

*Dostoevskii: Materialy i issledovaniia* and a number of monographic studies by Vetlovskaiia, Tunimanov, Belov, and others have contributed much toward a better understanding of Dostoevsky's works and their reception. In the West, more and more studies appear every year which do away with earlier misconceptions and present a reading of Dostoevsky which does justice to his texts, their contexts, and their subtexts. Trace's book is a worthy example of this trend. It produces a reading of *The Brothers Karamazov* which the Dostoevsky specialist will respect. This reviewer substantially agrees with it. Trace correctly recognizes and vigorously demonstrates that the novel is a statement of the Christian position according to which faith in God is inseparable from faith in immortality, that is, resurrection. Ivan Karamazov is aptly characterized as an "uncomfortable atheist *par excellence*" (81), a man who struggles with all the corollaries of God's death. Trace suggests most plausibly that "Christ kissed the Grand Inquisitor not as a sign of forgiveness, as is sometimes supposed, but for the same reason that Father Zossima kissed Dmitri in the monastery cell, i.e., out of recognition of his great spiritual suffering" (104). Accordingly, Trace has some most pertinent observations on Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and French Existentialism (166-70).

Trace also fully recognizes the importance of the notion of absolute evil in Dostoevsky's anthropology (97-98), but does not give it as accomplished a treatment as it deserves. More could have been said about the pervasive diabolic presence in the novel. Trace's perceptive and vigorous argumentation is marred by lapses which needlessly detract from his credibility. He underestimates the sophistication of the early Dostoevsky, ignoring the deep ambiguities found even in his first novel, *Poor Folk* (11-13). He dismisses Bakhtin much too early (155-56). Even his reading of *The Brothers Karamazov* is at times too straightforward. He ignores the subtle yet perceptible way in which Dostoevsky lets Ivan Karamazov "displace" the evidence of his guilt (88) and other details by which Ivan Karamazov is discredited as a human being long before his encounter with the devil. Mme. Khokhlakova, whose name is consistently misspelled, is not "poor old feeble-minded" (79). She is about thirty-three and a scatterbrain, but not unintelligent. Too many names are misspelled throughout the book: Nastas'ia Filippovna, the heroine of *The Idiot*, is called Natasha (20-21), one way to "turn off" a reader who might otherwise read Trace's book with considerable profit. The chapter on Dostoevsky in the Soviet Union (142-60) makes some good points, but is quite out of date.

Youssef Idris

*A LEADER OF MEN*

Trans. Saad Elkhadem

Fredericton, N.B.: York Press, 1988. 19 (English) + 17 (Arabic).

Reviewed by Issa J. Boullata

Youssef Idris, born in Egypt in 1927, is one of the most prominent Arab writers today. Originally a medical doctor, he has dedicated himself to literature and written some thirty books in various genres, including short stories, novels, plays, and essays.

One of his recent stories, published in the Egyptian magazine *October* (November 1, 1987, pp. 40-45), is entitled "Abû al-Rijâl." It is reprinted in Arabic in this book with an excellent English translation.

The story is not primarily constructed as a plot of events but rather as an exploration of a main character's inner depths. The tensions that sustain its continuity and keep the reader riveted till the end derive as much from Idris's masterful narrative art as from his choice of an unusual subject matter. In fact the subject matter is normally regarded in the Arab world as one about which feelings, thoughts, and words ought to be repressed. Idris brings them out into the open in this story as he deals with a married, virile, and macho man who, in his early fifties, discovers his latent homosexuality and is made to face up to it in the story.

The protagonist, whose name is Sultan, sits on his veranda at some distance from the handsome young man in tight pants whom he summoned. In silence he reviews his past full of heroic and manly acts in order to understand how his earlier macho self slipped imperceptibly into his present state. Memory takes Sultan back to his poverty-stricken childhood which, notwithstanding, was dignified and proud. He remembers his school days as an intelligent boy, with a strong personality and clear leadership traits, who did not permit other boys even to touch him. He recalls his university years during which he shared his bursary with his family as he earned two degrees, one in economics and the other in history, and won the respect of everybody through his call for social justice and his readiness to serve everyone in need.

Sultan then gradually becomes aware that he began to lose respect when, for no known reason, he did not immediately rise to help and defend his community at the village against an obvious aggression in which he was expected to act but counseled caution and preparation for a future encounter with the enemy. And when he was challenged by a young man who did not accept being insulted or ridiculed by him on account of his uncle being a well-known effeminate person in the village, Sultan lost all his self-respect on being pulled to the ground and forced to say in public that he was a woman or else die at the point of the sickle the young man pushed into his neck. After this incident in which he yielded, Sultan became the object of whispers, and he sank further in his shame. Finally he stopped caring as he accepted to act like a woman in homosexual relations, but continued to savor the hypocritical courtesy people still showed him as a champion of their causes.

In his English translation, Elkhadem captures not only the rhythm of the Arabic sentences but also the author's extreme caution in avoiding vulgar expressions and his care not to offend the sensibilities of readers exposing themselves to a controversial subject. He also parallels the author's flair for exactitude in his deep psychological analysis of the characters and his apt wording for vivid descriptions of situations and moods.