

“The outrage felt by many of Freud’s first readers - that he was subverting their moral world – was therefore misplaced. This is, I trust, a Dostoevskian point” (J. M. Coetzee).<sup>1</sup>

The present review – somewhat unusually – surveys a journal’s special issue: Scopus indexed *Studies in East European Thought* (1961-), currently published by Springer Nature, has brought out *Dostoevsky in the World Today* (2025), an English-language collection of sixteen articles and two book reviews, dedicated exclusively to the art of Dostoevsky and guest-edited by Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover (Monash University, Melbourne, Australia).

Unusual as reviewing a journal issue might appear, the collection calls for special scholarly attention on at least two counts. On the one hand, as Vladiv-Glover aptly points out in her introduction, the issue is defined – just like thematic volumes of academic papers – by a “confluence of scholarly methodologies” uniformly aimed at “forg[ing] a new direction [in Dostoevsky studies] by isolating the field of artistic fiction from that of his non-fiction and by presenting Dostoevsky primarily as a writer”.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the issue deserves special credits for addressing the art of Dostoevsky regardless of “the strong geopolitical divisions in contemporary cultural narratives, which affect perceptions of Russian literature and culture” (p. 783) as well as disrupt academic collaborations. It is in this culturally hostile environment that the former Chief Editor of *The Dostoevsky Journal* (2000-2023, discontinued by Brill) rallied together Dostoevsky scholars from four continents – Australia, Europe (including Russia), North America and Asia – for one major effort, with the declared purpose of blazing a new trail in Dostoevsky studies. Without exaggeration, that qualifies at the current historical moment as a heroic academic enterprise worthy of attention.

- 1 John Maxwell COETZEE, *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, ed. David Atwell (Cambridge [MA] and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 244.
- 2 Slobodanka VLADIV-GLOVER, “Guest Editor’s Introduction to *Dostoevsky in the World Today*”, special issue of *Studies in East European Thought*, vol. 77, № 5, 2025, pp. 783-784, doi: [10.1007/s11212-025-09754-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-025-09754-6)

In the rest of the present review, this volume’s studies are referenced with in-text citations including the author’s name and the relevant page range or page number only, supplemented on first mention by a footnote with the relevant DOI number.

Though united by a single purpose, the contributors of the volume come from different scholarly backgrounds and apply a variety of perspectives to Dostoevsky's texts, both his major novels and shorter fiction. Yet, some of the articles are arranged to bring into relief the above-mentioned "confluence of methodologies": studies written by members of the same scholarly circle are placed consecutively, directly or indirectly reinforcing one another's major points. At first sight, the reader might start to wonder why the editor did not choose to consistently pair off articles in obvious thematic dialogue with each other. For instance, Irene Zohrab's (New Zealand) discussion of Versilov's dream and the Golden Age in *The Adolescent* (1875) in a deist context (Zohrab: pp. 791-834)<sup>3</sup> reads well with Satoshi Bamba's (Japan) interpretation of Stavrogin's confession in *Demons* (1872), built around the same narrative (Bamba: pp. 1013-1019),<sup>4</sup> or even with Henry Buchanan's (Scotland) exploration of the Golden Age with regard to the politics of *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880; Buchanan: pp. 1091-1113).<sup>5</sup> An equally strong case could be made for putting into the same block the contributions exploring *The Idiot* (1869) – those by Géza Horváth from Hungary (Horváth: pp. 955-980)<sup>6</sup> and Natalya Khokholova from the USA/Kyrgyzstan (Khokholova: pp. 1073-1090).<sup>7</sup> Some scholars might prefer to read together the articles by Chinese scholar Shudi Yang (Yang: pp. 1021-1035),<sup>8</sup> the Scottish Buchanan and the Australian Vladiv-Glover (Vladiv-Glover: pp. 861-898),<sup>9</sup> each committed to shedding new light on *The Karamazovs*. Indeed, readers are free to do so: nothing compels them to read the issue from cover to cover. Nonetheless, when perusing the articles one after the other, the same sceptical reader is likely to sense the corroborating effect of arguments built on similar theoretical foundations – an effect nowhere more spectacular than in the writings of the most closely-knit scholarly circle featured in the volume, comprised of the members of the Australian Dostoevsky Society.<sup>10</sup> While their studies are linked by a broadly phenomenological context, others are connected by a shared focus on reception history in Italy, Chi-

3 DOI: 10.1007/s11212-025-09731-z

4 DOI: 10.1007/s11212-024-09644-3

5 DOI: 10.1007/s11212-024-09655-0

6 DOI: 10.1007/s11212-024-09698-3

7 DOI: 10.1007/s11212-024-09643-4

8 DOI: 10.1007/s11212-024-09649-y

9 DOI: 10.1007/s11212-025-09744-8

10 Apart from its two definitive senior figures, President Vladiv-Glover and New Zealand affiliate Zohrab, Monash-affiliated Edward Ascroft and Nikolai Gladanac, James Phillips (University of New South Wales, Sydney), as well as an international member – the above-mentioned Buchanan – contributed an article each to the issue.

na and Türkiye, by authors Maria Candida Ghidini (Ghidini: pp. 981-997),<sup>11</sup> Liu Na (Liu: pp. 1037-1059)<sup>12</sup> and Orçun Alpay (Alpay: pp. 1061-1072),<sup>13</sup> respectively. Similarly, the articles by Horváth and Konstantin Barsht (Russian Federation; Barsht: pp. 935-953)<sup>14</sup> are linked by addressing the interface of visual (graphic) art and literary writing. Some studies placed alongside each other also discuss the same text, like Buchanan's and Eric Kim's (USA) respective contributions on *The Karamazovs* (Kim: pp. 1115-1134),<sup>15</sup> the latter of which applies mathematical theory to the discussion of reason and characterisation in the novel (p. 1117). As a result, the special issue's versatile texts form blocks or pairs providing a platform for dialogue and ultimately comprise a coherent approach to Dostoevsky's fiction.

Although the length constraints of the present review prohibit a detailed discussion of each and every article in the issue, its unifying central claim on a novel approach to Dostoevsky's fiction, which guarantees its coherence, can hardly be ignored. Zohrab's opening study sets the tone for the volume's manifold revisions of widely held academic assumptions as well as ushers in the sequence of contributions characterised by a broadly phenomenological approach. Grounding her argument in meticulous philological and textual research on both the manuscript versions of *The Adolescent* and other evidence (correspondence, memoirs, journal publications, etc.) testifying to Dostoevsky's familiarity with deism – in fact, his calling himself a “deist [...] philosophically”<sup>16</sup> – Zohrab convincingly argues for this philosophy's relevance to the interpretation of Dostoevsky's fiction in general and his “especially cherished” narrative of the Golden Age in particular, although the latter is supposedly an outlet for his Orthodox Christian convictions (p. 802). Zohrab goes on to claim that – foreshadowing the uncertainty or indeterminacy principle to be coined in scientific discourse only in the 1920s (pp. 795, 828) – it was Dostoevsky's own uncertainty regarding Orthodox Christianity, rather than his single-minded attempt to avoid censorship, that produced the well-known ambiguities of his fiction (pp. 795-797).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> DOI: 10.1007/s11212-024-09658-x

<sup>12</sup> DOI: 10.1007/s11212-024-09667-w

<sup>13</sup> DOI: 10.1007/s11212-024-09681-y

<sup>14</sup> DOI: 10.1007/s11212-025-09705-1

<sup>15</sup> DOI: 10.1007/s11212-024-09640-7

<sup>16</sup> A conviction voiced by Dostoevsky in 1876, according to the testimony of Liudmila Khris-toforovna Simonova-Khokhriakova's memoirs, published in 1990 and qtd. in ZOHRAB, pp. 798, 801.

<sup>17</sup> In this context, Zohrab also mentions “preliminary censorship” – in Judith Butler's terms, implicit or self-censorship – a factor whose effects are near impossible to assess with pre-

Zohrab's – and the special issue's – declared commitment to questioning the persistent image of Dostoevsky as an absolute believer in Orthodox Christianity has at least two significant repercussions. First, her insistence on the “indeterminacy” of Dostoevsky's standpoint cannot but evoke a postmodern context.<sup>18</sup> Although Zohrab does not make that claim explicitly, arguing for the relevance of Dostoevsky in contemporary culture on the grounds of his affinities with postmodern discourse would not be unheard of – nor would it be an untenable assertion.<sup>19</sup> To say the obvious, such affinities are blatantly evidenced in the fiction of Nobel laureate South African-born Australian novelist J. M. Coetzee (1940-) – a postmodernist incessantly returning to Dostoevsky's fiction in his own writing, notably in his metafictional *The Master of Petersburg* (1994), a pastiche on *Demons*. As a matter of fact, Coetzee pinpoints in Dostoevsky's writing the birth of a new, morally subversive discourse of crisis and doubt (see motto), a definitive component of 20th- and 21st-century thought. Though the postmodern implications of indeterminacy are not pursued in *Dostoevsky in the World Today*, the mere existence of the vol-

cision, which complicates matters even further. See Judith BUTLER, “Chapter 4: Implicit Censorship and Discursive Agency”, in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 127–164.

<sup>18</sup> See Ihab HASSAN, “Toward a Concept of Postmodernism”, in *The Postmodern Turn* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987), p. 92.

<sup>19</sup> To mention only the beginnings, precisely thirty-five years ago, Malcolm V. Jones had already pointed out the plurality of relevant contexts for Dostoevsky's fiction, including that of postmodernism. Malcolm V. JONES, *Dostoevsky after Bakhtin – Readings in Dostoevsky's Fantastic Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. xvi. Inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin and Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva coined the term *abject* in 1980 and provided a poststructuralist reading of *Demons* along the way, inspiring further poststructuralist/deconstructive readings of Dostoevsky's fiction. Julia KRISTEVA, *Powers of Horror – An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 18–20. See also Кли夫 Томсон, “Беседа К. Томсона с Ю. Кристевой о рецепции работ Михаила Бахтина во Франции”, пер. М. Пухлий, *Диалог, карнавал, хронотоп*, vol. 38, № 1, 2002, pp. 108–34, and Michael André BERNSTEIN, *Bitter Carnival: Ressentiment and the Abject Hero* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), especially pp. 87–120. For a more recent Lacanian-Kristevan reading of *Demons* see for ex. Angelika REICHMANN, *Desire – Narrative – Identity: Dostoevsky's Devils in English Modernism* (Eger: Líceum, 2012), pp. 11–82. Rooted in structuralist theory, Katalin Kroó's research has also led to conclusions akin with poststructuralist interpretations, such as her insight that in *Demons* the narrative repeatedly “washes away” and “firmly establishes” the border between the spaces associated with *god* and the *devil*, respectively, and thus sets into motion a practically endless game of meanings, which also dominates the metatextual level of the novel. Каталин КРОО, «Творческое слово» Ф. М. Достоевского – герой, текст, интертекст (Санкт-Петербург: Академический проект, 2005), с. 261.

ume is a statement on this matter. The second consequence of the volume's overall approach is just as significant. The evidence that for instance Zohrab, Vladiv-Glover (Vladiv-Glover: pp. 861-898), Nikolai Gladanac (Gladanac: pp. 835-859)<sup>20</sup> and Barsht (pp. 935-945) have accumulated outlines the image of a Russian thinker equally firmly rooted in his national culture and Western European – English, German and French – thought and art, as well as thoroughly conversant with the cultural history and various tenets of English Protestantism. In short, Zohrab's approach provides a gateway for intertextual readings of Dostoevsky's fiction in hitherto ignored or downplayed (Western) European contexts.

Indeed, while the above attempt to free Dostoevsky from the shackles of ideological, theoretical, cultural and temporal confinement is probably most explicit in Vladiv-Glover's Hegelian reading of *The Brothers Karamazov*, it informs the large majority of the volume's articles to varying degrees. Gladanac's insightful exploration of parallels – both philologically based and intuitive – between Hegel's and Dostoevsky's notions of freedom serves as an apt preamble to Vladiv-Glover's extensive study on a similar theme with an impressively broader historical and cultural scope. While Gladanac reconsiders – among others – texts that have majorly contributed to the image of Dostoevsky as a fervent advocate of Russian exceptionalism, such as the Pushkin speech (pp. 845-847), Vladiv-Glover uses a sizable and comprehensive philological and theoretical apparatus to make her case for a metaphorical – instead of an Orthodox Christian – reading of *cmapvecmbo* as an image of the ethical community embodied in the Hegelian state. Her discussion of the two authors' dialogue is embedded in poststructuralist thought – a framework also aptly mobilised in the two psychoanalytic readings to follow, Edward Ascroft's Lacanian and James Phillips's post-Freudian interpretation of *A Disgraceful Affair* (Ascroft: pp. 899-919)<sup>21</sup> and *The Eternal Husband* (Phillips: pp. 921-933),<sup>22</sup> respectively. Indeed, Bamba's Derridean interrogation of genre in "Stavrogin's Confession" shows a close affinity with the Australians' approach, just like Horváth's discussion of writing and graphopoetics, which is firmly grounded in the philosophical framework of deconstruction and hermeneutics – a constant of the Hungarian researcher's scholarly output since the early 2000s. Extending the horizon of Dostoevskian dialogue from seventeenth-century English Protestantism to the philosophy of deconstruction, these studies probe and question the limitations posed on Dostoevsky scholarship by the Orthodox Chris-

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<sup>21</sup> DOI: 10.1007/s11212-024-09648-z

<sup>22</sup> DOI: 10.1007/s11212-024-09642-5

tian paradigm. Comparative studies proper – such as Horváth's juxtaposition of Dostoevsky, Cervantes, Victor Hugo (pp. 966-969) and Pascal (pp. 974-976), or Olena Bystrova's interdisciplinary discussion of the photographic imagination in Dostoevsky's and Jewish-Polish writer Bruno Schulz's (1892-1942) works (Bystrova: pp. 999-1011)<sup>23</sup> – contribute to the same effect.<sup>24</sup>

All in all, the studies of the issue mobilise diverse critical contexts and approaches to put into the forefront of Dostoevsky scholarship the interfaces of the nineteenth-century Russian author's fiction with twenty-first-century discourses beyond the context of Orthodox Christian thought. Thereby, they effectively address the issue of Dostoevsky's worldwide relevance today: rather than blazing a totally new trail in Dostoevsky scholarship, they continue discourses emerging from the 1980s onwards and – relying on rigorous philological research – they shift the emphasis to Dostoevsky's embeddedness in and constant dialogue with Western European religious, philosophical and literary trends. That said, firmly aware of the risks such an enterprise will entail and the heated debates which might ensue, the studies innovatively offer radical revisions of entrenched interpretations and assumptions. The in-depth analyses they provide – given the sophistication of their theoretical framework and arguments – are of prime interest for academic readers: Dostoevsky scholars, teachers in higher education and students of Russian literature. Yet, their readership will hopefully not be limited to the academia, as this well-written and carefully edited English-language volume is a timely scholarly contribution offering valuable insights to all readers well-versed in Dostoevsky's fiction and ready for the intellectual adventure of scrutinising his relevance in the world, today.

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<sup>23</sup> DOI: 10.1007/s11212-024-09663-0

<sup>24</sup> In line with the above, the two book reviews included in the issue – both by David N. Wells (Australia) – focus on Dostoevsky as a translator of Balzac (WELLS: pp. 1135-1136; DOI: 10.1007/s11212-025-09783-1) and posit him in a Deleuzian reading of modern Russian literature (WELLS: pp. 1137-1138; DOI: 10.1007/s11212-025-09794-y).