While there is no successful suicide in Dostoevskii's early works, Shneidman argues that “self-destructive, escapist tendencies permeate most of his early narratives.” Shneidman sees Dostoevskii's early hero as reaching out for the impossible. “Instead of attaining it, he faces inevitable doom. Self-destruction becomes a compositional device which demonstrates the futility of aspiration which cannot be fulfilled.” Actual suicide is not prominent in the early post-Siberian period either. Vasia from “Uncle's Dream” is the only example of “violent self-destruction” in Dostoevskii's works prior to Crime and Punishment.

The bulk of Shneidman's study is devoted to suicide in Dostoevskii's major novels. It is there that, by Shneidman's count, fifteen of the twenty-two actual suicides occur. It is there as well that one finds prominently depicted Ippolit's attempted suicide in The Idiot and Raskol'nikov's and Dmitrii Karamazov's extensive contemplation of suicide in Crime and Punishment and The Brothers Karamazov, respectively. This tally does not include Nastasia Filippovna's leaving Prince Myshkin for Rogozhin—an act that Shneidman justifiably considers tantamount to suicide. Raskol'nikov and Svidrigailov (Crime and Punishment), Kirillov and Stavrogin (The Possessed), Smerdiakov (The Brothers Karamazov), and Ippolit receive the most attention. A synopsis of Shneidman's findings would not do justice to the manifold issues involved. Suffice it to say that Shneidman makes good use of both his own judgment and secondary sources in discussing motivating factors and literary functions. He summarizes the function of suicide in Dostoevskii's art as: “a) a literary device serving to remove a character from the scene; b) a method to attach ideological meaning to the actions of a character; c) a symbol of deep philosophical, ethical, or religious significance; d) a vehicle for the expression of the author's views; and, e) a means for the exploration of the deeper levels of man's subconscious and the darker sides of human nature.”

It is with regard to the last point that the topic is most complex and richest in significance. Much of this is brought out in Shneidman's study which does, however, have some shortcomings. For all his efforts to be comprehensive, Shneidman misses out the suicide of Andreev, "le grand dadais" in A Raw Youth, and he pays no attention to young Prince Sokolskii's contemplated suicide (“the princely way out”) which includes his suicide letter at the end of Part II. Shneidman almost totally ignores the comic tonal counterpoint surrounding the suicidal acts of Svidrigailov, Ippolit, and Kirillov. Certainly, Dostoevskii used this counterpoint to influence our perception and evaluation of their acts. Additionally, given Smediakov's mental and physical deterioration, it is hard to agree that he is “capable of any action without experiencing pangs of conscience.” Some readers also may find it difficult to go along with treating suicide in so many of Dostoevskii's works prior to the major novels when in fact suicide in a literal sense is practically non-existent therein. Nevertheless, Shneidman's book is interesting and deserving of attention.

R. L. Busch

Gary Cox. Tyrant and Victim in Dostoevsky. Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1984, 119 pp. $9.95 (paper).

Tyrant and Victim in Dostoevsky falls mid-way between psycho-criticism and criticism of ideas. Following the Bakhtinian principle that “the structural center” of a Dostoevskii novel is “the hero's conception of himself” (p. 44), Gary Cox concentrates on Dostoevskii's characters and their embodiment of various philosophical points of view. He establishes the typological categories in which Dostoevskian characters fall, and identifies how each formulates either a philosophical concept such as solipsism or nihilism, or a psychological variant of what Cox calls “the dominance hierarchy.”
The book examines that “microcosmic society” Dostoevskii created in his fiction and delineates in it “a rigidly structured hierarchy where power relationships are clearly defined and where behavior proceeds along lines suggested by the central concept of personal dominance” (p. 9). Cox proposes Dostoevskii’s own “concept of dominance in personal relationships” as a ‘key’ with which to understand the novelist’s “unique vision of social interaction, organizing many of the writer’s perceptions around a central axis” (p. 10). He borrows from the critical approaches of both Freud (the totemic victim, the oedipal complex) and René Girard (triangular desire, violence and the sacred), and the somewhat controversial views of anthropologist-popularizers Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox (natural dominance of the male among certain animal species, the phenomenon of male bonding) to make his argument.

Although there are several very good sections, the book overall strikes this reader as uneven. Cox’s treatment of the Dostoevskian double is provocative and illuminating. He views this recurrent trope as a complex model which can be broken down into oppositional pairs: internal/external, psychological/superficial, contrasting/parallel. In chapter 9 “Primal Murders” on The Brothers Karamazov, Cox is at his best. He concentrates on the figure of the criminal-savior and on the paradigm of bowing which runs throughout the novel. He identifies Dostoevskii’s solution to the individual’s solipsistic view of the universe in a reversal of power: “it is the person holding power who must surrender it” (p. 91). This paradigm of self-renunciation, Cox points out, works not only on a personal level, but on the social level as well. He refers to Winter Notes on Summer Impressions in this context, although he does not quote the passage which, to my mind, best illustrates his point. In the “Essay on the Bourgeois,” Dostoevskii refutes the Western model of fraternity in favor of a “true brotherhood” in which the individual, by sacrificing himself, effects such a power reversal:

... each separate individual, of his own accord, without any coercion, without any advantage to himself, would say to society: “We are only strong when united; take me completely if you need me; do not think of me when making your laws; do not trouble yourself about me in any way; I cede all my rights to you. . . . I will obliterate myself, melt into the general mass, so long as your brotherhood remains and flourishes.” And brotherhood . . . would have to say: “You give us too much. . . . Take everything from us. We will strive with all our strength to assure you as much personal freedom as possible. . . .” Now there’s a real utopia for you, gentlemen. (Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii [Leningrad, 1972—], V, 80).

By isolating the bowing paradigm and showing that it recurs throughout the fiction (Notes from Underground, Dream of a Ridiculous Man, Brothers Karamazov) and the non-fiction (from Winter Notes to Diary of a Writer, thus spanning the whole of Dostoevskii’s journalistic writing), Cox suggests continuity of vision without overly simplifying the evolution of Dostoevskii’s thought.

Cox adapts the ideas of Freud and René Girard in his discussion of The Brothers Karamazov. He minimizes Freud’s insistence on the murder of the tyrannical father-figure as the original crime, replacing it with Girard’s notion of the murder of the surrogate victim. In the novel, Cox sees Iliusha as fulfilling this role of surrogate victim, his death a symbolic crime “surrounded with explicit ritual significance” (p. 100). Infanticide thus becomes a more primordial crime in Dostoevskii’s fictional world than patriicide. Cox’s analysis leads to a view of the novel as structured around two “crimes” rather than one. By emphasizing its binary structure, he prompts a new reading of the novel. The “Legend of the Grand Inquisitor” no longer dominates the novel’s ideological framework but is counterbalanced by “The Russian Monk.” Similarly, “The Boys” counteracts the episodes concentrating on the Karamazov family.