

dimer's latest fiction, encouraged by well-intentioned but ignorant praise from the international community, has not only tried uneasily to record the daily injuries sustained by ordinary individuals in South African society, but now strains to be the voice of the South African revolution.

That is why the best parts of *July's People*, far from convincing us of the truth of the situation, are concerned with Maureen's struggle to realize herself as a woman against a world of men and intractable house servants; for July remains, even in his own house, a servant. [WV]

## DOSTOYEVSKY AND THE JEWS

by David I. Goldstein

(University of Texas Press; 231 pp.; \$17.50)

Philip Sicker

Modern literary scholarship has a way of diminishing the heroes of our civilization, particularly when it is conducted with the exhaustive concern for truth and scrupulous documentation that characterize David Goldstein's *Dostoyevsky and the Jews*. Published in France five years ago and recently translated into English by Goldstein himself, the book is nothing less than an indictment of the Russian novelist's deep-rooted anti-Semitism. It is as painful to read as it is absorbing.

Anti-Semitism, despicable though it be, is not always incompatible with great art—Wagner, Pound, and D. H. Lawrence serve as modern illustrations. But there is something uniquely disturbing and paradoxical in the case of Dostoevski. How, Goldstein asks, are we to reconcile the novelist's messianic posture as Christian humanist, as apostle of "universal brotherhood," as patron saint of "the insulted and injured" with his perpetual denigration of the Jew as "Yid" (*zhid*) in his letters and essays, with his failure to support full legal rights for three million members of a persecuted race, with his desire to exclude them from the spiritual domain of Holy Mother Russia, and, finally, with his slanderous and paranoid incrimination of Jews for "evils" ranging from socialism to nihilism to anarchy? How could the writer whose obsession with psychological truth compelled the creation of an Ivan Kara-

mazov, a Stavrogin, even a Prince Myshkin, present the Jew only in mocking caricature: cunning yet simple-minded, anxiety-ridden, timorous, and grotesque? Drawing heavily upon Dostoevski's extant letters (many still remain locked in Soviet archives) and concentrating upon his political journalism, especially an 1877 piece entitled "The 'Jewish Question,'" Goldstein is more successful at documenting the novelist's hostility toward Jews than at explaining its causes and reevaluating his fiction in light of it.

Goldstein cites Dostoevski's stereotypic recreation of Gogol's "Jew Yankele" in an early dramatic effort (now lost) and in the ridiculous moneylender, Isai Fomich, in *The House of the Dead* to support his contention that the writer began his career with "a malicious irreverence" toward Judaism, which later developed into "a feeling of almost pathological revulsion." If we recall that Dostoevski started writing within a comic tradition dating back at least to Pushkin, we may question the malice of his early works, but his journals of the 1870s and his monthly pronouncements in *The Diary of a Writer* leave little doubt as to his eventual hatred.

Privately, Dostoevski rails against Jews as a blight on the Russian motherland: "Yids everywhere. The Yids have taken over everything, and there is no limit to their swindling, they literally swindle." Fiercely anti-Western, he imagines "the Yid and his bank" lurking behind every progressive movement in European politics and economics. Publicly, he insists that it is not he who hates the Jews. Rather it is the Jews who, believing in their status as God's chosen people, hold themselves above civil law and bear a merciless and implacable hatred toward all that is not Jewish. Finally, Dostoevski envisions the apocalyptic collapse of European civilization: The Jew will "uproot Christianity," and, amid the devastation, his "bank will still be there. The anti-Christ will come and stand above the anarchy." Russia could be saved from a similar fate only if it resisted liberal sentimentality toward its Jewish minority.

Ultimately, Goldstein believes, the roots of Dostoevski's anti-Semitism lay far deeper than these economic and ideological threats of which he sought to convince himself. His hatred was nourished by blind jealousy. Dostoevski, the

Slavophile who apotheosized Russian Orthodoxy as the one true faith and the Russian people as God's Chosen, could not bring himself to acknowledge the historically prior election of the Jewish people. So great was his bitterness, Goldstein argues, that by the end of his life he felt that "the time had come to square accounts with the Jewish people and eliminate them as rivals for all time."

But were the Jews really a lifelong "obsession" for Dostoevski? Joseph Frank reminds us in his Foreword that, if Dostoevski was anti-Jewish, his xenophobia also extended to the French, the English, the Germans, and, particularly, the Poles. Further, as morally and intellectually troubling as Dostoevski's anti-Semitism appears, Jews enter rarely and obliquely into his fiction. The only Jewish character of even secondary importance is the anarchist-turned-informer, Lyamshin, in *The Possessed*. Goldstein overstates Lyamshin's political importance in the novel and is understandably uncomfortable with the fact that this duplicitous Jew is the only member of the revolutionary society to react with appropriate horror to the murder of Shatov. Did the artist and psychologist in Dostoevski "humanize" Lyamshin at the expense of the ideologue? Or does Lyamshin's convulsive scream indicate that, at his moments of greatest artistic self-awareness, Dostoevski was able to extend his profound sympathy for human anguish even to a Jew? As neither conclusion suits Goldstein's thesis, he dismisses both. One is no less ill at ease when Goldstein hypothesizes that Dostoevski's close paternal friendship with a young Jewish girl, Sofy Luryc, was a ploy "which he needed to convince himself and others of the preposterousness and groundlessness of the charge that he was an 'unconditional' anti-Semite."

Clearly the weakness of Goldstein's book is its insistence upon confining Dostoevski to a single, consistent point of view. In treating a novelist so philosophically tormented and ambivalent, whose greatest characters often express the ideas he most feared, such reductiveness eventually undermines our confidence. Perhaps this weakness is a mixed blessing, for it offers us a loophole, permits us to question those blemishes in Dostoevski that we do not wish to see. Those who accept Goldstein's argument in full must also accept its

grave challenge—for to reveal so great a moral blindspot in a writer of Dostoevski's ethical urgency is to force a reevaluation not only of the artist's life, but also of his work. [WV]

**THE POLITICAL UNCONSCIOUS:  
NARRATIVE AS A SOCIALLY  
SYMBOLIC ACT**

by **Fredric Jameson**

(Cornell University Press; 305 pp.; \$19.50)

Mark L. Caldwell

Fredric Jameson's aim is to find a place for a coherent Marxist theory of literature amid the anarchic ferment currently bubbling in the world of literary criticism. At least since the advent of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, absolutely everything about the text has been put into question. Once critics prided themselves on their skill in concocting solutions—elixirs that, dropped discreetly into a poem, play, or novel, suddenly rendered all murkiness clear and banished all opacities. Apparent absurdities revealed a hidden logic; apparent crudities were rendered digestible when the critic revealed subtle felicities in a combination of flavors that, to a more naive taste, might seem unpalatable. In short, until the advent of the structuralists and the deconstructionists, the reigning bias of literary criticism was in favor of order, of reducing the difficulties of a text by appeal to the clear principles that underlay it.

But twenty or thirty years ago critics began to turn this convenient arrangement inside out. Increasingly they found it necessary and useful to focus on the gaps in a text, the problems that defy easy solution. More and more they've come to be suspicious of anyone who tries to trace down a complex text to a set of easily mastered governing propositions. The critical atmosphere has shifted from the polite applause of the classical ballet theatre, where the audience prides itself on a respectful appreciation of well-maintained bodies in beautifully formed patterns, to the wolf-whistles and rude cat-calls of the burlesque house, where the audience unsentimentally scrutinizes the performer's anatomy and reserves the right to comment aloud on skewed proportions, blemishes, and cellulite.

Whatever you think of this trend—and it has more advantages than my brief account of it might imply—pity the poor Marxist who faces it. For Marxism is an inherently orderly philosophy. It rests, as Jameson is careful to point out, on historical materialism—not the crude assertion that physical matter is the basis of all reality, but on the proposition that an inevitable historical process is the ultimate ground upon which rests all experience, mental and physical. Hence every phenomenon, from a revolution or strike to a novel or poem, must, if rigorously examined, trace back to historical forces, which are its point of origin and

its ultimate cause. So Marxist literary criticism is faced with a dilemma: how to take some account of the current revolution in critical method yet maintain its commitment to an orderly and integrated vision of the physical, social, and literary universe.

*The Political Unconscious* is a valiant, ingenious, and closely reasoned attempt to provide a solution. Its arguments are far too intricate to be adequately presented here, but Jameson's linchpin thesis, developed in a long introductory essay, "On Interpretation," can be summarized briefly. He distinguishes three phases in any valid Marxist interpretation of a text. The

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