

secular civilization blessed in its name, are *christian* in inspiration and objective. Just as Maritain is now superseded by the lay and ecclesiastical shock-troops (one of their militants calls him "a pimp for Christianity"), so is secular democracy overwhelmed by the World's fundamental atheism, today and always, of totalitarian inspiration. How much more Christian, how much more realistic is Romano Guardini writing in *The End of the Modern World*: In this anonymous world the God-centered man is a lonely traveler, "homeless and unprotected."

Reviewed by THOMAS MOLNAR

The Dostoevskian Mythos

Dostoevsky, His Life and Work, by Konstantin Mochulsky; translated by Michael A. Minihan, *Princeton, N. J.*: Princeton University Press, 1967. xxii + 687 pp. \$10.00.

KONSTANTIN MOCHULSKY, a Russian émigré teaching at the University of Paris, wrote this book in 1942 and published it in 1947. For years the work has been known and praised by Slavic specialists, and its appearance now in English can only be welcomed.

Mochulsky approaches the work of Dostoevsky from every possible angle; he gives us much of Dostoevsky's biography; something of literary process and the conditions in which he worked; something of literary history, influences, and critical comments and reactions. Dostoevsky is evoked for us by the documents of the age: the reminiscences and diaries of contemporaries, his own and others, letters and lengthy excerpts from his articles, short stories and novels. The study is criticism, biography, and lit-

erary history. It is also, in its interpretations, metaphysics, symbolism, and mythology.

It is the scholar and the historian that one notices first in reading the study, but there is another Mochulsky and he has left his mark on the book. There is the Mochulsky whose father was a professor of literature and who taught Russian literature for many years at the University of Paris: the academic with the habits of documentation and historical and biographical causation. And there is the Mochulsky who was brought up in the feverish and even hallucinatory atmosphere of Russian literary cenacles in Moscow and St. Petersburg in the first decades of the twentieth century. Literature and religion at this time were mixed by mystical exaltation, and the world and literature were looked upon as symbolic codices of "real-er realities." In prose another Russian émigré, Viacheslav Ivanov, was the high priest of these symbolic revelations and his influence on Konstantin Mochulsky is pervasive in this study. The same extravagant mythologizing and symbolizing that marred Viacheslav Ivanov's magnificent work on Dostoevsky has marred even more this study by Mochulsky. The émigré always leads an abstract life, but when he is brought up on abstractions, he leads a life of double jeopardy.

Anyone who is acquainted with the prose literature of the years 1900-1918 in Russia will have no trouble in recognizing the atmosphere of the era in the following quotation from Mochulsky's book on Dostoevsky, as well as the influence of Viacheslav Ivanov: "Dostoevsky's art is symbolic like every great art. His 'mystical realism' penetrates the veil of appearances to the 'essence of things.'" This quotation is moderate and almost meaningful. Others are not. Mochulsky speaks of the heroine of *The Idiot*, Nastasya Fillipovna, in these terms: "On the metaphysical plane his heroine is the 'image of pure beauty,' seduced by the 'prince of this world' and waiting in her dungeon for a liberator. The soul of the world, the beautiful Psyche—existing

in the bosom of the divinity, on the boundary of time—fell away from God.” And,

Having grown proud because of her likeness to God, she employed her freedom for evil and affirmed herself in ‘selfness.’ And together with her the whole world fell under the law of sin and death; ‘every flesh languishes and groans.’ From her former existence outside of time, Psyche has preserved memories of the ‘sounds of heaven’ and a feeling of fatal, irreparable guilt. The evil spirit that seduced her excites pride and a consciousness of guilt in the exile and through this drives her to destruction.

The vocabulary is recognizable but is not comprehensible. It would take an extraordinary re-creation of spiritual exaltation to make the word flesh again, and Konstantin Mochulsky, for all the merits of the book, and the YMCA Press of Paris were not able to do it.

It is the scholar, the historian, and the humanist in Mochulsky and his work that have evoked our admiration for so long. The mythicist, symbolist, and religious ecstatic evoke our curiosity. When he is not the mythic and symbolist critic, he is a critic of great intelligence and power, despite an outdated philosophical and ethical vocabulary that occasionally obscures what he is saying. One wonders how much better the book might have been if Mochulsky had been able to live and grow in the twentieth century. For the dominant modes and growths of criticism in our century—despite his long life in Paris—touched him very little. His psychology is Christian and philosophical, and nothing of Freud and the psychological revolution of our century has influenced his understanding or explanations of motivations. His concept of novelistic structure is conventional and classical and filtered through the words of his great contemporary Viacheslav Ivanov. Nothing of the structuralism of the West or the East finds the slightest reflection in his work, despite the fact that Russian formalism has provided us

with one of the most refined conceptions of novelistic structure. Equally, the various and manifold modes of linguistic analysis of our time find neither echo nor awareness in his study. He does not read “closely” even if he reads well. His explanations are almost always deductions from *a priori* concepts and large generalizations about human nature and historical phenomena. A small example is the following: “Golyadkin is intimately bound to ‘the Petersburg period of Russian history’; he is clearly a product of the Russian ‘Illumination.’ One can see in him the first caricature of the rationalized ‘universal man’ whom Dostoevsky so despised.”

This is a book of many voices, and of a critic who could find his own voice only occasionally. The study, appearing now in a creditable English translation a quarter of a century after it was written, is an item in the history of Russian criticism on Dostoevsky rather than an example of contemporary criticism. It takes its place—despite the date of its publication—among the classical works of criticism on Dostoevsky: with Belinsky, Mikhaylovsky, Rozanov, Merezhkovsky, Shestov, Ivanov, and Grossman. Like Mochulsky himself, the book has something of the uprooted appearance of the émigré looking for an atmosphere and a voice which exist only in the past. It is neither Western nor Russian, neither the work of the beginning of the century nor the middle of the century; yet such was the intelligence and insight of the man that it compels us to read and attend. We are only tepidly interested in knowing once again when Dostoevsky was born, when his brother Michael died and what Dostoevsky’s contemporaries said about *The Double*; we cannot seriously be interested in the symbolist-mythic vocabulary; and we cannot believe in the author’s religious exaltation that compels him to underestimate the nihilistic impulses of Dostoevsky and to say of the *Underground Man* that he is a man of “exalted faith.” Still, we are interested in the hundreds of flashes of insight and the play

of intelligence on every page, and we can share the passion of his belief in Dostoevsky's greatness.

Reviewed by EDWARD WASIOLEK