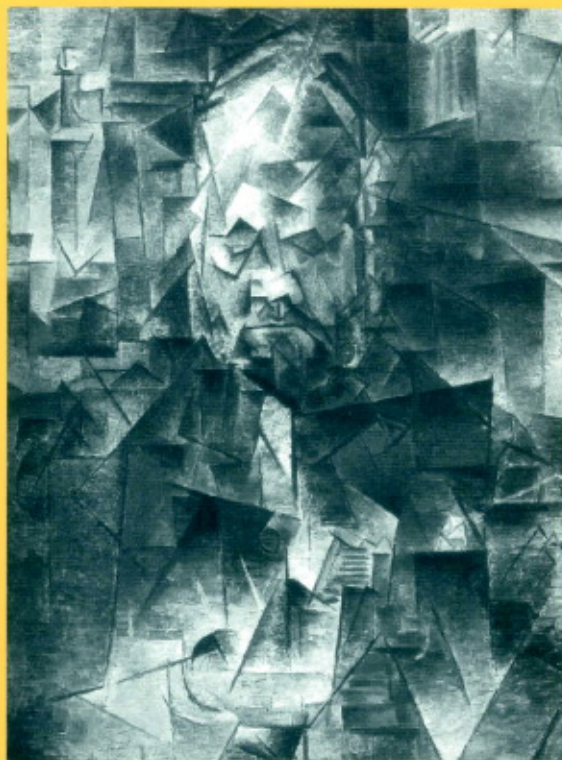


# **Dostoevsky and English Modernism 1900–1930**

**Peter Kaye**



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# DOSTOEVSKY AND ENGLISH MODERNISM, 1900-1930

When Constance Garnett's translations (1910-20) made Dostoevsky accessible in England for the first time they introduced a disruptive and liberating literary force, and English novelists had to confront a new model and rival. The writers who are the focus of this study – Lawrence, Woolf, Bennett, Conrad, Forster, Galsworthy, and James – either admired Dostoevsky or feared him as a monster who might dissolve all literary and cultural distinctions. Though their responses differed greatly, these writers were unanimous in their inability to recognize Dostoevsky as a literary artist. They viewed him instead as a psychologist, a mystic, a prophet, and, in the cases of Lawrence and Conrad, a hated rival who compelled creative response. This study constructs a map of English modernist novelists' misreadings of Dostoevsky, and in so doing it illuminates their aesthetic and cultural values and the nature of the modern English novel.

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PETER KAYE



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## *Acknowledgments*

This work began on a bright California morning many years ago, when I was asked by a Virginia Woolf enthusiast to name my favorite author. My answer of Dostoevsky prompted a fascinating response about Woolf's attraction to his work. One question suggested another, leading me eventually down the long and arduous road of this project, which began as a doctoral dissertation.

The members of my reading committee deserve my lasting gratitude. Bill Todd has nurtured this project from its tentative beginnings and served as its patient and clear-sighted guardian angel. Without his supportive direction, my work would have probably ended in futility. Lucio Ruotolo challenged me to rise to the most interesting questions, centered in the art of the novelists themselves; the texture of this study owes much to his stewardship. Will Stone gave me the benefit of his fine sense of our language, correcting my lapses and helping me realize that argument and elegance go hand in hand.

Others kindly assisted me at various stages. Helen Muchnic, whose 1939 publication *Dostoevsky's English Reputation (1881-1936)* inspired my own research, closely read my manuscript and sent delightful letters of encouragement. Joseph Frank lent support by his interest, his manuscript reading, and the example of his own scholarship. Thomas Moser assisted by sharing his articles on Conrad, which opened new paths of inquiry. Richard Garnett, the grandson of Constance and Edward, two distinguished literary people who figure prominently here, also deserves my gratitude for his interest and assistance. His letters, as well as his own biography of Constance, have given me a conduit to a rich past.

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## CHAPTER I

### *Introduction*

In 1912, Constance Garnett released her first major translation of Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*; within the next nine years she would translate nearly the complete body of his fiction. During the year that marked Dostoevsky's triumphant entry, or more precisely, re-entry, into England's literary marketplace, the winds of modernism blew strong across Europe. The Russian composer Igor Stravinsky labored in Paris on *Rite of Spring*, a ballet celebration of pagan ritual that would provoke a near-riot when premiered in 1913. The unresolved dissonances and harsh, shifting rhythms of Stravinsky's music assaulted traditional expectations. Sergei Pavlovich Diaghilev's startling production of the ballet further discomfited the audience by its perpetual motion and asymmetry. During the first night's performance the lead dancer, the famed Nijinsky, had to clap the rhythm on stage because the orchestra could not be heard over the objections of the audience. In Berlin, the Austrian-born Arnold Schönberg challenged fundamental musical structures and dispensed with tonal organization entirely. His 1912 composition *Pierrot Lunaire*, vocal arrangements with chamber accompaniment, marked a further step in his revolutionary new direction.

In the visual arts, the Russian Wassily Kandinsky published a treatise in Munich, "Concerning the Spiritual in Art," that explained his need to move beyond representational art. According to W. H. Jansen, Kandinsky's aim "was to charge form and color with a purely spiritual meaning (as he put it) by eliminating all resemblance to the physical world."<sup>1</sup> Pablo Picasso experimented in Paris with collage Cubism. In his *Still Life* of 1911–12, letters and shapes are presented in layered planes, atop an actual piece of imitation chair caning, which had been pasted onto the canvas. An oval piece of rope encloses the painting. By merging three-dimensional objects with two-dimensional brushwork, Picasso seems to explode centuries-old traditions of perspective, for in his work illusion and reality, depth and surface are inextricably mingled. Also in

Paris, Matisse, the leading figure of the Fauves (the Wild Beasts), continued his radical simplification of form and space, perhaps best illustrated by his 1905–6 painting, *The Joy of Life*. The bold colors and non-representational distortions of his work alienated audiences in Paris and in London, where Roger Fry gave Matisse prominence in his 1912 second Post-Impressionist showing.

Revolutionary experiments in style and form also permeated the literary world. In Germany, Thomas Mann published *Death in Venice*, a masterful exploration of Dionysian decadence, the story of a rigidly self-possessed writer, Gustave Aschenbach, who, at the height of his power and popularity, vacations in a plague-ridden Venice. Aschenbach, a figure of Apollonian control and bourgeois respectability, becomes infatuated with a fourteen-year-old boy and gradually abandons himself to a corrupt and fatal sensuality. In its representation of unacknowledged desire, the heavy toll of repression, and mythic symbols of the psyche, the novella suggests the influence of Freud and Nietzsche, two writers whose works stirred the modernist literary imagination. In Trieste, James Joyce worked on drafts of *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, breaking new ground in its lyrical rendering of consciousness and its depiction of the alienated modern artist. In a failed effort to find a publisher for *The Dubliners*, Joyce made his last visit to Ireland in 1912; the interwoven short stories, which Joyce described as a series of chapters in the moral history of his community, would remain unpublished until 1914. In France, Marcel Proust was nearing the completion of *Swann's Way*, the first volume of *A Remembrance of Things Past* would be published in 1913. The French writer created a new type of novel, constructed around the narrator's recurring memories of emotional and aesthetic events central to his life, such as his experience of eating madeleine, and his sleepless nights at Combray. For the narrator Marcel – and for Proust – memory alone provides permanence and unity amid the chaos, flux, and disintegration of the modern world.

Dostoevsky's reception among English writers in the early part of the twentieth century needs to be understood within the context of modernism, which may be heuristically defined, to borrow from Malcolm Bradbury, as “that movement of artistic revolutionary self-consciousness that we associate with the work of painters like Matisse and Picasso, novelists like Joyce, Proust, Mann, and Gide, poets like Valéry, Apollinaire, Pound and Wallace Stevens, dramatists like Maeterlinck, Jarry and Pirandello.”<sup>2</sup> While it is difficult to generalize about such a pluralistic international movement, a prototype of the modern artist might be

delineated by the following attributes: skepticism about the creeds, ideals, and artistic traditions of the past; disdain for the middle class and its conventions; a preoccupation with change; an interest in the workings of perception, consciousness, and what Virginia Woolf called “the dark places of psychology”; a profound sense of alienation, often separating the artist from family, community, or the general audience; an obsession with technique and an attendant delight in formal experimentation; and a conviction that the present time differed radically from all previous eras. In the words of Carl Jung, “modern man is an entirely new phenomenon; a modern problem is one which has just arisen and whose answer still lies in the future.”<sup>3</sup>

This study will focus on the writers, all touched by the modernist maelstrom that swept through England in the early decades of the twentieth century, who were most affected by their readings of Dostoevsky. In 1912, these seven writers – D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Arnold Bennett, Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster, John Galsworthy, and Henry James – were in different stages of their careers. The 27-year-old D. H. Lawrence published his second novel, *The Trespasser*, a work about illicit passion and the fear of physical intimacy, that pointed to the great novels to come. During that year, Lawrence was finishing *Sons and Lovers*, to be published in 1913. He became separated from the first important love of his life, Jessie Chambers, when she recognized herself as Miriam in the drafts of the work-in-progress and discovered the depths of Lawrence’s resistance to her. Soon after, he met the married Frieda Weekley in Nottingham; before long, the two were scandalous lovers. Frieda left her husband and three children to accompany Lawrence to Europe, first to Rhineland, then to Bavaria, Austria, and Italy, following a migratory impulse that characterized much of their life together.

During the same year, Leonard Woolf, who had just returned from seven years in Ceylon, succeeded in wearing down Virginia’s resistance to marrying him. On her honeymoon, she discovered her own aversion to physical intimacy with a man, though her biographer Quentin Bell reports that she was “still cheerfully expecting to have children.”<sup>4</sup> At the age of thirty, Virginia Woolf had already experienced at least three serious mental breakdowns. For the last seven years, she had been writing reviews for the *Times Literary Supplement* and was hard at work on her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, which she completed in 1913 and published in 1915. This novel, a promising though fairly conventional work, follows Mr. and Mrs. Ambrose and their niece Rachel on a sea voyage

from London to a resort on the South American coast. Essentially, it is the story of Rachel's coming of age.

The man who would eventually become Woolf's opponent in one of the famous literary quarrels of the time, Arnold Bennett, seemed at the height of his powers in 1912. Already an established writer and critic, Bennett worked on a sequel to his highly popular comic novel, *The Card* (1911). In *The Regeants*, which would be published in 1913, he again took up the story of Denry Machen, a joker, entrepreneur, and good-hearted adventurer, who left behind his life in the northern provinces – the Five Towns area based upon the pottery towns in Staffordshire where Bennett grew up – to settle in London, where he is engaged as a theatrical impresario and builds his own theater. In 1912, Bennett also enjoyed his first major theatrical success, *Milestones*, a play chronicling a family from 1860 to the current year. The drama, which ran for more than a year, added considerably to the author's wealth. Always a shrewd businessman, Bennett purchased his own yacht during this time; he also bought a country house in Essex.

Joseph Conrad, long acclaimed as a literary master but perennially denied commercial success, finally reached a larger audience at the age of fifty-five with his novel, *Chance*, first published serially in the *New York Herald* in 1912. This novel followed the 1911 publication of *Under Western Eyes*, a work that left Conrad in a state of mental collapse, in part because it proved the culmination of a bitter if unacknowledged rivalry with Dostoevsky, a battle in which the Polish writer refused to submit to the "destructive element." By contrast, *Chance* proved a fortunate affair; the novel won readers because it gave them both romance and a happy ending – two features not usually associated with the author. *Chance*, narrated by a pedestrian Marlow, is about a sea captain, Roderick Anthony, who falls in love with Flora De Barral, the daughter of a once wealthy man serving a prison sentence for fraud. Eventually, the father is freed and invited to join the newly married couple aboard ship. Of course, intrigue develops, based on misunderstandings, suspicion, and the isolation of seafaring, which lead to a thwarted murder attempt. In the end, all is well because that ever-menacing Conrad nemesis, Chance, proves unexpectedly beneficent.

By this time, the 43-year-old E. M. Forster had become firmly linked to the Bloomsbury circle, that iconoclastic collection of writers, painters, critics, and intellectuals who resided in a fashionable residential district of north-central London. This group of intimate friends included the Woolfs, the economist Maynard Keynes, the scholar Lytton Strachey,

the critics Clive Bell and Desmond MacCarthy, the painters Vanessa Bell (Virginia's sister) and Duncan Grant, and Roger Fry, an art theorist and painter. Forster had already completed four major novels, the last of which, *Howards End*, had been published in 1910. His biographer, P. N. Furbank, reports that Forster wrote a "prophetic morality play" in 1912, but that the work was put in a drawer and never published.<sup>5</sup> Forster traveled to India in October of 1912 with his aunt and mother, a trip that led to his most significant work, *A Passage to India*, begun in draft on the return voyage and published in 1924.

John Galsworthy, a far more public figure than Forster, became involved in yet another social cause. A tireless humanitarian activist who had already campaigned for prison reform, women's rights, and divorce law liberalization, the 45-year-old Galsworthy turned his attention to animals and fought for the introduction of humane slaughtering laws in 1912 and 1913. As a matter of conscience, he had already given up hunting though, according to Margery Morgan, each September he sent his spaniel to a shooting party in Scotland so that the dog could still enjoy the sport.<sup>6</sup> In 1912, Galsworthy's play, *The Eldest Son*, was produced in London. The drama, about an affair between a wealthy aristocratic heir and a lady's maid, exposes the double standard and sympathetically portrays the working class. Ironically, in a declaration of equality the pregnant girl in the end refuses the young man's offer of marriage. Galsworthy also wrote *The Pigeon*, a play that looks critically at the practical effects of philanthropy while endorsing the need for philanthropic sensitivities.

Henry James, long settled into the retiring life of a distinguished man of letters at Lamb House in Rye, was nearing the end of his career. At the age of sixty-nine, James had already published his last novel, *The Outcry* (1911); he was working on the first volume of his memoirs, *A Small Boy and Others*. The man who did so much to establish the novel as a work of art became something of an inadvertently comical figure. Harry T. Moore tells the story of James, in full evening array, coming late to a Max Reinhold production of *Oedipus Rex* at Covent Garden, only to be caught up in an entrance procession of the actors playing the chorus, parading down the aisles with the perplexed master in tow.<sup>7</sup>

Each of these writers responded to Dostoevsky in a manner that mirrors the respective stages of their literary careers. James condemned with the peevishness of an old man, fearful of what might next corrupt the young. Lawrence denounced with the muscular, youthful vigor of one who knows his rivals and who is determined to make his own mark.

Woolf, more subtle and modulated, alternately praised or disapproved, a writer still in her formation tentatively weighing new possibilities of expression. Regardless of their critical judgment, the seven writers could not ignore the disruptive presence of Dostoevsky in the English house of fiction, any more than Rogozhin could be ignored after he burst into Nastasya's party in *The Idiot*. One critic compared the enthusiasm that greeted the Garnett installments to that of the Victorians waiting eagerly for the next release of Dickens or Thackeray.<sup>8</sup> The Russian author was acclaimed as mystic, prophet, psychologist, irrationalist, a chronicler of the perverse, and sometimes as a novelist. His reception in the second and third decades of the century can be compared to the earlier discovery of Van Gogh, whose paintings seemed to strip away all artifice to render an emotional power and spiritual depth unavailable to the classically trained. In Dostoevsky the English found a new primitive whose coarse strokes and jagged lines bespoke a tortured soul who expanded art's domain.

To understand how the modern novelists in England responded to Dostoevsky, it is helpful to keep monsters in mind. In *Violence and the Sacred*, René Girard offers an analysis of monsters as symptomatic of cultural crisis. He cites the monstrous images in Euripides' *The Bacchae* as an example of a culture threatened by disintegration and a blurring of differences. Monsters resist classification and hence pose a threat of dissolution, for they combine what is normally kept separate and distinct – head of man and torso of beast become one. In their “formless and grotesque mixture of things that are normally separate,” they express the crisis of a “world caught up in the whirl.”<sup>9</sup> In 1912, England was similarly caught up in a cultural and social whirl, the inescapable disruptions of modernity. A distant war in the Balkans ominously threatened European peace; Mrs. Pankhurst and her daughters broke laws and windows and bobbies' heads in a vociferous battle for women's rights; striking workers were engaged in pitched battles, countryman against countryman; even the King's army threatened insubordination in a cantankerous Ireland; and artists offended where once they sought to please. To anticipate Yeats, all had changed, changed utterly.

In such a cultural vortex, Dostoevsky was introduced as an exhilarating monster, a Sphinx on the English horizon, representing a suggestively barbaric combination of the literary and nonliterary, posing an enigma that each author felt compelled to address. That enigma was both cultural and literary, derived from a perceived defiance of literary



conventions and the traditions that perpetuated order and continuity in an increasingly fragmented world. The writers who are the focus of this study all viewed Dostoevsky as a writer who could not be classified or assimilated within the traditions of the novel; his works were assumed to be unshaped by artistic intent and unloosed from social restraints. Our writers, along with most of the audience for Garnett's translations, read Dostoevsky as if he were a literary virgin, untainted by influence or knowledge of novelistic traditions. By disengaging him from his literary heritage, misunderstanding was assured.

Our study will begin with D. H. Lawrence, Dostoevsky's most outspoken and voluminous opponent. The writer from provincial Eastwood first encountered the Russian novelist at a crucial early stage of his own career; later, his best friend, Middleton Murry, "converted" to a strange hybrid Dostoevskianism, two factors which help explain the lifelong enmity. With admirable if misguided tenacity, Lawrence waged a ceaseless war against the author regarded as a false prophet of modernity's worst excesses: its perverse hyperconsciousness, blood-denying idealism, and sensual corruption. Though Lawrence shared Dostoevsky's belief in the novel as a sacred book that might give meaning and direction to an age of apocalyptic chaos, he insisted that his rival pursued the wrong grail, denouncing him as a diseased personality who mixed "God and Sadism."<sup>10</sup> Consequently, Lawrence never missed an opportunity to attack. In his letters, in his essays, in his reviews, and in his fiction, the curses of Dostoevsky resound with the intensity of a preacher trying to lure would-be believers away from a neighboring revival tent. At the same time, Lawrence learned from Dostoevsky's perception of evil and his use of the novel as a quest for wisdom. Indeed, his rival's subjects came perilously close to his own, and works such as *Kangaroo* and *The Escaped Cock* may be interpreted as a response to Dostoevskian themes.

Virginia Woolf also offered many public comments about Dostoevsky, though she felt no sense of rivalry and her most celebrated comments praised him as a means of modernist liberation. To a writer seeking to find her own voice, her Russian counterpart seemed a welcome salvo that might topple the stifling and materialist conventions of the Edwardian novel and defend her own literary experiments. In effect, he offered freedom from the shadow of Queen Victoria, the smug complacency of the Empire, the strictures of English class hierarchies, and the unquestioned assumptions of Arnold Bennett and his kind. Like most of her contemporaries, Woolf failed to see his indebtedness to the

dethroned and neglected Dickens and other novelists representative of her father's world. She later turned away from Dostoevsky when he proved too far removed from the literary and cultural traditions that gave her comfort. Though she yearned for modernist disruption in the arts, she felt too much upheaval in his works, which produced "stranger monsters than have ever been brought to the light of day before," and rejected him for leaving his readers unguided by fictional and social signposts that might create harmonious order.<sup>11</sup>

Arnold Bennett, who had already read a great deal of Dostoevsky in French before Garnett's translations, played a key role in promoting the Russian novelist. In 1910 and 1911, Bennett, as a critic for the avant-garde *New Age*, lobbied for a complete translation of Dostoevsky. Alone among the writers of our study, he emphasized Dostoevsky's traditional values and realistic narrative methods, professing a safe distance from modern uncertainties and moral ambiguities. In his later years, he promoted him as an antidote to the heartless expressions of modern art and the dissonant negativity of England's literary vanguard, sentimentalizing Dostoevsky to advocate vaguely defined middle-class values. The Russian became a bulwark of simple, indisputable truths in Bennett's effort to slow the onslaught of modernity.

Conrad offers the most intriguing response. Aside from a handful of oblique allusions and a few comments in his letters to Edward Garnett, the Polish expatriate kept a virtual silence. For the purposes of this study, organized according to who said the most about Dostoevsky, a discussion of Conrad's response belongs after the three previously mentioned writers. Yet in Conrad's silence resides a wondrous antagonism. He spent years engaged in a sullen struggle against Dostoevsky in a rivalry that he refused to name, and his political fiction, especially *Under Western Eyes*, may be read as a direct if camouflaged response to his hated predecessor. To adapt the terminology of Harold Bloom, both Conrad and Lawrence wrestled with Dostoevsky as a strong novelist whose influence must be resisted and whose intimidating presence necessitated misreading to protect their own creative identities.<sup>12</sup> Conrad could not forgive Dostoevsky for stoking the fires of modernity's chaos while voicing support of outmoded values. He censured the unrestrained emotions of his characters, whom he regarded as monstrous, and dismissed his works for their failure to achieve ironic distance, a mark of their moral and literary turpitude. Ideological differences also motivated disdain for the writer believed to embody czarist autocracy and Orthodox servility. In the chaotic shouting of his novels,

Conrad heard the refusal to accept with stoic dignity the intractable dilemmas of modern life.

The last three writers included in this study have less to say than the others, once allowances are made for Conrad's indirection, which explains the grouping of the three in a single chapter. E. M. Forster vacillated in his views, perhaps because he never resolved his own attitude towards the modern. He shared Lawrence's interest in the prophetic and astutely recognized the common ground between the art of Lawrence and that of Dostoevsky. Echoing his Bloomsbury friend Woolf, he celebrated the Russian novelist for pointing to new fictional domains, at the same time failing to detect conscious artistry. Though his tone was more playful and less Olympian than Bennett's, he shared with him an appreciation of Dostoevsky's traditional values, limited by a simplistic account of his moral perspective. Forster was at times unsettled by the emotional and didactic nature of Dostoevsky's fiction, not because he regarded such content as impermissible, as Conrad did, but because of a class-bound discomfort with such explicitness. These diverse intersections reveal Forster to be the quintessential modern man who could not make up his mind.

John Galsworthy and Henry James, though less affected than the others, confronted Dostoevsky as an anarchic challenge to their own genteel values and cultural legacy. Galsworthy bitterly condemned his works as an expression of the violent and formless chaos of the modern world. Dostoevsky's raw power affronted the nostalgic beliefs of the writer who insisted that artists maintain a quiet decorum. Yet in a moment of surprising self-criticism, Galsworthy later recognized Russian literature as a legitimate criticism of English culture.

Henry James proved more recalcitrant, fighting vainly to resist Dostoevsky's English influence in the hope that young novelists would not be led away from the sanctuary of novelistic artistry. He resisted the use of the novel as a means of philosophical exploration, fearing the social and literary consequences of such inquiry. James dismissed Dostoevsky's works as monstrous excesses of a modern age, untouched by the graces of civility and intelligence, potentially lethal combinations of formless art and disrupted social hierarchies. Of course, James, like Conrad, was not English by birth. But the two writers were an important part of the English literary landscape, vocal participants in its public discourse, and their responses to Dostoevsky were greatly influenced by English friends and circumstances.

Besides our seven novelists, three others come to mind as major

figures of the early modern era in English literature: H. G. Wells, Ford Madox Ford, and James Joyce. Where Dostoevsky is concerned, these men had little to say, and their stories and novels seem far removed from his influence. Ford Madox Ford offered intriguing comments relating his friend Conrad to the Russian author, which will be addressed in our discussion of the Polish writer. H. G. Wells apparently found in Dostoevsky a topic not worthy of comment – a Wellsian rarity – which suggests that he may not have read him. While James Joyce did read at least some novels, there is a scarcity of evidence about his response. Richard Ellman does report that Joyce purchased *The Idiot* while in Italy. Ellman also tells an amusing tale of the Irish writer subjected to the taunts of his adolescent son Giorgio, who chided his father with the claim that *Crime and Punishment* was the world's greatest novel and Dostoevsky the greatest novelist. Joyce enigmatically responded by saying that *Crime and Punishment* “was a queer title for a book which contained neither crime nor punishment.”<sup>13</sup>

By studying Dostoevsky's intrusion into the English house of fiction, much will be revealed about its lively and disputatious inhabitants and the complexities of cross-cultural literary reception. Our analysis will give priority to direct comments about Dostoevsky; at the risk of violating the etiquette of current hermeneutic studies, we will take the authors at their word, unless evidence suggests otherwise. To make sense of those words, we will address the aesthetic agendas of the English writers, as delineated in their own nonfiction, and probe their relevant comments about other writers, especially the Russians. Where appropriate, we will draw comparisons between the English fiction of the moderns and Dostoevsky, an always fascinating juxtaposition. Our goal is to elucidate the response to Dostoevsky within the context of each writer's literary career and personal life. The Russian author may not have been appreciated as an artist, but ironically he did succeed in forcing these novelists to clarify their own literary values and their own distinctive vision of modern life. This study should help us to gain insight into the art of the English novelists as well as that of Dostoevsky.

First, however, we must set the stage by examining the historical evolution of Dostoevsky's English reception, from its earliest years in the 1880s to the time of the Garnett translations. Then we will turn our attention to the difficulties that his readers have historically experienced in discerning artistic intent and understanding the distinctive literary features of his work. Such background will help us to position our subject in a historical, cultural, and aesthetic framework.

## THE ENGLISH HORIZON OF EXPECTATIONS

Though the judgments of the novelists were stamped with their distinctive personalities and artistic visions, each writer reflected the collective predispositions of the age, a condition that demands inquiry into England's horizon of expectations, defined by Wlad Godzick as "the sum total of reactions, prejudices, verbal and other behavior that greets a work upon its appearance."<sup>14</sup> The novelists did not merely engage in Promethean struggles with Dostoevsky, bumping in the Freudian night, so admired by Bloom, in an anxious struggle to protect or to liberate their authenticity. Their opinions were shaped by collective codes representing the historical moment, reflecting "national patterns of literary perception" described in a different context by Jacques Leenhardt.<sup>15</sup> As readers, the English authors do not occupy privileged positions: their "I" always refracts a sociological "we" and its attendant stereotypes and reading schemes. While proving more articulate and provocative than their associates, they were not necessarily better readers of Dostoevsky.

Here, the pioneering research of Helen Muchnic, who first studied Dostoevsky's English reception in 1939, provides an invaluable descriptive tool.<sup>16</sup> Muchnic's thoroughly documented work explains the historical development of Dostoevsky's reception by identifying its three earliest stages: the first years (1881–88), the interval (1889–1911), and the period of the Constance Garnett translations (1912–21). While these stages do not exactly correspond to the readings of the English novelists, most of whom first became acquainted with Dostoevsky through French translations, Muchnic's chronological divisions enable us to trace the evolution of shared literary and cultural assumptions that shaped the writers' responses to his works.

Dostoevsky did not become well known in England until after his death in 1881. Both the *Athenaeum* and the *Academy* ran obituaries, which were probably the result of widespread European attention to the spectacle of Dostoevsky's funeral and the magnitude of public mourning in Russia.<sup>17</sup> A loose English translation of his fictionalized prison memoir, *House of the Dead*, was published the same year. Within the next eight years, translations of *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *Injury and Insult*, and shorter works appeared. England's interest in Dostoevsky and other Russian authors was further stimulated by Melchior de Vogüé's *Le roman russe*, released in 1886, which catapulted Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Turgenev into the French literary spotlight.<sup>18</sup>

Vogüé exalted the author of *Crime and Punishment* for combining realism with compassion and religious sentiment, two qualities that he found absent in his contemporaries, Flaubert and Zola. He opened what was arguably the most influential essay ever written about Dostoevsky (“The religion of suffering” in *Le roman russe*) with the disarming words: “Here comes the Scythian, the true Scythian, who is going to revolutionize all our intellectual habits.”<sup>19</sup> Vogüé called Dostoevsky “an incomparable psychologist” but complained that he had “traveled only by night” and that his studies were limited to “dismal and mangled souls.” The French critic anticipated the responses of English novelists when he expressed the problem of classifying Dostoevsky, whom he regarded as a “phenomenon belonging to another world, a powerful but incomplete, intense and original monster”: “He may with justice be called a philosopher, an apostle, a madman, a consoler of the afflicted or the murderer of peaceful minds, the Jeremiah of a convict prison, or the Shakespeare of an asylum.”<sup>20</sup> Noticeably absent is the mention of literary artist.

Gilbert Phelps, who has studied the English response to Russian fiction, focusing mainly on Turgenev, cites Vogüé’s work as an important stimulus for English translations: “in 1886 [the year of its publication] no less than 18 titles appeared in London and New York. By the end of the decade all the great Russian novelists were represented in English versions, and most of their major works had been translated.”<sup>21</sup> The English audience of the 1880s shared Vogüé’s interest in compassionate realism. Muchnic documents their attraction to Dostoevsky as a chronicler of Russian life and a realist in the Dickensian mold, the Dickens of *Hard Times*. Reviewers compared him favorably to Zola, whose *Nana* reportedly had sold more than 100,000 copies in England.<sup>22</sup> Following Vogüé’s lead, the English praised Dostoevsky’s dramatic power, insight into “moral disease,” and sympathy for the suffering and oppressed.<sup>23</sup> Most reviewers saw in his works an accurate portrait of exotic and savage Russian life. When compared to Turgenev and Tolstoy, Dostoevsky was “absolutely Russian, the unWesternized Russian.”<sup>24</sup> He was regarded as a novelistic Baedeker guiding the reader through the primitive terrain of Russia: “the country, society, feeling, and habits of thought are altogether different from anything to be met with amongst ourselves.”<sup>25</sup>

Robert Louis Stevenson stands out among the readers of the 1880s, not only because of his enthusiasm but also because of his literary indebtedness. Stevenson probably read the French version of *Crime and*

*Punishment*, first published in 1884. That same year he published “Markheim,” a short story about the brutal murder of a pawnbroker and the subsequent confession of his killer. Donald Davie has judged this story as “the best-authenticated example of an attempt to write a wholly Dostoevskian novel in English.”<sup>26</sup> Davie, however, overstates his case. “Markheim” does employ certain unmistakable externals – the portrait of an obsessed criminal mind, the murder of a pawnbroker, a dialogue with a supernatural stranger, a confession marking an unexpected regeneration – yet the story bears little resemblance to the substance of its Russian predecessors. In the Stevenson work, the criminal exists primarily to advance the plot; we learn remarkably little about his motives. While the story owes much to the scenario of *Crime and Punishment*, all psychological depth, ideological conflicts, and spiritual turmoil have been banished from its domain. In a letter to A. R. Symonds written two years later, Stevenson praised Dostoevsky’s novel as “easily the greatest book I have read in ten years,” contrasting his reaction to that of Henry James, who could “not finish” the book. “It nearly finished me,” Stevenson confided to his friend. “It was like having an illness.”<sup>27</sup> Not coincidentally, Stevenson also published *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in 1886, a work suggestive of Dostoevsky in its investigation of the mysterious sources of evil within the human psyche. In Stevenson’s masterpiece, however, good and evil never appear simultaneously within the self; Jekyll and Hyde represent moral alternations that are far removed from the Manichean simultaneity that epitomizes the consciousness of Dostoevsky’s most compelling characters.

Despite Stevenson’s excitement, Muchnic reports that Dostoevsky entered a “long period of comparative neglect” after 1888.<sup>28</sup> Between the years 1889 and 1911 some studies became available, but only one new work of Dostoevsky’s was translated – *Poor Folk*, with an introduction by George Moore and a frontispiece by Beardsley – while the previously translated novels went out of print. Maurice Baring, a diplomat and classical scholar who had traveled through Russia and knew the language, proposed a translation of Dostoevsky’s novels in 1903 only to be told that “there would be no market for such books in England.”<sup>29</sup> Lombroso’s *Study of Genius*, translated in 1891, discussed the resemblance between Dostoevsky’s epileptic seizures and the inspiration of genius.<sup>30</sup> *Impressions of Russia* by George Brandes, the Dane who helped to popularize Nietzsche throughout Western Europe, proclaimed Dostoevsky as a great though barbaric artist who embodied the Nietzschean

concept of “slave morality.”<sup>31</sup> The relative neglect during these years can be understood in terms of English insularity, which is explained by the critic Samuel Hynes: “In the last decade of Victoria’s reign one could not buy a translation of Zola’s *La Terre* or Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot* or *The Possessed* or *The Brothers Karamazov* in London, or see a public performance of Ibsen’s *Ghosts*, or look at any picture by a French Impressionist at any gallery, either public or private.” “The new thought in Europe,” Hynes reports, “had been kept out of England, as though by quarantine.”<sup>32</sup>

It should be noted that few people in England knew Russian. The language was not recognized as a legitimate field of university study until the 1880s; even by the 1920s only a few programs were established.<sup>33</sup> As a result, the English depended almost entirely on translated works for their knowledge of Russian literature, and many of the translations were simply English versions of French and German editions. The first English history of Russian literature was not published until 1882. This work by Charles Turner, who served as Lector at the Imperial University of St. Petersburg, stopped short of Dostoevsky, an author mentioned only as a friend of Nekrasov.<sup>34</sup> Given the scarcity of information, it is not surprising that Russia’s cultural emissaries, some of whom had migrated to England, played an important role in promoting and interpreting their country’s literary heritage.<sup>35</sup>

Unfortunately, three of the most influential Russians distorted Dostoevsky and cast doubt on his artistic ability. Dmitri Merezhovsky, a novelist, symbolist poet, and critic, wrote an important essay that was translated into English in 1902. Merezhovsky, who lived intermittently as an exile in Paris throughout the early years of the twentieth century, called attention to Dostoevsky’s “hasty, sometimes clearly neglected language” and his “wearisomely drawn out” plots.<sup>36</sup> Though the critic showed an appreciation of his dramatic power and unique use of dialogue as a means of defining character, the English paid far more attention to the celebration of Dostoevsky as a “poet of evangelical love” and “seer of the soul,” as well as the oversimplified contrast between Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Merezhovsky, despite his merits, contributed to the English tendency to read Dostoevsky as a zealot instead of an artist, and his influence can be detected in the responses of writers such as Bennett, Woolf, and Forster, all of whom regarded Dostoevsky as an inartistic sage.

Prince Peter Kropotkin, an anarchist who emigrated and joined the vocal ranks of those political exiles who had fled Russia for the safety of



England, went further and refused to admit any element of artistic intent in Dostoevsky. In a survey of Russian literature that was published in English in 1905, Kropotkin complained that Dostoevsky wrote too fast and cared little about literary form. He expressed discomfort with “the atmosphere of a lunatic asylum” that permeates the novels, insisting that the heroes were simply transparent reflections of the author himself: “whatever hero appears . . . you feel it is the author who speaks.” While he recognized Dostoevsky as an important writer, his impatience with the novels’ lack of “artistic finish” led him to confess that “one is never tempted to re-read them.”<sup>37</sup> Kropotkin’s influence extended beyond that of Merezhovsky, because he lived in England, he frequently gave lectures about Russian literature, and he was a friend of Constance and Edward Garnett, the couple who were largely responsible for leading the resurgence of interest in Dostoevsky.

Regrettably, the emigrant who knew the most about Russian literature, D. S. Mirsky, had only a limited appreciation of Dostoevsky. His authoritative *History of Russian Literature*, published in English in 1927, includes astute observations but also perpetuates a stereotype of Dostoevsky’s disinterest in literary art. Mirsky objected to the “absence of all grace, and elegance . . . together with an absence of reserve, discipline, and dignity, and an excess of abnormal self-consciousness.”<sup>38</sup> His intolerance of Dostoevsky was exasperated for Marxist reasons; he evaluated the author as a corrupt reflection of imperial Russia, “the first and greatest symptom of the spiritual decomposition of the Russian soul.”<sup>39</sup> In a later work, Mirsky offered an interesting analysis of the English attraction to Dostoevsky: “Now that the hopes of the 1900s had come down to the catastrophe of the war [the First World War], the incomparably mystical, exaggeratedly irrational cult of faith in Dostoevsky was just what was needed to replace the rarefied naturalistically rationalistic faith of Shaw.”<sup>40</sup>

Two other exiles, Sergei Stepniak and Felix Volkovsky – close friends of Kropotkin – introduced Constance Garnett to the Russian language and its literature and served as her first tutors. Their influence prompted her translations of Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and other Russian writers. Garnett began her translations in the 1890s; she first translated Goncharov, then Tolstoy’s *The Kingdom of God Is Within Us*. By 1899 she had translated the complete works of Turgenev, earning the praise of reviewers and novelists such as Conrad and Galsworthy. She went on to other translations of Tolstoy, including *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, and numerous shorter works. Her husband’s biographer, George Jefferson,

reports that she translated “Dostoevsky from 1912 to 1920, Chekhov from 1915 to 1926, Gogol from 1922 to 1928, Herzen from 1924 to 1927.”<sup>41</sup> The work of Constance Garnett put Russian literature on England’s literary map.

English readers generally recognized Turgenev and Tolstoy as conscious literary artists. According to Gilbert Phelps, they immediately hailed Turgenev’s formal perfection when his works were introduced in the later years of the nineteenth century. The author, who had once traveled to England and had met George Eliot, Robert Browning, Tennyson, Swinburne, Trollope, Henry James, and Ford Madox Ford, was appreciated as a writer working within discernible literary traditions and was often contrasted to Dostoevsky. For example, Conrad, James, and Galsworthy all sharply reproved Dostoevsky for his failure to adhere to Turgenev’s lofty standards. Tolstoy, by comparison, was sometimes judged as Turgenev’s artistic inferior, and interest in his moral philosophy and pilgrim quests overshadowed appreciation of his artistry. Yet he was usually recognized as a literary master. Virginia Woolf spoke for many of her contemporaries when she praised Tolstoy as a great artist, indeed the greatest of all novelists, while she judged Dostoevsky a psychologist but no artist.<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps the assumption that Dostoevsky was the least accomplished artist of the Russian trinity contributed to the tardiness of his translations. Three pivotal works did, however, pave the way for his reintroduction to the English reading public. Edward Garnett took an important step towards creating a market for Dostoevsky when he wrote a short essay for the *Academy* in 1906. The essay masterfully presented the author to an audience that had lost touch with his works. “The present generation,” Garnett complained, “knows not Dostoevsky. So much the worse for the present generation.” He lambasted the English for their neglect, which he traced to cultural differences: “no doubt the reason for our neglect lies in the Englishman’s fear of morbidity.” Garnett went on to praise Dostoevsky for his spiritual depth, a depth far removed from the wholesome chatter of England’s vicars, and his exploration of consciousness that “yields us insight into deep, dark ranges of spiritual truths.” Where the generation of the 1880s had praised Dostoevsky as a realist who depicted Russian life and society, Garnett now acclaimed him as a psychologist of the abnormal, the “one who has most fully explored the labyrinthine workings of the mind unhinged.” Novels once read as a peculiarly Russian vision were now regarded as a psychological road map of humanity’s darker vistas. Significantly, Garnett dis-