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EDITED BY
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I

W. J. LEATHERBARROW

Introduction

When the idea for a *Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii* was first mooted it was recognised, first, that Dostoevskii had been extremely well served over many years by his critical commentators, in the West as well as in Russia, and, secondly, that the need for a further volume designed to introduce this author to yet another generation of students and more general readers was not self-evident and perhaps required some justification. To acknowledge this latter point is not at all the same as to imply that Dostoevskii's star is somehow on the wane or that the immense popularity his work has enjoyed is in decline. At the start of the twenty-first century his work is as widely admired as it has ever been, and its impact continues to resonate in cultural activity throughout the world more than a century after his death. Moreover, this resonance has been felt not just in the 'higher' or 'élite' manifestations of literary activity, but is also discernible in more popular forms of fiction such as the detective novel. Put simply, Dostoevskii seems unwilling to settle into the role of venerable classic, that of an author admired for the way his work once spoke loudly to his contemporaries, but whose impact in the present is more akin to that of a whisper. To employ an over-used term, Dostoevskii's novels still seem pressingly 'relevant' to the most immediate concerns of the present age in a way that those of his contemporaries perhaps do not. The world depicted in, say, *Crime and Punishment* or *The Devils*, despite its chronological and social remoteness, looks so much more like the world we live in than any described by Tolstoi or Turgenev. George Steiner's challenging assertion that 'Dostoevsky has penetrated more deeply than Tolstoy into the fabric of contemporary thought', having done more than any other writer of the nineteenth century to set the agenda and determine the 'shape and psychology' of modern fiction, does not seem over-extravagant.¹ Nor does Alex de Jonge's claim that, along with Proust, Dostoevskii was the artist 'supremely representative' not only of his own age, but also of ours,² a nineteenth-century novelist who has continued to provoke strong reactions in his subsequent readership. One minute acclaimed by Albert Camus as a

sort of prophet of twentieth-century Existentialism,³ the next he is dismissed and ridiculed by Vladimir Nabokov as the poor relation of Russian literature, unworthy of admission to the pantheon of the great because of his uncouth literary manners and taste for the cheaply melodramatic.⁴ Welcomed by John Middleton Murry for a revelatory art form that transcended the novel and dripped ‘metaphysical obscenity’,⁵ he was scorned by George Moore as a mere exponent of shilling-shockers and penny-dreadfuls.⁶ For Albert Einstein, the father of the modern scientific world-view, he provided an inspirational glimpse into the relativism and instability of reality and gave him ‘more than any other thinker, more even than Gauss’;⁷ for D. H. Lawrence, though, he was a ‘false artist’ with a false vision, a ‘big stinker’ sliding along in the dark like a rat, and ‘not nice’.⁸

The ubiquitous presence of Dostoevskii’s ghost in the machine of twentieth-century culture is as straightforward to illustrate as it is complex to explain. Why do we still read him? And why should we continue to do so? As Russia continues to languish in post-communist social and economic collapse and to watch what is left of its superpower status decay, it cannot be because Dostoevskii somehow symbolises, and helps us to understand, the virility and force of a strategically important imperial power, as British novelists perhaps did in the nineteenth century. (Although, as we shall soon see, it might be because he offers acute insights into the causes and processes of that cultural collapse.) One possible explanation for Dostoevskii’s enduring popularity lies in the unusual ability of his fiction to flatter our willingness to entertain and engage with ‘high’ serious intellectual and emotional issues while simultaneously rewarding any taste we may have for immediately compelling narrative energy and ‘low’ popular fictional devices. Nabokov was right (if not the first) to recognise that Dostoevskii drew some of the building blocks of his art from the literary slums of boulevard fiction, melodrama and cheap Romanticism, and George Moore was perceptive in recognising that the narrative hooks Dostoevskii employed to ensnare his readers’ attention were indeed those used most frequently in the popular novel. The outraged condescension shown by both, however, is characteristic of an earlier age than ours, an age which had not seen to anywhere near the same extent the democratisation and mass commercialisation of culture, and in which ‘élite’ fiction was not supposed to slum it by appropriating the dynamic or fantastic plots, over-egged melodrama, cliff-hanger situations, larger-than-life characters and abnormal psychology of the penny-dreadful. Today we are surrounded by, and sensitised to, cultural products designed for mass rather than élite consumption, and we are consequently far more ready to accept the adoption of the aesthetics and discourses of such products in the name

of 'high' art. Although still a literary 'toff', Dostoevskii seems much more like 'one of us' than Tolstoi or Turgenev.

Another feature of Dostoevskii's fiction that helps to account for its enduring popularity is its amenability to interpretation in terms of the changing concerns that have dominated literary criticism and cultural theory over the last century or so. Initially welcomed in Russia and the West as examples of critical and social realism, his novels rewarded such responses in their preoccupation with social concerns like poverty, crime, alienation and money, as well as with the issues at stake in the dominant intellectual debates of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, such as the erosion of traditional spiritual values by the burgeoning capitalism and heroic materialism that went with industrialisation. Later, as realism gave ground to decadence, modernism and aestheticism in the European fin-de-siècle, the same novels were acclaimed for their ability to yield metaphysical rather than social insights, for their anti-materialism, and for the doubts they cast upon objectivity. We have already glimpsed how they were then subsequently pressed into the service of philosophical Existentialism and called upon to validate the perceptual revolutions accomplished by the new physics, not only of Einstein but also of Heisenberg and others. The rise to dominance of fascism in inter-war Europe also saw Dostoevskii and his works mobilised in the service of both sides. In Soviet Russia enduring doubts about his ideological acceptability were laid aside as official critics set about the task of mining his works for those nuggets of anti-German sentiment and national messianism that so neatly accorded with war aims, while in Germany Nazi critics laid claim to Dostoevskii for his nationalism, anti-semitism and cultural imperialism.⁹ There is no room here to develop much further this attempt to illustrate Dostoevskii's adaptability to critical fashion, but we must at least recognise that such adaptability is not limited just to the social and ideological content of his art. The formal characteristics not only of his fiction, but also of such 'journalistic' writings as his *Diary of a Writer*, continue to attract much critical attention, and the notes and references accompanying the essays in the present volume acknowledge the frequency with which his works have been cited in demonstration of so many developments in literary theory, from the Russian Formalist school through Bakhtinian narrative theory to post-modernism.¹⁰ The novelist called upon in the 1840s by the Russian critic Vissarion Belinskii to fly the flag of social realism has subsequently been enlisted in the service of most of the aesthetic manifestoes of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

But, as Steiner's remark suggests, it is in Dostoevskii's enduring ability to keep his finger on the pulse of modernity that we find the most compelling

explanation of the on-going popularity of his art. His novels and tales appear to capture, in both their thematic content and their narrative forms, the fluidity and instability of existence as experienced by most in an age when confidence in enduring political, social, spiritual, scientific and intellectual certainties has retreated in the face of relativism and a craving for immediacy and short-term intensity. The hero of *Notes from Underground* may have puzzled his contemporary readership with his defiant and perverse rejection of the 'benefits' of heroic materialism and scientific progress, but today's reader is much more likely to share that character's distrust of science, of rationality and of schemes that sacrifice the individual to objective and immutable forces. The chaotic and unstable narrative voice of *The Double*, confusing experience and hallucination and contaminating the narrative discourse with that of the hero, may have strained beyond endurance the patience of Belinskii, but it is unlikely to alienate a readership schooled in James Joyce or contemporary critical theory. Interestingly, Dostoevskii himself sensed that his artistic vision was more likely to be validated by the future. In the following passage from his notebooks for *A Raw Youth* he appears to acknowledge the instability of contemporary life as a condition largely unrecognised by fellow writers, as well as the prophetic qualities of his own art and the nature of its enduring relevance for future generations:

Facts. They pass before us. No one notices them [...] I cannot tear myself away, and all the cries of the critics to the effect that I do not depict real life have not disenchanted me. There are no bases to our society [...] One colossal quake and the whole lot will come to an end, collapse and be negated as though it had never existed. And this is not just outwardly true, as in the West, but inwardly, morally so. Our talented writers, people like Tolstoi and Goncharov,¹¹ who with great artistry depict family life in upper-middle-class circles, think that they are depicting the life of the majority. In my view they have depicted only the life of the exceptions, but the life which I portray is the life that is the general rule. Future generations, more objective in their view, will see that this is so. The truth is on my side, I am convinced of that.

(xvi, 329)

The views expressed in this passage to the effect that his own 'realism' is somehow superior to that of his contemporaries in its ability to suggest the essential nature of an unstable and disintegrating 'reality' are views voiced regularly by Dostoevskii in the last decade or so of his life. Most famously, in an undated notebook entry toward the end of his life he claimed to be 'a realist in a higher sense; that is, I depict all the depths of the human soul' (xxvii, 65). This is a suggestive, but tantalisingly cryptic claim. What is 'realism in a higher sense'? If realism in the novel resides in verisimilitude, truthfulness to life, the accurate depiction of experience (as Dostoevskii's contemporaries

might well have claimed with a lack of that conscious provisionality that attends any discussion of the condition, or use of the term ‘realism’, today), then how is it possible to have ‘higher’ or ‘lower’ forms of it? In *The Idiot* Dostoevskii’s narrator had dwelt on the problem of the nature of artistic realism and had concluded that novelists should try ‘to select social types and present them in artistic form: types remarkably rarely encountered as such in real life, but which are almost more real than reality itself’ (VIII, 383; Pt 4, Sec. 1). Implicit in such references to ‘higher realism’ and the creation of an artistic world that is ‘almost more real than reality itself’ is the suggestion that for Dostoevskii conventional realism, as practised by the other great Russian (and, for that matter, European) novelists of his age, was somehow inadequate and incapable of accomplishing what was surely the primary objective of realist art: the illusion that contemporary reality had been effectively and accurately replicated. In a letter of 26 February 1869 to his friend Nikolai Strakhov Dostoevskii made the following statement: ‘I have my own view of reality (in art), and what most people regard as fantastic and exceptional is sometimes for me the very essence of reality. Everyday trivialities and a conventional view of them, in my opinion, not only fall short of realism but are even contrary to it’ (XXIX/1, 19). Shortly before, in a letter of 11 December 1868, he had expressed much the same view to another friend, A. N. Maikov: ‘I have entirely different notions of reality and realism from those of our realists and critics [. . .] With their kind of realism you cannot explain so much as a hundredth part of the real facts which have actually occurred. But with our idealism we have even prophesied facts’ (XXVIII/2, 329).

Such comments all share the implication that the aim of achieving in novelistic form a robust illusion of reality is not adequately or appropriately served by the conventional realist practices of a Tolstoi or Goncharov. The letters to Strakhov and Maikov cited above suggest that Dostoevskii did not regard the naturalistic depiction of the norms and surface appearances of day-to-day reality as the sole, or even primary, objective of realism. Instead, references to his own ‘idealism’ which ‘prophesies facts’ suggest that such an objective should consist instead in the ‘explanation’ of ‘the very essence of reality’, its underlying structures and innermost nature. If this required rejection or amendment of the traditional devices and practices of naturalism, so be it. In a letter of January 1854 to N. D. Fonvizina Dostoevskii had described himself as ‘a child of the age, a child of uncertainty and doubt’ (XXVIII/1, 176). This view of the contemporary age as one of uncertainty was to be repeated many times, by characters in his later novels as well as in his own journalistic writings. For example, Lebedev in *The Idiot* complains that the modern age lacks a binding idea capable of uniting men and nations

and preventing the disintegration and discord so characteristic of European political, social and personal life in the nineteenth century (VIII, 315; Pt 3, Sec. 4). While acknowledging here what Gary Saul Morson has called 'the irony of origins', in that these views are articulated by a character not otherwise identifiable with Dostoevskii, it would be perverse in the light of all the evidence not to sense the author's own values underpinning Lebedev's outburst.¹² For Dostoevskii Europe, including Russia, was at a transitional stage when the old social, moral and psychological structures were decaying and new ones had not yet fully emerged to take their place. In his *Diary of a Writer* for January 1877 he describes how in Russia the old landowning order is undergoing 'some new, still unknown, but radical change [...] some enormous regeneration into novel, still latent, almost utterly unknown forms' (xxv, 35). The same forces of uncertainty, dissolution, re-creation and unpredictability were at work also in most other areas of Russian and European life, in Dostoevskii's view. They manifested themselves in such political, social and cultural phenomena as the on-going processes of revolution, the rapidly changing social and economic order prompted by the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism, the collapse or erosion of traditional unifying social structures such as church and family, and the growth of individualism in both society and, following the Romantic movement, the artistic and cultural products of that society.

The contemporary age was for Dostoevskii a 'thunderous epoch permeated with so many colossal, astounding and rapidly shifting actual events' (xxv, 193). The present was a process rather than a firmly defined condition, and surely it demanded a new 'realism' to capture its essential provisionality and uncertainty. Yet many novelists wrote as though nothing was changing. In the conclusion to *A Raw Youth* the hero's former mentor, to whom he has sent a copy of his disordered memoir, remarks that in the current age a writer who wishes to depict a stable and orderly pattern of life has no choice but to write historical novels about a vanished reality, for there is no such order and stability in the present. He goes on to say:

Oh, and in the historical form you can depict a multitude of details that are still extraordinarily pleasant and comforting! You can even so enthrall the reader that he will mistake a historical picture for one still possible nowadays. Such a work, in the hands of a great talent, would belong not so much to Russian literature as to Russian history. It would be an artistically finished picture of a Russian mirage, but one that actually existed as long as no one guessed it was a mirage. (XIII, 454)

The 'great talent' offering mirages of Russian life is a thinly veiled reference to Tolstoi whose work, like that of other contemporary realists, was for

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Dostoevskii misleading and ultimately unrealistic in the way it suggested stability and permanence where there was in fact only discord and dissolution. While the majority of readers would probably not wish to join Dostoevskii in dismissing Tolstoi as a historical novelist even in works set ostensibly in his present – and, indeed, might even point, as Morson does in this volume, to the ways in which Dostoevskii's art represents a development rather than a rejection of Tolstoian narrative with its emphasis on presenting life as process – there is something in what he says. At the centre of Tolstoi's moral and artistic universe there does appear to remain a profound confidence in the enduring power of normality. This reveals itself in characters such as the Oblonskiis in *Anna Karenina* or the Rostovs in *War and Peace*, who stand as a touchstone of that normality and whose values ultimately endure in the face of the individual tragedy of others or cataclysmic historical events. Stability is the keynote of Tolstoi's novelistic world; life recomposes itself in the end; the ripples that have momentarily disturbed the surface eventually fade to reveal again the underlying permanencies.

For Dostoevskii, though, the ripples had now become the underlying permanency, and in his own art he struggled from the start to devise new artistic forms that would not finalise or stabilise the shifting uncertainties of the age they purported to depict: forms in which deep probing of the innermost and darkest recesses of the human soul took the place of portraiture and *paysage*; where coincidence, symbolism and mythography threatened to overwhelm the limits of verisimilitude; where the narrative point of view refused to locate itself in a secure vantage point and instead lured the reader into perceptual and ontological doubt; and where the clash of ideas took place not in the polite and limited confines of the conversation and the drawing room, but in the infinite spaces of the souls of his possessed characters. In his highly evocative meditation on the experience of reading Dostoevskii, which serves as a conclusion to this volume, Gary Saul Morson shows how Dostoevskii sought to find an alternative to traditional narrative, an alternative that would offer genuine uncertainty of outcome instead of the foreclosed possibilities and compromised immediacy of a structured and foreshadowed dénouement. Among the characteristics of this anti-determinist narrative, a form that bestows real freedom upon fiction and upon those who lead their lives within it, Morson identifies the following: *suspense*, or the intensification of moments when a character is confronted by a choice of possibilities, so that the reader experiences the reality of that choice; the technique of *sideshadowing*, which presents time 'not as a line of single points but as a *field of possibilities*' with no single structured outcome; and an approach to psychology based on the view that intentions are not fixed but an evolving process, so that actions too are part of a process, not the result or outcome

of it. These characteristics contribute to a novel form in which 'at every moment the author would know what he was doing, but not what he was going to do. He would be guided not by a single design but by an evolving set of possibilities.'

Broadly speaking, the immense critical literature that has arisen in response to the challenge of explicating the nature of Dostoevskii's art is, like that devoted to most great writers, conventionally divisible into, on the one hand, specialised works explicitly directed at an academic readership comprised of 'experienced' Dostoevskii scholars (and therefore implicitly inaccessible to the general reader and those approaching the writer for the first time), and, on the other, 'introductory' works explicitly directed at that general readership (and therefore implicitly of little interest to the specialist). This conventional division has gone unchallenged for so long that it has acquired the status of a clear and immutable truth; yet it begs a lot of questions and makes a lot of assumptions. First of all it seems to contain the implication that the 'advanced' reader is somehow a more sophisticated, and therefore 'better', reader of Dostoevskii. This is not self-evidently true, and those who remember the impact of their first reading of the works of this most immediately challenging novelist will be loath to dismiss that reading as somehow inferior. Secondly, the division also contains the implication that the discourse required for critical mediation between Dostoevskii and his 'advanced' reader is necessarily different from that appropriate to a general readership, and that the former therefore necessarily excludes the latter. It is arguable, though, that whoever writes about this most accessible, and in a very real sense 'popular', author in a discourse that is exclusive and inaccessible has, at best, perpetrated a failure of judgement and, at worst, is guilty of that dry scholasticism which the Russian writer Alexander Herzen dismissed so adroitly in his description of 'the guild of scholars': 'This jealous caste wants to keep the light to itself, and it surrounds knowledge with a forest of scholasticism, barbarous terminology and ponderous, discouraging language. In the same way the farmer sows a thorny bush around his plot, so that those who impudently try to crawl through will prick themselves a dozen times and tear their clothing all to shreds. All in vain! The time of the aristocracy of knowledge has passed . . .'¹³

The present volume, therefore, starts from the assumption that a critical work capable of offering fresh insights to the Dostoevskii specialist need not be inaccessible to the new reader, and indeed may be explicitly *directed* at the latter as well as the former. In order to achieve this dual objective the present *Companion* approaches its task in a way different from that adopted by other volumes in this series that are focussed on a single author,

and indeed from that characteristic of most 'accessible' critical studies of Dostoevskii. These have tended to be of the 'life and works' variety and have offered a linear, evaluative account of the writer's biography, of his social/historical/cultural/intellectual 'context', and of his 'major' writings. To produce another account of that sort is clearly unnecessary, and to do so would also, arguably, be a disservice to Dostoevskii himself, in that it would serve to reconfirm the implications and assumptions that go along with a familiar and long-established approach to his art. This is not to say that there is necessarily anything wrong with such an approach. Quite the contrary: works such as Konstantin Mochulsky's *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work* (1967), Edward Wasiolek's *Dostoevsky: The Major Fiction* (1964) and, most recently, Joseph Frank's multi-volume critical biography (1976–2000) are outstanding contributions to Dostoevskii studies and will remain indispensable for future readers. But the approach they adopt is not the only one appropriate to an 'introductory' study, and in this volume we shall be seeking to establish parameters additional to those of 'life and works', 'text and context', onto which to map the characteristics of Dostoevskii's art.

We must start by asking ourselves what traditional 'life and works' studies in fact achieve. In particular, do they produce what might be termed 'collateral' effects in their readership, in the sense of effects additional to and aside from those explicitly intended by their authors? It seems to me first that, consciously or unconsciously, they promote in the reader a receptiveness to an exclusively linear account of progression from youth to experience and from artistic immaturity to genius. Such progression may indeed be a reality but it is often too neat and comforting an assumption, and one that discourages other, complementary ways of looking at Dostoevskii and the artistic works he has created. Secondly, such accounts establish, as a by-product of their concept of progression, a canonical description of Dostoevskii's 'major' and 'minor' works which is rarely, if ever, challenged. There may well be very sound reasons for the existence of such a canon and for the lack of challenge to the assumption that, say, *Crime and Punishment* is superior to Dostoevskii's unfinished early novel *Netochka Nezvanova*, and it is certainly not the intention here to encourage the sort of extreme cultural relativism and downright failures of judgement sometimes discernible in the more extreme manifestations of 'cultural studies'. Let us rather subject the traditional canon to fresh, implicit interrogation by other approaches to Dostoevskii, and let us not be too surprised if its hierarchies survive such interrogation more or less intact: *Crime and Punishment* does indeed receive more attention than *Netochka Nezvanova* in the present volume, but the important thing is that it does so as the result of an approach which, by not starting from the rehearsal of familiar canonical hierarchies among

Dostoevskii's texts, frees up the reader to approach those texts in different ways. Thirdly, all but the best of the traditional introductions to Dostoevskii, as they migrate between 'life' and 'works', are vulnerable to the tendency to suggest perhaps too simplistic an account of the relationship between 'text' and 'context', between Dostoevskii's artistic products and the environment in which they were created, usually in terms of the 'influence' of the latter upon the former. Moreover, in establishing contexts and sources of such 'influence', traditional accounts have tended in general to prioritise what is now familiarly termed 'high culture' over 'low culture'. These are terms that should not be allowed to go unscrutinised, and we shall return to them shortly.

The present volume seeks to occupy a different niche in the market by adopting an approach designed to persuade the student to think about Dostoevskii and his art in a way different from that encouraged by the implicit assumptions of the 'life and works' approach discussed above. Most obviously, it adopts a different approach to authorship by virtue of being an edited volume bringing together the insights of some of the finest contemporary Western Dostoevskii scholars in a way that militates against singularity of critical perception whilst hopefully not dissolving into lack of coherence. The multi-authored critical volume is already a familiar form in Dostoevskii studies, and there have been several very successful examples in both recent and not so recent times.¹⁴ These have, though, tended to follow, in part if not in whole, the structures and embedded assumptions of the traditional approach, with essays devoted sequentially to separate 'major' works (sometimes with a more general preliminary essay on 'minor' or early works). The present volume seeks to avoid the assumptions that emerge as by-products of the linear, progressive view of Dostoevskii's career by adopting an approach structured upon what might be termed 'horizontal' (i.e. broadly speaking, 'thematic') sections through the author's life, works and cultural context, rather than the more familiar 'vertical' sections produced by linear accounts of Dostoevskii's life and works on a year-by-year or text-by-text basis. (Although for the sake of readers in need of some initial orientation in the chronology of Dostoevskii's career this Introduction does attempt to justify the selection of topics addressed by seeking to show how they emerge from the author's biographical, social and cultural experience, while the Chronology of major events and works offers a quick point of reference.) In selecting the topics that make up these horizontal sections the editor and contributors have sought to foreground the fact that Dostoevskii's writings were produced amidst a variety of cultural stimuli and assumptions, and to encourage awareness of the extent to which the nature of his texts was subject to manipulation – sometimes in ways acknowledged explicitly, on

other occasions implicitly – by the effects of those cultural stimuli and of the societal structures and relationships in which the process of production was embedded. Some of these stimuli, assumptions, structures and relationships were highly public and visible, deriving from ‘high’ culture such as the Russian literary tradition or contemporary political, social or scientific debate; others arose in less overtly public circumstances and from ‘low’ cultural forms and relationships which, although perhaps less immediately visible to the reader of Dostoevskii’s texts, impinged just as decisively on the day-to-day circumstances of their production. Examples of the latter might include Dostoevskii’s economic status as a professional writer at the mercy of deadlines; the demands of serial publication; his sensitivity to the literary and moral tastes of his readership; his awareness of popular lore and tradition; and the requirements of censorship, whether explicitly stated or ‘second-guessed’ by the author himself as a form of self-censorship.

We need to be careful here, for this sort of easy assumption that the effects of ‘high’ culture may be clearly separated out from those of ‘low’ culture turns out to be highly problematical. For a start the reader might reasonably ask for an explanation of what these terms mean. Attempts to theorise categorical definitions have been made elsewhere and are beyond the remit of this volume, where the terms are used rather more casually in order to suggest the following distinctions. First of all, the effects of high culture manifest themselves primarily in what is now commonly termed a ‘top-down’ way, in that they emerge from the activities of those élite parts of society, individuals or social groups that enjoy the most authority, whether that authority be political, economic or cultural. The effects of low culture, a term which here is used to embrace commercial as well as popular culture, may be perceived as operating in a ‘bottom-up’ way through the conditions affecting the artist at work and through his experience of mass culture. In reality, of course, there is a complex interference among cultural forms: the effects of popular culture are as likely to find their way into the work of a writer like Dostoevskii through the way that culture has been mediated in *belles-lettres* as they are directly; and censorship – whether in its official form or through the ideological inclinations of particular journals and their editors – is just as likely to operate in a bottom-up way, since an author will inevitably write, consciously or unconsciously, to a pattern of what he thinks he can get away with.

It is hoped that discussion of the topics selected for the essays in this volume will disclose some of this complexity. In making that selection the overall principle has been to identify areas that had an enduring impact upon, and resonance in, Dostoevskii’s art and which, in some cases if not all, have not been addressed in an appropriately persistent or sophisticated way in previous critical introductions. The period of Dostoevskii’s youth and the

circumstances surrounding his early career as a writer help us to identify at once several key areas that were to impinge upon the production of all his subsequent work in one way or another. The first of these is the way in which his own experience of family life in his youth and adolescence helped to shape his views both on the reality of family structures in mid-nineteenth-century Russia and on the ideal form he came to envisage that such relationships should take, views which were to contribute significantly to the conception and ideological shape of his writings. The young Dostoevskii's experience of family life was mixed. On the one hand, he did experience the intimacy of the nuclear family in the years before he was sent away to boarding school, albeit under the gaze of a strict and austere father who appears from the young man's correspondence to have evoked respect and fear, rather than warm devotion. Moreover, his subsequent relationship with his brother Mikhail – a relationship in which each served the other as best friend, confidant and literary ally – was extraordinarily intense and lasted until Mikhail's death in 1864. On the other hand, Dostoevskii's mother died in 1837, he found life difficult and lonely at school, and his father died in 1839 in circumstances that remain unclear but which suggest the possibility that he was murdered by his serfs – all indicating that Dostoevskii was not unaware of family disorder. Susanne Fusso's essay demonstrates how he subsequently developed a vision of the nineteenth-century Russian family that was the polar opposite of the idylls presented by Tolstoi and Turgenev, and how he came to see the depiction of the dissolution of the family as a civic duty. Indeed, that dissolution was to become for him a metaphor for the wider collapse of Russia's political, social, moral and spiritual fabric as traditional values were swept aside in the intelligentsia's rush to embrace foreign ideologies that were alien to the Russian way of life. Dostoevskii's belief that organic family relations, based upon a core of shared moral values, unconditional love and mutual reliance, were at the heart of an ideal social order explains the persistence with which the idea of family disorder recurs in his works as a means to explore the cognate themes of guilt and responsibility.

After his time in boarding school, in January 1838 Dostoevskii entered the St Petersburg Academy of Military Engineering, where with his dreamy and romantic nature he made an unlikely military trainee. He did, however, form an intense friendship with Ivan Shidlovskii, a Romantic poet who did much to shape the young man's aesthetic tastes, which during the years at the Academy embraced Pushkin and Gogol; the great European classics, Shakespeare, Goethe, Corneille and Racine; the adventure fiction of Walter Scott; the fantasies of E. T. A. Hoffmann; the works of Schiller; and the social melodramas of Balzac, George Sand, Victor Hugo and Eugène Sue. In August 1843 Dostoevskii completed his studies at the Academy and soon after

entered the Engineering Corps, but his years of study had done little to attract him to a military career. He turned instead to literature, firstly with a translation of Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet* in 1844 and then with his debut as a novelist in his own right in 1846 when both *Poor Folk* and *The Double* appeared, the first to great critical acclaim, the second to critical disparagement. These were difficult years financially, and Dostoevskii's correspondence with his brother discloses a constant twin preoccupation with literature and money, to the extent that from this point onwards the act of writing was rarely free – both in his mind and in reality – from commercial and financial contamination. The significance of literature and money as components of the cultural environment in which Dostoevskii worked is addressed by several essays in the present volume. My own treatment of metafictional strategies in the early works sets out to suggest the extent to which the experience of literature was incorporated into the way the young Dostoevskii saw, and wrote, his world and to demonstrate how the acts of writing and reading are thematised in those works. The essay first shows how in *Poor Folk* the manipulation of the epistolary narrative form, with its creation of a hero who is also a reader and writer, permits a rich and subversive narrative irony, and secondly illustrates the complex way Dostoevskii uses 'source' texts to signpost routes through his other works of the period. Boris Christa's contribution sets out, with a clarity that has not been approached in previous treatments of the subject, the unusual level of significance that money possesses in Dostoevskii's works, a significance that derives not only from its thematic importance as a source of either great power or great suffering, but also from the use of named sums of money as semiotic markers that allow more precise navigation of Dostoevskii's texts. As Christa eloquently shows, 'money talks' in Dostoevskii, serving as a profoundly expressive means of literary communication. It is effective as a major element in the construction or deconstruction of plot or character identity, in that the way money is acquired (e.g. through crime) or used (e.g. in gambling) makes precise, if oblique, statements about its owner and his/her actions or intentions. It can also allow the sub-textual expression and apprehension of literary and social taboos, the direct confrontation of which was not permitted by the conventions of the time. Perhaps the clearest example of this in Dostoevskii's novels is the use of money to infer erotic subtexts of sexual subjugation and exploitation: financial transactions and relationships are readily deconstructible into sexual ones.

In the spring of 1846 Dostoevskii met Mikhail Petrashevskii, an eccentric intellectual with socialist leanings who ran a Friday-evening discussion group at his home. Within a year he was a regular at these gatherings, where the political thought of Fourier, Blanc, Saint-Simon, Leroux, Proudhon and

others was discussed in the context of a Russia benighted by the reactionary policies of Tsar Nicholas I. Although hardly a political animal – despite later claims in his *Diary of a Writer* that he had dangerously revolutionary tendencies – Dostoevskii was drawn into a political conspiracy that resulted in the arrest of the Petrashevskii circle in April 1849. The ringleaders, including Dostoevskii, were imprisoned, tried, sentenced to death and subjected to a horrifying mock execution, before finally being sent into imprisonment and hard labour in Siberia, followed by a further period of exile. He did not return to European Russia, or resume his interrupted literary career, until the end of 1859. All biographies rightly emphasise the importance of this period for Dostoevskii, a period when he was forced to mingle with ordinary criminals (political prisoners were not segregated); when he discovered the inner strength and spiritual depths of the ordinary Russian, as well as the extent to which the intellectual classes had lost touch with that strength and those depths; when he was forced to rethink his deepest convictions, and when he rediscovered the meaning of the Orthodox faith that had been instilled in him by a zealous father in his childhood. In her essay on Dostoevskii and the Russian folk heritage Faith Wigzell shows how the writer's interest in folklore was also stimulated and changed by his Siberian experiences, and how the profound knowledge of the people and their beliefs which he gained in prison provided him with a means to articulate his evolving moral and intellectual stance, to the extent that he came to see the values of ordinary Russians, as embodied in their oral and religious culture, as the key to Russia's salvation from the diseases of Western European intellectualism that had infected the educated classes. Wigzell shows that the novels that best express these views, especially *The Devils* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, are profoundly folklorised in the sense that their philosophical, religious and narrative cores are contaminated with, and enlarged by, folk discourses and references. Her attempt to unravel the extent and nature of this contamination for a readership unversed in Russian folk tradition profoundly enriches appreciation of the works. Malcolm Jones's essay complements Wigzell's by showing how the Siberian experience and direct encounter with the unspoilt Russian folk revitalised Dostoevskii's religious faith to the extent that he returned from exile not only a Christian, but also a Christian novelist. However, although Christianity was central to Dostoevskii's subsequent art, its centrality was problematical. The great novels are not vehicles for the straightforward, finalised affirmation of a Christian world-view, but rather arenas in which faith is 'engaged in pitched battle with the most desolate atheism'. Jones analyses the post-Siberian work in the light of Dostoevskii's ability to identify himself imaginatively with both faith and the extremes of unbelief and to dramatise the process of rethinking Christianity in dialogue

with disbelief and the various challenges posed by a Godless ‘scientific’ age. The great achievement of that work is the way it leaves the impression that the outcome of this dialogue is uncertain, and Dostoevskii’s treatment of religion perfectly accords with Morson’s description of an artist who ‘knew what he was doing, but not what he was going to do’. As Jones concludes, whatever the ‘real author’ may have believed or desired, the ‘implied author’ of the texts confronts us with a world in which questions remain unresolved and unresolvable.

It was not only Dostoevskii who underwent a process of radical transformation during the years of his Siberian imprisonment and exile. The Russia to which he returned at the start of the 1860s was unrecognisable from that he had left a decade earlier. Nicholas I had died in 1855, after thirty years of stultifying rule that had led to political and economic stagnation and Russia’s catastrophic defeat at the hands of Western powers in the Crimean War. The new tsar Alexander II came to the throne pledged to a process of fundamental reform that culminated in 1861 with the emancipation of the serfs. In the new, more tolerant climate intellectual life was also reinvigorated, and debate on major issues exploded in the pages of newspapers and periodicals. However, the revitalisation of intellectual activity also led to factionalism as conservatives, liberals and radicals disagreed over the nature and extent of the reforms. This period saw the emergence of a younger generation of radical thinkers intolerant of tradition, implacably opposed to a reforming government that had not gone far enough, and dismissive of the previous generation that had tolerated the stagnation of Nicholaevan Russia. The mood of this moment is beautifully caught in Turgenev’s novel of 1862, *Fathers and Sons*. Dostoevskii threw himself into the polemical fray, and between 1861 and 1865 he edited, along with his brother Mikhail, the periodicals *Time* (1861–3) and *Epoch* (1864–5). Initially he used the pages of these publications to urge a process of national reconciliation, but he became progressively more intolerant of the extremism, materialism, utilitarianism and a-historic indifference to national identity espoused by the radical camp led by the journalists N. G. Chernyshevskii and N. A. Dobroliubov, and *Time* and *Epoch* became mouthpieces for an increasingly conservative nationalism. Derek Offord’s essay seeks to locate Dostoevskii in the polemical exchanges of his time and to evaluate his role as an *intelligent*, that is a member of the socially engaged Russian intelligentsia. It demonstrates his explicit assumption of that role through his willingness to pursue a career in journalism, or ‘publicism’ (*publitsistika*), alongside that of author of imaginative fiction, and through the way he used his own journalism as a test-bed for the world-view that informs the novels for which he is better remembered. Dostoevskii’s journalistic contributions to intellectual debate continued to

the end of his life through his editorship of the journal *The Citizen* in the 1870s and through his *Diary of a Writer*, which was still on-going at the time of his death in 1881; but Offord's essay concentrates on case studies offered by his journalism of the early 1860s and his travel memoir of 1863, *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*. As well as this sort of overt identification through publicistic activity, it is clear that Dostoevskii also assumed the role of member of the intelligentsia *implicitly*. In the 1840s, as I point out, his sense of being in a literary tradition had contributed to his self-image and helped to shape his verbal persona. It is clear from Offord's essay that Dostoevskii was similarly aware of the 'job-description' of an *intelligent*, and evidence of his willingness to assume such a persona emerges from the way his journalistic writings appropriate verbal or structural characteristics (Offord calls them 'flaws') typical of the genre as it was currently practised, from the way *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* appears self-consciously to flaunt its own indebtedness to travel writing of the past, and from the way Dostoevskii uses verbal and stylistic parody to summon up the ghosts of his ideological opponents and thereby dialogise his assertions.

Offord makes it clear that at the heart of Dostoevskii's hostility to the radicalism of the 1860s was the latter's exclusive reliance on the findings of human reason and its elevation of the natural sciences to the summit of human knowledge at the expense of spiritual insight, instinct or faith. Such foregrounding of scientific enquiry and the scientific method was, of course, characteristic of an age which was witnessing the technological progress generated by industrialisation, and the retreat of metaphysical explanations in the face of the triumphal entry of scientific rationality into areas where it had previously been deemed inappropriate: Darwin's *Origin of Species* was challenging traditional assumptions about creation; Marx was offering explanations of society and history in terms of objective and immutable 'scientific' laws. Diane Thompson shows that, despite the heroic march of science in the nineteenth century, the truths it offered were finite truths constrained and frozen within the reductive formulae of inflexible physical laws. For Dostoevskii, however, truth was infinite, commensurate with the wisdom of God's creation, and the search for it was an unfinalisable spiritual – not merely intellectual – quest. The nineteenth-century worship of science was a modern form of idolatry, and the idols had come from Western Europe as Russia caught on late to the scientific revolution. Dostoevskii's attitude to science therefore plays out in another key his trepidation at the sacrifice of traditional Russian cultural principles and values on the altar of Westernisation. Thompson's essay, however, resists the temptation to explore science solely as a barometer of Dostoevskii's intellectual condition, and focusses instead on the poetics of scientific allusions in the post-Siberian

fiction, where references to scientific facts are absorbed into the utterances of a particular character and are thus charged with that character's 'idea', in the sense of what he stands for. The pretensions of science to the assertion of absolute, unchallenged and therefore 'monologic' truth are thus relativised and 'dialogised' in Dostoevskii's fiction, and truth is shown to reside not in concepts but in the person, Christ serving as what Thompson calls the 'model of personhood'.

The scientific method embraced so enthusiastically by the radicals was also applied by them to psychology, and the result was a reductive 'science' of human nature and behaviour that emphasised self-interest and utilitarianism and stripped man of free moral choice. The hero of *Notes from Underground* (1864) was Dostoevskii's first sustained attempt to put such reductive theoretical psychology to the test of a morally complex individual who dodges and weaves through the challenges posed by contingency, rationality and physical necessity in order to secure the goal of independence and free moral choice. As a champion of these values he is hardly exemplary, as Thompson shows, and he subsides into inertia; but he does embody Dostoevskii's acute awareness of the complexity of human psychology, a complexity strikingly embodied in the major characters of all the great novels to come: *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1868), *The Devils* (1872), *A Raw Youth* (1875) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). Robert Belknap's essay shows how in creating such a psychology for his fictional characters Dostoevskii revealed his awareness of existing psychological systems and theories and how these entered his fiction either directly or as something to be reacted against. Belknap's analysis confirms that of Thompson by describing Dostoevskii's rejection of the materialist neurological psychology that formed part of the deterministic scientific outlook of the radicals of the 1860s. But the existence of such a psychological system and his own strong reactions against it were instrumental in helping shape his own approach to and use of psychology, an approach structured upon the revelation of the psyche outside the realm of causation and reaction, by means of the gratuitous act. This led Dostoevskii to a preoccupation in his major novels with the psychology of crime, the psychology of violence and the psychology of guilt. Belknap discusses how Dostoevskii also took issue with the stance of the radicals in his elaboration of a psychology of artistic creation that emphasised the inspirational process and unconscious creation in the face of those like Chernyshevskii and Dobroliubov who would reduce art, along with the rest of human activity, to the predictable outcome of self-interest and utility.

It is generally acknowledged by Dostoevskii's critics and biographers that the appearance of *Notes from Underground* signalled the end of his literary apprenticeship and ushered in the period of the great novels, to which it

stands as a preface in its philosophical toughness, psychological depth and narrative complexity (an apparent monologue that dissolves into a plurality of conflicting voices). But it was the great popularity enjoyed by *Crime and Punishment* that secured the author his position at the heart of Russian literary and intellectual activity and a literary reputation matched only by that of Tolstoi, whose *War and Peace* was serialised alongside *Crime and Punishment* in the same periodical, the *Russian Herald*. But Dostoevskii was dependent upon that activity not only for his reputation, but also for his livelihood, a situation that remained essentially unaltered until his death in 1881. By the end of his life his financial affairs were more or less in order, but the period between the collapse of his journal *Epoch* in 1865 (a year which also saw him assume financial responsibility for the family of his late brother Mikhail) and the completion of *The Devils* in 1872 were years of acute financial hardship, not helped by his pathological addiction to roulette. The period is marked by constant indebtedness, advances from editors against impossible deadlines, and writing against the clock. In Dostoevskii's own mind commercial pressures 'competed' with 'pure' artistic judgement in a way his rivals had never experienced. In 1866 he had to hire the stenographer Anna Snitkina, later his wife, in order to write *The Gambler* within a month, whilst simultaneously working on *Crime and Punishment*, and thus discharge his obligation to the unscrupulous publisher Stellovskii. During his work on *The Idiot* he felt that financial pressure had forced him to use an idea that was not yet ready; and while working on *The Devils* he wrote to his niece Sonia on 17 August 1870 complaining: 'If only you knew how hard it is to be a writer, and to carry such a burden! I know for certain that if I had two or three stable years for this novel, as Turgenev, Goncharov and Tolstoi have, I would write a work they would still be talking about in a hundred years!' (xxix/1, 136). As we have seen, Christa's essay demonstrates how in Dostoevskii's novels due acknowledgement is given to the power of money and to the way commercial transactions and relationships may be transmuted into the psychological and existential. William Mills Todd's essay complements this approach perfectly by concentrating on money and the commercial transaction not just as an ingredient of the artistic product, but also as an accompaniment to the creative process, giving due recognition to the fact that Dostoevskii was not only a writer – he was also a professional writer. Todd's essay gives the lie to the sort of notion expressed by Dostoevskii to his niece that there can be any state of 'pure' aesthetic creation independent of 'competing' commercial pressures, as well as to the idea that the dependence of the text on such external pressures must necessarily produce aesthetically adverse consequences. He pays particular attention to the fact that Dostoevskii's major novels were serialised and indicates how the pressures of deadlines were reflected in the

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form of those novels, leading to the creation of a specific poetics of serial publication. This is a theme that Morson also takes up when he suggests that Dostoevskii exploited the commercial reality of serial publication of his works in order to create his 'processual' novel form, a form that intensified the sense of presentness and kept open character destinies and plot options.

The above paragraphs have sought to justify the selection of what has been included in this volume. A word, finally, about what has been omitted. There is no doubt that a different editor relying on different contributors would have come up with a different selection of topics and would have argued just as emphatically in justification of that selection. I am aware of several themes that would have enhanced the approach adopted here, but which have had to be omitted for reasons of space or because their inclusion would have encroached significantly on the areas treated by existing contributors. I have also tried to avoid the inclusion of topics that have been thoroughly treated elsewhere in the critical literature. There is therefore nothing specifically on illness, despite the fact that Dostoevskii was himself an epileptic who exploited the pathology of that disease for his own artistic purposes, for the subject has been comprehensively investigated by James L. Rice.¹⁵ The same is true of the theme of suicide, equally prominent in the novels as an artistic device and equally well studied by Irina Paperno and N. N. Shneidman.¹⁶ The city is a major component of Dostoevskii's fiction right from the works of the 1840s, serving to ground the neuroses of his characters and to bind his novels to the 'St Petersburg tradition' evident in Russian literature from Alexander Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman* (1833) to Andrei Bitov's *Pushkin House* (1978) and beyond; but this too has been comprehensively covered in the critical literature. Issues of sexuality and gender are touched upon in several essays in this volume, but they have received fuller treatment elsewhere.¹⁷

Notwithstanding such omissions, the issues that are addressed in the present collection do serve to map out the most significant areas of the cultural territory in which the production of Dostoevskii's texts was located, and this surely should be a major aim of any critical companion to that writer.

Notes

- 1 George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky* (London: Faber, 1959), pp. 346–7.
- 2 Alex de Jonge, *Dostoevsky and the Age of Intensity* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1975), p. 1.
- 3 See, for example, *Le mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), pp. 140–50.
- 4 Vladimir Nabokov, 'Fyodor Dostoevski' in *Lectures on Russian Literature* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982), pp. 97–135.

- 5 John Middleton Murry, *Fyodor Dostoevsky: A Critical Study* (London: Martin Secker, 1916).
- 6 George Moore, 'Preface' to F. Dostoevsky, *Poor Folk*, trans. Lena Milman (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1894), pp. vii–xx.
- 7 See B. Kuznetsov, *Einstein and Dostoevsky* (London: Hutchinson, 1972), p. 7.
- 8 For a summary of Lawrence's views on Dostoevskii see W. J. Leatherbarrow (ed.), *Dostoevskii and Britain* (Oxford and Providence: Berg, 1995), pp. 31–3.
- 9 Richard Kappen's *Die Idee des Volkes bei Dostojewski* (Würzburg: Triltsch, 1936) is an example of such an approach. It is now of historical interest only.
- 10 For an over-view of Dostoevskii's critical reception see W. J. Leatherbarrow, *Fedor Dostoevsky: A Reference Guide* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1990), pp. xv–xxxii.
- 11 Ivan Alexandrovich Goncharov (1812–91). Russian novelist, best known for *Oblomov* (1859).
- 12 Gary Saul Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's 'Diary of a Writer' and the Traditions of Literary Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 77.
- 13 A. I. Herzen, 'Dilettantism in Science' (1843). Quoted from W. J. Leatherbarrow and D. C. Offord (eds.), *A Documentary History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1987), p. 136.
- 14 See, for example, Rene Wellek (ed.), *Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1962); and Malcolm V. Jones and Garth M. Terry (eds.), *New Essays on Dostoyevsky* (Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 15 James L. Rice, *Dostoevsky and the Healing Art: An Essay in Literary and Medical History* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985).
- 16 Irina Paperno, *Suicide as a Cultural Institution in Dostoevsky's Russia* (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), and N. N. Shneidman, *Dostoevsky and Suicide* (Oakville, N.Y. and London: Mosaic Press, 1984).
- 17 See, for example, Nina Pelikan Strauss, *Dostoevsky and the Woman Question: Rereadings at the End of a Century* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994), and Barbara Heldt, *Terrible Perfection: Women and Russian Literature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987).