

**COMPLICATED AND NECESSARY:
READING DOSTOEVSKY IN A TIME OF TROUBLE
(FOREWORD)¹**

One can't say that the world we lived in a year ago was the "best of all possible worlds". There was enough to worry about then as it was; and yet who could have foreseen what a difficult, ferocious, and tragic year we were about to experience? A year that insidiously tested the firmest and most amicable of bonds. That suddenly divided those unions we considered unbreakable.

Under such circumstances, working on a journal devoted to the genius and work of Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky is both complicated and necessary. Yes, editorial work for an international journal at a historical moment when contacts can suddenly become straitened has not been easy; but thanks to the good will of all involved - the editorial board, authors, reviewers - we have managed to maintain our efficiency, as well as the bright spirit - the scholarly and humanitarian core - of our task. This is necessary and will continue to be so, especially now: we need to read and study Dostoevsky's work, to reflect on it without preconceived notions, to defend scholarship on Dostoevsky from the various tendencies that distort his legacy, that are manifest today with a particular "virality": according to which Dostoevsky is the prophet of contemporary Russian "patriotism," the standard bearer for "holy war" and the Russian "messianic mission"; or, alternatively, the "dark angel" of pan-Russian chauvinism and/or imperialism, who deserves, according to such accusations, prohibition, cancellation and oblivion... Too many *consider* Dostoevsky as a symbol of something that either belongs to them or to someone else, but as a rule, such people do not *read* him at all. They read around him, under or over his works. If they read him at all. And it is characteristic of such morbidly radical and opposing receptions of the writer that they consistently rely on a dogmatic belief in him as a contemporary and a prophet, thus revealing a considerable misunderstanding.

Indeed, how is Dostoevsky our *contemporary*? We have all, indeed, repeatedly asserted - and rightly so - that Dostoevsky is a writer for our time, an eternally contemporary author and fellow-traveler; but, paradoxical as it may sound, to recognize a writer from another century as contemporary, we must first of all bear in mind that he is not "*synchronic*" to us - otherwise we immediately fall into flagrant anachronism. Dostoevsky is not a participant in our lives,

1 Thanks to Yuri CORRIGAN for the English translation of this *Foreword*.

our decisions, our attitudes with regard to the realities around us. He is not familiar with the individuals, ideas, actions and tendencies of our present day. Many feel the temptation to invoke him like a phantom or a genie from a lamp, and the results are pitiful: “Dostoevsky the idol” is very different from Dostoevsky the writer (and even from his controversial side as a political commentator), not to mention from the historical figure of F.M. Dostoevsky himself: the idol is false.

Let us then return to Dostoevsky’s own faithful and honest steps, to the study of his work, to his universality, to his humanism in the creation of his heroes of ideas. Not by accepting Dostoevsky as a flag or symbol of someone else’s worldview, but as a seminal author who belongs in some way to everyone precisely by virtue of his independence from everyone. We should continue along the path of studying Dostoevsky through philology, philosophy, academic scholarship. It is in this way that he will indeed help us better understand our current reality; in this, he is our eternal contemporary.

Dostoevsky Studies, with its more than forty-year history, has not changed its strictly scholarly criteria for selecting texts for publication. Our new issue (probably not coincidentally) focuses on the philosophical aspects of the great writer’s work. At the centre of the issue are five articles (three in English and two in Russian), exploring philosophical problems of Dostoevsky’s novels and political writings from different angles. The issue opens with an article by Svetlana Evdokimova, who takes on the classical comparison between Dostoevsky and Friedrich Nietzsche from an original perspective. Drawing attention to the multifaceted significance of the “bray of a donkey” from *The Idiot*, Evdokimova continues a theme from the previous issue (in Daria Farafonova’s article on Dostoevsky and Blaise Pascal). This is followed by an article from the Italian scholar Andrea Oppo, who evokes another comparison – also classical and equally ambiguous – with the philosophical world of Pavel Florensky. As in the case of Nietzsche, the need for antithesis arises here, but antitheses which never exclude a certain amount of commonality, as is so characteristic of our writer. In Konstantin A. Barsht’s article we find a comparative analysis of the “conversations” of the elder Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov* with the motifs and techniques of a text by Archimandrite Feodor (A.M. Bukharev), to which Dostoevsky scholars have repeatedly turned their attention. Based on the materials of *Notes from the House of the Dead* and on Derrida’s concept of the “supplement”, James Ferry’s work highlights the question of freedom in its dynamic confrontation with unfreedom: according to Ferry, the fundamental nature of freedom in Dostoevsky reveals itself in its deprivation. The issue’s fifth article takes us into the world of political ideas: Gary Rosenshield offers a penetrating

analysis of the significance of Siberia and Asia in Dostoevsky's corpus amid current debates on the nature of the writer's geopolitical vision and its relationship to such ideologemes as Eurasia, and Russian imperialism and chauvinism.

In the second part of the issue you will find detailed reviews of a number of the newest books, monographs and collected works on Dostoevsky, among the vast number of works that appeared in 2021 on the occasion of his anniversary. The journal concludes with news from the world of Dostoevsky studies.

I hope to be able to write the foreword to the next issue of *Dostoevsky Studies* a year from now, at the end of 2023, on a note of restored peace and harmony. The year 2023 promises to be a good one for Dostoevsky studies: after a pandemic-dependent suspension, the XVIII Symposium of the International Dostoevsky Society will finally take place in Nagoya, Japan, in the summer. May the Symposium mark the beginning of new productive encounters between parts of the world that are currently struggling to communicate. And may we all continue to read Dostoevsky, to reflect on his themes and study his immortal masterpieces. We are in need in them.

On behalf of the editorial board of *Dostoevsky Studies*,

Stefano ALOE
Managing Editor

