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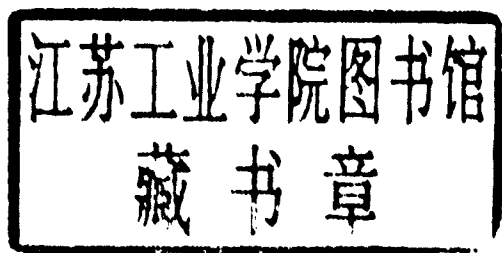
DOSTOEVSKII

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*Edited by*  
*W. J. Leatherbarrow*

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

References to Dostoevskii's works throughout this book are incorporated in the text and are by volume and page number (e.g. XIV, 255) to F. M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972–90). Where the publishers have divided a volume into two separately bound parts, an additional number appears after the volume number (e.g. XXIX/1, 375). Unless otherwise stated all translations from the Russian are by the authors of individual essays. For the benefit of those reading Dostoevskii's works in English translation references to his fictional works are also given by Part (Pt), Book (Bk), Chapter (Ch.) or Section (Sec.), as appropriate.

The transliteration of Russian words and names is based upon the standard Library of Congress system without diacritics. The only exceptions are names of Russian tsars, where the more familiar anglicised forms have been used (e.g. Peter I, not Petr I), and usages that have become so familiar that to alter them would create uncertainty (e.g. Tchaikovskii, not Chaikovskii).

My thanks are due primarily to the contributors, whose insights have made my task as editor a great pleasure; but I am also indebted to the patience and careful editorial interventions of Linda Bree and Rachel De Wachter at Cambridge University Press.

## CHRONOLOGY

	<i>Dostoevskii's life and works</i>	<i>Major literary and historical events</i>
1821	Born in Moscow at the Mariinskii hospital for the poor, where his father worked as a doctor.	
1823-31		Pushkin: <i>Eugene Onegin</i> .
1825		Decembrist Revolt and accession of Nicholas I.
1828		Birth of Tolstoi.
1830		Stendhal: <i>Le Rouge et le Noir</i> .
1831	Sees production of Schiller's <i>The Robbers</i> which affects him deeply.	
1833-7	At school in Moscow.	
1834		Pushkin: <i>The Queen of Spades</i> .
1835		Balzac: <i>Le Père Goriot</i> .
1836		Gogol: <i>The Government Inspector</i> .
1837	Death of mother.	Death of Pushkin. Dickens: <i>Pickwick Papers</i> .
1838	Enters St Petersburg Academy of Military Engineering.	
1839	Death of father in mysterious circumstances.	Stendhal: <i>The Charterhouse of Parma</i> .
1840		Lermontov: <i>A Hero of Our Time</i> .

# CHRONOLOGY

1841	Attempts to write plays.	Death of Lermontov.
1842		Gogol: <i>Dead Souls</i> and 'The Overcoat'.
1843	Graduates from Military Academy.	
1844	Resigns commission in order to devote himself to literature. First published work: a translation of Balzac's <i>Eugénie Grandet</i> .	
1845	Finishes <i>Poor Folk</i> . Meets Belinskii.	
1846	<i>Poor Folk</i> published to widespread acclaim. A more subdued reception given to <i>The Double</i> . Epilepsy diagnosed.	
1847	<i>The Landlady</i> . Starts to attend meetings of the Petrashevskii circle.	Emigration of Herzen.
1848	'A Faint Heart' and 'White Nights'.	Revolutions in Europe. Death of Belinskii. Thackeray: <i>Vanity Fair</i> . Russia invades Hungary.
1849	<i>Netochka Nezvanova</i> . Becomes involved with more radical section of the Petrashevskii circle. 23 April: arrested and imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress, where he writes <i>A Little Hero</i> . November: Commission of Enquiry reports and sentences Dostoevskii to death. December: mock execution. Death sentence commuted to Siberian hard labour and exile.	
1850	Arrives at Omsk prison settlement.	Dickens: <i>David Copperfield</i> .



# CHRONOLOGY

1851		World Exhibition at Crystal Palace, London.
1852		Death of Gogol. Tolstoi: <i>Childhood</i> . Turgenev: <i>A Sportsman's Sketches</i> . Crimean War.
1853-6		
1854	Hard labour ends. Posted to Semipalatinsk as a common soldier.	
1855		Chernyshevskii joins <i>The Contemporary</i> . Death of Nicholas I and accession of Alexander II amidst hopes of social and political reform.
1856		Turgenev: <i>Rudin</i> .
1857	Marries Maria Dmitrevna Isaeva.	Flaubert: <i>Madame Bovary</i> . Baudelaire: <i>Les Fleurs du Mal</i> .
1859	<i>The Village of Stepanchikovo</i> and 'Uncle's Dream'. December: returns to St Petersburg.	Turgenev: <i>A Nest of Gentlefolk</i> . Goncharov: <i>Oblomov</i> . Tolstoi: <i>Family Happiness</i> . Darwin: <i>The Origin of Species</i> .
1860	Starts publication of <i>Notes from the House of the Dead</i> .	Turgenev: <i>On the Eve</i> . Birth of Chekhov. George Eliot: <i>The Mill on the Floss</i> .
1861	Starts publication of moderate periodical <i>Time. The Insulted and Injured</i> .	Emancipation of the serfs. Formation of revolutionary organisation <i>Land and Liberty</i> .
1862	Travels in Europe. Affair with Polina Suslova.	Turgenev: <i>Fathers and Sons</i> . Tense revolutionary mood in St Petersburg. <i>The Contemporary</i> suspended and Chernyshevskii arrested. Hugo: <i>Les Misérables</i> .
1863	<i>Winter Notes on Summer Impressions</i> . Closure of <i>Time</i> . Further travels in Europe with Suslova.	Polish uprising. Tolstoi: <i>The Cossacks</i> . Chernyshevskii: <i>What Is to Be Done?</i>

# CHRONOLOGY

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|--------|--|---|
| 1864   | Launches <i>Epoch</i> . <i>Notes from Underground</i> . Deaths of wife and brother Mikhail.  | The First International. Student unrest in Kazan. Legal reforms in Russia, including introduction of trial by jury. Dickens: <i>Our Mutual Friend</i> . |
| 1865   | Financial collapse of <i>Epoch</i> . Severe financial difficulties. Starts work on <i>Crime and Punishment</i> .                         |   |
| 1865-9 |  | Tolstoi: <i>War and Peace</i> .   |
| 1866   | Publishes <i>Crime and Punishment</i> . Writes <i>The Gambler</i> in twenty-six days with help of stenographer Anna Grigorevna Snitkina. | Attempted assassination of Alexander II by Dmitri Karakozov.  |
| 1867   | Marries Anna Grigorevna. Flees abroad to escape creditors. Meets Turgenev in Baden. Visits Dresden and Geneva.                           | Turgenev: <i>Smoke</i> .  |
| 1868   | Still abroad. Death of infant daughter. <i>The Idiot</i> .   |   |
| 1869   | Returns to Dresden and plans 'The Life of a Great Sinner'.   | Murder of student Ivanov in Moscow by Nechaev's political circle.   |
| 1870   | <i>The Eternal Husband</i> .   | Defeat of France in Franco-Prussian War. Death of Herzen. Birth of V. I. Ulianov (Lenin).   |
| 1871   | Returns to St Petersburg.  | Defeat of Paris Commune.  |
| 1871-2 | <i>The Devils</i> .  |   |
| 1872   | Becomes editor of <i>The Citizen</i> .   | Trial of Nechaev. Leskov: <i>Cathedral Folk</i> . Marx's <i>Das Kapital</i> published in Russia.  |
| 1873   | Begins <i>The Diary of a Writer</i> .  |   |
| 1874   | Resigns from <i>The Citizen</i> . Visits Bad Ems for treatment for emphysema.  | Attempts by thousands of Russian students to provoke revolutionary unrest amongst peasantry.  |

# CHRONOLOGY

1875	<i>A Raw Youth.</i>	Political strikes in Odessa.
1875-8		Tolstoi: <i>Anna Karenina</i> .
1877		Russia declares war on Turkey. Turgenev: <i>Virgin Soil</i> .
1878	Death of son Alexei. Visit to Optina Monastery with Solovev.	Death of Nekrasov. Arrest and trial of Vera Zasulich.
1879-80	<i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> (completed November 1880).	Tolstoi's religious crisis, during which he writes <i>A Confession</i> .
1880	Delivers the Pushkin Speech.	
1880-1	Final issues of <i>The Diary of a Writer</i> .	
1881	January 28: dies in St Petersburg. February 1: funeral in Alexander Nevskii Monastery attended by over thirty thousand people.	Assassination of Alexander II.
1883		Death of Turgenev. Nietzsche: <i>Thus Spake Zarathustra</i> .
1889		Death of Chernyshevskii.
1904		Death of Chekhov.
1910		Death of Tolstoi.
1912		Constance Garnett's English translation of <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> .

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# I

W. J. LEATHERBARROW

## Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

(xvi, 329)

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