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## ***Hierarchy and Polyphony as the Divine and the Human in Dostoevsky's World\****

From whichever humanities standpoint we approach Dostoevsky's artistic texts – whether theological, philosophical, historical, sociological, philological, or other – one essential circumstance must not be overlooked. This circumstance, though seemingly self-evident, is by no means always taken into account.

Dostoevsky is a writer who created his own poetic cosmos, his own world. And what is it that we are doing when we study his works? In essence, we are applying various means and methods to *translate* into another language – the language of theology, philosophy, and so on – that which was written in the *language of Dostoevsky* himself. In other words, we are engaged in a kind of paraphrasing, a reinterpretation. Therefore, we must from the outset reconcile ourselves to the fact that such paraphrasing inevitably entails a certain *gap* between Dostoevsky's *world* (his heterocosmos, as Alexander Baumgarten might have called it) and our interpretations – a gap between artistic creation and *scholarship*.<sup>1</sup> The question, then, lies only in whether this gap will be wider or narrower.

Perhaps it is worth attempting to interpret Dostoevsky's world by means of a single metaphor. After all, Bakhtin's polyphony is itself a metaphor – trans-

\* I would like to thank Carol Apollonio for her help in reviewing the English translation of my article – *I. E.*

1 As M. M. Bakhtin emphasised, polyphony is merely “a figurative analogy” (*obraznaya analogiya*), “a simple metaphor” (*prostaya metafora*), cf. Михаил М. Бахтин, *Проблемы поэтики Достоевского* (Москва: Художественная литература, 1972), с. 37. At the same time, however, Bakhtin added: “Yet we turn this metaphor into the term ‘polyphonic novel’, since we can find no more suitable designation. One must only not forget the metaphorical origin of our term” (*ibid.*; here and further my translations – *I. E.*). It is well known that Bakhtin radically reinterpreted both what he regarded as the monological understanding of Dostoevsky's polyphony – in the interpretation of Vasily Komarovich, see: Василий В. КОМАРОВИЧ, *Роман Ф. М. Достоевского «Подросток» как художественное единство*, in *Ф. М. Достоевский: статьи и материалы*, Сб. 2 (Ленинград, Москва: Мысль, 1924), с. 31-71 – and the very philosophical foundation of that monologism, namely the monological philosophy of Broder CHRISTIANSEN in his book *Philosophie der Kunst* (Hanau: Clauss & Feddersen, 1909), translated into Russian in 1911.

posed from one sphere of culture, that of music, into another. It is a scholarly metaphor, as Mikhail Bakhtin himself explicitly wrote. Yet my metaphor shall be of another kind, and perhaps one that corresponds more closely to Dostoevsky's own axiological principles.

It is appropriate to recall that 'metaphor' is itself a Greek word, and we also recall Raphael's celebrated fresco *The School of Athens*, whose central figures, Plato and Aristotle, by the position of their hands, are conventionally believed to symbolise different (or even opposite) axiological orientations. The first points upward towards the heavens (the Divine), while the second gestures downward (toward the earthly, the human). To formulate the positions of the ancient philosophers more precisely: the former, with a clenched hand and an extended index finger, indicates a *vertical* striving upwards, toward heaven; the latter, with open fingers of his right hand, denotes the *horizontal* plane of the earth. In other words, the painter depicts the irreconcilable opposition – the dispute – between the vertical (hierarchy) and the horizontal.

This contrast is reinforced by the positions of their books: Plato's holds his *Timaeus* vertically, while Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* lies horizontally. As for the dispute in Raphael's composition between Aristotle's and Plato's silent (though well-known) "voices" – to use Bakhtin's terminology – it is reconciled by the intersection between the vertical and horizontal axes at the very centre of the fresco, forming the *Cross*.

Naturally, one must always keep in mind that this authorial intention is, of course, hidden from the figures themselves – the 'heroes' of *The School of Athens*. Raphael's characters (the "dialogists" of his work) are unaware of this; within their own *world* they are self-sufficient. They are, as we know, pagans. Yet within Raphael's authorial conception – as a Christian – this world is enriched by the work's composition and *surroundings*, thus performing a radical reconception of the essence of "the school of Athens": prefiguring the Christian in the ancient world. This reflects both medieval and Renaissance Christian reinterpretations of antiquity.

In this way, the composition of Raphael's *School of Athens* may be seen as prefiguring Bakhtin's later perception of the relationship between author and hero (which he conceived, but did not fully resolve). At the same time, this metaphorical correspondence (*Christocentrism*) may also clarify, more generally, the relationship between hierarchy and polyphony in Dostoevsky.

Why is it that theologians and philosophers have taken such a profound interest in Dostoevsky's creative work? Because the voices of his *characters*, for them, are in a sense almost as significant as – within the history of world philosophy – the voices of Plato and Aristotle. The ideas of Dostoevsky's charac-

ters are of such weight that they seem to provoke us into constructing various theological, philosophical, psychological, and other conceptual systems.<sup>2</sup> Did not the most famous Russian philosopher in the West, Nikolai Berdyaev, call himself a son of Dostoevsky, even while consciously imitating Stavrogin?<sup>3</sup> Our scholarly relativism, in turn, legitimizes itself by citing Bakhtin's "polyphony", in which the author's authoritative voice appears to dissolve – granting us far greater conceptual freedom than in other cases, especially since, according to Bakhtin, the true author "clothes himself in silence".<sup>4</sup>

The problem here, though, is that Bakhtin constructed the "horizontal" of the characters – the *human* horizontal – that so fascinated the scholarly world in the late 1960s, but in his own "small time", he was not permitted to develop the "vertical" (linked to "the existence of God"). Bakhtin himself, judging from his conversations with Sergei Bocharov, was fully aware that in his concept of polyphony he failed to express what was most *essential* in Dostoevsky's world:

I tore the form away from what is most *important* [my emphasis – *I. E.*]. I could not speak directly of the principal questions [...] – those philosophical questions that tormented Dostoevsky all his life about the existence of God. I had to keep dodging – this way and that. I had to restrain myself. As soon as a thought began, I had to stop it... I even had to hedge about the Church... Many religious and philosophical contexts were left unaddressed.<sup>5</sup>

Bocharov, though firmly disagreeing with Bakhtin's severe self-assessment, nonetheless rightly emphasized: "...there is both a principled refusal to complete the building and crown it with a cupola, but there is also a simple failure to finish. He left it *unsaid*".<sup>6</sup>

We may note that the *cupolas* of buildings – if they are church buildings – are *crowned* precisely by the Cross. We must remember what Bakhtin sorrow-

<sup>2</sup> For example, in the words of the contemporary Russian philosopher Vasily Vanchugov, "...one may safely say that the most plausible general characterisation of the Russian philosophical tradition of the 20-th century consists in the fact that it represents a series of commentaries on Dostoevsky – bearing in mind the wealth of general ideas scattered throughout his works" – Василий В. Ванчугов, *Очерк истории философии «самобытно-русской»* (Москва: РИЦ «Пилигрим», 1994), с. 354.

<sup>3</sup> See: Николай А. Бердяев, *Самопознание* (Москва: Книга, 1991), с. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Михаил М. Бахтин, *Эстетика словесного творчества* (Москва: Искусство, 1979), с. 353.

<sup>5</sup> Сергей Г. БОЧАРОВ, "Об одном разговоре и вокруг него", *Новое литературное обозрение*, № 2, 1993, с. 70-89: 71-72, 83.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, с. 86 (author's emphasis – *I. E.*).

fully left unsaid. It therefore seems necessary, in our scholarly constructions, to complete that *Cross* which most adequately conveys Dostoevsky's cosmos in accordance with his authorial intention – but to complete it in such a way that we do not discard polyphony itself, suspecting it of undue “relativism” (as, alas, some of our colleagues increasingly have tended to do).

Immediately after the publication of these conversations with Bakhtin, I repeatedly sought to draw attention to such confessions of his,<sup>7</sup> including at symposia of the International Dostoevsky Society,<sup>8</sup> not to mention in my own books<sup>9</sup> – unfortunately, almost without success.

Currently within global Dostoevsky studies, as far as one can judge, the prevailing tendency – according to Malcolm Jones's formulation – is that “hierarchy” and the concept of the polyphonic novel are, by their very nature, in obvious contradiction to one another.<sup>10</sup> Yet, as it seems to me, there exists a certain interpretative context in which this linear logic of opposition between hierarchy and polyphony ceases to apply.

The “dialogue of concord” between hierarchy and polyphony (to use Bakhtin's expression somewhat freely) lies not in recognising their relative truth for an adequate scholarly description of Dostoevsky's artistic world, nor in affirming the “truth” of hierarchy as a refutation of the “falsehood” of the relative horizontal. It lies in something else. In what exactly?

What is disquieting in the hierarchical interpretation of Dostoevsky's world – an interpretation which, in recent decades, has often been developed as *a replacement* for the earlier notion of polyphony – is this: such a hierarchy, in which the vertical (the Divine) is granted absolute priority but detached from

<sup>7</sup> See, for ex.: Иван А. Есаулов, “Полифония и соборность (М. М. Бахтин и Вяч. Иванов)”, in *The Seventh International Bakhtin Conference* (Moscow: MGPU, 1995), Book 1, с. 110–114; Id., “Полифония и соборность (М. М. Бахтин и Вяч. Иванов)”, in *Бахтинский мезаурус: материалы и исследования*: сб. статей (Москва: Изд. РГГУ, 1997), с. 133–137.

<sup>8</sup> Beginning with my paper at the 10th Symposium of the International Dostoevsky Society in 1998 (New York, Columbia University). The article based on this paper was published in the same year in the fifth issue of *Problems of Historical Poetics* – see: Иван А. Есаулов, “Пасхальный архетип в поэтике Достоевского”, in *Проблемы исторической поэтики* (Петрозаводск: Изд. Петрозаводского ун-та, 1998), вып. 5, с. 349–362. These papers, in which I attempted to draw my colleagues' attention to similar admissions by Bakhtin, were also published in English – see: Ivan ESAULOV, “New Categories for Philological Analysis and Dostoevsky Scholarship”, in Carol APOLLONIO (ed.), *The New Russian Dostoevsky: Readings for the Twenty-First Century* (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2010), pp. 25–35.

<sup>9</sup> Иван А. Есаулов, *Категория соборности в русской литературе* (Петрозаводск: Изд. Петрозаводского ун-та, 1995), с. 131–134.

<sup>10</sup> Malcolm V. JONES, *Dostoevsky after Bakhtin: Readings in Dostoevsky's Fantastic Realism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

the horizontal, may all too easily degenerate, alas, in our scholarly descriptions of Dostoevsky's artistic world, into an externalising ideological 'legalism' – ideological in its very essence.

In what circumstances may this occur? It occurs when, in asserting such a hierarchy, another consciousness – the consciousness of the character – is understood merely as an external receptacle of this or that "idea" When the characters are of interest to us only as "ideologists" within Dostoevsky's "ideological" novelistic world, and their "dialogue" is reduced to a dialogue of ideas. When "idea", "ideology", becomes that very Sabbath which, despite all its apparent "rightness", runs contrary to the spirit of the Gospel: the Sabbath made not for man, but above man ("Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath'. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" – Mark 2:27).

In Nikolai Berdyaev's celebrated book, *The Worldview of Dostoevsky*, the dominant word appears already at the very beginning – set in italics by Berdyaev himself: *ideas*. The word exerts a suggestive effect upon Berdyaev's reader:

Ideas play an enormous, central role in Dostoevsky's creative work [...]. By his art he penetrates into the first principles of the life of ideas, and the life of ideas pervades his art. Ideas live organically in his works; they possess their own inescapable vital destiny. This life of ideas is dynamic; there is nothing static in it, no stopping or ossification [...]. Ideas determine destiny.<sup>11</sup>

If the "life of ideas" is indeed so essential, then naturally a polemic concerning the hierarchy of ideas in Dostoevsky had to arise – if such *hierarchy* truly exists.

In the early 1920s, there appeared the well-known (at least according to Bakhtin) work by Boris Engelhardt entitled *The Ideological Novel of Dostoevsky*, in which it was asserted that the *idea* leads an independent life within the consciousness of Dostoevsky's characters. It is not they who live, but rather the ideas that live within them; the novelist, therefore, presents not the biography of his heroes, but the biography of ideas in them: "...ideas acquire a terrifying power over personality [...]. The central idea, which strikes the mind and imagination, becomes the decisive factor by which the individual features of the personality are defined and oriented". The hero of Dostoevsky, then, is a "man of the idea".<sup>12</sup> Yet, despite the undeniable significance of

11 Николай А. БЕРДЯЕВ, *Мироозерцание Достоевского*, in Николай А. БЕРДЯЕВ, *Философия творчества, культуры, искусства*, в 2 тт. (Москва: Искусство, 1994), т. 2, с. 9.

12 Борис М. ЭНГЕЛЬГАРДТ, "Идеологический роман Достоевского", in Ф. М. Достоевский: статьи и материалы (Ленинград, Москва: Мысль, 1924), сб. 2, с. 71-105: 85-86.

ideas in his novels, where, in the end, is the hero himself – the human being? Or human beings in general? Are the characters of Dostoevsky truly of interest only as embodiments of these dominant ideas – or also as human beings in themselves, as such?

Let us also ask: are we speaking only of *false* ideas – of those that are alien to Dostoevsky's own convictions? No; we are speaking of ideas of every kind. But if that is the case, then “idea” becomes precisely the Sabbath interpreted above in the sense that despite its possible ‘rightfulness’ it goes against the spirit of the Gospel as a whole. For this reason, I have permitted myself to employ the word ‘legalism’, transparently referring to cite Dostoevsky's own phrase, “the firm ancient law” (*ITCC* 14; 232).

Yet the issue here is not whether there exists in Dostoevsky's world a *hierarchy* of ideas or, conversely, a *polyphony* of equally valid ideas articulated by his ideological characters. The issue lies elsewhere. It seems to me that only through the recognition of the conciliar (*sobornyi*) foundation of Bakhtin's polyphony – when in the indestructible and irreplaceable “Thou art” of Dostoevsky's characters there ever shimmers the Other Face, the face that shows mercy and love toward sinners – can one truly reconcile the Divine and the human in Dostoevsky's vision.

Even within the unqualified Christocentrism of the church iconostasis, and the hierarchy of its tiers, the faces of the saints differ profoundly; the iconostasis is many-coloured, because the saints, each in his own way, manifest those aspects of Divine Providence which cannot be contained within a single human consciousness, within a single “idea” (or “ideology”). Likewise, Dostoevsky's characters are profoundly diverse – in the polyphony of their voices.

Naturally, polyphony cannot be entirely synonymous with conciliarity (*sobornost'*), for, unlike the assembly of saints, Dostoevsky's is a polyphony of sinners' voices. Yet, in much scholarly writing about Dostoevsky, this polyphony is understood as a kind of confrontation within his artistic world among different ideas or ideological positions held by “ideological” characters – in other words, as a clash *not of people but of ideas*, or worse still, of *ideologies*.

In contrast, the radiance of Orthodox conciliarity (*sobornost'*) within Dostoevsky's polyphony manifests itself not in the “equal” significance of the characters' ideological positions – say, those of Smerdyakov and of Elder Zosima (it is obvious that such an interpretation would be absurd) – but in the fact that in both cases, the human face represented by the author (behind which lies the Divine Image) is hierarchically higher than the ideological position which, as certain interpreters believe, that face *entirely* expresses. Why higher? Because any ideological stance necessarily externalises (*ovnešnit'*)

that face – and it is precisely in such a case that we may speak of the “enslavement” of man by an idea.

Any “ideological” stance – indeed, any abstract “legalistic” position – may be *overcome* (and Dostoevsky’s world depicts this process of overcoming). Yet it is not overcome by monological reasoning that opposes it, merely replacing one ideology with another, but rather through a *co-evental act* (*sobytiijnyi postupok*) in relation to the Other. It is appropriate to recall here the marvellous formulation of Father Pavel Florensky: “Orthodoxy is shown, not proved”<sup>13</sup> (that is, it is not demonstrated by setting one idea against another). In precisely this sense, the Person of Christ – as the Absolute Person – is, for Dostoevsky, separated from impersonal “truth”, which, in such an impersonal guise, invariably turns into legalistic falsehood.

If an externalising ideology – of whatever kind – constitutes enslavement by sin, then conciliar (*sobornoje*) “communion of unmerged souls” within Dostoevsky’s novelistic world is possible not as a “polyphonic” juxtaposition of their relative “ideologies”, but as a personified dialogue of irreducible persons.

Therefore, conciliar polyphony, contrary to the still widespread misunderstanding, is by no means a battle of “ideologists” (in essence, a clash of concepts, of various ‘truths’ or ‘verities’), but a *meeting of persons* (albeit within the text’s poetic reality) – a *meeting* that draws into its ethical horizon both author and reader. From this perspective, neither author nor reader can stand *vertically* ‘above’ the characters, for they too are human, not mere “representatives” of this or that “ideology”. At any rate, they may be representatives, but that is not the most important thing about them.

Similarly, in Dostoevsky’s world as a whole, the personal “dialogue” differs fundamentally from depersonalised, mechanistic “intertextuality”, since impersonal intertextuality constitutes, as it were, a legalistically truncated analogue of true personal dialogue. It stands in direct opposition to what Dostoevsky’s artistic world calls for: the resurrection of the reader, his liberation from the “old man” within, from the enslaving ideological abstractions imposed on him – an awakening to a personal encounter with the author.

Let me conclude by illustrating my theses through the material of *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*. This story provides a particularly convenient case, since it is a text that attracts theologians and philosophers almost more than Dostoevsky’s novels themselves. The reason for this is clear. At first and superfi-

<sup>13</sup> Павел А. ФЛОРЕНСКИЙ, *Собрание сочинений*, т. 1: *Стол и утверждение истины* (Москва: Правда, 1990), с. 8.

cial glance, it seems as though this small text contains nothing less than the entire history of humankind.

Yet from beginning to end, we are presented with a pure – one could say distilled – form of *Ich-Erzählung* (first-person narration). This means that all the statements pronounced by the hero-narrator – the very “ridiculous” man himself, from the opening sentence “I am a ridiculous man” to the final words “And I shall go! I shall go!” (*PICC* 25; 119 – here and further my own translation – *I. E.*) – belong not at all to the author of the *Diary*, not to Dostoevsky expressing his own religious or philosophical “ideas” in such a “form”, but solely to the consciousness of his hero.

This total dominance of the consciousness of the narrator-hero (not the author) applies in *full measure* also to the fantastic scenes of the Earthly Paradise and of the Fall which he depicts. If we fail to take this fully into account, we leave the realm of *poetics* proper and enter other spheres – what might be termed para-philosophical or quasi-theological. These interpretative transpositions may be witty and unexpected, yet, regrettably (for philology), they lead us further from grasping the true sense of Dostoevsky’s work rather than bringing us closer to it.

What, indeed, do Dostoevsky’s heroes – not just this one – occupy themselves with, apart from reflecting upon their own lives? As we know, they must “resolve the thought” (*PICC* 14; 76). They seek, as it were, to solve the *world’s* problems, to pose the “accursed questions”, many of which, one must admit, cannot be resolved definitively – once and for all – by human reason here on earth.

What, then, does the author occupy himself with (if we speak strictly of the artistic works)? The author, if we recall the Christian subtext of Bakhtin’s constructions, relates to his hero as God relates to man. This is the profound meaning of Bakhtin’s “Thou art” (*Ty yesi/Ты еси*). Without encroaching upon his Christian freedom – his freedom of choice – the author loves his hero as such, as a unique person, as his own creation, sympathising with him and refusing to reduce him to a mere “reflection” of certain social (or any other) “laws” or “ideas” – in other words, refusing to externalise (*ovnešnit’/овнешнить*) the hero, to use one of Bakhtin’s crucial terms.

The famous “equality” of voices between author and heroes in Dostoevsky’s novels, upon which Bakhtin so insisted and which has repeatedly been the subject of criticism, may also be *interpreted within a Christian context*. The author and the hero are indeed “equal”, but only before that Divine Truth which, in its fullness, is accessible to God alone, and which therefore is revealed not to an individual consciousness, but to a *conciliar* (*sobornyi*) one.

What happens when the purely *poetic* specificity of Dostoevsky's works is ignored? Vasily Komarovich, for instance, having discovered "striking correspondences" between Dostoevsky's fantastic story and Victor Considérant's *Déstinée sociale*, concluded that the ageing Dostoevsky – despite his well-known disclaimers and sharp repudiation of the "dreamy delirium" of his youthful social utopias – "not only preserved within himself the humanistic ideal of an 'earthly paradise', but consciously identified it with his youthful ideal derived from the French social utopias".<sup>14</sup>

One may agree or disagree with Komarovich's interpretation. Yet what seems to me essential is this: *Déstinée sociale* is a *treatise* – a philosophical composition – in which there is no author and hero, only the exposition of the author's position. *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, by contrast, is an *artistic work*, in which the central issue is not "philosophy", not the presentation of social views, not a treatise (in which a "dream" would serve merely as a technical means of conveying the author's ideas), but rather the *depiction of a hero* – with his own deeply autonomous views and his own vision of the world. This distinction, as we know, is characteristic of Dostoevsky.

In the one case, we have a single consciousness – the author's; in the other, two consciousnesses – that of the author and that of the hero. All of Considérant's authorial statements become the object of paraphrastic artistic play, whereas Dostoevsky's "ridiculous man", on the contrary, is brought to the foreground by the very structure of the story.

It was not his fantastic dream that saved the hero – not at all his resistance to utopian "laws of happiness", which are "above happiness itself" (IICC 25; 116) – but the *little girl*: "And I certainly would have shot myself, if it had not been for that little girl... *that girl saved me*, because my questions postponed the shot" (IICC 25; 107-108).

It is of crucial importance that she "saved" him – while he rudely pushed her away and *drove her off*: "...she suddenly clasped her hands and, sobbing and gasping, kept running alongside and would not leave me. Then I stamped my foot at her and shouted" (IICC 25; 106).

Like many other of Dostoevsky's heroes, the "ridiculous man" is a man of the *path*, not of its final completion. The text of the story ends with the words "I shall go, I shall go", but not with the end of the hero's *journey* (hence the formal open-endedness, the future orientation of "I shall go, I shall go"). Such is Dostoevsky's world: in it, the idea of conciliar salvation – not only of person-

<sup>14</sup> Василий Л. КОМАРОВИЧ, "Мировая гармония Достоевского", in Наталья Т. Ашимбаева (под ред.), *Властитель дум. Ф. М. Достоевский в русской критике конца XIX – начала XX века* (Санкт-Петербург: Художественная литература, 1997), с. 583-611: 584, 610.

al salvation – predominates. Yet this conciliar salvation is by no means impersonal or *collective* (not in the sense of “if only all would wish it”). For the “ridiculous man”, in the author’s conclusion of him, it is not these impersonal “all” that must be saved, but the *Thou* – that same little girl who a month earlier had saved him (and thereby, himself).

That is why, after the words “I found that little girl”, the text contains an ellipsis, implying incompleteness. In Dostoevsky’s world, this girl – the *Thou* – requires his care and salvation far more than any abstract “all”. For even before the hero’s dream, on that desolate night street, “there appeared some passer-by”, and the girl “ran from me to him” (*PICC* 25; 106). We may well imagine what sort of “passer-by” that might be – and what might happen thereafter to this girl, who so trustingly throws herself, in the deserted Petersburg night, first to the hero, then to “some passer-by”.

Scholars, however, as though hypnotised by the density of the hero’s philosophical and utopian reflections transmitted by the author, while raising important questions, imperceptibly move from the sphere of poetics into that of religious philosophy – discussing “ideas” (and their genesis) rather than depicted human beings. In Dostoevsky’s personalist world, what is central is not the description of the “dream” itself (nor of the “paradisal” order), nor even the “truth” that the hero “learnt last November – on the third of November” (*PICC* 25; 105), nor the call to “preach”, nor the sermon itself. After all, preaching is monological, not dialogical, and therefore cannot be “central” for Dostoevsky.

What is central is the “little girl” who prevented the “ridiculous man” from shooting himself. What restrained him from suicide were not at all the rational “philosophical” arguments of his ‘I’ – “for if I kill myself, say, in two hours, what is that girl to me, and what is shame, and all the rest of it? I shall turn into nothing, into absolute nothing” (*PICC* 25; 107-108) – but pity and shame before the *Thou*.

It is precisely for this reason that from “they”, “truth”, and “all”, the “ridiculous man” passes, at the very end, to “*Thou*”. This movement from “I” (and from the “philosophical” reflections on happiness, evil, good, and so forth – reflections that have preoccupied most scholars in their attempts to extract Dostoevsky’s “philosophical system” or even his “theology”) to “*Thou*” encapsulates, both in the path of the narrator (“And I shall go! And I shall go!”) and in Dostoevsky’s artistic world as a whole, one of the central features of the writer’s world.

Dostoevsky is not a psychologist, nor a philosopher, nor a theologian. He is a writer. The philosophical, psychological, and theological reflections are con-

ducted by his characters, as they strive to “resolve the thought”. It is the characters themselves – the human beings as such – who constitute the chief interest for Dostoevsky as author, not their philosophical or theological constructions or doctrines. His heroes are not reducible to particular “ideas”. What is most important, most precious to the author in them, is precisely that remainder, that *lik* – the Divine countenance – which does not embody “ideas”, but, on the contrary, resists them, being, in one way or another, participant in “other worlds”.

