

SLOBODANKA M. VLADIV-GLOVER:

Dostoevsky and the Realists: Dickens, Flaubert, Tolstoy (New York: Peter Lang, 2019). (Monographs). Hardcover, XIII-216 pp.

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Studies of the Russian novel often operate under the paradigm of a one-way influence: Russian novelists of the ‘realist’ tradition (Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy) read their West-European counterparts (Dickens, Flaubert, Zola, Eliot, and others) and then, influenced by their methods, turned to the specificities of the Russian context. This has been especially seen in discussions of the realist novel: scholars have shown how Russian novelists, inspired by the West, then responded to the special social, cultural, and theological situation of Russia in the 19th century. In this recent book, Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover offers a revision of this paradigm. Through the readings of several novels in the context of Dostoevsky’s work, Vladiv-Glover demonstrates that Russian experiments in realist technique were not entirely the result of this one-way influence of the West-European novel on the Russian tradition. Nor did novelists merely respond to the special ‘Russian’ condition in their novels. Rather, the realist paradigm of Dostoevsky (and of Tolstoy as well) emerged as a result of a common philosophical tradition grounded in the West-European phenomenology of Kant and Hegel: realist concepts were derived from the phenomenological understanding of perception and knowledge, and that these shared origins may unite discussions of Russian and West-European realist modes. What is important about this argument is twofold: it shows that Russian novelists contributed on an even-footing with their West-European counterparts, and that Russian realist modes may be read not as a side aberration of a West-European paradigm but rather as a product of similar secular intellectual roots. In the end, Vladiv-Glover links these phenomenological origins of realism to an emergence of proto-psychoanalytic modes of the unconscious, a broad phenomenon across national boundaries leading far beyond the 19th century.

Vladiv-Glover’s analysis begins with the classic manifestoes of realism from the 1830s and 1840s – *The Heads of the People, or Portraits of the English* (1838), *Les français peints par eux-mêmes* (1840) and *Наши, списанные с натуры русскими* (1840-41) – which help to frame the concepts of realism not, as she calls a “general” term that may be applied broadly but as one emerging as a “historical” phenomenon from novelists’ response to the philosophical tradition of German romanticism. The study proceeds through the close reading of Dostoevsky’s novels that follow this phenomenological trajectory (or as

she calls it, “genealogy”) for analyzing realist techniques and uncovering the shared philosophical origins of Russian and Western writers alike. Of special note is the treatment Dostoevsky’s novel *The Possessed*, in particular her reading of the concept of *pochvenichestvo*, or “return to the native soil”. While scholars have tended to focus on *pochvenichestvo* through the lens of Russian specificity, Vladiv-Glover re-reads this concept as, in her words, a “doctrine of *identity* and *difference* or, speaking through Hegel’s phenomenology, a doctrine of identity *as difference*” (p. 57). Importantly, Dostoevsky’s realist paradigm and especially his focus on the idea of *pochvenichestvo* had as its basis the same philosophical tradition that gave way to realism in the West: a concept close to ‘Russianness’ (*pochvenichestvo*) may be seen as originating in the phenomenology of Kant and Hegel and a philosophical approach to identity and difference.

From these chapters Vladiv-Glover then turns to other examples, notably Dickens’s *David Copperfield*, Flaubert’s *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and *Madame Bovary*, and finally Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*. In the case of Dickens, she demonstrates in a psychoanalytic reading how the novel is at once dislocated from historical events of the time and yet remarkable for its portrayal of the psychological depths of the characters. She reads this as a reflection of Dickens’s understanding of identity in his portrayal of characters, which is founded in phenomenology and prefigures Freud’s concept of the unconscious. A similar issue is seen in Flaubert. Turning to *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and *Madame Bovary*, Vladiv-Glover argues that the French novelist’s realist mode is focused not on the “positivistic portraiture of types of the nation,” but rather how the novel “probes the ‘unconscious’ physiognomy of the times” (p. 138). Finally, in the case of *Anna Karenina*, Vladiv-Glover reads this novel through Tolstoy’s later treatise, *What Is Art*. She demonstrates how Tolstoy stages different versions of perception and the gaze, where aesthetic (rather than positivistic) vision offers a totally separate epistemological plane from observation in the positivistic sciences.

In the end, Vladiv-Glover’s study brings Russian realism closer to West-European novelists, showing how a study of Dostoevsky may shed light on Flaubert, Dickens, Tolstoy, and others. This is an often-ignored direction in comparative studies of Russian and European novelists: what may Dostoevsky and Tolstoy reveal about the West-European novel? In the end, it is Dostoevsky who may shed light on the origins of realism and, importantly, on the long shadow these novelists cast, far beyond their age.

Brian Egdorf