

Title: Strakhov's Article on the Polish Uprising of 1863 and the Closing of the Dostoevsky Brothers' *Vremia*: A Reassessment

Author: Edyta Bojanowska, Rutgers University

The paper concerns Strakhov's pro-Polish article "Rokovoi vopros" ("A Fateful Question") that led to the closing of the Dostoevsky brothers' journal *Vremia* (*Time*). The closing was a major setback for the Dostoevsky brothers, both financially and politically. In its aftermath, they complained that the public had misunderstood vaguely worded passages. Literary historians continue to rely on this explanation – and this includes the otherwise reliable Joseph Frank. This paper will argue for the need to be skeptical about the Dostoevsky brothers' explanation, which seems more an instance of damage control than an honest confession. Evidence for this claim comes from an attentive reading of Strakhov's article, which usually goes unquoted in scholarship on the topic. Contrary to the accepted view, Strakhov's article starkly asserts that the Poles are a "civilized" nation and the Russians are "barbarians," and that the Poles' claims to independence are therefore justified. Whatever ambiguity there is concerns the practical implications of this cultural difference. Though he does not outright advocate Polish independence, Strakhov deconstructs the classic Russian justification for imperial sovereignty over Poland. Fyodor Dostoevsky read this article and approved it for publication, which would imply he considered it valuable, consistent with the journal's platform, and at least partly with his own views. Could Dostoevsky in 1863 have been toying with the notion of shrinking Russia's western dominions? Though this would be inconsistent with his later views, this intriguing question needs to be asked in light of this paper's reassessment of Strakhov's article. Research for this paper includes the study of Dostoevsky's correspondence and of *Vremia*'s other pieces on the Polish Uprising.