

Christoph GARSTKA
Bochum

In memoriam Horst-Jürgen Gerigk (1937-2024)

Prof. Dr. Horst-Jürgen Gerigk passed away in Heidelberg on February 9, 2024 at the age of 86.

The famous German novelist Martin Walser referred in one of his novels to a certain Professor in Heidelberg, who is known as a profound expert on Dostoevsky. He meant of course Horst-Jürgen Gerigk. When a literary scholar himself becomes a literary figure, reality and fictionality intermingle in such an astonishing way that the scholar himself can only understand it as a great honour, especially when he has spent a lifetime as a researcher repeatedly drawing attention to the “poetological difference” between what is visible and what is invisible in a work of art in terms of fiction and non-fiction. Even though Horst-Jürgen Gerigk was born in Berlin and attended grammar school in the Ruhr region, his time as a student and his entire teaching and research activities are inextricably linked to Heidelberg and its university, from which he has never been able to part. For many years, it was as much a part of the Heidelberg cityscape as the castle and the Old Bridge to see a man striding quickly from Handschuhsheimer Landstraße to the Slavic Institute in the Old Town with his hair blowing and his coat open, briefcase in his right hand, often stopping on his way to greet his many acquaintances from the university and the city’s cultural scene and to share his latest findings, insights and projects with them.

In the supplement to the *Bulletin of German Slavic Studies* for 2015, the editors have printed the programme of the very first German Slavic Studies Conference in Heidelberg in 1965, at the official residence of the association’s chairman at the time, Dmitrij Tschizewskij. Under the heading “Announcement of speakers and topics of the academic sessions”, the following reference can be found in second place: “Dr. H.-J. Gerigk, ‘Dostoevskij und die Sprachlichkeit der Sprache’ ” (Dostoevsky and the linguistic nature of language). Nearly 60 years after the lecture by the then newly graduated Slavic scholar, it is fair to say that two constants of an extremely productive academic career have already been revealed here: firstly, the connection to the “cosmopolitan village on the Neckar”, to the old university, which has created a small, idyllic town around itself, and secondly, the focus on the “tricky” Russian writer Dostoevsky and his work, which Gerigk embraced as a specialty and rendered more accessible to a

broad, particularly non-academic audience in German-speaking countries and far beyond through his work.

Horst-Jürgen Gerigk was born in Berlin in 1937. At the end of the 1950s, he began studying Slavic Studies, Philosophy and English/American Studies in Heidelberg, which he completed in 1964 with his dissertation *Versuch über Dostoevskijs "Jüngling"* (*Essay on Dostoevsky's "A Raw Youth"*, published in 1965) and a doctorate under Dmitrij Tschizewskij. Two years earlier, his first longer essay on "Vsevolod M. Garšin als Vorläufer des russischen Symbolismus" (Vsevolod M. Garšin as a forerunner of Russian Symbolism) had already appeared in the journal *Die Welt der Slaven*. This was the diploma thesis for what he himself described as "an interpreter's examination taken on the side, so to speak, with the subjects Russian, English and German constitutional law".¹ He was therefore well prepared when Tschizewskij almost casually informed him in the summer of 1964 that he would have to give a proseminar called "Einführung in die Literaturwissenschaft" (Introduction to Literary Studies), in the coming semester; he was already on the course catalogue. Many more "introductions" were to be given, which, however, never followed a monotonous, once-designed pattern, but always sought to introduce the young students to Russian literature in new and original ways. I remember a very reading-intensive and perhaps for this very reason extremely fruitful introduction based on a comparison of various common Russian literary histories. Gerigk worked as an assistant to Tschizewskij until his habilitation in "Russian Literature and General Literary Studies" at the Faculty of Modern Languages at the University of Heidelberg in 1971. He himself labelled his habilitation thesis, *Entwurf einer Theorie des literarischen Gebildes* (*Outline of a theory of the literary structure*), as the "mother text" for everything he wrote later in the field of literary studies, and he can also best summarise what he was concerned with: "Autonomy of the literary image on the basis of the peculiarity of the created thing, both in relation to the subjectivity of the reader and in relation to the subjectivity of the author, whose artistic intelligence must obey the thing if his work is to endure over time".²

Some time was to pass before he was appointed Professor of "Russian Literature and General Literary Studies" at the University of Heidelberg in 1974, which was put to good use: Gerigk was one of the co-founders of the *International Dostoevsky Society* in Bad-Ems in 1971 and was later elected its president

1 Horst-Jürgen GERIGK, *Die Spur der Endlichkeit. Meine akademischen Lehrer. Vier Portraits: Dmitrij Tschizewskij, Hans-Georg Gadamer, René Wellek, Paul Fussell* (Heidelberg: Winter Universitätsverlag, 2007), S. 64.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 14. All translations from German are by the author.

and finally appointed one of its honorary presidents in 2004. From 1998 to 2018, he was also the editor in charge of the “Journal of the International Dostoevsky Society”: the *Dostoevsky Studies*.

Gerigk's fields of work were so wide-ranging that it would be difficult to list them meticulously. At the very least, they included Russian, American and German literature, literary and narrative theory, Hollywood film and the history of aesthetics from Kant to Heidegger. This compilation can be continued with multiple ‘and’ connections: Literature and music, literature and film, literature and philosophy, literature, medicine and psychopathology (together with the medical historian Dietrich von Engelhardt and the psychiatrist Wolfram Schmitt, he founded a productive working group on this in 1983), and in his comparative orientation, he always included Russian and German, English, American, French, etc. literature. After the publication of his habilitation thesis in 1975, fourteen years passed until the publication of his next monographs. However, starting in 1989 and then even more so with his retirement from active teaching at the beginning of the new millennium, one can speak of a veritable explosion of independent studies, which must be regarded as the result of long-lasting and profound reflections. They all show us a practitioner of interpretation and a theorist of interpretation at the highest level of reflection. It would be almost a sacrilege to pick out just a few and praise them here, but it is nevertheless worth pointing out four works that have become very important for his own academic training. Firstly, there is the major comparative study on *Russians in America*.³ Not only is the immense influence of Russian authors of the 19th century on American literature, predominantly of the 20th century, presented here in a remarkably broad framework, but there is also a clearly formulated and pointed characterisation of the poetics of such Russian classic authors as Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev and Chekhov, which was very helpful to teachers of Russian literature in the subsequent period.

The quintessence of what was eagerly written in Gerigk's Heidelberg literature seminars in the 1990s can be seen in the “workbook” *Lesen und Interpretieren (Reading and Interpreting)*, first published in Göttingen in 2002, third edition in Heidelberg in 2013. Gerigk places the concept of “poetological difference”, which he coined himself, at the centre of his considerations. This refers to the distinction between inner and outer fictional realities when reading a work of fiction. If science involves the ability to abstract, then literary studies should impart the ability to distinguish between inner-fictional or psycho-

3 Horst-Jürgen GERIGK, *Die Russen in Amerika. Dostojewskij, Tolstoj, Turgenjew und Tschekow in ihrer Bedeutung für die Literatur der USA* (Hürtgenwald: Guido Pressler Verlag, 1995).

logical reasons for an event and extra-fictional reasons, which make it possible to gain an insight into the poet's workshop and his world view. *State and Revolution in the Russian Novel of the 20th Century, 1900-1925* (Heidelberg 2005)⁴ has also gone through a long "preliminary course" in academic teaching. Using well-known novels by five authors with completely opposing political views, Gerigk unfolds a broad panorama of Russian not only literary, but also cultural and political history between "legality and underground" at the beginning of the formative 20th century. The literary mastery of the writers is congenially traced here, but Gerigk must also note, with a touch of bitterness, that politics has inadmissibly nested too far into aesthetics.

The ideological appropriation of the literary work of art, as it was practised on the other side of the Iron Curtain (and especially in the 1970s on this side too), was always alien and repugnant to Gerigk. When I happily informed him at the beginning of 1992 that I had received a scholarship for St Petersburg University and wanted to study there for two semesters, he just looked at me in complete amazement and asked: "What do you want there?". A glance at the latest edition of the Falk city map, which was still sold under the name "Leningrad" at the time, could have made his scepticism more understandable: the university was still listed as "Zhdanov University". Even if his mistrust of the state-controlled Russian academic establishment has been so horribly confirmed in recent years, it is nonetheless a source of satisfaction that no small part of Gerigk's works is now available in Russian translations. This includes the fourth of the books to be highlighted here, namely the quintessence of his research on Dostoevsky, published in paperback by Fischer in 2013 under the title *Dostojewskijs Entwicklung als Schriftsteller (Dostoevsky's Development as a Writer)*, translated into Russian as *Литературное мастерство Достоевского в развитии* (Санкт-Петербург, 2016). But it's hard to keep up: a book on Turgenev (Heidelberg 2015) and another introduction to literary studies, *Lesendes Bewusstsein (Reading Consciousness)*, Berlin/Boston 2016) were published shortly afterwards. Even if no more monographs followed in his later years, the number of projects had not diminished: in 2020, a brochure on Nabokov's *Pnin* was published, which he immediately wanted to be understood as a "draft of a philosophy of emigration".

In view of these extraordinarily rich and varied results of a long academic career in research and teaching, not only Slavists can be relieved that the fears expressed by Tschizewskij at the first German Slavists' Conference in Heidel-

4 Horst-Jürgen GERIGK, *Staat und Revolution im russischen Roman des 20. Jahrhunderts, 1900-1925. Eine historische und poetologische Studie* (Heidelberg: Mattes Verlag, 2005).

berg in 1965 did not materialise. When, after Gerigk's lecture on Dostoevsky, a church historian from the University of Tübingen expressed outrage and indignation, Tschizewskij commented succinctly: "If you carry on like this, one day you'll be shot at the lectern".

Gerigk was an inspiring teacher who not merely fascinated his students with his captivating style of lecturing, but also a non-academic audience time and again. With deep gratitude and sincere admiration for his enduring life's work, his students, colleagues, a large community of Dostoevsky researchers and numerous friends of his always alert and immeasurably creative spirit bid him farewell.

