

Title: The Magic of Words – Not Only in Dostoevsky
Author: Rolf Hellebust, University of Nottingham

As Robin Milner-Gulland writes, “an enduringly persistent tradition in Russian literature, whether ancient or modern, written or oral, is that of the word as magical” (Neil Cornwell, *Reference Guide to Russian Literature*, 8). I intend to discuss Dostoevsky’s celebrated quest for a “new word” within this larger context of the Russian literary tradition, looking back to the religious roots of Dostoevsky’s cult of the word (the Logos of the Johannine Prologue, the apothegmatic tradition, the element of *imiaslavie* in Russian Orthodoxy) – as well as forward to the beginning of the 20th century, to the less orthodox verbal mysticism evidenced by such theoretical works as Belyi’s “Magiia slov” and Florensky’s “magichnost’ slova”. I will relate the Dostoevskian word to what I have called the *virtual sequel* in Russian literature (*SEEJ* 2000), as an unrealizable theurgic discourse that “goes beyond the bounds of language, fuses with thought and action, actualizes its extralinguistic potential” (Toporov) – one that is capable of creating the future and of granting personal immortality (the *novoe slovo* of the extraordinary individual in *Crime and Punishment*), a sacred “model of the world” in which “fleeting, earthly reality confronts eternal truth” (*Brothers Karamazov*), a word given as the sacred utterance of an entire nation.