

N. N. SHNEIDMAN

Soviet Theory of Literature and the Struggle Around Dostoevsky in Recent Soviet Scholarship

The acceptance of prerevolutionary cultural values in the Soviet Union has been constrained by the development of official interpretation of Marxist-Leninist dogma and its application to the changing historical and political conditions and issues of the day. The evolution of the official Soviet approach to nineteenth-century Russian classical writers thus has been a process influenced by ideological and political considerations. At each stage of development of the Soviet state, Soviet officials devise the necessary literary policy and literary theory with which the values most pertinent to Soviet society at a given stage of its historical development can be extracted from a work of art created in a bourgeois society by an artist alien to the cause of the revolution.

The official Soviet attitude toward nineteenth-century Russian classics may be characterized as a transition from a policy of rejection of the values propounded by most nineteenth-century Russian writers to a policy of passive acceptance in which the classics have been accepted, according to Plekhanov's formula, only "from here up to here."¹ Such an approach implies acceptance of the writers' criticisms of the tsarist regime and its social, political, and religious institutions, but it also entails the rejection of the positive ideas of such writers as Gogol, Tolstoy or Dostoevsky. Gradually this passive acceptance of the classics, particularly in the post-Stalin period, has developed into a complete reconciliation with the great writers of the past century. In this new situation the service of classical writers to the Russian people and their relevance to contemporary Soviet society are over-emphasized while their conservative, often anti-socialist background is minimized or altogether overlooked.

This gradual acceptance of the Russian classics was linked to the growth of the power and might of the Soviet state. It followed as a natural result of the Stalinist theory of the possibility of a victory of socialism in one country, which made it necessary to draw on the Russian historical past and on the spiritual resources of the Russian people in order to identify the best

1. G. V. Plekhanov, "Zametki publitsista: 'Otsiuda i dosiuda,'" in S. P. Bychkov, ed., *L. N. Tolstoi v russkoi kritike: Sbornik statei* (n.p., 1949), p. 315.

literary work of prerevolutionary Russia with the aims of the Soviet state. This does not mean that the acceptance of bourgeois cultural values has been a smooth process. On the contrary, it has been sensitive to important political events and changes in the political leadership. And if gradual acceptance of writers such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky follows an ascending line, it is certainly not a straight line but a zigzag one.

Dostoevsky was one of the first of the great nineteenth-century Russian writers to be attacked by the Soviet establishment and the last to gain recognition from the Soviet leaders. Even though he is presently placed next to Pushkin, Tolstoy, and Chekhov, Soviet literary scholars are still trying to come to grips with the problem of finding a correct interpretation of Dostoevsky, one that would make his place in Soviet culture secure. Early leaders of the Soviet state and Soviet culture acknowledged the great talent of Dostoevsky—his ability to penetrate the human soul and to present realistically pictures of Russian life. They criticized him, however, for his pessimism, for his conservative, often reactionary, views, and for his criticism of the socialists and radicals of his time. Dostoevsky's solutions to the problems of his day were emphatically rejected. Criticism was directed not only at Dostoevsky, but also at those who considered him their teacher and prophet. Referring to the decadent novel *Zavety ottsov* by V. Vinichenko, Lenin wrote in June 1914 in a letter to I. F. Armand that the novel is "in my opinion an ultra-bad imitation of the ultra-bad Dostoevsky."² Lenin also supported Gorky who attacked Dostoevsky for advocating the cult of suffering, for propagating social pessimism, and for discouraging social struggle by trying to convince others of the impossibility of a social change in Russia. Following in the footsteps of the nineteenth-century Russian populist N. K. Mikhailovsky, Gorky called Dostoevsky "the evil genius."³ At the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, Gorky summed up his attitude by saying that "the genius of Dostoevsky is unquestionable. His talent of artistic portrayal is perhaps equal to that of Shakespeare. But as far as his personality is concerned, as a 'judge of the world and the people,' one can very easily see him in the role of a middle-age inquisitor."⁴

Gorky regarded Dostoevsky as a representative of the petty-bourgeoisie. A. Lunacharsky viewed Dostoevsky similarly, and he pointed out that "Dostoevsky could be accepted in the young Soviet state only by that part of the petty-bourgeoisie and intelligentsia which did not accept the revolution."⁵

2. V. I. Lenin *o literature i iskusstve*, 3rd ed. (Moscow, 1967), p. 297.

3. N. K. Mikhailovsky wrote an article on Dostoevsky entitled "Zhestokii talant." See F. M. Dostoevskii *v russkoi kritike: Sbornik statei* (Moscow, 1956), pp. 306–85.

4. F. M. Dostoevskii *v russkoi kritike*, p. 401.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 434.

Lunacharsky suggested that it was necessary to learn through Dostoevsky but not from Dostoevsky. He claimed that it was improper not to be acquainted with such genius as that of Dostoevsky, "but it would be very shameful, and, it is possible to say, socially unbecoming, to fall under his influence."⁶

The zigzag development of the Soviet approach to Dostoevsky characteristic of the 1930s and 40s was influenced by political considerations. Faithful party ideologists followed the official political line in literature and without much ado usually changed the official interpretation of Dostoevsky to suit the needs of the moment. Most notorious in this respect was the well-known Soviet literary historian V. Ermilov, who would devise a certain interpretation of Dostoevsky and recant it whenever expedient.⁷

The post-Stalin "thaw" marks the beginning of a gradual revival of *Dostoevskovedenie* in the Soviet Union. The one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the writer's birth, celebrated in November 1971, gave a new impetus to the study of Dostoevsky and prompted a number of articles, research studies, and monographs devoted to Dostoevsky's personality, creative writings, and Weltanschauung. Most of the new studies emphasize the relevance of Dostoevsky to socialist culture, his criticism of bourgeois society, his sympathy and compassion for the simple people. The overriding concern of these recent studies on Dostoevsky is the desire to find an accommodation with the writer—to vindicate him. There is an obvious attempt to adapt Dostoevsky's heritage to contemporary Soviet needs and to put his writings at the service of the Soviet state and the socialist cause. This is a difficult task. Soviet ideology and Dostoevsky's Weltanschauung are mutually exclusive because they are based on different understandings of the very essence of man and different interpretations of social phenomena. The new interpretations of Dostoevsky also require the formulation of new theoretical premises for the adaptation of Dostoevsky's writings to the needs of contemporary Soviet society in conformity with Soviet literary theory and policy.

It would be difficult in an essay of limited scope to discuss all the studies of Dostoevsky which have appeared in the Soviet Union in recent years. The anniversary of Dostoevsky's birth and the attempt to reassess Dostoevsky by Soviet literary scholarship has prompted, over a period of four years, the appearance in the Soviet Union of more studies of Dostoevsky than had been produced in all the preceding post-revolutionary period.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 453.

7. For a detailed elaboration of the early history of *Dostoevskovedenie* in the Soviet Union see Vladimir Seduro, *Dostoyevski in Russian Literary Criticism 1846-1956* (New York, 1969). More recent studies on Dostoevsky, up to the year 1965, are discussed in a review article by R. L. Belknap, "Recent Soviet Scholarship and Criticism on Dostoyevskij: A Review Article," *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 11, no. 1 (1967): 75-86. V. Seduro's new study, *Dostoyevski's Image in Russia Today* (Belmont, Mass., 1975), covers the period from 1956 to 1973.

Among these recent publications on Dostoevsky, it is worthwhile to single out V. Kirpotin's *Razocharovanie i krushenie Rodiona Raskol'nikova* (Moscow, 1970), Iu. G. Kudriavtsev's booklet on Dostoevsky's world outlook *Bunt ili religii* (Moscow, 1969), the second edition of *Idei i obrazy F. M. Dostoevskogo* (Moscow, 1971), by M. Gus and the collections of articles *Dostoevskii i ego vremia* (Leningrad, 1971), edited by V. G. Bazanov and G. M. Fridlender; *Dostoevskii i russkie pisateli* (Moscow, 1971); and *Dostoevskii—khudozhnik i myslitel'* (Moscow, 1972), edited by K. N. Lomunov and others.⁸

The above studies differ from each other in methodological approach to Dostoevsky as well as in the interpretation of Dostoevsky's art and its relationship to Dostoevsky the man. It is not surprising, therefore, that they have generated a dialogue in Soviet literary criticism in which a wide variety of opinions have been expressed and in which there as yet appears to be no consensus.

The main thesis of Kirpotin's book on *Crime and Punishment* is that the roots of the crime are to be found in Raskol'nikov's loss of faith in justice and in his longing for the happiness of the oppressed and the downtrodden. Kirpotin sees the essence of Raskol'nikov's tragedy in the latter's assumption that "he could combine within himself the absolute and all-embracing power of Napoleon with the purpose of a Messiah, leading the people towards happiness and prosperity."⁹ According to Kirpotin the main reason which prompted Raskol'nikov to rebel and to kill was the altruistic desire to help those in need. Raskol'nikov's realization that the killing of the women turned him into

8. It is necessary to point out that the studies of Dostoevsky discussed in this article do not exhaust the long list of recent Soviet contributions to contemporary *Dostoevskovedenie*. The bibliography of works by Dostoevsky and works about Dostoevsky (which have appeared in the Soviet Union in the years 1970–1971) includes 577 different monographs, articles, dissertations, and so forth. See S. V. Belov, "Bibliografiia: Proizvedeniia F. M. Dostoevskogo i literatura o nem," in *Dostoevskii: Materialy i issledovaniia*, vol. 1 (Leningrad, 1974), pp. 305–37.

From among the titles included in the above bibliography it is worthwhile to single out the 83rd volume of *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* (Moscow, 1971), which includes, along with Dostoevsky's unpublished notebooks, comprehensive introductory articles by L. M. Rozenblium and G. M. Fridlender. Rozenblium's article, in particular, sheds new light on the development of Dostoevsky's Weltanschauung—on his relationship and dialogue with Strakhov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, and Mikhailovsky. The publication, in 1972, of the first volumes in the new thirty volume complete edition of Dostoevsky's collected works should also be noted. By the end of 1974 eleven volumes had been published. In 1974 the Institute of Russian Literature of the USSR Academy of Sciences also began publication of a series of research monographs to accompany Dostoevsky's collected works. The first volume of *Dostoevskii: Materialy i issledovaniia*, mentioned above, was published in 1974.

9. V. Ia. Kirpotin, *Razocharovanie i krushenie Rodiona Raskol'nikova* (Moscow, 1970), p. 177.

a despot and murderer shook the "historical-philosophical and ethical-psychological foundation of the idea of salvation which he had developed and which seemed to him to be unbiased."¹⁰ Kirpotin claims that the tragedy of Raskol'nikov "illustrates convincingly the essential shortcomings of any attempt to save the world by voluntarist-individualistic methods."¹¹

Kirpotin's conception of Raskol'nikov's crime encountered much criticism in the Soviet literary press. In an article appearing in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, A. Latynina refuses to accept Kirpotin's explanation of the crime. She accuses Kirpotin of minimizing the importance of the Napoleon theme in the novel, and says that Kirpotin takes this course because in dealing with Raskol'nikov's idea about Napoleon it is impossible to "explain Raskol'nikov's active love of mankind."¹² Latynina goes on to say "that perhaps a quality such as love of mankind does not require any theoretical explanations," and it is possible that Raskol'nikov's altruism was a part of his personality long before he became absorbed by the "Napoleon idea." She claims further that according to Dostoevsky the "Napoleon idea" "contradicted the internal essence of the human qualities implanted in Raskol'nikov,"¹³ and that the main tragedy of the hero is in the "dissonance between the idea and the human essence of its bearer."¹⁴ Thus, according to Latynina, it appears that Kirpotin uses a selective approach in the study of the novel and that he emphasizes only the facts which substantiate his own hypothesis. It is also possible to say that Kirpotin tries to minimize the irrational element in Raskol'nikov's personality without which it is difficult to find a valid explanation of the hero's actions.

E. Starikova attacks Kirpotin even more severely when she writes in *Voprosy literatury* that "particular omissions and very minor deviations from the text lead to a discrepancy between the spirit of the novel and the spirit of the critical study."¹⁵ Starikova charges Kirpotin with implying that Dostoevsky is only against the killing and oppression of the poor. In reality, she argues, Dostoevsky is against murder and bloodshed in general, regardless of the victim's class. This is not to say that Starikova agrees with Dostoevsky's attitude towards murder. She claims that his view runs counter to the logic of history because it does not take into account the thirst for vengeance on the part of the oppressed. The essence of Starikova's criticism of Kirpotin

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 178-79.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

12. A. Latynina, "Fakty, problemy, kontseptsii," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, September 8, 1971, p. 7.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. E. Starikova, "Istoricheskie korni prestupleniia Raskol'nikova," *Voprosy literatury*, 1971, no. 2, p. 221.

is that Kirpotin improves upon reality by projecting Dostoevsky in a light which makes him appear better than he really is.

Many critics accuse Dostoevsky of giving a verbal solution, in the controversial epilogue to *Crime and Punishment*, to a problem which he could not master artistically. Kirpotin claims the contrary. He says that the epilogue is an important and essential part of the novel because it illustrates Raskol'nikov's alienation from the masses—an alienation which is one of the main reasons for his failure. The epilogue shows, according to Kirpotin, that individual anarchistic rebellion leads nowhere and “that one is to look for the solution to eternal problems in another direction, in other programs, and not rely on the prerogatives of a particular individual.”¹⁶

The complexity of Dostoevsky's art and the duality and ambivalence of its creator make it very difficult to restrain the interpretation of his novels within fixed boundaries or to supply a single conception of his art as an exhaustive answer to all questions. Iu. Seleznev writes in *Voprosy literatury*¹⁷ that Soviet scholars currently studying the literary heritage of Dostoevsky have divergent points of view. Some acknowledge Dostoevsky's inner contradictions, his reactionary views, and his conservatism, but they say that despite all of this he is a great artist. Others tend to overlook the existing contradictions altogether. Seleznev insists that expressions such as “despite,” “notwithstanding,” or “nevertheless” do not help in understanding the contradictory nature of Dostoevsky's art. He implies that this ambivalent approach to the writings of Dostoevsky is one of the major shortcomings of many contemporary studies.

M. Gus is among those who do try to sort out the contradictions in Dostoevsky's work. In his book, *Idei i obrazy F. M. Dostoevskogo*, Gus criticizes those who claim that the main contradiction in Dostoevsky is that between his subjective thinking and the objective meaning of his art. He states that contradictions permeate Dostoevsky and that they are part of his consciousness, part of his world outlook, as well as of his art. But despite this refusal to view Dostoevsky the artist and Dostoevsky the man separately, Gus falls into a trap by claiming that Dostoevsky's success is a result of “artistic truth,” while his shortcomings are the result of “reactionary ideas.” Thus it appears, as A. Latynina points out,¹⁸ that Dostoevsky created valuable characters only when he refused to embody in them his own ideas. But since Dostoevsky's novels are mainly ideological novels, and as his ideas permeate most of his creative writing, Dostoevsky's creative activity is appraised by

16. V. Ia. Kirpotin, p. 445.

17. Iu. Seleznev, “Postigaia Dostoevskogo,” *Voprosy literatury*, 1973, no. 8, pp. 218–40.

18. A. Latynina, “Fakty, problemy, kontseptsii.”

Gus as a long chain of artistic failures. These include *The Possessed* and *Diary of a Writer*, as well as the characters of Myshkin and Ivan Karamazov. Latynina claims that it is impossible to say that Dostoevsky's work is a continuous chain of mistakes, and she suggests that "the writer surely strived to discover and to study the existing contradictions, but these were contradictions of reality itself. And while one is absorbed sorting out the 'correct' ideas from the wrong, he is liable to lose sight of the real artistic meaning of the author's quest."¹⁹

Gus's interest in Dostoevsky is not limited to socio-historical problems. In his article, "Lichnost' i istoriia,"²⁰ Gus makes an effort to reinterpret certain aspects of Dostoevsky's Weltanschauung and to tailor them to his contemporary conception of Dostoevsky. Thus he states that the main idea of *Notes from the Underground* is Dostoevsky's attack on the ideology and psychology of alienation. He also implies that Dostoevsky opposed the view that evil is an inherent and unavoidable element of human life. This assumption is motivated by the fact that in *The Brothers Karamazov* the theory of the inevitability of evil is developed by the Devil, and it is in essence contradictory to Ivan's views. Ivan Karamazov does not accept the world of God because there is evil in it, but Ivan's rebellion against evil is helpless because he does not understand the cause of evil and its role in history. Gus overlooks, of course, the fact that the Devil is Ivan's double, who expresses Ivan's subconscious thoughts. Gus also fails to mention that in Dostoevsky's article on *Anna Karenina* he writes: "It is clear and intelligible to the point of obviousness that evil in mankind is concealed deeper than the physicians-socialists suppose; that in no organization of society can evil be eliminated; that the human soul will remain identical; that abnormality and sin emanate from the soul itself; and finally that the laws of the human spirit are so unknown to science, so obscure, so indeterminate and mysterious, that as yet, there can neither be physicians nor *final* judges, but there is only He who saith: 'Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense.' He alone knows the *whole* mystery of the world and man's ultimate destiny."²¹

Gus claims further that Dostoevsky's prophecy about the future mission of the Russian people was right and wrong at the same time. It was wrong because Dostoevsky envisaged the future system in Russia as a mixture of orthodoxy, monarchy, and socialism, and based on the notion of the Russian people as a God-fearing people. Dostoevsky was right, however, in his prediction that Russia was destined to reveal a new truth to the world. It was

19. Ibid.

20. M. Gus, "Lichnost' i istoriia," *Znamia*, 1971, no. 11, pp. 195-215.

21. F. M. Dostoevsky, *The Diary of a Writer*, trans. and annotated by Boris Brasol, vol. 2 (New York, 1949), p. 787.

stated by Lenin.²² Gus finds the primary contradiction in both Dostoevsky's consciousness and his creative writing in the difference between Dostoevsky's ideal and the means by which it was to be attained. He claims that Dostoevsky wanted to reach an objective that constituted the essence of socialism and which could be attained only through the process of revolutionary struggle, and yet Dostoevsky spoke against socialism and against revolutionary struggle.²³

An approach leading to the total vindication of Dostoevsky is taken by Iu. Kudriavtsev in his analysis of Dostoevsky's world outlook. Kudriavtsev claims that Dostoevsky is justified in criticizing the shortcomings of metaphysical materialism, and that he did not attack socialism in general, but rather only its vulgar utopian brand. He states that if Dostoevsky had studied Marxism and true scientific socialism his attitudes would surely have changed, because at heart he was a socialist. Kudriavtsev writes that "Dostoevsky's underground man 'sticks his tongue out' at those revolutionaries who have no conscious program," because "Dostoevsky does not accept a 'socialism' which limits itself to the negative ideal of destruction; nor does he accept those who advocate such a 'socialism' . . ." ²⁴ Kudriavtsev goes on to say

that the revolutionary method was rejected by Dostoevsky because according to him it could not solve the contradictions between the individual and society, nor could it elevate the individual in society. But the revolutionary method was not rejected in order to make room for religion. Dostoevsky has shown that the religious method is even less capable of solving problems. Furthermore the rejection of the revolutionary method does not mean at all the rejection of socialism in general. In other words Dostoevsky rejects not socialism in general but petty bourgeois socialism, more precisely, the 'demonism' (*besovstvo*) in socialism.²⁵

Thus, according to Kudriavtsev, *The Possessed* should no longer be regarded as a pamphlet critical of the revolutionary movement, but rather a denunciation of existing evil and a sharp criticism of the deviations existing in the revolutionary movement. Such an interpretation is partially based on V. Bonch-Bruевич's memoirs of Lenin, which appeared in 1955. According to Bonch-Bruевич, Lenin severely criticized *The Possessed*, but also pointed out that the events depicted in the novel were connected not only with the activities of S. Nechaev but also with those of M. Bakunin. *The Possessed* appeared at the very time that Marx and Engels were carrying on a bitter

22. M. Gus, p. 214.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 215.

24. Iu. G. Kudriavtsev, *Bunt ili religia* (Moscow, 1969), p. 145.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

struggle with Bakunin and it was, according to Lenin, the duty of the critics to establish what in the novel was related to Nechaev and what to Bakunin.

Kudriavtsev's conception of Dostoevsky's attitude toward socialism is not new. It is reminiscent of V. Ermilov's ideas expressed in an article written during the Second World War when, for a short while, in the interests of the Soviet war effort, Dostoevsky was restored to grace.²⁶ (After the war, however, Ermilov recanted his views and joined in the attack on Dostoevsky prompted by A. A. Zhdanov's campaign against so-called liberalism and "bourgeois objectivity" in art.) As logical as Kudriavtsev's position might seem, a deduction such as he suggests is possible only if one tampers with facts and dwells exclusively on the material which fits neatly into his conception of Dostoevsky. In this connection, U. Gural'nik in his article, "Dostoevskii i sovremennost'," states bluntly that by accepting Kudriavtsev's argument one is "improving history,"²⁷ because Kudriavtsev not only omits facts which contradict his conclusions, he also changes and interprets factual material to produce most unusual results.

Kudriavtsev is not alone in his efforts to show Dostoevsky in a positive light. For example, Iu. Petrovsky in *Zvezda* discusses Dostoevsky's ethical ideal. Petrovsky arrives at the conclusion that Dostoevsky's objectives and his ethics are based on a pure and elevated love of man and that "it is possible to discover a rational humanitarian essence in each of Dostoevsky's ethical ideas."²⁸ Indeed, one could agree with Petrovsky that a high ethical ideal is at the root of Dostoevsky's creative work. But it would also be necessary to add that this ideal, this love for mankind in general, is repudiated by Soviet ideologists. In his article, Petrovsky does not elaborate on the essential distinction between Dostoevsky's ethics, which are based on a religious conception of the world, and Marxist-Leninist morality, which is based on the class character of ethics and on the precept of loving your class brother and hating others. It is obvious that Petrovsky endeavors to make Dostoevsky acceptable to the Soviet reader by ignoring aspects of the writer's Weltanschauung and his creative work which might conflict with official Soviet dogma.

Even more revealing, in this same respect, is an article by the notable Soviet literary scholar M. Khrapchenko, which appeared in the November 1971 issue of *Kommunist*, coinciding with the Jubilee celebrations of the anniversary of Dostoevsky's birth. Though Khrapchenko acknowledges many negative aspects of Dostoevsky's world outlook, he claims that "the opinion

26. V. V. Ermilov, "Velikii russkii pisatel' F. M. Dostoevskii," *Literatura i iskusstvo*, September 5, 1942.

27. U. Gural'nik, "Dostoevskii i sovremennost'," *Novyi mir*, 1971, no. 8, p. 247.

28. Iu. Petrovsky, "Nravstvennyi ideal F. M. Dostoevskogo," *Zvezda*, 1971, no. 11, p. 189.

according to which Dostoevsky's Weltanschauung is, in its most essential manifestations, conservative does not correspond to the truth."²⁹ According to Khrapchenko, a new approach to Dostoevsky is necessary because his old conservative ideas no longer pose any real danger in contemporary Soviet conditions. The relevance of Dostoevsky to contemporary society is to be sought, according to Khrapchenko, in the objective meaning of Dostoevsky's art which leads to the conclusion that the "boundless suffering of the people, begotten by bourgeois society, which is based on the principle of private property, can be eliminated only with the annihilation of that very society."³⁰ Khrapchenko concludes his article on a patriotic note in which Russian and Soviet patriotism seem to be synonymous. He states that the Russian and Soviet people should be proud of the fact that their motherland has given the world a writer of genius such as Dostoevsky.

Historically, most Soviet scholars who advocated an objective approach to Dostoevsky made an effort to emphasize the progressive elements in his writings and personality. In the 1930s, for example, A. S. Dolinin pointed out the change in Dostoevsky's world outlook that took place in the years 1876–80. Dolinin did not say that it ceased to be counterrevolutionary, but he claimed that it was a change for the better. According to Dolinin "all Dostoevsky's creative path was permeated by an inherent duality. In the period of *The Possessed* the tendency was so much in the direction of reaction that one could regard his ideas as identical with those of Katkov and Pobedonostsev. In the second half of the seventies, when the populist revolution gained strength, new elements [in Dostoevsky's Weltanschauung] began to appear."³¹ Dolinin analyzes Soviet critical literature appearing in connection with the fiftieth anniversary of Dostoevsky's death in 1931 and he decries the fact that there are few serious studies which attempt to penetrate the very essence of Dostoevsky's art. He claims that when Merezhkovsky, Rozanov, and Volynsky created their own image of Dostoevsky and proclaimed him as their prophet, Soviet critics and scholars were only too happy to surrender Dostoevsky to them. When the reactionaries howled that Dostoevsky was "ours, completely ours, our prophet," Soviet scholars and critics replied "yes, you are right, your opinion is correct—he is yours, completely yours."³² Dolinin's approach to the study of Dostoevsky differs from that of most contemporary Soviet Dostoevsky scholars. He endeavored to give a balanced

29. M. Khrapchenko, "Dostoevskii i ego literaturnoe nasledie," *Kommunist*, November 1971, no. 16, p. 109.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

31. A. S. Dolinin, ed., *F. M. Dostoevskii: Materialy i issledovaniia* (Leningrad, 1935), p. 80.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

view of Dostoevsky, while contemporary Soviet scholars have decided to wrest Dostoevsky away from the reactionaries in order to say that "he is ours, completely ours." In this latter approach, characteristic of many recent articles on Dostoevsky, authors, attempting to show the connection of Dostoevsky with Soviet literature, continually overlook the negative in Dostoevsky in order to create a positive impression of the writer. For example, in his article "Dostoevskii i Gor'kii," A. S. Miasnikov tries desperately to illustrate the influence of Dostoevsky on Gorky by stressing what united rather than divided these two writers. Referring to Lenin's statement about two cultures in a bourgeois society, Miasnikov claims that "Dostoevsky's creative work belongs in general to the democratic culture. . . . Socialist realism, and especially Gorky, has inherited all the best there was in Dostoevsky's creative work and in his aesthetics."³³ Miasnikov claims that by carrying on a relentless struggle against the so-called *Dostoevshchina*, Gorky cleared the way for an understanding of the real Dostoevsky.³⁴

The one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Dostoevsky's birth stimulated further attempts to portray Dostoevsky as one of Russia's great writers and one who is of immense importance to the contemporary generation. The celebration of this anniversary also added another dimension to Dostoevsky scholarship in the Soviet Union. Dialogue with the West on the relative merits of Dostoevsky's writings and his philosophy, previously limited to the confines of a scholarly discussion, has now become a weapon in the Soviet ideological armory, and Western literary scholars have become the prime target. Soviet literary scholars have assumed the role of Dostoevsky's defenders and they accuse the West of falsifying and misinterpreting Dostoevsky—creating a paradox in which the Soviets attack the West for something for which the Soviets, beginning with Gorky, are themselves responsible.

The new approach to the study of Dostoevsky was defined by Academician B. Suchkov who stated, during a conference on Dostoevsky organized by the editorial board of *Voprosy literatury*, that "Dostoevsky's heritage should be approached and examined in the aspect of the contemporary ideological struggle." He also lauded Dostoevsky "as the greatest critic of capitalism."³⁵ The attack on the West was continued in an article by Ia. El'sberg in *Literaturnaia gazeta*.³⁶ This article is actually nothing more than a reply to S. Karlinsky's essay on Dostoevsky which appeared in June 1971 in *The*

33. A. S. Miasnikov, "Dostoevskii i Gor'kii," *Dostoevskii—khudozhnik i myslitel'* (Moscow, 1972), p. 533.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 547.

35. B. Suchkov's statement in *Voprosy literatury*, 1971, no. 4, p. 224.

36. Ia. El'sberg, "Oblachivshis' v togu uchenogo . . . —Komu i pochemu v S.Sh.A. ne po vkusu nasledie F. M. Dostoevskogo," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, September 22, 1971, p. 2.

*New York Times Book Review*³⁷ in which Karlinsky calls for a more realistic approach to the study of Dostoevsky in the West. Pointing out the severe criticism of Dostoevsky by such writers as Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gorky, Bunin, and Tsvetaeva, Karlinsky says that in the treatment of Dostoevsky "all too often the only acceptable tone is that of hushed reverence. A few polite kicks at the awesome pedestal might be healthy."³⁸ El'sberg is furious. He claims that Karlinsky speaks in the name of contemporary bourgeois reaction and that Karlinsky attacks Dostoevsky because the latter criticized the West after having lived there for several years.

M. Khrapchenko also joined in the attack on the West by claiming that "when bourgeois scholars concentrate their attention primarily on *The Possessed*, they intentionally conceal the most important fact, namely, that Dostoevsky attacks most severely all their cherished beliefs."³⁹

While there are few Soviet scholars or critics who dare to question openly the Soviet attack on Western Dostoevsky scholarship, sober voices in Soviet literary scholarship do warn of the danger of jumping from one extreme to another—from a total repudiation of Dostoevsky to a complete vindication. B. Meilakh, for example, sees a danger in covering up Dostoevsky's true image by showing him in a better light than he deserves, a phenomenon which has become almost common in connection with the Dostoevsky Jubilee.⁴⁰ Similarly E. Knipovich writes in *Znamia* that while it would be foolish to reproach Dostoevsky for all his shortcomings, it would be equally wrong "to ignore his typical mistakes and to claim that Christ is just the pseudonym for 'goodness,' 'social justice,' and so forth, as is presently often done."⁴¹ Speaking at the conference at *Voprosy literatury*, writer G. Berezko sharply disagreed with B. Suchkov and said: "I cannot visualize in Dostoevsky, as B. Suchkov says, the greatest critic of capitalism in world literature. This is simply incorrect. I do not know any other writer in whose works the feeling of compassion for the downtrodden, the oppressed, the unhappy and the alienated would be stronger than in Dostoevsky's works, but this is not a denunciation of capitalism (just as Gogol's "Shinel'" is not a denunciation of capitalism). . . [Dostoevsky] did not call for a struggle with the unjust society and there is no need to attribute to Dostoevsky what cannot be found in his novels."⁴²

37. Simon Karlinsky, "Dostoevsky as Rorschach Test," *The New York Times Book Review*, June 13, 1971.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

39. M. Khrapchenko, p. 123.

40. B. Meilakh, "O khudozhestvennom myshlenii Dostoevskogo," *Voprosy literatury*, 1972, no. 1, p. 89.

41. E. Knipovich, "Legendy i pravda," *Znamia*, 1971, no. 11, p. 223.

42. G. Berezko's statement in *Voprosy literatury*, 1971, no. 4, p. 233.

B. Suchkov, until recently one of the official spokesmen on Dostoevsky scholarship in the Soviet Union,⁴³ was the main speaker at the Dostoevsky Jubilee celebrations in November 1971, at the Bol'shoi Theater in Moscow, with Politburo and Communist Party Central Committee members present. However, G. Berezko's position is probably closer to the truth. Dostoevsky was indeed more concerned with the fate of the individual than with social schemes. He was, as he called himself, a realist in a higher sense. He was able to probe and to dissect the dark sides of the human soul. He was, however, far from criticizing the existing order of things or from preaching socialism of any kind.

At this point, one is justified in asking how this new approach to Dostoevsky conforms to the basic premises of Soviet literary theory, which aspires to become an exact science based on the methodological foundations of Marxism-Leninism. The basic tools which one uses to evaluate a work of literature in the Soviet Union at the present time are the principles of *partiinost'* and *narodnost'* of art,⁴⁴ the first being mainly applied to Soviet literature. Lenin's articles on Tolstoy are considered to be an important guideline in the evaluation of a prerevolutionary work of literature, as well.

There are, in circulation in the Soviet Union, a number of divergent interpretations of the term *narodnost'*. One Soviet scholar suggests that "a work of literature complies with the requirements of *narodnost'* if it depicts events which take root in reality and which are important and of interest to the peoples' masses. These events should be depicted in the light of the progressive ideals of a given period; truthfully, completely, and deeply; and with great power of artistic expressiveness."⁴⁵ Another theorist of literature considers *narodnost'* the highest form of artistry (*khudozhestvennost'*). He claims that *khudozhestvennost'* reaches the level of *narodnost'* if the "author deals in his work with problems of general concern; if he approaches these problems in a manner which favors the interests of the people; if his depiction of man contributes to the spiritual growth of the people, and if there is a democratism of form which enables the masses to understand the given work."⁴⁶ A direct application of these definitions would disqualify Dostoevsky from being acceptable to the Soviet reader because his novels do not

43. B. Suchkov died early in December 1974. See *Literaturnaia gazeta*, December 11, 1974, p. 3.

44. For a detailed discussion of the principles of *ideinost'*, *klassovost'*, *narodnost'*, and *partiinost'* in literature see N. N. Shneidman, "The Russian Classical Literary Heritage and the Basic Concepts of Soviet Literary Education," *Slavic Review*, 31, no. 3 (September 1972): 626-38.

45. G. L. Abramovich, *Vvedenie v literaturovedenie*, 5th ed. (Moscow, 1970), p. 100.

46. L. I. Timofeev, *Osnovy teorii literatury*, 3rd ed. (Moscow, 1966), p. 124.

comply with these narrow requirements. In order to avoid such a possibility, L. Timofeev qualifies his definition of *narodnost'*: "in the past an author could seldom express ideas which were a direct reflection of the peoples' interests. It is important that his deep knowledge of life, his sincerity and honesty in depicting it . . . could lead to correct conclusions, even though the writer himself has not done so."⁴⁷ Thus Soviet literary scholars and critics are encouraged to draw conclusions from the creative work of nineteenth-century Russian classicists which conforms to the ideological requirements of the present day but which are far from what the classicists themselves intended. The use of a vaguely defined notion of *narodnost'* makes it possible to retain Dostoevsky's literary heritage on the bookshelves of Soviet libraries and in the curricula of Soviet educational institutions. It also makes it possible to adjust the interpretation of Dostoevsky to the changing needs of the political and ideological climate of the country.

Along with the claim that most of Dostoevsky's works do comply with the requirements of *narodnost'* an effort is also being made to apply, by analogy, the conclusions Lenin reached in his articles on L. Tolstoy⁴⁸ to the creative work of Dostoevsky. It is interesting to note that in the 1920s, when L. Tolstoy was still under attack by many representatives of the proletarian literary establishment, the studies "devoted to Tolstoy took no notice at all of Lenin's articles on Tolstoy."⁴⁹ Lenin's interpretation of Tolstoy's creative work and his assertion of the unity of Tolstoy the artist and Tolstoy the thinker-prophet became the guiding authority and binding only after Stalin's death.

This attempt to apply Lenin's articles on Tolstoy to the interpretation of Dostoevsky's novels is not without precedent, however. In the mid-1930s A. S. Dolinin, hoping to change the course of Soviet *Dostoevskovedenie*, advocated a similar approach. Dolinin wrote that "following the path indicated by Lenin who evaluated the creative work of Tolstoy, taking into consideration the socio-historical conditions which created this 'great writer of genius' with all his glaring contradictions, we should apply the same approach to the creative work of Dostoevsky. After Lenin's analysis no one doubts any more that Tolstoy was 'the mirror of the Russian revolution.' Dostoevsky, however, still remains in this regard under a shadow."⁵⁰ Dealing specifically with the period of 1876–80, Dolinin wrote further that "Dostoevsky reflected then the Russian revolution in a degree equal to that of Tolstoy but he had done it much clearer and with more passion."⁵¹ Because the progres-

47. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

48. See *V. I. Lenin o literature i iskusstve* (Moscow, 1967).

49. B. I. Bursov, *L. N. Tolstoi: Seminarii* (Leningrad, 1963), p. 33.

50. A. S. Dolinin, pp. 23–24.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.

sive representatives of the petty bourgeoisie, described by Dostoevsky, took part in the revolution much more actively than the peasants, Dostoevsky "expressed the revolution much clearer and with much more energy than did Tolstoy."⁵²

In the 1930s the time obviously was not yet ripe for such an approach to Dostoevsky, and, at a time when Gorky was attacking Dostoevsky from the rostrum of the Writers' Congress, Dolinin's recourse to Lenin was of no avail. Much has changed since. At present, there is seldom a serious Soviet study which endeavors to vindicate Dostoevsky without making reference to Lenin. U. Gural'nik, for example, suggests that the only key to the evaluation and interpretation of Dostoevsky is Lenin's theory of reflection, which "rejects the mechanical identification of the ideological essence of a work of art with the subjective intentions and strivings of an author,"⁵³ and his articles on Tolstoy. Gural'nik suggests further that, having understood the complex interaction of the objective and subjective in art, Lenin arrived at the conclusion that Tolstoy was a mirror of the revolution despite himself and without actually understanding it. Gural'nik quotes Lenin who says that "if we have before us a really great artist, he must reflect in his works at least some of the essential aspects of the revolution."⁵⁴ "And if so," Gural'nik declares, "we are entitled in the final analysis to consider Dostoevsky an ally who is on our side of the barricade."⁵⁵

It is interesting to note that the new interpretation of Dostoevsky also prompted a new approach to the comparative study of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Instead of a search for differences between them, we witness now a search for similarities. Instead of setting one against the other, Soviet scholars now seek a common approach to both based on the acceptance of those aspects in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky which are most useful and acceptable in contemporary Soviet society. Thus, according to K. N. Lomunov, "what the advanced and progressive people of the whole world cherish in the creative work of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky is what belonged to the future and not to the past, what expressed their reason and not their prejudice and error. We value in their heritage not their apolitical approach to life, not the preaching of humility and personal self-perfection but, as Lenin said about Tolstoy, 'the violent protest against any class oppression.'"⁵⁶ Lomunov warns against

52. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

53. U. Gural'nik, p. 247.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 247-48.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

56. K. N. Lomunov, "Dostoevskii i Tolstoi," *Dostoevskii—khudozhnik i myslitel'* (Moscow, 1972), p. 511.

a mechanical application of Lenin's characterization of Tolstoy to Dostoevsky. He says, however, that

there is no doubt that the principles of Lenin's approach to the characterization and evaluation of Tolstoy's world-outlook and his creative work, his methodology of the analysis of such problems as the connection of the artist with his epoch, the essence of the contradictions between the artist's views and his creative work, the determination of the strong and weak points of an artist's heritage, and the clarification of what is most important in him—could and should serve as a "guide for action" in the study of Dostoevsky and of any other artist and thinker as important and contradictory as Dostoevsky.⁵⁷

Clearly, Lenin's articles on Tolstoy have now become, along with the principle of *narodnost'*, the guiding theoretical templates for the interpretation of prerevolutionary artistic and cultural values in the Soviet Union. It is paradoxical, however, that a new approach to Dostoevsky is possible in which a relationship between the artist and the thinker is established that conforms to the requirements of contemporary Soviet ideological and political trends precisely because of the unified approach to Tolstoy first suggested by Lenin. Despite the sharp dialogue on the place of Dostoevsky in contemporary Soviet culture and literature, it is obvious that a new image of Dostoevsky is in the making. The tools of Soviet literary theory are designed to meet the new requirements.

57. Ibid., p. 504.