

INTRODUCTORY PAPER



ВСТУПИТЕЛЬНАЯ СТАТЬЯ

“POLYPHONY” — PLURALITY, OPENNESS AND SYNERGY IN THE STUDY OF FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY’S WORK

Imagine an educated reader of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s works who, while lacking the ambition to delve into analytical and theoretical treatments of the writer’s texts, is nevertheless familiar with Mikhail Bakhtin’s interpretation of Dostoevsky. If we ask this reader to characterise Dostoevsky’s artistic thinking, in particular his novelistic poetics, can we guess what will be the first expression to come to mind? We are probably not mistaken in assuming that our interlocutor will answer: ‘polyphony’ – thus invoking a concept that also figures prominently in this 2025 issue of *Dostoevsky Studies*.

The frequent use of this term, which could undermine the complex meaning of the concept itself, should not distract the researcher from its multifaceted significance and its changing relevance over time. In the 1990s, the distinguished scholar Caryl Emerson wrote in detail about the controversial history of the reception of Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony.¹ This reception draws on a broad context of concepts such as dialogism, double-voiced discourse, heteroglossia, and the openness of Dostoevsky’s novels. The idea of polyphony was further developed in such theoretical achievements² as the conceptualisation of the semiosphere by Yuri Lotman and the Tartu-Moscow School.³ It has become even clearer to us how to approach a ‘polyglot’ system based on the plurality of subsystems and micro-dialogues.

The question of the polyphony has not disappeared from studies of Dostoevsky’s poetics. On the contrary, our diverse and methodologically divergent academic discourses on this rich body of work have contributed to a keener understanding of the need for polyphony in research. The manifold opinions and positions, methods, and ways of interpretation that differ so sharply across the international field of Dostoevsky studies are features that productively mobilise our scholarly thinking and help to refine and improve the culture of our own argumentation. Giving space to diversity of research in *Dostoevsky Studies* is a conscious principle adopted by the journal’s editors, who select material

¹ Caryl EMERSON, *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), esp. pp. 127–161.

² Juri M. LOTMAN, “On the semiosphere”, trans. W. Clark, *Sign Systems Studies*, 33, № 1, 2005 [1984], pp. 205–229.

³ Peeter TOROP, “Semiosphere”, in Marek TAMM and Peeter TOROP (eds.), *The Companion to Juri Lotman. A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), pp. 296–307.

not according to their own taste or tableau of positions, but knowing that every scholar has the right to create their own evaluative position in relation to the formulation of a problem, its presentation, and the overall conceptual design of an individual article.

Micro- and macro-dialogues in a polyphonic system require active recipients who cannot work without a ‘dialogical situation’, which, in light of the concept of the semiosphere, can be identified as the *necessity* of dialogue. Lotman argues that this situation precedes not only the dialogue itself, but even the language (i.e., the creation of language) in which the dialogue is conducted.⁴ For Lotman’s assessment of Bakhtin in a personal dialogical life situation, we can quote a passage made available by Caryl Emerson, who published part of the lost Russian original text as translated from Estonian into English:⁵

Bakhtin was a fabulous interlocutor. And I mean interlocutor, not narrator. In conversation he would frequently stay silent and for long periods. But he had a talent for sympathetic silence, creating thereby a benevolent and confidential atmosphere without which conversation is impossible. His ability to divine another person’s thoughts was astounding. Occasionally it could even embarrass his interlocutor. Nowadays we are losing the art of conversation; we hurry to set out our own ideas and hardly ever listen to what is being said to us. Our conversations have become arbitrarily linked up monologues, resembling absurdist theatre. This is due to our outsized self-admiration and lack of interest in other persons. Mikhail Bakhtin, although seemingly lost in deep thought, was brimming with interest in the other person. He grasped others’ ideas with such ease that one could think he had thought it all over himself long ago, knew it all, and was interested not in bare authorless thoughts but in the thinking interlocutor – in the person who created the thought and the thought that expressed the person.⁶

As editors and readers, to respond to Lotman’s idea of “listen[ing] to what is being said to us”, means opening ourselves to numerous micro-dialogues, which

⁴ Juri M. LOTMAN, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, trans. A. Shukman (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 143–144. Cf. commented in TOROP, p. 301.

⁵ Caryl EMERSON, “Lotman and Bakhtin”, in Marek TAMM and Peeter TOROP (eds.), *The Companion to Juri Lotman...*, pp. 78–90: 86. The English translation from Estonian was made by Triina Pakk.

⁶ See the excerpt in Estonian, translated from Russian of a lost text by Malla Salupere: Juri M. LOTMAN, “Kutse dialoogile” [Invitation to Dialogue], in Mihail BAHTIN, *Valitud tööd* [Selected Works], ed. Peeter TOROP (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1987), pp. 5–14: 5–6. This English version is a back translation from Estonian.

manifest themselves in the form of explicit and implicit, affirmative and negative exchanges between different works, ultimately constituting a special kind of holistic polyphonic space. This polyphonic universe itself, with its dialogical relationships discovered by the reader, ‘invites’ us to creatively continue our open scholarly discourse. In this creative space, on the one hand, articles are grouped into thematic clusters, within which different perspectives on a particular problem or research direction emerge; on the other hand, there are many details in common running throughout the issue. We will only point out the general lines of orientation, since it is up to the reader-scholar to discover the full spectrum of dialogue and polyphony as they emerge.

The first section presents two contexts of philosophical discourse linked to Dostoevsky’s work. In his article “Reflections on Dostoevsky as a Philosopher and Theologian”, Jordi MORILLAS (Lübeck) extensively explores the genesis and history of philosophy and theology in Greece and their development in the context of European Christianity (Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Tertullian, Saint Augustine of Hippo, Schopenhauer), while also examining biblical texts in order to probe the dilemma of whether Dostoevsky can be called a philosopher or a theologian within the framework of the taxonomic categories identified. This question also touches upon the problem of the writer’s “prophetic” position or personality, which is also highlighted against the backdrop of Christian thought. Romilo Aleksandar KNEŽEVIĆ (Niš) in his work, “Freedom Before Being: Berdyaev, Dostoevsky, and the Ontology of the *Ungrund*. Reconsidering Divine Antinomy and Uncreated Freedom in Russian Religious Thought”, examines Nikolai Berdyaev’s interpretation of Dostoevsky in light of the idea of uncreated freedom (*Ungrund*), which originated with Jacob Böhme. The author traces a philosophical genealogy from Heraclitus to Hegel, ultimately pointing to the ontology of the principle of *Coincidentia Oppositorum*, which represents contradiction as the basis of life. In Berdyaev’s metaphysics, the author explores a move towards a dynamic ontology in which, under the conditions of *Ungrund*, human and divine creativity are able to coexist and co-operate. The author places the illustrative character of Kirillov, from *The Possessed*, into this philosophical context.

Both of these articles from the first section, which interprets philosophical discourses surrounding Dostoevsky’s thought, can be read in micro-dialogical relation to Laura Salmon’s papers on Dostoevsky’s artistic and non-artistic texts (representing two different types of cultural discursivity, such as poetics and philosophy). In a similar way, the reader is encouraged to think further about the coexistence of divine and human creativity in the ontology of life, as interpreted in the articles of the second thematic cluster of the jour-

nal issue, including from the perspective of the possibility of simultaneity or synthesis.

The works in the second thematic cluster – *Polyphony, Dialogism, Simultaneity* – highlight the concept of polyphony from four different perspectives, although not all authors set themselves this explicit goal. In his article “The Wisdom of Rejecting Synthesis: Intercultural Dialogue between Fyodor Dostoevsky’s Polyphonic Novel and Taoist Dialectics”, Wang ZONGHU (Beijing) employs a comparative methodology, juxtaposing Dostoevsky’s polyphonic world and Taoist philosophy as represented in texts attributed to the Chinese philosophers Laozi and Zhuangzi. The central semantic focus of the comparison is the determination and description of the absence of a stage of synthesis in the dialectical relationship between opposing elements – in Dostoevsky, these elements are irreducible to reconciliation in a higher unity as the highest truth. Taoist dialectics focuses not on a teleological process, but on mutual transitions and temporary equilibrium. Both in Dostoevsky’s literary practice and in Taoism, the polyphony of reality turns out to be an evaluative category, considered from an ethical point of view. Ivan ESAULOV (Moscow), in his work “Hierarchy and Polyphony as the Divine and the Human in Dostoevsky’s World”, keenly raises the question of the compatibility of hierarchy and polyphony both as phenomena and as concepts. He rejects both the position of ideological relativism in Dostoevsky’s world and the identification of hierarchy with what he describes as religious “legalism”, which sacrifices the value of the individual, who is not called upon merely to preserve the consciousness of others and be a bearer of ready-made ideas and positions. Esaulov emphasises the Orthodox conciliar basis of Dostoevsky’s polyphony. Against the backdrop of the writer’s Christocentrism, this basis provides an opportunity to place the individual above any ideological beliefs. Conciliar personalised communication as an eventful act manifests itself in the movement of an open person from ‘I’ to ‘You’. The concept of conciliar polyphony highlights a shift in attention from ideological to poetic formulations of the truth of the image of the human personality and its connection to the divine world. It is not difficult for the reader to relate this idea to the emergence of a micro-dialogue on the need to distinguish between different discourses – including the philosophical and the poetic – both in Dostoevsky’s work itself and in scholarship. This theme is presented with distinct foci in the articles by Jordi Morillas and Laura Salmon.

Zhou QICHAO (Hangzhou) interprets Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novel, bringing the figure of Ivan Karamazov to the fore by emphasising the issue of polyphony in the multi-voiced nature of the literary character himself. The article “The Energy of the ‘Symbiosis’ of Consciousness: Notes on the Multidirec-

tionality of Ivan Karamazov's Ideas and Impulses" lists well-known elements of the hero's consciousness and emotional world from a new perspective, with the aim of showing the coexistence of the most diverse components of the literary character's thoughts and emotions. The article's author is interested in the possibility of interpreting the synchrony and symbiotic presence of these thoughts and emotion – in the sense of a joint existence – as personality initiatives and impulses. Like factors motivating an action, "symbiosis" means the coexistence, interpenetration and interaction of multiple self-awarenesses with different orientations at a specific moment in time. This gives rise to multiple possibilities in the character's words and actions. "Symbiotic consciousness" is thus interpreted primarily from the point of view of synchronicity, and its study stems from the question of the aesthetic effect it has on Dostoevsky's readers. The article also launches into a comparative analysis of the poetics of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy in this context. In her article "On Some Further Semantic Aspects of the Experience of *Fullness/Completeness* in F. M. Dostoevsky's Poetics", Katalin KROÓ (Budapest) adds several new considerations to the interpretation, already begun in another of her works, of Dostoevsky's poetic modelling of the personal experience and world perception of *fullness/completeness*. The author focuses on the artistic development of the semantic definition of *fullness/comprehensiveness/inclusiveness* as it is shaped in the sense of entering connections and experiencing the convergence of various elements of the world in a single temporal or/and spatial sphere, into which the subject of perception penetrates with great intensity. This requires studying the chronotope of fullness/completeness with a distinction between horizontality and verticality, as well as the uncertainty, abstractness, and degrees of concreteness (metaphorisation and symbolisation) of the chronotope. The forms of experiencing and comprehending completeness bring together diverse and opposing elements of everyday realities and their emotional or intellectual interpretations. In this sense, this topic is inseparable from such traditional aspects of the study of Dostoevsky's poetics as polyphony, the event in the understanding of M. M. Bakhtin, monodualistic antinomy, or the problem of simultaneity. Illustrative examples are taken from the novels *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Idiot*.

The third section of the issue, *Dostoevsky in the Context of Reading Experience: Life, Literature, Research*, is devoted to a wide range of vectors of reading experience, both in relation to the books that are represented in Dostoevsky's œuvre and in relation to reading the writer's own works. In "Books in The Idiot", Tatyana KASATKINA (Moscow) summarises the approach of the research project (2023-2024, IMLI RAN, RSF Foundation) that she led and whose results are published in a collective monograph (Татьяна А. КАСАТКИНА, Катерина КОР-

БЕЛЛА, Татьяна Г. МАГАРИЛ-ИЛЬЯЕВА, Николай Н. ПОДОСОКОРСКИЙ, *Книги в книге. Роль и образ книги в романе Ф. М. Достоевского «Идиот»*, отв. ред. Татьяна А. КАСАТКИНА [Москва: ИМЛИ РАН, 2024]). Dostoevsky's characters, as she points out, “read, discuss, translate, interpret and analyse, buy and sell, give away, borrow, lend, and write a wide variety of books” – these books are important in their subject matter and as a semantic space for their content. They play a similar role in terms of their genre embodiment, “ranging from the everyday and historical anecdote, the *feuilleton*, the magazine and newspaper article, to the evangelical parable and the apocalyptic prophecy”. The study focuses on the novel *The Idiot* and examines the multifaceted functionality of books relating to various levels of textual comprehension.

Pavel FOKIN (Moscow), referring to the research principles and achievements of the collective monograph described above, continues to examine the role of books in Dostoevsky's works (“Books in the Artistic Space of Dostoevsky's Works”), arguing that books, having both spiritual and material value in the writer's artistic world, “are at the top of the hierarchy of objects”. They appear in a wide variety of hypostases – as “part of a still life, an element of interior or design, a detail in a portrait, part of a genre scene”. They also often have symbolic meaning and can become not only a participant in the action, but also the embodiment of personality traits. The article interprets the poetic power of books through an analysis of certain episodes from the novels *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *The Adolescent*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Boris LANIN (Poznań), in “Dostoevsky in Friedrich Gorenstein's *Debates about Dostoevsky*”, provides an interesting example of how Dostoevsky – a well-known figure in a given intellectual milieu, in this case, the editorial board of a Soviet publishing house – can become a protagonist, whose figure and work are the subject of various interpretations, discussions, and polemics in the context of a secondary text: the manuscript *Dostoevsky and Atheism* by the author Roman Edemsky. The discussion concerns the question of how Dostoevsky is ‘read’ from an ideological perspective (atheist and rationalist, religious writer, prophet of the Russian idea, etc.) by representatives of “the real struggle for the interpretation of the writer in Soviet culture”, which also raises the question of antisemitism, understood against the backdrop of relations with Western and nationalist orientations, and in the context of the question of national identity. The author of the article attributes the principle of the drama's construction (1973) – a play of ideas, according to its genre – to Bakhtin's principle of open dialogue, carnivalism, and polyphony.

Enrique F. QUERO GERVILLA and Natalia ARSENTIEVA (Granada) in their work “The Phenomenology of Modal Indeterminacy in *Crime and Pun-*

ishment by F. M. Dostoevsky: Analysis of Language and Translation Solutions”, raise the question of translating Dostoevsky’s works into Spanish on the basis of reading and interpreting the peculiarities of expressions of modal uncertainty. The authors provide a typology of modal indeterminacy and not only illustrate the examined phenomenon, but also analyse in detail textual examples from the novel selected for discussion. Epistemic, emotional-psychological, and behavioural modal indicators are considered from functional-semantic and phenomenological perspectives. The rich linguistic material reveals how, in the semantic world of the novel – at different levels of consciousness with regard to the characters, the narrator and the author –, the oscillation “between perception and imagination, knowledge and conjecture, emotion and action” manifests itself especially at the moment of thought formation. These dynamics convey information about the vision of the world presented in the work and draw attention to the problem of the possibility of the metamorphosis of speech. The article thus combines the areas of linguistics, literary hermeneutics, and the study of translation. Numerous examples in Spanish are provided to address the problem of preserving or compensating for important semantic nuances and their effectiveness.

The article by Konstantin BARSHT (St. Petersburg), “Ways and Means of Exploring Dostoevsky’s Creative Legacy in the 21st Century”, attempts to outline a range of possibilities – with advantages and difficulties – available to contemporary researchers of Dostoevsky when working with manuscripts and academic texts in the form of traditional publications and their appearance on digital platforms. Among other things, the author reflects on such textological aspects – entering a polemic discussion – as the translation of archaic 19th-century grammar and punctuation into modern Russian, the dating of notes, and the access to the writer’s ideographic notes and drawings. He calls the attention to the important role of internet resources created in recent years, which play a significant role in integrating and strengthening the international scholarly base.

In his paper “Dostoevsky and Artificial Intelligence”, Blaž PODLESNIK (Ljubljana) places Dostoevsky’s work in the context of the pressing issue of transhumanism from the perspective of artificial intelligence technology. He draws attention to the ability and potential of large language models to generate works of art that can be recognised by their stylistic properties as original texts by different authors. The issue is discussed within the broader context of the “digitised Dostoevsky”, underscoring the emergence of new opportunities and methodologies for reading, which, “alongside traditional reading, provide a completely different access to the texts”, including special digital corpora. The

space of generative AI contains pseudo-Dostoevsky material, the evaluation of which is put into the context of the concepts of subject and subjectivity in Dostoevsky's works and with regard to the author himself. This complex phenomenon includes readerly subjectivity and the dynamic interaction with the text as it unfolds. The paper considers Bakhtin's dialogism, the subject–word/text relationship (cf. in *The Brothers Karamazov*), the open word, the multiple forms of represented ideas, and the stages of the very formation of the author's and reader's subjects – as remaining unreflected in the achievements of generative AI.

In the *Translations* section, we find three important works by the Italian scholar Laura SALMON, which are linked, in many ways, to the thematic ramifications of the subjects discussed in the above-mentioned articles. Three papers: "The Anti-Romantic Rebellion of Dostoevsky the Artist and the Disturbing Substrate of *White Nights*"; "On the Coherence of Dostoevsky's 'Polyphonic Monologues': Typology, Namelessness, and Antonomasia of Ridiculous Underground 'Dreamers'"; "The Significance of the 'Unnamed' Name of the 'Prisoner' in Dostoevsky's Story of the Grand Inquisitor" represent a unique and, in many ways, innovative approach to the above-mentioned topics, offering new perspectives on familiar works and their interpretation, and presenting a significant research achievement in understanding Dostoevsky's poetics, which until now has only been known in Italian. This section is also noteworthy from the point of view of the work of translation itself, which is raised as a problem by the translator Daria FARAFONOVA in her "Introductory Words" to these three articles. We also receive, here, an interpretation of the research achievements in the translated articles.

The *Reviews* section further expands the geographical boundaries of international research on Dostoevsky. Stefano ALOE (Verona) reviews a book by the Japanese scholar Tetsuo Mochizuki, *Микрокосмы Достоевского* [Dostoevsky's Microcosms] (Дальний Восток, близкая Россия; вып. 7) (Белград: Границар, 2025); Raffaella VASSENA (Milan) reviews an American monograph by Lindsay Ceballos, *Reading Faithfully: Russian Modernist Criticism and the Making of Dostoevsky, 1881-1917* (Ithaca: Northern Illinois University Press, an imprint of Cornell University Press, 2025) (NIU Series in Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies); Angelika REICHMANN (Eger, Hungary) reviews the special issue of *Studies in East European Thought* (vol. 77, special issue, no. 5, Oct. 2025, pp. 783-1138), edited by the Australian scholar Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover; Zsófia MAKÁDI and Dmitry A. MAZALEVSKY (Debrecen, Hungary) introduce readers to the book *The Language I Spoke and Framed: Linguistic Presence: Collection of Academic Papers in Honour of Árpád Kovács's 80th Jubilee*, compiled and edited by Márton Hoványi and Angelika Molnár (Budapest:

ELTE Eötvös József Collegium, 2024). Of particular value to readers are surveys of the current year that provide an overview of research, events, and projects related to Dostoevsky that have been undertaken by research groups, institutes or countries. In this context, we receive information about the activities in 2025 of the Research Centre of the Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences “F. M. Dostoevsky and World Culture”, in a review by Nikolai PODOSOKORSKY (Moscow). We are grateful to Jordi MORILLAS for his chronicle of the international conference held in Athens, as well as to Alejandro Ariel GONZÁLEZ for his report on the upcoming XIX IDS Symposium in Buenos Aires in June 2026.

With heavy hearts, in three necrologies, we remember our friends, distinguished scholars of Dostoevsky studies who were dear to many of us, members of IDS, Boris Nikolaevich Tikhomirov, Kinoshita Toyofusu, and Árpád Kovács. The authors of these writings are: Vladimir ZAKHAROV and Irina ADRIANOVA; Naohito SAISU; Katalin KROÓ).

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This introductory article began with a reminder of Bakhtin’s dialogism and polyphony, pointing out how the thematic, argumentative, and interpretive components of individual articles can help readers discover micro-dialogues between articles in the open and pluralistic space of academic thought. *Dostoevsky Studies* involves its readers in a synergetic contribution to Dostoevsky research. The concluding words of Daria Farafonova’s introduction to her own translations can be extended to the evaluation of many other papers in the issue: “Consistently relying on the artistic word, these writings allow us to identify and study the textual mechanisms that give rise to multiple readings. This, in turn, opens up space for scholarly discussion”. Our fruitful discussions in the pages of *DS* can continue in any direction in the subsequent articles of future issues.

But let us not forget about the important forum announced in last year’s issue of our journal, the *ECHOES* section. This section will include any feedback on writings published in previous issues of *DS*. Comments, pieces of additional information, disputes or affirmations with regard to any formerly presented theoretical, interpretive, methodological, or textual problems are welcome here. As we seek to nurture further dialogues, moreover, this issue’s section of articles in translation reminds us of how many other writings we might not be aware of in the incredibly rich store of valuable Dostoevsky studies. This also means that we must get started, without delay, on creating a common digital database of works in Dostoevsky scholarship by current and former members of

the IDS, to which each member of our society can contribute yearly data from their research, with references to available digital links. First and foremost, we need a thematic database of academic writings, classified according to the titles of Dostoevsky's works, supplemented with annotations, on the basis of which it will be possible to discover a multitude of thematic cross-references.

The practical implementation of such an internet resource from year to year requires careful consideration (initiatives and specific ideas have already been put forward on more than one occasion). Our further productive synergetic processes should be able to rely to a large extent on mutual knowledge of valuable works that have accumulated over many decades of scholarly activity by the International Dostoevsky Society.*

*Katalin KROÓ
Managing Editor*

* On behalf of the Editors I would like to express my sincere gratitude to our colleagues, native speakers of Russian and English, who selflessly and generously assisted in the linguistic editing of this issue of our journal: Daniil ALOE, Carol APOLLONIO, Aleksandra BANCHENKO, Yuri CORRIGAN (the language editor of the present paper as well), Nyina MÁGOCSI, Nina NIKOLAEVNA, Sarah HUDSPITH.