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The International Dostoevsky Society A personal tribute

As a founding member of the International Dostoevsky Society, I am delighted to have the opportunity to pay a personal tribute to the Society on its 50th anniversary and on the 200th anniversary of Dostoevsky's birth. Although I can claim little credit for its success, it gives me great satisfaction to have been associated with the IDS from its very first meeting. More importantly, it enables me to publicly acknowledge its contribution both to my own academic life and to that of many other scholars over the last half century, as well as its dynamic (dialogic) role in promoting the study of Dostoevsky's work itself. Its triennial symposia and its various publications, together with the many opportunities it has afforded for meeting other Dostoevsky scholars, gathered together from around the globe, have provided an exceptional forum for co-operation and mutual stimulation. For some years, it was also a rare meeting place for free discussion between scholars from both sides of the Iron Curtain.

I was fortunate to be present at the first meeting of the IDS at the beautiful West German spa town of Bad Ems in 1971. As the only British participant, I emerged from Bad Ems with the imposing title of 'British national representative', entitled to participate in meetings of the Executive Committee. Fifteen years later, in 1986, I was to host the VIth Symposium at the University of Nottingham while, in 1995, I was elected President and served in this capacity at the Xth Symposium in New York in 1998.

So it might be imagined that I would have privileged knowledge of the inner life of the Society from its very beginnings.

This is not, however, really the case. In the event, I have been able to attend only nine of the Society's 17 Symposia, the last being the XIIth at Geneva in 2004. My memories are vivid but fragmentary; the papers I have retained are incomplete; my role in the history of the Society was, for most of its existence, marginal. While I was sometimes brought in to ensure wider participation in key decisions, I was only occasionally catapulted into the centre of action. Moreover, much of real significance has happened since 2004. During that time, the Society has reached maturity, with full participation by Russian scholars, including

a Russian President and a Symposium in Moscow itself, where Dostoevsky was born. I can therefore offer only personal reflections on events that others may remember quite differently, and from different perspectives.

Anyone attempting to write a history of the Society will be confronted by problems similar to mine. One might of course confine oneself to documentary sources. This would inevitably result in a dry and colourless institutional account of events that were in reality sometimes exasperating and frustrating, but more often inspirational, exhilarating, rewarding, constantly on the move, and full of colourful – one might almost say Dostoevskian – personalities. Rudolf Neuhäuser has referred to this phase of its history as that of "an independent, voluntary organisation".[1] Among other things, this meant that it was driven by the personal commitment and enthusiasms of its founders, heavily dependent on personal initiatives, improvising where necessary (as reflected, for example, in the revisions to its constitution approved at Rungstedgaard in 1977) to keep it on track. The flavour of such an organisation could hardly be caught by a dry institutional narrative.

Yet even an account based on documentary evidence would present problems. Alterations were often made to the programmes of the Symposia at the last moment and some of the listed participants did not in the event attend, or gave papers with different titles, or at different times, or not at all. Nor are the lists of officers and title-holders that appear in the Society's publications entirely reliable, often retaining names long after the expiry of their terms of office and failing to record the election of new members until there was nobody left with a clear memory of what had actually happened. Certain of the 'traditions' ascribed to the Society were sometimes no more than aspirations.

To complicate matters further, any future historian of the Society will have to reckon with the fact that, between Symposia, many of the day-to-day decisions and all the forward planning in the early years were conducted through the exchange of mimeographed or hand-written memos, personal encounters at chance meetings around the world and independent personal initiatives for which approval might be sought retrospectively. The first twenty years of the Society's history were of course lived under the shadow of the Cold War. Before the days of electronic mail, in a community with four official languages employed randomly, with no provision for interpreting, and in which scholarly work was

1 Rudolf Neuhäuser, "The International Dostoevsky Society: From the beginnings to the End of its Existence as an Independent Voluntary Organization", *Dostoevsky Studies*, New Series, 21, 2017, pp. 13-41. See also Malcolm V. Jones and William Mills Todd III, "A Letter to the Editorial Board of Dostoevsky Studies", *Dostoevsky Studies*, New Series, 22, 2018, pp. 7-9.

often fraught with personal, political and national passions and rivalries, it was perhaps amazing that the Society held together at all. Each Symposium seemed to produce its own version of a Dostoevskian scandal scene. Some regular participants even claimed to look forward to them.

Yet what might have been a recipe for chaos turned out in the event to be the Society's inner strength. This owes much to some key factors that any history should acknowledge.

The first of course is the universal genius of F.M. Dostoevsky, of which no more needs to be said in this place and in this context. The second, and not far behind, is the 25 years or more of service given by Nadine Natov, its executive secretary from 1971 to 1995. Her commitment to Dostoevsky studies in all its manifestations, and to the IDS, of which she could rightfully claim to be co-founder, supplied the personal dynamism that characterised its work for its first 25 years and beyond. Nadine Natov had many helpers on whom she depended, especially members of the North American Dostoevsky Society, founded on her initiative in 1970. But hers was the indomitable energy and missionary fervour that lit the fire of enthusiasm and kept it alight. She was deservedly elected an Honorary President when her final term as Secretary came to an end in 1995. Many have spoken and written of her generosity, good-heartedness, her fierce dedication and her passion for everything that promoted the international study of Dostoevsky's work. She was capable, as I know myself, of infecting others with that enthusiasm, and of persuading them to undertake tasks which, in their right minds, they would scarcely have contemplated. There were times when her presence seemed ubiquitous and, for many years, the IDS seemed to embody a blend of Dostoevsky's and Nadine Natov's personalities.

The third is the support the fledgling Society received from so many of the world's leading Dostoevsky scholars. To mention any other names at all risks overlooking some whose contribution in the early years, though less visible, was vital to the business of giving credibility and practical shape to the initial enthusiasms of its founder members. These include the hosts of all the Symposia that were to follow. Special mention must however be made of some outstanding names. One of these is undoubtedly Rudolf Neuhäuser, who was not only one of the founding fathers but also for many years edited *Dostoevsky Studies* from its earliest incarnation as a *Bulletin*. Through its vicissitudes with different publishers and editors, the journal was to maintain an enviably high academic standard across the four languages approved by the Society, under the direction of Rudolf Neuhäuser, Gene Fitzgerald, Horst-Jürgen Gerigk and other members of its Editorial Board. Down the years it published not only much important research

and many fine critical studies but also the invaluable bibliographies that were compiled for many years by June Pachuta Farris.[2]

In his own account of the Society's history, Rudolf also mentions the critical role in the foundation of the IDS of Robert L. Jackson, Dmitrii Grishin (whose idea it was) and G.M. Fridlender who was an extremely important supporter. Robert L. Jackson was also the Society's second President. By no means least, mention must be made of Deborah Martinsen, who was for many years Treasurer, co-hosted the New York Symposium in 1998, and was herself President during the period of the highly successful Moscow Symposium, an event to which the IDS had been (very) cautiously moving since its inception. As Treasurer in the early days of the Society, responsible for collecting membership dues, she would probably understand the expression 'herding cats'.

Few members were sufficiently fluent in Russian, French, German and English[3] to get full value from all the papers read at Symposia, and English tended to dominate the programme from the start. But perhaps as important as the formal sessions were the conversations that took place between them, on walks round the delightful, and often historic places where they were set, at mealtimes and over coffee, and on the outings that were always included in the programme, or inspired by the concerts, dramatic performances or Requiem Masses that always accompanied them. Some of these contacts gave birth to books (5 in my own case) and to articles, some collaborative, some in translation, some published in the Society's own journal, many elsewhere. Many members established personal friendships with colleagues who shared their interests, leading to personal invitations to lecture and to take part in other conferences abroad, sometimes across the Iron Curtain. For many generations too, they were forums where younger scholars might be introduced to senior figures in their field, whose work they knew and admired but whom they might otherwise never have met, let alone socialised with, and whose attention they might never have attracted.

The question of Soviet participation was a thorny one. Certainly there were distinguished Russian émigré participants from the very beginning, and there were also members from the other countries of Eastern Europe, including Yugoslavia, but rarely from the Soviet Union itself. While recognition of the international and inter-disciplinary significance of Dostoevsky's work was a founding principle of the Society, it was clearly paradoxical that there were no Soviet Rus-

2 See Horst-Jürgen Gerigk, "*Dostoevsky Studies*. New Series 1993-2017", *Dostoevsky Studies*, New Series, 21, 2017, pp. 43-44

3 I can find no reference to the use of languages in the Constitution, but it was generally accepted that only these four languages were admitted for use at Symposia and in the Society's publications.

sian participants. Not only was Dostoevsky a great Russian writer, and almost all his works set in Russia, but Russia was also the home of generations of scholars who had produced fundamental research into his life and work, on which we all depended, not to mention the scrupulous work on his *Collected Works* going on in St Petersburg at the time under the direction of G.M. Fridlender and his team at Pushkinsky dom.

Apart from political mistrust, one reason for their absence was the difficulty of extending personal invitations to Soviet scholars. The usual procedure was to send an invitation to an institution, which would then nominate a 'delegation' of its own choosing. Another was an apparent wariness on the part of the Society's leading members of the possibility of a Soviet 'take-over', which might result not only in the exclusion of papers that were politically unacceptable in the Soviet Union, but also narrow the interdisciplinary reach of its programmes and its publications. For a time, this wariness extended to the choice of locations for Symposia and, indeed, there seemed to be a danger that such limits might be imposed at the first IDS Symposium held in Eastern Europe in Ljubljana in 1989. But this danger, together with a suggestion that all papers should be delivered in Russian, was thankfully averted.

There had in fact been three distinguished Soviet Russian participants at the IIIth Symposium at Rungstedgaard in Denmark in 1977: (M.V. Khrapchenko, G.M. Fridlender and P.V. Palievsky). But there were no more before the VIth Symposium at Nottingham in 1986, when G.M. Fridlender was in the event the only Soviet Russian scholar able to participate. But now, with the advent of Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, and a relaxation of East-West tensions, these problems were gradually to abate and Russian scholars to play a full part in future Symposia. On my election as President at Gaming in 1995, I said that it was my hope that Russian participation would be continually strengthened and that we should soon be able to arrange a Symposium in Russia itself. Sadly, G.M. Fridlender was to die that very year but, by the time of the next Symposium in New York in 1998, there was already a very strong Russian presence and it would not be long before a Symposium would take place in Moscow itself in 2013 and Vladimir Zakharov would serve as the first Russian president of the Society. A future historian of the Society might wish to trace the fluctuating participation of various national groups and its broadening reach.

I have retained papers and photographs relating to most of the Symposia that I attended. Sometimes I kept a day-to-day diary as well. Reading them through brings back happy memories of experiences, encounters and inspirational conversations at Symposia at Bad Ems, Bergamo, Cérisy-la-Salle, Nottingham, Oslo, Gaming, New York, Baden-Baden and Geneva. The bulkiest, inevitably, relate to

those in which I played an official role: at Nottingham in 1986; on my election as President at Gaming in 1995; in my capacity as President at New York in 1998. Some of these documents, unhappily, relate to the deaths of prominent members and supporters, beginning with the death of Janko Lavrin at the close of the Nottingham Symposium in 1986. He was 99 and had been Nottingham's first professor of Slavonic languages. During my presidency I also had the sad task of recording the deaths of two of our Honorary Presidents, René Wellek and G.M. Fridlender, both of whom died in 1995, while in 2000 came the death of Frank Seeley, who had introduced me to the study of Dostoevsky as an undergraduate and supervised my own doctoral thesis at Nottingham.

The Nottingham Symposium was generally held to have been a notable success, with participants from 21 countries and 61 papers.[4] The Symposium was held in a modern Hall of Residence on one of the most attractive campuses in the UK. Moreover, the University Park was situated alongside the beautiful Wollaton Park estate, crowned by its Tudor (16th century) mansion, while private excursions to visit the city, with its castle and historic inns, were easily made. Outings were arranged to Stratford-on-Avon (Shakespeare), Newstead Abbey (Byron) and Eastwood (D. H. Lawrence), all having significant associations with Dostoevsky's work. A piano recital by Alla Kravchenko, a Requiem Mass for Dostoevsky and a closing banquet completed the programme. Nadine Natov referred in her report to the "quiet, friendly atmosphere" that prevailed.[5] There were, however, the usual stress points. I was unable to attend most of the sessions myself, owing to the stream of organisational issues and the personal requests by participants with which all conference organisers are familiar.

I unfortunately missed the VIIth Symposium in Ljubljana in 1989. It happened to coincide with a hiatus in the production of *Dostoevsky Studies* (no issues appearing in 1990, 1991 and 1992). Consequently, it was unable to publish any of the papers read at the Ljubljana Symposium, but 24 of these appeared in a separate volume entitled *Dostoevsky and the Twentieth Century, the Ljubljana Papers* published by Astra Press in Nottingham in 1993,[6] which I edited myself and which helped to fill the gap.

At the Gaming Symposium in 1992, I had the honour of being elected President for the following three years, with Erik Egeberg as Secretary. This was a

4 In his article on the early years of the IDS (*see note 1*), Rudolf Neuhäuser misremembered its location and, perhaps for that reason, devoted no space to it.

5 Nadine Natov, "The Sixth International Dostoevsky Symposium [...] held at Nightingale Hall at the University of Nottingham", *Dostoevsky Studies*, 7, 1986, pp. 215-17.

6 Malcolm V. Jones (Ed.), *Dostoevsky and the Twentieth Century: The Ljubljana Papers* (Nottingham: Astra Press, 1993).

significant moment not only for me but also for the Society, for it was the Symposium at which Nadine Natov was to step down as Executive Secretary and to be elected an Honorary President,[7] alongside René Wellek, Dmitrii Likhachev and G.M. Fridlender. It also marked the close of Rudolf Neuhäuser's presidency. Though they both continued to exercise influence from the wings, and to make their voices heard for some years to come, this was undoubtedly a key moment in the Society's history. The contribution made by distinguished Russian participants was a particularly welcome feature of this Symposium.

During the next three years, problems with the publication of *Dostoevsky Studies* rumbled on in the background without a clear resolution. At Gaming, it was decided to discontinue the arrangements whereby the journal was published under the management of Charles Schlacks at the University of Utah, Vols 2 to 6 (1994-1998) coming out in a single volume in 1998. Negotiations with Dresden University Press were long drawn out and there had been another long gap in publication. Although I was not involved in these negotiations myself, I was made aware of the problems, and required to intervene at key moments. Further consternation was caused in some quarters by the announcement inside the back cover of the last issue to be published in Utah of a new journal called *The Dostoevsky Journal, An Independent Review*, edited by one of our members, Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover. Rudolf Neuhäuser, who had invested so much time and effort in negotiating a new deal with Dresden University Press, was particularly upset by this development. On the other hand, it could be seen as a welcome sign of the spontaneous growth of members' activities, alongside the national Dostoevsky Societies that had sprung up independently in several countries.

At the end of my three-year term, I presided over the Xth Symposium in New York, organised by Robert Belknap, Deborah Martinsen and their colleagues at Columbia University. As with other Symposia, the meetings were brilliantly organised and there were ample opportunities to fit in excursions and outings round the great city. Once again, the contribution of Russian participants was an outstanding feature of the Symposium and I relieved a heart-warming letter of thanks after its close. Apart from chairing the General Assembly, my own principal contribution was a presidential address in which I foresaw the development of two new lines of research on the eve of the new millennium: on the one hand, there was the burgeoning growth of interest in the religious dimension of Dostoevsky's writing in post-Soviet Russia; on the other there was the dominance of post-modernist theory in the humanities in the West, which had, as yet, left little imprint on the study of Dostoevsky, but would surely do so, I thought,

7 Her name was unfortunately not added to the list of Honorary Presidents in the issues of *Dostoevsky Studies* published at the University of Utah from 1993 to 1998.

in the near future. I recall with pleasure that I was able to introduce younger scholars from my own country to the IDS in New York. These were Alex Harrington, Sarah Hudspith and Sarah Young, who have all published significant contributions in the field.

Although it had become normal for presidents to serve two terms, I felt obliged to seek a successor after my initial three years. This was partly because I had taken early retirement from my university in the previous year and no longer had an institutional base from which to work, and partly because of my wife's deteriorating health. We were fortunately able to persuade Horst-Jürgen Gerigk to take on this task, with Erik Egeberg continuing as Executive Secretary.

Apart from papers relating to individual Symposia, I have retained a fascinating folder labelled 'Problems and Controversies' which relates for the most part to issues that arose and had to be addressed between Symposia. One of the fattest understandably concerns the fortunes of *Dostoevsky Studies*, especially to its transfer between publishers; others relate to financial problems; others to constitutional matters; others to the succession (and even the identity at given points) of the Society's office-holders. Then there were issues of a political nature too. Some involved proposals for boycotts over human rights issues, or solicited support for members experiencing political embarrassment. Some were more parochial, such as the proposal of one of our members at Nottingham to video the sessions. This met with some resistance, lest any of the East European participants should be recorded saying things that might get them into trouble back home. It was also necessary to be aware of the sensitivities of members from countries where no funding was available, lest they should feel they were being treated as second-class members. The size of the folders does not necessarily equate to the magnitude of the problem. One of the bulkiest concerns the proposed date of the Nottingham Symposium and whether it was still possible to change it to avoid a conflict with MAPRYAL long after all the bookings had been made (It was not).

Some of the problems and controversies arose from misunderstandings, cultural differences and perceived personal affronts (of the kind that Dostoevsky would have understood all too well). Some were of an organisational kind. Each host country has its own way of organising conferences, and differing constraints were imposed by local requirements. These did not always conform to the vision of those who, with justice, saw themselves as guardians of the Society's soul. Compromises had to be reached and life had to move on.

There were also, as Rudolf Neuhäuser has highlighted in his article, issues over the legal status of the Society. However successful it had turned out to be while driven by the energy and enthusiasm of its founding members, and howev-

er democratic its General Assembly might have appeared, the processes by which recommendations reached the General Assembly could rarely be described as transparent. Moreover, without affiliation to an international cultural body, or charitable status under one or another national jurisdiction, it could be impossible to open a bank account, let alone to receive grants from outside bodies. The financing of each Symposium depended largely on local arrangements, and the financing of *Dostoevsky Studies* seemed always to be on a knife-edge. Rudolf had himself made unsuccessful attempts to resolve this issue. It was left to Ulrich Schmid, during his presidency from 2004 to 2007, to find a solution involving changes to the constitution which, whatever reservations some of the founder members may have had, received the approval of the General Assembly with little dissent.

My own last Symposium was the one at Geneva in 2004. Of that, as well as of the others that I attended but have not described in any detail, I retain the fondest of memories. Of course, I remember some outstanding contributions during the formal sessions but, above all, I remember the stimulating conversations that I enjoyed in between. I think with deep satisfaction of the expansion of the Society, with Symposia in an ever-increasing list of different countries, each with its own tradition of Dostoevsky scholarship, but with a shared belief in the value of international dialogue.

I recall saying in my retirement speech from the University of Nottingham in 1997 that the IDS seemed at times like a scaled-down version of what the world would have been like if it had been created by Dostoevsky. Of course, that was said with tongue in cheek, but there were indeed times when it seemed as though the membership consisted principally of characters from his novels. Fortunately, we had all read our Bakhtin, and polyphony ultimately prevailed. The evidence is to be found in its flourishing condition 50 years on and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity of paying my own tribute on this notable occasion.