The Reception of Fedor Dostoevskii in Britain (1869-1935)

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Thesis Submitted for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Bakhtin Centre, University of Sheffield
October 2000

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank a number of people and institutions that made it possible for me to undertake this research project and to bring this thesis to completion. In the first instance, I would like to acknowledge the Bakhtin Centre and the Department of Russian and Slavonic Studies at the University of Sheffield for offering me the possibility to achieve a doctoral qualification in Britain. In particular, I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor David Shepherd and Professor William Leatherbarrow for the provision of intellectual support and for giving me the necessary confidence in the validity of the project undertaken. In the second instance, I would like to acknowledge the British Academy for its funding that gave me the concrete opportunity to turn the initial proposal of research into a fully-fledged dissertation. I must also thank the secretary of the Department of Russian and Slavonic Studies at the University of Sheffield, Ms Carol Speight, and the staff of Sheffield Central Library and Sheffield University Library.

Also, I wish to thank a number of people that directly or indirectly contributed in turning my desire to do research work into a reality. First, I would like to thank the members of my family, Carmela, Giovanni, and Francesco, for their continued moral and material support, even in moments when the results did not quite meet the initial expectations. I also would like to give my special thanks to Dr David Miller, for me both a continuous source of intellectual stimulation and a concrete human support, real antidote against dangerous drifts towards despondency.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Prof. Giovanni La Guardia of the Department of Sociology of Literature at the University of Naples; the seminar group of the Sociology of Literature course, for me a thought-provoking arena of many stimulating discussions; Ms Stefania Suma, Mrs Jean Miller and Mr David Miller Senior, and Ms Luisa Matera.

Ringraziamenti

Vorrei ringraziare innanzitutto il Bakhtin Centre e il Dipartimento di Russo dell'Università di Sheffield per avermi dato la possibilità concreta di intraprendere il dottorato di ricerca; in particolare il ringraziamento è rivolto al Prof. David Shepherd e al Prof. William Leatherbarrow. Vorrei anche esprimere la mia gratitudine alla British Academy per aver finanziato il dottorato fino al momento del suo completamento, alla segretaria del Dipartimento di Russo presso l'Università di Sheffield, Ms Carol Speight, e allo staff delle biblioteche cittadine e universitarie di Sheffield.

Ci sono inoltre varie altre persone che hanno fatto sì che il mio desiderio di fare ricerca si trasformasse in realtà. Vorrei esprimere la mia più profonda gratitudine innanzitutto ai membri della mia famiglia, Carmela Giovanni e Francesco, per il loro continuo appoggio materiale e morale, anche in momenti in cui i risultati non sembravano affatto promettenti. Un grazie speciale va anche a David Miller, che col suo calore umano e con la sua capacità di confronto, è stato, ed è tuttora, un constante stimolo intellettuale e un insostituibile compagno di vita.

Ultimi nell'ordine, ma non ultimi per importanza, vorrei ringraziare: il Prof. Giovanni La Guardia, del Dipartimento di Sociologia della Letteratura presso l'I.U.O. di Napoli, per essere stato positivamente determinante nella mia formazione e per avermi trasmesso la sua passione per il pensiero critico; il gruppo del seminario abbinato al corso di Sociologia della Letteratura, per avere soddisfatto la mia sete di confronto in tante appassionanti discussioni; la signora Stefania Suma, la signora Jean Miller e il signor David Miller Senior, e la signora Luisa Matera.

I hereby declare that all the content of the work contained herein is the product of my individual intellectual endeavour and that all the contributory references, quotations, and sources have been rightfully acknowledged.

Abstract

This thesis deals with the reception of Fedor Dostoevskii in Britain from 1869 to 1935. The objects of investigation are reviews, essays, and monographs devoted to the Russian author and written in the designated timespan. These sources are investigated with the intention of exposing their underlying ideological tensions. In this light, the reception of Dostoevskii emerges as a process in which many elements come together. The leading argument of this thesis concerns the recognition that the impact of works of art in a determinate social setting can be measured, as it were, only by identifying a common ground of investigation. I argue that the common ground where art and society confront each other is the ideology of the aesthetic. On the basis of this critical approach, further considerations on the actual status of reception theories and their relation to literary criticism are made, which lead in their turn to a reassessment of reception and reader-response theories by means of a particular instance, the reception of Dostoevskii.

This critical approach appears to be productive in that it avoids reducing the study of reception to the compilation of different views on a certain subject. In this respect, in theoretical terms the early diffidence shown by British intellectuals towards Dostoevskii's novels is as relevant as the 'Dostoevskii cult'. These two aspects of the reception of Dostoevskii are not taken at face value, but are examined for what they reveal. I argue that the reticence towards Dostoevskii, even in the period of the so-called 'cult', bears witness to the difficulty that British intellectuals had in coming to terms with the innovative power of Dostoevskii's form. I argue that both the initial suspicious attitude towards Dostoevskii's morbidity and the subsequent manifestations of enthusiasm for his prophetic gifts, especially after the publication of Constance Garnett's translations, are not based on any aesthetic consideration of Dostoevskii's novels. Dostoevskii the artistic innovator is the great absence, while we consistently

come across Dostoevskii the prophet, Dostoevskii the psychologist and so on. I also argue that the failure of intellectuals like Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster to recognise the innovative force of Dostoevskii's novels can be read in the light of their reticence to really break with a literary tradition, which they knew was on the verge of a definitive crisis. In the course of the thesis, it is shown how this reticence seriously undermines their project of renovation of the novelistic form.

Thus, the final assumption of the thesis is that the difficulty that British intellectuals had in grasping the importance of Dostoevskii's works for the development of the novelistic genre is partly due to the persistence of psychological criticism, which focused on authorial intentions rather than on the novels themselves, and partly to the attempt to inscribe Dostoevskii's novels within the Romantic or Victorian conventions of novel writing. In the final section of the Conclusion, I argue that Dostoevskii's experiments with the novelistic form situate his writings closer to the Modernist examples of novel writing than to the Romantic ones. A brief analysis of Stavrogin's Confession aims at clarifying this aspect. Finally, I stress that Western literary criticism has become more aware of the pioneering significance of Dostoevskii's form only in the post-World War II period, while in Eastern Europe signals of recognition of the innovative potential of Dostoevskii's form emerge already by the early 1920s.

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To stay among things most familiar even, we are not permitted [...].

Rainer Maria Rilke, 'To Hölderlin', in *An Unofficial Rilke: Poems 1912-1926*, selected, introduced and translated by Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1980), p. 57.

He filled his mind with all that he read in them, with enchantments, quarrels, battles, challenges, wounds, wooings, loves, torments and other impossible nonsense; and so deeply did he steep his imagination in the belief that all the fanciful stuff he read was true, that to his mind no history in the world was more authentic.

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Adventures of Don Quixote*, trans. by J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1950), p. 32.

Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse: quel giorno piú non vi leggemmo avante.

Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1973), vol. I, 'Inferno', canto v, pp. 64-65.

1. Introduction: The 'Process' of Reception

1.1. 'Reception' vs. 'Reputation'

The decision to devote yet another study to Fedor Dostoevskii might engender a few doubts, given the amount of work already produced on the subject. Yet, the continuous interest that Dostoevskii's works still provoke today confirms their lasting artistic significance and the necessity of new interpretative modes. This thesis will deal with the works of the Russian author in their English renderings, the subject matter being the way these works have been received in Britain from the moment in which they were first reviewed in a British literary magazine or journal to the threshold of World War II.

The more obvious reason for concentrating upon Dostoevskii might seem at first to be merely a practical one. Up to now, the only comprehensive study accounting for the introduction and early reputation of Dostoevskii in this country dates from 1939.[1] There have been comparative studies on the influence of nineteenth-century Russian fiction on British and American fiction, but in these studies the space devoted to Dostoevskii is small.[2] Furthermore, even those studies entirely devoted to Dostoevskii's influence on British authors[3] cannot constitute a ground for comparison with the present study, given that in this thesis the direct influence of one author upon another is not the theoretical basis for the approach.

Helen Muchnic's monograph *Dostoevsky's English Reputation (1881-1936)* remains the most complete study we have for the timespan considered. In itself, this element might even play against the choice to embark upon a research project that does

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[1] Helen Muchnic, *Dostoevsky's English Reputation: 1881-1936* (North Hampton, Massachusetts: Smith College, Department of Modern Languages, 1939).

[2] See Dorothy Brewster, *East-West Passage: A Study in Literary Relationships* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1954), and Gilbert Phelps, *The Russian Novel in English Fiction* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1956).

[3] See W. J. Leatherbarrow (ed.), *Dostoevskii and Britain* (Oxford: Berg, 1995), almost entirely devoted to Dostoevskii's influence on British authors, and Peter Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism: 1900-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

not aim at going beyond the temporal limits set by Muchnic herself. However, if it is true that a practical issue is never *merely* practical, then the theoretical issues emerging from a modern reading of that early study demand now to be addressed in the light of a general assessment of 'reception theories'.

It is a commonplace of much literary criticism that to deal with the 'reception' of an author amounts to nothing more than an account of his reputation, fame, or fortune. This is the case with Muchnic's study for instance, or with an Italian scholar, Anna M. Guarnieri Ortolani, who wrote a similar monograph about the reception of Dostoevskii in Italy.[4] The common element of these surveys is the tangible lack of critical ambition. They mainly consist of a list of reviews, positive and negative, and of translations into English of Dostoevskii's works, and a fairly schematic record of their impact on British (or Italian) culture. Only at the end of the chapters, or at the end of the books, are the circumstances in which the reception of the Russian writer developed mentioned, and even then, the causes underlining different types of reception are not investigated in any depth. These surveys claim objective status by maintaining the putative neutrality of their methodology of inquiry. The question of the sources (not just the criteria for their selection, which sometimes can be determined by their accessibility, but also their position within a wider context, in other words the ideological standpoint of the sources) is avoided. The apparent assumption we are supposed to make is that the author of the survey is moving more in the scientific realm of social observation than in the less reliable realm of critical theory or literary criticism.

A closer analysis of these surveys reveals that underneath this supposed neutrality there are a whole series of ideological tensions. It is precisely when the literary critic pretends to be a warrior at rest, summing up the situation, that the most important and definitive directions in the formation of literary canons can become fixed. However, it is

[4] Anna Maria Guarnieri Ortolani, *Saggio sulla Fortuna di Dostoevskij in Italia* (Padova: CEDAM, 1947).

important to notice that the persistence of this kind of approach, even in concomitance with the development of theories of reception, can be understood only in relation to the ambiguous position of reception theories within the general position of literary criticism. A deeper examination of the causes of this ambiguity will be done in due course. One point that can be made now is that the instability of contemporary theories of reception is strictly linked with the instability of their main putative object of investigation: the reader. Continuous fluctuations between the figure of a reader statistically defined and improbably representative of a community of readers and the figure of a reader isolated in his psychophysical reactions to an abstractly considered text inevitably affect the credibility of these theories. A large vacuum is left, which has been, and continues to be, filled by those who have simplistically considered the concept of reception as immediately assimilable and replaceable with concepts of reputation, fame, or fortune.

This study aims at distancing itself from such reductive notions of 'reception'. Although a greater part of the research will deal with the analysis of primary sources, such as reviews and translations, the main aim of the thesis is not to establish Dostoevskii's reputation or 'fortune' in Britain, but to understand the reason behind different attitudes towards the Russian author. The point of this exercise is not to delineate a typology of the reader of Dostoevskii's novels either, but to sketch an ideological map of the tensions surrounding the reception of Dostoevskii's novels in this country. Through the analysis of these tensions we might gain a deeper insight into the kind of setting that makes possible a certain reception, and about the novels that, in many ways, orientate their own reception. The process by which works of art interact with the setting in which they are received will be under scrutiny here, in the belief that it is in this process, rather than in the origin or in the final assumed point, that lies the possibility of comprehending what we refer to as 'reception'.

1.2. They, 'The Intellectuals'

One of the pivotal figures, to which this study will make constant reference, is the figure of the 'intellectual'. This is a figure that by definition interposes itself between worlds, and whose function (and the responses to it) is therefore multiple and multifaceted. His is not just a mediatory function, but a more dynamic relationship of a social figure to the whole of society. A thorough investigation of the role of intellectuals and their function in relation to ideology is not a concern here. Because of this, I believe it is necessary to outline the theoretical horizon in which observations about intellectuals take place.

It is a complicated issue from the start, when one is compelled to ask oneself what one means by 'intellectual'. Antonio Gramsci, in an attempt to determine some parameters in relation to which the 'intellectual' ought to be defined, writes in his prison notebooks:

> The most widespread error of method seems to me that of having looked for this criterion of distinction in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities, rather than in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations.[5]

Gramsci's definition of intellectuals based on their function in society implies important theoretical consequences. First, it clears the field of some bizarre definitions of intellectuals as 'people out of the ordinary'. Edward Shils, author of a collection of articles significantly titled *The Intellectuals and The Powers and Other Essays*, gives one exemplary instance of such definition. Shils describes the intellectuals as people 'with an unusual sensitivity to the sacred, an uncommon reflectiveness about the nature of the universe, and the rules which govern their society'. In Shils' view, in every society there is 'a minority of persons who, more than the ordinary run of their fellow

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[5] *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, trans. and ed. by Quintin Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), pp. 8-9.

men, are inquiring, desirous of being in frequent communion with symbols which are more general than the immediate concrete situations of everyday life and remote in their reference in both time and space'.[6] It seems that, in Shils' eyes, the division between intellectuals and non-intellectuals is determined by nature (some people are more naturally gifted than others), and above all, it seems to be unbridgeable.[7]

In contrast with Shils' definition of the intellectual, Gramsci's theoretical stance on intellectuals allows binary oppositions to be overcome. Specifically, Gramsci reveals the inadequacy of such binaries when the ideological consequences of intellectuals' activity are to be evaluated within their institutional context. As Gramsci says:

> All the men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals. When one distinguishes between intellectuals and non-intellectuals, one is referring in reality only to the immediate social function of the professional categories of the intellectuals, [...]. This means that, although one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist.[8]

Such a broad definition does not preclude the reference to a historically determined figure whose function is defined by a conscious appropriation of a term of identification. The denomination as 'intellectuals' of a particular social group with particular characteristics obviously does not cover the totality of intellectual activities; rather the appropriation of a term is entailed within the more general historical process. As Gramsci points out, although the idea of the 'independent' or 'autonomous' intellectual is indebted to the social utopianism that found expression in idealist philosophy, '*the way intellectuals think of themselves matters*', it has 'consequences in

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[6] Edward Shils, 'The Intellectuals and the Powers', in *The Intellectuals and the Powers, and Other Essays* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 7.

[7] Edward Shils is an extreme example. However, it is striking that, although vaguely dissenting, Thomas Heyck in his study on intellectuals introduces Shils as 'the leading theorist of intellectuals'; see Thomas Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 14. This is why I felt obliged to distance clearly this study from that kind of 'personalistic' approach (though not less political), that distinguishes Shils' essays.

[8] Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 9.

the ideological and political field, consequences of wide-ranging import'.[9] Shils' case is very revealing in this respect. As Raymond Williams clarifies in *Culture and Society* and in *Keywords*, the reference to the transition from the *amateur* to the *intellectual*, as far as Britain is concerned, alludes to a *conscious* use of both terms, bringing forth implications which evoke more than mere linguistic considerations.

Gramsci is much aware of the complexity of the intellectual function, the variety of forms it assumes, and its connection with 'very concrete traditional historical processes'.[10] His distinction between the 'organic' and the 'traditional' intellectual is extremely useful when applied to the analysis of the role intellectuals played historically in a number of European countries. In a comparative analysis of the relation of French and English intellectuals to the newly established bourgeois powers, Gramsci writes:

> The new social grouping that grew on the basis of modern industrialism shows a remarkable economic corporate development but advances only gropingly in the intellectual-political field. There is a very extensive category of organic intellectuals—those, that is, who come into existence on the same intellectual terrain as the economic group—but in the higher sphere we find that the old land-owning class preserves its position of virtual monopoly. It loses its economic supremacy but maintains for a long time a politico-intellectual supremacy and is assimilated as 'traditional intellectuals' and as directive group by the new group in power. The old land-owning aristocracy is joined to the industrialists by a kind of suture, which is precisely that which in other countries unites the traditional intellectuals with the new dominant classes.[11]

The suture, as Gramsci calls it, between organic and traditional intellectuals denotes a peculiar condition of non-antagonism, of 'ideological *rapprochement*', to use Terry Eagleton's expression, between the old landed aristocracy and the new industrial bourgeoisie, which characterises the economic and political scene in Britain after the industrial revolution. In England, the new category of 'organic' intellectuals did not have to struggle for the conquest of political power, mainly because the position of

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[9] Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 7. The italics are mine.
[10] Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 11.
[11] Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 17.

virtual monopoly preserved by the land-owning class was not in direct antagonism with the position of real monopoly of economic power of the industrial bourgeoisie. Indeed, as Eagleton points out, one seemed to have to rely upon the other:

> The uneasy nineteenth-century alliance of patrician and philistine, culture and society, is among other things the tale of an ideology in search of hegemony – of a spiritually disabled bourgeoisie constrained to go to school with an aestheticizing right which speaks of organic unity, intuitive certainty and the free play of the mind.[12]

On the contrary, according to Gramsci, in France, in 1789, the political appearance of a new social grouping on the historical stage seems to have proceeded in harmony with the development of the whole nation both in the economic and in the intellectual-political field. In *L'Ancien Régime et la révolution* [1856], Alexis de Tocqueville, from a completely different perspective, seems to confirm Gramsci's point. De Tocqueville devotes a brief but interesting section of his study to the leading function that French men of letters had in mid-eighteenth-century politics. He imputes part of the dissimilarities in the development of English and French societies to the different role played by 'men of letters' in the two countries. In fact, de Tocqueville regrets that a similar suture between 'organic' and 'traditional' intellectuals did not occur in France, and implies that the lack of a hegemonic governing bloc is one of the causes of revolution. De Tocqueville argues that the revolutionary principles that French men of letters promoted were not grounded in any political praxis, and thus 'they failed to perceive the very real obstacles in the way of even the most praiseworthy reforms, and to gauge the perils involved in even the most salutary revolutions'.[13] Although, unlike England, eighteenth-century French intellectuals did not hold posts of any kind in the government of their country, they were 'interested in all that concerned the government of nations', to such a point that they examined the structure of society and

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[12] Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 62.

[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution* [Originally published as 'L'Ancien Régime et la révolution', Paris, 1856], trans. by Stuart Gilbert, intro. by Hugh Brogan (London: Fontana Press, 1971), p. 162.

criticised 'its general plan'.[14] Their theories were so successful among the masses because they filled a gap created by the lack of political participation from so-called 'civil society'. De Tocqueville is referring on the one hand to the myopic attitude of the French aristocracy, its inability to foresee that society would change with them, the aristocrats, or in spite of them, and on the other hand, to the general detachment of the middle classes, intellectuals included, from active political life. Thus, rather than co-operating, as English intellectuals did, with those who actually governed, French men of letters 'indulged in abstract theories and generalizations regarding the nature of government', without pondering enough on the consequences of their ideas. This is what really worries de Tocqueville. The unconcern of people with public affairs let them 'be carried away by the writers of the day', that usurped the place of aristocracy in the direction of public opinion.[15]

In Britain, no usurpation took place, at least not by the intellectuals. They rather succeeded, in de Tocqueville's view, where the French had failed, that is, 'in gradually modifying the spirit of their ancient institutions without destroying them'. Probably, if French intellectuals had really been integrated into political affairs, they themselves 'would not have been so prompt to clamour for a new order'.[16] De Tocqueville acutely realises the risks involved in the revolutionary claims made by some French intellectuals for the future existence of the middle classes. The demand for political and social equality, acceptable and inevitable, could degenerate into the dangerous demand for economic equality, and not to foresee this was, in de Tocqueville's opinion, a sign of the political myopia of the ruling classes. In other words, de Tocqueville perceives the advantages of the suture to which Gramsci refers, although the enduring oppression of

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[14] de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Régime*, pp. 160-62.
[15] de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Régime*, pp. 162-63.
[16] de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Régime*, p. 163.

'unjust privileges', the crystallisation of medieval practices, and the condition of diffuse 'non-freedom' of French society made it almost impossible to accomplish.

A circumstantial critique of de Tocqueville's analysis of the French revolution is not the subject matter of this study. Nevertheless, perplexities arise concerning de Tocqueville's representation of 'men of letters', or 'writers', as he sometimes refers to them. One has the impression of dealing with an abstract entity with a barely defined social connotation, which at once enters the historical arena and leads the masses to revolution. 'Visibility' or 'invisibility', 'commitment' or 'non-commitment', 'autonomy' or 'submission': any allusion to these abstractions can be significant as an instrument of analysis only if included within a wider complex of functions that negotiate, not necessarily in a conciliatory way, the tensions arising in the historical process among those powers which constitute the driving forces of society. Thus, for instance, 'invisibility' does not entail 'absence'; rather it can indicate a presence intertwined with the established powers to such an extent as to be almost coextensive with them.

However, a merely sociological analysis of the condition of intellectuals never gives a full account of the complexity of this function. Gramsci pointed out, and this still holds true, that the most recent studies on the role of intellectuals are classified under the heading of 'social studies'. An excessive emphasis on this form of analysis tends to liquidate as a matter of 'social observation' what is, in reality, a complex political and ideological issue. Thomas Heyck, for instance, in his already mentioned study *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* fails to grasp the significance of the important debate among various exponents of the British Left that took place in the 1960s. In his predominantly sociological study of intellectuals, Heyck mentions, although in a quite dismissive tone, the 'hot dispute', fought through the pages of the *New Left Review* and the *Socialist Register*, and involving intellectuals like

Perry Anderson, Tom Nairn and E. P. Thompson. The theatre of the debate was a Great Britain vexed by economic problems, and governed by the Labour Party after thirteen years of opposition. It was a political debate that tried to look back at the roots of the Labour Party and the Labour Movement in order to provide political responses to the pressing demands of its own social context. Part of the debate concerned the role that intellectuals were going to play in the renewed political panorama. The object of the quarrel was a different interpretation of the results of the English Revolution, the development of capitalist society, and the role played by movements and parties of the political Left. What concerns the present study is the different outlook, the different critical approaches, expressed by these intellectuals about their own role. As Thompson remarks: there is a 'peculiarity of the English', a particular combination of factors in which, however, the intellectuals do not necessarily play always a subordinate role. This peculiarity should not be evaluated necessarily in comparison with the achievements of the European 'intelligentsia', as Thompson accuses Anderson and Nairn of doing, given that those very achievements are debatable as absolute touchstones.

There was more at stake in this debate than a mere assertion of different points of view about a specific historic development. The claim of two different approaches, one adhering more to structuralism, the other adhering more to dialectic historicism, is significant as an *intellectual praxis* that refuses to play an ancillary role within a general political context. It is difficult then to agree with the dismissive tone used by Heyck. While acknowledging the importance of the questions raised by this debate, he criticises Thompson, Anderson, and Nairn for 'the heavy-handedness of their generalizations and the casualness of their usage of terms like "the intellectuals", and "an intelligentsia" '. In his view, they 'boldly set out in a few pages an interpretation of all of modern British history'.[17]

[17] Heyck, *The Transformation*, pp. 17-19.

It might well be true that sixty pages are not enough to cover three centuries of history, and it is obvious that the sociologist is faced by a non-sociological use of certain terminology. However, I think that to evaluate those essays in these terms is, in a sense, to miss the point. They were certainly not conceived as historical tractates. The demand by Thompson for historical accuracy is part of his critique of Anderson's structuralist approach that, although it claims to be a forum of Marxist structuralism, ends by denying the premises on which, Thompson claims, a materialistic and dialectical analysis of history should be founded.

This said, their attempt to give visibility, in political terms, to their role is what matters here. It is through coming to terms with their relationship to social forces that intellectuals play a role. In this light, they will be regarded in this thesis whenever they are mentioned. Their importance goes beyond their mediatory function, to which they seem to be destined by their being situated between worlds. It will become apparent, as this study goes on, that the confrontation of intellectuals with the forces that operate within the same social context is not direct and it is not fought on one ground only. The simple reason for this is that intellectuals do not constitute *per se* either economic or political power, although they can exercise strong influences on both. In fact, because of their multiple and multifaceted social function, intellectuals can attain a degree of authority potentially capable of breaking through the same mechanisms that they actually appear to mediate. Vice versa, they can end performing a role which is entirely functional to those mechanisms.

Thus, one of the aims of this thesis will be on the one hand to identify the nature of the role that prominent intellectuals played in the reception of Dostoevskii, and on the other hand to investigate the process by which that role was performed, by pointing out contradictions and incongruities.

1.3. Primary Sources: A Methodological Premise

1.3.1. Reviews and Publications: The Need for Selection

As mentioned above, much of the material analysed will consist of reviews and publications on Dostoevskii and translations of Dostoevskii's novels. The reviews are mainly excerpted from literary journals of the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, such as the *Athenaeum*, *Academy*, *Spectator*, *Saturday Review*, and the more recent *English Review*, *London Mercury*, and the *Slavonic Review*.

An early choice is nevertheless required, concerning the inclusion or exclusion of North American reviews and publications. Previous studies of Dostoevskii's reputation in England have considered, almost indiscriminately, North American and British material. It is true that especially from the second decade of the twentieth century, the American and British publishing industries ran more and more in parallel, and that the intellectual life of the two countries became more and more intertwined in the so-called high modernist phase. However, it is my conviction that a clear distinction needs to be maintained between the forms of criticism in the two countries. This is necessary particularly when dealing with Dostoevskii, whose works, as Muchnic intimates and Brewster clearly shows, penetrated the American publishing industry in a much less restrained atmosphere. As a consequence, the emphasis of certain aspects of reception, their import in each social and cultural environment, will be, presumably, diverse. It is for this reason, therefore, that in this study there are references to North American reviews only insofar as they are seen as directly contributing to the debate in the British cultural setting, otherwise they are excluded.

The second choice that is required from the beginning concerns the possibility of making a distinction by geographic areas, and to consider the reception of Dostoevskii in Scotland, in England, in Wales and in Northern Ireland. However, as soon as this research took a coherent direction, it was apparent that the massive centralisation of the cultural and publishing industry in London, the propulsive centre of British cultural

production, implied clearly that the interventions at a regional level had very little, or no impact.

1.3.2. Translations: The Works and their 'Translatability'

As far as the translations of Dostoevskii's novels are concerned, attention will be concentrated not on their quality, but upon their impact as products of the cultural industry. In this respect, this study is not conducted from the perspective of the Russian specialist and is not concerned with philological issues. In spite of this, a theoretical question needs to be raised about the relationship between original works of art and translations. As it will be shown subsequently, one of the reasons for the resistance that Dostoevskii's novels encountered in this country was the fact that their original text was in a language that very few people were able to speak. Virginia Woolf once stressed that translations inevitably distort the original and make almost impossible a thorough comprehension of 'foreign' works of art. It was along these lines that F.R. Leavis justified his disinterest for foreign literature. However, it was thanks to translations that readers from Europe began to appreciate Dostoevskii's novels and ensure for them the status of great works of art. The question that needs to be raised is: if translations are a degeneration of the original work, how is it possible that a great work of art is still considered so in any language into which it is translated? Is it possible that this recognition derives exclusively from a credit given to the work based on the judgement of those who have read it in the original language? Is Joyce in Italian or Dostoevskii in English still a masterpiece?

One is inclined towards the affirmative. Walter Benjamin, in the essay 'The Task of the Translator' helps to clarify this controversial point. The connection between the original and the translation is a 'vital connection', in that it has much more to do with the historical life of the work than with the original itself. The quality of translations should be then verified not in terms of fidelity to the original text but as relevant

expressions of a moment of life in the work of art, that moment in which it survives to its own historical present and reaches, through the translation itself, a higher form of existence. Benjamin indicates that '[...] it can be demonstrated that no translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For in its afterlife—which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living—the original undergoes a change'.[18] Translations can also tell us about the life of a language in a given time and about the relationship between languages. Again Benjamin turns our attention to the problem: 'Translation is so far removed from being the sterile equation of two dead languages that of all literary forms it is one charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own'.[19] The critic here seems not to refer to the whole of works and translation, but indicates that 'translatability' is 'an essential quality of certain works', and that this is independent from the existence of any translation as such. The relationship of translations to the original can be compared to the relation of the works to their reception: as the work of art consents to its own reception or *receptions*, so the original 'contains the law governing the translation: its translatability', as Benjamin puts it.[20] The extreme complexity of this essay cannot be accounted for in this thesis. However, some of the issues raised by Benjamin are essential, in my view, for a critical approach to reception theories. As stated at the beginning of this section, this thesis will deal exclusively with translations. It will be proved in the next chapters that the resistance and complexities concerning the acknowledgement of Dostoevskii's artistic ability have very little to do with the fact that the works were read in translations.

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[18] Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn, ed. with an intro. by Hanna Arendt (London: Fontana Press, 1973), pp. 70-82 (p. 73).
[19] Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p. 74.
[20] Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p. 71.

1.3.3. Dostoevskii's Reception in Germany: A Case Study

The necessity of circumscribing the timespan taken into consideration is dictated by a series of unavoidable circumstances. There are practical reasons: it would have been impossible to include in the space of this thesis the entire reception of the Russian author, from its origins to the present day. There are also theoretical reasons. As has been suggested previously, the main aim of this study is not to list all the documents in which Dostoevskii has been mentioned, but to select the most significant instances. The attention to the social, economic, political and cultural context, which will give us the measure of the conditions in which reception, or rather *different receptions*, of the Russian author have been possible, is one of the analytical tools adopted in this research. In order to understand what kind of reading (in terms of translations, editions, distribution) of Dostoevskii's works was offered at a given time to the British public, under what conditions, and why this happened, it will be important to highlight the role played by publishing houses and translators, and to link this with the more general function of the cultural industry and, within it, of intellectuals, scholars and academic institutions. Thus, we may discover the 'mystic' Dostoevskii, the explorer of the human soul, the deep voice of modern consciousness, the serial novelist, the novelist of mere detective stories, the mouthpiece of sufferings of poor people, the thinker, the journalist, the philosopher, the prophet, etc. A close analysis of the process through which such a variety of images of the Russian novelist spread in this country should give an insight into the different cultural and aesthetic tendencies of the timespan considered.

An investigation of the reasons underlying the construction of so many myths around the figure 'Dostoevskii' is rendered necessary by their continuous proliferation. There have been attempts, in the past, to try to explain why this happens. One such is Leo Löwenthal's rather neglected study about the reception of Dostoevskii in Germany

from the time his main works were translated to the post-World War I period.[21] In this long essay, published in 1934, Löwenthal, a member of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, interprets the reception of Dostoevskii by the lower middle classes of Germany before World War I as an expression of a disillusioned social consciousness, which is no longer so optimistic about its present, and does not have high hopes for its future. In this context, Dostoevskii as the 'reconciler of irreconcilable conflicts' becomes the spiritual weapon of the bourgeoisie, not with the aim of denying social contrasts, but rather transmuting them into 'characteristics of what really exists', that is, as *natural* components of human society. Löwenthal establishes a relationship between the important role played by the rising myth of 'Dostoevskii as an expression of the soul of the Russian people' in the genesis of German Nationalism, and the fact that the editor and publisher of the completed works of the Russian writer in Germany was Moeller Von Der Bruck, a supporter and theoriser of Nationalistic doctrines. In a long foreword to the German edition of *The Devils*, Von Der Bruck stresses two aspects of Dostoevskii's poetics that Löwenthal highlights. First, Von Der Bruck imputes to Dostoevskii an ability to embody for the first time the vision of the Russian world, and providing Russia with a mythology of soul. Secondly, denying any kind of relationship with the European tradition of nineteenth century, especially with French Naturalism, he insists that Dostoevskii describes the whole of Russia, the whole of the Slavonic world. This element, according to Löwenthal, provided a mythology of the nation, which in that moment proved very useful for those who wanted to support the myth of the superiority of the German 'race'.

In spite of the significance of Löwenthal's analysis, the differences and stratification within the bourgeois consciousness, consisting of more than mere variations of accents, and the different ideological levels in the interpretations of

[21] Leo Löwenthal, 'Die Auffassung Dostojewskis im Vorkriegsdeutchland' [1934], in *Schriften*, (Frankfurt: Hrsg. von Helmut Dubiel, Surkhamp, 1980) Band I.

Dostoevskii's works, are not fully accounted for. That Dostoevskii performed a consolatory function for those strata of society, let us call them 'lower middle classes', which did not feel and did not want to be equal with the working class, does not explain the success of Dostoevskii in relation to different social classes. Nevertheless, Löwenthal's study raises important questions about what has to be meant by 'reception study', and more profoundly, by 'reception theory'. An entirely sociological approach, although supported by accurate historical research, does not provide the answers to relevant questions. What is remarkable about Löwenthal's study, and in this sense it ought not to be neglected, is that it takes due account of all those elements of mediation that play an active role in the process of transmission of the content of the work of art to the reader. In other words, it is made clear by Löwenthal that reception is not merely a relationship between a de-contextualised text and the 'subjective state of mind' of a perceiving subject.

However, a few crucial questions, concerning the status of reception theories within literary criticism today, need to be raised. Are reception theories just an appendix of literary criticism or cultural studies? Can the way a text is read tell us not only about the epoch but also about the work of art itself and about the reasons why that work can be interesting in different epochs in different ways? The following sections will be an attempt to reason around these important interrogatives.

1.4. 'Rezeptionästhetik'*: A Critical Excursus*

Although reception theories have been accepted by now as an integral part of literary criticism, their initial relevance for literary theory seems to be diminishing. The entrance of the reader in the interpretative circle of literary works has determined a shift in emphasis in Western literary criticism from the moment of production of the artefact to its moment of 'reception'. When, however, we try to define what is meant by

reception, we find out that this term is adopted in a series of different circumstances, some of which have very little to do with literary criticism. Under the term of 'reception', for instance, we find all sorts of sociological surveys about various types of readers, or psychological studies about the emotive reactions of group of readers to a certain book or to a type of book. We also have studies that focus on the process of reading, that is a whole series of psychological mechanisms that operate from the moment the readers meet the written word.[22]

In other words, the term has been applied so ubiquitously across a range of disciplines that the broader theoretical debate about the validity of reception theories for literary criticism has been neglected in favour of more particular discussions about their specific applications. Thus, while we can say that the reader has been finally acknowledged as a legitimate guest in the house of artistic creation, the position of reception theories in the house of literary criticism has become increasingly blurred. As David Shepherd argues in his essay 'Bakhtin and the Reader', 'despite the sheer volume of reader-orientated work, the bewildering multiplicity of guises assumed in it by the reader means that questions about how best to theorise the concept are still being asked and still worth asking'.[23] Along these lines, in the course of this thesis, and more specifically in this introductory chapter, I will argue that, in spite of the fact that the debate on reception theories seems to have reached a dead end, the issues these theories both raised and responded to at the time of their appearance on the literary scene demand to be re-addressed. I will also maintain that the direction taken by contemporary

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[22] See for instance Norman H. Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968). In the Preface to his book, Holland clarifies the intent of his study: 'It is the aim of this book [...] to develop a model for the interaction of literary works with the human mind', p. x. Roman Ingarden is even more precise when in the Introduction to his book writes: 'This book answers the question "what is the procedure which will lead to knowledge of the literary work; that is, how does the cognition of the work of art come about and to what does or can it lead?"', in Roman Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, trans. by Ruth Ann Crowley and Kenneth R. Olson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 4.

[23] David Shepherd, 'Bakhtin and the Reader', in Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (eds), *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp. 91-108 (p. 91).

approaches to reader-orientated theories not only does not satisfy those demands but ends up putting those very theories out of business altogether.

1.4.1. From the Sign to the Aesthetic Object

The aesthetics of reception emerged from the need to account adequately for the complex connection between art and society, a connection demanded by the indisputable relationship of the work of art to a differentiated social reality. Traditional approaches to literary studies placed the social and aesthetic significance of the work of art exclusively at the level of content, usually interpreted as the arena in which the intentions of the author or the tensions of society were transparently reflected. We owe to Russian Formalism the theoretical elaboration of the refreshing concept of the *literariness* of literature, which drew attention to formal devices as essential components of the artistic value of the work of art. However, Formalism's refusal to consider any connection between art and society as a relevant literary fact simply deferred, rather than solved, the confrontation with this unavoidable issue. In reality, the members of the movement had already admitted Formalism's theoretical aporias, specifically, the theoretical indeterminacies in the concept of *ostranenie* [making it strange]. Indeed, *ostranenie*, as one of the basic concepts of the Formalist theory of art, heavily undermined the possibility of development of a movement otherwise enormously influential.

Pavel Medvedev, one of the members of the 'Bakhtin Circle', confronts Formalist theories in a lucid study published as early as 1928. While giving credit to the Formalists for having liberated artistic creation from the chains of biographism or appreciation, Medvedev also stresses the difficulties with aspects of the 'formal method'. His main problem with Viktor Shklovskii's and Boris Eichenbaum's theory of form is the exclusion of the 'ideological meaning of the work'. He is concerned with the 'nihilist slant of Formalism', which tends to ignore the referential function of the word

in favour of its semiotic function. Formalists did not deny *a priori* a link between art and society or art and life. They rejected the possibility that this link could have any relevance for literary evaluation. 'In a word—comments Medvedev—Formalism is not able to admit that an external social factor acting on literature could become an intrinsic factor of literature itself, a factor of its immanent development.'[24] The results of this inability are visible in the impossibility of excluding the perceiving subjective consciousness. As Medvedev comments:

> [...] in its vital aspects Formalist theory amounts to a unique psychotechnics of artistic perception, i.e., to the explanation of the general psychotechnical conditions in which the artistic construction is perceptible.

The risk of psychologism is not avoided:

> As for psychological subjectivism—it is the very thing the Formalists were unable to overcome. On the contrary, in severing literature from the ideological world, the Formalists turned it into some kind of stimulus for relative and subjective psychophysical states and perceptions.[25]

The involvement of the 'perceiving subject' as the indispensable agent of a 'defamiliarised perception', that in turn renders the work of art artistic, bears within itself, indeed 'presupposes', the inevitable descent of this subject into the infinite particularity of subjective consciousness. According to Jan Mukařovský, of the Prague Linguistic Circle, this infinite particularity is strikingly at odds with Formalist claims to generality and objectivity both of aesthetic norms and aesthetic value. In his study *Art as A Semiotic Fact*, Mukařovský writes: 'The framework of individual consciousness is constituted, even in its innermost layers, of contents belonging to the social consciousness.'[26] The subjective elements of perception can, and must, be objectified in

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[24] Pavel Medvedev/ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. by Albert J. Wehrle (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 67. The dispute around the authorship of this book has been going on for years. It was believed that Medvedev had written the book in collaboration with Mikhail Bakhtin. However, now it is more or less certain that the book has only one author, that is, Medvedev, and such will be assumed here.

[25] Medvedev/Bakhtin, *The Formal Method*, p. 149.

[26] Jan Mukařovský, 'Art as a Semiotic Fact', in John Burbank and Peter Steiner (eds), *Structure, Sign, and Function* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 82-88 (p. 82).

what Mukařovský defines as the 'aesthetic object', that is, the material artefact as it is perceived by the collective consciousness on the ground of shared aesthetic norms.[27]

Mukařovský's notion of 'aesthetic object', together with his important assertion of the semiotic value of art, represents a significant step towards the emancipation of the aesthetic from persisting metaphysical connotations. In Mukařovský's terms, art is both an autonomous and a communicative sign that refers to a complex web of social phenomena like philosophy, religion, politics, and economy, which constitute the whole of reality. He suggests that aesthetic norms are dialectically related to manifestations of everyday life and that they influence each other. However, the mechanisms by which heterogeneous forces intervene in the passage from one sphere of influence to the other are not clarified. Although Mukařovský acknowledges the dialectical nature of the antinomies characterising the evolution of the aesthetic sphere both in art and in society, his structuralist framework gets in the way of his analysis, which is mainly and essentially conducted by means of analogies and comparisons among different 'systems'.

Yet, it is precisely by a close analysis of the 'intermediary processes' that govern, rather than interfere with, the passage from one sphere to the other that the dynamic complexity of the art-society relationship can be grasped. Mukařovský himself points out that '[...] the application of the norm is not automatic',[28] thus suggesting that even the system cannot be taken as a self-enclosed structure, and that a powerful influence is exercised by the intervention of different forces. Notwithstanding the acknowledgement of the importance of the diachronic analysis of the aesthetic object, the structuralist framework in which Mukařovský moves definitely weighs in favour of synchronicity. The diachronic dimension is thus reduced to *serialised synchronicities* so to speak, that

[27] Jan Mukařovský, *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts*, trans. from the Czech, with notes and afterword by Mark E. Suino, Michigan Slavic Contributions (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1970), pp. 90-91.

[28] Mukařovský, *Aesthetic Function*, p. 41.

is, synchronicities inserted within a temporal progression. As with the Formalists, the role that Mukařovský attributes to the perceiver in establishing the aesthetic function of the work of art is still decisive for explaining the 'universal aesthetic value', which allows certain works to survive beyond time and space. The subjective intention of the author and the subjective perception of the reader are related to the work of art by means of what Mukařovský defines as 'the criterion of evidence', that is, the immediate certainty of the subject that his judgement contains both a general and an individual meaning. Thus, a transhistorical necessity, which resounds with the Kantian echoes of the compelling universality of disinterested aesthetic contemplation, casts a shadow upon the possibility of pursuing the diachronic as a concrete alternative to traditional metaphysical aesthetics. From the admission of a complex of aesthetic norms shared by the author and the reader there does not follow in Mukařovský's analysis a theoretical insight into the immanent dialectical nature of the work of art itself. Rather, the aesthetic function seems to be reduced to a receptacle of crossing tensions, which are in certain periods reconciled under the aegis of universal values, and legitimised, which is possibly more unsettling, on an anthropological basis. Artistic forms are excluded from this scheme, within which the critical potentialities inherent in the assertion of the semiotic value of the work of art are remarkably reduced. Besides, Mukařovský's claims to generality seem to bear witness to an inability to make of his theory a helpful tool for tackling specific critical issues concerning literature and art.

The distinction drawn between the immutability of the material artefact and the variability of the aesthetic object[29] evokes dichotomies of Saussurrean kind, particularly the one concerning the synchronic dimension of *langue* and the diachronic dimension of

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[29] '[...] an objective (i.e. independent and lasting) aesthetic value must be sought, if it exists, in a material artifact which endures alone and unchanging, whereas the aesthetic object is changeable, being determined not only by the organization and properties of the material artifact, but equally by the corresponding stage of development of the non-material artistic structure', Mukařovský, *Aesthetic Function*, p. 90.

parole. The urgent interrogative that we inherit is the following: is such a sharp distinction really plausible? Given the acknowledged autonomy of the aesthetic artefact, how is it possible to separate within the work of art the aesthetic values from the extra-aesthetic ones? If Mukařovský's definition of art as 'the highest manifestation of the aesthetic'[30] holds true, then aesthetic values must be immanent in the work of art, and not, as it were, transposed from one realm, that of society, into another, that of the 'material artefact' itself. These few considerations suggest that something else is at work. Perhaps within the work of art there are not, and cannot be, extra-aesthetic values which have not gone through a process of mediation by means of the artistic form and which therefore are not conveyed to the reader in an irreversibly altered form. The dialectical relation between these altered values and that reality that Mukařovský was trying to map out in a rather indistinct way, can be quantified, and grasped as a loss. This loss can be defined only negatively as an absence, as the recognition, loaded with consequences, that reality is not *in* the work of art, but that the work of art *is* a kind of reality.

Having said this, the issue of the social control of the aesthetic function and that of the concept of the aesthetic, issues that have inevitable repercussions for the work of art, remain to be dealt with. If on the one hand it is true that the aesthetic cannot be confined to art, it might be too hazardous, on the other hand, to say, as Mukařovský does, that outside art the aesthetic is potentially 'everywhere'. Perhaps the aesthetic is the common ground in which art and society confront themselves. However, in itself this statement does not suffice to keep away metaphysical spectres. It must be acknowledged that a different order of discourse is needed in order for us to have access

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[30] Referring to the multifaceted nature of the aesthetic, Mukařovský observes: 'All these aspects, and many others, are embraced by the aesthetic, particularly in its highest manifestation, art', Mukařovský, *Aesthetic Function*, p. 96.

to a meaningful insight into the aesthetic, a discourse which involves, as I hope to show in the course of this thesis, the key concept of ideology.

1.4.2. *Rezeptionästhetik*: Interpreting *Understanding*

Hans Robert Jauss, who elaborated *Rezeptionästhetik*, goes beyond Mukařovský's boundary of the aesthetic object and aesthetic norm. He seizes on the centrality of the idea of history in general, and literary history in particular, for his aesthetics of reception. Incidentally, Paul de Man, in his introduction to Jauss' *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, salutes this theory as a 'methodology'.[31] We do not know whether he is really paying a compliment to the German scholar or is cleverly condensing in one word all the limits implied in the notion of 'scientific methodology'. It is also possible, however, that de Man is actually playing on the ambiguity of his own definition in order to avoid being involved with the concepts of history and ideology. But let us consider in more detail Jauss' position.

Jauss, the founder of the Konstanz school, acknowledges the merits of Formalism, especially as regards the theory of literary evolution. However, he also sees its limits. Jauss refuses the one-dimensional and mechanistic character of the Formalist idea of literary evolution. He points out the historical character of innovation, whose potentiality is not always 'immediately perceptible within the horizon of its first appearance', but can emerge after a long process of reception. A history of literature thus conceived allows the discovery of the 'socially formative function' of literature. The work of art evokes for the reader a horizon of expectations, 'formed by convention of genre, style or form', that is, a system of references which can be established or altered, thus creating a continuous dialogue between the work and the reader. 'To see the work of art in *its* history—Jauss states—[...] is not yet the same as to see the work of art in *history*, that is, in the historical horizon of its origination, social function, and

[31] Paul de Man, Introduction to Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. from the German by Timothy Bahti (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), pp. vii-xxv (p. viii).

historical influence.' In his view, an aesthetics of reception emerges from the necessity of finding a solution to the problem 'of comprehending the historical sequence of literary works', and 'the coherence of literary history'.[32]

Yet the notion of 'horizon of expectations', what de Man all too subtly refers to as 'historical consciousness', is no less problematic than the Formalist notion of 'estrangement'. Jauss is already in trouble when in Thesis VIII he states that 'the artistic character of a work is to be measured with the aesthetic distance with which it opposes the expectations of its first audience'.[33] This might seem plausible when we have to explain why later readers do not consider a work artistic any longer. However, it reveals all its inadequacy when we have to explain the opposite, that is, the persistence of the artistic character of the work not just against a changed historical background but also in spite of periodical attempts to claim this artistry as 'self-evident'. How is it possible to account for a situation in which the aesthetic distance seems annulled while at the same time the horizon of expectations continues to be challenged for centuries?

It is only in Theses X and XI that we realise how Jauss is going to deal with the issue of the 'later readers'. While using Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of 'history of influence' to answer what he sees as an inability on René Wellek's part to give a satisfactory answer to the 'aporia of literary judgement' (namely, the possibility or impossibility of objective judgement), Jauss writes:

> The 'verdict of the ages' on a literary work is more than merely 'the accumulated judgement of other readers, critics, viewers, and even professors'; it is the successive unfolding of the potential for meaning that is embedded in a work and actualized in the stages of its historical reception as it discloses itself to understanding judgement, so long as this faculty achieves in a controlled fashion the 'fusion of horizons' in the encounter with the tradition.[34]

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[32] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic*, pp. 35, 24, 18, 19.
[33] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic*, p. 25.
[34] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic*, p. 30.

In a concept of horizon that sees literary history as a history of 'events', tradition remains for Jauss, as well as for Gadamer, the co-ordinate by which we define our position *in* history. Past and present horizons of expectations are delineated in terms of 'question and answer', a device presented by Jauss as a 'productive function of progressive understanding'. Nevertheless, it is precisely this device that brings about manifest discontinuities in Jauss' theory, especially when he hazards associations between the artistic value of the work and the public recognition of the work itself. In the end, according to Jauss, the non-recognition of a work of art in a certain historical time becomes a non-value in the aesthetics of reception, while the moment when the hidden meaning is unfolded and 'properly understood' becomes the 'productive function of understanding'. Furthermore, although Jauss gives much importance to the incursion of mediations between the reader and the text (this is mostly what the horizon is about) we have the impression that these mediations are coincident with the notion of 'medium'. The result would be a sort of 'average' horizon of expectation that the historian of literature outlines in order to establish why in a particular historical moment, certain works were prominent while others remained in the background or were forgotten forever. This series of dual structures consisting of question and answer, old and new horizons, tradition and history, leads towards a deeper dualism between the notion of understanding and that of misunderstanding. The Jaussian literary historian is the one who can stand at one and the same moment inside and outside his horizon; he can pose the appropriate question to the answers that his historical time has given, and can unbiasedly relate to a 'tradition' as his final moment of legitimation.

However, Wellek's aporia has not been answered yet. A concept of 'tradition', conceived as 'tradition for us', to put it in Gadamer's terms, risks taking as plausible any concept of tradition offered to us; on the other hand, a notion of scientific objectivity applied to the interpretation of history is no less unstable. Jauss seems to be

aware of the risks involved. While acknowledging the importance of a hermeneutic approach to literary history, he yearns for a scientific legitimation of his method. However, what his method refuses and perhaps cannot tell us is where the privileged *locus interpretandi* is to be found, in other words, where we should look in order for our hermeneutic approach to be of any theoretical relevance. Where should we look for the insight that would allow us to orientate and legitimate heavily loaded interrogatives like why study literary history, why can a work of art resist for centuries the attempts to be turned into 'culinary art', as Jauss puts it, etc.?

The alacrity with which de Man alerts us to the 'scientific and didactic', rather than 'critical', concerns of the Konstanz group is at odds with a persistent use by de Man himself of terminology borrowed from psychoanalysis. The use of expressions like 'preconscious or unconscious assumption', or 'preconscious or subconscious expectations', to describe the 'horizon of expectations' reveal a sort of psychoanalytic instability in this concept. De Man, in a double gesture of acknowledgement, both emphasises and undermines the possibility, offered by Jauss' theory, to reach the 'synthesis between the private and the public dimensions of the literary work'.

Certainly, there is at work in Jauss' theory of reception an attempt to go beyond the tendency of some reader-response theories to relegate reception to the realm of individual consciousness. However, in Jauss the combination of poetics and hermeneutics is achieved, as de Man himself openly admits, at the expense of a dialectical and critical approach. The use of certain terminology betrays in Jauss, and more subtly in de Man's analysis of the Rezeptionästhetik, a dangerous drift. For example, the counter-position of notions such as 'proper understanding' and 'misunderstanding' might be considered interesting to analyse from an ideological perspective, but it can become a highly questionable methodological tool to use for studying ideology itself. In fact, there still remains to be answered the question, which is

not rhetorical, of how do we know what is 'proper understanding' and what is not. And if this 'understanding' is 'progressive', as Jauss writes, how is it that some works are considered artistic in certain periods and non-artistic in others? Besides, is this rejection a final form of 'understanding' or 'misunderstanding'?

In the last thirty years, the sociology of literature, which in countries like Italy for instance has been inaugurated by studies on Jauss' and Mukařovský's aesthetic theories, has de facto been struggling to assert its validity, caught as it is between the scientific pretence of the sociological method and the progressive relativisation of certain hermeneutic approaches. Sociology of literature is either struggling to turn itself into a more comprehensive field of knowledge like 'critical theory', or even 'cultural studies', or is regressing to the stage of mere social observation or, worse, of mere statistical survey. The risk is to end up by having very little to say about literature. One of the main arguments of this thesis is that in the field of critical theory, theories of literary reception can find an appropriate ground for expanding their potentialities as theories concerned with the ideology of the aesthetic.

1.4.3. The *Productive Parasitism* of Theories of Reception

In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Theodor Adorno warns us against one-sided definitions of art and against bold attempts to grasp the nature of the aesthetic unilaterally, as do those which subsume the concept of art under that of its origin.[35] Adorno emphasises the essentially bifurcated nature of art. On the one hand, the autonomy of art is 'irrevocable'; on the other hand, this irrevocability implies the existence of something 'other' from which art is autonomous. Thus '[...] art is autonomous and is not: without what is heterogeneous to it, its autonomy eludes it'. Furthermore, because of its historical essence ('art's substance could be its transitoriness'), any attempt at positive definition of this essence proves highly unstable. As Adorno puts it: 'The concept of art

[35] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor, ed. by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), pp. 1-2.

is located in a historically changing constellation of elements; it refuses definition.'[36] It is then through these contradictory components that there develops in works of art a dialectical tension that '[...] not only is of the same essence as the dialectic external to them, but resembles it without imitating it'. That is to say that works of art refer to an external reality rather than reflecting it.

For Adorno, therefore, the work of art remains the privileged place to look for a theoretically relevant insight into the concept of art. In particular, the recognition of the aesthetic form, by means of which 'art opposes the empirical' as 'sedimented content', emancipates the work of art from the limited confines of the mimetic, to which certain criticism had relegated it. However, if, as Adorno writes, works of art are 'answers to their own questions', so that 'they themselves thereby truly become questions', then the investigation of the multiplicity of processes by which these questions relate to what is not art, to empirical reality, gains theoretical relevance.[37] These processes are not univocal at all, although the dialogic characteristic of this linkage is less relevant *per se* than the devices by means of which the linkage is established. Perhaps, all that can be traced are 'constellations of moments' which have an internal dynamic and necessity, whereby the constellation itself becomes part of the process of formation of the ideology of the aesthetic. In other words, unlike Jauss' assertion, it is only on the ground of the ideology of the aesthetic that those questions and answers can be comprehended in all their importance and maintain their historical actuality. Otherwise, one risks a fall into rhetorical abstraction, historical determinism, or empty psychologism. On this ground, the object of investigation can and must be identified, and the choice of this object is 'allegorically signifying', it is meaningful within the ideological framework in which the investigator moves.

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[36] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 1, 6, 3, 2.
[37] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 5, 6.

The suggestion here is that the notion of 'productive understanding', envisaged by Jauss, might be substituted with the notion of 'productive parasitism', or 'inquilinism', that any theory of reception has to assume as its starting point. Any theory of reception has to rely heavily, like a parasite, upon the immanent dialectic of the work of art in order to grasp in any significant way the relationship between the work itself, the sphere of the aesthetic, and empirical reality. Past theories of reception can be recuperated only partially by broadening their context in the wider dialectical ground of ideology. Art by definition cannot be reduced to ideology, but certainly different ideologies meet and/or collide in the work of art. Their reception is one of the levels at which this collision manifests itself more overtly. Ideolog*ies* can also be disguised as art, taking advantage of the similarity of the media (language, sound, images) they adopt in order to express themselves, and works of art can, in turn, be ideologically manipulated. Although this might have little consequence for the work in itself, it has massive implications for the concept of the aesthetic.

The critical standpoint of this thesis should be more apparent by now. First, there is a necessity to distinguish among fields of investigation: art, works of art, aesthetic, while at the same time acknowledging their inextricable relation. It is in the investigation of the nature of their relationship that all the efforts will be concentrated. The reader is indeed one of the main figures involved. However, trying to determine the impact of a certain work on a hypothetical reader is as futile as trying to measure the creative contribution of the reader to the work of art. The role of the reader can only be grasped as a series of ideological tensions, which confront themselves on the ground of the aesthetic, and as such, they demand to be critiqued.

The terms 'ideology' and 'aesthetic' have traditionally been regarded as mutually exclusive. However, much recent study has proven that, in reality, they are strictly related. As Terry Eagleton, in his introduction to *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*,

maintains, 'the construction of the modern notion of the aesthetic artefact is [...] inseparable from the construction of the dominant ideological forms of modern class-society, and indeed from a whole new form of human subjectivity, appropriate to that social order.'[38] In this light, the 'notion of the aesthetic artefact' is changeable according to the changes occurring in the 'dominant ideological forms', and the aesthetic can be seen as the privileged fields in which the battle for ideological supremacy is fought. One of the consequences of Eagleton's standpoint is that the critical interpretation and scrutiny of the mechanisms governing ideology is seen as a concrete theoretical contribution to the analysis of the aesthetic. This assumption, which can be taken almost as a postulate, stands in antagonism both to certain postmodernist presuppositions that we no longer live in an ideological world and in a similarly distorting view that everything is 'ideological'. The basic assumption that inspires this thesis is the acknowledgement of the productive possibility for the researcher in unfolding mechanisms underlying ideological discourses. This position, rather than reducing the critical potentialities of a certain outlook, multiplies and amplifies the dialectical tensions, making some of its offspring available for critical interpretation. Ideology is not considered here, or is not merely considered, to be 'false consciousness' from which the critic has to preserve his integrity. It is also the standpoint from which the critic exercises his faculty of interpreting, even more so when he denies having an ideological position at all.

The purpose of the present thesis, then, is not to define the boundaries of a new theory of reception, which would be over-pretentious for the limits of this study. On the one hand, I will endeavour to take issue with the inadequacy of current theories of reception, starting from the necessary acknowledgement that they have reached a point of stagnation, which, however, does not invalidate the questions that those theories tried

[38] Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology*, p. 3.

to raise. On the other hand, I will approach the reception of Dostoevskii in Britain according to parameters that practically reformulate the method of analysis, thus distancing the present study from the presumed neutrality of its predecessors.

Finally, a few words need to be said about the structure of the thesis. Apart from this Introduction and the Conclusion, the argument of this dissertation develops in two parts. The first part (chapters 2-3) concerns the reception of Dostoevskii from the first time he is mentioned in a British journal to the moment immediately preceding the 'cult'. This part follows mainly a chronological order. By contrast, the second part of the thesis (chapters 4-7) deals with the 'cult' period and its wider implications. Because the thematics involved are much more complicated, this second part is much more extended and the chronological order is at one point abandoned in favour of a subdivision of chapters by issues. This allows for a more eclectic vision of the problems raised throughout the thesis, and opens a series of theoretical possibilities within the interpretative process of reception, without reducing it to a monolithic view.

PART I: The Introduction of Dostoevskii in Britain

2. A Difficult Start

2.1. Early Years: A Deliberate Omission

While by 1890 in France and Germany practically the whole of Dostoevskii's works had been translated, in Britain an unfriendly atmosphere of suspicion and reticence often accompanied the early publication of translations of a few of Dostoevskii's novels.[1] Yet, by 1880 Dostoevskii was a well-known author in Russia and all his great works had been published.[2] On the contrary, in Britain, the publication of an important work such as *Brat'ia Karamazovy* attracted very little or no attention. Referred to as a 'very interesting novel of Dostoievsky', there is only a quick notice about its publication given in the section of the *Contemporary Review* devoted to 'recent light literature' in Russia.[3]

The first English translation of a novel by Dostoevskii appeared in 1881, when Marie Von Thilo's version of *The House of the Dead* was published in New York and London with the title of *Buried Alive: Or Ten Years of Penal Servitude in Siberia.*[4] Before then, and to a certain extent, after that year, the work of Dostoevskii in Britain was almost completely ignored by reviewers, scholars, and publishing houses. All one can find are sporadic references to Dostoevskii in articles dealing with Russian literature in general, where his name is simply mentioned as one among others. One can discern from this that the fame achieved by Dostoevskii in Russia was not sufficient to draw the attention of British literary journals towards his works.

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[1] Helen Muchnic, in her monograph, *Dostoevsky's English Reputation, 1881-1936* (North Hampton, Massachusetts: Smith College Department of Modern Languages, 1939), refers to this delay, but she does not sustain a hypothesis of omission. She rather sees Dostoevskii's introduction to England as the 'culmination of British interest in Russian culture'. See Muchnic, *Dostoevsky's*, p. 2.

[2] *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* was published in 1866, *Idiot* was published in 1868, *Besy* was published in 1871-72, *Podrostok* was published in 1875, and *Brat'ia Karamazovy* was published in 1879-80.

[3] T.S., 'Contemporary Life and Thought in Russia', *Contemporary Review*, 37 (1880), 165-66.

[4] Published in London by Longman and Green and in New York by G. Munro.

The lack of interest in Dostoevskii, while he was alive and certainly not a second order figure in the intellectual panorama of nineteenth-century Russia, is also witnessed by the general disinterest shown towards Von Thilo's translation. As a reviewer later remarked, although it was a free rendering from the original Russian text made by a Russian lady (Von Thilo), and in spite of the positive reviews of journals such as the *Academy* or *Athenaeum*, '[...] the book, so far as we remember, attracted little notice'.[5] It was only the 'striking demonstration of respect with which Dostoevskii's funeral had been attended at St. Petersburg',[6] which drew the attention of the British literary press to him and his works. Nevertheless, a general attitude of indifference towards Dostoevskii continued until Vizetelly's publications of Russian novels, which included mainly Dostoevskii's works, appeared.

The hypothesis that we are dealing with an omission of a particular writer and not with a general attitude towards the Russian novel is proved by the amount of regular reviews of Russian literature in British journals and magazines. In fact, the increasing interest in Russian culture and literature after the Crimean War was mainly motivated by the necessity of better knowing a nation which was threatening, from an economic, political, and military point of view, the hegemony of the leading Western countries. In this respect, fiction functioned as a credible medium through which some of the mysteries of the 'Russian soul' could be deciphered. A review of Nik olai Strakhov's book, *General Tendency of Russian Literature*,[7] is revealing in terms of some of the mechanisms of mediation through which 'Russia', as a concept, was entering the imagination of British readers.

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[5] *Saturday Review*, 64 (1887), 457.
[6] W.R.S. Ralston, '*Buried Alive; or Ten Years of Penal Servitude in Siberia.* By Fedor Dostoyeffsky', *Academy*, 19 (1881), 273-74.
[7] I suppose this is an imperfect English translation of *Bednost' nashei literatury: kriticheskii i istoricheskii ocherk*, the only work published by Strakhov around 1868. The review was published in the *Athenaeum* (1869, January 9), 48-49.

The *Athenaeum*'s reviewer disagrees with the pessimistic view of the general development of Russian literature that emerges from Strakhov's book. Strakhov complained about the fact that Russian 'civilisation' was far behind that of other Western nations. His call for a deep-rooted national Russian literature was based on the belief that the time had come for Russia to confront Europe on equal terms. In his view, Russian artists should oppose 'the absurd preference of foreign over native models'. Although he admired the Turgenev of *Fathers and Sons*, he kept a very critical distance from Turgenev's later novels, which he regarded as more akin to the Western European literary canon. According to Strakhov, Turgenev's *Smoke*, for instance, could only have been composed by someone 'who looked at Russian life with detachment',[8] someone who had given himself over to Western culture and values. That he did not refer only to literary values is made obvious in a passage that the reviewer quotes from Strakhov's book:

> Now, more than ever before, we feel our distance from Western Europe; now, more fully than ever before, we are penetrated with a deep sense of our weakness relatively to her, whether measured by material arms or by those of morals and intellect. *The sack of Sevastopol opened our eyes* to the real state of our extrinsic power; but revelations even more painful and humiliating have since been made to us respecting our moral and intellectual condition. Where, we ask, are *our* Europeans? Where are we to look for those who, schooled by Western Europe by many generations, ought by this time to stand upon the same level with their masters, and to cope with them on terms of equality?[9]

Strakhov was clearly concerned with Russia's position in the political panorama of Europe, and literature was the place from which to start a national regeneration from the 'ashes of Sevastopol'. The reviewer for the *Athenaeum*, however, only in part agreed with these and other comments by Strakhov on the resurgence of Russia. On the one hand, he seemed to share with Strakhov the anxieties caused by the progressive

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[8] Strakhov, quoted in Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-1871* (London: Robson Books, 1995), pp. 214-15.
[9] Strakhov, quoted in *Athenaeum* (1869, January 9).

penetration of nihilist ideas in Europe. He condemned 'the fancied degeneracy of the present day, which appears to animate so many honest and well-meaning men in our country, as well as in that of Mr Strachoff'. On the other hand, however, his comments on the characteristics of the 'Russians' reveal much about the position of power and superiority with which Britain regarded Russia, but also about the trepidation in the face of the concrete threat to the stability of the British empire represented by Russian expansionist ambitions. Strakhov, the reviewer commented,

> [...] has laid his finger with surgical accuracy upon the one great blemish of the whole frame of Russian thought. For it is unquestionably true, that the marvellous power of imitation [which Strakhov was complaining about] which makes the Muscovite the best of subordinates makes him also the worst of leaders.[10]

However, Strakhov's dislike of Turgenev's *Smoke* consisted precisely in what the reviewer of the *Athenaeum* valorised. In spite of Strakhov's complaints, Turgenev's 'detachment' from 'native models' made of him the first and most liked Russian author in Britain. When Dostoevskii's novels were mostly unknown in Britain, Turgenev's novels were already acclaimed champions of the 'true realism', so dissimilar from the pessimism of Zola and the Naturalists. Certainly, the fact that Turgenev spent most of his adult life in the West without doubt facilitated the wide knowledge of his own works among the reading public of all Europe. However, the dismissive attitude towards Dostoevskii, and the negligible number of translations and publications of his works after Vizetelly's arrest,[11] are as significant as the enthusiastic reception of the two other major Russian writers, Tolstoi and especially Turgenev.

2.2. *Turgenev: The 'British' Answer to French Naturalism*

As Phelps points out, 'the first step [...], in any examination of the reception of the Russian novel in England'—and I would say, particularly in any examination of the

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[10] *Athenaeum* (1869, January 9).

[11] The 'Vizetelly Affair' will be explored in full in section 2.4.2.

reception of Dostoevskii's novels in this country—'must be to shift the emphasis away from Dostoevsky, and to place it instead on Turgenev'.[12] This particular aspect of the reception of Dostoevskii, also highlighted by Helen Muchnic and in some respects by Dorothy Brewster,[13] is worth focusing on more carefully. In fact, to focus on the reception of Turgenev might be a key for interpreting the initial non-reception of Dostoevskii.

What was it that made Turgenev so attractive for the British public? On the one hand, Turgenev represented a sober approach to Russian literature. His refined style and his appreciation of Western European values made him more palatable to the taste of British readers. For them, Turgenev was at once a 'symbol' of the humanitarian struggle for the emancipation of the serfs in Russia and a model of stylistic grace. He was also Russian enough to preserve that touch of exoticism and of unpredictability, which readers were expecting from a culture so alien to theirs. On the other hand, at a deeper level, unlike Zola's, Turgenev's realism did not linger on 'unnecessary details' and his sympathetic, tender, and humane attitude towards his peasant characters corresponded perfectly to the 'liberal' and 'humanitarian' spirit of the day.[14]

Turgenev's obituary, published in the *Athenaeum* in September 1883, is suffused with deferential tone. He is described as a great artist, who 'has reached the pinnacle of literary excellence'. He was a very balanced man, who, in spite of his '*Russianness*', showed a high degree of lucidity of thought as regards his attitude towards the West and the dispute between Slavophiles and Nihilists. 'Notwithstanding his cosmopolitan popularity, Tourguénief was a Russian heart and soul'. He

> [...] loved his country, but had no sympathy with the Philo-Slav party. To him it seemed childish to ignore the labours of the West, and to endeavour to create an

[12] Gilbert Phelps, *The Russian Novel in English Fiction* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1956), p. 15. As Phelps gives a broad account of the reception of Turgenev, I will consider only the main aspects of it.

[13] The first two have already been mentioned. The third is Dorothy Brewster, *East-West Passage: A Study in Literary Relationships* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1954).

[14] Phelps in his study rightly imputes the favourable reception of Turgenev in Britain to the fact that he offered an alternative to the 'excesses' of Zola. See Phelps, *The Russian Novel*, pp. 42-58.

> Eastern Slavonic civilization out of the ruins of the patriarchal autocracy which had been based on serfdom and the knout, institutions which he hated cordially.[15]

Although he was close to the French Naturalists, though he even lived among them, he was never one of them, he never reached the 'excesses' of a Zola or his fellow-Naturalists. 'He never permitted himself to exaggerate, not for one single instant even to be so carried away by his idea as to be false to human nature.'[16] A. R. R. Barker, author of the obituary in the *Academy*, particularly insists on this point:

> Turgenev possessed in the highest degree that combination of imagination and the analytical faculty which is essential for the production of life-like fiction. He has been styled the chief of European realists. But he was a realist only in the sense that all great artists who borrow their inspiration direct from nature may be called realists. His art had not the least affinity either to that of the French school, It is to rake together the garbage of life, or that of some modern writers who painfully evolve 'studies of character' out of their own consciousness. [...] His pages are warmed and lighted by a poet's fancy, but at the same time the artist never loses sight of his models. Hence there is nothing grotesque about Turgenev's most original creations.[17]

The acrimony shown by this reviewer against the 'French school' was not an isolated phenomenon. In Britain, Naturalism was initially attacked both at a moral and at an artistic level. Yet, the new perspective on society offered by Naturalist novels contributed in intensifying the atmosphere of disenchantment and in revealing the obvious discrepancy between the optimistic dreams of the British bourgeoisie and the real condition of social disparity among classes.[18] On the one hand, fiction constituted the congenial ground on which the investigation of the degraded condition of the working class and the urban slums could be contained, as it were, between the two realms of social observation and literary artefact, between the scrutinising methods of

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[15] 'Ivan Serguéyevitch Tourguénief', *Athenaeum* (1883, September 8), 305-06. Helen Muchnic's claim that Dostoevskii is expressly mentioned in this article is not accurate; see Muchnic, *Dostoevsky's*, p. 9.

[16] 'Ivan Serguéyevitch Tourguénief', *Athenaeum* (1883, September 8).

[17] A. R. R. Barker, 'Obituary: Ivan Turgenev', *Academy*, 24 (1883), 179-80 (p 180).

[18] David Trotter, in his study on the English novel connects the rise of Naturalism with the rise of what he defines as the 'decline-plot', or the plot of' physical and moral exhaustion'; see David Trotter, *The English Novel in History: 1895-1920* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 114-15. Further connections between the decline-plot and degeneration narratives, and their relevance in the process of reception of Dostoevskii's novels, will be established in this study in Part I: Chapter 3.

scientific disciplines and the imaginative world of literature. On the other hand, the attention paid to the working classes as a new subject for fiction speaks of the impossibility of avoiding the issue of working-class living conditions.

To become a subject of literature, however, did not necessarily imply any substantial amelioration of those conditions, especially when the responsibility for them was imputed to 'evil', somehow intrinsic to, and engendered almost *metaphysically* by, the new technologies and new factories, rather than to the political will of the ruling classes themselves. Neither did the appropriation of this new subject in the literary realm facilitate the spreading of reading among workers. Both the industrial and the slum novels were written by authors who, and for an audience which, were *not* 'working class'.[19] These new intellectuals, of middle class origin and distinguished from the upper class men of letters, tried to draw the attention of the whole of society to a situation that risked becoming uncontrollably alarming. The unfettered development of towns helped, quite literally, to 'map out' within the new cities the economic, social, and cultural gulf between classes. The 'discovery' by Disraeli of the 'two nations' evoked very much the *explorations* of the New World.

In this atmosphere, the production of books started to differentiate itself into two branches: there were books *by* the middle-classes *for* the middle-classes and books *by* the middle-classes *for* the working classes. Nevertheless, while in theory it is possible to trace a demarcation between these two types of cultural products, in practice it is quite difficult to confirm such sharp distinctions.[20] Although the working classes did not have control over any of the structures of the emerging cultural industry, they had access to the products of that industry that were not immediately destined for them. Literary

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[19] Peter J. Keating, *The Working Classes in Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 2-3.
[20] Peter J. Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel - 1875-1914* (London: Fontana Press, 1991), p. 27.

readings were not at all alien to the intellectuals of the working classes, nor was 'useful knowledge'.

In general, the growth of leisure, and within it, the expanding of reading habits contributed to a changed attitude towards so-called 'imaginative literature'. In spite of the persistence of the old religious and utilitarian prejudices against reading for entertainment, once the printed word started to circulate, the diffusion of the novel and of 'light literature' was inevitable. The habit of reading for amusement, and not for a fixed end in mind, spread even among the puritan middle classes.[21] Increasingly, reading novels was considered a rational way to spend free time. The first large-scale surveys on the state of fiction emphasised the important role played by the novel in the progress of society, because of its capacity to 'advanc[e] the knowledge of human nature'.[22] Far from being conceived as art, the novel could nonetheless provide an 'experimental' knowledge of facts, compared with which the abstract and/or introspective methods were insufficient. However, besides popularity, what the novel had to acquire was prestige.

Two factors, among others, contributed to the growing prestige of the novel. The first was simply its increasing financial success. The proportional growth of the reading public drew attention to fiction's 'positive' qualities in terms of profits. Secondly, the novel was gradually promoted as a sort of secular alternative to the omnipresent and interfering influence of religious belief and morality. Zola's claim of scientific neutrality for his experimental method granted to his novels a wider spectrum of investigation in zones until then unexplored because of the limits imposed by

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[21] The main source of reference about the spread of reading habits in this country has been Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* (Chicago: The University Chicago Press, 1957).

[22] Robert A. Colby, '*Rational Amusement*: Fiction vs. Useful Knowledge in the Nineteenth Century', in James R. Kincaid and Albert J. Kuhn (eds), *Victorian Literature and Society: Essays Presented to Richard D. Altick* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984), pp. 46-73. Here are cited two surveys about fiction: Hugh Murray's *The Morality of Fiction* (1805) and Colin Dunlop's *History of Prose Fiction* (1814), p. 47.

religious beliefs and bourgeois moralism. In Britain, the process of secularisation was slow and often openly opposed. Victorian novelists were continuously confronted with moral issues, and it was not unusual for publishers to demand that entire pieces be re-written on the basis that they offended against current moral principles.[23]

A debate around a definition of realism, able to provide a valid alternative to the naturalistic perspective on reality, occupied the pages of the major literary journals of the time. Is the 'realist' the one who reports in individual terms what he sees with his own eyes, or the one who describes in a novel not what he imagines but what he observes?[24] At issue in this debate were not, of course, just conceptions of novel writing, but, at a deeper level, also questions concerning the consolidation of the notion of 'bourgeois subject' and its relation to a changing concept of 'reality'. Fiction was the ground on which the notions of 'subjectivity' and 'real' confronted each other according to modalities that resulted from a modified concept of 'historicity'.

As Michael McKeon acutely points out, 'doctrines of literary realism, [...] rise from the ruins of the claim to historicity', and 'reformulate the problem of mediation for a world in which spirituality has ceased to represent another realm to which human materiality has only difficult and gratuitous access, and has become instead the capacity of human creativity in itself [....]. 'Reality' becomes a substitutive device for the notion of 'history':

> Realism validates the literary creation for being not history, but history-like, 'true' to the only external reality that still makes a difference, but also sufficiently apart from it (hence 'probable' and universal) to be true itself as well.[25]

By being 'history-like', realistic fiction represented a credible mediation between crude factuality and the artistic sphere, to which imagination is inevitably tied. The 'subject'

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[23] Keating reports two exemplary cases of authors pressed by publishers and libraries to 'tone everything down'. The authors are George Gissing and Thomas Hardy, see Keating, *The Haunted Study*, pp. 254-63.
[24] Keating, *The Working Classes*, p. 133. Keating is referring to two definitions of realism given by Morrison and Moore, representatives, in his opinion, of the 'two critical poles within which late-Victorian working-class novelists moved'. On Morrison, see Keating, ibid., pp. 167-98.
[25] Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (London: Radius, 1987), p. 120.

has the leading role in this mediation. Whether existing objectively outside the mind of the artist or created by it, 'reality' is conceived as an objective *datum*. The role of the 'subject' is not to give an indistinct representation of it, but to free itself from the constraints of historical truth and work as a filter. The truth of realistic fiction replaces the validity of historical truth. The notion of 'realism' ceases to be founded upon the greater or lesser degree of correspondence to 'external reality', and relies instead on the degree of sincerity or respect for truth on the part of the writer.

It is in this light that the introduction of Russian realistic novels in Britain must be analysed, if we want to understand in what terms and why Turgenev provided for a certain period the most adequate alternative both to French Naturalism and to Dostoevskii himself. The observation of facts, complemented by moral principle and compassion, where real life and the needs of the human soul were 'fully in accord with the spirit of the age', as Vicomte de Vogüé put it, provided a conceptual framework for the mediation of otherwise intractable problems.

2.3. *A Novelist 'Worthy of Note'*

Dostoevskii is first mentioned in a British journal, but further searches might prove otherwise, in 1869. In the *Athenaeum*'s regular reports on Russian literature and culture, among the publications reviewed there is 'the most important book of the year in Russia', that is, *The Systematic Catalogue of Russian Books for Sale at the Bookshop of Bazunof in St. Petersburg*, prepared by Mr. V.J. Mezhof, of the Imperial Library. The book, it is said, contained 11,993 titles. They were 'arranged according to subjects, with a separate index of authors', 'notices of all the criticisms of that book which appeared in Russian periodicals since 1825', and 'notices of four hundred separately published translations into foreign languages of Russian works'. Because of the extensive number of references, the catalogue was touted as a valuable tool for the study of Russian

literature, as well as history, politics, and economy, of which, as the comments of the reviewer prove, so very little was known. As far as 'fiction and general literature' are concerned, Turgenev, Goncharov, and Tolstoi are mentioned as representative of the best of the flourishing Russian literature. Only at the end does the reviewer cite Pisemskii as 'the only other novelist of note except Dostoiefsky'. This, however, is all we are told about our author 'worthy of note'. There is no reference to any novel by Dostoevskii, nor to any biographical details.[26]

It is worth recalling once again that by the end of 1869 Dostoevskii had already published *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* and *Idiot*, which were very popular in Russia, at least among literary circles. In spite of the growing popularity of the Russian writer in his own country, in a subsequent article by Ralston published a year later in the same journal, in a citation of the same catalogue the reference to Dostoevskii disappears.[27] Walter Ralston mentions the catalogue in order to defend the literary merits of Russian literature from the attacks of the scholar Frederic W. Farrar, who in his *Families of Speech* 'dares to say' that the only Slavonic languages which have any literary interest are Polish and Serbian. Farrar, in his answer to Ralston, from the pages of the same journal justifies his dismissive attitude towards Russian literature with these words: 'I was, of course, aware that Russia may boast of a tolerably extensive literature, but I still maintain that, with the exception of Krilof, Tolstoi, and Tourgénief, few Russian authors can be fairly said to have attained to European celebrity.'[28] Neither Ralston nor Farrar mention Dostoevskii.

It is evident that, apart from the degree of popularity that these authors could have in their country of origin, in Britain in these years (1860-1880) the attention is all around Turgenev and Tolstoi.

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[26] 'Russia', *Athenaeum* (1869, December 25), 859-60.
[27] The article in question is W. R. S. Ralston, 'A Slavophile's Appeal', *Athenaeum* (1870, March 26), 220.
[28] Frederic W. Farrar, 'The Value of Russian Literature', *Athenaeum* (1870, April 24), 453.

Walter Ralston and, to a lesser degree, Eugene Schuyler are the key figures for the initial introduction of Russian literature in Britain. Ralston in particular played an extremely important role in introducing his friend Turgenev to British literary circles as well as to the highest spheres of the Oxbridge academic world. Turgenev, on his part, returned the favour, reviewing the third edition of Ralston's translation of *Krilof and his Fables* (1868) in the pages of the *Academy*.[29] In many cases, Ralston assumed the role of a vigilant guard of any matter concerning Turgenev and the English translation of his works, as was the case when he denounced Eugene Schuyler's dubious translation of *Fathers and Sons* (1867), published 'with the approval of the author', but really a second-hand translation from the French *Pères et Enfants*.[30]

In spite of this incident, about which apparently Turgenev himself was not particularly troubled, Schuyler did not abandon his ambitions as a translator and scholar of Russian literature. In 1878 he translated Tolstoi's *Cossacks* and wrote periodically for North American and occasionally for English periodicals, such as the *Athenaeum*, to which he contributed the Russian section of the annual summaries of European literature. To Schuyler, we owe the first mention of a novel by Dostoevskii. In one of his summaries for the year 1875 Schuyler reported about 'A Young Man' (this is the English title given by Schuyler to *Podrostok*), a novel by 'Dostoiefsky', just published in Russia.[31] The brief review was not favourable. In spite of the interesting subject, that is 'the power of wealth in modern society', the author 'has fallen into the habit of

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[29] Ivan Tourgéneff, 'Krilof and his Fables. By W. R. Ralston', *Academy*, (1871), 345. In 1869, Ralston himself translated *Dvorianskoe gnezdo* with the title of *Liza*, subsequently generally titled *A Nest of Gentlefolk*.

[30] W. R. Ralston graduated from Trinity Hall, Cambridge, and subsequently, after a series of misfortunes, entered the British Museum as assistant in the printed-book department. His job impelled him to study Russian literature and language, at a time when Russian was very little studied. Ralston was also elected a corresponding member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences of St. Petersburg, and collaborated with the most important literary journals of the time, the *Academy*, *Athenaeum*, *Saturday Review*, and *Nineteenth Century*. Eugene Schuyler was a diplomat interested in Russian literature. He wrote for the *North American Review*, *Scribner's Magazine*, *Nation*, and *Athenaeum*. Biographical details of both have been taken respectively from the *Dictionary of National Biography*: entry 'Ralston', pp. 224-25, and the *Dictionary of American Biography*: voice 'Schuyler, Eugene', pp. 471-72.

[31] 'Russia', *Athenaeum* (1875, December 25), 874-76.

allowing himself to give too much importance to episodes' and therefore has become 'wearisome'. Schuyler imputed this characteristic of Dostoevskii to the serial publication system, which prevented the author from having an overall view of his work, given that parts of it would be published 'before the rest is written'.

More than for Dostoevskii, Schuyler's eulogistic tones were reserved in the same article for Count Alexis Tolstoi, whose death was regarded by Schuyler as a loss of one of the supporters of the cause of art for art's sake. His emphasis on the necessity of publishing Alexis Tolstoi's work 'at least abroad',[32] suggests an elitist basis for complaint on Schuyler's part. Serialisation and social criticism were elements of the process of 'democratisation' of, or at least of the progressive expansion of the means of access to, art. They progressively threatened the existence of an exclusive territory in which aesthetic artefacts, and those who could enjoy them, could be defended from intrusions. According to Schuyler, an overtly authoritarian state like the Russian was as damaging for art as were the claims of the social significance, function, or utility, of art being propagated in Britain at the same time.

Schuyler's claim for the autonomy of literary artefacts, especially from the increasing dictatorship of public taste, took, in practice, contradictory forms. Distaste for a progressive penetration of the artistic sphere into mass culture was at odds with the increasing utilisation of the products of the cultural industry, such as journals and magazines, the very media through which that message could reach the public sphere. While the literary artefacts, and their reviews, were increasingly gaining an 'autonomous space' and the numbers of literary journals and magazines was multiplying, in reality the exigencies of the market heavily influenced the journals' policies. In Schuyler's defence of the cause of art for art's sake one can perceive the

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[32] In Russia, Schuyler writes, Count Alexis Tolstoi was impeded both by the authorities, who thought him 'an ultra-republican', and by the contemporary school of writers and critics, who considered him 'a retrograde', 'Russia', *Athenaeum* (1875, December 25).

broader affirmation of the principle of *disinterestedness* applied to the sphere of aesthetic appreciation and production. The general outline of this principle was being manufactured in Britain, more or less in the same period, by English intellectuals like Matthew Arnold.

The implications of the concept of *disinterestedness* for the present study are considerable. For some of the most important journals of the last century, like the *Athenaeum*, the *Academy*, or the *Saturday Review*, the endorsement of this position became almost their *raison d'être*. The models of aesthetics provided by journals such as these contrasted with the kind of policy followed by journals like the Tory *Quarterly Review* or the Whig *Edinburgh Review*, where the reference to artistic works was overtly instrumental to current political polemics. In the case of the *Quarterly Review* or the *Edinburgh Review*, the defence of the autonomy of art was not an important issue. Their social status warranted to the upper classes the exclusivity of artistic fruition. With the progressive expansion of the middle classes, the modalities of access to the aesthetic sphere are subject to a process of adaptation to the exigencies of the new consumers, and producers, of aesthetic artefacts. The initial appeal for the lower educated middle-classes of Dostoevskii's 'social realism' of novels such as *Poor Folk* or *Insulted and Injured* was grasped by, and emphasised in, journals like the *Athenaeum* and the *Academy*. For example, in 1880, the *Quarterly Review* still denounced Dostoevskii for his negative influence, and considered the Russian author's ideas responsible for spreading in the heart of a people, 'dry prepositions and dead deductions', which are rooted in nothing less than Hegelian philosophy.[33]

[33] According to the author of this article, titled 'The Slavonic Menace to Europe', 'two powerful influences in Russian politics and Russian society', risked to threaten the stability of Europe: Panslavism and Nihilism. Turgenev, in his analysis of Nihilism, 'discerned that he had before him not a solitary phenomenon, but a type. He went deeply into the subject, and finally wrote his celebrated novel, "Fathers and Sons"'. 'Tcherniscevski and Pisemski' are also 'two instructive writers, for any one who wishes to study Nihilism'. The reviewer, on the contrary, regards Dostoevskii, whose novels are, in his view, 'sombre and repulsive', as having a very negative influence among the younger generations. 'Nihilistic' statements such as: 'Down with instruction and science'; or: 'The thirst for knowledge is an aristocratic thirst', and traceable, according to the reviewer, to the ideas spread by Dostoevskii in his novels, 'The

In contrast to this position, the obituaries of Dostoevskii in the *Academy* and the *Athenaeum* valorised in the Russian author those qualities that Belinskii had pointed out a few decades earlier after reading *Poor Folk*. In the *Athenaeum*, Dostoevskii's and Pisemskii's deaths (which occurred in the same year) were regarded as a great loss of 'two of the most eminent of Russian novelists'. Dostoevskii, author of 'an excellent novelette entitled "Poor Folk"', was characterised as 'the poet of the miserable (in "Humble and Slighted"), and the painter of abnormal conditions of mind (in "Crime and Punishment"), which he described with a depth of psychological analysis that strongly reminds one of Edgar Poe'. There is a reference to Von Thilo's translation, but only in order to remember the author's experience in Siberia, a consequence of his 'ardent' Fourierism. After this experience, 'as years drew on, the mystic element assumed a more and more dangerous tendency, and threatened to ruin his genius'. The author of the obituary, Nicholas Storojenko, is primarily interested in the young Dostoevskii, the social reformer, whom he takes pains to distance from Dostoevskii, the Slavophile reactionary. According to Storojenko, Dostoevskii's crusade against Western progress, conducted from the pages of his journal, drew him close to Slavophiles and distant from 'the part of the more advanced and educated section of Russian journalism'.[34]

In the end, the mystic and psychological element, as far as Dostoevskii is concerned, prevails as the main peculiarity of both his personality and his works. The obituary in the *Academy* focuses on the same points, although it seems that the author of the article is more aware of the whole of the Russian writer's literary works. Actually, this particular reviewer pays more attention to the major novels, and regards 'The Brothers Karamazof' as the novel where Dostoevskii 'reaches a still greater height' than in *Crime and Punishment*, *Demons*, or *The Idiot*.[35]

Slavonic Menace', art. 8, *Quarterly Review*, 149 (1880), 518-48 (pp. 546-48).

[34] 'Russia', *Athenaeum* (1881, December 31), 893-95. Note the English translation of the title of *Unizhennye i oskorblennye*, 'Humbled and Slighted', not yet known by the English readers.

[35] *Academy*, 19 (1881), 136.

It is in the pages of the *Academy* that the first article wholly devoted to Dostoevskii was published in 1885 by Schütz Wilson. Schütz Wilson, who knew about the Russian writer from his German friends, remarked that Dostoevskii, 'exceedingly popular' at that time in Germany, was totally unknown to the British public. In accordance with the *Academy* policy of paying particular attention to continental, and particularly to German criticism, he cited some articles about Dostoevskii published in German journals, mainly dealing with 'an elaborate comparison between Tourgénieff and Dostojewsky'. Following in the German critics' footsteps, Schütz Wilson maintained the comparison between the two novelists, and asserted that Turgenev was a 'pessimist and fatalist', while Dostoevskii was 'hopeful in tone' and 'believes in human perfectibility'. After providing some biographical information, Schütz Wilson mentioned Von Thilo's translation, which he thought to be still unknown in England. Finally, he referred to 'the story of the later novel [The Brothers Karamazov]', as to 'that of the lives and fates of a father and three typical Russian sons'. After giving a summary of it, Schütz Wilson translated an episode, part of the 'Legend of the Grand Inquisitor', from German, and ended writing: 'A work which can yield such an extract is surely worthy to be made known to the English public'.[36]

There is something in common then, which ties together these seemingly isolated, differentiated, and casual references to the Russian author. They reveal in embryo what subsequently will be one of the main characteristics, continued ever since unfortunately, of the reception of Dostoevskii, not only in Britain. I am referring here to the persistent identification of the ideas illustrated and characters portrayed by Dostoevskii in his novels with the author himself. This process has taken different shapes, leading either to the demonisation or sanctification of a personality that, unlike Turgenev, during his life was not a protagonist of animated intellectual meetings with the most important novelists and intellectuals of Europe. News about his personality seeped into Britain

[36] H. Schütz Wilson, 'The Russian Novelist Dostojewsky', *Academy*, 28 (1885), 395.

gradually and always surrounded by an aura of romance. Time after time, it was with the haunting ghost of Dostoevskii's personality, the Nihilist, the philosopher, the prophet, the epileptic, etc., that the way to the eventual so-called 'Dostoevskii cult' was paved.[37] At this initial stage of reception, however, it is necessary to investigate the cultural atmosphere in which the construction of these images of Dostoevskii occurred. Hopefully, this will help to put the cult in the right perspective and to understand what tensions it mediated, and to whom it appealed. The real extension of the 'Dostoevskii cult' to a restricted selection of enthusiasts is strikingly at odds with the description of the cult as a generalised phenomenon of appreciation. In fact, at the moment of the 'cult' Dostoevskii was not *read by the masses*. At this time, cultural production, as it has been intimated previously, was far from being available to all. The meaning of the apparent universalisation of concerns implied by the 'cult', which in practice involved only a restricted circles of intellectuals, is a matter related to the position of intellectual elites within a cultural industry which is not yet the mass-culture industry. The implications of this position for the Dostoevskii cult will be explored in due course. The following sections will focus upon the cultural climate in which a first attempt at introducing Dostoevskii's novels in Britain was made.

2.4. The Cultural Setting

2.4.1. The *Professional* Man of Letters

As indicated previously, the early introduction of Russian literature in Britain and the occasional references to Dostoevskii were characterised by an attitude of generic appreciation, mixed with distrust, rather than by a reasoned assessment of the literary merits of an, until then, almost unknown writer. As said before, this was partly due to the delay with which Dostoevskii's works were translated, and it also partly reflected a prevailing attitude towards literary fiction. Novels in particular, were regarded either as

[37] The 'Dostoevskii cult' will be dealt with in full in the second part of this thesis.

a tool to be used for political polemics, or as objects of appreciation. This amateurish attitude towards 'light literature', however, which characterised the education of the 'gentleman', was gradually to shift towards a more 'professional approach'. The offspring of such a shift would largely be represented by the transition from the 'amateur' to the 'intellectual', that is, from an education based on the summary acquisition of general knowledge to that of an increasingly specialised and parcelled type.

Obviously, this transition is not neatly demarcated, neither it is homogeneous. In the period under consideration, the late 1870s and 1880s, it is possible to identify a transitional figure, the 'professional man of letters', a composite figure that still maintains some of the characteristics of the amateur, but is already projected into a system based on the capitalist division of intellectual labour, in which the professional intellectual originated. What characterised the amateur was the fact that knowledge did not constitute for him a source of income. In this respect, Schuyler and Ralston are tokens of different but coexisting conditions. While the main incentive of Ralston's intellectual occupation was, beside an undoubtable passion, his economic subsistence, although still as a member of the upper classes, Schuyler's main incentive was literary appreciation, an amenity that other conspicuous sources of income, that is, his work as diplomat, could allow him. Thus, while to the former specialisation assured a reasonable level of competitiveness and credibility on a broadening market, to the latter Russian literature was only one of his 'favourite subjects'. However, both wrote for publishing, and through the journals both were in touch with public opinion.

This communality of intentions matters in terms of a definition of their role. Victorian men of letters openly promoted the purposefulness and importance of their work, in order to improve the moral level of the 'community'. The community they referred to, was the British middle and upper classes, from the ranks of which they

generally came and to which their writings were addressed. The more they became connected to their readers, whose number, although still exiguous, extended progressively, the more they acquired influence, and the more their activity was required to be 'professional'. As Thomas Heyck confirms in his study, the task of these intellectuals was not the expansion of knowledge (as it was for men of science), rather the task was the interpretation, supported by a background of general notions, of the existing order.[38] In a moment of gradual but fundamental structural changes, they were actually required by the increasing reading public to play this role.

The journals constituted the appropriate arena where any discourse claiming public authority and influence could be introduced. Journals like *Quarterly Review* and *Edinburgh Review*, or literary journals like the *Athenaeum*, or later the *Academy* or the *Saturday Review*, proved to be the ideal platform from which campaigns of all sorts could be launched, according to the political views of the editors. Their sphere of influence, although not nearly as broad as we could imagine for contemporary journals, was powerful, precisely because the audience was essentially constituted by that part of the population corresponding to, or linked by economic or political interests with, the hegemonic governing bloc. The journals themselves presided over the changes occurring in their relationship with the public opinion, and the traces of it are in the revision of relevant aspects of their policy. For instance, the Whig *Edinburgh Review* and the Tory *Quarterly Review*, in spite of their long tradition, were not adopted as models of journalism any longer, rather as anti-models, especially as far as the treatment of literature was concerned.

The issue at stake was much more important than it might appear at first. It concerned primarily, although not solely, the share of the benefits deriving from the flourishing of the cultural industry. The progressive specialisation of fields of

[38] Thomas Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 24.

knowledge, and the outgrowth of new disciplines, persuaded many businessmen to invest in this expanding sector. In many cases, the most famous of which were Blackwood's or Macmillan, the proprietor of a journal or a magazine would also own a publishing house, thus managing to publish books and then to support their sale with a proper campaign conducted through the pages of his own journal.

Although the profit-seeking policy concerned any newspaper, magazine, or journal with any aspiration to survive in the market, factors other than mere profiteering required as much attention, if not more. One of them was the degree of influence and authority that these 'emissaries' of knowledge were going to attain in the public sphere. Campaigns against 'puffery'[39] in literary reviews, in favour of spreading literature to the low strata of the middle classes, or in favour of a 'signed', 'anti-polemic', 'disinterested' criticism, were part of what Eagleton defines as 'the discursive reorganisation of social powers'.[40] Journals like the *Athenaeum* or the *Academy*, the *Spectator* or the *Saturday Review*, notwithstanding the differences, epitomised the dynamics through which this reorganisation took place.

In this respect, the concept of 'disinterested criticism' assumes a particular significance. The protest against politically biased criticism was only an exterior outcome of an ongoing ideological estrangement of knowledge from the realm of politics. The claim for an objective evaluation of literature imposed a change not only in the standards of judgement, but also on the figure of the critic. Men of letters posited themselves beyond political boundaries, and many journals, like the *Athenaeum* under the Dilkes, made a virtue out of the fact that they excluded 'political matters' from the

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[39] The term 'puffery', rarely used nowadays, literally means 'exaggerated praise, especially in publicity or advertising' (Collins English Dictionary). At the end of the nineteenth century this term was frequently used when it was believed that an author not particularly gifted received too much praise in journals and magazines. In this case, the reviewer, frequently anonymous, would be accused of 'puffery', that is, of inflating the qualities of a writer out of proportion, or of conjuring up news just for the sake of sensationalism.

[40] Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From* 'The Spectator' *to Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984), p. 11.

pages of their journals.[41] The sphere of knowledge did not interfere with, indeed had to be separated from, the sphere of politics. Men of letters had to pursue the spiritual regeneration of society, from which the political system would have benefited. They had to be regarded as the moral guides of the country, occupying a place that, as Matthew Arnold himself pointed out in many occasions, had been left vacant by, among other things, the decreasing authority of the Church of England.

Matthew Arnold's criticism represented a pivotal moment for the diffusion of this conception, especially if considered in relation to its general influence on the way intellectuals came to regard future conception of knowledge. In theorising a moral function of instruction and edification for the critic and the poet, Arnold, who was highly aware of the power which lay in knowledge when applied to political and economic purposes, defined the role that men of letters ought to, and indeed were going to, have in the above mentioned reorganisation. Arnold identified the task of criticism in the 'disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world', 'irrespectively of practice, politics, and everything of the kind'.[42] Arnold's campaigns in favour of a state-supported public education derived from the necessity, entirely of a political nature, to enlarge access to knowledge to include the low middle classes, the expansion of which was rapid and inevitable. As Keating points out, Arnold 'acknowledged the signs of the times and set about helping them to move in the right direction. This meant above all education reform; support, as always, for popular elementary education; and, even more urgently, improved education for the middle classes'. It is evident then that intellectuals such as Arnold were *organically* taking part in a political project, which concerned mainly the consolidation of the governing bloc,

[41] Charles Wentworth Dilke's editorship of the *Athenaeum* lasted from the middle of 1830 until the beginning of 1846. His grandson had the property of the journal from 1869 until his death, in 1911. On the history of the *Athenaeum* see Leslie A. Marchand, *The Athenaeum: A Mirror of Victorian Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1941).

[42] Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', in *Essays in Criticism: First and Second Series* (London: Dent, 1964), pp. 33, 19.

and the neutralisation of that variable that could possibly threaten stability, that is, the potential antagonism of the labouring classes, a concern which had almost reached pathological proportions since the French Revolution. Arnold made no mystery of the fact that culture, understood as manifestation of human achievements, but also as the project through which the dominant forces of society finalise and direct the potentialities of those achievements, ought to be handled by an oligarchy that possessed the necessary qualities of leadership, thus avoiding its falling into the wrong hands. Keating acutely highlights the link between Arnold's concept of culture and 'modernist' cultural elitism, remarking that, interestingly enough, in the atmosphere of anti-Victorianism that characterised the end of the last century, 'Arnold was one of the very few mid-Victorian writers whose reputation and influence continued to grow'.[43]

Thus, while denying the close bond between politics and knowledge, these 'professional men of letters' claimed authority and self-referentiality, in the name of a reiterated and reformulated concept of 'autonomy'. They declared, their 'faith in the certainty and unity of knowledge', as Appleton, the editor of the *Academy*, put it,[44] as *intellectuals* who, while attempting to preserve a sphere of autonomy of aesthetic judgement, ended by protecting the established order, thus playing *de facto* a highly significant political role. 'Disinterestedness', standing opposite, in Eagleton's words, to 'bourgeois particularism', 'bourgeois selfishness', denotes an appeal to, but also betrays a longing for, a superior totality. The universalism of German idealist philosophy, the influence of which can be perceived in Appleton's words and overtly cited as the *Academy*'s intellectual legacy, is utilised in the 'discursive reorganisation of social power' as a mitigator of the selfish pursuing of particular economic interest promoted by utilitarian philosophy.

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[43] Keating, *The Haunted Study*, p. 145.

[44] These words Appleton, editor of the *Academy*, wrote to the publisher of the journal, John Murray. See Diderik Roll-Hansen, *The* Academy *1869-1879: Victorian Intellectuals in Revolt* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1957), p. 120.

However, the dichotomy between specialisation and particularisation on one side, and universalism and totality of knowledge on the other, is only apparent, and once again the concept of 'disinterestedness' substantiates the falsity of it. In fact, the 'objective' and 'disinterested' approach to the various fields of knowledge required an increasingly specialised and committed criticism. Arnold complained about the low esteem in which criticism was kept in England, especially in comparison with countries like France and Germany, and he partly imputed this decadent state of things to the unceasing spread of the 'Philistines' ideology'. However, in order to give some kind of resonance to his critique, Arnold had to rely, or at least to go along with, precisely those instruments, such as periodicals, that were contributing to the consolidation of the economic power of those 'Philistines', whom he was attacking on ideological grounds.

The signed review policy, promoted by Appleton and a few others, and adopted, though still partially, only after 1874, was conceived in order to guarantee the quality and the 'disinterested' character of contributions. The reviewer built his own prestige around a specific subject, and the signature at the end of the article made him easily identifiable with his own topic by the reading public. However, the increase of the demand, due to the increase of the reading public, could be satisfied only at the expense of competence. The division of intellectual labour in the rising cultural industry imposed its own rules, to the detriment of quality or precision. The project to find in criticism a reconciliatory moment between a longing for a comprehensive interpretation of a more rapidly changing reality, and a progressive, although initial, fragmentation and reduction of spaces of subjectivity imposed by the expansion of the industrialised mode of production, was soon to reveal its illusory character, and in a sense the nature of the project already suggests a kind of self-awareness. It is not by chance that, while during his life Arnold worked in an atmosphere of relative hostility, around the two last decades of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century the

influence of his thought became increasingly relevant. At this time, the possibility of reconciliation, both at a social and political level, appeared more desirable than ever. Massive changes were going to perturb the sort of *pax romana*, if ever there was one, that exponents of the middle classes, like Matthew Arnold himself, wished to preserve as long as possible. Thus, while Arnold encountered open hostility during his own career, *Arnoldism* became ideologically effective in a period replete with a sense of collapse and conflict.[45]

One characteristic that implies a possible bridge from Arnold to *Arnoldism* and to Modernism, and it might be relevant in this discussion, is the different attitude towards foreign literature. The cosmopolitan character of the 'modernist' movements, due, among other things, to technological progress, helped to modify the almost xenophobic attitude that mid-Victorian men of letters had towards contemporary literature from other countries. Again Arnold is one of the precursors of this change: 'By the very nature of things, as England is not all the world, much of the best that is known and thought in the world cannot be of English growth, must be foreign; [...]; the English critic, therefore, must dwell much on foreign thought'.[46]

In this respect, the persistence of a degree of approximation in reviews of modern foreign literature cannot be exclusively imputed to the compartmentalisation, at the expense of quality, of intellectual labour suggested previously. The reasons for this are partially to be found elsewhere. Although the inclusion of reviews of French, Spanish, Italian, or later, Russian literature, was the boast of the *Athenaeum*, or the *Academy*, a competent knowledge of foreign modern literature was rare in Victorian men of letters. As far as Russian literature was concerned, this ignorance persisted, especially in this early stage. Apart from a few men of letters who built their fame around the specialisation on this topic, generally literary journals either neglected this field or

[45] See Keating, *The Haunted Study*, pp. 369-72.
[46] Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism', p. 32.

relied on the judgement of occasional commentators. The dismissive attitude towards modern foreign literature, especially novels and fiction in general, involved English literature as well, which only in the first decade of the twentieth century challenged, as an academic discipline, the unquestioned authority of the classics.[47]

Before then, English literature, fiction in particular, entered the public scene through different channels, such as public libraries, Mechanics' Institutes, and, above all, periodicals of all sorts. In a sense, the success and the credibility of the novel was interwoven with the parallel success and prestige acquired by these institutions, especially by the periodicals. These played an important role in filtering a possible indiscriminate affluence of foreign material. So did many publishing houses, primarily through the practice of the 'abridgement', an elegant, but in the end highly patronising term, a substitutive of 'mutilation', which was particularly recurrent as far as foreign novels (especially French novels) were concerned.

2.4.2. The *Vizetelly Affair*

When a little publisher like Henry Vizetelly started publishing abridged and unabridged translations of Flaubert, Maupassant, Zola, Gogol, Dostoevskii and Tolstoi, representatives of Victorian bigotry began to target him. The ruthless attack on Vizetelly's *Paris in Perils*,[48] concerning the events that occurred during the Paris Commune, anticipated the atmosphere of irritation that in general surrounded the activity of this publisher. He suffered continuous attacks from the National Vigilance Association, which launched a campaign against the publication of 'immoral' literature. Vizetelly made his job to spread foreign 'modern' literature, possibly because he was attracted by the perspective of good business, possibly because of a genuine concern with the introduction of Naturalism in Britain.

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[47] Terry Eagleton, 'The Rise of English', in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 17-53.

[48] Reviewed in the *Academy*, 22 (1882), 428-29, by W. Markheim.

As a matter of fact, there was a gap in the market, which Vizetelly, third generation printer, tried to cover by publishing cheaper editions which would stand in competition with those of the circulating libraries. George Moore, whose works were published by Vizetelly, supported the battle against the omnipresence of the circulating libraries, and was one of the few that defended the publisher when he was charged with publishing obscene material.[49] What characterised the 'Vizetelly affair' was the position of abandonment in which the literary establishment left Vizetelly when, already an old man, he was sent to prison for three months. Although, as Keating argues, the motives behind Vizetelly's project might have been largely commercial, the whole affair is very significant in relation to the impact of naturalistic novels in Britain, but also in relation to Dostoevskii's introduction to the British public. The theory advanced by Keating that Vizetelly was interested in publishing naturalistic novels because their daring and sometimes obscene content could have been an attractive factor for the readers, is worthy of being pursued, but with some substantial reservations.

It is true that Vizetelly's advertising methods relied heavily on the 'risqué nature', as Keating puts it, of many of his publications. However, it is equally true that the parameter of evaluation of the 'obscene' and the 'pornographic' was partly the very object of the dispute in which Moore himself, as 'Britain's leading spokesman for Naturalism', was actively involved.[50] As suggested above, the irruption of the French naturalistic novel into the intellectual panorama of Britain was so troubled precisely because the idea of a novel based on the mere observation of facts did not leave so much room for any kind of conventional morality, and this was problematic both from a

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[49] In 1884, fascinated by an American translation of *Nana*, Vizetelly began to publish Zola. Because of the increasing demand, in 1886 there appeared translations of seven works by the same author, three in 1887 and two in 1888. On October 31, 1888 Vizetelly was charged with publishing obscene libels. The publisher pleaded guilty to publication, and undertook to withdraw Zola's works from circulation. In spite of this warning, he decided to reissue Zola's works in a modified form, but in May 1889 he was charged again, and again he pleaded guilty. This second time he was sentenced to three months imprisonment. Information on Vizetelly's life is taken from the *Dictionary of National Biography*, voices: Vizetelly. On the 'Vizetelly affair', see the valuable observations of Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study*, pp. 245-51.

[50] Keating, *The Haunted Study*, p. 115.

religious and from a 'scientific' perspective. As Keating points out, Zola's 'horizontal insight into society' in contrast with the vertical view of English novels, 'was able to explore aspects of working-class life hitherto ignored by novelists, [...] without passing moral judgement on the life he described'.[51] No matter how attractive or repulsive these aspects might have been considered, the consequences implicit in the naturalistic description of social life, in the 'horizontal insight' into society, at first scandalised and alarmed British men of letters. A decade or more of controversies, during which the most ridiculous peak was reached with the imprisonment of Vizetelly, marked the history of the reception of the naturalistic novel in this country.

Yet, when in 1893 Zola was welcomed to London as a guest of the Institute of Journalists, a change of attitude was obviously taking place. Lukács' critique of Zola's conception of society as 'a harmonious entity', working as a great mechanism in which the parts relate to each other and to the whole in terms of causes and effects, helps us to understand what element could, up to a point, dissolve, or at least smooth the antagonism towards the French writer. This element has already been individuated in Arnold's concept of criticism and in the concept of 'disinterestedness', and can be otherwise addressed as a process of aestheticisation of pressing political conflicts. Aesthetic appreciation became a realm in which morality was defined according to different parameters. What allowed Zola's novels an 'official' legitimation among the ranks of so-called 'high literature', was the emphasis on Naturalism as a 'literary method'. Unlike what had been seen a few decades before, scholars and professional men of letters were, at the turn of the century, attracted by the aesthetics of Naturalism, by its 'sense of form and a respect for workmanship unknown among the novelists who satisfied the requirements of English circulating libraries'.[52]

[51] Keating, *The Working Classes*, p. 130.
[52] Roll-Hansen, *The* Academy, p. 196.

There is another element that contributed to this changed attitude, which Lukács identifies as the moment of transition 'from the old realism to the new, from realism proper to Naturalism'. Lukács writes: 'The decisive social basis of this change is to be found in the fact that the social evolution of the bourgeoisie had changed the way of life of writers. The writer no longer participates in the great struggles of his time, but is reduced to a mere spectator and chronicler of public life'.[53] Certainly, Naturalism could not provide political solutions to ever more acute social conflicts. The gradual ideological establishment of the writer as a 'solitary observer', characteristic of a whole generation, proved that a contemplative position, was more suited to the political role that professional men of letters were going to play in the 'discursive reorganisation of the social power'. In this context, far from making of the publisher Vizetelly a literary martyr, it is still difficult to dismiss the challenge that his publications represented for the mid-Victorian sense of morality, and not to see this challenge as part of a process in which that very concept was under slow, but deep and irreversible, transformation.

Keating rightly remarks that although Dostoevskii's works were as 'objectionable' as Zola's were, their publication provoked less opposition. Indeed, Vizetelly's project to publish the masterpieces of Russian literature was positively lauded by literary journals. It remains true, however, that after Vizetelly was arrested no other publisher dared to take the risk of publishing a new translation of Dostoevskii until 1912.[54] As seen earlier, Turgenev constituted a satisfying introduction to Russian realism, the anti-Zolaesque characteristic of which had been rapidly and constantly emphasised.[55] Vizetelly's editions and publications of some of Dostoevskii's works represented a slight departure from the previous trend of prevalent inattention that

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[53] Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki and Others*, trans. by Edith Bone (London: Hillway Publishing Co., 1950), p. 89.

[54] Within three years, from 1886 to 1888, Vizetelly published English translations of *Crime and Punishment*, *Injury and Insult* [1886]; *The Friend of the Family*, *The Gambler*, and *The Idiot* [1887]; *The Uncle's Dream* and *The Permanent Husband* [1888], all of them translated by Frederick Whishaw.

[55] Keating, *The Haunted Study*, pp. 129-31.

characterised the early reception of his works. He never finalised the entirety of his avowed project and did not publish the two last, more problematic, big novels of Dostoevskii, *The Devils*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*. Generally these were not so much appreciated by those reviewers that had read them in French or, more rarely, in Russian. De Vogüé himself maintained:

> In this work [Crime and Punishment] Dostoyevski's talent had reached its culminating point. In "The Idiot", "The Possessed", and especially in "The Karamazof Brothers' many parts are intolerably tedious. The plot amounts to nothing but a framework upon which to hang all the author's favourite theories, and display every type of his eccentric fancy.[56]

In spite of this mistrust in Dostoevskii's talent, the curiosity for the Russian author was finally aroused. The frequent comments in the reviews of Vizetelly's publications of Dostoevskii's novels about the integrity of the translations or about the mutilations of the original text revealed the inception of curiosity around the figure of the Russian author. Frederick Whishaw's translations for Vizetelly were usually appreciated by William Sharp, the reviewer of the *Academy*. On the other hand, from the *Saturday Review* came firm criticism. The renderings of Dostoevskii's novels were dismissed as 'villainous English of which the ordinary translator appears to enjoy the monopoly'.[57] Yet in 1886, the *Athenaeum*'s and the *Spectator*'s reviews of *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* were based on the French translation by Victor Derely. In both, Dostoevskii was introduced as 'one of the most remarkable of modern writers', and *Le Crime et le châtiment* as 'one of the most moving modern novels'. The distinction from Zola is rapidly pointed out. 'It is realism, but such realism as M. Zola and his followers do not dream of', writes the reviewer of the *Athenaeum*.[58] He (Dostoevskii) is 'never zolaesque', although 'intensely realistic', writes a reviewer in the *Spectator*.[59]

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[56] E. M. de Vogüé, *The Russian Novelists* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1975) [originally published in French with the title *Le Roman russe* (Paris: Plon, 1886), trans. into English and abridged by Jane Loring Edmunds, 1887], reprint of the 1887 edition published by D. Lothrop, Boston, pp. 184-85.
[57] 'Injury and Insult', *Saturday Review*, 63 (1887), 58-59.
[58] 'Novels of the Week: *Le Crime et le châtiment*', *Athenaeum* (1886, January 16), 99-100.
[59] 'A Russian Novelist', *Spectator*, 59 (1886), 937-39.

The fulcrum around which many of the articles converged concerned the issue of realism. Although Vizetelly himself introduced the translations of the Russian writer's novels as 'Russian Realistic novels', the reviewers generally remarked that the kind of realism offered by Dostoevskii adhered neither to the naturalistic and minute description of specific social environments nor to the self-complacent 'epic' of the British middle classes. Reviewing *Le Crime et le châtiment*, the *Spectator*'s article recites: 'We doubt [...], whether it will be very popular in this country; for it must be admitted that Dostoyevsky did not write with much regard for the prejudices of British Philistines'.[60]

In the pages of the *Spectator*, the epithet of 'realistic' certainly did not constitute anything like a compliment. In pointing out the absence of 'a single pleasant scene' in *The Idiot*, the reviewer of the *Spectator* commented: 'Perhaps that is only what might be expected in a novel which professes itself "realistic", since to apply this term to anything nowadays, is almost equivalent to saying that the thing so qualified deals entirely with what is ugly and disagreeable.' Instead, 'authors desirous of popularity should bear in mind that the so-called realism, which consists in a display of deformities, more or less hideous, dragged forth and paraded for the public to gloat over if it chooses, is unquestionably unpleasant'.[61]

2.4.3. The Unpleasant Dostoevskii

'Unpleasant' *was* one of the terms often associated with Dostoevskii's novels. In his celebrated book, *Le Roman russe* (translated into English in 1887 and regarded as a seminal study for the spreading of Russian literature in Europe), Melchior de Vogüé warned against the extreme *unpleasantness* of Dostoevskii's novel. He attempted to instruct his readers saying that this execrable singularity was to a certain degree justifiable. First, de Vogüé indicated that it was imputable to different functions that literature, novels in particular, had respectively in France and in Russia. While in France

[60] 'A Russian Novelist', *Spectator*, 59 (1886).
[61] 'A Russian Realistic Novel', *Spectator*, 60 (1887), 1575.

literature was required to be edifying and entertaining (so de Vogüé writes), in Russia, due to particular restrictions of the possibilities of expression, novels became the means through which a political and philosophical debate could be set forth. Moreover, in the case of Dostoevskii, the circumstances of his life were so peculiarly troubled that it was difficult to blame him for describing what had been part of his personal experience.[62]

From another starting point, which nonetheless led to very similar conclusions, John Lomas, in an article published in *Macmillan's Magazine*, commented on the impossibility of judging Dostoevskii's works and in general Russian novelists' works according to their adherence to the literary canons followed by other contemporary novelists.

> It is commonly said that a novelist fails when he relates his own experiences, unless he can so distort them as to be beyond recognition. The whole work has come to be one of perfected fiction, dependent for its success not more upon intrinsic worthiness than upon the correctness of the art with which it is constructed.[63]

The Russians, and Dostoevskii in particular, ignored 'all these academic rules', and generally followed their own 'intuitive genius' and experience. Thus, unpleasant and without style as Dostoevskii's novels were, they could be interpreted and understood only in the light of the author's life. It is a fact that most of the reviews insisted upon the analogy between life and work, and the more so in regard to Dostoevskii than in regard to Turgenev or Tolstoi. Dostoevskii's life, especially the way Vicomte de Vogüé had reported and described it in his book, had more in common with a romance than his own novels had. Dostoevskii's life became one of the narratives, indeed the most attractive, in so far as it allowed one to decipher and justify the various and complicated narratives of his works in a way that a stylistic analysis of the texts could never fulfil. Any critic or reviewer who followed this path, found himself in the arduous situation of having to define Dostoevskii's kind of 'realism', given that this did

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[62] de Vogüé, *The Russian Novelists*.
[63] John Lomas, 'Dostoïewsky and His Own Work', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 55 (1887), 186-98 (p. 186).

not conform to any of the parameters which they were used to, even the Zolaesque. They were dealing with a form so much aware of its own possibilities and so mature that the criticism available at the time was revealed to be mostly inadequate. When we enquire more closely why the reviewers recommended Dostoevskii's novels, the stress was on their originality, an originality hard to define in detail and unsettling. Thus, when the author's life was not directly foregrounded as a key to the deepest meaning of his works, the allusion to the 'morbid' and 'sombre' atmosphere, which surrounded the man as well as the works, was emphasised to such an extent that one without the other was unthinkable. The vicissitudes of this troubled life, 'helped' to overcome and sympathetically forgive the lack of that stylistic sophistication typical, for instance, of a Turgenev. His novels were interpreted in terms of correspondences to the author's personal life. Even when they were considered a failure, like *The Friend of the Family* or *The Gambler*, the depth of characterisation, coupled with the analysis of the 'human soul', was appreciated.

Dostoevskii's psychological profundity of analysis offered, in the complicated process of the author's reception, an opportunity to transpose the discourse emerging from the increasingly acute conflicts of society to a level of intimacy, that is, as a discourse about the conflicts of the deep 'human soul'. In turn, Dostoevskii's life became a metaphor of the 'troubled soul'. Thus, while Zola's annoying idiosyncrasies could be glossed over in the name of aesthetic appreciation, Dostoevskii's ones could represent a point of suture in a dismembered and changing notion of morality. The 'key-note' of his novels, the ones that were known in English translation, was 'suffering and sacrifice'[64]. More than novels, they were regarded as 'studies in human degradation and misery', describing 'sorrows and sufferings of the needy and the oppressed'.[65] It took

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[64] 'A Russian Novelist', *Spectator*, 59 (1886).
[65] The first quotation is from William Sharp's review of *Injury and Insult*, published in the *Academy*, 30 (1886), 290. The second is from the *Athenaeum*'s review of the same novel, (1887, February 26), 281.

only a few years to give a biological explanation to 'degradation,' 'suffering and sorrow', as Cesare Lombroso's and Max Nordau's books, so important to understand the frame of mind of the last decades of nineteenth century, were going to show.

Meanwhile, although the depth of insight was frequently associated with 'insanity' or, oddly, with 'vulgarity', it was somehow necessary to overcome the *unpleasantness* of Dostoevskii's works, as well as in general to get closer to Russia and Russian culture.[66] Unlike previously, in 1887 the Russians were heralded as 'the great Russian people, whose onward march is now disquieting many nations, and of whose inner life so little is known outside the frontiers of its own land'.[67] One of the reasons why Vizetelly's project to publish a complete edition of Dostoevskii's novels was welcomed with enthusiasm may well be connected to a changed attitude towards the Russian Empire. A whole series of gradual shifts occurred at the turn of the century, which contributed to turning an 'implausible' alliance between Britain and Russia into a 'reality'. As Eric Hobsbawm points out,

> With the Triple Entente Britain linked up permanently with France and Russia [the two historical enemies] against Germany, settling all the differences with Russia to the point of actually agreeing to the Russian occupation of Constantinople – an offer which disappeared from sight with the Russian revolution of 1917.[68]

When the historian examines 'how and why did this astonishing transformation come about', the explanations given are many and complicated, but pertain to a certain extent to the subject discussed here. In fact, only within a new configuration of European power, does a change of attitude assume some kind of relevance, and allow us to understand why at one point 'Russians' needed to be known in depth rather than be rejected as the *enemy*, or the *ignotum*, hidden somewhere out there in the East.

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[66] 'Russians themselves are said to consider him the greatest of the celebrated trinity of writers who may be justly regarded as the inheritors of Gogol, ranking Turgenieff and Tolstoi as his inferiors', *Academy*, 30 (1886).
[67] 'Some Russian Books', *Athenaeum* (1887, February 26).
[68] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of the Empire: 1875-1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995), p. 314.

Obviously, the intent here is not to cover in a few lines what Hobsbawm analyses in detail in his voluminous and comprehensive books. However, some suggestions can be taken on board in order to discern what kind of climate surrounded the increasing appreciation of Russian literature. Towards the last decade of the nineteenth century, it was becoming increasingly clear that Russia was not going to represent a threatening power for British supremacy in Europe. Increasingly Germany became the object of British anxiety. Part of this new climate was conceivable because of the possibility of more exchanges, both in economic and cultural terms, between two countries that were going to be allied against the increasing threat of the German Empire and its allies. The approaching process between Russia and Britain was just starting at this stage, but it is useful to keep it in mind as a contextual background for the formation of the 'Dostoevskii cult'.

3. From 'Morbidity' to 'Sickness': 'Degeneration Narratives' and 'Clinical Discourse' in the Reception of Dostoevskii

3.1. 'A Continental View of Russia'

3.1.1. Georg Brandes and the 'True Scythian'

Impressions of Russia, by the Danish scholar Georg Brandes, was translated into English and published in Britain in October 1888. The book is the outcome of a three-month journey throughout Russia, where the author had been invited by Peter Weinberg, a journalist and translator, who was attracted by the fame the Danish scholar had achieved in Poland. While in St Petersburg, Brandes delivered several lectures on the Russian novel, on literary criticism, and on Zola. He also lectured in Moscow and was generally warmly welcomed by Russian intellectual and aristocratic circles.[1]

From a critical point of view, the *Impressions* do not deserve attention other than for their historical significance. At a moment when Russia and Russian literature were just being discovered, they represented another door open to the mysteries of the Slavonic world. In fact, Brandes' book did not have the same impact as Melchior de Vogüé's *Le Roman russe*. The *Spectator* and the *Academy* reviewed it only in 1890,[2] and adopted two diametrically opposite positions. The reviewer of the *Spectator* expressed great appreciation for this 'unpretending volume', written by 'one of the ablest critics and publicists of the day'. According to him, Brandes' portrait of the Russian State, 'in depth of insight, range of knowledge, and vividness of presentation, surpasses every contribution we are acquainted with to our knowledge of the vast Empire which in England is still so little known, and, with insular heedlessness, too often slighted or neglected.'[3] William Morfill, by contrast, Reader in Russian and

[1] Bertil Nolin, *Georg Brandes* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), p. 108. All subsequent references to Brandes' life and thought are from this monograph, which is one of the few studies about the Danish scholar translated into English.

[2] The book was first reviewed in an anonymous article titled 'A Continental View of Russia', published in the *Spectator*, 64 (1890), 696-97. W. R. Morfill's review of *Impressions of Russia* was published in the *Academy*, 37 (1890), 438.

[3] 'A Continental View of Russia', p. 696.

Slavonic languages at the University of Oxford, and author himself of a history of Russia and of a grammar of the Russian language, from the pages of the *Academy* mercilessly denigrated the book and its author, with the rigour and meticulousness of the trained scholar.[4]

Yet, in spite of the presence of a large component of anecdotalism, which Morfill is right to denounce, one can find in Brandes' *Impressions* stimulating new elements so far as the reception of Dostoevskii is concerned. In fact, a more attentive analysis might supply a more solid ground for a better understanding of the enthusiasm of the *Spectator*'s reviewer, and for a definitive distancing, notwithstanding the many similarities, of Brandes' book from de Vogüé's. One of these elements is a quite precocious association of Dostoevskii with the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, in terms that contrast with those that later will come, for instance in Lev Shestov's *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*.

The chapter devoted to Dostoevskii and to some of his works was actually conceived a few years earlier, when Brandes was asked to write a couple of articles about the increasingly famous Russian writer. These articles appeared originally in the Danish *Morgenbladet* in 1882-1883, and later in other Scandinavian and Austrian newspapers. As an eclectic man of letters, the Danish scholar was interested in the whole of European literature and philosophy. His major critical project, *Main Currents*, was an attempt at writing a history of literature including the contemporary literary developments of the main European countries. In 1882, Brandes was already acquainted

[4] W.R. Morfill wrote *A Grammar of the Russian Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), and *Russia*, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1890). To give an idea of the general tone of Morfill's article, it might be worth quoting the following passage: 'Dr Brandes writes throughout with the facile pen of a practised *littérateur* (some of his expressions, by the way, are translated into rather quaint English), and his accounts of the writings of Pushkin, Shevchenko (where he appears to have mainly used Obrist), Tolstoi, and Dostoievski are very pleasant reading. But we never feel quite sure whether he has made use of original sources, so much is identical with the pages of Rambaud [...]', *Academy*, 37 (1890), 438. All the mistakes in spelling, sources, or historical details are meticulously pointed out throughout the article. This is a clear example of the rise in authority of Slavonic studies as a discipline.

with Russian literature, but it was after the great success achieved by *Le Roman russe* that his attention was definitively drawn towards the 'eminent Russian authors'.[5]

The circumstances in which the articles on Dostoevskii were written concerned the attempt of the Leipzig publishers to introduce the Russian writer into Germany. After the negligible response given by the German public to *Memoirs from the House of the Dead* in 1860, the German publishers tried again in the 1880s with *Crime and Punishment*. Several intellectuals had been sent the novel to read and to review, hoping that this expedient would help in spreading the knowledge of these works and their author. Brandes was one of them, and so wide was his sphere of influence that he 'helped to make Dostoevsky famous in Germany and Northern Europe'.[6] In this respect, his contribution can hardly be ignored or glossed over in any study dealing with the Western reception of Dostoevskii, especially considering Brandes' connections with German literary and philosophical thought. As Bertil Nolin states, although Brandes basically offered an outlook on the Russian author very similar to de Vogüé's ('the true Scythian'), 'his portrait of Dostoevsky was original and diversified'.[7] What makes Brandes' portrait 'original' and 'diversified', Nolin does not explain, but this is precisely the concern of the present study.

3.1.2. Brandes' *Milieu*: From Taine's 'Environmentalism' to Nietzsche's 'Aristocratic Radicalism'

Brandes was an interesting example of a continental intellectual devoted to a cause which took the form of radical liberalism or antidemocratic aristocratic radicalism. He represented that part of liberal thought that put the principle of individual freedom above the principle of authority. According to this principle, the rights of an abstractly

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[5] He knew Reinoldt's *Geschichte der russischen Litteratur* [A History of Russian Literature], cited in Nolin, *Georg Brandes*, p. 104.
[6] Nolin, *Georg Brandes*, p. 110.
[7] Nolin, *Georg Brandes*, p. 111.

posited free individual prevail above the social individual, whose freedom is limited by the constrictions deriving from the rules imposed by the social contract.

As a matter of fact, mid-nineteenth-century Danish society presented features that in other Western industrialised countries were only a reminiscence of the past. A liberal constitution and a land reform were only recent achievements of the newly forming middle classes, whose centre of economic interests was not industry but still land property.[8] Brandes was orientated towards liberalism as far as political reforms were concerned, but imputed the potential for progress and advancement not to the exploited masses, but to a few enlightened great men. Democracy was not his ideal institutional system, and it was precisely on this base that he began to be interested in Nietzsche's philosophy, described by Brandes himself as *aristocratic radicalism*.[9] The young Brandes, then an enthusiastic disciple of Hippolyte Taine's lectures, found later on in his intellectual development an adequate theoretical support from the most representative among the theorisers of individualism, Søren Kierkegaard in the first instance, and later Nietzsche. However, this development distanced his thought both from Taine's Naturalism and from pre-Hegelian transcendental Idealism.

Initially, Brandes was particularly intrigued by Taine's analysis of literature through the description of the social and political environment in which it was produced. Taine, the historian, was interested in the mechanisms through which a certain environment affected literary artefacts, and conversely, how an analysis of literary artefacts and their authors as products of their own environment allowed a better understanding of the spirit of a particular people or country in a determinate historical moment. Literature and art in general, therefore, were interesting inasmuch as they served a purpose for the historian. 'A cet égard un grand poëme, un beau roman, les

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[8] See Terry Eagleton, 'Absolute Ironies: Søren Kierkegaard', in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Backwell, 1990), pp. 190-91.
[9] Nolin, *Georg Brandes*, p. 124.

confessions d'un homme supérieur sont plus instructifs q'un monceau d'historiens et d'histoires', wrote Taine in his introduction to his *History of English Literature* (1863).[10] The major concern for the historian was to achieve a systematic and scientific knowledge of 'l'homme invisible', to bring to the surface

> [...] un noveau monde, monde infini, car chaque action visible traîne derrière soi une suite infinie de raisonnements, d'émotions, de sensations anciennes ou récentes, qui ont contribué à la soulever jusqu'à la lumière, [...]. C'est ce monde soutterrain qui est le second objet, l'objet propre de l'historien.[11]

The method by which to achieve this aim had to be borrowed, according to Taine, from the then expanding natural sciences, that is, from biology and geography, etc. Only in this way it was possible to create favourable conditions for the rise to scientific dignity of the 'moral sciences', especially psychology, understood by the historian as a sort of 'physiology of sentiments', but till then so entrenched with metaphysics to lose any credibility in the scientific realm.[12] 'La race', 'le milieu', and 'le moment' constitute Taine's formula, by which every psychological phenomenon could be explained. The verification and analysis of literary works and literary men's psychology on the basis of these *a priori* posited co-ordinates was the access key to the 'spirit' of an epoch:

> Trois sources différentes contribuent à produire cet état moral élémentaire: *la race*, *le milieu* et *le moment*. Ce qu'on appelle *la race*, ce sont ces dispositions innées et héréditaires que l'homme apporte avec lui à la lumière, et qui ordinairement sont jointes à des différences marquées dans le tempérament et dans la structure du corps.[13]

Taine moves on to define the notion of *milieu*:

> Lorsqu'on a ainsi constaté la structure intérieure d'une race, il faut considerér le milieu dans lequel elle vit. Car

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[10] 'In this respect, a great poem, a beautiful novel, the confessions of an exceptional man, are more instructive than a set of historians or histories', translated from Hippolyte Taine, *Introduction à l'histoire de la littérature anglaise*, ed. from the original text with a preface by H.B. Charlton (Manchester University Press, 1936), p. 55.

[11] '[...] a new world, an infinite world, for every visible act brings with it an infinite series of reasoning, emotions, old and new sensations which contributed to bringing it [this world] to light, [...]. It is this underground world that is the second object, the proper object of the historian', Taine, *Introduction*, p. 30.

[12] Charlton, Preface to Taine, *Introduction*, p. 4.

[13] 'Three different sources contribute to the production of that basic moral condition: *race*, *milieu*, and *moment*. What we call *race* are those innate and hereditary predispositions that man brings with him to light, and that normally are combined with pronounced differences in temperament and in the structure of the body', Taine, *Introduction*, p. 39.

> l'homme n'est pas seul dans le monde; la nature l'enveloppe et les autres hommes l'entourent; [...] les circonstances physiques ou sociales dérangent ou complètent le naturel qui leur est livré.[14]

And finally, *le moment*:

> Quand le caractère national et les circonstances environnantes opèrent, ils n'opèrent point sur une table rase, mais sur une table où des empreintes sont déjà marquées. Selon qu'on prend la table à un *moment* ou à un autre, l'empreinte est différente; et cela suffit pour que l'effet total soit différent.[15]

Brandes accepted Taine's theories with few, but significant, reservations. He was too wedded to a Kierkegaardian notion of the individual to agree completely with the explanation of external causality. For instance, he objected to the lack of an extended analysis of *genius* in Taine's theory, and in this respect Nietzsche's philosophy, just spreading also thanks to the interest of intellectuals like Brandes, satisfied some of the claims that these liberal radicals were raising. But the times were not mature enough. Some of those who hailed with enthusiasm Nietzsche's new concept of morality and 're-evaluation of all values' became belatedly embarrassed by the insanity of their *protégé*. However, when Brandes wrote his articles on Dostoevskii, he was just discovering Nietzsche's early works, such as *Human, All Too Human* [1878], and *The Gay Science* [1882]. Here it is possible to find some of the views about morality that will be later developed in *Beyond Good and Evil* [1886] and *On the Genealogy of Morals* [1887], on which Brandes lectured with little success among the students in the University of Copenhagen in 1888.[16]

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[14] 'When we have thus established the interior structure of a race, we have to consider the environment in which it lives. For man is not alone in the world; nature envelops him and other men surround him; [...] physical or social circumstances disrupt or supplement the natural which is left to them', Taine, *Introduction*, p. 41.

[15] 'When the national character and the environmental circumstances are at work, they do not do so on a tabula rasa, but on a tabula which is already imprinted. Depending on whether one takes the tabula at one moment or another, the imprint is different; and this suffices for the total effect to be different', Taine, *Introduction*, p. 43. I would like to acknowledge Prof. David Shepherd for the supervision of these translations.

[16] Nolin, *Georg Brandes*, p. 126.

3.1.3. Dostoevskii's 'Morality of the Slave' in Brandes' Philosophical Reading

The chapter on Dostoevskii starts with a description à la Taine: from the physical characteristics, physiognomy included, to the kind of environment in which the Russian author lived and worked. Brandes points out Dostoevskii's democratic stamp, à la Rousseau, but, unlike the French thinker, Dostoevskii imposes, in his view, his Christian standpoint. It is this specific standpoint that gives him faith in a moral revolution rather than a political one, 'starting from the bottom, in the spirit of the gospel'. As a 'spokesman for the proletariats', 'the morality that he [Dostoevskii] preaches is, perhaps, the purest expression of the morality of the pariah, of the morality of the slave'.[17] Brandes openly refers to Nietzsche, who, we have to bear in mind, was hardly known yet, for the definition of the two morals:

> We are indebted to the philosopher Frederick Nietzsche for the establishment of the real and wide contrast between the morality of the gentleman and the morality of the slaves. By the morality of the gentlemen is meant all that morality which emanates from self-esteem, positive animal spirits: the morality of Rome, of Iceland, of the renaissance; by the morality of the slave, all that morality which proceeds from unselfishness as the highest virtue, from the denial of life, from the hatred for the happy and the strong.[18]

As Joseph Frank reports in his biography of Dostoevskii, Brandes himself wrote to Nietzsche that 'Dostoevsky represented the very slave morality against which the German thinker was philosophizing with a hammer'. 'Nietzsche agreed'—continues Frank—'and replied in a letter (November 20, 1888): "I treasure him, all the same, as the most valuable psychological material I know—I am exceedingly grateful to him, however much he always grates against my deepest instincts".'[19]

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[17] Georg Brandes, *Impressions of Russia*, trans. from the Danish by S.C. Eastman (London: Walter Scott, 1889), p. 308.
[18] Brandes, *Impressions*, pp. 308-09.
[19] Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1850-1859* (London: Robson Books, 1983), p. 149n. Frank quotes the following sources: G. Fridlender, 'Dostoevskii i Nitsshe', in *Dostoevskii i mirovaia literatura* (Moscow: GIKhL, 1979), 214-54, whose position is similar to Brandes', and Wolfgang Gesemann, 'Nietzsche's Verhältnis zu Dostoevsky auf dem Europäischen Hintergrund der 80er Jahre', *Die Welt der Slaven*, 2 (July 1961), 129-56, a survey concerning 'Nietzsche's relation to Dostoevsky'.

A discussion about the extent to which Dostoevskii's novels influenced Nietzsche's works, or how much of Nietzsche's thought was anticipated in Dostoevskii's novels, could perhaps stand as an object of study in its own right. However, a thorough analysis of the influence of the Russian writer on the German philosopher goes beyond the purposes of the present study. For now it will suffice to say that although the German philosopher addressed the Russian writer as an imaginary interlocutor, and although similar issues could have arisen in the works of both, one cannot overlook the difference of the forms that they chose for the expression of their respective *Weltanschaung*. Philosophical discourse and artistic discourse cannot be conflated one with the other, nor can their comprehension be achieved by following the same analytical standard. Theodor Adorno, in his 'Introduction' to *Negative Dialectics*, refers to the complicated relation between the two forms of discourse as necessary and problematic at the same time. 'The aesthetic moment', Adorno argues, 'is not accidental to philosophy', because 'to represent the mimesis it supplanted, the concept has no other way than to adopt something mimetic in its own conduct, without abandoning itself'. However, Adorno continues, philosophy's 'affinity to art does not entitle it to borrow from art.'[20] Although the context in which the following passage occurs is concerned with a broader philosophical issue than the one considered here, it is nonetheless illuminating:

> A philosophy that tried to imitate art, that would turn itself into a work of art, would be expunging itself. It would be postulating the demand for identity, claiming to exhaust its object by endowing its procedure with a supremacy to which the heterogeneous bows a priori, as material—whereas to genuine philosophy its relation to the heterogeneous its virtually thematic. Common to art and philosophy is not the form, not the forming process, but a mode of conduct that forbids pseudomorphosis. Both keep faith with their own substance through their opposites: art by making itself resistant to its meanings; philosophy, by refusing to clutch at any immediate thing. What the philosophical concept will not abandon is the yearning that animates the nonconceptual side of art, and whose fulfilment shuns the immediate side of

[20] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 14-15.

> art as mere appearance. The concept—the organon of thinking, and yet the wall between thinking and the thought—negates that yearning. Philosophy can neither circumvent such negation nor submit to it. It must strive, by way of the concept, to transcend the concept.[21]

Thus, it is 'not the forming process, but a mode of conduct that forbids pseudomorphosis', that is common to philosophy and art. This should be borne in mind especially as far as Dostoevskii is concerned. Although his novels contain philosophical issues, they are thematised within a form in which precisely the claim for immediacy and identity between conceptual and nonconceptual exposes those issues to a permanent ironic condition. This condition pertains to a certain degree also to philosophical discourse, which, while refusing to abandon 'the nonconceptual in the concept', and questioning immediacy and identity claims, can build its own conceptual framework only through them. Again, Adorno helpfully states:

> No object is wholly known; knowledge is not supposed to prepare the phantasm of a whole. Thus the goal of a philosophical interpretation of the works of art cannot be their identification with the concept, their absorption in the concept; yet it is through such interpretation that the truth of the work unfolds.[22]

The perspective in which a philosophical reading of Dostoevskii's novels is necessary to 'unfold' the truth content of his works should now be clearer. It would be a mistake to identify Nietzsche with Zarathustra, just as it would be a mistake to identify Dostoevskii with the underground man.

The reason why I regard it as necessary to insist on this point is because part of Dostoevskii's cult in the 1910s and 1920s is based on the 'appropriation' of the novelist as 'philosopher', 'prophet', labels that persisted for a long time, for different reasons that will be explored as this study proceeds. What I am trying to trace here is the history of this appropriation, or mis-appropriation, if it is legitimate to say this. Nietzsche, who for his part greatly mastered metaphor as an aesthetic device,[23] did not seem to fall into

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[21] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 15.
[22] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 14.
[23] On the importance of metaphor for Nietzsche's writing, see Bryan Magee, *The Great Philosophers: An Introduction to Western Philosophers* (London: BBC Books, 1987), pp. 248-49.

this equivocation, and could serenely address, as said above, Dostoevskii as his interlocutor. The German philosopher certainly knew *The House of the Dead*, *Insulted and Injured*, *Notes from Underground*, *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot*. He referred several times to Dostoevskii in his works, especially in *Will to Power*. Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche's translator and scholar, even sustains the hypothesis that the character Myshkin, discovered by the philosopher in 1887, was illuminating in relation to the definition of the figure of Jesus in the *Antichrist*.[24] In conclusion, the choice is not between an unconsciously Nietzschean Dostoevskii or a consciously Dostoevskian Nietzsche. One is not compelled to accept Shestov's choice either: from the complete identification of Dostoevskii's position with that of his own characters to the subsequent association of these characters' ideas with Nietzsche's philosophical assumptions, and, finally, to the consequential, almost syllogistic, implicit correspondence of Dostoevskii's 'thought' with Nietzsche's.[25] What it is important to point out in relation to this study are rather the characteristics that the association between the writer and the philosopher took time after time, without losing sight of the multiplicity of discourses that are involved.

3.1.4. The 'Sick Genius'

As Frank mentions, subsequent studies, spurred on by the discovery of new material from the Nietzsche archives and aiming at a refutation of Shestov's sympathetic interpretation of the relation between the German philosopher and the Russian writer, have their predecessor in Georg Brandes. However, more than this can be gathered from

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[24] 'It seems plain that Nietzsche conceived of Jesus in the image of Dostoevsky's *Idiot*. [...] his whole attitude toward Jesus hinges upon the "something" he "learned" from Dostoevsky.' The words in inverted commas refer to Nietzsche's famous statement about the Russian writer: 'Dostoevsky—the only psychologist, by the way, from whom I learned something', quoted in Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, fourth edition (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 340-41.

[25] See Lev Shestov, 'Dostoevsky and Nietzsche: The Philosophy of Tragedy', in *Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Nietzsche*, trans. by B. Martin and S. Roberts, intro. by Bernard Martin (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969), pp. 141-322.

Brandes' rhetoric. Although in an embryonic state, one can isolate some thematics the presence of which definitively places Brandes' *Impressions* at a later stage of Dostoevskii's reception, a phase which announces all the problematics of Modernism. As shown previously, the rhetoric informing Brandes' work, but also Cesare Lombroso's and Max Nordau's, has a history that can be traced back, and in which Taine and the Naturalistic School play an important role. Lukács, in his *Studies in European Realism*, commenting on Taine and Zola as figures who contributed to the passage from the old realism (of Balzac) to Naturalism, traces lucidly the path from a misconceived environmental causalism to psychopathologies of an individual devoid of his social basis, from absolute determinism to extreme individualism.[26] Thus it might not be so much of a hazard to establish an ideal link between Taine's environmentalism, Brandes' flirtation with theories that promote an almost physiognomic interpretation of the genius, and Nietzsche's theories about the sick artist. This imaginary Ariadne's thread could be pushed so far as to include Lombroso's or Nordau's attempts at re-establishing the primacy of 'common sense' over the unhealthy (politically and socially unhealthy more than anything) 'degenerations' of contemporary artists, although Brandes and Nietzsche (but not Taine, interestingly enough) were themselves among the victims of their ostracism.

The implication of their theories, especially in relation to the reception of Dostoevskii will be explored shortly. Before that, it is necessary to point out that this link is not propounded as a leveller of the deep differences between these thinkers. It is rather suggestive of a similarity of problematics, the approaches and the answers to which are diversified according to the historical time and the context in which they were raised. Notwithstanding this, they do present certain aspects of continuity that in this

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[26] Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki and Others*, trans. by Edith Bone (London: Hillway Publishing Co., 1950), chapter IV, 'The Zola Centenary', *passim*.

case are worth exploring. Some of the connective points of this hypothetical constellation, which comes useful, then, as a heuristic device and does not pretend to be exhaustive in the least, have been already hinted at. In the following paragraph, Nietzsche's notion of the 'sick artist' will be considered in order to understand in what cultural atmosphere comments about Dostoevskii's morbidity and degeneration emerged. As it will be shown in due course, the implications of these ideas and their terminology resounded in the reviews on the 'sick artist' *par excellence*, Dostoevskii.

Nietzsche expounds his ideas about the sickness of the artist in *Will to Power*. In fragment 811 (*March-June 1888*) he clearly states that: 'It is exceptional states that condition the artist—all of them profoundly related to and interlaced with morbid phenomena—so it seems impossible to be an artist and not to be sick.'[27] This sickness, however, is peculiarly conceived. In fact, just in the next aphorism, Nietzsche clarifies:

> For by now we have learned better than to speak of healthy and sick as of an antithesis: it is a question of degrees. My claim in this matter is that what is today called 'healthy' represents a lower level than that which under favourable circumstances *would be* healthy—that we are relatively sick—The artist belongs to a still stronger race.[28]

The artist's capacity to give, regardless of the 'perspective of the audience', guarantees his creative power. However, the artist who wants to be also a critic (a condition of the modern artist according to Nietzsche) is an impoverished artist, who risks losing his most creative characteristics. Nietzsche enumerates them:

> 1. *intoxication*: the feeling of enhanced power; the inner need to make of things a reflex of one's own fullness and perfection; 2. the *extreme sharpness* of certain senses, so they understand a quite different sign language—and create one—the condition that seems to be a part of many nervous disorders—[...]; 3. the compulsion to imitate: an extreme irritability through which a given example becomes contagious—a state is divined on the basis of signs and immediately enacted—[...]—the realm of admitted stimuli is sharply defined.[29]

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[27] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 428.
[28] Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, p. 430.
[29] Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, pp. 428-29.

Needless to say, we are dealing here with a very delicate and complex aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy. As Eagleton points out, although 'Nietzsche has more than a smack of vulgar Schopenhauerian physiologism about him', it would be a mistake not to agree with the German philosopher when he identifies in the body the 'enormous blindspots of all traditional philosophy'.[30] However, in this instance I will attempt to highlight those aspects, perhaps the most vulgar, that might be argued to be the partial precursors of the subsequent development and application of low-profile physiologism and psychologism to the realm of the aesthetic.

Brandes shares Nietzsche's views on the exceptional condition of the artist, a psychological state which is not just imputable to the environment in which the artist lived and worked—and here we are already beyond Taine—but which is imputable to a particular condition of the artist's mind. The intimation , on Brandes' part, of physiognomic characteristics of the artist are coupled with considerations about the latter's condition of the mind, thus suggesting a generic link between the artist's almost inevitably exceptional mental state and his physical characteristics, a link that will take sinister connotations. As Neil Kessel explains in his informative essay 'Genius and Mental Disorder', the suggestion of a metaphorical or authentic condition of mental disorder of the artist provided a fertile ground on which to establish an extremely imprecise, but very popular at the time, association between genius and disease, which flourished in the latter part of nineteenth century.

The connection of genius with madness was not new. Kessel quotes Shakespeare as one of those who saw affinity between the lunatic, the lover, and the poet.[31] However, it is especially in the eighteenth century that a modern notion of genius and its

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[30] Terry Eagleton, 'True Illusions: Friedrich Nietzsche', in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, pp. 234-61 (p. 234). For a fuller discussion of the concept of the body in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, see also Eagleton, 'The Death of Desire: Arthur Schopenhauer', in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, pp. 153-72.

[31] Neil Kessel, 'Genius and Mental Disorder: A History of Ideas Concerning Their Conjunction', in Penelope Murray (ed.), *Genius: The History of an Idea* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 196.

exceptional state develops and starts to be an object of philosophical investigation. For Immanuel Kant, '*Genius* is the innate mental disposition (*ingenium*), *through which* Nature gives rule to Art'. Kant clarifies in what relation Art, Nature and rule stand:

> [...] every art presupposes rules which are laid down as the foundation which first enables a product, if it is to be called one of art, to be represented as possible. The concept of fine art, however, does not permit of the judgement upon the beauty of its product being derived from any rule that has a *concept* for its determining ground, and that depends, consequently, on a concept of the way in which the product is possible. Consequently fine art cannot of its own self excogitate the rule according to which it is to effectuate its product. But since, for all that, a product can never be called art unless there is a preceding rule, it follows that nature in the individual (and by virtue of the harmony of his faculties) must give the rule to art; i.e. fine art is only possible as a product of genius.[32]

Therefore, rules do apply to art and nature but not to genius, which is conceived as a 'natural talent', a 'natural endowment', which cannot be learned precisely because it 'requires to be bestowed directly from the hand of nature upon each individual'.[33] Genius rather than being determined by any rule is the way through which nature 'gives the rule'. There is no way, then, by which this talent could be transmitted, and the artist himself does not have any theoretical understanding of the mechanisms by which he renders his gift in his works. However, Kant is unequivocal when he states that genius alone is not enough to produce a work of art. To have 'natural talent' is a necessary condition of fine art, but not sufficient: 'Genius can do no more than furnish rich *material* for products of fine art; its elaboration and its *form* require a talent academically trained, so that it may be employed in such a way as to stand the test of judgement.'[34]

Drummond Bone opens his essay on the Romantic notion of genius with the assertion that 'the word "genius" itself is often a kind of aporia'.[35] In Kant's definition

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[32] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. by James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), first edition 1952, p. 168.
[33] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, p. 170.
[34] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, pp. 171-72.
[35] Drummond Bone, 'The Emptiness of the Genius: Aspects of Romanticism', in Penelope Murray (ed.), *Genius: The History of an Idea*, pp. 113-27 (p. 113).

of genius the aporetical point is already latent in the philosophical investigation of an unfathomable exception, which is nonetheless responsible for the possibility of aesthetic judgement, that is, the possibility to reconcile, be it only at a formal level, the universal and particular. This reconciliation seems to be itself an unfathomable exception if, as Eagleton argues, 'the aesthetic [in Kant] is in no way cognitive, but it has about it something of the form and structure of the rational; it thus unites us with all the authority of a law, but at a more affective, intuitive level.'[36]

The relation of genius to knowledge provides an example of this incumbent paradox. On the one hand, the condition of the genius does not seem to be considered by Kant an impediment for a demeanour led by Reason. Only an 'impostor' acts like a genius in matters where 'the most patient rational investigation' is required. On the other hand, however, the balance between knowledge and natural talent is only apparently maintained, for the philosopher's preference, as far as the results are concerned, weighs decisively on the side of knowledge. Although men of science are not naturally gifted, they discover things in both art and science that can be subsequently taught and learned. Consequently, according to Kant their talent

> [...] is formed for the continued advances of greater perfection in knowledge, with all its dependent practical advantages [...]. Hence scientists can boast a ground for considerable superiority over those who merit the honour of being called geniuses, since genius reaches a point at which art must make a halt, as there is a limit imposed upon it which it cannot transcend.[37]

It might be argued then that the notion of a *rational* genius, if we can say so, certainly is exposed to the risk of constantly undoing itself, because of the feeble foundation of this exceptional condition. The implications involved in this attempt to accomplish what Bone defines as a 'secular absolute', thus breaking the frail bond that tied the idea of genius to the impersonally instinctive natural gift, are constitutive of the Romantic debate. If genius can be also understanding, the direction given to it can be

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[36] Eagleton, 'The Kantian Imaginary', in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, p. 75.
[37] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, p. 170.

chosen self-consciously. Therefore, the tension between nature and knowledge, between instinct and method, between genius and rules, fostered, although contradictorily, by Kant's definition of genius, is further exacerbated in the ambivalence of the Romantic usage of the term. As Bone states:

> The idea of genius as a Promethean substitute for divinity, and the very involvement of the word philologically with 'spirit' or 'soul', involve us in contradictory movements towards both man and God, realization and essentialization, and the awkwardnesses of religious presence, secular absolute, and individual universality [...].[38]

It is this 'ambiguous gift' that left space for sinister associations, especially when the qualities of genius were eventually to be investigated in the light of what the Romantic Coleridge already claims as 'good sense'.[39]

3.1.5. The Degenerate Physiognomy of the Artist

The book where the ambivalence of the Romantic notion of genius is tempered by generic appeals to 'good sense or common sense' is Cesare Lombroso's *The Man of Genius*, a study that at the time when it was published claimed scientific authority. Genius is no longer the 'natural gift' of Kantian memory, in which understanding plays no part, but rather a secular concept. It does not apply just to the artist, but to every field of knowledge. Although Lombroso recognises that it is possible to have a man of talent lacking in genius and vice versa, he generally imputes to both a certain degree of 'abnormality'. Specifically, men of genius are 'lacking in tact, in moderation, in the sense of practical life, in the virtues which are alone recognised as real by the masses, and which alone are useful in social affairs [...] Good sense travels on the well-worn paths; genius, never.'[40] Thus, the connection between genius and degeneration is very rapidly established. Genius is both a physical and a moral degeneration, which

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[38] Bone, 'The Emptiness of the Genius', p. 114.
[39] Coleridge's letter to Lady Beaumont, quoted in Bone, 'The Emptiness of the Genius', p. 124.
[40] Cesare Lombroso, *The Man of Genius*, English translation [by Havelock Ellis] from the Italian *Genio e follia* [1888] (London: Walter Scott, 1891), pp. ix-x.

manifests itself through specific pathologies, the scientific analysis of which can offer a serious contribution, in Lombroso's view, to the study of literature and art in general.

Although the kind of language used by Lombroso might seem ridiculous for the contemporary reader, it was not so when the book was published. Certainly it encountered forms of opposition, but this opposition can only be indicative of the popularity reached by these theories at the turn of the century. Dostoevskii's life and works represented in this respect the ideal example of the degenerative and morbid artist.[41] Lombroso pretended to ground scientifically what de Vogüé or Brandes hinted at on a critical level. Thus, when mapping out 'certain characters which very frequently, though not constantly, accompany these fatal degenerations', Lombroso points out the 'cretin-like physiognomy' of 'Dostoieffsky'.[42] When remarking on the egotism of insane men of genius, which brings them to speak obsessively of themselves and of their manias in their own works, Lombroso again refers to Dostoevskii's novels' 'semi-insane' and 'lunatic' characters.[43] However, the apex is reached when he describes 'the epileptoid nature of the genius', arguing that 'the creative power of genius may be a form of degenerative psychosis belonging to the family of epileptic affections'. And obviously, Dostoevskii's description, in *The Idiot* or *The Devils*, of the effects of an epileptic fit is used to demonstrate a connection between epilepsy and 'creative inspiration or *oestrus*'.[44]

In spite of the patent lack of any scientific foundation for these theories, and in spite of the general disregard in which they are held, it might be surprising how

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[41] In Russia, this standpoint was taken by Nikolai K. Mikhailovsky, who in his *Dostoevsky: A Cruel Talent*, published in 1882, suggested that Dostoevskii's nature was far from being compassionate towards 'injured and insulted' but, on the contrary, quite 'cruel'. This 'cruelty' revealed itself more distinctly, in Mikhailovsky's view, in Dostoevskii's artistic talent. In confronting the critic Dobroliubov's contrasting opinion, Mikhailovsky writes: 'We, on the contrary, [...] not only do not see in him [Dostoevskii] an 'anguish' for the insulted and injured person, but, on the contrary, we see a sort of instinctive yearning to cause this insulted and injured person anguish', Nikolai K. Mikhailovsky, *Dostoevsky: A Cruel Talent*, trans. by Spencer Cadmus (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978), p. 48.

[42] Lombroso, *The Man of Genius*, pp. 7, 8.

[43] Lombroso, *The Man of Genius*, p. 321.

[44] Lombroso, *The Man of Genius*, pp. 336, 338-40.

pervasive their rhetoric still can be in these days, especially among those scientific branches, like genetics or neuropsychology, for instance, which are too often considered above suspicion.[45] At the end of the last century, however, the physician was increasingly becoming an authoritative figure, whose judgement, as far as mental disorders were concerned, could make a difference. At a moment when the boundaries between what was socially acceptable or unacceptable were being strongly delineated, theories of degeneration flourished to stigmatise the less cooperative sectors of society. The rise of psychology as a scientific discipline, the 'series of operations, which silently organised the world of the asylum, the method of cure, and at the same time the concrete experience of madness',[46] are part of this process, although their function is obviously not exhausted in the process itself.

One is not suggesting here that there was a big conspiracy on the part of obscure forces of the ideological state apparatuses to disrupt any form of opposition, but that certainly it is possible to individuate certain channels by which the hegemonic classes attempted (whether successfully or not is a different issue) to implement their ideology. The legitimation of sinister narratives centred on very suspect pseudo-theories of 'race', by endowing them with such specialised linguistic devices as to give them the aura and the authority of a scientific discourse, can be considered as one of these channels.

In this respect, Max Nordau's book *Degeneration*, published in German in 1892, translated into English in 1895, and openly inspired by Lombroso's publications, is an

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[45] See, for instance, the article (covering almost a full page) published in the *Guardian*, 20 October 1998 (p. 3), with the eloquent title 'Van Gogh's Tortured Genius Finds Echo in Work of Dementia Patients'. In this article it is reported, without a shadow of irony, that a certain 'Bruce Miller of the University of California at San Francisco writes in the latest issue of the journal *Neurology* that a relatively rare dementia could bring out startling artistic talent in some people—and this would blossom even though they could no longer understand words such as "art".' The article concludes with this astonishingly confused as well as worrying statement: 'Painters such as Van Gogh were geniuses to start with [sic!]—but Prof. Miller believes that the artistry he and colleagues had seen in the Californian clinics could be an accident of frontotemporal dementia, which accounts for about 10 per cent of all dementia cases. He argues that the failure of one corner of the brain could spark extra life in another.' It is surprising, and encouraging in a way, that although epilepsy is indicated as one of the characteristics of the genius, Dostoevskii is not in the list of the crazy geniuses!

[46] Michel Foucault, 'The Birth of the Asylum', in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 142.

exemplary attempt. As a physician, Nordau arrogated to himself the authority of publishing a book about the symptoms and possible cures of the spreading degeneracy among the new aesthetic tendencies, and more generally in contemporary society. His attack on modern civilisation can be seen and understood as an indication of the undermined confidence in the bourgeois project that emerged from the ideals of the French revolution and the industrial revolution. In the ultimate analysis, however, rather than an attack, it becomes an extremely reactionary response to any form of opposition to what has been traditionally consolidated, and therefore becomes part of the process of normalisation previously mentioned. In this sense, the Zionist Nordau is a figure highly emblematic of his own time, precisely because of his double-edged position. Extreme pessimism encounters in him blind (nearly mystic) optimism in a field in which there is no space left for a political solution. The offspring of this collision is rather a contradictory form of annihilating teleologism. On the one hand, the majority of civilised humanity is defined as a 'hospital', populated by degenerates and hysterics. On the other, 'humanity has not yet reached the term of its evolution', so that an ordered progress based upon the potentialities of the natural sciences would be somehow accomplishing the future of human species. On the one hand, Nordau clings to the optimism of the bourgeois original project. On the other hand, the age in which he lives patently makes the achievement of those goals extremely problematic. The belief in a political solution of social problems is removed from the horizon of possibilities by Nordau, and a rather more mystical perspective of natural selection of the species and survival of the fittest (the fittest being the one with the greatest capacity for adaptation) replaces it.

Nordau's project is clearly stated in his book: 'Such is the treatment of the disease of the age which I hold to be efficacious: characterisation of the leading degenerates as mentally diseased; unmasking and stigmatizing of their imitators as enemies to society;

cautioning the public against the lies of these parasites.' Among the enemies there are authors and artists. In his dedication of the book to his 'dear and honoured master', Cesare Lombroso, Nordau writes:

> Degenerates are not always criminals, prostitutes, anarchists, and pronounced lunatics; they are often authors and artists. These, however, manifest the same mental characteristics, and for the most part the same somatic features, as the members of the above-mentioned anthropological family, who satisfy their unhealthy impulses with the knife of the assassin or the bomb of the dynamiter, instead of with pen and pencil.[47]

It is curious, as well as apparent, that while Nordau identifies mysticism as one of the symptoms of degeneration, his rhetoric, veiled as it is with pseudo-scientism, assumes very often a mystic tone. This tone is particularly observable when Nordau imputes to himself a kind of religious mission, of which the writing of this book is entirely part. In Nordau's view, degenerates will end their 'race', because of their incapacity of adaptation to the changed conditions of the modern world, especially the hard conditions of labour under capitalism. They are therefore definitively lost. Nordau's concern is rather for those 'who are only victims to fashion and certain cunning impostures, and these misguided ones we may hope to lead back to right paths.'[48] Among the lost ones there are mystics and ego-maniacs of the likes of Tolstoi, Ibsen, Nietzsche and Brandes, the latter being 'one of the most repulsive literary phenomena of the century', 'a sponger on the fame or name of others'.[49]

But where does Dostoevskii stand in all this mélange? The Russian author is considered among the 'mentally afflicted', occasionally overcome by 'mystic fright'. Although the reader experiences 'a feeling of displeasure caused by the repulsiveness of the work', the undoubtable morality of his emotions 'gives us a feeling of pleasure'.[50] Obviously, Nordau always quotes passages from Dostoevskii's novels to show what

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[47] Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, trans. from the second edition of the German work, intro. by George L. Mosse (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), pp. 560, v.
[48] Nordau, *Degeneration*, p. 551.
[49] Nordau, *Degeneration*, p. 356.
[50] Nordau, *Degeneration*, pp. 226, 331.

Dostoevskii 'really' thinks. However, it is not so much this aspect that I think it is important to focus on as the necessity to grasp the atmosphere, typical of the end of the last century, in which these theories spread and without which certain terminology used to define Dostoevskii's genius would be incomprehensible. It might be worth remembering that Nordau's *Degeneration* was an extremely successful book for at least two decades. Its fame resounded until the beginning of the First World War, and it was translated into many languages and published in numerous editions. Although Dostoevskii is hardly mentioned in *Degeneration*, Nordau represents the last link of the hypothetical constellation that I have tried to sketch so far, in which the way to mystical appropriations of the Russian novelist will be paved.

3.2. A British View of Russia

> It is refreshing, in these degenerate days of the modern novel, to turn from the inane indelicacies of fashionable fiction, from the hysterical emanations of the unhealthy imagination of the New Woman and the vapid vapourings of the *fin-de-siècle* young man, to luminous page of a literature that has in it all the life of true realism, whilst it does not flaunt in our faces those lower phases of human nature which are best left to the imagination of the prurient.
>
> Such a literature is the best Russian fiction of the century; [...].[51]

In his informative book about the English novel between 1895 and 1920, David Trotter argues that in the period taken into consideration speculations about degeneration of the 'white races', and decadence in society and art, were accompanied by regeneration theories, which inspired pseudo-disciplines like eugenics, for instance. The progressive 'biologizing of social theory' originated double narratives in which bloodline, its purity or its contamination, had become a subject matter and a major concern as far as race-degradation and race-preservation were concerned. Trotter acutely shows how these theories characterised the frame of mind of an epoch, and

[51] R.G. Burton, 'An Appreciation of Russian literature', *Westminster Review*, 144 (1895), 539-44 (p. 539).

'coloured all shades of political opinion, from the most reactionary to the most radical'.[52]

As Russian literature's fame became more and more established, the characteristics of the Russian people were emphasised in terms that recalled the rhetoric of these degeneration and regeneration theories. The promising development of the Russian realistic novel pre-announced, according to the reviewer of *Temple Bar* 'the splendid future' of 'the Sclavonic races'. What 'Tourgenief' and 'Dostoïevsky' had in common was 'the same ardent desire to regenerate Russia'. 'Dostoïevsky', particularly, showed us that

> There is no abrupt line of demarcation between health and disease, between physiology and pathology, between right and wrong. Indeed, is it not certain that what is right in one instance may be wrong in another? This is the vast field of analysis of motive and action lying before the modern romance. There is a physiognomy of the mind as of the countenance.[53]

The next year, in the same journal, an article wholly devoted to 'Dostoiefski' was published on the basis that 'he is an extremely interesting literary character, and his genius, though allied to madness, is indisputable.'[54]

This said, however, Trotter's remark about the resistance of some British novelists to the discourse of heredity (but not necessarily to its ideology), and to the decline-plot deserves much attention. Authors like George Gissing, George Moore, or Rudyard Kipling incorporated, in Trotter's view, the decline-plot within a new frame of moral deprivation of the environment in which the hero or the heroine lived. In the previous section of this chapter, I argued how the genetic and hereditary stream, and the environmentalist stream, are historically and theoretically connected. However, to join them into a single phenomenon would mean to overlook, for instance, the precocious modernist claims of a George Moore. The interest in this late Victorian Irish novelist in

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[52] David Trotter, *The English Novel in History: 1895-1920* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 114.
[53] J. M., 'Characteristics of Russian Literature', *Temple Bar*, 89 (1890), 210-22 (pp. 213, 216, 218-19).
[54] 'Dostoiefski', *Temple Bar*, 91 (1891), 243-49 (p. 243).

the present context is motivated by the fact that he wrote a preface to the first translation into English of *Bednye liudi*, published in London and Boston, in 1894, with the title of *Poor Folk*.[55] 1894 was an important year for Moore, in that it saw the publication of *Esther Waters*, the novel that 'established him as writer of importance in his own time'.[56] And Moore was perfectly in line with his own time, specifically at this stage of his intellectual and artistic development, if his 'major concern', as Trotter suggests, 'was the pathology of faith and creativity'.[57] However, he seemed to transpose to a more metaphorical level the degeneration plot, and to be concerned more about artistic forms than genetic fallacies. In his preface to *Poor Folk*, one of the very few publications of Dostoevskii's works in these years, the aesthete Moore, an admirer only a few years before of Zola but now extremely attracted by Richard Wagner's vision of the total work of art, discusses the potentialities of the short story as an artistic form. He participates in a debate of his days, when Maupassant's (in France) and Kipling's (in England) short stories were very successful, and when the short story as a form had acquired the necessary prestige (and space in the market) to be considered an artistic form.

Moore's attitude towards the short story was ambivalent. He made use of it belatedly, in *The Untilled Field* [1903]. He did it aware of the fact that at that specific moment this form was providing a profitable market in a short time both to writers who could not engage in the harder composition of a whole novel, and to publishers of journals and magazines who could thus avoid all the risks involved in instalment publications of fiction. Although the short story, in his view, seemed to be doomed to superficiality, although it 'remains little literature', it could be said to have some value

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[55] George Moore, 'Preface' to *Poor Folk*, trans. from the Russian by Lena Milman (London, Boston: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, Roberts Brothers, 1894), pp. vii-xx.
[56] Janet Egleson Dunleavy, *George Moore: The Artist's Vision, The Storyteller's Art* (Lewisburgh: Bucknell University Press, 1973), p. 111.
[57] Trotter, *The English Novel*, p. 119.

when it dramatised moral ideas: 'We should prefer little literature when it is good, and little literature can at times be very good indeed (witness Maupassant and Kipling) [...]'.[58] Dostoievskii's *Poor Folk* was another example. Moore had previously defined *Crime and Punishment* as 'Gaboriau with psychological sauce', but this novelette sufficed to change his opinion so much as to prompt him to compare Dostoevskii with Turgenev and Tolstoi. Maybe Dostoevskii could not challenge Turgenev in 'fineness of verbal style', but certainly he could challenge both of them in 'fineness of thought', although Dostoevskii retained 'a certain coarseness of texture' that seems to separate his story 'from work of the very highest class'. Moore focuses upon the form, the method of composition:

> For what seems to me to distinguish this story in particular and Russian fiction in general from English and French fiction is that the manner of weaving is not apparent. In English and French fiction we can follow the method. [...] But in Russian fiction the manner of working is not to be detected, the picture is apparent only in the result. The life upon the written page is as mysterious as the life around us; we know not how or whence it came, its origin eludes our analysis. The vulgar mechanism of preparatory scenes is withdrawn, is concealed in the things themselves.[59]

It seems reasonable to argue that Moore's words do not echo the much-reiterated criticism about Dostoevskii's ineptitude in artistic composition. Rather, there occurs something more complicated that in certain respects anticipates the preoccupations of Virginia Woolf, when she describes, in the famous piece called 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', a new relation of the authors to their characters. Although Woolf wrote that piece in 1924, the sense of crisis, and the perception of an epochal change in human character that she was describing, had their roots back to the last years of the last century.

The indication in terms of years of the beginning of Modernism is still, perhaps inevitably, an object of dispute. Virginia Woolf set this radical change of mind in

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[58] Moore, 'Preface', p. x.
[59] Moore, 'Preface', pp. xii-xiii.

December 1910, whereas Keating emphasises more the process that leads to Modernism, focusing on 'forces and events that serve, in the act of shaping the nature of a particular phase of society, to close certain options for writers and open others'.[60] I would rather take Gramsci's point that moral and intellectual development do not occur simultaneously through every social stratum, rather the opposite. According to Gramsci, it is a mistake to judge from a single perspective any change as progressive movement, as if any new acquisition was the necessary premise of progress. There is a multiplicity of movements, says Gramsci; moreover, even in the most progressive movement there can be regression. It might therefore be more effectual, and convenient in this context, to look at literary Modernism as the moment of convergence of heterogeneous forces which had been active in society for a while, and had imposed themselves on the social imaginary, towards a project that found an objectified form of expression in what we recognise today as modernist literature and art, but to the shaping of which ideology contributed those very factors that Virginia Woolf was arguing against in 1924.

It would perhaps be inappropriate, then, to call George Moore a modernist, but certainly we cannot help considering his exploration of ideas and his development of technique as orientated towards modernist claims. The technique of the interior monologue as well as the Wagnerian notion of the wholly unified work of art, to which he was introduced by Edouard Dujardin, founder and co-editor of *La Revue indépendante* and *La Revue wagnérienne*, questioned strongly the traditional role of the author in relation to his characters.[61] Moore was dealing with these issues in this period, and developed his views on them both in some of his subsequent novels[62] and in his essays. In his preface to *Poor Folk* he approved Dostoevskii's 'manner of weaving',

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[60] Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel, 1875-1914* (London: Fontana Press, 1991), p. 92.
[61] Egleson Dunleavy, *George Moore*, p. 116.
[62] See the analysis of the novel *The Lake* [1905] made by Egleson Dunleavy in *George Moore*, pp. 121-26.

which 'is not apparent' but goes deeper and deeper as long as the story proceeds. The critical note was turned towards the traditional form of realism and towards those critics who wanted to deny the conventionality of artistic devices. The use of the form of the letter by Dostoevskii attracted much criticism because, among all conventions, this appeared to be the falsest of all. Moore rejected a criticism based on the principle of major or minor correspondence to reality:

> The least critical cannot fail to perceive that these letters are unlike real letters, that they bear no kind of resemblance to the letters that might have passed between a half-witted clerk and a poor girl living over the way; nevertheless we realise the character of the old man far better than we should from the publication of the actual correspondence of two such people.

The reader knows the characters intimately, even though he might not know the details of their physical features or of the environment in which they live. The richness of external details and their realistic effect was not a primary concern for George Moore any longer: 'In such futile questions modern criticism wastes itself. So I repeat once more that all conventions are equally false, and the business of the artist is not so much to hide from the critic the convention which he employs, as to make him forget it'.[63]

To argue that George Moore was concerned with the interior monologue and the total work of art is not to say that he used these techniques expertly, or especially that he sustained his claims with the same conviction as a Virginia Woolf. However, he was on to something when he referred to the peculiarity of Dostoevskii's method in spite of his use of such a conventional form as the letter. The argument Moore (although he was not alone in this) used in the preface to *Poor Folk*, and elsewhere, anticipated certain notions of the stream of consciousness and the invisible author, on which Dostoevskii himself worked and which modernist writers fully explored. That he was an anticipator might explain the circumspect response from journals, such as *Academy* or the *Spectator*, that reviewed Moore's piece. Although the preface was generally praised, the

[63] Moore, 'Preface', pp. xix, xx.

reviewers did not seem to comprehend fully his point, and these perplexities were openly expressed in the articles. Generally they agreed in considering *Poor Folk* as an interesting novelette, but were less understanding of Moore's lucubrations about 'the manner of weaving':

> [..] it would be impossible to apply the metaphor of 'weaving' with its accessories of complete design and colour-harmony, to a work deficient in completeness of form, totally innocent of design or plot, and in which the range of colouring is entirely neutral and sombre. Dostoievsky's method is more that of a student who dissects and studies the limb of some small creature under the microscope.[64]

William Morfill again from the pages of the *Academy* is lapidary. After his usually aseptic comments on the quality of the translation and a few philological remarks, he concludes: 'Mr. George Moore has furnished a preface. We will not quarrel with him for what he has written. We will only remark that good wine needs no bush, and certainly Dostoievski gives us very good wine, [...].'[65]

3.3. 'Sickness unto Death'

In his study of the penetration and development of clinical discourse within fiction and in particular in the realistic novel, Lawrence Rothfield informs us that 'clinical discourse becomes saturated with a special kind of quasi-avant-garde cultural (and even political) authority at the very moment when Balzac, Flaubert, and Eliot invent their versions of realism'.[66] Rothfield explores in details the tensions criss-crossing the 'pathological realism' as the new sciences arise: 'As Zola's and Conan Doyle's work shows, medicine itself becomes more experimental and specialised, deterministic and logically absolute in a manner that is foreign, even condescending to clinical medicine.'[67] A useful warning can be evinced from Rothfield's book, which is the

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[64] '*Poor Folk*', *Spectator*, 73 (1894), 83-84 (p. 83).
[65] W. R. Morfill, '*Poor Folk*', *Academy*, 46 (1894), 249.
[66] Lawrence Rothfield, *Vital Signs: Medical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. xiii.
[67] Rothfield, *Vital Signs*, p. 149.

attention paid to the different forms that clinical discourse assumed during the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth. He argues that literary Modernism characterises itself as a counter-discourse, which rejects, or criticises, the realist and naturalist 'clinically coded notions'.[68] One reason for this, among others, is the 'abandonment of the embodied person as the constitutive element of fiction', and the assumption of the self as an organising point to begin with.

However, it seems that Rothfield gets trapped into what he himself defines, in his attempt to make the case for 'a new historicist methodology', as the 'archaeological method', which, according to him, permits one 'to account for differences within a genre without reducing the differences to an essential identity'.[69] This is indeed a very noble claim. The risk, emerging from his writing, is to dwell so much upon, and valorise the different fragments of the supposed object of study so as to disregard the consistent significance, and the potentialities, of the object taken in its whole complexity. On the one hand, his critique is mainly turned against those theories that regard medicine as only one among the ideological apparatuses, and that emphasise 'medicine's participation in ideology, focusing attention on the operational presence within the medical context of gender, class or racial oppositions—oppressive ideological differences that medical ideas reinforce or restabilise as pathologised stereotypes.'[70] On the other hand, his attempt at re-establishing a sort of virginity of medical discourse in relation to which it would be possible to confront literary forms, such as realism or Modernism, seems to fall into a kind of 'clinicism', which Terry Eagleton, interestingly enough, imputes to Michel Foucault's writing.[71]

Thus, the medical viewpoint is, as it were, chosen and 'incorporated' (the term is Rothfield's) in Rothfield's writing, almost in the similar way in which he saw it *just*

[68] Rothfield, *Vital Signs*, p. 157.
[69] Rothfield, *Vital Signs*, pp. 179-80.
[70] Rothfield, *Vital Signs*, pp. 175-76.
[71] Eagleton, 'From the *Polis* to Postmodernism', in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, p. 384.

chosen and incorporated in realistic novels. What starts as a 'fruitful point of departure' in order to 'interpret works of fiction within a cultural context that is first and foremost a discursive one', ends by reducing its own theoretical perspective to a more microscopic level. Rothfield ends by dealing with a specific terminology, which 'may help shape a novel's mode of characterisation by providing a model for the internal structure of the individual'; or it 'may help shape a novel's causal structure by providing an etiological framework for understanding causes, even where pathogenic features are not explicitly marked'.[72] However, what the archaeological method does not account for is the moment at which medical terminology, novelistic discourse, and social practices penetrate each other to the point when they generate something else. This something we might call ideology, in the sense that it has already surmounted the limits of the respective generative discourses, and cannot be reduced to the sum of their parts.

For example, Rothfield's archaeological method cannot account for the way in which novelistic medical terminology, or discourse (which for him seem to be the same), informed social practices which found at their disposal a whole set of terminology which was, as it were, liberated, also via the novelistic discourse, from the limitative boundaries of the scientific disciplines. In this perspective, I believe that degeneration theories and the decline-plot can be seen and understood as modelling one of the ideologies that informed the frame of mind of the end of the last century. Assuming this standpoint, then, it becomes apparent that although literary Modernism arises as a critique of clinical realism, it cannot be qualified as a 'counter-discourse', at least not in the way Rothfield does this. This would mean to ignore the fact that in a sense early literary modernists in particular partially grounded the attack on their predecessors on that very terminology or discourse.

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[72] Rothfield, *Vital Signs*, p. 179.

In this respect, Havelock Ellis deserves particular attention as far as Dostoevskii's reception is concerned, in view of his relevance for the issues raised above.

In 1901, Ellis published in the *Contemporary Review* an essay entitled 'The Genius of Russia', in which his involvement with degeneration and regeneration theories and practices is fully discernible. 'Dostoieffsky's *Recollections of the House of Death* and his *Idiot*' are here mentioned among other Russian novelists' works that have the peculiarity to 'have reflected the national soul'.[73] In Ellis' view, unlike the Western novelists, whose creations are 'puppets', Russian novelists are interested in human beings. Russian literature is marked with 'humanity', not 'humanitarianism'. Although the 'neurotic and abnormal element in Russian men of letters' has revealed 'the neurotic and abnormal element in their own race', Russia is a land full of promises, in terms of 'regeneration of the race': 'Russia at the present time is a vast laboratory for the experimental manufacture of the greatest European and Asiatic nation, fated to mould, as much probably as any nation, the future of the world.'[74] The 'special mission of civilisation' that Russians possess will carry them very far: 'These things, far more than either an outrageous militarism or the capacity for frantic industrial production, in the end make up civilisation.'[75]

Havelock Ellis epitomises the development, very contradictory at times, of degeneration and regeneration narratives that flourished in his own epoch. It is not just the medical discourse that informs his rhetoric, of which the reference to the 'curiously-mixed blood in Russian genius' is an example. Neither can his position be summed up in a few words like 'ideology of the oppressive state apparatus', especially if one thinks that his books were later banned by Nazi Germany.[76] In his theory there is not an 'incorporation' of the medical discourse with, in this case, a critical discourse. Ellis, the

[73] Havelock Ellis, 'The Genius of Russia', *Contemporary Review*, 80 (1901), 419-38 (p. 425).
[74] Ellis, 'The Genius of Russia', pp. 426, 428, 429.
[75] Ellis, 'The Genius of Russia', p. 438.
[76] Phyllis Grosskurth, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography* (London: Allen Lane, 1980), p. 435.

English translator of Lombroso's *The Man of Genius*, is representative of a generation that believed, and pretty soon experienced the dark side of this belief, that science alone could help shape a better society, by giving a deeper insight into physical, psychical and natural phenomena.

One of the consequences was the application of 'scientific' discourse to social issues, and conversely the apparent *socialisation* of scientific issues. The New Woman movement is emblematic in this respect. In fact, the progressive fall of reticence in dealing with topics concerning sexuality, in which Ellis played a primary role, favoured a redefinition of the still subordinate role of woman in society, which was already problematised by the increasing number of working women. As intimated previously, eugenics became the catalyst for the most disparaged tendencies, including leading Fabians, social Darwinists, and others. Sterilisation of the unfit was openly promoted as a method of control to create a better race. Phyllis Grosskurth, Ellis' biographer, reports that a bill, fortunately turned down by a large majority, was even introduced into the House of Commons 'to legalize voluntary sterilization, under certain conditions, among both the general public and the mental defectives.'[77] On this point Ellis disagreed with his colleagues, and on this subject he came to conflict with the German Nazi ideology.

Havelock Ellis is then emblematic not only because he offers a credible context in which to inscribe the tone of the increasing appreciation of Dostoevskii, but also because in a sense he lived through all the different stages of this escalation of dangerous illusions into which the middle social strata of his generation fell. However, it is not just a matter of slight misjudgement. As Eagleton opportunely remarks, ideology is 'less a particular set of discourses, than a particular set of effects within discourses'.[78] And the disastrous and disturbingly irreversible effects of these

[77] Grosskurth, *Havelock Ellis*, p. 412.
[78] Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1996), p. 194.

discourses, and of the dangerous illusion that they fomented, is unfortunately part of history.

3.4. Sickness unto Life?

Just before the publication of the translations that established once and for all Dostoevskii's fame, the Garnett translations, the writer's name was quite often associated with degeneration and regeneration narratives. Not many articles or essays were entirely devoted to him in the last decade of the last century and in the first decade of the new century. However, Dostoevskii's increasing authoritativeness, and the growing interest in Russian literature, were shaped mainly along the lines of those narratives. As Helen Muchnic helpfully summarises, there were published, in the United States, at least two histories and one anthology of Russian literature, in which Dostoevskii was included. Moreover, in the early years of the new century, Dostoevskii gained an unprecedented popularity in Russia, in particular among a group of intellectuals that highly valued the Russian author more as a mystic and philosopher of a new religion than as a novelist. In this way, the position of those who wanted to see in him the prophet of the bright future of the Russian nation was confirmed, if such confirmation was needed.

Among this group of intellectuals there was the controversial figure of Dmitrii Merezkhovskii, who was an active promoter, specifically in the years 1901-1903, of the Religious-Philosophical Society in St Petersburg, dedicated to the open discussion of religious problems. Valerii Briusov, who had taken part occasionally in the Society meetings, reported this event in the *Athenaeum*: 'In Russian society and Russian literature there has been observed for some time a mystic and religious movement. During the last year it exhibited itself with special force. A new society has been formed

in Petersburg for religious and philosophic meetings.'[79] Briusov mentions also a study by Merezhkovskii on Tolstoi and Dostoevskii, although the title that he refers to does not seem to correspond to the title of the study known in English as *Tolstoi as Man and Artist With an Essay on Dostoievski.* Briusov refers to 'Christ and Antichrist in Russian Literature', which rather resembles the title of the trilogy of historical novels, *Christ and Antichrist*, written between 1892 and 1904, and focusing around three personalities and their own time: Julien the Apostate, Leonardo da Vinci and Peter the Great.

Harold Bedford, in a monographic study on Merezhkovsky, informs us that it is rather in a critical work, *On the Reasons for the Decline and on New Trends in Contemporary Russian Literature*, that Merezhkovskii anticipated some of his views about Tolstoi and Dostoevskii, views that he later developed in his more renowned study *L. Tolstoy and Dostoevskiy.*[80] In English only the first two parts, abridged, had been published, and in 1903 a review of this translation appeared in the *Athenaeum.* The anonymous author of this review seems to fall into another misunderstanding. In fact, he refers to '*Tolstoi as a Man and Artist*' as to the final part of his trilogy.[81] There is a problem of dates, that might have been, supposedly, the source of this error. As Bedford argues, 'while it was in *Peter and Alexis* [final part of the trilogy, published in 1904] that Merezhkovskiy gave a literary presentation of his latest concepts, he had actually revealed it in much more detail a few years earlier in *L. Tolstoy and Dostoevskiy.*'[82] Thus, it might well be the case that when the articles were written the critical study was seen mistakenly as the final part of Merezhkovskii's trilogy, 'from divarication to synthesis', as he himself wrote.[83] And in a sense, this study is a quest for a reconciling

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[79] Valerii Briusov, 'Russia', *Athenaeum*, (July 1902), 24-26 (p. 24). For extended informations about the Religious-Philosophical Society, see C. Harold Bedford, *The Seeker: D. S. Merezhkovskiy* (Lawrence, Manhattan, Wichita: The University Press of Kansas, 1975), pp. 113-17.
[80] See Bedford, *The Seeker*, pp. 53-54.
[81] '*Tolstoi as Man and Artist*', *Athenaeum* (1903, February 21), 238.
[82] Bedford, *The Seeker*, pp. 91-92.
[83] Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, quoted in Bedford, *The Seeker*, p. 91.

moment, what he calls the 'One in two',[84] although this state of perfection is not implemented by any of two Russian novelists, rather only prefigured by the dialectical relation between the polarised positions that they represented. In fact, Merezhkovskii writes: '[...] so both Tolstoi and Dostoevskiy remain imperfect in our sight. Neither one nor the other approaches that highest reconciling and fusing region of thought and inspiration where the eternal azure is transfused by the eternal sun, and opposites meet in the Absolute.'[85]

Merezhkovskii's study represents one moment of capital importance in the multiple streams that contributed to forging the features of a religious existentialist reception of Dostoevskii, and which includes names like V. V. Rozanov, N. A. Berdiaev, V. Ivanov, L. Shestov, to mention only a few. Furthermore, with *Tolstoi as Man and Artist*, the opposition between the two novelists, both in artistic and philosophical terms, begins to be consistently theorised. On this opposition, although based on different premises, George Steiner built his own famous critical study *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky: An Essay in Contrast*.[86]

It is evident that for Merezhkovskii Dostoevskii represented not a novelist but a prophet who in his works prefigured the possibility of a great Russian nation destined to play a leading role in Europe and in the world. He, and to a certain degree Tolstoi, therefore literally embodied this hope. It is interesting, in relation to degeneration and regeneration narratives, to see how Merezhkovskii imagined this future in physiognomic terms: 'Russia has never yet possessed a world-wide face, beautiful and

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[84] Dmitri Merejkowski, *Tolstoi as Man and Artist, With an Essay on Dostoievski* (New York: Putnam and Sons, 1902), p. 161.

[85] Merejkowski, *Tolstoi as Man and Artist*, p. 154.

[86] In his book, George Steiner mentions several times Merezhkovskii, whom he defines 'an erratic, untrustworthy, and yet illuminating witness', especially as regards the contrast pagan/christian and epic/tragic applied respectively to Tolstoi and Dostoevskii. See George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky: An Essay in Contrast* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 12. Although Steiner's book is among the most interesting and fascinating pieces of scholarship, so far as the two Russian novelists are concerned, I believe that this presumed contrast between the two authors has been and still is very misleading, so as to become almost a prejudice: either with one or with the other.

national too, as that of Homer, the youthful Raphael, or old Leonardo'. What he aims at is explained in the following passage, which deserves to be quoted in full length:

> But the Russian people has not, so far, found its proper embodiment or type. Its typical man lies not in Pushkin, or even in Peter, but still in the Future. This future man, third and final, perfectly 'symmetrical", who will be wholly Russian and yet cosmopolitan—a face, I fancy, splendidly symmetrical—is to be sought for in a balance between the two great natures— Tolstoi's and Dostoievskiy's. Some day there will flash between them, as between two opposite poles, a spark of that lightning which means national conflagration. In this Russian shall the 'Man-god' be manifested to the Western World, and the 'God-man', for the first time, to the Eastern, and shall be, to those whose thinking already reconciles both their hemispheres, the 'One in two'.

When Merezhkovskii speculates on the apparent contradiction of such an ideal of perfection with the morbidity and cruelty of Dostoevskii's genius he gives an explanation, the tone of which should sound familiar by now:

> Yet does there not exist a less obvious but not less real connection between disease and strength? If the seed does not sicken and die and decay, then it does not bear fruit. [...] There is a sickness, not unto death, but unto life. Whole generations, civilizations, and nations are like to die for pain, but this too may be the birth-pang and the natural and wholesome sickness'.

And Dostoevskii was such a champion in suffering that he had almost achieved an *odour* of sanctity, 'if not of the author himself (though those that were about him declare that there were times when he too seemed almost a saint) yet that of the *Idiot* [...]'.[87]

The only reason why I insist so strongly in reporting what could easily be regarded as useless anecdotalism is that, although in Britain the mystical tone was slightly more sober and moderate, a certain mysticism was entirely part, as I hope to have demonstrated, of the degeneration and regeneration narratives. Ellis, years later, in his *Impression and Comments*, questioned the 'sanctity' of Dostoevskii, which means that the idea was not so risible for his contemporaries as it might seem to us these days.

[87] Merejkowski, *Tolstoi as Man*, pp. 161, 257, 258.

Achievements in art and literature were considered as 'products of a race', representatives of types into which mankind was divided.[88] Part of the cult of Dostoevskii consisted precisely in his valorisation as a prophet, maybe not prophet of the glorious Russian nation, but certainly a prophet, and at the same time necessary martyr, sacrificial victim, of the delusions of a generation, of the crisis of man, and so on. The contours of this crisis needed be delineated in physical and mental terms. Merezhkovskii is again dismaying in his sincerity:

> Who has overcome the fine delusion of our day, which confounds in each of us, in minds and life, the withering of the seed with its revival, the birth-pang with the death-pang, the sickness of Regeneration with the sickness of Degeneration, the true 'symbolism' with 'decadence'? Action is first needed; and only when we have acted can we *speak*.[89]

Action for him meant militant anti-Semitism, vehement anti-Communism, and active sympathy for Mussolini, to whom he referred, in his letters to the Italian fascist dictator, as the 'Creative Genius of the New Italy and the Creative Soul of the New Italian Renaissance'.[90] Where all this led is, again, unfortunately part of history.

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[88] In this respect, the comparison between English and Russian fiction was not made on aesthetic grounds, but as an expression of the temperament of a race: 'The heroes of English fiction, from Tom Jones to Tom Tulliver, are more or less representative of what the race tends to produce. [...]. The representatives of the Russians belong to a quite different type. The hero of English fiction has his *raison d'être* in doing, the hero of Russian fiction in being', quoted from 'Russian and English Fiction', *Academy and Literature*, 64 (1903), 14-15 (p. 15).

[89] Merejkowski, *Tolstoi as Man*, p. 273.

[90] Quoted in Bedford, *The Seeker*, p. 152.

Part II: The Making of a 'Cult': Facts and Perspectives

4. 'A Monster Erupting into the House of Fiction' (Constance Garnett)

4.1. 'Cult': Denotation and Connotation of a Problematic Word

The translation of Dostoevskii's novels and short stories took Constance Garnett about eight years, and this was the first chance the British public had to read the Russian writer's works in an unabridged form, at a reasonable price, and above all in first-hand translations.[1] However, to stress the importance that these translations had for the future appreciation of Dostoevskii—in a sense many generations of readers learned to appreciate the Russian writer through them—is not necessarily a proof of the existence of a 'Dostoevskii cult'. In fact, if we distinguish the denotative meaning of the word 'cult' as a 'popular fashion followed by a large section of society' from the connotative characterisation of the implicit reference to a 'person or thing popularised as a cult figure', then the 'cult of Dostoevskii' presents itself as at least bifurcated. While the denotative meaning of the word emphasises the moment of reception of the phenomenon, implying a character of generality, the emphasis of the connotative characterisation is rather on the 'object of cult', thus narrowing the focus of investigation. There are also other implications connected with the use of the word 'cult'. For example, one is that the social and cultural prestige and authority imputed to the object of cult, Dostoevskii in our case, is proportional with and reciprocal to the power of those who actually follow the cult. This last connotation needs to be further explained.

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[1] After *The Brothers Karamazov* (1912), Constance Garnett translated *The Idiot* and *The Letters from the Underground* in 1913, *The Possessed* and *Crime and Punishment* in 1914, *The House of the Dead* and *The Insulted and Injured* in 1915, *The Raw Youth* in 1916 and in the next four years collections of short stories were published.

Because of a series of converging factors, which will be examined later, it is undeniable that Dostoevskii's works aroused the interest of those who were dominating the literary scene. In this respect, therefore, the cult should be understood not so much in terms of popularity, as in terms of effect. Dostoevskii's works were appreciated within the narrow boundaries of the literary establishment. Even those who denounced the establishment for its capitulation to the laws dictated by the market, even those who vehemently opposed mass culture and were searching for new forms of artistic expression, the so-called avant-garde, relied inevitably upon the establishment for publication and circulation of their manifestos and programmatic pamphlets, and therefore they were, so to speak, 'well connected'. Figures like Constance and Edward Garnett, John Middleton Murry, Katherine Mansfield, and obviously Virginia Woolf and her friends, belonged to this world, which was small, maybe not so attuned to the moods of public opinion, but well connected and, above all, influential in the cultural sphere.

These considerations aim at stressing the difficulty of a non-problematic acceptance of certain terminology, like 'cult' for instance, a difficulty increased by the application of such a problematic term to such a complicated author as Dostoevskii. If we accept the word 'cult' as the most appropriate term to describe the characteristics of the reception of Dostoevskii between 1912 and 1920, we have to bear in mind that we are dealing with a term applied *a posteriori* to describe a very circumscribed phenomenon. It is also important to acknowledge that the contours of this phenomenon massively influenced the contemporary perception of the fortune of the Russian author in this country. From these few observations, one element emerges clearly: dealing with a cult is as hazardous as dealing with a double-edged sword. A cult, especially a modern one, while posing itself as an eternal, almost sacred, object of devotion and demanding religious fervour, can at the same time be as quickly changeable as any fashion is. This

is particularly true as far as the 'Dostoevskii cult' is concerned. Both Muchnic and Phelps write that it came as suddenly as it went, but in the end, both scholars do not question the notion of 'cult' when applied to Dostoevskii. Of the two, however, Phelps is the most accurate when he imputes the 'Russian fever' to a series of converging factors, which is a far more sober way to look at the phenomenon in question. The aim in the following sections will be to outline some of the key passages of this intense interest in the Russian author, especially during World War I, with the awareness, however, that it will be unlikely, even reductive in a sense, to give a definitive homogeneous outlook on a period in itself so full of contradictory elements.

4.1.1. William Heinemann's Project

When Constance Garnett's translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* appeared, Dostoevskii was certainly better known in the circles of the *literati* than ever, but he was far from being a 'popular' writer in Britain in the way some authors, not only British, were at the time. Be that as it may, it is certainly striking that in a monograph on the publisher William Heinemann, written by one of his collaborators as early as 1928 Heinemann's project of publishing the almost complete works of such an important author, is literally glossed over.[2] There may be many reasons for this omission, as well as for the persisting unpopularity of Dostoevskii in Britain. One reason might lie in the traditional British scepticism towards foreign ideas, which involved not just readers, but also publishing houses. To be sure, various attempts had been made to let European thought infiltrate British culture, now as well as in the past. Matthew Arnold's interest in German and French thought is exemplary in this respect. Moreover, in the last three decades before the outbreak of World War I, the possibilities of cultural exchange were considerably facilitated by more modern communication systems, and some pioneering publishing houses, such as Heinemann, were trying to build a bridge between

[2] Frederic Whyte, *William Heinemann: A Memoir* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928).

continental and British culture. Nevertheless, a certain resistance, on the side of the literary establishment, to letting continental thought influence and penetrate Britain, coupled to a self-confident valorisation of the 'splendid isolation', persisted.[3]

Particularly acute, initially, was the diffidence towards Russia, regarded, in her distance and inscrutability, mostly as a threatening power. However, in the changing international political and economic panorama after 1914, this attitude was starting to be seen as questionable. In this respect, the following passage written in 1910, by the reviewer of the *Contemporary Review*, is precociously symptomatic: 'The future of the world must largely turn on the relationship of England and Russia, and yet there can be no real sympathy between these great peoples unless they have read each other's heart in their respective literatures.' And a little further down he adds: 'We need now, as we have always needed at the successive periods of crisis in our literary history, a powerful foreign influence. That influence will have to be Russian.'[4] It is understandable, then, why in an article published in the *Athenaeum* in December 1914—World War I has already started—Heinemann's project was welcomed with even more enthusiasm. In emphasising the publication of the Garnett translation of *Crime and Punishment*, the reviewer of the *Athenaeum* thus condenses the political, as well as literary, interest in these publications:

> Though 'Crime and Punishment' has been translated before, Mr. Heinemann is rendering a very real service by publishing a good version of it at a reasonable price, and in a volume which forms part of an excellent series, but can be obtained separately. When the edition was first planned, the publisher can hardly have foreseen the importance, political as well as literary, that now attaches to all books that enable us better to appreciate our Allies.[5]

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[3] See Lesley Johnson, *The Cultural Critics: From Matthew Arnold to Raymond Williams* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979).

[4] Literatus, 'Modern Russian Literature: I.—Gogol to Tchekov', *Contemporary Review*, Literary Supplement, 97 (1910), 1-5 (p. 1).

[5] 'Russian Novelists', *Athenaeum* (1914, December 26), 663-64 (p. 663).

There is no doubt, then, and this has been stated several times, that the war and the anti-German alliance with Russia encouraged a more attentive observation of the 'Russian point of view'. It is also true that during the war, the interest in Russian literature and Russian culture in general grew out of proportion and with Dostoevskii was said to have reached 'hysterical peaks'. However, even assuming the validity of this contextual frame, it is hard to rid oneself of a sense of suspicion surrounding the whole notion of the cult in relation to Dostoevskii. This suspicion is caused by two basic factors. The first concerns a generalised prudence, which we are already used to, discernible in many of the reviews of *The Brothers Karamazov*, and of other novels by Dostoevskii in Garnett's translations. For instance, on the one hand the reviewer of the *Spectator* recognises in Dostoevskii 'the same vast and potent inspiration which filled so erratically and yet so gloriously those old poets of Renaissance England'. However, on the other hand his comments focus mostly upon 'the looseness of his construction' and the strangeness of his books, 'not only in form, but in spirit'.[6] Similarly, in the *Athenaeum*, while on the one hand Dostoevskii is compared with the Greek tragedians, on the other hand 'the plot in itself must be acknowledged to be hideous'.[7] Similarly, although both Helen Muchnic and Gilbert Phelps insist that 'on the whole, admiration of Dostoevsky was ardent, not to say excessive'—Phelps says 'warmly received'—both have to admit that the publication of his major novels 'did not immediately put a stop to doubts and misgivings'.[8]

A serious perplexity arises then, and is substantiated not just by the presence of a renowned core of resistance, personified by Henry James, John Galsworthy, Joseph Conrad, and D.H. Lawrence (all of whom it is claimed have been influenced by

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[6] 'Dostoievsky', *Spectator*, 109 (1912), 451-52 (p. 452).
[7] 'Two Realists: Russian and English', *Athenaeum* (1912, June 1), 613-14 (p. 613).
[8] Helen Muchnic, *Dostoevsky's English Reputation, 1881-1936* (North Hampton, Massachusetts: Smith College Department of Modern Languages, 1939), p. 73; Gilbert Phelps, *The Russian Novel in English Fiction* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1956), p. 169.

Dostoevskii, by the way), but also by the ambivalent position of the so-called enthusiastic admirers. First of all, who are they? Are they a significant majority or rather a 'qualified' minority? And also, much more important, why and in what way were they interested in Dostoevskii? In other words, if not popularity, then what are the elements that allow us to say that a 'cult' of Dostoevskii existed in the period of his reception between 1912 and 1921?[9]

4.1.2. 'How Obscure and Careless a Writer' (Constance Garnett)

Constance Garnett was commissioned to translate the complete works of Dostoevskii in 1911 by the publisher William Heinemann, with whom she had been working for most of the last twenty years.[10] It was Heinemann who agreed to publish her first translation from the Russian, *A Common Story* by Ivan Goncharov, as early as 1893. Heinemann was then a young publisher, interested in acquainting the British public with foreign literature. He built his reputation on the series called 'International Library of Translations', and Constance Garnett was his main collaborator for Russian literature. Heinemann started his edition of Russian novels with Turgenev, at the time quite popular. Constance Garnett tested herself on those translations, which were quite well received, although it has to be said that there were not so many competing translators from the Russian around at the time.

The edition of Tolstoi's works encountered a number of problems—in fact it had to be stopped—firstly because of the increasing competition with American specialised translators and publishing houses, and secondly because of the poor state of Constance Garnett's eyes, which compelled her to work more slowly and with more than one assistant, in order to conclude *Anna Karenin* and *War and Peace*. In 1908 she was asked

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[9] The choice of these dates is not arbitrary, but refers to the periodisation given by Muchnic in her *Dostoevsky's English Reputation*, specifically in the chapter 'The Dostoevsky Cult—1912-1921', pp. 66-110.

[10] The references to Constance Garnett's life are taken from her biography written by Richard Garnett, *Constance Garnett: A Heroic Life* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1991).

by Ford Madox Hueffer to translate a story by Tolstoi for his new journal, the *English Review*. She translated a sketch from Tolstoi's account of the war in the Caucasus, which she entitled 'The Raid'. In 1909, in the same magazine she published her first translation of a work by Dostoevskii, the short story *An Honest Thief*.[11] Although the translation passed almost unnoticed, it is in these years, between 1909 and 1911, that the idea of proposing to Heinemann an edition of the complete works of Dostoevskii originated. As Richard Garnett reports, both Constance Garnett and Heinemann were reticent about engaging in such a risky enterprise. Both were worried that Dostoevskii would not appeal to the British public. Particularly, Constance Garnett found it very difficult to translate Dostoevskii, an 'obscure' and a 'careless' writer, as she wrote. Furthermore, she was in that period more interested in Anton Chekhov, whose short stories and plays she had tried without success to promote among the British public, translating *The Cherry Orchard*.[12] Heinemann, on his own account, was concerned that Dostoevskii's works would not sell and he would be forced to interrupt the project before it could be completed, as had happened with Tolstoi.

The urge for publication of Dostoevskii in unabridged form and in reliable translation came from Arnold Bennett, who from the pages of the *New Age* challenged Heinemann to commission Constance Garnett with an enterprise that should be postponed no longer.[13] In this respect, particularly significant is the appearance of the first of Garnett's translations of Dostoevskii in the pages of the *English Review*. The *English Review* was not just one among many of the literary magazines and journals that flourished in the first decade of the new century, but one that we can definitively link to the modernist project. However, apart from sporadic episodes, when in 1911

[11] For the sake of information, Richard Garnett does not mention the *English Review* in relation to 'An Honest Thief'. However, this short story was published there in 1909 (2, 215-30). Garnett only mentions the American *Living Age*, as the place where it was first published, on June 19, 1909. See Garnett, *Constance Garnett*, p. 259.

[12] Garnett, *Constance Garnett*, pp. 266, 254.

[13] The role of Arnold Bennett in the British reception of Dostoevskii will be fully explored in Part II: section 7.2.

Heinemann at last agreed to embark upon the project of the publication of Dostoevskii's main works, he was still uncertain and maintained such a prudent attitude that he asked Bennett, via Constance Garnett, to keep quiet about the whole project at least until the autumn of the same year.

Crime and Punishment was the first work to be translated by March 1911, and the one about which Constance Garnett had most doubts as far as the public's appreciation was concerned. By September of the same year she completed the famous edition of *The Brothers Karamazov*, but this time the doubts came from Heinemann, who asked her to cut the 'passages appallingly shocking' of which he had been told by a Russian friend.[14]

It is apparent then that as late as 1912 the publication of Dostoevskii's works was indeed a ticklish question. It is also true that only some of the younger intellectuals hailed them with the greatest enthusiasm. On their behalf, the denomination of a cult might seem justified. However, if we accept this standpoint, we have to look at it in its limits, both numerical and temporal, quantitative and qualitative.

4.2. The 'Cult' Years: Consolidating the Traditional Line of Reception

4.2.1. The Ambivalence of Dostoevskii's Genius

When *The Brothers Karamazov* actually appeared, British journals like the *Academy* or the *Athenaeum* were more concerned with assessing Garnett's translation and with the importance of Heinemann's editorial project in Britain's attempt to keep pace with interest in Dostoevskii in other European countries than with anything else. If they engaged with the novels, they did it with that kind of 'discretion' and 'aplomb' to which British reviewers and critics have accustomed us.[15]

On the whole, if we read closely the reviews of this period, we are left with the usual impression of ambivalence, certainly due now not to lack of translator's

[14] Garnett, *Constance Garnett*, p. 260.
[15] See *Athenaeum* (1912, June 1), 613-14; *Academy*, 83 (1912), 448.

competence, as we might have witnessed with the very early reviews of Dostoevskii's works, but perhaps with a persistent element of difficulty in dealing with Dostoevskii's artistic form. In 1912, the wording of critical studies and reviews on Dostoevskii is not much distant from the one adopted years before, when the Vizetelly editions were published. The review that most of all epitomises the circumspection that British literary journals still had towards the subject of Dostoevskii in 1912 is the one in the *Spectator*. Small passages of this review have already been quoted. However, at this moment, it is worth examining it more fully.

The reviewer is fully aware of the general resistance that the novels of Dostoevskii can encounter among the British public, and in fact he gives voice to the possible objections:

> Above all, he [Dostoevskii] is acclaimed as the most distinctively Russian of the writers; and, no doubt, it is this very fact that has so far prevented his popularity in England. There is something so strange to English readers in Dostoievsky's genius—its essence seems so unfamiliar, so singular, so unexpected—that we are naturally repelled. But having swallowed Tolstoy, there is no reason why, in time, we should not also swallow Dostoievsky.

This 'enlightened' reviewer tries to palliate and make what is 'unfamiliar', 'singular', and 'unexpected', comprehensible and palatable. So he continues:

> Hitherto a material difficulty has stood in the way: the English translations of Dostoievsky's work have been few, incomplete, and unsatisfactory. But with the publication by Mrs Garnett, the well-known translator of Tourgenev and Tolstoy, of a complete and accurate translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* in a wonderfully cheap form, a great step has been made in advance. Mrs Garnett promises us the whole of the works of Dostoievsky, so that soon there should be no valid excuse for the most insular of English readers if he refrains at least from trying to become acquainted with a writer who, in the opinion of his countrymen, has high claims to rank as the supreme spokesman of the Russian race.

According to the reviewer, English readers' distress with Dostoevskii is perfectly understandable. Dostoevskii's 'agitated' 'feverish' 'intense' narrative is patently in contrast with 'the great tradition of English fiction', 'from Defoe, through Fielding,

Scott, Miss Austen, Thackeray, right down to the present day, to George Gissing and to Mr Arnold Bennett':

> With very few exceptions (Emily Brontë is the most outstanding of them) all our great novelists have been writers whose fundamental object has been to treat of life from the standpoint of common sense; to present it with sanity, with breadth, with humour, to throw over their vision of it the plain clear light of day, and to stand on one side themselves with the detachment of amused and benevolent spectators. The result has been a body of literature remarkable for its sobriety, its humanity, and its quiet wisdom; and it is only natural that a reader who has grown accustomed to these qualities should be perplexed and jarred when he comes upon the extravagance and the frenzy that seethe in Dostoievsky's pages.[16]

However, if it is not in the balance between 'form' and 'spirit', nor in their merits as artistic creations, where does the value of Dostoevskii's novels reside? Moreover, where is the 'fervent' and 'warm' welcome that we should have expected in the so-called 'cult' years? The moment of redemption is situated by the reviewer at a higher level of comprehension. He addresses those who refuse 'to be rebuffed by first impressions', saying that, despite appearances, Dostoevskii is 'a profoundly sane and human writer':

> He can show characters where all that is base, absurd, and contemptible is mingled together, and then, in the sudden strange vision that he gives us of their poignant underlying humanity, he can make us lay aside our scorn and our disgust, endowing us with what seems a new understanding of the mysterious soul of man. No other writer ever brought forth with a more marvellous power the 'soul of goodness in things evil'.
>
> This power is but one manifestation of the wonderful intensity and subtlety of Dostoievsky's psychological insight. Here, no doubt lies the central essence of his genius, the motive force which controls and animates the whole of his work. It is his revelations of the workings of the human mind that give him his place among the great creative artists of the world.[17]

In this wavering between sanity and insanity, which we have already encountered in previous reviews, there is nonetheless an element of novelty, determined by a shift in the position of the (journalistic) critic toward his public. In fact, previous reviewers

[16] 'Dostoievsky', *Spectator*, 109 (1912), 451-52.
[17] 'Dostoievsky', *Spectator*, p. 452.

expressed the prevalent viewpoint on this issue, whereas in this review we see a clear intent to direct the taste of the public. The reviewer is no longer the mouthpiece for his public, but imposes himself as a more professional figure, who has to justify and somehow mediate the fact that parts of the public cannot keep pace with new artistic developments. The views of both the reviewer and his public start to bifurcate. Soon the artistic avant-gardes, which will express their *credos* through the consolidated medium of the literary journal, will regard the voice of the already limited number of readers with detachment and, not infrequently, with contempt. What is anticipated in this shift in the role of the journalistic critic from presumed mouthpiece to presumed expert is the elitist principle of exclusivity of aesthetic taste to a form, the novel, which until then had been valued precisely for the opposite capacity of addressing the vast majority of the reading public. It is important to note this aspect, because it is indicative of the progressive appreciation of the novel as one of the fine arts, a realm from which until then it had been excluded.

4.2.2. Recurring Themes in the Reception of Dostoevskii

Apart from this element of novelty, which only later will display its potentialities, in general the reviews and editorial policies on the subject 'Dostoevskii' proceed under the sign of continuity. One particular example of repetition of familiar topics is the recurrent reference in the reviews to Nietzsche's 'will to power'. As seen already in the previous chapter, the association of Dostoevskii with the German philosopher is not new. However, the hesitant terms of the end of the century are now replaced with an open preference for Dostoevskii, seen as a 'corrective' to Nietzsche's unbalanced philosophy. Both in the *Saturday Review*'s and in the *Athenaeum*'s comments on *Crime and Punishment*, now published in Garnett's translation, Dostoevskii's teachings of

'compassion', 'subjection and humiliation of the self' are seen as 'virtues' in opposition to Nietzsche's assertion of the superior value of the will to power.[18]

Two other examples of 'confirmation' and 'consolidation' of the path previously followed in the British reception of Dostoevskii are given by the re-publication of two early studies: de Vogüé's book *The Russian Novel* in 1913, wholly translated and published in Britain this time, and, in 1916, Soloviev's *Dostoievsky: His Life and Literary Activity*[19]. *The Russian Novel*, reviewed by the *Academy* in January 1914, was considered 'the most brilliant study of a foreign literature we have read for a long time', which testifies to the fact that in more than twenty years very little has happened.[20] The second study was written as early as 1891 by the Russian Evgenii Soloviev, considered one of the earliest Marxist critics in Russia.[21] It is opportune to devote a few words to the definition of this study as somehow 'proto-Marxist'.

It is well known that the penetration of Marxism in Russia preceded the Soviet Revolution by many years. As the historian Tibor Szamuely reports, the first foreign edition of *Das Kapital* was a Russian translation published in 1872, while Marx's economic theories were penetrating into the Russian academic world (their scientific character was not seen as a threat to the establishment). However, although Marxist ideas were spreading in Russia faster than in other Western countries, their penetration was accompanied by a persistent confrontation with the widespread populist *narodnik* ideology.[22] This said, the position of Soloviev is slightly controversial. It is certainly problematic to accept the most current definition of him as a Marxist critic on

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[18] 'The Russian Macbeth', *Saturday Review*, 118 (1914), 419-20; 'Russian Novelists', *Athenaeum*, (1914, December 26), 663-64.

[19] E. Melchior de Vogüé, *The Russian Novel*, translated from the eleventh French edition of *Le Roman russe*, by Colonel H. A. Sawyer (London: Chapman and Hall, 1913), and Evgenii Soloviev, *Dostoievsky: His Life and Literary Activity*, trans. from the Russian by C. J. Hogarth (London: Allen and Unwin, 1916).

[20] The review mentioned is the following: 'From Pushkin to Tolstoy', *Academy*, 86 (1914), 11-12.

[21] Vladimir Seduro, *Dostoyevsky in Russian Literary Criticism: 1846-1956* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), pp. 64-69.

[22] See Tibor Szamuely, *The Russian Tradition*, ed. and with an intro. by Robert Conquest (London: Fontana Press, 1988), particularly the chapter 'The Marxist-Populist Dialectic', pp. 502-25.

the ground that he applied the method of 'economic materialism'. As Vladimir Seduro himself admits in his study *Dostoyevsky in Russian Literary Criticism*, 'his [Soloviev's] approach was by no means consistent, for a large residue of traditional *narodnik* ideology remains in his work'.[23]

C. J. Hogarth, who in 1913 had already translated for Dent and Sons Dostoevskii's *Letters from the Underworld*, was also the translator of Soloviev's study. In his brief introduction to the *Letters*, Hogarth refers to 'Theodor Dostoievsky' as 'the greatest of Russian realistic writers'. His appreciation of Dostoevskii's work can be inscribed within the traditional line of reception, which he summarises in these words:

> Dostoievsky may be said to constitute particularly healthy reading for the 'comfortable' section of society, for he lays bare some of the worst of our social sores, and invites all men and women to contemplate the putrescent foulness which civilisation permits to exist, even if it has not brought into existence. That it is Russia of which the author speaks does not make the picture any the less applicable to other modern communities, our own included, since moral plagues and plague-spots of the kind which he describes exist everywhere, and seem to form a necessary concomitant of the system upon which the modern society is based.[24]

All the ingredients are here, although they might have been used in an inverted order. The critique of modern civilisation is rendered through the clinical metaphor of the putrescent body, a body, modern society, which the 'healthy reading' of Dostoevskii's novels (defined by Hogarth as descriptions of what the author had personally experienced) can help us to look at and to reflect upon. The author, writes Hogarth, gives us 'a terrible picture—perhaps some might say too terrible. To such persons one might almost imagine the author retorting: "Do not look at it, then. Continue good people, to be—comfortable".'[25]

Soloviev's position is not much different from that of his translator. In his book, he emphasises the sufferings that Dostoevskii went through during his life, and connects

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[23] Seduro, *Dostoyevsky*, p. 64.
[24] C. J. Hogarth, Introduction to *Letters from the Underworld* (London: Dent and Son, 1913), p. vii.
[25] Hogarth, Introduction to *Letters*, p. ix.

them, in a rather deterministic way, to the suffering characters of his novels. Especially his poor economic conditions and his frequent conflicts with the publishing houses are seen as a primary motive behind his work. Likewise, Soloviev's definition of Dostoevskii as a 'psychopath', a man with a general 'unhealthy temperament', is connected to the milieu in which his personality developed. To support his theory, Soloviev quotes the historian A.M. Skabichevsky, who in his *History of Modern Russian Literature* wrote:

> Dostoievsky represented the plebeian, the governmental service, class, and was a petulantly nervous son of the city. Also, whereas the majority of those *littérateurs* were men of established social status, Dostoievsky alone belonged to the newly arisen class of the intellectual proletariat.[26]

It is therefore clear that Soloviev's study is more connected with an environmentalism *à la* Taine (which I attempted to analyse in a previous chapter), with particular stress on the economic milieu, than with Marxism. In this respect then, the publication of this study in 1916 did not represent a novelty in the critical panorama of Dostoevskii's studies, but rather an editorial choice of publishing material, which the audience—still a selected one, we have to bear in mind—was already familiar with, and therefore was ready to receive. That is why in the final analysis one is compelled to question altogether the notion of cult used in relation to Dostoevskii, as a credible ground for an adequate understanding of the process of reception of the Russian author in this country. From a closer scrutiny, it emerges that the so-called Dostoevskii cult was a very limited phenomenon, which would be perhaps more appropriate to define as 'fashion'. The superficial character of this vogue is cleverly parodied by Katherine Mansfield, who in her review of one of the Constance Garnett's translations, insists on the necessity to take Dostoevskii 'seriously' and

> [...] to consider whether it is possible for us to go on writing our novels as if he never had been.This is not only a bitter and uncomfortable prospect; it is positively dangerous; it might very well end in the majority of our

[26] Soloviev, *Dostoievsky*, pp. 18-19.

> young writers finding themselves naked and shivering,
> without a book to clothe themselves in.[27]

In 1919, when she writes this article, the 'fashion' was already declining. Nonetheless, if we consider the reviews during the years from 1912 to 1916, that is the timespan which the cult is said to have lasted, and beyond to the period of the so-called decline, the figure of Dostoevskii remains a powerful conduit for a multiplicity of discourses. In order to understand fully the impact these discourses had on the British cultural background, it is necessary to abandon at this point the chronological account of the reception of Dostoevskii and to follow more closely the traces of these multifaceted and interrelated paths. In fact, in order to grasp the proper connections between the 'cult' years and what preceded them, it will be necessary in the following chapters to refer occasionally to primary sources without respecting the chronological order followed up to this moment. In the next chapters I will endeavour to take issue with some of the ideas recurrently associated with the reception of Dostoevskii, and to locate the impact that his novels had in these years in Britain within a wider theoretical framework.

[27] Katherine Mansfield, 'Some Aspects of Dostoevsky', *Athenaeum* (1919, November 28), 1256.

5. Psychoanalytic Discourse and the Dostoevskian Novel

5.1. Dostoevskii and the 'Discovery' of the Unconscious

'It is rather strange that it is impossible, apparently, to procure today any of the translations of Dostoievsky's works that the late Mr. Vizetelly issued about twenty years ago.' [1]

In 1906, when Edward Garnett wrote the article from which this passage is selected, only a minority among intellectuals stressed the insufficiency of the existing translations, mostly out of print, of Dostoevskii's novels, and called for the publication of better-quality English renderings. As it has already been stressed, in spite of the constant, although fragmentary, interest in the Russian writer, in Britain by 1910 the complete works of Dostoevskii had not been translated yet. Edward Garnett imputed this ongoing reticence, which still prevented a full appreciation of Dostoevskii's great novels in Britain, to 'the Englishman's fear of morbidity', to his unease at being confronted on a ground where no comforting 'wholesomeness' was offered to the reader, but rather an uncomfortable 'underworld of the suffering or thwarted consciousness'. However, as Edward Garnett's article shows clearly, the ideological line which separated the realm of 'wholesomeness' from that of degradation, be it moral or physical, was in this particular historical moment very thin and unstable:

> Dostoievsky's work demonstrates what every experienced physician knows, that no hard dividing line can be drawn between the world of health and strength and the world of disease, weakness and insanity; and that all our normal impulses and acts will shade, given the cruel pressure of circumstance, into the abnormal in an infinite, finely wrought net of deviations, all of which are, psychologically, of import.[2]

How this ideological opposition/juxtaposition of sanity to insanity can be understood within the conceptual framework of 'degeneration and regeneration

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[1] Edward Garnett, 'A Literary Causerie: Dostoievsky', *Academy*, 71 (1906), 202-03.
[2] Garnett, 'A Literary Causerie: Dostoievsky', p. 202.

narratives', I hope to have sufficiently elucidated in a previous chapter.[3] In this section, however, the changes occurring in the perception of Dostoevskii's 'morbidity' will be explored in relation to the gradual penetration, in Britain, of the psychoanalytic discourse. As mentioned previously, quite a few obstacles prevented a more balanced view of Dostoevskii's novels. However, twenty years after Vizetelly's publication of *Crime and Punishment*, changes occurred in the way the notions of 'insanity' and 'abnormality' were regarded which contributed to the removal of some of the prejudices. What previously in Dostoevskii's works had been looked upon with suspicion and abhorred as morbid, disturbing, and unacceptable to Victorian morality, at the turn of the century was regarded as a plausible object of debate and investigation. The use of such terminology echoes only distantly the clinical discourse, described in a previous chapter. What we are confronting in this case is obviously the discourse of psychoanalysis, which entered literary discourse following the great impact of Freud's theories of the unconscious. Therefore, other aspects need to be foregrounded now, which project on to the present study a different way of looking at the reception of the Russian author in Britain.

5.1.1 A Psychoanalytic Reading of Dostoevskii's 'Excesses'

Lawrence Rothfield, who, as previously said, adopts the clinical discourse as a metaphor and an indicator for distinguishing Realism from Modernism, proves useful again. In his book *Vital Signs*, in answering the question: 'What then marks off the writing of Dostoevsky, Proust, Franz Jung, and Gide from the realistic writing of Balzac, Flaubert, or Eliot?', Rothfield writes:

> [...]: this Modernism differs from realism in the intensity with which it questions the truth-value of the distinction between the pathological and the normal. In the realistic novels of Balzac, Flaubert and Eliot, this normal/pathological distinction serves a heuristic end. It permits the narrator to distinguish himself from his characters as a physician from his patients, and to make sense of them from a position of relative certainty as to

[3] See Part I: Chapter 3.

> what counts as significant. The celebrated distance and omniscience of the realist narrator is precisely the distance that separates those who are sick from those who recognize what sickness is. In the second kind of Modernism I have in mind, on the other hand, the pathological perspective becomes the dominant one—it is the narrator himself who is sick [...]. Not only is the writing subject now the sick subject, but the pathological perspective may even be cultivated for its own sake, [...].[4]

In the previous chapter reservations were expressed about the limits of a theory of literature, Rothfield's, which refuses to engage both with a theory of literary genres and with the way different discourses and ideologies penetrate them not just at the level of content, but also at the level of form. In spite of this, it must be acknowledged that Rothfield's emphasis on the change of perspective within the boundaries of degeneration and regeneration narratives can certainly be taken as a useful suggestion. It seems that the further we venture into the new century the more the literary expression of the distinction between health and disease, between sanity and insanity, becomes ambiguous. First of all, at the level of narrative, a slight alteration in the localisation of disease occurs. Disease does not affect just certain people with specific physical and moral characteristics but can affect each one of us: the obscure can reside within us; it can hide behind appearances of normality. It is an underworld concealed in the deep recesses of our mind, to which anybody, and not just those with particular genes or physiognomy, can be exposed. Excess of consciousness can be a disease, to which the writer himself is not immune; indeed, as a subject with a particular sensitivity, he is more than anybody exposed to the mutable state of human consciousness.

Dostoevskii thematises this lethal constituent of human consciousness in *Notes from the Underground*, where he specifically establishes a link between the physical pains of the underground man and his psychological disorders. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, this novel was very little known. More than his

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[4] Lawrence Rothfield, *Vital Signs: Medical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 160.

works, used mostly as a moment of confirmation, it was Dostoevskii's life, or the highly romanticised versions of it circulating at the time, that provided the most vivid example of the thin line that separated sanity from insanity. On the one hand, in Edward Garnett's view, 'the perfect clarity, calm, penetrating judgement, and classic objectivity of "The House of the Dead" (1862)' attests to the sanity of Dostoevskii's mind; on the other hand 'the fantastic confusion and startling divagations in the motives and impulses of his favourite characters, his sick and possessed heroes [...]' attest 'the accompanying morbidity and erratic abnormality of Dostoevsky's brain'. However, the 'force of his psychological genius' is incontestable.[5]

In other words, the mind is clear, while the brain is confused. It is peculiar, to say the least, and worth pointing out, how incomprehensible for Garnett's contemporaries was Dostoevskii's use, at a fictional level, of the notions of sanity and insanity. Rather than suggesting a complex and conscious mastery of the novelistic form realised through the anticipation of literary tropes that will be developed in modernist literature, Dostoevskii's explorations of the abnormal are rather interpreted as a result of unfavourable circumstances in his life. Thus, for instance, Dostoevskii's fictional rendering in *The Idiot* of epileptic fits, as the moment in which extreme clarity of mind is available only in a sick body, is immediately transferred onto a biographical level and identified with his personal experience of epilepsy. Moreover, the progressive discovery and publication of new material concerning his life legitimated and fomented the arbitrary ascription to Dostoevskii of sanity and/or insanity. As late as in 1910, Maurice Baring, in his renowned study *Landmarks in Russian Literature*, defines Dostoevskii's life as *a long disease*.[6] However, his use of the sane/insane opposition is applied to Dostoevskii in an inverted way. If it is true that in every sane person there is a grain of

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[5] Garnett, 'A Literary Causerie: Dostoievsky', p. 202.
[6] Maurice Baring, *Landmarks in Russian Literature* (London, New York: Methuen, Barnes and Noble, 1960), first edition published by Methuen, 1910, p. 103.

disease and insanity, it is similarly true that even in the most degenerate of men, grains of humanity can be found. Dostoevskii's value resides, according to Baring, precisely in his ability to bring them to the surface:

> For in contradistinction to many writers who show us what is insane in the sanest men, who search for and find a spot of disease in the healthiest body, a blemish in the fairest flower, a flow in the brightest ruby, Dostoievsky seeks and finds the sanity of the insane, a healthy spot in the sorest soul, a gleam of gold in the darkest mine, a pearl in the filthiest refuse heap, a spring in the most arid desert.[7]

5.1.2. The Risks of Psychoanalytic Criticism

To give an account of the huge influence that psychoanalysis had in many spheres of social and intellectual life is, for obvious reasons, beyond the range of this discussion. However, insofar as Dostoevskii is said to have constituted an integral part of the process of penetration into literary discourse of the narrative of the unconscious, some passages of that influence must be pointed out. But first, it might be worth clarifying the use of the verb 'constitute' in this context.

In 1920, J.D. Beresford in his article *Psychoanalysis and the Novel* invites us to distinguish the 'intellectual' experimenters of psychoanalysis from the 'emotional' interpreters of experience:

> In the case of the experimenters we are considering, such a subject as psycho-analysis is studied from the surface, the facts and general teachings are memorised and then applied, more or less arbitrarily, to the invented or observed characters who figure in the story. Such a method when brilliantly used may produce an impression of truth, may even in rare cases lead to discovery, but in its essence it is mechanical, a mere collection and presentation of material that has not been assimilated, and hence very slightly transmuted by the writer.
>
> The opposed example is that in which the study of, say, psycho-analysis comes to the understanding of the writer as a formula that interprets for him a mode of experience. [...] In such a case as this the manner of incidence, to which I referred, differs markedly from the first example. Here we get a sense of interpenetration and subsequent assimilation, in the former case rather of obliquity and reflection; the true difference being that one writer finds in psycho-analysis an aid to the

[7] Baring, *Landmarks*, pp. 57-58.

> understanding of human thought and action, the other merely a useful piece to add to his repertoire.[8]

Dostoevskii, who cannot be said to have been influenced by Freud, is, in Beresford's opinion, the proof *ante litteram* of the 'applicability of psychoanalysis to fiction'. He is therefore 'constitutive' of the process of penetration of psychoanalytic discourse into fiction, precisely because he uses that discourse before it was actually systematised by Freud, starting from his personal experience. However, it will be argued here that the very definition of Dostoevskii as the writer of the unconscious, very popular in the 1920s and persisting through more recent times, cannot be understood except by relating it to the shift of attention from the external to the internal, of which the so-called 'psychological novel', flourishing in these years, reflects only one aspect. It will be also argued that, even acknowledging Dostoevskii's extraordinary insights within the recesses of the human psyche, the limitations that the label 'writer of the unconscious' imposes on the artist are commensurate in fact with the limits of the application of psychoanalytic theories to literature.

Introspection has never been entirely alien to literary discourse. Whether it was openly expressed by the choir of the Greek tragedies and the soliloquies of the tragic heroes, or is implied in the distance that the artistic form imposes, for instance, between the way the character sees himself and what the character actually represents, the moment of reflection has been a constant *leitmotiv* in literary narrative. As Lionel Trilling reports, Freud himself, on his seventieth birthday, corrected those who greeted him as the discoverer of the unconscious saying: 'The poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious. What I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied.'[9]

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[8] J.D. Beresford, 'Psycho-analysis and the Novel', *London Mercury*, 1 (1920), 426-34 (p. 427).

[9] Sigmund Freud quoted in Lionel Trilling, 'Freud and Literature', in David Lodge (ed.), *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 276-90.

Nevertheless, to take Freud's tribute to literature and philosophy to the letter would considerably distort the import that the development of psychoanalysis had for the novelistic form. The credit Freud gives to literature may say less about the narratives of the unconscious than about the ambivalent character of his 'scientific method'. With Freud, the unconscious acquires a scientific status, which in return will affect the novelistic discourse to such a degree that the very notion of introspection, to name only one element, will be defined according to altogether different parameters. As Terry Eagleton argues, after Freud the aesthetic artefact 'can no longer dupe us as integral, well-rounded, symmetrical': it implicitly 'interrogates the whole classical aesthetic heritage, from Goethe and Schiller to Marx and Matthew Arnold, of the rich, potent, serenely balanced subject'.[10]

Paul Ricoeur goes even further, saying that Freud elaborated, in a series of essays, a psychoanalytic aesthetics, which is fragmentary precisely because it refuses to base its interpretative method upon biographical documents. He suggests that Freud's most attractive approach to the work of art is the one that adopts analogy, rather than identification, as an investigative and interpretative method. Quite a turn this, away from vulgarised forms of so-called psychoanalytic criticism. However, Ricoeur himself indicates that even within Freud's work, which, he insists, provides a coherent and rigorous aesthetic theory, it is possible to distinguish two major tendencies: the biographical on the one hand, and the analogical on the other. As to the former tendency, Ricoeur gives as an example Freud's analysis of the Mona Lisa:

> What renders this analysis suspect [...] is that Freud seems to go far beyond the structural analogies that would be authorized by an analysis of the technique of composition and enters into instinctual themes that the painting disavows and conceals. Is this not the very pretension that fosters bad psychoanalysis—the analysis of the dead, the analysis of writers and artists?[11]

[10] Terry Eagleton, 'The Name of the Father', in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, pp. 262-87 (p. 263).
[11] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, trans. by Denis Savage (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 171.

A similar charge of 'bad' psychoanalysis could be levelled, unfortunately, at Freud's late essay 'Dostoevsky and Parricide', which appeared for the first time in English translation in the *Realist*.[12] Here Freud argues the existence of a link between Dostoevskii's choice of material for his novels (crime, epilepsy) and his masochistic nature, the characteristics of which emerge clearly, in Freud's view, not just from his novels, but also from the posthumous papers and his wife's diary. In particular, the murder of old Karamazov would be unequivocally linked with a peculiar form of Oedipal complex, a form which, because of Dostoevskii's 'latent homosexuality', would be manifest in the simultaneous love and hatred of the figure of the father. In this respect, therefore, the fictional killing of old Karamazov, the responsibility for which is clearly shared between the three brothers, would be the expression of a desire, the desire to kill the father, whereas the epileptic fits (Dostoevskii's fits are, according to Freud, an expression of his hysteria and not of a disease in his brain) would originate from the repression and punishment of that desire, for fear of castration.

Although it is easy for us to ridicule the assumptions of Freud's theory in relation to Dostoevskii, it would be unjust and certainly superficial to take the connection established by him between Dostoevskii's problematic relationship with his father and the episode of parricide contained in *The Brothers Karamazov*, as straightforwardly and transparently as much so-called psychoanalytic criticism has done.[13] Freud must be

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[12] Sigmund Freud, 'Dostoevsky and Parricide', in *Realist*, 1 (1929), 18-33, reprinted in René Wellek (ed.), *Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1962), pp. 98-111.

[13] For example, in 'Dostoiefsky and the Sense of Guilt', published in the *Psychoanalytic Review*, 17 (1930), 195-207, S. C. Burchell describes Dostoevskii as 'the most exquisitely subjective of the great writers'. And adds: 'This trait increases the value of biographic material in critically estimating his works and conversely, his writings will serve to illuminate his life'. Along these lines Burchell interprets for instance *A Raw Youth* as 'really an account of the adolescent Dostoiefsky's struggle with the Edipus situation' and so on, pp. 195, 196. Of a similar tone is the article 'The Phantom Double: Its Psychological Significance' that Stanley M. Coleman published in the *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 14 (1934), 254-73. His interpretation of *The Double* is read in biographical terms: '*The Double* represents in an exaggerated manner his own [Dostoevskii's] bitter reflections at the foolish way in which he had behaved at the time'. However, to give him his due, Coleman makes clear that his is an analysis of the psyche of Dostoevskii the man through his works, not a critique of the work : 'Whatever the intrinsic value of *The Double* may be as a work of literary craftsmanship, it has a very special interest in that it is the first of the author's novels to present the idea of the mind in conflict, of dual personality', p. 265.

credited with a degree of honesty in dealing with the matter of artistic creativity, which very often is hard to find in other applications of the discipline to the aesthetic sphere. In fact, in the Dostoevskii essay, as well as in the Leonardo essay, and indeed on many other occasions, Freud is eager to warn the reader of the impossibility, for psychoanalysis, of giving a meaningful insight into 'the nature of the artistic function'.[14] However, very quickly he realises the importance that literature can have for psychoanalysis. Because the unconscious, primary object of psychoanalytic investigation is knowable only through its external symptoms, that is, only by being made conscious, and can never manifest itself to us directly, but only by means of multiple mediations and efforts, the analysis of works of art from the psychoanalytic point of view can provide a series of intermediary parallel narratives which turn out to be very useful when it comes to giving an insight into the laws governing the unconscious.

Nevertheless, this positive element in itself does not suffice to protect works of art from 'bad' psychoanalysis. Ricoeur himself is perfectly aware of the dangers of an uncritical application of psychoanalysis to art criticism, although, in the final analysis, he sees in what he defines as Freud's 'metapsychology' a useful hermeneutic tool. According to Ricoeur, by connecting, as Freud does, the Gioconda's smile to Leonardo's childhood memories, we are reminded of an absence, of a lost link in fact, with that past of which we preserve the memories, as well as of the fact that a direct

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[14] A few examples drawn by Freud's texts might help in clarifying this position. For instance in the Leonardo essay, Freud states: 'Since artistic talent and capacity are intimately connected with sublimation we must admit that the nature of the artistic function is also inaccessible to us along psychoanalytic lines.' In the first paragraph of 'Dostoevsky and Parricide' we find this unequivocal lines: 'Before the problem of the creative artist analysis must, alas, lay down.' Again, in the last paragraph of 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming', he asserts: 'When a creative writer presents his play to us or tell us what we are inclined to take to be his personal day-dreams, we experience a great pleasure, and one which probably arises from the confluence of many sources. How the writer accomplishes this is his innermost secret.'. See respectively Sigmund Freud, 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood', in *Art and Literature: Jensen's* Gradiva, *Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works*, trans. from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey, The Penguin Freud Library (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1990), XIV, pp. 143-231; 'Dostoevsky and Parricide', in Wellek (ed.), *Dostoevsky*, p. 98; 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming', in Lodge (ed.), *Twentieth Century*, pp. 36-42 (p. 42).

access to 'instincts as such' is denied. Only their 'psychical expressions' are available to us, expressions which, inasmuch as they symbolise a relation to a reality which is lost, demand to be deciphered:

> Hence the economics is dependent upon the deciphering of a text; the balance sheet of instinctual investments or cathexes is read only through the screen of an exegesis bearing on the interplay between the signifier and the signified. Works of art are a prominent form of what Freud himself called the 'psychical derivatives' of instinctual representatives.

Ricoeur is obviously interested in the 'structural analogies' for a series of reasons, the validity of which he argues productively in his book. The analogy, for instance, between the dream-work and the artwork is especially productive. 'If dreams are a work, it is only natural that psychoanalysis approaches the work of art from its "artisanal" side, in order to disclose, with the help of a structural analogy, a far more important functional analogy.'[15]

However, Theodor Adorno, in his investigations of the possible implications of psychoanalysis for the process of understanding works of art, advises us to beware of the disclosing power of analogy. The comparison of works of art with daydreams, argued primarily by Freud in his celebrated essay *Creative Writers and Day-dreaming* [1908], even interpreted metaphorically in the terms suggested by Ricoeur, presents itself with the risk of confusing works of art 'with documents and displaces them into the mind of a dreamer, while on the other hand, as compensation for the exclusion of the extramental sphere, it reduces artworks to crude thematic material [...].' In other words, the analogy of the artwork with the dream-work, while restoring the former to *praxis*, reduces it to its material content, without taking into account the mediation of artistic form:

> [...] psychoanalysis considers artworks to be essentially unconscious projections of those who have produced them, and preoccupied with the hermeneutics of thematic material, it forgets the categories of form and, so to speak, transfers the pedantry of sensitive doctors to

[15] Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, pp. 174, 166.

> the most inappropriate objects, such as Leonardo da Vinci or Baudelaire.

Dostoevskii could easily be added to this list. However, to think that Adorno dismisses psychoanalysis would be erroneous. He clearly acknowledges the importance of psychoanalysis in revealing something about art that was denied before: its 'social character'. Adorno is unequivocal in suggesting that psychoanalytic theories might be extremely productive from a psychological point of view, and in emphasising their emancipatory function towards the liberation of the traditional notion of the aesthetic from metaphysical connotations. However, Adorno is just as unequivocal in asserting that they are totally unhelpful when trying to define a current notion of the aesthetic:

> The psychoanalytic theory of art is superior to idealist aesthetics in that it brings to light what is internal to art and not itself artistic. It helps free art from the spell of absolute spirit, whereas vulgar idealism, rancorously opposed to knowledge of the artwork and especially knowledge of its entwinement with instinct, would like to quarantine art in a putatively higher sphere, psychoanalysis works in the opposite direction, in the spirit of the Enlightenment. Where it deciphers the social character that speaks from a work and in which on many occasions the character of its author is manifest, psychoanalysis furnishes the concrete mediating links between the structure of artworks and the social structure. But psychoanalysis too casts a spell related to idealism, that of an absolute subjective sign system denoting subjective instinctual impulses. It unlocks phenomena, but falls short of the phenomenon of art.[16]

The tendency to constrain the fictional element of art within the limits of its content gets in the way, according to Adorno, of an adequate comprehension of that very element within the complex relation between form and content. The analogy with the dream allows only for one vision, which may give insights into the inner causality of a work of art, but says very little about its truth content.

5.1.3. Dostoevskii: Writer of the Unconscious or Unconscious Writer?

The question to put at this point concerns Dostoevskii directly. If, after Freud, nothing is as it was before, what is it that grants Dostoevskii a ticket into the post-Freudian world?

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[16] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor, ed. by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), pp. 8-9.

Beresford suggests a possible answer: when trying 'to test the applicability of psycho-analysis to fiction', he refers to Dostoevskii as to the most plausible example, especially if we regard him 'primarily as a patient rather than as a doctor'.[17]

This is not the first time that we see Dostoevskii's supposed state of mind scrutinised by improviser analysts, but the novelty is that, after Freud, what earlier seemed obscure, incomprehensible and morbid can be understood and promoted as 'scientifically grounded'. The figure 'Dostoevskii', however, is caught in the irreparable contradiction of being at the same time doctor and patient, and in this double narrative the two positions briefly recounted above in relation to the letters find their common ground. In fact, whether in support of the myth surrounding the figure of Dostoevskii or as a means of explaining the inconsistencies of the man's psyche, the assimilation in one figure of doctor and patient can cope with the intrinsic contradictions of his personality without having to reconcile the irreconcilable. Within this scheme of interpretation, the *Notes from Underground* acquire a pivotal function not because of their artistic value, but insofar as they are seen as a confession by the author of his own disease, where the author is at one and the same time the analyst and the analysand.

In 1920, when Beresford wrote this article, Freud's essay on Dostoevskii had not yet been published. However, as suggested previously, the discourse of the unconscious had infiltrated the narratives of many contemporary novels almost to the point of absurdity. This form of 'hysteria' touched much literary journalism, which, because of a superficial interpretation of the Freudian parallel of the condition of the artist with neurotic symptoms manifested in dream activity, felt quite entitled to give summary diagnoses of writers' personalities, misusing and abusing scientific terminology borrowed from psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, Beresford's attempt to give the co-ordinates of a phenomenon which *de facto* was growing out of proportion must not be underestimated. Beresford, a novelist himself, denounces the irritating effects for the

[17] Beresford, 'Psycho-analysis and the Novel', p. 428.

reader of the 'deliberate, intellectual use in the pages of a novel of the teachings of psychoanalysis'. The ability of Dostoevskii consists in being able to use his own disease 'to the benefit of literature'.

This is the sense, therefore, in which he is to be regarded simultaneously as doctor and patient. The ability of the doctor to dig into the most hidden recesses of the unconscious is magnificently revealed in his novels. The neurotic state of the patient, the source of his disease, can be examined through his letters. In other words, while in the novels the multifaceted characteristics of the unconscious are displayed in all their unsettling variety, it is from the letters that we can trace the pathological condition of the author's personality. In this respect Dostoevskii responds perfectly to the canons of spontaneity required by any 'true form of self-expression'.[18] In general, in spite of his motivated diffidence, Beresford is still convinced of the powerful influence that psychoanalysis could have on the novel of the future. What is more important for the present study, however, is the way the debate on the influence of psychoanalysis affected irreversibly, in the terms outlined above by Eagleton, the concept of the aesthetic.

Psychoanalytic discourse, entering the sphere of the aesthetic, informs literary narratives on a double contradictory level. While on the one hand the influence of psychoanalytic discourse gives the unconscious the right of citizenship within the realm of literary art, on the other it binds once more the literary artefact to its thematic component, leaving artistic form, considered merely as a receptacle of psychological conflicts, to play a very secondary role. But how can artistic form be ruled out of any consideration concerned with the aesthetic? How can its role of mediation be underestimated? Even dreams must be narrated in some way or another, and Freud is aware of the fact that the only possible way we can find out about our unconscious is to

[18] Beresford, 'Psycho-analysis and the Novel', pp. 429-30.

'read' and 'interpret' the breaks, the slips and the incoherences within our consciousness. By establishing this bond between creativity and dreams, the substantive difference between artistic language and ordinary language is annulled. In fact, in the final analysis, although Freud distinguishes artistic technique from the content expressed through that technique, there is no doubt that he places the mark of creativity on the content, and not on the technique, thus following the clichéd view of the mimetic nature of art, also associated with the nineteenth-century concept of the novel as imitation of external reality.

The radical change, however, is in the nature of the reality that is imitated. This reality is no longer the surrounding external world, but, as Beresford points out, the underground world, the world of the unconscious. It is easy to see why in this respect Dostoevskii is now considered a pioneer, a precursor of the analysis of the unconscious, but at the same time a neurotic personality which can be comprehensible only in the light of the discoveries made by psychoanalysis. The incoherent and erratic nature of Dostoevskii's characters, so incomprehensible in terms of nineteenth-century realism, becomes reasonably comprehensible in the light of the discovery of the incoherent and erratic nature of the mind. But, because of this mimetic fallacy, which induces an over-concentration on thematic correspondences, the early potential of the analogy of the abnormal with a positive moment of psychological insight is collapsed in the reduction of the artistic to a presumed free expression of the unconscious. The obvious conclusion, drawn by Beresford, is therefore that, contrary to what was thought in the nineteenth century, the real responsibility for great literature lies not with the conscious side of the artistic writer, nor with his technique, but with the unconscious, which has evolved like the conscious: 'The impulses of the unconscious', concludes Beresford, 'are no longer simply feral and animal. We are [...] coming to the conclusion that it is this other shadowed self that is responsible for all that is best and most permanent in

literature.'[19] The valorisation of the unconscious as the source of human creativity is therefore double-edged. While on the one hand it reveals the presence of an interfering element undermining the already fragile solidity of the Kantian notion of disinterestedness, on the other hand associating artistic creation with the world of instincts reintroduces through the back door the old mimetic function of art, from which the Kantian notion of disinterestedness had partially liberated us.

Thus, psychoanalytic criticism, when applied to the aesthetic, characterises itself as the photographic negative of biography. The former reads through the breaks and incoherences of somebody's personality, namely in the unconscious, while a biographical work describes what is immediately visible of that personality. Both however rely on a series of *data* that have already gone through levels of selection, which are bound to affect their characteristics. This is particularly so for psychoanalytic criticism, which deals with works of art as 'projection of the unconscious'. The unconscious, before being projected into a work of art, must be projected into our consciousness, either through our own effort or through that of a psychoanalyst. Therefore, if we can still talk of projections, in a work of art we have one of only a third or fourth order.

To be aware of the link, no matter how remote, of art to the unconscious might be vital for our understanding of why there is art, but can say very little about what art, or the aesthetic, is. In this second case, the unavoidable confrontation of any aesthetic artefact with pre-established classified notions of normal and abnormal, against which the characters' behaviour should be assessed, would lead the critical analysis to a standstill, precisely because the work is turned into a static entity. In fact the psychoanalytic critic, if he remains within the lines of his own discipline, works in conditions where, unlike the psychoanalyst, who deals with the immense variability of the human personality, has to confine himself to the narrow boundaries of the written

[19] Beresford, 'Psycho-analysis and the Novel', p. 433.

text, or more precisely, to the narrow boundaries of the textual narrative, a very limited landscape to observe when dealing with a work of art. What I am trying to point out here is the fact that psychoanalytic criticism, somewhat like certain more modern structuralist criticism (if the parallel is not too hazardous), reduces the work of art to the limits of its textual rendering, and thinks that the appropriate and deep reading of the content of that limited text is sufficient to account for the truth content of the work of art. The difference is that whereas for the structuralist the text is the sum of stylistic and rhetorical devices, for the psychoanalyst the text is the narrative of the unconscious.

5.1.4. Janko Lavrin's 'Psycho-Critical Study'

One exemplary instance, as far as Dostoevskii is concerned, of the reductive function of psychoanalytic criticism is Janko Lavrin's study *Dostoevsky and His Creation: A Psycho-Critical Study*, the first study of Dostoevskii published with the overt intention of applying the psychoanalytic method to the analysis of his works. Lecturer in Slavonic Studies at the University of Nottingham, Lavrin came from Serbia and was originally a war correspondent. His study, published previously as a series of articles in the journal *New Age*,[20] came out as a book in 1920, in an atmosphere which was conducive to acceptance of the use of psychoanalytic terminology beyond the boundaries of the discipline. The reactions to it were, as usual, twofold. From the *English Review* and the *Athenaeum* came accusations of superficiality,[21] while from the *Times Literary Supplement* came a very enthusiastic response. The *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer evaluated the book as 'a very able piece of work', and explained that Lavrin, being a Slav himself, illustrated with a certain degree of knowledge aspects of the psychology of the Slav Dostoevskii, which were still incomprehensible and obscure to the Western reader.[22]

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[20] *New Age*, 22 (1918).
[21] *Athenaeum* (1920, December 3), 758; *English Review*, 32 (1921), 557-58.
[22] *Times Literary Supplement* (1920, December 9), 811.

Apart from these comments, the real interest of this book resides in the implications stemming from a further subdivision, promoted by Lavrin, within the pathologic. After warning against easy classifications of the normal against the pathologic, and objecting to an idea of normality understood as uniformity, which seeks 'to convert the individual into a rational psychological machine', Lavrin suggests a further distinction within the pathologic between 'abnormal and supernormal':

> From the 'normal' point of view, both aspects are equally pathological; nonetheless their directions are exactly contrary: the former leads to a degenerate regression, while the latter opens on a wider progenerate plane of the human soul, leading to a 'higher health'. Thanks only to the confusion of abnormal and supernormal, was it possible to classify, as Lombroso did, the genius with the insane or criminal, and to accept as an ideal the average-normal type with its coarse-grained nervous system and limited psyche.
>
> It is too often forgotten that the growth of the individual soul is in itself a 'pathologic' process.[23]

The risk of inner self-division is always there when the individual who differentiates himself from the collective severs his links with the normal undifferentiated type. But it is from this self-division that creativity emerges. Lavrin continues:

> Not the 'logarithms', but the quest and conquest of the Unconscious thus becomes the task of a profound psychologist, and such a quest has more to do with pathology than with the admired 'normality'; it also often goes beyond the limits of mere science, for it demands at times as much subtlety and intuition as any work of art.[24]

Thus, again, the parallel between artistic creativity and the quest for the unconscious is established. When Lavrin applies his theory to the analysis of Dostoevskii's novels, his ends become clearer. The access to the innermost recesses of the human psyche is allowed by Dostoevskii's split self. The tension between the abnormal and the supernormal is visible in the tension that infuses all Dostoevskii's novels between God-man and Man-God. It is clear, therefore, in Lavrin's view, that this tension originates in a confrontation with the ultimate quest for the Absolute Value,

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[23] Janko Lavrin, *Dostoevsky and His Creation: A Psycho-critical Study* (London: Collins Sons and Co., 1920), pp. 44, 42-43.
[24] Lavrin, *Dostoevsky and His Creation*, p. 45.

which he identifies with God: 'The unceasing urge of Dostoevsky's creative art was the search for an Absolute value.' Dostoevskii's dialectical investigation of the impossibility of basing an ethical system upon a notion of Absolute value, of which he has revealed all the weaknesses, is denied by Lavrin's conclusion that for Dostoevskii the negation of an Absolute value was disastrous:

> He came to the logical conclusion that without God every possibility of such a standard must be replaced by casual values, based either on the power of external authority or on the caprices of self-will. Denying God, moreover, man's consciousness must recognise itself as a meaningless, casual, and momentary flash, and, consequently, renounce for ever that path of higher self-assertion which finds his expression in individual immortality.

The confines of critical analysis, which now seem boundlessly stretched to the infinite all-pervading dimension of the Absolute, involving a titanic struggle between God the infinite and man the finite, are remarkably reduced to the narrow spaces of the human psyche, where metaphorically speaking the forces of the rational and the irrational confront each other. As Lavrin says:

> His chief characters are thus at war neither with their environment nor with their social conditions, but with irrational forces of their own consciousness, whose martyrs and victims they become. [...] Rational man perishes, overwhelmed by the irrational man whom each of us carries in his own consciousness.[25]

With such an indistinct field of investigation, half of which is bound to remain unknowable, the psychoanalytic critic can only limit itself to describing the symptoms of this struggle, thus renouncing a deeper interpretation of the work of art and its relation to the ideology of the aesthetic. Works of art cannot be reduced to 'surrogate gratifications' of the unsatisfied fantasies of the unconscious, nor to symbols of the author's mind, as Lionel Trilling intimates in his essay 'Freud and Literature'.[26] Pursuing such an elusive goal, the art critic cannot but withdraw from his undertaking,

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[25] Lavrin, *Dostoevsky and His Creation*, pp. 57, 35.
[26] See footnote 9 of this chapter.

and play the role of the moralist or of the pseudo-analyst. Lavrin's conclusion to his study seems to substantiate this view:

> What is especially valuable in him [Dostoevskii] is the fact that it is impossible to draw a line between Dostoevsky the man, and Dostoevsky the artist, since all his art was an organic and necessary result of his actual inner experience, and not of the imagination of a *littérateur*. He saw much, not from a psychological curiosity (which is so characteristic of many modern "psychological" writers), not even because he wanted to see, but because he was impelled to see—impelled, as it were, by some higher will which made him its medium, and, at the same time, its victim.[27]

Edwin Muir, reviewing Lavrin's study in his *Latitudes*, offers the reader a timely warning of the dangers of psychoanalytic criticism. In particular, he sees the risk that the critic may confine artistic discourse within the boundaries of his own perception: 'The danger of analysis in criticism is that one always reduces—and must always reduce—one's subject not to his terms but to one's own.'[28]

According to Muir, Lavrin, in his attempt to capture the mysteries of the unconscious, neglects entirely the dimension of consciousness and human will so important in Dostoevskii's novels:

> Yet all this [...] is nothing less than the other side of the truth: this is the realm of the conscious, the practical, the possible, the incarnate. Yet this half of terrestrial life Mr. Lavrin, either out of reverence for Dostoyevsky or out of agreement with him, seems to ignore. [...] There is not such a thing as human will; there are only self-will and the will of God.[29]

Although he ends by explaining Dostoevskii's peculiarity with a dubious tautology (the distinctive character of Russian literature is imputed to the peculiarity of the Slavonic 'race', of which Dostoevskii represents one exemplary instance), Muir's opportune remarks represent as early as 1924 a contradictory voice in the general choir of acquiescence to the new fashion. However, he is not alone in drawing attention to the need for the critic to concentrate on the artistic and philosophical significance of

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[27] Lavrin, *Dostoevsky and His Creation*, p. 189.
[28] Edwin Muir, *Latitudes* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, Inc., 1924), p. 60.
[29] Muir, *Latitudes*, p. 61.

Dostoevskii's novels, a significance that increases the more the novelistic genre explores new frontiers, of which the Russian writer had given a glimpse almost fifty years earlier.

6. Dostoevskii the Man and Dostoevskii the Myth

6.1. Dostoevskii's Letters: Revising the Myth

The publication of letters and biographical material, from 1914 (the year of publication of the *Letters of Fyodor Michailovich Dostoevsky to his Family and Friend*)[1] onwards, performed a double function. On the one hand, the knowledge of unknown details of the life of the Russian writer fomented the myth surrounding his person and encouraged the old practice of adopting biographical details to explain obscure parts of his novels, so that in general the ground for comparison between life and work broadened. On the other hand, on many occasions the details emerging from the documents were not pleasant at all. Therefore the embarrassment provoked by the unveiling of sinister aspects of Dostoevskii's thought, such as for instance his political opinions on Jews and Poles, encouraged a diversion of attention toward the specificity of his work.

In 1914, Ms Mayne's translation of seventy-seven of Dostoevskii's letters (only a small portion of the whole collection of letters still retained by his widow) was not much appreciated. As pointed out in the reviews in the *Athenaeum* and especially in the *Times Literary Supplement*, these letters were not translated directly from the Russian, but rather were based on German and French versions.[2] In spite of, or perhaps precisely because of, the scarcity (at the time) of biographical records, in contrast with the numerous *stories* circulating about Dostoevskii's life—two collections of letters published in ten years is not that much for such a famous author—the letters aroused a considerable interest, although, it should be remembered, still within a very restricted audience.

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[1] *Letters of Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky*, trans. by Ethel Colburn Mayne (London: Chatto and Windus, 1914).

[2] See 'Russian Novelists', *Athenaeum* (1914, December 26), and 'Dostoevsky's Letters', *Times Literary Supplement* (1914, October 29), 478.

As suggested previously, since the publication of de Vogüé's successful book, the level of mystification surrounding Dostoevskii's life reached ridiculous peaks. One representative example is the tone of adoration that Maurice Baring adopts in his already mentioned *Landmarks in Russian Literature* when referring to Dostoevskii. In comparing Dostoevskii to Shelley, Baring refers to both as 'the embodiment of elemental forces'. Because of the years that the Russian writer spent in Siberia, Dostoevskii was, in Baring's view, a 'martyr', whose 'value' resided mostly in his 'life'. Dostoevskii's work was regarded as a good substitute for St. John's gospel, in case the latter was lost [sic!].[3] The journalists who reviewed Baring's book did not fail to note and criticise these profuse expressions of enthusiasm. Particularly, in the *Contemporary Review*, the reviewer even complains that the claims for Dostoevskii are so high that 'judgement is paralysed'.[4]

In this climate, the impact of the letters was sobering and refreshing because they offered, at last, an opportunity to provide evidence against which all the assumptions made about the personality of the Russian author, on the basis either of his novels or of the imprecise and highly romanticised versions of his life, could be verified. The publication of these letters engendered, broadly speaking, two forms of reactions. To put it succinctly, the first saw in them the final confirmation of Dostoevskii's spiritual and material dissolution, which contrasted with the elevated feelings and deep sense of human suffering shown in the novels. The second saw in them a further confirmation of the negative circumstances of Dostoevskii's life, during which the writer's spirit had been harshly tested, and its tribulations skilfully represented in his novels.

In the former case, therefore, the mythical constructions surrounding the figure of Dostoevskii were seen in perspective. It was finally realised that the deeds of

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[3] Baring, *Landmarks*, respectively pp. 82, 92, 104.
[4] Literatus, 'Modern Russian Literature: I.—Gogol to Tchekov', *Contemporary Review*, Literary Supplement, 97 (1910), 1-4 (p. 3).

Dostoevskii the man were inconsistent with the noble or brave gestures imputed to the writer on the basis of his novels, and that the figure of the author emerging from the synthesis of his characters was in fact a highly contradictory, sometimes unpleasant, and, most of all, a fictional one. In the latter case, the myth was inflated out of proportion. Dostoevskii's ability to master the novelistic form, what critics of this period used to refer to as his 'genius', appeared to the supporters of this position in all its magnitude only in the light of the terrible experiences the writer had to go through all his life.

However, as distant as they might appear, these two positions have actually more in common than might be immediately perceptible. In fact, from the separation, made possible by the publication of the letters, of the man from the myths surrounding him there did not necessarily follow a rise in esteem for Dostoevskii the novelist. On the contrary, it should be evident from what has been said in the previous sections that much of the material produced on Dostoevskii in the late twenties is directed exactly in the opposite direction. In fact, as far as the biographical material is concerned, the duality of reaction to the publication of the letters is, at this stage, more apparent than real. The impression is that where there was admiration for the figure 'Dostoevskii', the detailed description of the economic worries and anxieties of the Russian writer either intensified the sense of compassion for the sufferings of 'Dostoevskii the man' or contributed to displacing the empathy on to the various narratives which were feeding 'Dostoevskii the myth'. Furthermore, in general terms, a better knowledge of Dostoevskii's vicissitudes allowed for a much more direct and substantiated association of the author's misfortunes in real life with the imputed morbidity of his novels, and paradoxically helped to make the latter look more acceptable or, at least, explicable.

Thus, in the 1920s in Britain, the figure of Dostoevskii became a converging point for contradictory elements and was invested with a symbolism of which John Middleton

Murry drafted the main vocabulary, earlier in 1916, in his study on Dostoevskii.[5] The significance of this for the reception of Dostoevskii will be explored in detail in the next chapter. In this section, only Murry's comments on Dostoevskii's letters will be considered. According to Murry, Dostoevskii was more than a novelist: he was the embodiment of an idea, an idea, however, which was anything but reassuring, rather troubling. As for the letters, they are important for reaching a deeper knowledge of his life, but, Murry argued, they have less importance if we wish to understand the idea behind the emblem 'Dostoevskii': 'Dostoevsky is essentially a consciousness and his history is to be sought not in his letters or in any biography, but in the evolution of the creative mind which is traced in his books.' In Murry's view, Dostoevskii's letters 'are profoundly interesting, but in a way absolutely different from that in which the letters of other great writers are interesting. Their significance is really negative: they are not letters at all.'[6]

In 1923, Koteliansky and Murry translated directly from the Russian 'wholly new material, lately liberated from the Russian State archives by the present government.[7] The publication of this second group of letters is reported in two reviews, one in the *Spectator* and another in the *New Statesman*. Their titles are already revealing of the gradual divergence in the position towards 'Dostoevskii' mentioned above. In 'The Man Dostoevsky', published in the *New Statesman*, the reviewer seeks to transcend what he sees as a lack of consistency between the pathetic image that comes out from the letters and the prophetic image that comes out from the novels, saying that the letters confirm the enigmatic character of all great writers:

> [...] there is no reader but finds a piece of literature made the more interesting, and his enjoyment subtly enriched, by a biographical preface. This unappeasable hunger for 'human interest' is a very creditable thing in its way, but Dostoevsky, no less than Shakespeare,

[5] A full account of the significance of Murry's study will be given in Part II: 7.1.
[6] John Middleton Murry, *Fyodor Dostoevsky: A Critical Study*, new edition (London: Martin Secker, 1923), pp. 59, 56.
[7] B. H., 'The Man Dostoevsky', *New Statesman*, 21 (1923), 682-84 (p. 682).

> seems inexplicable by a mere compilation of authentic biographical details.

The 'man' Dostoevskii, shown either in the letters or in the novels, cannot be fully known. What we can grasp are parts of his essential self, the sum of which, however, is 'not equal to the self from which they sprang':

> Dostoevsky's problem was, in fact—the highest problem of every man—terribly deepened by the peculiar cast of his genius; his struggle, the same as ours, infinitely enhanced.
>
> From such point of view his letters are profitable reading only in so far as they show the items of this struggle in his personal conduct. From any other point of view, from the angle of human interest, they are so intolerably painful that their publication would seem a cruelty only second to the reading of them.[8]

In the *Spectator*'s article 'The Dostoevsky Myth', the reviewer shows a high degree of awareness of the mythical constructions surrounding the figure of Dostoevskii, and prefers to concentrate upon the state of the writer's psyche. The reviewer gives a rapid diagnosis on the basis of his letters. His conclusion, however, while displaying a good dose of scepticism, which refuses to concede any credibility to mythical constructions, is heavily destabilised by an almost monotonous intransigence about Dostoevskii's 'psychotic' nature:

> It has become rather the habit to think of Dostoevsky as a prophet and, precisely, as one who saw clearly. In Dostoevsky's morbid obsession with the problem of good and evil, his passionate interest in pain, his feverish and prismatic awareness of psychological relations, it is suggested that we may discern, smokily as it were, the flash of a kind of Grail.
>
> In this—in this Dostoevsky religion—what we see, of course, is a weak, neurotic emulation of the sort of mythopoeia of which Dostoevsky was himself so magnificently the victim; [...].

It is clear to the reviewer that we are dealing with a pathological case:

> They [the letters] continue and fill in the portrait already clear enough in the earlier volume of letters, and make more than ever unmistakable the fact that in Dostoevsky we are dealing with a 'possessed' type of literary genius of the most fascinating sort. Of wisdom, of orderly and logical thought, of unbiased observation, we may search these letters in vain for much evidence. What we find instead is an outpouring everywhere, as prolix and unrestrained as the characteristic flight and vehemence

[8] B. H., 'The Man Dostoevsky', p. 682.

> of his novels—that vehemence so disquietingly suggestive of the epileptic, which may, indeed, plausibly be seen as an 'epileptic equivalent'.

Psychotic the man and psychotic the letters: this is the conclusion that the reviewer of the *Spectator* reaches at the end of his article. Although his analysis is saturated with that 'bad' psychologism, of which a few examples have been given in a previous chapter, it might be interesting to notice that the reviewer is prepared to concede to Dostoevskii the artist, 'whom we respect, the agonized the creator of myths', what he is not prepared to concede to Dostoevskii the man.[9] However, what none of the reviewers is prepared to concede as yet is Dostoevskii's conscious engagement with artistic creation. Even those who are enthralled by his achievements, regard these as spontaneous expression of an uncontrolled genius.

6.2. E. H. Carr and Mario Praz: The Romantic Connection

If, following the lines of Middleton Murry's standpoint, 'Dostoevskii' became an idea, it is central for this study to try and understand what the Russian author was an idea of. Some of the key passages of the building process of this 'idea' have been already highlighted. At this stage, a few considerations need to be added about the way the two forms of reaction outlined above diverged as the years went by, until the moment when it became necessary to distinguish between two formerly indistinguishable fields of investigation: the biographical analysis of the man and his work, and the criticism.

When the effects of the Dostoevskii fashion started to wane, that is, from the early 1930s, the laudatory tone of the past was finally dismissed as inappropriate and misleading. In 1931, the year of publication of E.H. Carr's important biography of Dostoevskii, D.S. Mirsky, in his preface, welcomes the new, more sober, attitude:

> English enthusiasm for Dostoevsky has flagged considerably. There is no longer any question of regarding him as a prophet [...]. With but a slight lag

[9] 'The Dostoevsky Myth', *Spectator*, 130 (1923), 1045-46.

> England has followed the lead of Russia and is content to-day to regard him as no more than a novelist.

According to Mirsky, compared with Carr's book, the biography by Dostoevskii's daughter Aimeé, was 'sensational gossip'; Middleton Murry's critical study was 'Pecksniffian sob-stuff'; André Gide's book consisted of 'perverse and arbitrary sophistications'; and the contribution of the Germans (probably Mirsky is referring to Meier-Graefe's book on Dostoevskii) was regarded as 'unutterable rot' of 'pseudo-profundity'.[10] In Mirsky's eyes, Carr's biography had the merit of being 'the first Life of Dostoevsky, in any language, to be based on adequate material', that is based on 'fresh material' accumulated by 'an Englishman who is a thorough student of Russian and who has made himself comfortably at home in the storehouse of available documents.'[11]

Mirsky's emphasis on the significance of Carr's biography is understandable. It is rather curious that we owe to a biography one of the first attempts, in the English language, to engage with Dostoevskii's novels *as novels*. Although Carr the biographer indulges himself in finding correspondences between the letters and the novels, the attempt that he makes to go beyond the immediacy of these correlations should not be underestimated. As Mirsky remarks, the importance of Carr' s study resides also in his 'equally penetrating analysis of the origins of the specific Dostoevskian hero and heroine':

> The insistence on the literary and Romantic antecedents is of importance, and goes far to show that much that seems so modern in Dostoevsky is modern only insofar as the term 'modern' can be extended to Rousseau, Byron and Benjamin Constant. And this explains the seeming paradox that backward Russia should have produced so modern a mind as Dostoevsky. He was produced by Russia precisely because he was a belated parallel in his country to what the Romantics had been in the West.

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[10] The books mentioned, besides Murry's, are: Aimeé Dostoyevsky, *Fyodor Dostoyevsky: A Study* (London: Heinemann, 1921), originally published in German; André Gide, *Dostoevsky* (London: Dent, 1925); Julius Meier-Graefe, *Dostoevsky: The Man and His Work* (London: Routledge, 1928), trans. from the German.

[11] D. S. Mirsky, Preface to E. H. Carr, *Dostoevsky (1821-1881): A New Biography* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1931).

This passage is very revealing, for there emerges one peculiarity of the reception of Dostoevskii in the 1930s, that is, his association with Romanticism. Mirsky is in no doubt when he says that modern thought is 'unaffected' by Dostoevskii. Carr's analysis of the late novels seems to substantiate this view. What Carr cannot ascribe to Dostoevskii's Romantic roots, he imputes to his character. In the chapter 'Dostoevsky the Psychologist', he immediately warns us that 'the psychology which Dostoevsky presents to us, and which Western Europe has reborrowed from him, is directly descended from the psychology of the French romantics'. Soon after, he reassures us about the originality of the Russian writer, although he does not pursue the implication of his insight:

> The point in which Dostoevsky may lay claim to originality, and in which he anticipated more recent psychological theories, is the identification of this 'lower' element (which he calls the 'double') with the unconscious or the subconscious man. He first explored the subconscious hell which seethes in the depth of each man's soul, whose waters have since been charted with so much ingenuity by the psycho-analysts.

The temptation of Carr the biographer to subsume every artistic detail within the frame of the artist's personality brings him to inquire 'how far these theories reflect the characteristic features both of the author's own personality and of the Russian mind':

> The theory of the 'double' does not, so far as we can trace its origins, seem to have been born of personal experience. It was rather, in its genesis, a literary conception of Western origin; and it was used by Dostoevsky, not only for literary purposes, but to introduce some semblance of order into his diagnosis of his own character. [12]

The connection between Dostoevskii's character and the characters of Dostoevskii, established in his analysis of *The Double*, becomes much stronger in Carr's reading of Dostoevskii's last novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. In Carr's view, this novel was 'set out' by the Russian writer 'to proclaim his faith to the world'. Although Carr's rigorous approach prevents his analysis from descending into mysticism, he has no

[12] Carr, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 255, 256, 261.

doubts about Dostoevskii's religiosity. Indeed, he attacks those critics who 'maintain that Dostoevsky remained to the end of his life a sceptic':

> We have admitted that Dostoevsky's faith was the product of reason rather than of intuition; and we are not inclined to claim for it any great measure of spirituality. But we see no reason to discredit the reality of his professed belief such as it was; and to do so on the strength of Ivan Karamazov's argument might commit us to deducing from *Paradise Lost* the conclusion that Milton's innermost sympathies were on the side of Satan, not of the angels.

Following these lines, Carr inevitably sees in the characterisation of Alyosha a failure to deliver the 'didactic purpose' of Dostoevskii's last novel. Alyosha, 'has not the supreme quality of Myshkin'. 'It was perhaps artistically inevitable—Carr comments—that Alyosha should, beside its titanic brothers, appear a somewhat pale and puny figure. But the didactic purpose of the book naturally suffers.'[13] In accordance with his vision of Dostoevskii's mind as a combination of three elements, 'religious, Romantic and masochistic', Carr indicates in Dmitri Karamazov the central figure of the novel, and on this ground he compares him to Myshkin. From the moment of his arrest,

> [...] Dmitri Karamazov, like Myshkin, has ceased to belong to the world in which he moves. He begins to speak a language which his tormentors cannot understand. He bears witness against himself; he declines to pursue, is not even interested in, facts which speak for his innocence. He recklessly disregards his interests, because he no longer sees those interests with the eyes of other men. He never swerves from his conviction that his sufferings are just. He suffers, if not for his own sins, then for the sins of the others. And since he accepts his suffering as a just expiation for sin, it becomes his path to salvation.

Viewed in this light, as the story of Dmitri's atonement, *The Brothers Karamazov* is a completed novel: 'Perhaps Dostoevsky contemplated a sequel; but we do not miss it. He had contemplated the story of Dmitri Karamazov's redemption through sin and suffering; and he had completed his work.'[14]

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[13] Carr, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 285, 287, 288.
[14] Carr, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 299, 300.

As Mirsky notices in his preface, Carr's inscription of Dostoevskii's art within the Romantic tradition was confirmed by Mario Praz in his study *The Romantic Agony*. Like Carr, Praz sees in Dostoevskii's novels 'a belated manifestation of the Romanticism of 1830'. This belatedness 'made him, by a curious combination of circumstances, particularly vital to the Decadents of the end of the century, who renewed the taste for the "frénétique" [...]'. Again, the argument is that what European decadent writers seemed to find in Dostoevskii was nothing other than a 'more mystical and more subtle' version of Poe's 'esprit de PERVERSITÉ', to which Baudelaire was so much indebted. According to Praz, 'Dostoievsky did nothing more than make use, but with profounder understanding, of certain themes used by the "frénétique" French Romantics, and the method of the passionate monologue as used in the *Confession d'un enfant du siècle* [by the French Romantic poet Louis Charles Alfred de Musset]'.[15]

This correspondence of views between Praz and Carr is not accidental, especially if we consider the significance of their studies in relation to the general approach to literary criticism. Although the form they adopt is very different, they are both asserting the need to start a different kind of literary scholarship. In the introduction to his book, Praz synthesises convincingly the elements of novelty in his approach. First, he dissociates his treatment of the 'erotic sensibility' as it appears in Romantic literature from 'pseudo-erudite' treatments of 'morbidity' and 'degeneration' as appeared in the volumes by Lombroso and Nordau. Secondly, he dismisses certain criticism, which reduces the content of literary analysis to the examination of the writer's character. In straightforward terms, Praz observes:

> It must, however, be stated without further delay that a study such as the present one differs from a medico-scientific treatise in that the recurrence of certain morbid themes in a particular period of literature is not invariably treated as an indication of a psychopathic

[15] Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. from the Italian by Angus Davidson, reissued with a new foreword by Frank Kermode (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), first published in English in 1933, pp. 350-51. The first Italian edition of the book was published in 1930, and obviously Mirsky already knew of it, when he made the comment in his preface to Carr's book.

> state in the writers discussed. The genetic link is in this case provided by taste and fashion; literary sources are discussed, and not—is it necessary to mention?—resemblances due to psychological causes, so that, side by side with writers of genuinely specialized sensibility are to be found others who give a mere superficial echo of certain themes. Again, this study has not even a remote connection with the sociological study of collective psychology, in which case it would have to include documentations from police and assize reports, scientific or pseudo-scientific works, and anonymous or popular literary productions.[16]

This declaration of intentions is unequivocal and also symptomatic of the confusion afflicting the treatment of literary subjects. Carr's biography emerges from the same necessity to distinguish different fields within the same discipline. In fact, a more scientific approach to the life of authors would certainly help clearing the field from that 'pseudo-erudition' of which Praz was complaining about. And to a certain degree it did clear the field. The welcome received by Carr's book is indicative of the opening of a new season for the reception of Dostoevskii, a season in which more attention will be paid to criticism concerned with the artistic element of Dostoevskii's work. Nevertheless, the process of acknowledgement of Dostoevskii's artistic abilities was slow. As we have seen in this chapter, even those who grasped the artistic value of Dostoevskii's work, inscribed this value within the Romantic tradition, thus reducing the innovative potential of the Dostoevskian novel. It will be shown in the next chapter, that those who in Britain were most likely to appreciate Dostoevskii as an 'innovator' insisted in representing him as an 'erratic' and 'inartistic' genius.

[16] Praz, Author's Preface to the First Edition of *The Romantic Agony*, pp. xv-xxiii (p. xvi).

7. Dostoevskii Philosopher and Prophet: Surrogate Narratives for Novelistic Discourse

7.1. A 'Symbolic' Break

What most of the reviews and publications on Dostoevskii and his novels have in common, irrespective of the year of their publication, is the allegation that Dostoevskii's novels lacked any formal coherence and style. Even when the discussions around the morbidity of the Russian writer shifted, as seen in the previous chapter, towards a redemptive interpretation of his sufferings, Dostoevskii's technical faults in writing his novels were constantly pointed out. Some examples of this attitude have already been mentioned previously. However, the moment has come now to analyse this characterisation of Dostoevskii as the 'great artist without artistic abilities' at a deeper level.

It was suggested in a previous chapter that Dostoevskii's imputed 'problems' with form have been more often than not related to external factors. For the scholar Maurice Baring, on the other hand, the explanation for the peculiarity of Dostoevskii genius was to be found in the Russian character. The 'matter-of-factness' that pervaded the literature of the country, was a 'natural expression of Russian temperament', the characteristics of which were related by him to the size and climates of Russia.[1] In general, however, many commentators imputed the lack of artistic construction in Dostoevskii's novels to the unfortunate circumstances of his life. In 1912, in an already mentioned review in the *Spectator*, we read:

> No doubt the most obviously disconcerting of Dostoievsky's characteristics is his form. Most of his works are not only exceedingly long, but—at any rate on a first inspection—extremely disordered. Even in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the last and the most carefully composed of his novels, the construction seems often to collapse entirely; there are the strangest digressions and the most curious prolixities; we have an endless

[1] See Maurice Baring, *Landmarks in Russian Literature* (London, New York: Methuen, Barnes and Noble, 1960, first edition published by Methuen, 1910), introductory chapter 'Russian Characteristics'.

> dissertation, introduced apparently *à propos de bottes*, on the duties of a Russian monk; we have a long, queer story, read aloud by one of the characters in a restaurant, about Christ and a Grand Inquisitor. In some of the most important of his works—in *The Idiot*, *The Adolescent*, and *The Possessed*—this characteristic appears in a far more marked degree. The circumstances of Dostoievsky's life certainly account in part for the looseness and incoherence of his writing.[2]

While the debate concerning Naturalism focused in the end upon the formal aspects of novel writing, the definition of the peculiarity of Dostoevskii's realism was based upon other premises. Maurice Baring's definition of Dostoevskii's realism and its differentiation from French Naturalism was not based on formal considerations, regarded as non-pertinent in his case, but is transposed to the level of 'non-artistic' content. Dostoevskii's work is 'often shapeless', Baring comments, and 'the incidents in his books are sometimes fantastic and extravagant to the verge of insanity'. 'Though Dostoevsky as a man possesses qualities of universality—Baring concludes—he is not a universal artist such as Shakespeare, or even as Tolstoy [...].'[3] To Naturalism, characterised by a realism of form, able to perceive only the external appearance of phenomena, Baring can confidently counterpoise Dostoevskii's 'realism':

> When the word 'realism' is employed with regard to literature, it gives rise to two quite separate misunderstandings [...]. The first misunderstanding arises from the use of the word by a certain French school of novelists who aimed at writing scientific novels in which the reader should be given slices of raw life; and these novelists strove by an accumulation of detail to produce the effect of absolute reality. [...] The second misunderstanding with regard to the word 'realism' is this. Certain people think that if you say an author strives to attain an effect of truth and reality in his writing, you must necessarily mean that he is without either the wish or the power to select, and that his work is therefore chaotic.[4]

Dostoevskii's method is neither of those two things: his purpose is neither to linger on shocking details, nor to give an indiscriminate chaotic description of 'raw life'.

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[2] 'Dostoievsky', *Spectator*, 109 (1912), 451-52 (p. 451).
[3] Baring, *Landmarks*, pp. 161-62.
[4] Baring, *Landmarks*, pp. 11-12.

Although he is careless of any stylistic concern, he is able to perceive 'certain heights and depths of the human soul', unexplored until that moment.

Baring's approach moves mostly within the traditional lines of reception of Dostoevskii. In this respect, *Landmarks in Russian Literature*, a study essentially projected backwards in terms of critical development, is nonetheless important as a self-justifying and self-legitimating moment in the problematic initial reception of the Russian writer in Britain. Edmund Gosse, in an article published in the *Contemporary Review*—essentially an homage paid to Melchior de Vogüé after his death—in emphasising the connection of Baring's study with the traditional approach to Dostoevskii's work, of which de Vogüé can be considered the initial advocate, clearly perceives and acknowledges the definitive value of Baring's study. 'Mr. Maurice Baring has recently defined for us the elements of the realism of the Russians', writes Gosse, elements in which the issues raised by de Vogüé or Georg Brandes, argued in the previous chapters of this study, resound, although now with a more assertive tone.[5]

Having said this, the persistence of traditional lines in the reception of Dostoevskii bears witness to the fact that even in those studies that distanced themselves from previous approaches to Dostoevskii's work, the refusal to admit these novels' artistic value was strong. This was the case with Middleton Murry's 'symbolic' approach to Dostoevskii's work, as well as D. H. Lawrence's 'philosophical' approach. This will also be the case with novelists such as Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster, who, as will be shown in due course, recognised the value of Dostoevskii's work not in the author's artistic potential but in his psychological or spiritual force.

[5] Edmund Gosse, 'Melchior de Vogüé', *Contemporary Review*, 97 (1910), 568-79 (p. 577). Assertive also is the tone of the reviewer of the *Athenaeum*, when he tries to describe what this peculiar form of Dostoevskian realism consists of: 'It is a trite thing to say that Dostöevsky is a great realist. Yet it may be worth while to notice that his is that mode of realism which works from within outwards, using the outward phenomena, however boldly, only in subservience to the discovery and explication of inward truth [...]', 'Two Realists: Russian and English', *Athenaeum*, (1912, June 1), 613-14 (p. 614).

The aim of the following sections will be, therefore, to highlight the circumstances in which 'surrogate narratives' filled the gap left by the lack of examination of Dostoevskii's artistic capacities. The resistance that British intellectuals showed against Dostoevskii the novelist helped to give the reception of Dostoevskii and his works particular features, the characteristics of which have been outlined in the course of this study.

7.1.1. Dostoevskii: 'Evil Thinker' or 'Marvellous Seer'

The contradictory character of the reception of Dostoevskii in Britain is particularly well epitomised by the position John Middleton Murry's *Dostoevsky: A Critical Study*, published in 1916, occupied in it. In fact, on the one hand, this study consciously sets itself in opposition to the traditional approach to Dostoevskii's works. Murry is fully aware of the distance that separates his study from previous ones. He stresses the necessity for an alternative approach, which will allow the 'next generation of readers a better understanding of the novels of this not fully appreciated genius'. If we take this awareness as an innovative factor in its own right, then the book represents a real watershed. However, Murry's refusal to attribute any significance to Dostoevskii the 'novelist', as opposed to Dostoevskii the 'emblem', places his study within the mainstream of reception of the Russian author in Britain.

The complex history of the genealogy of Murry's book is fully documented.[6] It is well known that D. H. Lawrence was supposed to collaborate with Murry on writing a book on Dostoevskii. However, their profound disagreements on their approach to the Russian author led Murry to undertake this task on his own. As Peter Kaye rightly remarks, the nature of the divergence, which put at serious risk Murry's friendship with

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[6] Helen Muchnic, in her *Dostoevsky's English Reputation* reports some details of the dispute. A more complete representation of the nature of the dispute between Murry and Lawrence and Dostoevskii is in Peter Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism: 1900-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 35-44. For this reason, I do not consider it necessary to re-examine in this thesis the terms of the dispute itself. I will rather focus upon aspects that in these two studies have been neglected.

Lawrence, was not artistic. The points of disagreement concerned for both Murry and Lawrence the philosophical implications of Dostoevskii's novels. In Russia, these implications were emphasised soon after the death of the writer. As Vladimir Seduro points out in *Dostoyevsky in Russian Literary Criticism*, Vladimir Solovev and later Dmitri Merezhkovskii recognised in Dostoevskii 'a prophet unprecedented in history'.[7] Scholars such as Vasilii Rozanov, Lev Shestov, and Viacheslav Ivanov were among the promoters of Dostoevskii as philosopher and prophetic leader of a generation of Russian intellectuals who found in the author of *The Brothers Karamazov* an illuminating guide to the contradictions of the incoming twentieth century. Nicholai Berdiaev found in Dostoevskii the precursor of a kind of spiritual existentialism, that is, one not directly connected with any positive religion but deeply concerned with issues of transcendence and spirituality.[8] In this respect, Lawrence's and Murry's approach to Dostoevskii is closer to Berdiaev's than to that of intellectuals such as Woolf or Forster.

Apart from a general irritation manifested in various occasions in his letters, Lawrence expressed openly his points of disagreement with Dostoevskii's view of the world in his Preface to Dostoevskii's *The Grand Inquisitor*, translated and published in 1930 as an independent work by S. S. Koteliansky. He confronted the 'Legend' entirely at a thematic level, regarding *The Grand Inquisitor* as a philosophical treatise used by Dostoevskii to communicate his *Weltanschaung*. In his Preface, Lawrence took a position in relation to Dostoevskii diametrically opposite to that of Murry. His hostility to the Russian author was motivated, in Lawrence's words, by the perversity of Dostoevskii's insight. Dostoevskii, 'a marvellous seer' according to Lawrence, had discovered the 'truth' about human beings' weakness. He had discovered that only few

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[7] Dmitri Merezhkovskii, quoted in Vladimir Seduro, *Dostoyevsky in Russian Literary Criticism: 1846-1956* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), p.40. A whole section is devoted to Merezhkovskii in a previous chapter of this thesis. See Part I: Section 3.2.

[8] See Nikholai Berdiaev, *Dostoievsky: An Interpretation*, trans. by D. Attwater (London: Sheed and Ward, 1934). Although Berdiaev's book on Dostoevskii was translated into English in 1934, and reviewed in the article 'Dostoevsky as Prophet', *Times Literary Supplement* (1935, January 3), 7, its idea of Dostoevskii as 'philosopher of freedom' will influence the reception of Dostoevskii only after World War II.

of the elect manage not to be seduced by the powers of 'mystery', 'miracle', and 'authority'. On the contrary, according to Lawrence, the masses will bow down to those able to control the seductive power of these elements. However, in Lawrence's view, Dostoevskii, 'the evil thinker', shows all his perversity in describing those who side with this 'truth' as 'satanic' and 'diabolic':

> [...] in this respect, Dostoevsky showed his epileptic and slightly criminal perversity. The man who feels a certain tenderness for mankind in its weakness or limitation is not therefore diabolic. The man who realizes that Jesus asked too much of the mass of men, in asking them to choose between earthly and heavenly bread, and to judge between good and evil, is not therefore satanic. Think how difficult it is to know the difference between good and evil! Why, sometimes it is evil to be good. And how is the ordinary man to understand that? He can't. The extraordinary men have to understand it for him. And is that going over to the devil?[9]

In other words, Lawrence is of the opinion that Ivan and the Grand Inquisitor have finally found the 'truth' about man, and Jesus' kiss to the Grand Inquisitor and Alyosha's kiss to Ivan are an implicit admission of this fact.

The implications, at a philosophical level, of Lawrence's assertions will not be investigated here. In terms of influence, Lawrence's Preface had only minor repercussions, although it was favourably reviewed.[10] Rather, it was Murry's view on Dostoevskii, although expressed fourteen years earlier, that had wider repercussions on later developments in the interpretation of Dostoevskii.

7.1.2. The 'Disembodied Spirit' of Dostoevskii

As mentioned above, Middleton Murry, like Lawrence, did not regard Dostoevskii's works as novels, and neither, unlike Lawrence, as a product of the author's ill health. Indeed, Murry made a serious attempt to detach the critical analysis of Dostoevskii's novels from a misleading biographism: 'To argue that Dostoevsky's work was the result

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[9] D. H. Lawrence, 'Preface to Dostoevsky's *The Grand Inquisitor*, in René Wellek (ed.), *Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1962), pp. 90-97 (p. 93).

[10] In the *Times Literary Supplement* (1930, September 11), 712, the reviewer affirms that 'the special interest of this new translation, an elegant and tasteful piece of book production, is in D. H. Lawrence's introduction, which is unfortunately undated.'

of his epilepsy is, besides yielding to the unpardonable methods of a Nordau, to commit the greater crime of confounding cause with effect'. He also dismissed Evgenii Soloviev's environmentalism, defining the book published a few months before as 'spiteful, shallow and misleading'.[11] According to Murry, Dostoevskii was a completely new phenomenon, which, in order to be appreciated, required new critical tools.

One of the first questions that Murry addressed to his readers was a basic one: what is a novel? Henry James, many years earlier, had defined it as a 'representation of life'. Murry seemed to accept this definition, which involved a 'sense of process' and 'movement'. However, if 'the sense of time is what makes the novel a form of art', if that is what makes it a 'representation of life', then, Murry deduced, Dostoevskii's works are not novels, that is, they are *not* a representation of life 'bathed in a sense of time'.[12] That is why, in Murry's view, Dostoevskii's works have been deeply misunderstood, because they have been criticised as *novels*. On the contrary, they are totally 'a new creation' that combines different elements in a new way.

Murry's attack is directed towards those who dismissed Dostoevskii's artistic achievements. In this respect, Murry's comments on the inadequacy of traditional critical tools in relation to Dostoevskii's works are extremely important. He seems to be aware of the innovative force of Dostoevskii's methods. However, his transposition of Dostoevskii's art on to a symbolic level of representation ends by giving to his theoretical approach a completely different direction. In Murry's words, the result of Dostoevskii's 'creation' is a 'symbol'. Referring to Dostoevskii's characters thus he writes:

> As Dostoevsky's art developed and his thought went deeper and ranged farther, we must be prepared to discern in them more and more clearly symbolic figures. They are real, indeed, and they are human, but their reality and humanity no more belongs to the actual

[11] John Middleton Murry, *Fyodor Dostoevsky: A Critical Study* (London: Martin Secker, 1916), pp. 38, iii. Soloviev's environmentalism has been discussed in Part II: Section 4.2.2.
[12] Murry, *Fyodor Dostoevsky*, p. 25.

> world. They had not lived before the book, and they do not live after it. They are no physical beings.
>
> Ultimately they are creations not of a man who desired to be, but of a spirit which sought to know. They are imaginations of a God-tormented mind, not the easy overflow and spontaneous reduplication of a rich and generous nature. Principalities and powers strive together in this imagined world, and the men and women are all in some sort possessed, and because they are possessed are no longer men and women. Therefore they are not to be understood or criticised as real, save in the sense that the extreme possibility of the actual is its ultimate reality.[13]

What we are dealing with, according to Murry, are 'symbolic figures' that more than any biographical detail, can help the critic and the reader in general to penetrate the very essence of Dostoevskii's thought. But Murry goes even further, saying that it is pointless to look for answers in the writer's life, because 'the outward and visible life of Dostoevsky is in the nature of a clumsy symbol of that which he really was'.[14] Thus, whereas previously, from de Vogüé onwards, critics had to look at 'the man illustrating the work',[15] now, according to Murry, only the books can give the critics an insight into the man's ideas. Rather that looking at Dostoevskii's novels as accomplished works of art, Murry turns Dostoevskii into a 'disembodied spirit', 'incommensurable with the forms of life', as much as his art was incommensurable with the forms of art.[16] It is clear, therefore, that Murry's initial insight on the peculiarity of Dostoevskii's art is not pursued.

Murry is on to something when he warns us about the impossibility of inscribing Dostoevskii's works within the traditional parameters of the novelistic genre. The history of the reception of the Russian writer, up to Murry's study, shows precisely this difficulty in dealing with the form of his works, a form which, rather than finding its comfortable niche within the secure boundaries of the realistic novel, has resisted this attempt. The major risk for Dostoevskii's novels is not so much, or not only, of being

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[13] Murry, *Fyodor Dostoevsky*, pp. 127-28.
[14] Murry, *Fyodor Dostoevsky*, p. 54.
[15] The phrasing is Edmund Gosse's, from the above-mentioned article on Melchior de Vogüé, in occasion of his death, 'Melchior de Vogüé', p. 577.
[16] Murry, *Fyodor Dostoevsky*, p. 54.

mis interpreted (as shown in the introduction to this thesis, the notion of misinterpretation can be a controversial parameter of interpretation), but of being mis-recognised as something 'other' than *novels*. An interpretation like Murry's, that invests heavily in the 'symbolic', represents the moment at which this risk is highest. In fact, such an interpretation performs a double simultaneous function: it at once frees the Dostoevskian novel from the interpretative limits of the traditional literary canon, while at the same time turning it into an immaterial, inessential entity. The novel, as a genre defined by certain formal characteristics, disappears from Murry's horizon of interpretation, and the Dostoevskian novel is replaced by 'symbols', which, by their own very essence, can never be fully decrypted.

Murry insists on the inadequacy of objects to that which they symbolise—'They are caricature of their own intention', he says—and defines this discrepancy as a 'metaphysical obscenity, which consists in the sudden manifestation of that which is timeless through that which is in time'.[17] He seems to imply that a certain definitive knowledge, not just of the actual content of the specific works, but also of the objective world, is practically impossible. It is obvious then, that the essence of reality is not to be found in its external representation, but belongs to an inner sphere, the contours of which melt into immateriality, a sphere which, in Murry's view, Dostoevskii, unlike his predecessors, was fully and *intrinsically* aware of. As Murry writes: 'The labour of his life was to translate the deep thoughts of his mind into imaginative terms; he had to create symbols, which should express ideas of the most transcendental kind.'[18] The path, which Murry embarks upon, is bound to neglect the artistic relevance of an author like Dostoevskii. In fact, what is lost in Murry's analysis is not just 'the novel' as a genre, which he seems to dismiss, but also 'the work' and 'the author', both of which are turned into an 'idea' the connotations of which are inevitably destined to remain vague.

[17] Murry, *Fyodor Dostoevsky*, p. 36.
[18] Murry, *Fyodor Dostoevsky*, p. 68.

From this excursus through one of the most relevant moments of the reception of Dostoevskii, some conclusion must be drawn.

One of the commonplaces of the reception of Dostoevskii is to situate the cult in the years 1912-1921 and to indicate 1916 as the year in which it reached its peak. If there was a 'cult' (understood as a moment of sublimation of fears and desires) of Dostoevskii in the period under consideration, Murry's study might be said to represent its most tangible moment. This is the moment when both 'Dostoevskii' and his 'characters' are transferred to the realm of the transcendent, and become 'superhuman figures of this symbolic world'. Their relation to the world, to the real world of the *man* Dostoevskii, and the fictional world of his creations, is lost. Although the 'symbolic world' instated by Murry can still remind us of this loss, the promise of recuperation of a deeper reality can never be delivered *through* it, but only *in spite of* it. Murry does not seem to bother with recuperation, nor with interpretation. Reading his critical study, innovative in many respects, we remain disorientated by a consistent dose of mysticism which underlines and permeates the whole book. This is not surprising. The connection of symbolism and mysticism, historically traceable, found in this country an unreserved supporter in Arthur Symons, who in his book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) had honestly admitted:

> Here, then, in this revolt against exteriority, against rhetoric, against a materialistic tradition, in this endeavour to disengage the ultimate essence, the soul, of whatever exists and can be realised by the consciousness; in this dutiful waiting upon every symbol by which the soul of things can be made visible; literature, bowed down by so many burdens, may at last attain liberty, and its authentic speech. In attaining this liberty, it accepts a heavier burden; for in speaking to us so intimately, so solemnly, as only religion had hitherto spoken to us, it becomes itself a kind of religion, with all the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ritual.'[19]

Unfortunately, probably only a few writers have been turned so radically into secular icons (if this is not an oxymoron), in the way Dostoevskii has been. The

[19] Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1899), p. 10.

'symbolic' approach to Dostoevskii and his novels, of which Murry's study is only one representative, while apparently liberating Dostoevskii and his works from the chains of biographism, *de facto* turned them into an empty vessel to be filled according to different exigencies. The cult of Dostoevskii corresponded to the moment in which 'Dostoevskii', with all that this implied, was turned into an abstraction, into an extremely malleable and minimally defined idea. It had to be so, in order to become a cult: an idea invoked almost as a panacea. However, like all cults, it did not last long, and, as we all know, Dostoevskii's works outlasted the cult for their author.

These considerations lead on to a second aspect, which makes Murry's study significant in the process of reception of Dostoevskii in Britain. In the annihilation of forms that accompanies Murry's 'symbolic' approach, perhaps a negative truth is implicit, a truth that, however, has more to do with gain than with loss, and which becomes discernible only by paying attention to what is left aside. The subject of this negative truth concerns in fact the development of the novel itself. It is well known that consideration of the novel as a form of art was indeed a recent development. Generally novels had been considered other than art; they were rather seen as performing a social function. Consolidation of their artistic status and a re-evaluation of the potentialities of the genre were part and parcel of the modernist debate. It might be worth bearing in mind that when Murry wrote his study James Joyce had not yet published *Ulysses* (although the novel was already completed), and many of the experimental novelists were encountering not a few difficulties in publishing their works. However, by 1916 events had already occurred that paved the way for this development of the potentialities of the novel as a form. The cult of Dostoevskii might well be located, if this is needed, within the boundaries of a period of transition towards new expressions of the novelistic genre. The Russian author became in Britain the conduit for the battle against traditional novel writing. However, to what extent British authors grasped the

innovative import of his technique is a different issue, the complexity of which will be the subject matter of the following section.

7.2. Mr Bennett, Mrs Woolf, and the Form of Dostoevskii's Novels

In spite of the fact that the Garnett translations of Dostoevskii's works were indeed, as Virginia Woolf writes retrospectively on many occasions, a major event on the British literary scene, 'doubts and misgivings' still surrounded the figure of the Russian novelist and his work. One could say that, while the interest in Dostoevskii had always been high, the enthusiasm for Dostoevskii seeped into the British literary establishment through the back door, as if it were almost ashamed of showing itself openly. That this view is not mere conjecture is proved by a series of elements, one of which emerges from a straight observation of the sources of investigation.

When the last of the Garnett translations was published, the reputation of Dostoevskii was undoubtedly established and consolidated.[20] However, the contours of that reputation were extremely problematic, for the reason that, as I have endeavoured to show, the characteristics imputed to the figure of Dostoevskii went far beyond the artistic domain, and were often overshadowed by considerations and factors of a different nature.

As has been noted several times in this thesis, many of the reviews concerning Dostoevskii and his novels tended to valorise him more as a philosopher or a prophet, rather than as an artist aware of his own artistic capabilities and with an elaborated aesthetic project. This aspect of the reception was particularly marked in Britain and in parts of Europe from the late twenties onwards. This section will be devoted to the reactions of those representatives of the British literary scene who in these years were

[20] The last volume (the twelfth) includes *The Friend of The Family* and *Netochka Nezvanova*. (1920)

overwhelmed by the 'incoming flood' of the Dostoevskii fashion and had to deal with the figure of Dostoevskii whether they liked it or not.

In most cases they simply inherited, rather than discovered, the legacy of such an important author, and were drawn into, rather than attracted by, his art. For any British artist or intellectual of the period between the mid-twenties and the early thirties, it would have been hardly possible to avoid the encounter with Russian literature and with Dostoevskii in particular. In not a few cases, this encounter turned out to be rather a collision, a clash not only between different worlds, but also and especially between antithetical ways of representing them.

This tension around the figure of Dostoevskii was related to, and partly motivated by, the broader debate among British intellectuals concerning the development of the novelistic genre. In this context, the position of Arnold Bennett, essayist and novelist, appears to be much more relevant than usually acknowledged. His importance in the process of reception of Dostoevskii has very often been underestimated. As a matter of fact, he might be regarded as a key-figure. Not only did he try relentlessly to persuade publishing houses and translators to take a risk with Dostoevskii; he also played a role of primary importance in the intellectual polemic with Virginia Woolf, to which so much of the debate that helped shape what we refer to as English Modernism is actually indebted. That Virginia Woolf finally prevailed in that debate is constantly proved both by the state of neglect in which Bennett's writings have been kept, and by the inevitable presence in most readers or anthologies on the subject of the famous (and infamous) 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown'.[21] This, however, is by no means an attempt at

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[21] Virginia Woolf published two versions of 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown': the first one was first published in the *Nation and Athenaeum*, 34 (December 1923), 342-43 and republished in Andrew McNeillie (ed.) *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: 1919-1924, Vol. III* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1988), pp. 384-89; a second revised version was used to give a paper to the Heretics, Cambridge, on May 18th, 1924, and has been republished in Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays, Vol. I*, ed. with foreword by Leonard Woolf (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), pp. 319- 37. In the first version, Dostoevskii is mentioned several times, while these references disappear in the second version. The quotations used in this section will refer to the second version.

rehabilitation of Bennett's reputation, but rather a cautious invitation to analyse the relationship between these two important representatives of the English literary scene from an unusual perspective, a privilege that perhaps this study on Dostoevskii, with its oblique view on the debate on modernism and modernist literature, can make possible.

7.2.1. Bennett's Quest for Form

Although in the period of Dostoevskii's reception covered in this thesis (1869-1935) the artistic value of Dostoevskii's novels was usually neglected or dismissed, there are some interesting remarks from some well-known novelists that are worth recalling. Apart from the influences of one author upon another, often quite difficult to trace, the interest of British novelists in Dostoevskii is witnessed in letters and reviews. Robert Louis Stevenson's impressions on the powerful effects of Dostoevskii's technique are well known, as is Henry James' resistance to them.[22] However, it is with authors like Arnold Bennett, Virginia Woolf, and E.M. Forster that specific comments upon Dostoevskii's novels become part of a broader discussion on the development of the novelistic genre in this country. It is also thanks to them that the contributions of European intellectuals such as André Gide or Herman Hesse reached the British public.[23] Among them, Arnold Bennett stands out as a Dostoevskii supporter from the very beginning and for this reason has a major significance for this study.

It is common to think of Bennett as a public figure that managed to reconcile his artistic pursuits with his economic ambitions. However, a closer analysis of his essays and of the context in which he operated reveal all the contradictions of his peculiar position. The progressive quest for a new artistic form pursued by Bennett the novelist

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[22] Helen Muchnic reports Stevenson's impressions and enthusiasm about *Crime and Punishment*, quoting a passage from a letter to John Addington Symonds, in which the writer refers also to Henry James' distaste for Dostoevskii. See Helen Muchnic, *Dostoevsky's English Reputation*, pp. 17-18. An extensive section is devoted by Peter Kaye to Henry James' approach to Dostoevskii's novels in his book *Dostoevsky and English Modernism*, pp. 175-90.

[23] Arnold Bennett promoted the translation and publication of Gide's book *Dostoevsky*, of which he wrote the preface, while two essays on Dostoevskii by Herman Hesse, 'The Downfall of Europe: "The Brothers

is in fact, ill at ease with the retrograde assertion of the moral function of art made by Bennett the manager and ideologue of the cultural industry. To reflect upon his sympathetic but contradictory attitude towards Dostoevskii can be just as thought-provoking as Virginia Woolf's inability to grasp in any meaningful way, other than with comments on 'the stuff of the soul', the innovative power of Dostoevskii's novelistic form.

Both these intellectuals were committed to the project of exploring new possibilities for the development of the novel as artistic form. Their influence in the British literary scene has been massive, and even today they are an important part of the English Literature curriculum of study. However, as Samuel Hynes observes, because of the limited number of people involved, the idiosyncrasies of the individual personalities often interfered with the intellectual debate, giving it a tone of diatribe rather than of discussion. In particular, according to Hynes, this seems to have been the case with Arnold Bennett and Virginia Woolf, whose dispute concerning the nature of the novel as an artistic form assumed the characteristics of a personal 'quarrel'.[24] Yet, it is reductive to circumscribe the significance of the quarrel within the boundaries of personal contrasting views. The underlying motivations behind this clash of personalities are still determined by the differences in their conception of art and novel writing. Thus, whatever importance the whole contention might have for us today, it resides less in what it can reveal about the two personalities than in what it certainly reveals about different conceptions concerning the development of the novel. For this reason, it might be more productive in this section to focus exclusively on the aesthetic significance of that debate and on the position Dostoevskii occupied within it.

Karamazoff"' and 'Thought's on Dostoevsky's "Idiot"' were translated and published on the *English Review*, 35 (1922), 108-20, 190-96.

[24] In 'The Whole Contention Between Mr Bennett and Mrs Woolf', Samuel Hynes gives full details about the dispute and the way it originated. He insists on characterising it more as a clash between personalities than as debate about two different views on art. See Samuel Hynes, *Edwardian Occasions: Essay on English Writing in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 24-38.

Hynes is onto something when he says that 'they [Bennett and Woolf] were *not* antithetical in their views of their common art.'[25] But, in what way were their views *not* antithetical? Hynes suggests that it is on their 'commitment to art' that both Bennett and Woolf found their common ground. Certainly both were convinced that the novel was an artistic form, and both were trying to define the canons according to which it would be possible to distinguish artistic from non artistic fiction. The differences arose when they tried to define what *is* artistic and what is the task of the novelist. Their conception of character-creation diverged. They accused each other of being unable to create a 'proper' character and to put in a novel the things that matter. Woolf labelled Bennett as representative of that literary 'tradition' that she and her friends said they wanted to overcome and renew. Bennett labelled Woolf as the 'queen of the high-brows', with some talent as a novelist, but essentially 'victim of her extraordinary gift of fancy (not imagination)'.[26]

These tensions, quite controlled in tone and officially channelled as they might have been, do not reflect immediately the position of the two intellectuals vis-à-vis Dostoevskii. Peculiarly, Bennett, supposedly the 'traditionalist' of the two, does not seem to have any doubt in acknowledging the innovative power of Dostoevskii's novels. He reserves some doubts about their style but is prepared to concede that stylistic concerns are bound to become secondary in the face of such artistic power. In the long essay *The Author's Craft*, Bennett admits:

> It is hard saying for me, and full of danger in any country whose artists have shown contempt for form, yet I am obliged to say that, as the years pass, I attach less importance to good technique in fiction. I love it, and I have fought for a better recognition of its importance in England, but I now have to admit that the modern history of fiction will not support me. With the single exception of Turgenev, the great novelists of the world, according to my own standards, have either

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Peter Kaye devotes two chapters to Virginia Woolf and Arnold Bennett in his already mentioned *Dostoevsky and English Modernism*, pp. 66-95 and pp. 96-117.

[25] Samuel Hynes, 'The Whole Contention', in *Edwardian Occasions*, p. 27.

[26] Arnold Bennett, 'Queen of the High-Brows', in *The Evening Standard Years: Books and Persons 1926-1931* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1974), pp. 326-28 (p. 327).

> ignored technique or have failed to understand it. What an error to suppose that the finest foreign novels show a better sense of form than the finest English novels! Balzac was a prodigious blunderer. He could not even manage a sentence, not to speak of the general form of a book. And as for a greater than Balzac—Stendhal—his scorn of technique was notorious. Stendhal was capable of writing, in a masterpiece: "By the way I ought to have told you earlier that the Duchess——!" And as for a greater than either Balzac or Stendhal—Dostoievsky—what a hasty, amorphous lump of gold is the sublime, the unapproachable *Brothers Karamazov*![27]

Bennett's conclusion seems to be that both good technique and perfect style are *not* sufficient to reach the sublime, they are *not* the *sine qua non* of artistic creation, and masterpieces like Balzac's, Stendhal's or Dostoevskii's novels are there to prove it. Thus, the confrontation between foreign and English novels cannot, and must not operate, in Bennett's view, at the level of style, because in that case the greatest novels would be excluded from the competition. Bennett, the sagacious connoisseur of continental literature, was aware of the fact that the impact of Dostoevskii's novels went beyond their content, and concerned an altogether different use of the form, which did not comply with traditional stylistic canons. Bennett's comments about the lack of form in *The Brothers Karamazov* never questioned his belief in the superior quality of Dostoevskii's novel. His stylistic remarks, as he himself admitted, were not primary in the evaluation of one of the greatest novels ever written. Although he did not seem to be able to explain in coherent theoretical terms what Dostoevskii's innovative power consisted of, Bennett nonetheless recognised in the Dostoevskian novel the ultimate development of the genre. However, to take this outlook as Bennett's final word on the novel would not give a proper account of the contradictions, which he embodied as a public literary figure and a novelist.

As a public figure, Bennett always paid particular attention to the taste of the reading public. He was concerned with the possibility of democratising art and

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[27] Arnold Bennett, *The Author's Craft* (London, New York, Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), pp. 46-48.

educating the public to appreciate great literature. In order to achieve this aim, he thought it his duty to meet the public's expectations both in terms of 'construction' of the novel and in terms of moral values conveyed through the novel. In this respect, his deep-seated middle-class moralism, and his desire to please the taste of the reading public, got in the way of his critical insight, and in the ultimate analysis compromised it irreversibly. The introduction of moral categories as parameters for the evaluation of works of art leads Bennett's criticism more often than not to a dead end. In the last part of *The Author's Craft* for instance, Bennett designates, among the attributes that 'the great novelist must have', 'fineness of mind':

> A great novelist must have great qualities of mind. His mind must be sympathetic, quickly responsive, courageous, honest, humorous, tender, just, merciful. He must be able to conceive the ideal without losing sight of the fact that it is a human world we live in. Above all, his mind must be permeated and controlled by common sense. His mind, in a word, must have the quality of being noble.[28]

On this basis, he commits some serious blunders, as with Flaubert:

> And when we come to consider the great technicians, Guy de Maupassant and Flaubert, can we say that their technique will save them or atone in the slightest degree for the defects of their mind?

And adds:

> [...] the declension of Flaubert is one of the outstanding phenomena of French criticism. It is being discovered that Flaubert's mind was not quite noble enough—that, indeed, it was a cruel mind, and a little anaemic.[29]

It is obvious that this is not the Bennett that we can take seriously. What matters here is that his appreciation of Dostoevskii, consistent throughout his career, is based also upon aesthetic remarks, perhaps not well argued at a theoretical level but still a relevant part of his reflection, and certainly a rare occurrence in the panorama of Dostoevskii's criticism. Bennett's concern with form is already manifest as early as

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[28] Bennett, *The Author's Craft*, p. 45.

[29] Bennett, *The Author's Craft*, pp. 48-49. It is surprising that in this moral slaughter Dostoevskii's imputed morbidity goes unmentioned. When this is hinted at, it is even justified in a guise that has been already mentioned in this thesis, as a consequence of the harsh conditions in which Dostoevskii lived and wrote.

1910, when, reviewing Baring's *Landmarks of Russian Literature*, he complains about the lack of a critical comment on Dostoevskii's technique:

> Dostoievsky's works—all of them—have grave faults. They have especially the grave fault of imperfection, that fault which Tourgenieff and Flaubert avoided. They are tremendously unlevel, badly constructed both in large outline and in detail. The fact is that the difficulties under which he worked were too much for the artist in him. Mr. Baring admits these faults, but he does not sufficiently dwell on them. He glances at them and leaves them, with the result that the final impression given by his essay is apt to be a false one. Nobody, perhaps, ever understood and sympathized with human nature as Dostoievsky did. Indubitably nobody ever with the help of God and good luck ever swooped so high into tragic grandeur. But the man had fearful falls. He could not trust his wings. He is an adorable, a magnificent, and a profoundly sad figure in letters. He is anything you like. But he could not compass the calm and exquisite soft beauty of "On the Eve" or "A House of Gentlefolk".

Bennett had just read *The Brothers Karamazov* in French and already showed a certain apprehension about the possibilities opened by the Russian novel and in particular by Dostoevskii's novels. In spite of the faulty technique, he already perceived their novelty and uniqueness:

> I thought I had read all the chief works of the five great Russian novelists, but last year I came across one of Dostoievsky's, "The Brothers Karamazoff", of which I had not heard. It was a French translation, in two thick volumes. I thought it contained some of the greatest scenes that I had ever encountered in fiction, and I at once classed it with Stendhal's "Chartreuse de Parme" and Dostoievsky's "Crime and Punishment" as one of the supreme marvels of the world. [...]The scene with the old monk at the beginning of "The Brothers Karamazoff" is in the very grandest heroical manner. There is nothing in either English or French prose literature to hold a candle to it. And really I do not exaggerate! There is probably nothing in Russian literature to match it, outside Dostoievsky. It ranks, in my mind, with the scene towards the beginning of "Crime and Punishment," when in the inn the drunken father relates his daughter's "shame." These pages are unique. They reach the highest and most terrible pathos that the novelist's art has ever reached. [30]

In 1927, only four years before his death he still insisted that Dostoevskii was the greatest novelist of all. In an article called 'The Twelve Finest Novels', the first four

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[30] Arnold Bennett, 'Tourgeniev and Dostoievsky', in *Books and Persons: Being Comments On A Past Epoch 1908-1911* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1917), pp. 208-13 (pp. 211, 212-13), originally published in *New Age* 31/3/1910.

positions are occupied by Dostoevskii's novels and the other eight are occupied by Turgenev's and Tolstoi's.[31]

7.2.2. The 'English' Point of View

In his enthusiasm for continental and Russian literature, but especially in his appreciation of the innovative force of Dostoevskii's novels, Bennett was quite isolated. The attitude of intellectuals of the younger generation, although diverging in approach, led substantially to uniform conclusions. Virginia Woolf's and E.M. Forster's appreciation of Dostoevskii's novels, for instance, was characterised by a fundamental reluctance to acknowledge their innovative import for them and for future generations of writers. All they could appreciate was their disruptive power, a power though not fecund enough to generate any output.

Woolf is the one where this attitude is most visible. Her surprise and bewilderment when faced with novels such as *The Eternal Husband*, *The Idiot* or *The Possessed*, does not prevent her, initially, from using the source of her disorientation as a leverage against traditional novel writing, and in particular against Bennett and other writers like him:

> Alone among writers Dostoevsky has the power of reconstructing these most swift and complicated states of mind, of rethinking the whole train of thought in all its speed, now as it flashes into light, now as it lapses into darkness; for he is able to follow not only the vivid streak of achieved thought but to suggest the dim and populous underworld of the mind's consciousness where desires and impulses are moving blindly beneath the sod. Just as we awaken ourselves from a trance of this kind by striking a chair or a table to assure ourselves of an external reality, so Dostoevsky suddenly makes us behold, for an instant, the face of his hero, or some object in the room.
>
> This is the exact opposite of the method adopted, perforce, by most of our novelists. They reproduce all the external appearances—[...]—but very rarely, and only for an instant, penetrate to the tumult of thought

[31] Arnold Bennett, 'The Twelve Finest Novels', in *The Evening Standard Years*, pp. 32-34.

> which rages within his own mind. But the whole fabric of a book by Dostoevsky is made out of such material.[32]

However, far from imputing this ability of penetration to Dostoevskii's artistic capacities, she finds the answers to her disorientation, caused by 'observing men and women from a different point of view from that to which we are accustomed', in the profundity of his 'intuition'.[33] With such a feeble basis for evaluation as this, we are not surprised when in a subsequent article she manifests her irritation at Dostoevskii's inability to control 'the fervour of his genius', which 'goads him across the boundary'.[34] In *The Russian Point of View*, this irritation is thoroughly argued and takes the form of a fully aware aesthetic rejection of an idea of development of the novel in which the Dostoevskian novel would constitute an essential component. Woolf envisages too many impediments, which reduce the possibility of a real influence. First of all, the cultural and linguistic differences: according to her, not only is always difficult to 'understand' a foreign culture, but when also the language divides the two cultures then the barrier is almost insurmountable. Translators can only give 'a crude and coarsened version of the sense':

> What remains is, as the English have proved by the fanaticism of their admiration, something very powerful and very impressive, but it is difficult to feel sure, in view of these mutilations, how far we can trust ourselves not to impute, to distort, to read into them an emphasis which is false.

In spite of this obstacle, she is still able to lump the whole of Russian literature into one cloudy mass, 'which lures us from our own parched brilliancy and scorched thoroughfares to expand in its shade—and of course with disastrous results':

> Battered to the crest of the waves, bumped and battered on the stones at the bottom, it is difficult for an English

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[32] Virginia Woolf, 'More Dostoevsky', *Times Literary Supplement* (1917, February 22), 91. As Peter Kaye notices, in a passage quoted from the initial shorter version of the famous essay 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs Brown', she is unequivocal as to the importance of Dostoevskii for the development of the novel: 'After reading *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot* how could any young novelist believe in "characters" as the Victorians had painted them?' For a detailed account of Virginia Woolf's intervention on Dostoevskii, see Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism*, pp. 66-95.

[33] Woolf, 'More Dostoevsky', ibid.

[34] Woolf, 'Dostoevsky in Cranford', *Times Literary Supplement* (1919, October 23), 586.

> reader to feel at ease. The process to which he is accustomed in his own literature is reversed.[35]

Thus, where Bennett saw in Dostoevskii a stimulating chance to enrich the English novel with new fields of exploration of the human, Woolf saw only chaos. While Bennett struggled to maintain a balance between the canonical conception of style and a new kind of artistic vigour that he seemed to have found in Dostoevskii's novels, Woolf, who supposedly more than Bennett should have been interested in renewing the traditional canons of novel writing, accused Dostoevskii's novels of not being obsequious enough to the stylistic rules of artistic construction. She even denied the possibility of any compositional ability in Dostoevskii. He is rather a force that 'cannot restrain himself'. According to her, he is unable to perceive clearly such complicated things, very important for the British reader, as class divisions:

> It is all the same to him whether you are a noble or simple, a tramp or a great lady. Whoever you are, you are the vessel of this perplexed liquid, this cloudy, yeasty, precious stuff, the soul. The soul is not restrained by barriers. It overflows, it floods, it mingles with the souls of others.

What characterises this Dostoevskian 'force', which in her view is instinctual and not rational, is 'simplicity' and 'absence of effort'.[36] The almost natural conclusion of this attitude appears in another of Woolf's 'famous' essays, 'Phases of Fiction' [1929], where, in the attempt to periodise the different phases of development of the novel, she finally categorises Dostoevskii's novels as belonging to the 'novel of psychology', which although it allows for introspection, requires from the reader such a continuous emotional commitment that he or she become 'numb with exhaustion':

> But in Proust and Dostoevsky, in Henry James too, and in all those who set themselves to follow feelings and thoughts, there is always an overflow of emotion from the author as if characters of such subtlety and complexity could be treated only when the rest of the book is a deep reservoir of thought and emotion.

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[35] Virginia Woolf, 'The Russian Point of View', in *The Common Reader (1st Series)* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1925), pp. 219-31 (pp. 220, 221, 227).
[36] Woolf, 'The Russian Point of View', pp. 228, 221.

If the choice is therefore between the barbarism of uncontrolled emotions and the controlled style of civilisation, obviously Woolf will choose the latter: 'To brush aside civilization and plunge into the depths of the soul is not really to enrich'.[37] In trying to outline the characteristics of the novel of the future, she ends by asserting that the 'most complete novelist' is the one that balances the two powers 'that fight when combined into a novel: style and feelings'. In her view both Dostoevskii and Proust are excessive, and although between the Russian and the French, she will definitely prefer the latter, much more 'civilised' and much less alien to English sensitivity, they both lack what she calls the gift of 'synthesis'.

Thus, to go back to the initial question—is Bennett's and Woolf's view of art antithetical or not?—one might say that both Virginia Woolf and Arnold Bennett elected themselves paladins of the novel. But, while Bennett saw in the French and Russian novel the greatest contemporary examples, in relation to which the English novel ought to measure its standards, Woolf was trying to transform the genre from the English point of view, denying de facto that the possibility of radical innovation of the form could come from elsewhere. On the contrary, Virginia Woolf defended the position of intellectuals and writers like her (a position weakened by the increasing power that the cultural industry had to determine literary taste and to influence public opinion) by vague appeals to English cultural identity. She perceived the renewal romantically, as a change in sensibility. She even indicated the date (December 1910) of this change, which the novel—almost automatically, we are inclined to think—was to reflect:

> All human relations have shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when the human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature. Let us agree to place one of these changes about the year 1910.[38]

[37] Woolf, 'Phases of Fiction', in *Collected Essays: Vol. II* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1972), p. 88, 87.
[38] Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', in *Collected Essays, Vol. I*, p. 321.

The astounding determinism of this statement might be seriously misleading in making us regard Woolf as an advocate of innovation. The type of change that she promoted was unable to perceive the real innovative power of a Joyce, for instance. Her conservatism blinded her perspective even in relation to *Ulysses*, the disruptive potential of which, almost in the same way as with Dostoevskii, she recognised but was unable to define and use it purposefully. In fact, it is with Joyce that we are really reminded how unstable the whole notion of cultural identity is. Not only did the author of *Ulysses* live most of his life abroad, rejecting an idea of 'Irishness' that relied on a cultural tradition full of divisions and sectarianism, but he also created a character, Leopold Bloom, an Irish Jew, whose forced condition of estrangement in relation to his culture of origin questions at its core the whole notion of identity. Woolf's interest in Joyce is rather concerned with other elements:

> Mr Joyce's indecency in *Ulysses* seems to me the conscious and calculated indecency of a desperate man who feels that in order to breathe he must break the windows. At moments, when the window is broken, he is magnificent. But what a waste of energy!

She would prefer young writers to make a pact with what she saw as the failure of canonical novel writing, from the ashes of which something new should emerge, rather than follow a path which, in her view, would lead only to chaos. Such was the path paved by the uncontrollable force of Dostoevskii as well as by Joyce's indecency:

> We must reflect that where so much strength is spent on finding a way of telling the truth, the truth itself is bound to reach us in rather an exhausted and chaotic condition.[39]

It is not to chaos, but to the synthesising and condensing gift of poetry that the novel ought to refer as its model:

> The novel, it is agreed, can follow life; it can amass details. But can it also select? Can it symbolize? Can it give us an epitome as well as an inventory? It was some such function as this that poetry discharged in the past.[40]

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[39] Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', pp. 334, 335.
[40] Woolf, 'Phases of Fiction', p. 102.

This idea of allocating to the novel a function once accomplished by poetry goes back to the Romantics. Terry Eagleton, crediting the 'Romantic period' with the birth of a 'modern' concept of literature, writes: ' "Poetry" comes to mean a good deal more than verse: by the time of Shelly's *Defense of Poetry* (1821), it signifies a concept of human creativity which is radically at odds with the utilitarian ideology of early industrial capitalist England'.[41] Outside Britain, Schlegel, in his *Letter about the Novel*, explains why this emerging genre, what he calls 'Romantic poetry', is particularly apt to voice a new, modern sensibility:

> Its mission is not merely to reunite all separate genres of poetry and to put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetorics. It will and should, now mingle and now amalgamate poetry and prose, genius and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature, render poetry living and social, and life and society poetic, poetize wit, fill and saturate the forms of art with solid cultural material of every kind, and inspire them with vibrations of humor.[42]

Virginia Woolf makes a similar appeal to the omni-comprehensive faculty of the novelistic genre. In her view, the novel is not about this or that aspect of reality but about *the whole of life*: 'The novel is the only form of art which seeks to make us believe that it is giving a full and truthful record of the life of a real person.' Woolf's investment of the novel with such a comprehensive task is as generic and vague as Murry's 'symbolic' claims for Dostoevskii's novels. Unlike the Romantics, Woolf is not dealing with the novel as an emerging form full of potentialities, but with a form that has already tested most of its possibilities as literary genre. The trepidation detectable in the words 'seeks to make us believe' betrays the fear, very much palpable in writers of her generation, of the impossibility of gathering 'the meaning of life' in one organic whole. The fascination with the novel resides, now more than ever, in its malleability, regarded as a positive element, of which the artist can take advantage, in

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[41] Terry Eagleton, 'The Rise of English', in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), pp. 17-53 (p. 18).

[42] Friedrich Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, trans. by Ernst Behler and Roman Struc (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968), p. 140.

order to give free voice to his sensibility: 'There is room in a novel for story-telling, for comedy, for tragedy, for criticism and information and philosophy and poetry'. Not just the writer, but also the reader is attracted by the freedom of the novel: 'Something of its appeal lies in the width of its scope and the satisfaction it offers to so many different moods, desires, and instincts on the part of the reader'.[43]

However, when all these elements are unified under the aegis of the term 'life', their illusory character becomes more apparent. E.M. Forster's application of the word 'prophetic' to those novels which express artistically the universal, again speaks of the difficulty that these critics and novelists encountered when dealing with Dostoevskii's artistic form. Peculiarly, unlike Woolf, Forster seems to recognise that it is not chaos or barbarism that we face reading Dostoevskii's novels but universality. He gives to the novel that manages to express 'the universal' the name of 'prophetic', a novel, that is, where 'what is implied is more important [...] than what is said'. In his *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster illustrates what he means by prophecy and names other prophetic novels, such as Melville's *Moby Dick*, D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*, and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (Joyce's novels are not included, interestingly enough). Then he establishes an interesting opposition between George Eliot the preacher and Dostoevskii the prophet:

> George Eliot talks about God, but never alters her focus; God and the tables and chairs are all in the same plane, and in consequence we have not for a moment the feeling that the whole universe needs pity and love – they are only in Hetty's cell [character of the novel *Adam Bede*]. In Dostoyevsky the characters and situations always stand for more than themselves; infinity attends them, though they remain individuals, they expand to embrace it and summon it to embrace them; [...].

Dostoevskii's characters are not just 'artistic creations' but also 'prophetic visions': 'it is the ordinary world of fiction, but it reaches back'.[44]

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[43] Woolf, 'Phases of Fiction', p. 99.
[44] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, first published in 1927 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1962), pp. 136-37.

Like Woolf, however, Forster, instead of pursuing the implication of his approach to the Dostoevskian novel, ascribes its universal quality to the prophetic gift of its author. Thus, Forster's acute admission that Dostoevskii 'is a great novelist in the ordinary sense – that is to say his characters have relations to ordinary life and also live in their own surroundings, there are incidents which keep us excited, and so on',[45] turns out to be only incidental. The final appeal of this 'gentleman-writer', as Kaye cleverly calls him, is to 'common sense', a comfortable niche in which these intellectuals found refuge from unsettling influences.[46] In Forster's view, the price paid for the deeper insights of the prophetic novel, 'roughness of surface' and 'suspension of the sense of humour', is reasonable only if we put aside 'the furniture of common sense'.

7.2.3. Contrasting Modernisms

The application of criteria of ordinary common sense to the evaluation of the artistic artefact is commensurate to the apparently opposite movement of praising the novel's ability to reach mystical heights. The ductility of the novelistic form, which Forster and Woolf refer to, coupled to its capacity to deal with the mundane and the spiritual at the same time, has very little to do with the manipulation of 'low' and 'high' genres at work in Dostoevskii's novels, and in a more complete way in Joyce's *Ulysses*. In both these cases, the passage from the base to the sublime is processed by the mastering authority of an artistic form, the novel, which has reached the peak of its maturity, rather than its degenerative phase.

The appeal to a notion of universality still driven by common sense masks a genuine reticence in breaking with a literary tradition from which after all authors like Woolf and Forster themselves emerged. The association of their conception of the novel with the Romantic dream of the all-pervasive artistic form, its ultimate expression being

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[45] Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, pp. 136-37.

[46] Peter Kaye, again, shows very lucidly the class-related roots of the resistance to Dostoevskii by such 'gentlemen-writers' as Forster, John Galsworthy and Henry James. See Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism*, pp. 156-90.

life itself, might suggest a re-examination of their aesthetic project vis-à-vis Modernism in a different, less innovative, light. Certainly, they are aware that the Romantic idea of the organicity of life and art is jeopardised first and foremost by the highly unstable position of the self. While in the wide notion of 'Romantic poetry' is inscribed the belief in the possibility of the dream coming true, for these mature writers the illusory reality of that dream is fully revealed. However, their response to this new condition seems to be a defensive and nostalgic one. The inner world of Woolf's Mrs Dalloway is constrained by the physical space of her house and by the metaphorical space of her social status and her class-relations. Her journey outward does not portend any substantial change. The promise of renewal offered by the interior journey through the meanders of consciousness is reduced to a ruminative digression, which consolidates the idea of the impossibility of change and looks nostalgically at lost authenticity.

In this respect, then, Woolf's and Forster's views on art and novel writing are certainly in conflict with the English literary tradition. But this is a conflict of a peculiar type, a conflict that lays open the unsolved contradiction which these intellectuals epitomise. While wanting to break with a traditional mode of representation, which they perceive as inadequate to express a modern, changed sensibility, the nostalgic turn towards concepts of organicity and freedom in which art and life become joined under the auspices of the universal, suggests a double contrasting movement. The rebellion against the constrains of social realism upon the novelist, and the claim of the artist's freedom to pursue the truth other than by means of the faithful description of a social setting, is coupled, as has been shown previously, to remarks about style and technique that are rather in continuity, more than in conflict, with the traditional mode of novel writing. Although in Woolf's or Lawrence's novels new thematics are introduced, they never seriously challenge the stability of the canonical rules of composition, in spite of courageous declarations of intent from the artists themselves.

As a matter of fact, the conquered freedom of the author manifests itself in the position of uncertainty he now occupies, a position that turns him from the omniscient author of the nineteenth-century novel into a timid explorer of the nature of his own characters. Although this shifted perspective is bound to renovate the artistic mode of expression, it is not in Woolf's novels or in her aesthetic project where this renovation reaches its full-fledged form. Malcom Bradbury, in his extensive collection of essays on modernism, when discussing Woolf's novels and their relation to modernism, rightly observes: 'We experience an exploration both of the aesthetics of consciousness and the aesthetics of art, pursued simultaneously and without any real sense of artistic crisis—rather with a kind of joyous artistic freedom.'[47] This artistic freedom never seriously undermines or causes any *artistic crisis*, to use Bradbury's words, to the artist's 'mode' of expression, and this, it could be argued, applies both at the level of content and at the level of form.

This said, one does not mean to reduce Modernism in Britain to the limited experience of these intellectuals. These sections, however, were not devoted to Modernism, but to the significance that the Dostoevskian novel had, or could have had, for those writers whose major concern was in fact the development of the novel as artistic form. In this respect, the point of the exercise has been that of establishing a connection between these writers' difficulty in grasping the innovative import of Dostoevskii's art and their reticence in really breaking with a tradition, a literary but also a social and cultural one, which they knew was on the verge of a definitive crisis. It has been suggested that Woolf and Forster, even more than Bennett, stand antithetically to Joyce. They do not reject those aspects of tradition in which after all they are comfortably established, and therefore their appreciation of the new novel must preserve a character of continuity with the past.

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[47] Malcom Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds), *Modernism: 1890-1930* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 409.

The 'civilising mission' that Virginia Woolf required from the novel will find one of its main advocates in F. R. Leavis, who in suturing the present of D. H. Lawrence, Pound, and Eliot (not Joyce) to the past of George Eliot, Jane Austen, Joseph Conrad, and Henry James, inaugurates the so-called 'great tradition'. English literature is seen as the last bulwark against the Philistinism of contemporary mass culture, in that it preserves, through the richness of the English language, the lost organicity of past societies. However, Terry Eagleton is unequivocal in pointing out how the myth of the organic society becomes an ideological conduit for social immobilism:

> Organic societies are just convenient myths for belabouring the mechanized life of modern industrial capitalism. Unable to present a political alternative to this social order, the Scrutineers offered an 'historical' one instead, as the Romantics had done before them. They insisted, of course, that there was no literal returning to the golden age, as almost every English writer who has pressed the claims of some historical utopia has been careful to do. Where the organic society lingered on for the Leavisites was in certain uses of the English language.[48]

The English language becomes the discriminatory ground on which, as George Steiner writes, 'much of the argument against Joyce is conducted in terms of the native as against the eccentric and uprooted. Joyce's experiments with language reflects a cosmopolitan sophistication. The veritable genius of English lies nearer home'. Leavis's 'critical nationalism' ends by neglecting novels written in languages other than English. This discrimination was justified by Leavis as the result of a singular distrust in the ability of translations to convey the artistic force of works of art. The limiting consequences of this approach are again enumerated by Steiner, the eclectic humanist:

> To 'place' Henry James without clear reference to Flaubert and Turgenev; to exalt the treatment of politics in *Nostromo* and *Middlemarch* without an attendant awareness of [Dostoievsky's] *The Possessed*; to discern the realization of social nuance in Jane Austen without allowing the presence of Proust in the critical context; all this is to proceed in an artifice of isolation.[49]

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[48] Eagleton, 'The Rise of English', p. 36.

[49] George Steiner, 'F.R. Leavis', in David Lodge (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 622-35 (p. 633.)

In a similar 'artifice of isolation' proceeded Leavis's precursors. British criticism on Dostoevskii up to the early 1930s reflected this attitude. The real impetus towards a different direction came from the East. In 1929 the critic Mikhail Bakhtin had already written a first version of his important *Problems of Dostoevsky's Works*, where the scholar engaged directly with the Dostoevskian novel and its links with a vast literary tradition that goes back to the menippean satire.[50] The Soviet scholar Leonid Grossman had been publishing essays on Dostoevskii's art since 1914.[51] It was only in 1931 that awareness of these critical efforts reached British literary journals. Grossman's *Collected Works* were reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement*. Although they were not even translated into English, the reviewer perceived their innovative import. Commenting on Grossman's *Collected Works*, he concentrated particularly on the one section devoted to Dostoevskii:

> The section of the third volume of his Collected Works entitled 'Dostoevsky's Poetics' is the first detailed study of Dostoevsky's literary education, and one of the most successful attempts to define the nature of his literary genius. Grossman is particularly resourceful in his endeavour to unravel the multitude of influences that contributed to the formation of Dostoevsky's complex artistry. He sees in Dostoevsky not, as many critics would have him, a great artist despite the irregularities and deficiencies of his art, but a striking innovator, who, in his mature period, deliberately sought to free the novel from the limitations of the classic canon.[52]

What is preannounced here is a different stage of the reception of Dostoevskii in Britain, a stage in which the authoritative and innovative voice of Dostoevskii the artist would prevail over the other voices.

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[50] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. and ed. by Caryl Emerson, intro. by Wayne C. Booth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).
[51] See for references W. J. Leatherbarrow, *Fedor Dostoevsky: A Reference Guide* (Boston, Mass.: G. K. Hall and Co., 1990).
[52] 'Dostoevsky's Methods', *Times Literary Supplement* (1931, February 3), 94.

8. Conclusion

8.1. Rezeptionästhetik vs. *Reader-Response Theory*

In this thesis, two complementary motifs have run parallel. One motif concerned directly the reception of Dostoevskii in Britain, and emerged from the doubts following the examination of previous studies on the same subject. The aim of this study was not, or not just, to account taxonomically for the various phases in the reception of the Russian author in this country, but to prove that this could be done following a critical approach that would not reduce a study of reception to a list of names or reviews. In this respect, the argument developed in this thesis stands in opposition not only to prior examples of reception studies of Dostoevskii, but also to current conceptions of 'reception'. The second motif concerned the theoretical implications of this modified approach to the study of reception. In fact, a second aim of this thesis was to insert the reception of Dostoevskii within a revisited theoretical framework, in order to reassess the validity of reception theories for literary criticism today. Thus, the point of the thesis was to put forward a workable methodological and, to a certain extent, theoretical alternative to current notions of reception. The intent was to demonstrate that there is no possible 'reader-response' or 'reception' theory other than one that deals with the ideological substratum underlying the infinite multiplicity of individual subjective responses.

In the Introduction, I endeavoured to show that the risks involved in using subjective response as an analytical tool are at least two. When subjective response is rejected *in toto* as unreliable, the risk is to fall, to give an example, into W. K. Wimsatt's and Monroe Beardsley's excess of confidence in the ability of the text to be

self-contained and almost impermeable to any external influence.[1] When, on the other hand, the subjective response is accepted as the only plausible index of readers' taste, the risk is to fall into the pseudo-subjectivism, for instance, of a Stanley Fish. The intricate nature of these risks needs further explanation.

Elizabeth Freund, in her study of the history and actual condition of reception theories, rightly observes that reader-response criticism is 'a distinctly Anglo-American phenomenon'.[2] In this respect, reader-response theories follow a rather distinct tradition of thought, which more often than not modelled itself in antagonism to, or ignored altogether, the critical developments occurring in continental Europe in general, and more specifically in Eastern Europe. By contrast, it has been a characteristic of this thesis to adopt mainly Eastern European criticism as a theoretical reference for studying the reception of Dostoevskii. In the Introduction, the theoretical excursus through reception theories refers to a stream of thought that must clearly be differentiated from the development of reception theories in the anglophone world. From Lukács to Adorno, from Mukařovský to Jauss, from Medvedev to Grossman, they can be all considered part of the European, and in particular Eastern European, school of literary criticism.

This choice is not accidental: rather it reflects an aspiration, which is also a prerogative, to inscribe this study within a composite and differentiated theoretical framework. This is not, therefore, a parochial appeal to be partial towards one critical

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[1] In their seminal and influential essays 'The Intentional Fallacy' [1946] and 'The Affective Fallacy' [1949] Wimsatt and Beardsley lead a systematic attack on what they define as 'affective criticism'. Dismissing any critical interpretation that confuses 'the poem and its origins', or 'the poem and its *results*', the two critics try to map out the co-ordinates of 'objective criticism'. In their view, the critic I. A. Richards paved the way for 'objective criticism', although they regard his sharp distinction between 'emotional' and 'symbolic' language as a weakness. It is worth noticing the dates of publication of the essays and to observe that while in the West the attack on so-called 'psychological criticism' was conducted in the post-World War II period, in Eastern Europe Formalism's quest for an 'objective' literary criticism had been conducted in the early 1920s: see W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy' and 'The Affective Fallacy', in David Lodge (ed.), *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 333-58.

[2] Elizabeth Freund, *The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 9.

tradition as opposed to the other, but is rather an invitation to compare the two traditions in order to draw some interesting conclusions for criticism in general.

Unlike the Eastern European approach, the Anglo-American approach to reception theories has developed along lines that would cut off the possibility of elaborating an aesthetic of reception. In this respect, the definition of 'reader-response' criticism, in contrast with Jauss's definition of *Rezeptionästhetik*, is revealing. It immediately denotes the preference for two distinct spheres of investigation. In fact, *Rezeptionästhetik* is mainly concerned with the implications of the reader's incorporation into the creative process, thus bringing about a reflection on the role that the reader plays in the formation of the concept of the aesthetic. 'Reader-response' criticism, by contrast, mainly emphasises the 'emotional' impact of the text on the reader and mostly neglects the consequences that this impact can have at the level of the aesthetic. The implications of this distinction between two different spheres of investigation are relevant in order to justify the theoretical perspective of this thesis.

In her book, Freund argues that reader-response theories emerged as a reaction to the issues raised by the North American literary group identified under the name of New Criticism. In her view, the more the interest of literary critics shifted towards the literary text, the more issues concerning the position of the reader in relation to the text demanded to be answered. Freund sees the question of the reader as relevant, but she does not seem to grasp the problematic nature of the different responses to such issues. Along the theoretical lines of that Anglo-American tradition of which she is trying to map out the development, she summarises the 'relevant questions' of reader-response criticism. According To Freund, reception theories try to answer the following questions:

> Why do we read and what are the deepest sources of our engagement with literature? What does reading have to do with the life of the psyche, or the imagination, or our linguistic habits? What happens—consciously or

> unconsciously, cognitively or psychologically—during the reading process?[3]

One of the main efforts of this thesis—and a few examples given in the Introduction should prove it—[4] has been to show that the condition of stagnation of contemporary reception theories can be imputed precisely to these theories' attempt to address questions such as these. In fact, these questions have very little to do with the notion of the aesthetic and the aesthetic artefact. Considerations about the reason why we read or about what happens during the reading process add little or nothing to our comprehension of the process of interpreting the work of art. Still, a few questions remain to be answered, and *Rezeptionästhetik* has only partially responded to them. At what level does the reader's voice emerge? Is this an unmediated voice? What instruments do we have to detect the reader's voice? In addition, do we not have to rely upon the critic in order finally to make the presence of the reader manifest?

As the research work proceeded, it became apparent that in order to answer these questions it was opportune to include within the analysis categories which were normally excluded by, and nonetheless were inextricably related to, the object of investigation, in this case reception theory and the reception of Dostoevskii. What categories could work as a useful critical tool in this circumstance? The description of the potential characteristics of Dostoevskii's 'implied reader' was assumed to be inadequate, because it would have left unsolved the numerous enquiries about the infinite (obviously) possibilities of reading, responding, and reacting to a text. It was also believed that trying to 'measure' the reader's contribution to the text, besides being almost impossible, would distort the analysis and cause its implosion into the infinity of particularities. To this infinity, however, one could not oppose the 'impersonality of critical reading', given that the critic is himself a reader, although of a particular type.

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[3] Freund, *The Return of the Reader*, p. 5.
[4] See Introduction 1.3., and in particular note 22.

On the other hand, even those who reject the privileged status of the critic in relation to works of art in favour of an only apparently more democratic openness towards readers in general must admit that there is very little one can do to discriminate on an emotional basis between one reader-response and another. In the improbable prospect of investigation of individual reactions, the criterion for discrimination remains unjustified, and anyway it is unlikely that such an investigation could give any major insight into the work of art itself. All it could provide is a series of individual opinions and personal impressions on a certain subject, in relation to which theory and, consequently, the critic who elaborates it become redundant.

This is the awkward position in which the critic Stanley Fish has put himself. Far from being, as he seems to claim, a non-position, or a non-method, Fish's theoretical standpoint has actually very dangerous implications for reception theory. As a matter of fact, a discrepancy can be detected in his theoretical project that undermines his authority as a critic and compels him to defend the credibility of his theoretical perspective against the theoretically rarefied nature of his own statements. In the essay 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics', published in 1970, Fish explains clearly what he means by 'response':

> The category of response includes any and all of the activities provoked by a string of words: the projection of syntactical and/or lexical probabilities; their subsequent occurrence or non-occurrence; attitudes toward persons, or ideas or things referred to; the reversal or questioning of those attitudes; and much more.

His investigation therefore focuses on the 'sentence', conceived as an 'event, something that happens to, and with the participation of, the reader'. '*Meaning*' is not to be found in the utterance but in this *happening* between 'the reader's mind and the words'. The question to answer, according to Fish, is not 'what does this sentence mean?', but 'what does this sentence do?'.[5] If, therefore, the special relationship instated

[5] Stanley Fish, 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics', *New Literary History* 2, 1 (Autumn 1970), 123-62, reprinted in Jane Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-*

between the reader and the work of art occurs at such a specific level as the sentence, then *any* 'sentence' becomes a 'meaningful' experience for the reader. In this respect, the role played by the reader ends by becoming indifferent to the artistic value of the text that the reader confronts; indeed, the artistic component of the text becomes secondary, if not irrelevant.

Fish does not seem to deny this. Whether the sentence is constructed by words within a work of art or words within any utterance, this, according to Fish, does not change the fact that the reader can experience meaning as 'something that happens' to him. Fish criticises the usual attitude that 'assumes that meaning is a function of the utterance', on the basis that this location of meaning *in* the utterance excludes as 'uninteresting' a whole series of 'objects of analysis'. If, conversely, we apply to such utterances 'the question "what does it do"', then we discover, according to Fish, that meaning as possible experience is actually everywhere.[6]

One important implication of this approach is the collapse of the distinction between ordinary and artistic language. In answer to those who, like I. A. Richards, presuppose a division between 'poetic' and 'emotional' language, Fish states that any language is 'emotional', and that therefore such a division does not hold. Finally, he openly renounces to the evaluation of literature as literature. This is not really a problem for Fish, since he does not see this as a limitation to his method. Literature is seen as a 'subcategory' of language, so if we understand language we can better understand its subcategories, and literature among them.

The main implication of this position is the refusal of the category of the aesthetic as a helpful analytical tool for the understanding of the reader's position within the creative process:

Structuralism (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 70-100 (pp. 73-74, 72).

[6] Fish, 'Literature in the Reader', p. 75.

> My method allows for no such aesthetics [universal aesthetic] and no such fixings of value. In fact, it is oriented *away* from evaluation and towards description. It is difficult to say on the basis of its results that one work is better than another or even that a single work is good or bad. And more basically, it doesn't permit the evaluation of literature as literature, as apart from advertising or preaching or propaganda or 'entertainment'.[7]

Progressively, the theoretical and methodological validity of Fish's own assertions is seriously undermined when he describes the qualities of what in the initial pages of his essay he ventured to call his 'method':

> First, strictly speaking, it is not a method at all, because neither its results nor its skills are transferable because there is no fixed relationship between formal features and response (reading has to be done every time); and its skills are not transferable because you can't hand it over to someone and expect him at once to be able to use it. (It is not portable.) It is, in essence, a language-sensitizing device, and as the 'ing' in sensitizing implies, its operation is long term and never ending (never coming to the point). Moreover its operation are interior. It has no mechanism, except for the pressuring mechanism of the assumption that more is going on in language than we consciously know; and of course the pressure of this assumption must come from the individual whose untrained sensitivity it is challenging.[8]

However, just when we are wondering what are the criteria by which Fish's 'devices' are more valuable than others', and why we should accept to submit to his 'pressurising mechanisms' rather than to others', we are reminded of the fact that although we all have the faculty to be 'language-sensitised', not all of us are 'sensitised' in the same way. It is at this point that we recollect a passage in Fish's essay that at first did not seem important. It is in this crucial passage that it becomes clear how Fish's supposed openness to any possible 'experience' of meaning is drastically reduced by a series of conditions, including the amount of 'experience' accumulated by the reader. In fact, it becomes apparent that Fish's address is to the 'informed reader', 'a construct, an ideal or idealized reader'. In this passage, Fish describes, in his own words, the characteristics of his desirable reader:

> The informed reader is someone who

[7] Fish, 'Literature in the Reader', p. 88.
[8] Fish, 'Literature in the Reader', p. 98.

> 1. is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up.
> 2. is in full possession of the 'semantic knowledge that a mature...listener brings to his task of comprehension.' This includes the knowledge (that is, the experience, both as a producer and comprehender) of lexical sets, collocation probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects, etc.
> 3. has *literary* competence.
>
> That is, he is sufficiently experienced as a reader to have internalized the properties of literary discourses, including everything from the most local of devices (figures of speech, etc) to whole genres. In this theory, then, the concern of other schools of criticism—questions of genre, conventions, intellectual background, etc.—become redefined in terms of potential and probable response.[9]

How can Fish's reader internalise 'whole genres', if we have to dispense with theory of genres altogether? After all, genres exist only in so far as they are defined as such beyond the singular responses to the literary text, otherwise they are not theories at all but personal reactions to a given text. Moreover, why take the trouble to internalise genres given that the reader's experience of literary discourse is equated by Fish with the reader's experience with everyday discourses? In conclusion, this seems, in the final analysis, the fundamental confusion in Fish's standpoint: he seems to defend his position as a critic by suggesting how worthless criticism is. This attitude would put any critic wanting to adopt Fish's 'non-method'-method in the awkward position of having to justify on the basis of his personal experience the credibility of his own statements.

It should be apparent by now that this thesis sets itself openly in contrast with positions such as Fish's. It has been stated clearly that a selective and discriminatory process is an essential component of the reading process as well as of the compositional process. The criteria for selection are in some way orientated by the very object of investigation on the one hand, and by the investigative tools chosen by the critic on the other. The methodological premise of this study, therefore, was based on the assumption that an appropriate analytical tool for a study of reception, which allowed the destabilising effects of the subjective response to be counterbalanced, had to come from

[9] Fish, 'Literature in the Reader', pp. 86, 87.

a sphere where both the reader's selective process of understanding and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion (of possible worlds) at work in a literary text converged in the process of interpretation.

The common ground where text and reader encounter has been identified as being not *just* a social ground, and this is why the analysis conducted here was not, or not just, sociological. In a perspective that suggests that the ideology of the aesthetic is such a 'common ground' where reader and text possibly encounter, diatribes concerning the dominance of the text over the reader, or emphasising the creative role of the reader over the artistic potential of the written text, prove to be futile. On the other hand, to reject the model that sees the text as 'a unique, complete and self-sufficient linguistic entity whose recognized presence or fullness is the object of critical exegesis',[10] is not the same as to say that after all the text is just a fragment of world, from the imperfect boundaries of which we, readers, are left the arduous task of guessing what fragment is attached to them. In other words, it is one thing to say that the reader plays some role in letting the truth content of the work of art emerge, another to say that that truth content is entirely determined by the reader. We are dealing with a mutual relationship, and one of the points of this thesis has been precisely to prove that the relationship between works and their reception is reciprocal. So much so, that the next necessary step of a research work such as this would be to attempt an immanent critique of Dostoevskii's novels on the basis of the suggestions coming from a study on their reception. The present stage of the research is in a sense preliminary to this attempt, and from the issues that have emerged in the course of the thesis a few conclusions can be drawn.

[10] Freund, *The Return of the Reader*, p. 12.

8.2. Coda

8.2.1. 'A Stylistic Experiment': Stavrogin's Confession

It has been stressed that one of the persistent elements of the reception of Dostoevskii in Britain in its early stage was the difficulty of grasping the innovative potential of Dostoevskii's novels. Both in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century we come across a kind of resistance to crediting the Russian author with any artistic ability whatsoever. The implications and ramifications of this attitude have been discussed in the course of the thesis. However, a few words need to be said on the uneasiness of British, and not only British, literary criticism when dealing with Dostoevskii's technique. Part of it can be ascribed to the haunting hegemony of the already mentioned 'psychological criticism'. It has been shown that criticism on Dostoevskii abounded with considerations concerning authorial intentions and the effects of Dostoevskii's novels on the reader's psychology. Part of this, however, was due to the peculiarity of Dostoevskii's artistic form, which made it difficult to situate the Russian author's works within the Romantic or Victorian conventions of novel writing.

Yet it is precisely in this reticence, which occasionally manifested itself as a rejection, that the extremely interesting element of the early reception of Dostoevskii in Britain resides. In fact, it is by interpreting the signs of this circumspection that we may attempt to point out a few characteristics of the Dostoevskian novel. What was so disconcerting about the form of Dostoevskii's novels for the British readers of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth? Again, the answer is not univocal; neither it can be found in the individual 'experiences' of the readers themselves. Probably, one way to approach this question is again by identifying a ground on which different tensions converge and offer the possibility of an insight into

the issue discussed. One such ground is, in my opinion, 'Stavrogin's Confession', a controversial piece, part of an even more controversial novel such as *Devils*.[11]

The 'Confession' is particularly interesting because of the veil of irony that surrounds it, both at the level of composition and at the level of reception. The history of its publication is quite dazzling. In fact, the 'Confession' was originally conceived as a section of the second part of *Devils*, but apparently the publisher Katkov found it too obscene to appear in the *Russian Messenger*, where instalments of the novel were being published.[12] Only in 1921, was the 'suppressed chapter', containing Stavrogin's Confession and Tikhon's reaction to it, discovered among the author's papers, and, together with the notes on a longer novel called *The Life of a Great Sinner*, translated into English by S. S. Koteliansky and Virginia Woolf and published in 1922.[13]

The first irony therefore concerns the instability of this piece since the moment of its conception. Dostoevskii's final decision to remove the chapter from the novel, after various attempts to adjust it in order to please the publisher, bears witness to this instability. Yet, today the 'Confession' is considered an integral part of *Devils*, whether it is published in the form of appendix or inserted in the text exactly where the author originally intended it. At the same time, its initial publication as an autonomous piece, independent from the rest of the novel, suggests that the 'Confession' also has a relative degree of narrative autonomy.

All these elements particularly intrigued the reviewers of the time. In his review in the *Nation and Athenaeum*, John Middleton Murry recognised the crucial importance of the 'Confession', although it is clear that for him the tension between the 'Confession'

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[11] Dostoevskii published *Besy* in 1871-72. The title has been translated into English in various ways: *The Possessed*, *Demons*, *The Devils*. The edition referred to in this chapter is titled simply *Devils*, trans. and ed. by Michael R. Katz (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). All subsequent page references to the novel are given in the text.

[12] Details about the 'suppressed chapter' are given in Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1875-1871* (London: Robson Books, 1995), pp. 431-34.

[13] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Stavrogin's Confession* and *The Life of a Great Sinner*, trans. by S. S. Koteliansky and Virginia Woolf (London: The Hogarth Press, 1922).

and the novel develops entirely at the level of the content. Murry argued that Katkov's veto against its publication was 'a miraculous interposition, for whatever may have been in Dostoevsky's mind at the moment, his deepest purpose in the novel did not admit of Stavrogin's regeneration by confession'.[14] In spite of this, Murry in the following passage of the same article unequivocally stated:

> Yet, though it is certain that Stavrogin does not confess, and that he *must* not confess, in 'The Possessed,' it is equally certain that the newly translated chapter is Dostoevsky's work and that it belongs to 'The Possessed' at some stage in its creation.[15]

Similarly, the reviewer of the *Times Literary Supplement* pointed out the contradictory position of the 'Confession' in relation to *Devils*. He had no doubt that this piece 'formed part of "The Possessed" at one phase of its creation', but he also believed that there was no 'place for "Stavrogin's Confession" in the scheme of the novel as we have it now'.[16] In dealing with the 'Confession', both reviews raise issues concerning the coherence of its content in relation to the whole of the novel. If Stavrogin represents the irredeemable, then there is no place for a confession in a novel where Stavrogin is the main character, as there is no place in *Devils* for redemption.

However, the comments of the Russian scholar Leonid Grossman place the 'Confession' in an altogether different and interesting light. In his little-known essay 'Stavrogin and his Stylistics (Toward a Study of the New Chapter in *The Possessed*)', Grossman points out that the importance of the 'Confession' resides not so much in the possibility of redemption for Stavrogin as in its style of composition:

> 'Stavrogin's Confession' is a remarkable stylistic experiment in which the classical prose of the Russian novel was for the first time shaken, distorted and shifted in the direction of some unknown future achievement. Only against the background of contemporary European

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[14] John Middleton Murry, 'The Crisis in Dostoevsky', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 32 (1922), 357-58 (p. 357).
[15] Murry, 'The Crisis in Dostoevsky', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 32 (1922), 357.
[16] 'Dostoevsky Possessed', *Times Literary Supplement* (1922, November 2), 702.

> art can one find the criteria for evaluating all the prophetic devices of this disorganized style.[17]

Grossman wrote this essay in 1924, and already grasped the significance that the 'Confession' had for a better understanding of 'future achievements' of the novelistic form. Mikhail Bakhtin, in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, uses Grossman's insight to give an example, in Dostoevskii's style, of 'internally dialogic orientation vis-à-vis the other person'.[18] Whether interpreted monologically, as an expression of Stavrogin's tormented consciousness, or dialogically, as a confrontation of Stavrogin the author with his critic Tikhon, it is certain that the 'Confession' is not a confession at all. The comical tone, detected by Bakhtin, of a scene which on the surface is meant to provoke nothing other than existential horror, the real horror that Marlowe experiences in his journey to the Heart of Darkness, indicates that we are in the presence of an ironic game in which it is the very notion of 'style' that is being parodied.

The first one to be aware of Stavrogin's game, tragic but nonetheless still a game, is the addressee of this piece of writing, that is, its designated reader, Father Tikhon. Tikhon does not give an emotional response to the confession at all; indeed, his is an accurate reading, and his remarks are the remarks of a critic, who, by the way, has been conquered, in aesthetic terms, by the object of his analysis (we are told that in addressing Stavrogin, 'he persisted with unusual enthusiasm' [475]). Tikhon's remarks concern mainly the style of the 'Confession'. The horror provoked by Stavrogin's crimes is surmounted by another most horrific insinuation, which situates Tikhon under a completely different and much more sinister light. Tikhon is oddly attuned to the demands of the 'document', and his remarks point immediately to the core of Stavrogin's problem, the nature of which is entirely aesthetic. In a way, Stavrogin's 'Confession' seems to prefigure the aesthetic complicity of its reader. Tikhon seems to

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[17] Leonid Grossman, 'Stilistika Stavrogina (K izucheniiu novoi glavy *Besov*)', quoted in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson, intro. by Wayne C. Booth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 243.

[18] Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 243.

suggest that Stavrogin's crimes, as well as his way of 'representing' them in writing, are so 'ugly' and 'inelegant' to be 'beyond horror' and to become 'ridiculous'. The 'Confession' reminds Tikhon of the sensationalism of certain writing: '[...]; it's [Tikhon says] as if you reveal in your own psychology and latch on to every trivial detail merely to astonish the reader with an insensitivity you don't really have' (475). The 'ugliness' of the 'Confession' is 'in the form' and 'in the substance' (478), although we cannot help thinking that the 'substance' also concerns the aesthetic quality of the text rather than the reality of Stavrogin's deeds.

A passage from *Notes from Underground* will illuminate this point: 'No [says the underground man], a man can't have a trace of self-respect, can he, who has attempted to find his pleasure in the consciousness of his own degradation.'[19] This is the reflection that the underground man makes upon his own prurience, and this is the accusation that at first Tikhon seems to level at Stavrogin: he is taking pleasure at his own degradation by using words which are designed to create an 'effect' of horror. At this level, the *Notes* and the 'Confession' seem to have much in common. Immediately therefore we are confronted with two elements that are also parts of the underground man's reflections. The first concerns the impossibility of writing a confession 'sincerely', because, as the underground man makes clear:

> I may remark, by the way, that Heine states that trustworthy autobiographies are almost an impossibility, and that a man will probably never tell the truth about himself. According to him Rousseau, for example, lied about himself in his *Confessions*, even deliberately, out of vanity. I am sure Heine was right; I can understand very well how vanity can make one accuse oneself of downright crimes, and I can even see what kind of vanity is responsible. But Heine was talking of men making public confessions. I, however, am writing only for myself alone, and let me declare once and for all that if I write as if I were addressing an audience, it is only for show and because it makes easier for me to write. It is a form, nothing else; I shall never have any readers. I have already made that clear...[20]

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[19] Fedor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground / The Double*, trans. with an intro. by Jessie Coulson (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 25.
[20] Dostoevskii, *Notes from Underground*, p. 45.

Obviously, to say that he is writing for himself alone is only the last of his fictional 'lies', although from this statement a truth emerges that can be applied also to Stavrogin's Confession, that is, the impossibility for self-consciousness of speaking of itself sincerely. Thus, the first problem one faces in dealing with this piece concerns the form of the confession as an artistic device. Tikhon shrewdly recognises that Stavrogin's 'stylistic experiment' has failed: '"Might it be possible to make some changes in this document?" "Why? I was writing sincerely," Stavrogin replied. "Maybe some of the style"' (474). If the 'authentic' self cannot be spoken of, what is the significance of Stavrogin's confession? In textual terms, it is an aesthetic failure, but precisely in this failure one can trace the fictional success of the whole 'suppressed chapter'.

Reed Merrill, in an essay devoted to Stavrogin has indicated in Marquis de Sade Stavrogin's predecessor. Merrill writes:

> Like his famous predecessor, the Marquis de Sade, his life of aesthetic degradation is self-willed. [...] Stavrogin consistently maintains the position of the devil's advocate, nihilistic adversary, a negative sounding-board for people's obsessions. In addition, because of his staticism, he seems to suggest a kind of stability and reliability which his friends lack, while in actuality he is in a constant state of inertia and entropy. Stavrogin has no anticipations and no affirmation, but stands a solitary consciousness confronting his self-made abyss.[21]

Merrill's considerations, however, do not seem to take adequate account of the necessary distinction between the representations of the character Stavrogin and his actual fictional status. The representations we are given of this character all fit the image of the Romantic hero, the 'man of action', to use the underground man's expression. Stavrogin is presented by other characters, including the chronicler, as belonging to the category of the 'doers', that is, as the underground man tells us, of

[21] Reed Merrill, 'The Demon of Irony', in Alexej Ugrinsky, Frank S. Lambasa and Valija K. Ozolins (eds), *Dostoevski and the Human Condition After a Century* (New York, Westport, Connecticut, London: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 87-97 (p. 88).

those people 'who can avenge their wrongs and generally stand up for themselves'.[22] These people can be sincere in their choices, because they are not crossed by moral dilemmas. In reality, however, and in this the *Notes* diverge sharply from the 'Confession', the fictional status of Stavrogin does not quite fit the description. All we know about his deeds is either reported by other characters or 'represented' in the form of confession. He is indeed a static figure, but, notwithstanding what Merrill writes, he is *unable* to confront his 'self-made abyss'. In fact, his attempt to confront his own abyss ends in complete failure. This failure portends an even greater catastrophe, foreseen, incidentally, by father Tikhon, that is, the self-annihilation of the character Stavrogin and his precocious physical disappearance from the narration, in spite of the persistence of Romantic representations of him within the novel. The last time that we hear him talking is at his meeting with Liza in the chapter called, ironically enough, 'The End of a Romance', while the last word that we have about him is on the last page of the novel, in the description of his suicide.

In other words, Tikhon's remarks about Stavrogin's 'document' reveal a truth about this character, one that has been latent throughout the novel and that to a certain extent is condensed within the confession itself. What is this confession if nothing else than a badly composed compilation of dark Romantic literary topoi? The ingredients are all there: Stavrogin-Don Juan, with his simultaneous affair with both 'a certain lady' and her maid; sexual depravity; a taste for lingering on disturbing details. In this respect de Sade, rather than being a reference for Stavrogin's actions, is a literary reference. Stavrogin takes pleasure in the representation of himself as one of de Sade's characters, while simultaneously he is disconcertingly conscious of the impossibility of living up to his own vision of the Romantic sadist hero. In the novel, his horrific deeds either are a thing of the past or are mediated by a narrative of some kind, be it a letter, a confession, or a story told by the chronicler. The unmediated representation of those acts,

[22] Dostoevskii, *Notes from Underground*, p. 20.

peculiarity of the Romantic taste for the horrific and the macabre, has become in Dostoevskii's form almost impossible. As Theodor Adorno states: 'Romantic art hopes to conserve the mimetic element by refraining from mediating it through form: the whole is to say what the particular scarcely still has the capacity to say.'[23] The 'Confession' is the place where this mediation of the form is most evident at a compositional level, but this mediation of form is also the subject matter of the whole 'suppressed chapter'. The impossibility of representation of the Romantic dream of the aesthetic life is allegorically represented in the novel by Stavrogin's unfulfilled character and, correspondingly, by the emptiness of the Romantic image that Stavrogin wishes to give of himself in the 'Confession'.

Thus, Tikhon's remarks in response to the 'Confession' are also an implicit critique of the Romantic canon of novel writing in favour of new unexplored forms of expression. With this 'stylistic experiment' Dostoevskii pushes the possibilities of the novel to its limits, which will be overcome only by the two great modernist novels, *Ulysses* and *À la recherche*. In this respect, one can only partially agree with Bakhtin's assertion that

> Dostoevsky is deeply and intimately connected with European Romanticism, but that which the Romantic approached from within, in categories of his own 'I' by which he was obsessed, Dostoevsky approached from without—in such a way, however, that this objective approach did not reduce by one iota the spiritual problematics of Romanticism, nor transform it into psychology.[24]

In fact, although the link of the Dostoevskian novel to Romanticism is undeniable, it is also obvious that Dostoevskii's form has already worked through and reflected upon Romantic themes and stylistic issues. His relation to Romanticism is therefore much more critical and reflexive than Bakhtin makes out. In this respect, Stavrogin's failed dream of the aesthetic life, as well as his inability to represent it artistically, represents

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[23] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor, ed. by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), p. 184.
[24] Bakhtin, *Problems*, pp. 277-78.

the moment of greatest distance of Dostoevskii's form from the Romantic. As Tikhon remarks, the representation of the 'ugly' enters the novel as 'dissonance', which cannot find a harmonic reconciliation. As Adorno points out, according to traditional aesthetics, 'the ugly is that element that opposes the work's ruling law of form; it is integrated by that formal law and thereby confirms it', and in this sense 'participates in the production of a dynamic equilibrium'. On the contrary, in modern art 'harmony [...] becomes something disturbing, false, and effectively dissonant'. Not only, therefore, does the 'Confession' alter the 'harmonistic view of the ugly', but the whole 'suppressed chapter' is about the irreversibility of this alteration. As Adorno helpfully condenses, 'powerlessly the law of form capitulates to ugliness'.[25]

The implications of this capitulation lead to the representation of 'the physically revolting and repellent in Beckett', and certainly one would not want to suggest that Dostoevskii has gone as far as that.[26] However, to read his stylistic experiment in an anti-Romantic key might help us in understanding the degree of incomprehension of his artistic significance by his early critics. In particular, it should become more apparent in what sense, for instance, the British reception of Dostoevskii in the period considered in this thesis is characterised by a fundamental difficulty, up to the 1930s, in perceiving the innovative element of Dostoevskii's novels. Many reasons for this have been indicated in the thesis, which concerned mainly the ideological tensions at work in the field of the aesthetic once Dostoevskii's novels appeared in the British intellectual scene. However, the aim of this brief section on Stavrogin's Confession has been to show through one exemplary, and perhaps extreme, instance how that inability to perceive the disruptive

[25] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 46.

[26] It might be worth noticing, however, that the critic Walter Benjamin goes even as far as to suggest that 'Stavrogin is a Surrealist *avant la lettre*': 'One might [...] select from Dostoyevsky's entire work the one episode that was actually not published until about 1915, "Stavrogin's Confession" from *The Possessed*. This chapter [...] contains a justification of evil in which certain motifs of Surrealism are more powerfully expressed than by any of its present spokesmen', see Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, intro. by Susan Sontag (London: Verso, 1979), p. 234.

potential of Dostoevskii's novels was grounded, among other things, in these novels' maturity in relation to the Romantic canon of novel writing.

To define Dostoevskii as a modernist in the sense that Joyce and Proust are is perhaps excessive and out of place, but to claim Dostoevskii's central position in the transition towards the modernist novel, indeed a glorious transition, is not unmotivated at all. Of course, a lot more has been said and could be said on this subject. Nevertheless, I hope with this thesis to have made a modest contribution to the understanding of Dostoevskii's novels and to the re-evaluation of reception theories from a different perspective.

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3. Translations of Dostoevskii's Works (1881-1931)

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1887 - *Prison Life in Siberia*, translated by H. Sutherland Edwards (London: John and Robert Maxwell).

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1887 - *The Idiot*, trans. by Frederick Whishaw (London: Vizetelly).

1888 - *The Uncle's Dream and The Permanent Husband*, trans. by Frederick Whishaw (London: Vizetelly).

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1909 – 'An Honest Thief', trans. by Constance Garnett, *English Review*, 2, 215-30.

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