

TOLSTOY'S EPIC VISION: A STUDY OF *WAR AND PEACE* AND *ANNA KARENINA*. By Harry J. Mooney, Jr. University of Tulsa Department of English Monograph Series, no. 5. Tulsa: University of Tulsa, 1968. ii, 88 pp. \$2.50, paper.

*Tolstoy's Epic Vision* is a most unfortunate attempt to bring together a series of impressions about Tolstoy which are inaccurate, misleading, effusive, and, it must be added, occasionally astute. While the book hardly pretends to be a definitive study of Tolstoy (it is difficult, in any case, to do much with both *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* in a slim ninety-page volume), even if one is prepared to grant the author his own self-admitted limitations, the book remains largely superficial or panegyric, for Mooney tends to regard both novels as if they were holy writ. The imperfections of Tolstoy are closed to Mooney, as are the fascinating labors Tolstoy engaged in during the construction of his novels (Tolstoy's drafts reveal so much about their development, they are essential to any serious critic). Most of all, Mooney's basic premise places him in difficulties from the first. Influenced by George Steiner's equally faulty, but far more sophisticated *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, Mooney chooses to regard *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* as "epics" rather than novels. In his opening he states: "Leo Tolstoy is probably most effectively approached in terms of his relationship not to the conventions of the novel but rather to those of the epic. The following study represents, at least in part, an attempt to set his two major works within the framework of that vibrant tradition, and to render them more accessible to the contemporary reader than they would be if read merely as novels, although among the greatest of the world." Why "merely" as novels (the italics are Mooney's, not mine)? Are they anything less for being what they are? Tolstoy himself was not beyond comparing *War and Peace* to Homer, but aside from the obvious similarities in proportion, both *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* owe much more to the novelistic tradition to which they belong, and of which Tolstoy was always conscious. Moreover, once Mooney turns to his discussion of the two works, he must approach them as novels (it is rare that he even mentions an "epic" moment, and then only in relation to *War and Peace*), investigating precisely those characteristics he as a critic concerned with the novel, and we as readers of novels, will appreciate. Only his sense of *Anna Karenina's* duality produces a few pages of perceptive writing; for the rest, his admiration for Tolstoy's panoramic sweep prevents him from paying much attention to details.

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THE FIERCE AND BEAUTIFUL WORLD. By Andrei Platonov. Introduction by Yevgeny Yevtushenko. Translated by Joseph Barnes. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970. 252 pp. \$6.95.

Five years ago Andrei Platonov was a nonentity. Now, after the Soviet publication of two collections of his stories, from which the present translation is derived, he is recognized at home and abroad as one of the great Russian writers of the century. This resurrection is not really surprising, for the most vital works of Soviet literature are precisely those that have been censored, restricted, or somehow neglected. Without the state support of bunko, the Gladkovs, Fadeevs, and Alexei Tolstoy would flit away to everlasting oblivion, and Soviet prose would be seen to begin with Zamiatin and Pilniak, to continue with Babel, Olesha, Bulgakov, and other suppressed talents, and to conclude with Platonov and Solzhenitsyn. Among these