

THE BURDEN OF VISION: DOSTOEVSKY'S SPIRITUAL ART. By George A. Panichas, Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977. 216 pp. \$5.95, paper.

During the last generation, American efforts in the field of Dostoevsky studies have mainly been focused on questions of biography, textual criticism, and formal-aesthetic, "technical," and, occasionally, psychological analysis. In contrast to these tendencies, the mainstream of Dostoevsky research and critique in Europe, and in prerevolutionary Russia, and among Russian émigrés (the situation in the USSR, needless to say, has always been different and peculiar) has been primarily dominated by metaphysical, moral, and spiritual considerations, with psychological insights added, but nearly always within a philosophical context. Since the publication of Robert L. Jackson's highly perceptive and penetrating study *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form* (1965), however, the observer of the literary scene is no longer entitled to speak about a lag in American Dostoevsky scholarship as opposed to the European achievement in this fascinating area of investigation and interpretation. The title of this excellent book is basically a misnomer: actually, it is devoted to a comprehensive presentation of Dostoevsky's philosophy of art. After Jackson, now comes Panichas, and it is perhaps no longer an exaggeration to speak of a veritable breakthrough on the American Dostoevsky front: for with this book, the case for Dostoevsky as a metaphysician, prophetic mind, and spiritual pathfinder, who must be taken seriously as a thinker and moralist, has been stated with so much intellectual forcefulness, persuasiveness, and, one is almost tempted to say, self-evident truth that this manner of approach to the Russian visionary's work has definitely arrived to stay.

A brief review cannot do justice to the profundity, erudition, and spiritual as well as moral candor displayed in George Panichas's treatise. Suffice it to say that he did not intend to write an exhaustive book on Dostoevsky the man, thinker, and artist. What he offers instead is "the essential Dostoevsky," as revealed in the great novels *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *The Devils*, *A Raw Youth*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*. Panichas states that "his major characters are identified by the strength and range of the moral energy they actualize, whether as moral self-realization or as antimoral self-disintegration. The dramatization of this intrinsic moral process is Dostoevsky's most intense artistic impulsion. . . . But if the moral process in Dostoevsky's novels is problematic, it is in the end unconditionally religious. . . . The moral condition has a divine limit that defines man's situation" (p. 13).

Panichas's style combines lucidity, subtlety, and immediacy with a convincing eloquence which derives its force from a vision of undeniable truth. His highly original and personal observations find support in a number of authorities consulted with considerable circumspection and intelligent selection. Two important names are missing, however—Lev Shestov and Fedor Stepun—especially in regard to *The Devils*; Stepun's remarkable essay, "Dostojewskijs prophetische Analyse der bolschewistischen Revolution," in *Dostojewskij und Tolstoj: Christentum und soziale Revolution* (Munich, 1961), should have been cited as well. But this criticism is not meant to detract from the overall merit of this most welcome enrichment of the body of Dostoevsky studies. Hopefully, Panichas's work will receive the widest possible circulation among academic specialists, literary critics, and educated readers.

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