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Departamento de Letras Orientais, Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo
Av. Prof. Luciano Gualberto, 403 sala 25
CEP: 01060-970
Cidade Universitária
São Paulo/SP - Brasil

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Telefone: 055 11 3091-4299
E-mail: rus.editor@usp.br

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REVISTA DE LITERATURA E CULTURA RUSSA

Methodological approaches to studying the problem of interaction between Literature and Philosophy

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Abordagens metodológicas para estudar o problema da interação entre literatura e filosofia

Autor: Elena Takho-Godi

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Methodological approaches to studying the problem of interaction between Literature and Philosophy[1]

Elena Takho-Godi*

Abstract: The article describes the experience of a research team studying the interaction between Russian literature and philosophy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The project has been going on at the A.M. Gorky Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences with financial support of the Russian Science Foundation since 2017. The paper presents peculiarities of the approach to the study of the problem, concern over educational and informational aspects along with the research process itself, as well as the use of various forms of organizing scholarly activities: an international conference, publishing activities, a scholarly seminar.

Resumo: O artigo descreve a experiência de uma equipe de pesquisa que estudou a interação entre a literatura russa e a filosofia nos séculos XIX e XX. O projeto está em andamento no Instituto de Literatura Mundial A. M. Gorky da Academia Russa de Ciências, com apoio financeiro da Fundação Russa de Ciências desde 2017. O artigo apresenta peculiaridades da abordagem ao estudo do problema, preocupação com os aspectos educacionais e informacionais junto com o próprio processo de pesquisa, bem como o uso de várias formas de organização de atividades acadêmicas: uma conferência internacional, atividades de publicação, um seminário acadêmico.

Keywords: Russian literature; Philosophy; Theoretical and methodological approaches
Palavras-chave: Literatura russa; Filosofia; Abordagens teóricas e metodológicas

* Lomonosov Moscow State University; Leading Research Fellow of the Department of Russian Literature of the Late XIX – Early XX Centuries, A.M. Gorky Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences; Principal investigator of research project "Russian Literature and Philosophy: Ways of Interaction" (RSF, project No 17-18-01432-П); Head of the Department, The Library-Museum "A.F. Losev House"; Moscow, Russia. http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6907-8656; takho-godi.elena@yandex.ru

In 2017, in Moscow there started work on the project "Russian Literature and Philosophy: Ways of Interaction". To conduct this interdisciplinary effort a special research team was created at the A.M. Gorky Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The project has been implemented with the support of the Russian Science Foundation (RSF), which has taken upon itself the financing of the work and its expert evaluation. The RSF is the largest science foundation in modern Russia supervising a large number of studies in a wide variety of academic fields, including humanities. In accordance with the Foundation's requirements to performance in a research team, young researchers, primarily post-graduate students have been involved in the work alongside the principal investigators – well-known scholars with a name long established in scientific circles. Thus, the project from the very start was both exploratory and educational in nature. Initially, the project was designed for three years. But due to its successful operation, the RSF extended its support for another two years, until 2021 inclusive.

Peculiarities of the approach to the study of the problem

Work on the project was carried out in various forms and directions: theoretical, scholarly research, organization of scholarly work, publishing activities, and informational promotion. The project participants conducted an interdisciplinary study on literature and philosophy interaction over a lar-

1 **Acknowledgements**: This research was conducted at the A.M. Gorky Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences with financial support from the Russian Science Foundation (RSF, Project No. 17-18-01432-П). DSc in Philology, Professor of the Department of History of Russian Literature, M. V.

ge time span (the XIX-XX centuries) basing their views on the assumption that in the traditions of Russian culture *classical literature* – from Pushkin, Lermontov, Tyutchev to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky – was a figurative-artistic form of *philosophic* exploration of reality.[2] The global task thus was to demonstrate what particular influence philosophical ideas had on the poetics of a literary text; which philosophical ideas and in what historical context had attracted masters of the pen; on what philosophical foundation the artistic consciousness of different literary trends was based. However, each member of the research team was developing their individual topic. Thus, for example, Yulia Anokhina studied philosophical motifs in the works of the poet Evgeny Boratynsky; Anna Seredina analysed the *pochvennichestvo* ("return to the native soil") base for the prose of Apollon Grigoryev; Tatyana Kasatkina examined theological and philosophical ideas in the legacy of Fyodor Dostoevsky; Anton Filatov interpreted axiological values in the poetry of the Acmeists; Svetlana Seregin investigated the influence of philosophical ideas on the work of Nikolai Klyuev and Sergei Yesenin; Anastasia Gacheva evaluated the literary heritage of the cosmist philosophers who developed the ideas of Nikolai Fedorov; Natalia Mikhalenko surveyed the utopian prose of the economist-cum-philosopher Alexander Chayanov created in the 1920s; Elena Takho-Godi scrutinized the philosopho-musical prose of Alexey Losev in the 1930s; Oleg Korostelev and Yevgeny Ponomarev explored the interaction of philosophy and literature in the culture of Russian Émigré; Elizaveta Zakharova surveyed the specifics of present-day philosophical-literary criticism and assimilation by it of traditions dating back to Vladimir Solovyov.

This 'medallion' principle of work, when each of the researchers elaborated their own aspect of the topic, contributed to a greater coverage of specific material and, at the same time, to a more comprehensive vision of the problem itself. Alongside with that, the very methods of mastering the material were developed further, taking note of the findings not only by

2 See: Takho-Godi, "The Interactions between Literature and Philosophy: A View from Russia. Guest Editor's Introduction" (2020).

Russian, but by foreign scholars as well. Examination of the heritage of individual authors became the basis for the development of methodological approaches to the topic allowing one to follow up various modern research strategies. Thus, Tatyana Kasatkina introduced into scholarly use the idea of the *subject-subject* study of a literary text in order to gain access to its philosophical and theological ideas.[3]

In four years of work, the project participants have gathered an astounding bulk of factual material, they have prepared about 200 various publications and about 250 reports based on the results of their studies. The main ideas and provisions, developed during the implementation of the project, have been tested at authoritative conferences held both in Russia and in Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Georgia, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Poland.

Organization of work: the scholarly seminar

The members of the team conducted extensive organizational work. To implement the tasks set, the project participants organized a permanent scholarly seminar of the same name "Russian Literature and Philosophy: Ways of Interaction". Over 20 sessions of the seminar have been held. These sessions were held jointly with the Library-museum "A. F. Losev House". The library-museum was established in the year 2000 in Moscow in memory of the outstanding Russian thinker of the 20th century Alexey Losev (1893-1988), who went down in the history of Russian culture both as a philosopher and the creator of philosopho-musical prose. The seminar featured presentations by both project participants and scientists from other institutions.

The presentations were made by Professor Vladimir Kantor (Moscow, National Research University Higher School of Eco-

3 See: Kasatkina, "Filosofiya vospriyatiya literatury i iskusstva: o sub'yekt-sub'yektnom metode chteniya" (2018).

nomics) "When Depicting to Understand, or a Felt Thought"; Professor Boris Tarasov (Moscow, Maxim Gorky Institute of Literature and Creative Writing) "The Mystery of Man and the Mystery of History in Russian and Foreign Literature and Philosophy"; Professor Robert Byrd (USA, University of Chicago) "Towards the History of Positive Aesthetics"; Professor and the leading researcher Konstantin Barsht (Saint Petersburg, Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House) of the Russian Academy of Sciences) "Time and the Apocalypse in the Philosophy and Narrative System of Fyodor Dostoevsky"; Professor Aleksandr Ledenev (M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University) "On the Metaphysics of Vladimir Nabokov: To the 120th Anniversary of his Birth"; Professor Boris Egorov (Saint Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences), who spoke about his own experience in studying the interaction between Russian literature and philosophy.

The seminar sessions featured presentations of scholarly books and publications prepared by the project participants or related to its topic, for example, Aleksandr Korolkov *The Moral Philosophy of Valentin Rasputin* (Saint Petersburg, 2018), Konstantin Barsht *Dostoevsky. Etymology of Narration* (Saint Petersburg, 2019); Jan Krasicki *Dostoevsky and the Laboratory of Ideas* (Warszawa, 2020), a collective monograph *From Chekhov to Brodsky: the Aesthetic and Philosophical Aspects of Russian Literature of the Twentieth Century* (Moscow, 2019), etc.

Organization of work: international conferences

In order to draw more experts to developing the central theme of the project – the interaction between literature and philosophy – the project participants held a series of international conferences.

In November 2017, the international Round table "Literature and Philosophy – Post-revolutionary Metamorphoses and Transformations of Meanings: To the 100th anniversary of the

October coup" was held. The topics for discussion were the metamorphoses of the space-time continuum in post-revolutionary literature and philosophy of the 1920s and 1930s; the interpretation of classical texts of the XIX – early XX centuries by the literature and philosophy of Russian Émigré of the 1920s and 1930s. Special attention was paid to the activities of the State Academy for the scientific Study of Art, which in the 1920s aimed at an interdisciplinary (synthetic) approach to the study of literature and philosophy.

At the beginning of 2018, a Round table (one-day conference) "Mikhail Katkov: Heritage and Modernity. To the 200th Anniversary of his Birth" took place, where special attention was paid to the philosophical and political views of the famous publicist and publisher of the journal *Russian Bulletin* Mikhail Katkov, his attitude to classical German philosophy and relations with contemporary thinkers (Helena Blavatsky, Vladimir Solovyov).

In 2018, the International Conference "Literature and Religious and Philosophical Thought of the late XIX – first third of the XX Century. To the 165th Anniversary of Vladimir Solovyov" was convened. The conference participants discussed the religious and philosophical views of Solovyov, their implementation in the literary-critical and poetic heritage of the thinker himself, as well as their influence on Russian literary and philosophical thought of the late XIX– first third of the XX century.

In the same year, 2018, the International Conference "The Merezhkovsky Circle in the Literary and Philosophical Context of the Epoch" was organized. The purpose of the conference was to consider the problem of "Russian Literature and Philosophy: Ways of Interaction" as exemplified by the activities of Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Zinaida Gippius and Dmitry Filosofov. This triumvirate was a living embodiment of religious and philosophical searches and creative aspirations. A complex pattern of their biographical and intellectual path, dialogues and disputes with allies and opponents (Alexander Blok, Andrei Bely, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Vl. Solovyov and others),

as well as connections with those figures that usually remain outside the scope of research attention (Sergei Yesenin, Nikolai Klyuev and others) is inseparable from the literary and philosophical context of the era, and largely determines it.

In 2019, the International Conference "Literature and Philosophy: from Romanticism to the Twentieth Century. On the 150th anniversary of the death of Vladimir Odoyevsky" was arranged. The conference programme included more than one hundred scientists from Russia and ten other countries. The speakers analyzed the works of Vladimir Odoevsky, his religious and theoretical views, the impact of European, including mystical, philosophy on his views, as well as the development of the problems raised by Odoevsky in Russian literature up to the first half of the twentieth century.

In 2020, the International Conference "Poetry of Thought: from Romanticism to Modernity. To the 220th Anniversary of Evgeny Boratynsky" was held. At the conference, 70 reports were made by scientists from various regions of Russia and from abroad: Germany, Israel, Italy, Norway, Serbia, the United States, France, Switzerland and Ukraine. The conference participants did not only discuss the influence of philosophical ideas on the poetics of Boratynsky. They set themselves the goal of studying the dynamics of the development of such a phenomenon as "poetry of thought" in Russian culture, in order to determine the chronological boundaries of its existence, the relation to and difference from the traditional concept of "philosophical poetry". The speakers sought to describe the main mechanisms of generating philosophically rich symbols and mythologemes in poetry, the teleology of artistic rhythm and the function of space-time coordinates that form the artistic world of lyrics; to trace the process of interaction between literature and philosophy in Russian poetry from Romanticism to modernity in order to identify the maximum number of specific examples. Special attention was paid to the problem of poetic anthropology, ontology or epistemology. The interpretations of classical poetic texts by Russian philosophers of the early twentieth century were also mentioned.

Educational aspect

Young scientists – students and postgraduates – were widely involved in the work of International Conferences. However, by this measure alone the educational aspect was not exhausted. It was decided to hold annual youth conferences on the topic of the project. The co-organizers of youth conferences were: A.M. Gorky Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences; the Library-museum "A. F. Losev House"; A. F. Losev Center for the Russian Language and Culture of the Institute of Philology of the Moscow Pedagogical State University; the journal *Solovyov Studies*.

In November 2018, the first International Conference of Young Scholars "Space and Time in Russian Literature and Philosophy" opened. The second conference was held in 2019, and the third in 2020. The fourth conference is planned for 2021. The conferences were attended by young scientists from Russia, Germany, China, Poland, the United States and Turkey. The conference participants focused on a range of problems associated with the analysis of the most important philosophical and aesthetic categories – *space* and *time*: the author's philosophical views through the prism of the categories of artistic space and time; philosophical and aesthetic aspects of temporal and spatial images and motifs in imaginative writing; axiological principles of the spatial and temporal organization in a work of fiction; the idea of space and time in the works of Russian philosophers; methodological aspects of the analysis of the categories of space and time in literary and philosophical texts.

Since the conferences were not only academic, but also educational in nature, a *master class* was held within the framework of each conference: both members of the research team and invited professors made plenary presentations to young scientists. In 2020, among the plenary presentations were those given by colleagues from Polish Universities: Professor of

the Jagiellonian University Andrzej Dudek; Eva Komorowska from the University of Szczecin; and Professor of the University of Gdańsk Danuta Stanulewicz. Select video reports presented at these workshops have been published in the text and visual multimedia electronic online publication *Scholarly and Methodological Journal of Russian Literature* (2021, No. 1).

Members of the research team have delivered lectures and reports on the project at seminars for young scholars and postgraduates, in cultural institutions in Moscow and the Moscow region, in various regions of the country and abroad. A very extensive scholarly and educational work has been carried out by Tatyana Kasatkina: she organized the VIth Summer school on analytico-synthetic reading of works of literature and art and read four lectures and conducted four workshops as part of its activities (for information about the Readings see the Italian website of the project: http://www.ilmondoparla.com/eventi); she has also read a large number of lectures in libraries, cultural centers, lecture halls of Moscow, Russia and Italy.

Publishing activities

During the implementation of the project, the team members conducted a vigorous publishing activity. A.M. Gorky Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences took a decision to publish a book series "Russian Literature and Philosophy: Ways of Interaction". In this series, collective works prepared during the project implementation or as a follow-up to the conferences are published. The help of historians of philosophy and foreign colleagues is enlisted in the work on the books. Thus far, four issues of the series have been released. The first issue was published in 2018.[4] In this collective monograph, attention is focused on the key figures of various literary trends – from Romanticism to Futurism and literature of the Russian Émigré: Evgeny Boratynsky, Apollon Grigoryev, Alexey Tolstoy, Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Dmitry Filo-

4 Takho-Godi (ed.), *Russkaia literatura i filosofia: Puti vzaimodeistvia* (2018).

sofov, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Sergey Yesenin, Yeghishe Charents, etc., as well as the authors who consciously worked in both fields – in philosophy and in literature: Vladimir Solovyov, Alexey Losev, Aleksandr Gorsky, Alexander Chayanov. The book is written by literary critics and historians of philosophy belonging to different schools and generations both from Russia and abroad – Germany, Israel, Italy, the United States.

In the same year, 2018, the second issue of the series was published: *Literature and Religious and Philosophical Thought of the late XIX – first third of the XX Century. To the 165th Anniversary of Vladimir Solovyov*.[5] There are seven sections in this collective work. The figure of Solovyov – a philosopher, theologian, publicist, poet and literary critic – is a semantic staple in a wide panorama of the key figures of literary and philosophical schools during the second half of the XIX – first half of the XX centuries: Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Merezhkovsky, Gippius, Klyuev, Yesenin, Nikolay Gumilev, Vladimir Nabokov; Ivan Aksakov, Nikolay Berdyaev, Nikolay Lossky, Nikolay Fedorov, Semyon Frank, Vladimir Ern, including those who consciously worked, like Solovyov, in both fields – both in philosophy and in literature: Vasily Rozanov, Losev, Gorsky, Chayanov. A number of publications are based on archival materials. For example, the publication of Alexey Kozyrev (M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University) "Mysticism in the Chains of Reason: Automatic Records of Vl. Solovyov" with the automatic records of Solovyov appended, as well as the publication of Nikolay Kotrelev (A.M. Gorky Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences) "From the unpublished and unassembled by Vl. Solovyov: the letter to M. N. Katkov, July 20, 1886; the letter to M. M. Stasyulevich, 1886, before September 2/14".

The third issue of the series is a collective monograph *Literature and Philosophy: From Romanticism to the Twentieth Century. To the 150th anniversary of the death of Vladimir*

5 Takho-Godi, E. A. (ed.), *Literatura i religiozno-filosofskaia mysl' kontsa XIX – pervoi treti XX veka. K 165-letiyu Vl. Solov'eva* (2018).

Odoevsky.[6] The name of Vladimir Odoevsky – a Russian writer and music critic – marks a highly important milestone in the history of interaction between literature and philosophy: the creation of the first Russian philosophical novel *Russian Nights* (1844). However, the authors of the collective monograph do not confine themselves to the study of Odoevsky's work only and its significance for Russian romanticism. Their field of vision embraces the legacy of Pushkin, Boratynsky, Nikolay Gogol, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Merezhkovsky, Osip Mandelstam, Vladimir Nabokov, etc., as well as the interaction of literary texts and philosophical systems of prominent Russian thinkers (Gustav Shpet, Pavel Florensky, Losev, etc.). Another area of research is the philosophy of art (primarily, music) and its implementation in imaginative writing. The major objective of the book is to trace the process of interaction between literature and philosophy, starting from Romanticism and up to the twentieth century, in order to identify the maximum number of specific examples and aspects of this kind of interaction, and to further develop the scholarly tools necessary for such an analysis.

The fourth issue of the series was made up by the monograph by Tatyana Kasatkina *Dostoevsky as a Philosopher and Theologian: an Artistic Mode of Expression*.[7] The book embarks on studying the philosophical and theological implications of *Notes from Underground* and the fiction parts of *A Writer's Diary* by Fyodor Dostoevsky by means of the subject-subject method fully described in the first part of the study. In the second and third parts (*Notes from Underground* and literary texts from *A Writer's Diary*) the author explores what exactly the philosophy of Dostoevsky's works is. The author explains why it exists in his texts as internal and implicit, just how it exists there and by what means it is revealed to the reader. The first part also demonstrates the possibilities of the subject-subject method in relation to works of fine art: icons and religious paintings.

6 Takho-Godi (ed.). Literatura i filosofia: Ot romantizma k XX veku. K 150-letiiu so dnia smerti Vl. F. Odoevskogo (2019).

7 Kasatkina, *Dostoevskii kak filosof i bogoslov: khudozhestvennii sposob vyskazyvaniia* (2019)

In 2019, the monograph of Anastasia Gacheva "*The Ideal is also Reality*": *Russian Philosophy and Literature* was published outside the series but included materials prepared in the course of work on the project.[8] The book treats of such subjects as axiological horizons of the original Russian philosophy of the *lyubomudry* ("lovers of wisdom"), which manifested itself in various genre forms – from masterpieces of Russian philosophical lyrics, "the great pentateuch" by Dostoevsky to *Lectures on Godmanhood* by Solovyov, *Notes from the Uneducated to Scientists* by Nikolay Fedorov, *Philosophy of Economy* by Sergei Bulgakov and collective journal projects by figures of Russian Émigré: «putejzev» (authors rallying round the journal *Put'* ('The Way'), Eurasians, novogradcy (devotees of the journal *Novograd* ("New city"), etc. The author focuses on the main existential themes of Russian thought and literature, which find their solution in Christianity understood actively and projectively. Death and immortality, man and Nature, relatedness and unrelatedness, memory and resurrection, the meaning of history and the sense of creativity, philosophy of love and ethics of transformed Eros – all these topics are connected with the search for adult, conscious faith which is not afraid of the union with the mind and strives to become "the realization of the hoped for".

In the near future, the team plans to prepare for publication a collective monograph *Poetry of Thought: from Romanticism to modernity. To the 220th anniversary of Evgeny Boratynsky* based on the materials of the International conference of the same name held in 2020.

In addition to collective works and individual monographs, the research team has prepared and published several special issues of journals dedicated to the project topic. In 2018 a special edition, timed to coincide with the 125th anniversary of an outstanding philosopher and writer Alexey Losev was prepared for the international scholarly journal *Russian Studies in Philosophy*.[9] A special block of materials on the project topic

8 Gacheva (2019).

9 Takho-Godi (ed.), Alexei F. Losev: On the Occasion of His 125 Birthday Anniversary (2018).

was published in the international scholarly journal *Transcultural Studies* (Brill publishing house).[10] Two special issues of the journal *Russian Literature* (No. 5 for 2019 and 1 for 2021) devoted to the interaction of literature and philosophy have been published. In 2020, a special issue "A Symbiosis of Russian Literature and Philosophy" was published on the problem of the interaction of literature and philosophy in the journal *Studies in East European Thought*.[11]

Informational promotion of the project

Editions prepared for publication during work on the project were presented at sessions of the established seminar. About a dozen reviews of the publications created by the project participants have been published in scholarly periodicals and mass media. Members of the project have time and again made appearances in the media – on television, radio, giving interviews to newspapers. A special website has been created, where not only up-to-date information about the reports or events on the project topic was posted, but also full-text publications (articles and books) prepared by the project participants were exhibited.[12] This site can be a good platform for further work on the topic.

Other important institutions took part in the organization of these conferences held under the auspices of A.M Gorky Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences. For example, the Institute of Philosophy the Russian Academy of Sciences; the faculty of philosophy and the faculty of philology of M. V. Lomonosov Moscow State University; the Library-museum "A. F. Losev House"; the Memorial apartment of Andrei Bely (Alexander Pushkin State Museum); the Centre for the study of philosophy and literature at the Institute of Philo-

10 Shalygina (2019).

11 Takho-Godi Elena (ed.), Special Issue: A Symbiosis of Russian Literature and Philosophy (2020).

12 See: https://www.lit-phil.ru/

sophy of The Rhenish Friedrich Wilhelm University of Bonn; Research Group "Russian-Language Poetry in Transition: Poetic Forms – Addressing Boundaries of Genre, Language, and Culture Across Europe, Asia, and the Americas." (University of Trier); A. F. Losev Center for the Russian language and culture named after at the Institute of Philology of Moscow state pedagogical University, the journal *Solovyov Studies*.

The interest in the project is also indicated by the fact that the research team has been invited to act as a co-organizer of a number of international conferences. In 2019, the team helped to organize the International Conference "The Phenomenon of the Russian Émigré: Philosophy, Culture, Literature, Literary Studies" held in Siedlce (Poland). In 2020 and 2021 the research team participated, along with colleagues from the Ural Institute of Humanities of the Ural Federal University (Ekaterinburg), in the development of the concept of a cycle of International symposia on the history of the First wave of Russian Émigré, organized on the initiative of the Research Centre for Russian studies and Methodology of Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest, Hungary).

Together with National Research Tomsk State University, the concept of the International Conference "Dostoevsky in World and Russian Philosophical Thought: a Precursor of Hermeneutics and Existential Analytics" has been developed. The conference is scheduled for June 2021 and dedicated to the 200th anniversary of the great novelist.

The works performed by the members of the research team attract the attention of foreign colleagues. This is evidenced by the publication of articles by the project participants in foreign journals, as well as the translation into Serbian of the *monograph Dostoevsky as a Philosopher and Theologian* by Tatyana Kasatkina, published previously in the series "Russian Literature and Philosophy: Ways of Interaction".[13] The fact that foreign colleagues have been interested in the method of analyzing a philosophically rich text is also indicated by the translation of the theoretical article by Kasatkina "The

13 Касаткина (2020). Достојевски: филозоф и богослов.

Problem of Access to a Writer's Philosophy and Theology: The Unavoidability of Philology. Apollon and the Mouse in F. M. Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*" published in the English-language journal *Russian Studies in Literature*.[14]

All this testifies to the interest both in the project itself and in its central theme – the ways of interaction between literature and philosophy, and in Russian culture in general.

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14 Kasatkina (2019) The Problem of Access to a Writer's Philosophy and Theology: The Unavoidability of Philology.

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