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ROBIN FEUER MILLER
Brandeis University

Joseph Frank

Joseph Frank died on February 27, 2013 in Palo Alto, California at the age of 94. He will be remembered, not only by all of us who read Dostoevsky and write about him, but by all those around the world who read biographies and cultural histories. The monumental biographies by Richard Ellmann (James Joyce), Walther Jackson Bate (John Keats) and Leon Edel (Henry James) come to mind, not to mention Boswell's *Johnson*. These works, along with the work of Joseph Frank, shape the way we understand not only a writer and his work but the world, both that of the writer and our own. In 2009 Frank (along with editor Mary Petrusewicz) condensed his five-volume biography into a single book, albeit a book of 959 pages. But the five-volume version will remain the one most treasured and consulted by future generations.

Frank was born Joseph Nathaniel Glassman in the Jewish neighborhood of the Lower East Side in Manhattan in 1918, an immigrant neighborhood where many of America's future intellectuals spent their childhoods. His father died when he was a young child, and he was adopted by his mother's second husband, William Frank. Those who knew Frank will remember that he suffered from an occasionally debilitating stammer. Turning inward as a child, he became a voracious reader and, while still in high school, attended lectures at the New School for Social Research. Amazingly, although he earned a Ph.D. at the University of Chicago from the famous Committee on Social Thought, Frank never received a B.A. His parents had died when he was still a young man, and, nearly penniless, he had first traveled to the University of Wisconsin where he had heard that the Dean there was sympathetic to Jewish students seeking an education. It is easy to forget the kinds of discrimination that were widespread in the United States both before World War II and even after it.

During the 1940s and beyond Frank began to publish a series of brilliant essays and quickly became recognized as one of the country's most

promising literary critics and theorists. His essay, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," remains a classic and formed the core of his seminal book, *The Widening Gyre*. (This work appeared in a second edition with important additions and commentaries as *The Idea of Spatial Form* (1991). Frank wrote essays for the leading intellectual and literary journals in the United States (such as *The Sewanee Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *The Partisan Review*, and *The New Republic*) on an impressive range of artists and authors – Gide, Flaubert, Malraux, Mann, Goya, Cezanne, Sartre, Proust and, increasingly, Dostoevsky.

I and others of my generation first encountered Frank's work through his unforgettable essays on *Notes from Underground*, *The Idiot*, and *The Possessed*. Reading these essays could change the way one read not only Dostoevsky but novels in general, that is both the author and oneself as general reader were simultaneously transformed. Reading Dostoevsky proved transformative for Frank as well: to the surprise and disappointment of some, Frank put aside his role as major literary critic and theoretician to write a biography of Dostoevsky – a biography whose creation spanned the next decades of his life until 2002. He spent much of his final decade working on the one volume condensation of the biography along with other essays, which appeared again in primary publications such as *The New York Review of Books*. He published two important collections of his essays, *Through the Russian Prism: Essays on Literature and Culture* (1989) and, most recently, *Between Religion and Rationality: Essays in Russian Literature and Culture* (2010).

Frank was an exceptionally warm and generous figure who reached out to colleagues, undergraduate and graduate students, and to emerging scholars. Many of us owe him a great debt for his encouragement of our work, both publically and privately. What I have always particularly cherished about Frank's work is its deep integrity, its willingness to follow the evidence wherever it would lead him, even if it meant revising and rethinking a former position. He was a meticulous and creative close reader of texts who brought those readings to bear on the largest, most complex and pressing cultural, political, and social issues of Dostoevsky's time. Although his work on Dostoevsky is frequently hailed as "monumental," it should also be hailed as "finely observed and closely argued."

The remarks that follow are partly a condensation and an adaptation of my essay, "Frank's Dostoevsky"[1]:

Frank completed his five-volume biography of Dostoevsky in 2002. In any project spanning decades of work, one's view of one's subject changes, as does the cultural and critical climate surrounding the biographer himself. Frank's opus reflects both his evolving take on Dostoevsky – the thinker, the writer, the man – and his own development as a major critic of our time, one whose early preoccupations with theory gave way to his interest in creating, by the time he reached volume five (*Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet, 1871-1881*), an almost day-by-day account of the last decade of Dostoevsky's life. One can even indulge in drawing parallels between the number of pages of Frank's biography and those of Dostoevsky's novels or between the span of decades of each as well. There is a similarity of scale, a similarity of preoccupation with certain great themes and ideas. (Increasingly, Frank, like Dostoevsky before him, found his own past work to be one of his most useful sources.) Counter-posed to these similarities there is, in the work of both subject and biographer, movement forward in surprising new directions. From time to time in reading Frank's narration one can imagine him almost as an extension of one of Dostoevsky's own narrators – but whether he resembles the narrator-chronicler of *The Brothers Karamazov* (whom Frank shrewdly characterizes as writing his novel in an "up-to-date version of the pious, reverent, hesitant, hagiographical style of the Russian religious tradition....[and who can] produce a sense of trust in the reader" (V, 573)), or whether he is a narrative presence with an authority over his material equivalent to Dostoevsky's over his, remains ambiguous.

Frank came to Dostoevsky as a literary critic and theorist par excellence and through a vital encounter with *Notes from Underground.* "My own attempt . . . began with *Notes from Underground.* It was in grappling with this text that I began to understand the complexity of the relations in [Dostoevsky's] writings between psychology and ideology, and how important it was for a proper comprehension of the first to identify its roots in the social-cultural context of the second" (V, xii). Frank's fascination with this work is one of the primary intellectual underpinnings of his five-volume biography, and his sustained encounter with it seems as fundamental to his overall vision as does Dostoevsky's with the Book of Job. It enriches much of his interpretation of other aspects of Dostoevsky's

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[1] Robin Feuer Miller, "Frank's Dostoevsky," *Slavic and East European Journal,* vol. 47, no.3 (2003): 471-79.

work. He discovers emanations of the underground man throughout *The Diary*, not only in "A Gentle Creature" and "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man," but in the musings of "A Certain Person." In volume three, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860-1865* (Princeton, 1986), Frank makes a broad and categorical statement that, despite its ringing absolutes – its unmodern lack of qualifiers – has held true. Let me quote him at some length:

> Few works in modern literature are more widely read than Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* or so often cited as a key text revelatory of the hidden depth of the sensibility of our time. The term "underground man" has now become part of the vocabulary of contemporary culture, and this character has now achieved – like Hamlet, Don Quixote, Don Juan, and Faust – the stature of one of the great archetypal literary creations. No book or essay dealing with the precarious situation of modern man would be complete without some allusion to Dostoevsky's explosive figure. Most important cultural developments of the present century – Nietzscheanism, Freudianism, Expressionism, Surrealism, Crisis Theology, Existentialism – have claimed the underground man as their own or have been linked with him by zealous interpreters; and when the underground man has not been hailed as a prophetic anticipation, he has been held up to exhibition as a luridly repulsive warning. The underground man has thus entered into the very warp and woof of modern culture in a fashion testifying to the philosophical suggestiveness and hypnotic power of this first great creation of Dostoevsky's post-Siberian years. At the same time, however, this widespread notoriety has given rise to a good deal of misunderstanding (III, 310).

Frank's introductory chapter to *The Mantle of the Prophet* offered readers a superb summary of the interaction between Dostoevsky's life and ideas which has proven helpful to those reading about Dostoevsky for the first time. It has been, perhaps, even more useful to those with some knowledge of him, for this introduction brims with succinct formulations of complex aspects of Dostoevsky's vision. But this introduction also exposes a fault-line--the idea to which Frank has clung since before he came to write his towering biography, the grain of sand that may have spawned the pearl: his original interpretation of *Notes from Underground.* How many of us have, for decades, taught Frank's reading of this particular work to our students?

I have been captivated by Frank's argument that the underground man does not attempt to refute the ideas of the radicals of the sixties so much as he is himself a representation of those ideas. This insight offers a compelling path into the labyrinth of Dostoevsky's creative mind.

Nevertheless I have found that as intellectually satisfying and neat as this interpretation is, the underground man himself has a way of reverting back to a simpler, less intellectually clever form in which he remains more clearly understandable in his guise of opponent or paradoxicalist than as embodiment of the very ideas he seeks to refute. Frank asserts, "No other writer equals Dostoevsky in his ability to portray this relation between ideas and their effects on the human personality. What would it really mean for human behavior if one accepted, as does the underground man, Chernyshevsky's denial of the reality of freedom of the will?" (V, 11). Over the past several decades Frank did not alter this hypothesis – that the underground man accepts Chernyshevsky's denial of the freedom of human will. But this very point – which forms part of the bedrock of Frank's entire oeuvre – continues to be extremely influential, yet, despite its elegance, still debatable for some readers, including myself.

By the time Frank reached volume five, he had become less interested in understanding Dostoevsky's significance to our contemporary culture and to the history of ideas generally and, instead, more single-mindedly intent upon fixing him within his own milieu – with discovering as completely as it is possible to do so, the meaning of Dostoevsky's thought and creative works in the context of his own times. Thus for Frank, the *Diary of a Writer,* "far from being a distraction from his creative vocation, [was a] necessary means of keeping abreast of the passing scene . . . a guarantee 'that the multitude of impressions . . . will not be wasted' for future artistic employment" (V, 209).

An example of this shift in focus is Frank's disinterest in polemicizing with Freud's interpretation of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Frank's critique of the Freudian view of Dostoevsky had played out both in earlier volumes of his biography (especially in volume one) and in various exchanges with such critics as the late James Rice. In *The Mantle of the Prophet*, however, he is less interested in assessing Dostoevsky's impact upon major figures and intellectual movements of the future and more intent upon anchoring Dostoevsky in the particular events and ideas of the 1870s and 1880s. Thus, it is delightful when Frank adapts for his own purposes Freud's pithy and often quoted statement, "Before the problem of the creative artist, analysis must, alas, lay down its arms" (Sigmund Freud, "Dostoevsky and Parricide," in *Freud: Character and Culture*, ed. Philip Rieff, New York,

1963). Freud was here acknowledging the way in which a work of art can ultimately resist any attempt to unravel it as an expression of the author's psychology or daily life. Frank characterizes Dostoevsky's stubborn preoccupation with present day matters with a turn of speech reminiscent of Freud, though used for an almost opposite purpose – to show his immersion in that very present: "Dostoevsky. . . refused to lay down his arms before the challenge of the present" (V, 209).

In the nearly three decades during which Frank worked on his biography, trends in contemporary criticism also shifted. The first volume of Frank's biography, *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849* (Princeton University Press) appeared in 1976. At that time it seemed that Frank, known as an adventurous literary theorist, was bucking a trend when he decided to take on what seemed to be a traditional – even old-fashioned – life and work biography. Yet he ended by producing a work that depicts a life as an encounter with contemporary culture and intellectual movements. Although Frank himself was undoubtedly unconcerned about such critical fashionableness either then or now, his work is squarely in the vanguard again.

The only other time that Frank makes such a resoundingly categorical statement as the one already cited about *Notes from Underground* occurs when he turns to Dostoevsky's final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*:

> Indeed, this work towers even over his earlier masterpieces, and succeeds in achieving a classic expression of the great theme that had preoccupied him since *Notes from Underground*: the conflict between reason and Christian faith. Never before had Dostoevsky expressed this clash with such poetic power, such symbolic elevation, and in terms of so broad a depiction of Russian social types and Russian life. No previous work gives the reader such an impression of controlled and measured grandeur, a grandeur that spontaneously evokes comparison with the greatest creations of Western literature. *The Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, *King Lear*, *Faust* – these are the titles that naturally come to mind as one tries to measure the stature of *The Brothers Karamazov*. For these too grapple with the never-ending and never-to-be ended argument aroused by the "accursed questions" of mankind's destiny (V, 567).

Yet the fact is that throughout Frank's minute analysis of the novel, which spans over one hundred and thirty pages, his primary focus is less on those

universal "accursed questions" than on understanding and elucidating the novel's intellectual underpinnings and conjoining them to Dostoevsky's other writings.

Frank sought to delineate precisely the way the many parts and characters of this novel fit together to form a microcosm of Russian society. This approach bears fine fruit in his analysis of the trial scene in Book 12, a part of the novel which has been of increasing recent interest to a variety of Dostoevsky scholars. Here Frank argues that by permitting the prosecutor to present a patronizing "if not completely hostile" treatment of Dostoevsky's own program of *pochvennichestvo* and by also allowing him "to characterize Alyosha's religious orientation as backwardness and obscurantism, Dostoevsky was giving his opponents their just due; and the whole purpose of his novel was to persuade readers that such judgments were mistaken and misguided" (V, 691).

Frank emphasizes Dostoevsky's abidingly pragmatic concerns as he crafted his final novel. "Dostoevsky," writes Frank, was "wise enough not to attempt to compete with Tolstoy" except in the basic areas of proportion and amplitude (V, 567). The matter of Dostoevsky's competition during the last decade of his life with Tolstoy is a subject that Frank handles well, although one could argue that *The Brothers Karamazov* bristles with a keener competitive awareness of Tolstoy than Frank suggests. Undoubtedly this debate will continue.

In all the volumes, Frank offers a minute account of the serialization of each of the major novels, enlarging both our understanding of the social climate in which Dostoevsky wrote as well as representing for us the shifting pattern of Dostoevsky's own moods and stratagems. We see with graphic clarity the extent to which Dostoevsky had become a kind of cultural hero in the last decade of his life – a figure whom both the representatives of autocracy and the generation of Populists each claimed as their own. Frank describes how, toward the end of his life, Dostoevsky had "now become a revered, symbolic figure who stood above the merciless battle of ideologies." He cites the memoirs of one A.V. Kruglov, "I was walking along the Nevsky Prospect with a medical student. . . Dostoevsky happened to come past us in a carriage. The medical student quickly, before I could do so myself, raised his hat. 'Do you perhaps know Dostoevsky?' I asked. 'No, but what does that matter? I did not *bow* to him, but bared my head as I did in Moscow when I walked past the statue of Pushkin'" (V, 723). Gestures made with hats have been significant for Dostoevsky from his first novel, *Poor People*, until his last.

In *The Mantle of the Prophet*, Frank was particularly concerned to demonstrate Dostoevsky's "return" to some of his earlier convictions and his need to believe that they found a genuine resonance in Populist thought, maintaining that Dostoevsky "now found in the key Populist texts a decisive affirmation of precisely what he had maintained all along – and what Nihilism had declared to be nonexistent" (V, 73). He depicts for us in a way that makes sense the sheer irony of Dostoevsky's publishing nearly simultaneously in the conservative *Citizen* and in the leading Populist journal, *Notes from the Fatherland.*

Frank's concern to elucidate Dostoevsky's desire to connect with the Populists is a primary focus of the *The Mantle of the Prophet.* When Frank turns to *A Raw Youth* he asks, "Why should *A Raw Youth* slump so markedly when compared to Dostoevsky's other great novels?" His answer, which he goes on to demonstrate deftly and convincingly, lies in the "implicit self-censorship that [Dostoevsky] here exercised on his creative faculties" in large part because he was publishing in *Notes of the Fatherland*, "the leading Populist organ that was carrying on the social-cultural tradition against which he had fought all through the 1860s" (V, 171). Frank suggests that this choice of venue ultimately inclined him to reduce "the theme of parricide to that of parental irresponsibility and substituted a relatively innocent and boyishly illusory romantic rivalry between father and son for the merciless oedipal clash in *The Brothers Karamazov* that so impressed Freud." Frank argues persuasively that in deciding to write a "social-psychological novel of relatively limited range" (V, 171) Dostoevsky in effect hobbled his own effort.

Ultimately Frank's massive analysis of Dostoevsky's political, philosophical, and intellectual views co-opted this final volume of his biography and thus differentiated it from the other four. His own views on what it is important to write about were perhaps in flux as he worked on this final volume.

Dostoevsky the artist, even in his novels, retreats to the background. Frank tells us that "[n]o issue in Russian culture was more important for Dostoevsky than the relationship between the intelligentsia and the people" (V, 263). He represents for us virtually every stage of Dostoevsky's attempt to understand this relationship, whether through journalism, art, personal correspondence, the reminiscences of his contemporaries, or through his increasingly frequent public readings. And despite the many pages devoted to *The Brothers Karamazov* and even to *A Raw Youth*, it is the chronicling of Dostoevsky's evolving ideas and his constant effort to promote them through his journalism, through public readings, and through almost any

means at his disposal that dominated this final volume and constitute both its strength and, to some degree, its weakness. In its intense focus Frank's final volume follows that of the unsurpassed work of Igor Volgin.

Frank has rendered these last two novels as so of a piece with the journalism that their leap into art and irreducibility, at least for me, became obscured. To be sure, Frank has described *The Brothers Karamazov* – its characters, its narrative, its ideas. Yet from his Olympian perch the jaggedness that is a sine qua non of the novel's wholeness flattens out. Because Frank agrees with those critics who read the novel as a primarily "philosophical-publicistic" work (a phrase of Vetlovskaya, quoted by Frank), and a work which advances a "definite tendency" (V, 573), his analysis, unlike that of Bakhtin and others, is not charged with the many self-contradictory ironies, the mini-explosions of insight, the bursts of self-qualification, the weird moments of play or odd invention that seem to lie at the core of so many of the characters. Their inconsistences seem ironed out.

For example, Ivan's rebellion (whose arguments were acknowledged by Dostoevsky to be "irrefutable" even as he prepared to refute them in Book 6) is countered by a reading of the novel that puts this philosophical and publicistic view at the forefront. Frank fully appreciates the "disquieting effects of [Ivan's] deeply moving jeremiad" (V, 604): "There is no question that the Dostoevsky who wrote these pages poured into them all his own anguish, both personal and social, over the abominations he was recording. But it would be a serious underestimation of the integrity of his talent and of the depth and daring of his Christian irrationalism to assume that he endowed Ivan's voice with such overpowering resonance only through lack of artistic control. Ivan represents . . . the supreme and most poignant dramatization of the conflict between reason and faith at the heart of the book. . . . Faith, as Dostoevsky wishes it to be felt . . . must be totally pure, a commitment supported by nothing except a devotion to the image and example of Christ; and the arguments of reason against it must thus be given at their fullest strength"(V, 607).

Frank's readings of the novels and stories never relegate Dostoevsky the thinker – the compelling but flawed and messianic would-be prophet, the anti-Semite, the nationalist, the ideologue – to the background. Dostoevsky's creative work, for Frank, can never exist in a safety zone cordoned off by the force of his genius and humanity as an artist. The barrier is down; the thinker and the artist are one, and the reader, like Frank before him, just has to deal with it.

Frank draws heavily upon the vast amount of material collected in the *Polnoe sobranie*, upon the many memoirs of the period, upon his own

unsurpassable knowledge of and intimacy with all the rest of Dostoevsky's personal journalism and correspondence. He also draws upon the superb work of many contemporary Russian critics, scholars, and editors. At times he has been criticized for relying upon these sources too heavily. I find his sustained engagement with all these sources and critics a strength of his work and not a weakness. His work is as much an engagement with the ideas and words of others as is Dostoevsky's.

But what is lacking, and in my view sadly lacking, is a response to the equally important work of a whole array of Western critics on both *The Diary of a Writer* and the novels. No one else is better situated to offer such a response, and it is a small disappointment not to find this engagement. Frank does make passing reference to a few, but most are never mentioned at all. It seems bizarre to suggest that a biography of thousands of pages could be longer, but what about the seminal critical contributions and basic research of such writers as Belknap, Emerson, Fanger, Jackson, Jones, Knapp, Leatherbarrow, Levitt, Martinsen, Meerson, Morson, Murav, Paperno, Peace, Rosenshield, Thompson, and Todd (to name a few) who had made, by the time of Frank's writing, important contributions on some of the same subjects? Such an engagement would have sharpened the discourse and problematized it at moments when Frank's own narrative seemed to need that kind of focus and critical energy. In later conversations Frank himself acknowledged that more such engagement with others in the West currently working on Dostoevsky would have been desirable, but then again this kind of dialogue was not the focus of his critical biography and cultural history.

In the preface to *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849*, Frank reveals that he had already thought about undertaking this tremendous project for some twenty years. He writes that "my work is thus not a biography, or if so, only in a special sense – for I do not go from the life to the work, but rather the other way round. My purpose is to interpret Dostoevsky's art, and this purpose commands my choice of detail and my perspective" (I, xii). By volume five, this trajectory has nearly reversed. Dostoevsky's daily intellectual, political, and religious life permeates the work; the work seems to be an expression of those aspects of his life. They dominate the art.

The achievements of each of the five volumes are certainly equivalent. Perhaps Frank's greatest contribution overall is his demonstration that Dostoevsky's relationship with the radicals was always at the center of his creative endeavor. *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet*, the long-

awaited final volume of the biography, lived up to the promise, to the expectations of all – much like Dostoevsky's readership with his final novel – who had eagerly awaited it, half expecting it would never be completed. Nor was Frank ever more immersed in his gigantic subject. Thus it is interesting to observe that at the very stage when he could have made generalizations about Dostoevsky's canon or his life as a whole, Frank's most urgent interest was instead absorbed by his subject's present. He concluded his work, not with his own insight about Dostoevsky, but with a flowery quotation from V.S. Solovyev spoken a few days before Dostoevsky's death, "Just as the highest worldly power somehow or other becomes concentrated in one person, who represents a state, similarly the highest spiritual power in each epoch usually belongs in every people to one man, who more clearly than all grasps the spiritual ideals of mankind, more consciously than all strives to attain them, more strongly than all affects others by his preachments. Such a spiritual leader of the Russian people in recent times was Dostoevsky" (V, 756).

Although Frank recapitulated some of the important themes that stayed with Dostoevsky until the end, for the most part Frank chose to follow Igor Volgin in describing Dostoevsky's last year of life. His final volume thus displayed an intense preoccupation with the minutiae of *realia* rather than rendering what one might expect to find: a theory, a reverie, or a meditation upon the whole.

Frank's first book, *The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature* (Rutgers, 1963) drew its title from Yeats' famous poem, "The Second Coming" (in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, 1921). And I suspect many admirers of Frank's oeuvre, myself among them, are tempted to draw inspiration from that poem in thinking about Dostoevsky. We can ruminate on how to juxtapose Dostoevsky's horror of the lukewarm – played out so unforgettably in *The Devils* – to Yeats's aphorism that "[t]he best lack all conviction, while the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity." Certainly Dostoevsky embodied both conviction and passionate intensity. Does he represent a counter example of that famous aphorism?

But it is another poem of Yeats, "The Circus Animals' Desertion," (in *Last Poems*, 1936-39) and its potential for reversal in contemplating Dostoevsky that springs most powerfully to mind. Dostoevsky's themes did not desert him. Even though Dostoevsky claimed throughout his creative life that he had managed to say something new, Yeats's lament, "What can I but enumerate old themes?" would not have reduced Dostoevsky to despair. Despite his lifelong efforts to bring new material to his fiction, he also reused and rewove the same themes throughout his

entire creative life. Frank has managed to show us that other side of Dostoevsky's tapestry; the vast design he lays before us includes the knotted threads and the dangling ones. Yeats, like Dostoevsky was acutely conscious of the difference between life itself and representations of it.

> "Players and painted stage took all my love,
> And not those things that they were emblems of."

Dostoevsky perhaps was better able to resist misplacing his love in the way Yeats berates himself for having done. But Yeats's ruminations on artistic process brought him back to its unlofty sources in a way that Dostoevsky, whether as diarist, as thinker, or above all, as artist would surely have understood.

> "Those masterful images because complete
> Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?
> A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
> Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
> Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
> Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,
> I must lie down where all the ladders start,
> In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart."

Joseph Frank, the biographer of Dostoevsky whose biography will be remembered as the timeless one, or the one for all time, has given us a Dostoevsky who is, above all, a writer of his own time. Frank's Dostoevsky, even as he wrote loftily about finding diamonds in the filth, could lie down in that very place where all those ladders start. For all his heightened visions, readers may perhaps experience most deeply Dostoevsky's "rag-and-bone shops" – his dead houses, his underground, his bathhouses, his depictions of the human heart. Frank showed us the interconnections of it all in his representation of a life in ideas, art, culture and time.

In closing, here is a sampling of informal, brief and spontaneous reflections by some of Frank's contemporaries in North America. I asked a few colleagues, not for a grand statement about the importance of Frank's work but to reflect on something smaller that has lodged with them. Here are responses from six well-known scholars of Dostoevsky:

Ellen Chances: "Because of Joe Frank, my dissertation adviser, I wrote my thesis on *pochvennichestvo* in *Vremia* and *Epokha.* Joe's brilliant article, "Nihilism and *Notes from Underground,*" answered questions about how to fit together the two parts of that novel, and it caused me to be haunted, for years, by that question. His "Masks of Stavrogin," about Stavrogin's representing the 1830s, caused me to be haunted by the question of how, historically, Stavrogin fits into *Demons.*"
Julian Connolly: "One of the most powerful moments of discovery occurred when I read Joe's essay on *Notes from Underground*: the notion that the underground man was not simply mocking the progressive's theories but rather had deeply absorbed their reasoning and had taken it to its (il)logical extreme. For me, this opened a new perspective on the way parody works at the narrative level in Dostoevsky's writing."
Paul Contino: "Not long after I had completed my dissertation, I decided to write Joseph Frank a letter. In it, I expressed my gratitude for his indispensable biography, then a work-in-progress, but also questioned his view that Dostoevsky remained suspicious of reason, especially in its relation to his religious faith. Not long afterward, I received the most thoughtful response – a great kindness to a young scholar! I have treasured that letter, as well as my memory of finally meeting him at Holy Cross in the spring of 2008. For as long as I write about Dostoevsky, Joseph Frank will remain an inspiration."
Linda Ivanits: "Joseph Frank's biography of Dostoevsky has been fundamental to my teaching and research. When students ask about the cultural background against which Dostoevsky wrote, I send them directly to Frank, and, of course, I place all five volumes on reserve when I teach a Dostoevsky course. In any new research project I turn to Frank immediately after reading the primary text. All volumes of my copy are stuffed with slips of paper and notes from previous readings. I often wonder what would emerge if I had the leisure to simply peruse the passages I had marked."
Donna Tussing Orwin: "I did not know Frank personally, but of course I have read all his books, even the last one, which is not as rich as the others. Believe it or not, along with many wonderful details from different volumes, what stays with me most is something from his brief preface to the first book. He confesses there that he originally went looking for one thing in Dostoevsky that he thought he knew about – existentialism – but couldn't find it. So he decided to burrow and study until he had figured out what Dostoevsky and especially his underground man are really all about. I have to say too that I think that the discussion of *Notes from Underground*

is the most thrilling of all the many wonderful things in the book. Warm, warmer, hot: you can feel Frank's excitement and certainty that he's figured out what he needed to know."

And, finally, from our own dear **Deborah Martinsen**, the heroic past president of the International Dostoevsky Society: "I did not know Joseph Frank, only his work, but I found it so compelling that I took volume 3, *The Stir of Liberation, 1860-1865*, on my honeymoon."

These eloquent statements encapsulate what has been so remarkable about Frank's oeuvre.