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Part Three —Themes

Acknowledgments

This project has been a significant undertaking, and we are indebted to a number of people and institutions for their help, support, and advice.

A major debt of gratitude is owed to the wonderful graduate research assistants, without whom we would likely still be tracking down permissions and scanning documents! Anton Nonin organized nearly all the permissions we required, helped with scanning and OCRing texts, and also masterfully translated a number of Russian texts that appear in the volume. Kristina McGuirk and Hanna Murray also helped significantly with locating texts, scanning and editing. We send them all a massive thank you.

When we began working on the volume, we were glad to receive invaluable advice, suggestions, and encouragement from a number of Dostoevskii scholars. We thank all those who answered our request to share their Dostoevskii class syllabi, which proved immeasurably helpful as we began to plan the volume. We acknowledge, with thanks, the contributions of Carol Apollonio, Deborah Martinsen, Robin Feuer Miller, William Mills Todd, III, and Sarah J. Young who met with us to share their suggestions for improving our first plan for the volume. We are also especially grateful to those scholars and institutions that allowed us to reproduce copyrighted material without charge, purely for the love of Dostoevskii. In particular, we thank Robert Louis Jackson, Igor′ Volgin, Vladimir Zakharov, and *Yale Review* for this support.

The volume originated as part of the "*Crime and Punishment* at 150" project, which was made possible through support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Additional funding was provided by the Faculty of Arts and Department of Central, Eastern, and Northern European Studies at the University of British Columbia, and Academic Studies Press.

Finally, we are grateful to Academic Studies Press for their enthusiasm for and support of the volume, in particular Mark Lipovetsky, who gave us helpful structural suggestions; our first editor, Faith Wilson Stein, with whom we began the project; and her successor, Oleh Kotsyuba, who concluded it with us.

We hope that you find this volume as useful and interesting as we have found working on it to be.

How to Use this Book

Fedor Dostoevskii's popularity and relevance as a writer have not dwindled over time. Indeed, as Rowan Williams points out, the subjects of Dostoevskii's fiction—from absent fathers and child abuse to terrorism and the nature of national identity—are the quintessential anxieties of the twenty-first century.[1] *Crime and Punishment* remains the embarkation point for many readers setting out to discover Russian literature, and students remain fascinated by Raskol'nikov's Theory of Great Men, intrigued by the Underground Man's sardonic ramblings, and awed by their encounter with the Devil in *Brothers Karamazov*.

Though courses focused on a single author are not as common as they once were, a class simply titled "Dostoevskii" can still attract substantial enrollments. His writing also figures heavily in survey courses that cover nineteenth-century Russian literature, and his works regularly show up in surveys of the European novel, as well as classes on "Great Books," as one might expect. However, as disciplinary boundaries become more porous, Dostoevskii increasingly features in syllabi in other fields. Students might encounter "Notes from Underground" in a philosophy class, *Demons* in political science, *The Idiot* in divinity school, or *Brothers Karamazov* in an advanced seminar on Law and Literature, to give but a few examples. Such variety would not come as a shock to the author, a polymath who rejected the idea of art for art's sake and whose own fiction unabashedly tackled social, political, and theological questions. Therefore, although *A Dostoevskii Companion: Texts and Contexts* is written primarily from the perspective of literary studies, we hope that this collection will speak to those interested in Dostoevskii as a thinker as well as a writer.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part, Biography and Context, opens with a chapter on the early Dostoevskii, supplying background

1 Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction* (London: Continuum, 2008), 1.

on the author and setting his work in the context of influences from Russian and European writing in the mid-nineteenth century. The second chapter, on "Dostoevskii and His Contemporaries," focuses on his place in the nineteenth-century Russian canon, with an emphasis on comparative approaches with Lev Tolstoi and Ivan Turgenev, the other two leading writers of his day.

The second part, Poetics, begins with a chapter on "Aesthetics," explores Dostoevskii's conception of what art and literature should be, notions of beauty in his work, and his idiosyncratic stance on the fraught question of Realism. "Characters," the longest chapter in the whole volume, consists primarily of secondary literature on Dostoevskii's most intriguing personages from Makar Devushkin to Alesha Karamazov. "The Novel" takes a broader look at the form and structure of Dostoevskii's novels, exploring their genesis through the writer's notebooks, and how narrative voice, plot, and time operate in his work. "From Journalism to Fiction" looks at Dostoevskii as a writer whose works not only incorporated both fiction and nonfiction, but often challenged the distinction between these two modes of writing, especially in his *A Writer's Diary*.

Finally, the third section, "Themes," concentrates on the content of Dostoevskii's writing, and looks explicitly at some of the social, political, and theological issues that he addresses. "Captivity, Free Will, and Utopia" brings together three interlinked themes in his oeuvre, beginning with his fictionalization of his own experience in prison, *Notes from the House of the Dead*, addressing his critique of socialist utopian thinking and yet recognizing that his ideas of universal brotherhood still carried a utopian urge. "Others" charts Dostoevskii's changing—and often problematic—representations of ethnic and religious minority groups, such as Jews and Muslims, while also examining his attitude towards women at a time when the "woman question" was at the forefront of political debate. "Russia" investigates the question of national identity in Dostoevskii's writing, particularly the apparent contradiction between the imperfect, historical Russia in which he lived and the idealized, holy Russia that he longed for. The final chapter, "God," examines the vital role that religion plays in Dostoevskii's works, looking at how the Bible and the Christian tradition inform his work, but also giving voice to more skeptical critics who have provided alternative readings.

We hope that the tripartite division—"Biography and Context," "Poetics," "Themes"—will help guide the reader, but we understand that it is an impossible task to separate these three entirely. Dostoevskii's biography inevitably contributed to both his philosophical views and the form of his writing, as the "Captivity, Free Will, and Utopia" section shows, connecting his time in

prison in Siberia with his emphasis on the importance of free will. Moreover, the form and content of Dostoevskii's novels must be studied together: Gary Saul Morson has argued that the very form of Dostoevskii's novels reflected his philosophical indeterminism. Indeed, some of the most challenging perspectives in Dostoevskii criticism have come from scholars who have sought to reconcile the writer and the thinker. How could the exponent of universal love who penned *Brothers Karamazov* also have written the antisemitic tracts in *A Writer's Diary*?

Like the rest of the Cultural Syllabus series, this book is aimed primarily at undergraduate students, although we anticipate that it may also be of interest to the general reader with a knowledge of Dostoevskii. It is intended as a sourcebook for those who have already read at least some of the writer's stories and novels. Instructors may choose to assign particular excerpts, although we hope the volume is user-friendly enough for students to dip into themselves. Each chapter comprises a mixture of sources, ranging from Dostoevskii's own letters and journalism, to reviews of his work from his contemporaries, to seminal treatments of the writer by major figures such as the religious philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev and the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, to some of the best current criticism on Dostoevskii from our own time. We have deliberately chosen to include a range of critical voices, many of which dissent from one another and some of which are rather hostile to Dostoevskii—though all of them think he is worth writing about! As editors, we try to contextualize each of these excerpts briefly in a short introduction to each chapter, but we purposefully refrain from providing our own critical judgments. We believe it is the students' job to do that thinking for themselves. For those looking to go further, each chapter includes a list of suggested further reading; we have sought to avoid duplication here, but many of the suggested works could be listed in several different chapters.

We deliberately chose not to organize this volume work by work, with one chapter on *Crime and Punishment*, another on *The Idiot*, and so on. One reason is that there already exist multiple series that do precisely that: the Northwestern Critical Companions, for instance, or Bloom's Guides. More importantly, however, we wanted to encourage readers to make connections between texts and perhaps spark a desire for students to read something new. For example, the "Russia" chapter includes readings on *Notes from the House of the Dead*, "The Peasant Marei," and *Demons*, not the most commonly assigned texts for undergraduates. However, the issues around national identity raised here will be relevant to students reading, say, *Crime and Punishment*, and it will

encourage these readers to think beyond the particular text they are currently studying.

Finally, we would stress that we realize that this volume cannot provide encyclopedic coverage of Dostoevskii's life and times. Most university libraries will already have a copy of Kenneth Lantz's *The Dostoevsky Encyclopedia*, an excellent point of reference to begin research.[2] Several recommended biographies are also available, from Joseph Frank's five-volume magnum opus to the more accessible offerings by Konstantin Mochul'skii or Robert Bird.[3] Another invaluable resource is Deborah Martinsen and Olga Maiorova's *Dostoevsky in Context*, which provides superb coverage of a range of topics on the literary and historical contexts of Dostoevskii's Russia.[4] Rounding out these recommendations, *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii*, edited by W. J. Leatherbarrow, offers a series of introductory essays on key topics in Dostoevskii criticism.[5] Our hope is that students will use *A Dostoevskii Companion* alongside these existing works, but that our volume will allow students the satisfaction of working with a variety of primary and secondary sources to form their own opinions and arguments about the classic Russian writer.

2 Kenneth Lantz, *The Dostoevsky Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004).

3 Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, trans. Michael A. Minihan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971); Robert Bird, *Fyodor Dostoevsky* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012).

4 Deborah A. Martinsen and Olga Maiorova, eds., *Dostoevsky in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

5 W. J. Leatherbarrow, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Note on Translation, Transliteration, and Referencing

Our volume is intended primarily for Anglophone readers, and we assume no knowledge of the Russian language. As such, all the Dostoevskii texts and much of the secondary literature in this volume are presented in English translation. As editors, we wish to acknowledge the generations of translators whose work we have excerpted here. Too often their labor is invisible. Moreover, we would point out to our readers that any encounter with Dostoevskii in English is always mediated through translation; that is, translation shapes how we understand and interpret Dostoevskii. Thankfully, Dostoevskii has been well served by translators, with new versions of major works like *Crime and Punishment* still appearing at regular intervals in the twenty-first century. While each reader will have his or her favorite translation, many instructors find it rewarding to bring a variety of translations into the classroom and discuss the different variants with students. Even for students without knowledge of Russian, this exercise can make visible the work of translators and the decisions they make, while also showing the multiplicity of possible meanings and interpretations inherent within a Dostoevskii text.

While we encourage instructors to experiment with multiple translations in the classroom, we also wanted to provide as much consistency for the reader as possible within this volume. Therefore, when we include excerpts from Dostoevskii's own works, we most often use the Constance Garnett translations, which remain generally reliable and nearly all volumes have the significant advantage of being out of copyright.

In the contemporary criticism reproduced here, most scholars refer to the Russian texts of Dostoevskii, usually relying on the standard scholarly

edition: F. M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh*, 30 vols. (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972–90). Rather than repeat this full reference multiple times, we use the abbreviation PSS throughout the book to refer to this edition.

As for transliteration, we have chosen to use the Modified Library of Congress system for transliteration (Dostoevskii, not Dostoevsky; Gogol', not Gogol), again for reasons of consistency. The exception is in bibliographic references in footnotes and the lists of further reading; here it is necessary to reproduce the exact title of published works, such as Richard Peace's *Dostoyevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels*. Where possible, we have standardized the referencing throughout the volume to accord with the *Chicago Manual of Style* to provide consistency for the reader and updated the spelling to American English.

Timeline of Dostoevskii's Life and Works

1821 Dostoevskii is born November 11 (October 30, old style) in Moscow.
1825 Serial publication of Pushkin's novel *Eugene Onegin* begins.
1825 Decembrist uprising in St. Petersburg.
1828 Tolstoi born.
1831 Dostoevskii and his brother attend school in Moscow (until 1836).
1836 Publication of Chaadaev's "First Philosophical Letter"; publication of Dickens's *Sketches by Boz*.
1837 Pushkin dies in a duel; Dostoevskii's mother dies of tuberculosis and the Dostoevskii brothers are sent to a St. Petersburg boarding school.
1838 Dostoevskii enters military engineering school in St. Petersburg.
1839 Dostoevskii's father is killed (allegedly murdered by his own serfs).
1841 Dostoevskii obtains a military commission; he begins experimenting with writing historical dramas à la Schiller and Pushkin (now-lost titles include *Maria Stuart* and *Boris Godunov*).
1842 Gogol''s *Dead Souls*, part 1 is published.
1843 Dostoevskii passes his final engineering examinations, translates Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet*.
1844 Dostoevskii resigns his commission in the army and embarks on a literary career; he translates George Sand's *La dernière Aldini*, finishes *Poor Folk* in November.
1845 *Poor Folk* is well received by critics; Dostoevskii enters literary society.
1846 *Poor Folk* and *The Double* are published; *The Double* receives negative critical reviews.
1847 Dostoevskii writes for the *St. Petersburg Gazette*; first signs of epilepsy.
1848 Marx writes "The Communist Manifesto."

1849 Dostoevskii begins work on *Netochka Nezvanova*; the novel remains unfinished when Dostoevskii is arrested for his membership in the Petrashevskii Circle; Dostoevskii is sentenced to death. The sentence is commuted at the last moment and he is sent to penal servitude in Siberia.

1850 Dostoevskii arrives at the prison in Omsk.

1851 The Crystal Palace is erected in Hyde Park for the Great Exhibition.

1852 Gogol' burns the second part of *Dead Souls* and dies.

1853 The Crimean War begins; Dostoevskii begins to experience periodic epileptic seizures.

1854 Dostoevskii is released from prison; begins his forced military service at Semipalatinsk; meets his future wife.

1855 Nicholas I dies; Alexander II ascends the throne.

1857 Dostoevskii marries Mariia Dmitrievna Isaeva; he publishes "The Little Hero," which he wrote while in prison in 1849.

1858 Dostoevskii begins writing again; writes *The Village of Stepanchikovo* and *Uncle's Dream*.

1859 Dostoevskii leaves the military; returns to St. Petersburg after ten years of exile. Darwin publishes *The Origin of Species*.

1860 Dostoevskii writes *Notes from the House of the Dead* and *The Insulted and Injured*; he joins his brother in editing the literary journal *Time*.

1861 Emancipation of the serfs; the first two parts of Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* are published.

1862 Dostoevskii goes abroad for the first time, visits England, France, and Switzerland; meets Gertsen in London.

1863 Chernyshevskii's *What Is to Be Done?* is published. Dostoevskii publishes *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*. Dostoevskii travels abroad again and begins an affair with Apollinariia Suslova.

1864 The Dostoevskii brothers found the journal *The Epoch* after *Time* is dissolved. Dostoevskii's wife dies in April and his older brother, Mikhail, in July. Dostoevskii works on *Notes from Underground*. Tolstoi publishes the first part of *War and Peace*.

1865 *Epoch* goes bankrupt and shuts down. Dostoevskii leaves Russia to escape his debts. Suslova rejects his proposal; Dostoevskii settles in Wiesbaden where he falls into gambling; he writes *Crime and Punishment*.

1866 Karakozov attempts to assassinate Alexander II. Dostoevskii returns to Russia, writes *The Gambler*, and meets Anna Grigor'evna Snitkina. *Crime and Punishment* is published.

1867 Marries Anna Grigor'evna; they settle in Dresden to escape his debts in Russia. The Umetskii trial takes place in St. Petersburg that fall.

1868 A daughter, Sofiia, is born, but dies several months later. *The Idiot* is serialized; the Dostoevskiis move to Italy.

1869 A daughter, Liubov, is born; the family moves to Dresden.

1870 Lenin is born; Dickens dies.

1871 Dostoevskii gives up gambling. A son, Fedor, is born in St. Petersburg. *Demons* is serialized.

1873 Dostoevskii becomes editor of *The Citizen* journal (resigns 1874).

1874 Dostoevskii is arrested and imprisoned again for censorship offenses. Dostoevskii travels to Bad Ems seeking a cure for emphysema. Dostoevskii travels to Staraia Russa for the first time.

1875 *The Adolescent* is published. A son, Aleksei, is born. Dostoevskii again travels to Bad Ems for his ailment.

1876 Dostoevskii begins publishing *A Writer's Diary* in *The Citizen*.

1877 The Russo-Turkish War breaks out; Tolstoi publishes *Anna Karenina*.

1878 Dostoevskii's son, Aleksei, dies; Dostoevskii begins work on *Brothers Karamazov*.

1880 *Brothers Karamazov* is published. Dostoevskii gives his "Pushkin Speech" at the unveiling of the Pushkin monument in Moscow; returns to Staraia Russa.

1881 Dostoevskii dies on February 9 (January 28, old style) and is buried in the Aleksandr Nevskii lavra in St. Petersburg. Alexander II assassinated March 13 (March 1, old style)

Part One

Biography and Context

CHAPTER 1

The Early Dostoevskii

This volume begins with a chapter on Fedor Dostoevskii's early literary career, from his student days in the early 1840s to his arrest, trial, and mock execution in 1849. Although ostensibly in the capital to attend engineering school, Dostoevskii and his brother Mikhail devoted themselves to literary pursuits. In *A Writer's Diary*, Dostoevskii recalls, "We passionately believed something, and though we both perfectly knew what was needed for the mathematics exam, we dreamed only about poetry and poets." The passion Dostoevskii felt was a product of his reading habits during this time, which heavily influenced his art and outlook.

During this period, Dostoevskii produced several translations of French and German works, three novellas (*Poor Folk*, *The Double*, *The Landlady*), ten stories (which include shorter works like "A Weak Heart" as well as longer ones like "White Nights"), and an unfinished novel, *Netochka Nezvanova*. These early works demonstrate Dostoevskii's preoccupation with the romantic concept of the "lofty and beautiful," which later would be ironized by Underground Man; during this period, however, Dostoevskii's engagement with these ideas was sincere and intense.

This chapter is organized around the way the early Dostoevskii shaped the later Dostoevskii. To this end, the chapter begins with an excerpt from Robert Bird's biography *Fyodor Dostoevsky*. Bird's opening discussion focuses not on the events of the 1840s, but on Dostoevskii's literary influences and aspirations, and the way these were shaped by the events of the 1840s. For Dostoevskii during this period, art was life.

The chapter includes a selection from the works that the young Dostoevskii was reading. Earlier writers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), Friedrich Schiller (1775–1805), and Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823) appear alongside

Dostoevskii's contemporaries, including Nikolai Gogol' (1809–52), Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), and Charles Dickens (1812–70). Interested students might also seek out works by Eugène Sue (1804–57) and George Sand (1804–76), two of Dostoevskii's favorite writers that do not appear here. The excerpts that are included give a taste of the kind of literature that inspired young Dostoevskii as well as address common themes such as poverty, sentimentality, human value and dignity, and love. Throughout these works, individual freedom is valued, and human dignity championed.

Excerpts from Dostoevskii's own writing that appear in the chapter include an exchange of letters from his first novel, the epistolary *Poor Folk* (1846), and the first encounter between hero and heroine in "White Nights" (1848). These two passages readily demonstrate the connections between Dostoevskii's early writing and the works that influenced him. *Poor Folk* launched Dostoevskii's career—its depiction of the downtrodden urban poor impressed the literati of the day, including poet Nikolai Nekrasov and critic Vissarion Belinskii. In *Poor Folk,* in the correspondence between its heroes, we see the individual on display in all his mundane pettiness; yet, despite degradation and humiliation, Makar Devushkin and Varvara Alekseevna preserve their humanity, acting with compassion towards each other. "White Nights" tells of a romantic "Dreamer," a famous Dostoevskian character type, and his encounters with Nasten'ka, a young girl. The Petersburg setting comes to life, and here Dostoevskii was demonstrably influenced by both the sublime landscapes of Radcliffe and the physiological descriptions of Sue and Balzac.

During the 1840s, Dostoevskii lived in a world of "lofty and beautiful" words and ideas—ideas were life, but they could be dangerous too. The failed Decembrist uprising in 1825 had ushered in the reactionary conservative regime of Nicholas I, who instituted widespread state censorship. Despite—or because of—this repression of literature, art, and particularly the written word, was seen as a tool that could speak the truth to the people; this was a view held by the literary critic Belinskii, a major shaper of Russian letters during the period. Included here is Belinskii's "Letter to Gogol'" (1847), a publicly circulated letter that openly called for the abolishment of serfdom. In the letter Belinskii berates Gogol' for failing to live up to this vision of authorial "truth" in his latest book, and for propagating conservative views that are morally repugnant. The written word wielded power, and authorities banned Belinskii's "Letter." This letter would also play a role in Dostoevskii's arrest in 1849; his crimes, detailed in his official