

What are you reading?

A weekly look over the shoulders of our scholar-reviewers

December 8, 2011

Mark Berry, lecturer in music, [Royal Holloway, University of London](#), is reading Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (Oxford University Press, 1998), translated by Alan Myers. "*Crime and Punishment* was for me a life-changing novel. Although it swiftly led to more Dostoevsky, I have taken far too long to reach *The Idiot*. The inevitable, tragicomic failure of a Christ-like figure on Earth, sin victorious, insufficiency of beauty, compassion, humility, even truth: the fascination for Nietzsche becomes ever clearer. And what an achievement, even simply (?) as a novel!"

Martin Cohen, editor of *The Philosopher*, is reading Hergé's *Les Cigares du Pharaon* (Casterman, 2006). "Of course I have read this in English, too, but now I can at least practise my French by re-reading this classic of world literature in the original language. Nothing to do with that awful new [Steven] Spielberg film, either. There is a new-generation Tintin-ophile in the house who must be fed at least one adventure every night."

Andreas Hess, senior lecturer in sociology, [University College Dublin](#), is reading Jeffrey C. Alexander's *The Performative Revolution in Egypt: An Essay in Cultural Power* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2011). "Performativity is the new key concept that cultural sociologists have come to employ. Here, Alexander uses the example of the recent protest and upheaval in Egypt and the role that the new means of communication played in the process to argue that it is not the case that social facts simply speak for themselves. Rather, it is the representation of social facts and symbolic construction that give meaning to social and, in this case, revolutionary action."

Kate North is lecturer in creative writing, [Cardiff Metropolitan University](#). "I am reading Jane Monson's *Speaking Without Tongues* (Cinnamon, 2010). This is Monson's first poetry collection and I think it is essential reading in the field of the prose poem. She demonstrates the impact of our environment on our use of language and vice versa, showing that they are dependent on each other. This is a celebration of language and the physical world around us."

Tom Palaima, professor of Classics at the [University of Texas at Austin](#), is reading William Trevor's *Selected Stories* (Penguin, 2011). "Small stories sparely told. Common people arriving where their lives have led them. What Greek tragedies might look like set in Ireland and stripped of tragic heroes and tragic flaws. Trevor's characters make choices with

unheroic courage and minimal quiet desperation. They could tell our former Scots-Irish president Bill Clinton, at last, 'what the meaning of *is* is'."