

Edward Peter Ascroft (BA Hons, MA, PhD)

*The Decentring of the Subject in Modern Poetics:
Dostoevsky's Short Fiction Read through Bakhtin and Lacan*

Excerpts from Examiner's Review

Edward Peter Ascroft's thesis provides an analysis of three shorter works by Dostoevsky (the short story "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" and the novellas *A Disgraceful Affair* and *The Eternal Husband*) (10). His analysis is carried out with the help of a complex and intriguing theoretical apparatus, which in itself vouchsafes for the depth of thought and academic rigour expected in research at PhD level. While operating with basic concepts of the Bakhtinian paradigm (dialogic, *chronotope*, carnival(esque), focus on the motif of the threshold), the thesis also interrogates Bakhtin from a Lacanian perspective, in accordance with the recent critical approach to Dostoevsky's oeuvre which is most prominently represented by Millicent Vladiv-Glover. Lacan and Lacanian thought provides the main context for Ascroft's discussion of the (Dostoevskian) modern subject, with such concepts in the focus as the gaze, the Other and retroactive subject formation ("I am not where I am the plaything of my thought; I think about what I am where I do not think I am thinking"). Lacan's language-focused approach, which at the same time has a prominent visual component, thus provides the thesis with an intriguing dual focus: Lacan's concept of the subject is inseparable from a re-interpreted role of self-reflection, as explored in his seminal concept of the mirror phase (the imaginary and the symbolic, as opposed to the real) and his concomitant re-interpretation of narcissism and shame (see also Richard Boothby's 1991 interpretation of both and Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject as detailed in *Powers of Horror*, 1980). This extensive research is clearly documented in the thesis, which, especially in the literature review section, testifies to a remarkable ease and elegance with which the candidate handles his ample sources: terse and insightful comments establish connections between concepts from diverse paradigms and reflect Ascroft's thorough understanding of and dialogic engagement with the most current critical discussions of Dostoevsky's art.