often unconscious or subconscious dilemmas in their daily lives regarding issues of class, status, and social and religious identity. Abû Zayd, the black hero of the epic who is an apparent bastard, outcast from his family to become a stranger in a land he fights to make his own, is shown to be the focus of audience sympathies as listeners and performers identify with him. Connelly's analysis does not study the themes only but also the language and its oral transformations in the epic, paying attention to how puns, metonyms, and metaphors are used to generate feelings of identification and dissolution of boundaries.

This is an important contribution to a new understanding of the Arab epic of Bani Hilâl as a saga of identity and cultural self-definition. It advances our knowledge of the relationship between the formal and the informal aspects of Arabic literature as it sheds further light on the significance of the oral tradition disdained by the learned for a long time, as much in performance as in the cheap pulp editions of variants to be found in bookstalls all over the Middle East. Connelly's study reinstates it among the learned as an integral part of the culture of the masses in the Arab world.

Roger B. Anderson

DOSTOEVSKY: MYTHS OF DUALITY

University of Florida Humanities Monograph Series, No. 58

Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1986. Pp. x + 186

Reviewed by Victor Terras

In an introduction which contains a useful discussion of recent approaches to myth, Professor Anderson promises to show that Dostoevsky's novels "cohere structurally through the kind of symbolic reasoning that distinguishes myth" (p. 3). He certainly keeps this promise. With the aid of Bakhtin, Lotman, Vygotsky, and a structuralist conception in general, Professor Anderson demonstrates that Dostoevsky's fiction develops patterns analogous to those of the ideas that moved the society of his age, then proceeds to recognize in these patterns new versions of very ancient myths.

Professor Anderson's analysis of *The Double* suggests that its hero, Golyadkin, is "caught between two worlds, two distinct mental processes" (p. 25). This would not seem to be a novel observation, except for the fact that Anderson finds in Golyadkin's stream of consciousness distinct reflexions of an atavistic condition of the human psyche which generates archetypal myths. The chapter on *Notes from Underground* performs an analogous operation in somewhat more specific terms, as the patterns of neurotic behavior displayed by the anti-hero are interpreted as a re-enactment of the trickster myth, an anthropological universal. Anderson's argument presents strong evidence in support of the notion that even the most "modern" and topical works cannot escape the patterns of archetypal myths.

Crime and Punishment as "rites of redefinition" seems less convincing, perhaps because the elements of a more immediately perceptible political allegory and an explicit religious message are so clearly dominant. But the chapter on *The Idiot* is again most compelling. The familiar interpretation of Prince Myshkin as an allegoric Christ figure is quite appropriately expanded in the direction of the myth of the suffering deity, Dionysus. Though this may appear far