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Language – Media – Ideology

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Foreword

This monograph is the result of a research project situated at the intersection of three fields that have become increasingly entangled in the humanities over recent decades: language, media, and ideology. Rather than treating these as separate domains, we approach them as interdependent dimensions of a single cultural process that encompasses the production of meaning, the organization of collective experience, and the regulation of attitudes in public life. In this view, ideology is understood as a mode in which discourse operates to construct meaning. Media are not neutral channels of transmission but actively shape interpretive frameworks. Language serves as a tool for constructing social reality – from memory narratives and institutional discourse to the digital attention economy and generative AI.

The volume's central aim is to trace how, across different historical periods, genres, and media channels, communities develop mechanisms for interpreting their own experience, drawing boundaries between “us” and “them”, legitimizing norms, and harnessing emotion as a persuasive resource. The collected texts chart a trajectory from classical forms of literate culture and literary debate, through the press as an instrument of identity politics, to institutional discourses and semiotic analysis. This trajectory continues into the contemporary digital sphere and finally into the emerging landscape of generative AI.

The first part, *Ideology in Narrative Language: Memory and Trauma*, sets up an interpretive lens in which narrative language and rhetoric become central to understanding ideology as a form of meaning control. Boris Lanin's chapter on Friedrich Gorenstein's play *Disputes about Dostoevsky* (1973) shows how a fictional editorial board meeting gives voice to a polyphony of worldview positions. The dispute over how to read Dostoevsky exposes mechanisms of censorship, peer pressure, antisemitism, and rhetorical manipulation, revealing the ways institutional discourse works to contain a plurality of meanings within a monologic ideological frame. Nino Mindiashvili's contribution, which examines authorial treatments of collective trauma in post-Soviet Georgian literature, shifts attention toward cultural memory. Analyzing a range of narrative strategies, she argues that experiences of armed conflict and socio-economic crisis are processed, symbolized, and negotiated, and the literary text becomes a record of suffering and a means of forging new identities. What ties this section together is the conviction that ideological tensions, whether in institutional settings or in the realm of memory, can be revealed through close attention to language and narrative structure.

The second part, *Media of Empire and Nation: Ideology, Language, Colonial Optics*, explores how the press and public commentary serve as long-term carriers of ideology, reproducing hierarchies, mapping ethnic and national categories, and generating the interpretive frameworks through which communities come to recognize themselves. Bianka Sadowska's study recovers a perspective that has received relatively little attention in Polish cultural memory: views of the Russian publicist and activist Alexander Hilferding on the "Polish question". Her analysis captures the logic of imperial discourse, in which the reality under description is organized according to the colonizer's own political and civilizational categories, exposing the mechanisms by which domination is legitimized. Iwona Sakowicz-Tebinka's study of *Kraj*, a Polish periodical published in Saint Petersburg, introduces the especially resonant theme of "double coloniality". Poles, themselves subject to the pressures of the Russian Empire, were simultaneously accused of colonialism toward Lithuanians. The analysis of press discourse thus uncovers layered configurations of agency and subordination, along with their lasting consequences for historical perception. This section shows that conflicts over identity are, at bottom, conflicts over the language in which the world is described.

The third part, *Language as Ideological Infrastructure: Discourse, Meaning, Semiotic Resources*, shifts focus to the machinery beneath ideology: the discursive and semiotic resources that underpin shared assumptions. Beata Mikołajczyk and Péter Csátár examine how the concept of *tradition* operates in university mission statements as a legitimizing resource (via historicization, normativization, and authorization), with a comparison of German, Polish, and Hungarian material revealing distinct national profiles in how institutions present themselves. Karolina Lisczyk's corpus-based study moves the analysis to the level of value-laden vocabulary in public circulation: *self-acceptance* emerges as a concept tightly clustered around particular themes (body, sexuality, health, relationships) and embedded in specific media ecosystems (celebrity gossip sites and portals aimed at women), which points to the discursive production of norms and expectations. Iwona Loewe's chapter on colour as a sign offers a wide-ranging methodological perspective (textological and multimodal). She demonstrates that colour constitutes a semiotic resource with a stable presence in discursive practices, whose connotations can be contested and renegotiated, particularly on social media. This chapter combines the analysis of language with the analysis of the image, setting up the transition to mass communication in digital environments.

The fourth part, *Emotion and Ideology in Persuasive Media Discourse*, turns to media as technologies for managing emotions. Two chapters on social advertising in Georgia offer a diachronic perspective: from the 1990s, when

television spots were shaped by technological limitations and the stylistic inheritance of the Soviet era (Soso Gazdeliani and Nino Chalaganidze), to 2020–2025, when internationally backed campaigns targeted shifts in social norms around children's rights and violence, with their effectiveness sometimes evaluated through statistical data (Ekaterina Chalaganidze). Aleksandra Kalisz, working within a mediolinguistic framework, traces how disgust is realized across multimodal media messages and how it serves a strategic function by capturing attention, signalling the sender's stance, and enabling both persuasion and stigmatization. This section shows how emotions in the media are managed according to recognizable patterns.

The final part, *AI as Medium and Ideological Actor: Language, Hallucinations, Self-Reflection*, moves the discussion into the most rapidly evolving area of the media ecosystem: the coexistence of content generated by humans and by generative AI. Anastasija Belovodskaja proposes that *AI hallucinations* be understood not as a technical glitch but as a cultural-philosophical phenomenon, one that reveals analogies between distortion mechanisms in language models and representational deformation in human cognition. She draws particular attention to multimodal and cultural hallucinations, which stem from the absence of embodied experience and from biases encoded in training data. In this light, AI is no longer merely a tool but an actor that co-shapes worldviews. The monograph closes with a call to develop philosophical and semiotic frameworks adequate to an era in which meaning is produced in a hybrid environment, and the line between describing the world and creating it through text continues to blur.

Even as carriers and technologies change, from literature and the press to digital media and AI, the fundamental questions endure: who holds interpretive power, what semiotic and emotional resources are available to discourse, and how media amplify or erode the pluralism of meaning. The chapters gathered here also draw on a range of methods, from hermeneutics and comparative analysis through postcolonial studies and institutional discourse analysis to media linguistics and multimodal analysis. What they share, however, is a commitment to describing the mechanisms by which discourse becomes the space where ideology shows its hand.

Marta Noińska, Urszula Patocka-Sigłowy, Żanna Śładkiewicz

PART 1

**Ideology in Narrative Language:
Memory and Trauma**



Ideology and Rhetoric in Friedrich Gorenstein's Disputes about Dostoevsky

Boris Lanin

Abstract This chapter examines Friedrich Gorenstein's play *Disputes about Dostoevsky* (1973), a dramatic exploration of ideological conflict within the Soviet literary establishment. Set during a fictional editorial board meeting, the play stages a debate over a controversial manuscript titled *Dostoevsky's Atheism*. Through a polyphonic structure reminiscent of Mikhail Bakhtin's theories, Gorenstein presents a spectrum of ideological positions – liberal-Westernist, nationalist, and Stalinist – each vying to define Dostoevsky's legacy. The play reveals how literary interpretation becomes a proxy for broader political, ethnic, and philosophical tensions in late Soviet society. Anti-Semitism, editorial censorship, and rhetorical manipulation are central themes, exposing the fragility of intellectual freedom under ideological control. Gorenstein's work ultimately critiques the monologic nature of Soviet discourse and affirms the necessity of dialogic plurality in literary and cultural analysis.

Keywords Gorenstein – Dostoevsky – rhetoric – ideology – polyphony – anti-Semitism – Bakhtin – polyphony – censorship – literary criticism

Fyodor Dostoevsky occupied a special place in Friedrich Gorenstein's reflections, prose, and dramaturgy¹. Contemporary researcher Olga Chudova writes:

Gorenstein engaged in dialogue with the author of the great Pentateuch not only in his journalistic articles (*Ideological Problems of Berlin City Toilets, The Sixth End of the Red Star*), literary-critical works (*Chekhov and the Thinking Proletarian*), but also in works of fiction (*Psalm, Redemption, The Place, Disputes about Dostoevsky, Steps*, etc.). (Chudova 2008: 137)

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In 1973, Friedrich Gorenstein wrote the play *Disputes about Dostoevsky* in Moscow, which was first published fifteen years later, in 1988, in New York by the publishing house “Slovo/Word” as part of the collection *Three Plays*. In 1990, this work became Gorenstein’s first publication, marking his return to the literary scene of the mother country. The two-act play builds up the figure of Fyodor Dostoevsky as a symbolic and intellectual center. Although he is not presented as a character, Dostoevsky’s ideas, texts, and interpretations form the discursive field of conflict and personal revelations of the characters.

The play’s plot is deceptively simple. At a meeting of the editorial board of a state publishing house, a manuscript entitled *Dostoevsky’s Atheism* by Roman Grigorievich Edemsky is under discussion. The editorial board must decide whether to publish or reject the work. Although a contract has already been signed and an advance paid, the final decision hinges on the ideological acceptability of Edemsky’s interpretation. The debate dramatizes the full spectrum of Soviet literary approaches to Dostoevsky, mirroring the intellectual and political fractures of the time.

Gorenstein composed the play during the deep crisis of official Marxism–Leninism, following the collapse of Khrushchev’s utopian promises of accelerated communism. As Gennady Kostyrchenko (2013) observes:

The ideological vacuum was rapidly filled with a diverse array of oppositional and politicized ideas. Long latent within the intellectual sphere, this ideational current began to assert itself with increasing boldness and volume in response to the regime’s softening – particularly within the literary milieu, where it differentiated into three distinct directions: liberal-Westernist, Russian-native soil (*pochvennicheskaya*), and conservative-Stalinist. (Kostyrchenko 2013: 120)

The author of the monograph, Edemsky, speaks several times with conviction and emotional energy, mentioning thinkers, writers, and literary scholars who were banned in the USSR, which arouses the suspicion of the publishing house’s editor-in-chief, Pavel Vartanyants, and his deputy, Mikhail Soskis.

Edemsky and his friend Zhuovyan, who came to support him, belong to the liberal-Western camp. Chernokotov and his supporters represent the Russian-nationalist camp. The publishing house’s management, especially Vartanyants and Soskis, on whom the editorial board’s decisions depend most, are very conservative in their views and actions. Their rhetoric is full of bureaucratic jargon and contains many ideological clichés of official Soviet literary criticism.

The very title *Dostoevsky’s Atheism: Spiritual Searches, or Scientific Psychoanalysis* provokes anxiety. Vartanyants warns that such an interpretation risk

undermining Dostoevsky's official image and thus threatens the ideological function of his canonization. However, Fyodor Dostoevsky himself touched on this topic. Prince Myshkin exclaimed:

It is so easy for a Russian to become an atheist, easier than for anyone else in the world! And ours do not simply become atheists, but inevitably believe in atheism as if it were a new faith, without noticing that they have believed in nothing. (Dostoevsky 1973: 452)

The play stages not only a debate over a manuscript but also a struggle over the symbolic ownership of Dostoevsky himself. Rather than centering on the progression of external events, the play foregrounds a collision of divergent interpretations of Dostoevsky's oeuvre, intricately linked to the behavioral dynamics of its interlocutors. It constitutes an intellectual "drama of ideas", wherein the literary debate surrounding Dostoevsky's legacy is refracted through an additional lens – namely, that of socio-ethnic identity.

The time frame corresponds to the heyday of the so-called "Russian Party" – an informal association supported by part of the Soviet party elite and including representatives of the creative and publishing spheres, including writers, artists, and editors of leading magazines. Nikolai Mitrokhin wrote:

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the "Russian Party" entered a phase of organizational consolidation as an independent political and social force: decision-making centers emerged, along with leaders ("chiefs") and even "rank-and-file fighters of the Russian Party" <...> Within the "Russian Party", there existed a genuine polyphony of views. Individuals who shared the party's two core tenets – "love for Russia (Russians)" and the "correct stance on the main issue" (hatred of Jews) – demonstrated a remarkable diversity of opinions on other political, social, aesthetic, and even religious matters. (Mitrokhin 2005: 378–379)

In his chamber play, featuring a small cast of characters, Gorenstein succeeded in conveying not only the extremist disposition of the party's rank-and-file, but also the diversity of their tactics and ideological positions.

The drama also exposes fault lines of national and ethnic identity in Soviet cultural discourse. The publishing house leadership is composed of national minorities – Vartanyants, an Armenian, and Soskis, a Jew. During the debate, nationalist participants repeatedly question their legitimacy in representing "the Russian genius". These remarks come from Vasily Chernokotov, an aggressive unemployed alcoholic who constantly carries Dostoevsky's works with him and demonstratively refers to them. Chernokotov also tried to write a

work about Dostoevsky, but not only he suffered for his article *Sonya Marmeladova – Venus of St. Petersburg*, but also his teacher Soskis.

It is in the character of Chernokotov that anti-Semitism manifests itself in the play. His lines combine personal bitterness, xenophobia, and persistent everyday anti-Semitic stereotypes. Anti-Semitism in *Disputes about Dostoevsky* is present not only as part of ideological polemics, but also as a tool for revealing the characters' personalities and their hidden motives. The discussion about Dostoevsky gradually escalates into a conflict of a national nature, and some characters use anti-Semitic statements as part of their worldview. For example, Edemsky's comrade and associate Zhuovyan attempts to analyze Dostoevsky's ideas from the perspective of their national subtext and speaks about the messianic Russian idea. Chernokotov rudely interrupts him in response, resorting to openly anti-Semitic statements, calling him a "Jew-Ovyan" and accusing him of "Semitic propaganda". Such outbursts demonstrate how easily literary discussion could degenerate into xenophobic rhetoric, exposing the underlying chauvinism of segments of the Soviet intelligentsia.

Chernokotov is one of the most radical characters in the play. He sees Dostoevsky as a national prophet and is ready to defend him from any attempts at criticism. These statements show that anti-Semitism in the play is not just a random phenomenon, but a conscious position of certain characters. It is not just a background element, but an important part of the overall ideological struggle. It is used to discredit opponents, as well as a way to emphasize the divide between the "Russian" and "Westernized" interpretations of Dostoevsky. Interestingly, some characters either do not react to Chernokotov's anti-Semitic remarks or try to calm him down, but do not condemn him. The discourse surrounding Dostoevsky evolves into a broader engagement with national and political tensions, revealing latent prejudices within the Soviet intelligentsia. What initially appears as a literary inquiry thus emerges as a deeper interrogation of national and ideological identity. Vasily Chernokotov is portrayed as an aggressive antisemite and pogromist; his interpretation of Dostoevsky's work is marked by hysterical fervor and chauvinistic distortion. It is understandable why the editorial board invites Monceвич and Shmuler-Dysny to discuss the monograph.

They are professors, which justifies their status as invited experts, although they do not clarify the situation. But Chernokotov is a college dropout, and his presence at an internal editorial event can only be explained by the growing influence of Russian nationalism. He simply should not have been at this meeting. Chernokotov, having no real influence on the outcome of the discussion, causes chaos with his anti-Semitic remarks, which increases the tension

of the conversation and reinforces the editorial board's reluctance to deal with risky topics. Chernokotov, like many characters in the play, sees Dostoevsky as the embodiment of the Russian idea and national mission. He "defends" Dostoevsky from Western concepts, which, in his opinion, attempt to distort the writer's legacy. In fact, Chernokotov is looking for a reason to cause a scandal and compromise both the author of the book under discussion and the entire editorial board:

Come closer, you trembling creatures... Here I am... I have crossed the line... I have transgressed... I have power... I shout in your Semitic faces, I am Russian... What happiness it is to be Russian for all to hear... (Gorenstein 2019: 102)

After starting a fight and getting what he deserved, Chernokotov, beaten by the security guard Ivan, leaves the publishing house.

Starting as a professional discussion, the debate around Edemsky's book quickly escalates into an ideological dispute in which different positions clash. In Soviet literary studies, F.M. Dostoevsky was rehabilitated and established as a symbol of Russian culture, and any attempts to revise this status were closely monitored. Edemsky's atheistic interpretation is perceived as a threat to the fragile compromise between state atheism and the nationalist perception of the writer. In the play, Dostoevsky appears as a symbolic figure around whom ideological "fortifications" are erected. The play was written at a time when official ideology was trying to reconcile Dostoevsky with the Marxist worldview. Some characters, such as Edemsky, try to present Dostoevsky as an atheist and rationalist whose works can be explained by scientific psychoanalysis. Others, such as Trush or Chernokotov, defend Dostoevsky as a deeply religious writer, a national genius, a prophet of the Russian idea. Conflicts arise literally after every sentence spoken. For example, Edemsky says that Dostoevsky is "the comprehensive embodiment of ideal revisionism" and that his work can be analyzed as a scientific phenomenon. The nationalist and chauvinist Trush responds by accusing him of simplifying Dostoevsky's ideological issues and calling his approach "blasphemous". This conflict reflects the real struggle for the interpretation of Dostoevsky in Soviet culture. For some, he was a reactionary, for others, a great artist who predicted the horrors of the 20th century. The various characters represent different ideological views on Dostoevsky. Petruzov insists on protecting the writer from extremes – "dogmatists and decadents"; Trush condemns the tendency toward "self-flagellation" of national culture; and Khomyatov fears that Edemsky's work will open the way to undesirable interpretations that could undermine the established national myth.

To the pathos-laden admiration of Dostoevsky's literary genius, Edemsky offers a rigorous analytical counterpoint. He interprets Dostoevsky not as a religious writer, but as a national thinker, for whom the figure of Christ is not a theological symbol but a national one – embodying the Russian idea. Edemsky emphasizes that in *The Sermon on the Mount*, Dostoevsky did not accept the spirit of reconciliation between opposites: law and love, and thus rejected the spirit of the Gospel. Thus, Edemsky interprets Dostoevsky's work as an atheistic reinterpretation of Christianity in a national key, where spirituality is subordinated to the idea of Russian destiny. Along the way, he expresses theses that sound confrontational:

Dostoevsky is the only one of the significant Russian writers of the nineteenth century to whom the fate of women was inaccessible... (Gorenstein 2019: 39) <...> Dostoevsky is the comprehensive embodiment of ideal revisionism... (Gorenstein 2019: 41) <...> Dostoevsky is the invasion of scientific methods of thinking into the spiritual... It is no wonder that scientists such as Einstein and Freud admired Dostoevsky... Dostoevsky's work is truly the birth of twentieth-century souls. But souls outside of the flesh... Souls expressed not through characters, but through ideas... (Gorenstein 2019: 41) <...> Dostoevsky completely misunderstood the Sermon on the Mount... (Gorenstein 2019: 44) <...> Dostoevsky is the least mysterious of all the notable writers of the nineteenth century... Or rather, he is no more mysterious than a textbook on modern physics; he can be studied with effort... (Gorenstein 2019: 59) <...> And in general, possessing such a high talent for destroying God's world, Dostoevsky failed to create a single holy page... His active nationalistic atheism prevented him from doing what Chekhov achieved thanks to his lyrical, passive atheism... (Gorenstein 2019: 50)

Despite the paradoxical nature of many of his theses, Edemsky comes across as a profound and talented researcher. His view of Dostoevsky is based on facts, on his study of Dostoevsky's works, which he quotes freely and knows very well. He has indeed "studied Dostoevsky with effort". However, many members of the editorial board are alienated and even hostile to everything he says.

Ideological control is the main restraining factor. Edemsky is accused of various ideological sins. These include Freudianism, which was not welcomed, and "Berdyaeism", which was categorically prohibited, as well as references to writers whom official Soviet literary criticism considered reactionary and counterrevolutionary, such as Merezhkovsky. All this casts a shadow on the manuscript.

For deputy editor-in-chief Mikhail Zalmanovich Soskis, the task is to prevent the publication of a book that could cause a scandal. At one time, he even opposed signing a contract with Edemsky and argued about it with editor-in-chief Vartanyants. Now he is giving Edemsky a chance to speak, asking him not to interrupt. Soskis understands that Edemsky will not be able to win over the editorial board. Perhaps he writes interestingly, but he does not know how to defend his views. Let him talk more, his words are self-revealing. Soskis has a special attitude toward what is happening. He was once considered an expert on Dostoevsky, but as a Jew, he suffered during the era of the struggle against "cosmopolitans". The reason was his article *Dostoevsky the European*. Therefore, he willingly switches from ideology to poetics: "Dostoevsky has this remarkable ability to draw us into the dark depths of psychology, to clarify every little realistic detail..." (Gorenstein 2019: 64). Soskis feels that power lies with the "Rusits" camp, as the communists called Russian nationalists in party slang. He tries to join them, to curry favor with them, even to fawn over them. He needs support: Vartanyants is terminally ill, doctors give him no more than two or three months to live, and Soskis, deep down, aspires to take the place of his current boss. In a conversation with Trush and Chernokotov, Soskis raises the stakes: now he will do everything to ensure that Edemsky's book is not published by any Soviet publishing house, even a provincial one. Trush and Chernokotov are the camp of enemies, and not only enemies of the book, but also of the author. For them, Dostoevsky is the banner at the head of a chauvinistic, aggressive army. Petruzov is close to them, although he is more cautious in his rhetoric.

Many call Roman Edemsky talented, and his book is considered original, though controversial in places. Kugushev argues with him with interest and complete sincerity: he wants answers to his questions about Dostoevsky. Edemsky is definitely supported by two ladies: the book's editor Olga Kolmakova and Zoya Karabinovich, Khomyatov's mistress. Khomyatov is a literary *apparatchik* whose word can change the editorial board's decision. He does not talk about writers, but about enemies and allies. Khomyatov feels he is in an ideological war, and his rhetoric is not literary at all. He speaks in slogans and phrases from the party media:

No matter how great the amplitude of Dostoevsky's fluctuations, he nevertheless presented the people of a decaying society with the ideal of Russian socialism, which was borrowed from the school of Belinsky, Herzen, Petrashevsky, and the teachings of utopian socialism, and not from the church... In this sense, the question of Dostoevsky's atheism is very timely... (Gorenstein 2019: 93)

Khomyatov did not arrive in time for the beginning of Chernokotov's rampage, but he did witness his fight with the guard Ivan. It is well known that the official Soviet line was that local republican nationalist movements did not pose a threat to the country. Russian chauvinistic manifestations were another matter. The party leadership fought them seriously, even though they were supported by the chauvinistic sentiments of the party leadership. The experienced Khomyatov immediately understands that he is dealing with precisely such extreme manifestations of chauvinism:

We are receiving many signals about such national-chauvinistic tendencies... Under the innocent pretext of analyzing the legacy of the past, they are trying to rehabilitate such figures as Berdyaev, Katkov, Merezhkovsky, Suvorin... Through quotations, comparisons... They are trying to do the same with the classics... Especially with Dostoevsky... To present him from their own perspective... And now, the dispute has escalated into open anti-Sovietism and even into an ugly hooligan brawl... (Gorenstein 2019: 111)

He mentions that he "had a hand" in ensuring that the Slavophile anthology, in which Chernokotov participated, was not allowed to be published, and briefly mentions his article. Nevertheless, the source of Khomyatov's influence remains unclear until the very end. When, during a break in the meeting, his mistress Zoya Karabinovich asks Khomyatov to speak in defence of the manuscript under discussion and help Edemsky, Khomyatov categorically refuses:

Khomyatov. I am always cynical when I am worried... And to be honest with you, Zoya, there is little I can do now. My position seems to be high, higher than before, but before I could do more

Karabinovich. When was that, under Stalin?

Khomyatov. Yes, back then... There's no need to ridicule and boo everything in the past... That's not a creative position...

And then his Stalinist nature is fully revealed:

Khomyatov. There's no doubt that Edemsky is talented, but if we help him today, tomorrow we'll have to help Chernokotov... They say he's talented too... In his own way, of course... No, Zoya, enough with the thaws. We are a

northern country... Moderate frost is good for us... It's easier to breathe, everything is covered with snow, clean, sacred... (Gorenstein 2019: 115–116)

Khomyatov gradually becomes more and more heated and finally leaves with a threatening tirade on his lips:

You don't have to be Russian by birth. That's chauvinism, nationalism... Anyone can become Russian by loving Russia as they love themselves (*suddenly flaring up*), or love Russia, or get the hell out! (Gorenstein 2019: 117)

While denouncing chauvinism in principle, he lapses into Stalinist rhetoric extolling “moderate frost” and equating Russianness with self-sacrificial loyalty. With this phrase, he draws closer to Chernokotov, although he had just said that chauvinists must be fought. The departure of Khomyatov, who did not wait for the end of the meeting and did not speak up for the manuscript under discussion, effectively dooms its author to defeat. His refusal to defend Edemsky seals the manuscript's fate.

At the critical moment, Soskis does not lose his composure, but soberly calculates how the vote might go so that Edemsky's book is not recommended for publication. Editorial intrigues are his specialty.

However, there is another reason for Edemsky's defeat. It lies in the inconsistency between his rhetoric and the purpose and content of the dispute. Here is a member of the editorial board, Olga Kolmakova. She is “all for it”, although she mentions some “details”. In the course of preparing the manuscript for publication, many controversial issues will be resolved, and an experienced publishing editor will bring the manuscript to fruition as a published book. Edemsky now needs only to remain silent, because a strong voice has been heard in favor of his book. But Edemsky does not weigh the strength of his ideas against his bureaucratic powerlessness. He begins to argue with the woman who has just supported his book, expressing disagreement with one phrase only. For Edemsky, this phrase, “the mystery of man is outside of man”, is extremely important. For him, it is not a detail, and Edemsky rushes to defend the meaning of this phrase. He reveals himself to be an erudite expert on Dostoevsky, but his erudition also covers areas of philosophy and literary studies that are taboo for Soviet science. The accuracy and completeness of his understanding of Dostoevsky is more important to Edemsky than anything else. Due to his character or inexperience, Edemsky does not feel that his pompous and drawn-out speeches are inappropriate.

Kugushev emphasizes the philosophical depth of Dostoevsky's works. Kugushev believes that when a person reaches the limits of despair, he or

she comes closer to God. Therefore, Dostoevsky creates characters such as Raskolnikov, who commits a crime and encounters the Gospel. Kugushev emphasizes that Dostoevsky's time is a time of "collective, mass existence", where types replace characters. Dostoevsky's artistic insight lies in the fact that he reflects the problems of his time through type rather than through character and flesh.

Olga Kolmakova states that Ivan Karamazov and Raskolnikov are Dostoevsky's two main atheistic figures, and that he rejected God not through reason, but through personal searching and doubt.

Edemsky asserts that Dostoevsky rejected the "religious" Christ and replaced him with a "national" Christ, and that his ideas were aimed at destroying the old religious commandments. Zhuovyan adds that Dostoevsky admired the personality of Christ but never accepted his sermons, considering them useless.

The play discusses the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, and the characters disagree on its meaning. Edemsky believes that this text is not about religion but about the national issue, and that Prince Myshkin from *The Idiot* is closer to Stavrogin and Raskolnikov than to the image of Christ. Kugushev objects: Dostoevsky shows the danger of absolute freedom. Freedom leads Raskolnikov to murder and Verkhovensky to terrorism. These disagreements make the discussion of Dostoevsky in the play polyphonic, which corresponds to the complex nature of his religious ideas.

Gorenstein claimed that at the time of writing the play, he had not read Mikhail Bakhtin's books on Dostoevsky. However, Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas, especially his concept of polyphony and dialogism, can be traced in the play. Although Bakhtin is not directly mentioned, the nature of the discussions in the play, the views of some of the characters, and the very method of presenting the debate about Dostoevsky reflect his theories.

Bakhtin defined polyphony as the presence of multiple independent voices in a work, where no single voice is the ultimate truth. In *Disputes about Dostoevsky*, we see a clash of different points of view, each expressed subjectively and emotionally, but none of them presented as the only correct one.

Each character has their own voice, but the author of the play does not make a final judgment. Different statements do not exclude each other, but create an interaction of ideas, which corresponds to Bakhtin's understanding of dialogue as a method of thinking. In the play, the discussion about Dostoevsky turns into a heated argument, where the participants even insult each other, and the discussion of literature escalates into political and personal conflicts. The boundaries between high and low forms are blurred, and the argument becomes like a dramatic performance.

Yury Kudryavtsev interpreted the scholar's goal, which he achieved by writing the book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Oeuvre* (1929), in his own way:

There was a goal. And, as I see it, it was more significant than understanding the nature of Dostoevsky's Russian novel. The goal was more global – to save, as far as possible, the crumbling Russian thought.

The book was written against the backdrop of unprecedented monopolization and monologization of thought and speech. Only one theory was declared to have the right to exist. Only one thinker (and perhaps his follower) was declared unconditionally true and correct. And in these conditions, when it was impossible to speak out directly against such Eastern barbarism, Bakhtin, using Dostoevsky's material, which he interpreted arbitrarily, spoke out in defense of polyphony, the polyphony of thought. (Kudryavtsev 1994: 113)

The play *Disputes about Dostoevsky* confirms Y. Kudryavtsev's hypothesis. Edemsky offered an alternative interpretation, a different opinion – and the monologic nature of the state's understanding of Dostoevsky was threatened with destruction.

Edemsky is a representative of rational, national-philosophical discourse, seeking to strip Dostoevsky of his "sanctity" and make him the object of secular analysis. His opponents represent different facets of the perception of Dostoevsky: from religious to humanistic and mystical.

The refusal to publish the book was dictated not so much by its content as by the fear that any radical interpretation of Dostoevsky could undermine his established canonical image – an important tool of ideological control. Then, the editorial board's decision becomes an attempt to keep Dostoevsky in the status of "one of their own", controllable and safe, without allowing him to be reinterpreted beyond what is permissible. Ultimately, Edemsky's defeat stems from both institutional censorship and his inability to adjust his rhetoric to political realities. His insistence on the precision of his interpretation over strategic compromise illustrates the tragic incompatibility between intellectual independence and Soviet ideological discipline.

Thus, the perception of Dostoevsky in the play varies from a scientific and materialistic approach to a deep religious and philosophical understanding of his work. The characters in the play highlight various aspects of his works, offering both rationalistic and mystical interpretations, thereby demonstrating the complexity and multifaceted nature of his legacy. The hero's desire to defend the freedom of literary-critical thought evokes sympathy, but Friedrich Gorenstein clearly shows that the outcome of this struggle is known in advance. In the play, Dostoevsky is inevitably drawn into an ideological

dispute. The characters argue and even fight over Dostoevsky because he is a figure through whom they can express their views on the world, philosophy, religion, history, and even politics. The perception of Dostoevsky turns out to be a battlefield between different ideological camps, which makes the play particularly acute. *Disputes about Dostoevsky* dramatizes the ideological function of Dostoevsky's canonization in Soviet culture. Gorenstein demonstrates how Dostoevsky's legacy was mobilized as an ideological fortress – whether as prophet, atheist, or national genius – while genuine critical engagement was stifled.

By staging these conflicting voices, the play affirms Bakhtin's insight into the necessity of polyphony against the monopolization of discourse. Yet unlike Bakhtin's theoretical ideal of dialogism, Gorenstein shows how real-world dialogue collapses under ideological pressure. The characters' arguments over Dostoevsky become proxies for broader struggles over identity, politics, and intellectual freedom. What begins as a literary inquiry ends as a revelation of the limits of Soviet cultural discourse. This emphasis on ideology contradicts Bakhtin's approach, which avoided reducing Dostoevsky to political categories. The play, on the other hand, can be seen as an argument against Bakhtin's "de-ideologization", showing that in a real social context, Dostoevsky inevitably becomes an instrument of ideological battles.

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