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University of Glasgow

# Dostoevsky's French Reception

From Vogüé, Gide, Shestov and Berdyaev to Marcel, Sartre and Camus  
(1880-1959)

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## **Abstract**

This history of Dostoevsky's reception in France draws from critical responses, translation analysis, and the comparative analysis of adaptations as well as intertextual dialogues between fictional, critical and philosophical texts. It begins from the earliest translations and critical accounts of the 1880s and 1890s, such as Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé's seminal moralist reading. It then traces modernist responses and adaptations from the turn of the century to the twenties. Existential readings and re-translations dating from the arrival of émigré critics and religious philosophers in the wake of the Russian Revolution are examined, assessing the contribution of these émigré readings to emerging existential readings and movements in France. Finally, French existentialist fiction is analysed in terms of its intertextual dialogue with Dostoevsky's work and with speculative and critical writings of French existentialist thinkers on and around the philosophical reflections expressed in Dostoevsky's fiction.

By following specifically the existential and existentialist branches of Dostoevsky's French reception, an overlooked aspect of the history of French, Russian and European existentialisms comes to the fore, reframed within a pivotal period in the history of European intercultural exchange, and of transmodal literary and philosophical discourse.

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### **Note on Translation and Transliteration**

All translations are my own unless otherwise stated. Russian names and titles have been transliterated in accordance with the Library of Congress system, with the exception of well-known names (e.g. Dostoevsky) in which case the common English spelling has been used. Names and words transliterated in quotations and references have been left as transliterated in the source.

## Introduction

Reception history has a somewhat antithetical status in relation to dominant, nationalised intellectual and literary histories. This nationalisation itself is constructed and reinforced more by institutionalised disciplinary boundaries than by the reality of reading and writing, in which translated foreign texts play as significant a role as native texts. So long as the task of writing and rewriting histories of French literature falls to specialists of French literature understood as texts authored in French, causal relationships and linear chains of exchange are constructed and reconstructed with a disregard for the fact that translated texts operate just as productively within literary discourse and, as such, in national literary history. Reception history is therefore a means of questioning monolithic, nationalised historical narratives and bringing to the fore the equal significance of translated literature in the emergence of new literary movements.

The reception specifically of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian novel in France is a phenomenon that stands out from all others. Even Nietzsche's reception historian, Jacques le Rider, has acknowledged that Nietzsche's colossal wave of reception was second to that of *les Russes*.<sup>1</sup> The particular interest of the chronological framing of the current investigation, i.e. from the late romantic period towards post-modernity and post-colonialism, is significant in that reception history permits a microcosmic view of one culture's perception of another. The

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques le Rider's authoritative history of Nietzsche's colossal significance to 20<sup>th</sup> century French intellectual life states: "Le seul domaine qui surpasse, par son ampleur, la réception de Nietzsche dans les pays de langue française, est celui de la littérature russe contemporaine (Dostoïevski, Tolstoï)." See Jacques le Rider, *Nietzsche en France: De la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle au temps présent* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), p. 105.

translation boom of the 1880s, when the current history commences, was initially met with striking hostility and fear of intercultural contamination. The history of the gradual and laborious deconstruction of the *Volksgeist*, the mode of envisioning interculturality that dominated 19<sup>th</sup> century discourse emerges. Notions of intercultural clashes subside and cosmopolitanist reading strategies come to the fore.

Lefevere's writings were seminal in approaching the question of translated texts in nationalised literary history:

Literary histories, as they have been written until recently, have had little time for translations, since for the literary historian, translation has had to do with 'language' only, not with literature – another pernicious outgrowth of the 'monolingualization' of literary history by Romantic historiographers intent on creating 'national' literatures preferably as uncontaminated as possible by foreign influences.<sup>2</sup>

Post-colonialist critics, following the structuralists and semioticians, have attempted to decentralise intellectual histories via translation studies. Selim writes:

Literary history is one of the most powerful vehicles by which the nation state protects its legitimacy and authority within and beyond its own borders. [...] Literary history is therefore not innocent of the broader political and discursive practices that have shaped the relationship between Europe and its others in modernity.<sup>3</sup>

The great interest in the Russian context in the period in question is that Russia's status as one of Europe's Oriental other was in dramatic transition, as was the

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<sup>2</sup> André Lefevere, "Translation: its Genealogy in the West," in *Translation, History and Culture*, eds Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (London: Printer Publishers, 1990), p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Samah Selim, "Pharaoh's Revenge: Translation, Literary History and Colonial Ambivalence," in *Critical Readings in Translation Studies*, ed. Mona Baker (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 321.



international status of Russian literature. The simultaneity of these processes was, of course, no coincidence. Selim has also written that while the legitimacy of literary history per se has come into question in the post-structuralist context, the reintegration of marginalised histories remains meaningful.<sup>4</sup> To this end, reception histories of Russian literature inclusive of marginalised émigré readings are crucial.

The present study's selection of readings of Dostoevsky is by no means exhaustive, and by no means arbitrary. Starting from the 'orientalist' roots of reception in chapter one, and the modern, proto-existential reading of Gide in chapter two, a particular branch has then been followed, namely the existential branch of reception. This attention was in part attracted by the curious absence of Dostoevsky's name from French histories of existential and existentialist thought and literature in France and in French scholarship. The Anglophone and Russophone literature on the matter differs greatly in this respect, which roused the curiosity at the origins of this project and which resulted in the choice of a historical approach to the question. The place and role of Russian émigré 'intermediaries' in this history is also – unsurprisingly, given the historical and political context – much emphasised by post-Soviet scholarship and Anglo-American comparatists, more often overlooked by French intellectual historians, as the literature review below demonstrates.

The reception history of Dostoevsky's philosophical fiction across this

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 322.

‘existential’ period also traces a second, crucial event in the intellectual history of Europe: that of a disciplinary breakdown between literary and philosophical writings, and between scientific and narrative conceptions of truth. This is a question of particular interest when addressing disparities between French and Russian cultural discourse from the 19th to 20th centuries and their marked institutional differences. In this regard, the existential/existentialist moment in intercultural history is a significant one: a meeting point between disciplinary cultures and discourses, as well as between national cultures. Languilli, writing a history of existentialism around 1970, bemoaned the fact that commentators on the movement had done away with the sacred distinction between literature and philosophy. Justifying his omission of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Rilke and Kafka from his history of existentialism, Languilli writes:

There is a hope related to this omission – the hope that the distinction between fictional discourse and philosophical discourse remains intact in the mind of the reader. The chances against such a hope being fulfilled are great, however, because of the blithe facility of this era, or of any era probably, to blur distinctions and to ignore differences.<sup>5</sup>

Languilli gave no further explanation as to why these differences were so sacred, other than that they had already been established. Languilli was mistaken insofar as distinctions were disintegrating not from the blitheness he associated with the era, but by necessity. The existential moment in intellectual history is significant precisely because these movements sought such a disintegration, by generating new, composite discourses in literary philosophy and philosophical literature.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Nino Languilli, ed., *The Existentialist Tradition: Selected writings* (New York: Anchor Books, 1971), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> These disciplinary boundaries had of course been blurred by the likes of Voltaire, however, the existential writers and thinkers went significantly further towards an integrated conception of the

The literary output of the philosophers associated with existentialism and the philosophical output of the writers cannot be seen as a coincidence: the movement was a hybrid one, and resulted in an enduring hybridisation. As this thesis will demonstrate, intercultural exchange was conducive to this deconstruction.

Initial clarification must be made between the usage of the terms existential and existentialist throughout this thesis. Ramona Fotiade has consistently underlined the distinction that religious existential thinkers emphasised between their own anti-systematic philosophies and later existentialist philosophies.<sup>7</sup> The term ‘existential’ is thus used throughout to denote religious, anti-systematic and anti-rationalist philosophies of human existence, while ‘existentialist’ and ‘existentialism’ refer to the atheist branch associated with Sartre. When referring to both collectively, Jean Wahl’s term ‘philosophies of existence’ is employed.

Even with such distinctions drawn, the anti-systematic, ‘literary’ nature of these philosophies makes pinning down definitions problematic. Patisson is typical in avoiding a definition:

Let us rather speak of an atmosphere, a climate that pervades all of them. The proof that there is such a thing as the philosophy of existence is that we can legitimately apply the term to certain philosophies and not to others. Therefore, there must be something that is common to these philosophies.

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philosophical novel, interrogating philosophical questions by means of poetics. Shervashidze has set French existential thought apart from contemporaneous German strands in that the French branch was concurrently literary and philosophical. See Vera Vakhtangovna Shervashidze, *Ot romantizma k ekzistentsializmu: Tvorchestvo Andre Mal'ro i Al'bera Kamiu* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo rossiiskogo universiteta druzhby narodov, 2005), p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Ramona Fotiade, *Conceptions of the Absurd: From Surrealism to the Existential Thought of Chestov and Fondane* (Oxford: Legenda, 2001), pp. 6, 229.

That something we shall try to pursue without perhaps ever attaining.<sup>8</sup>

The difficulty stems from the fact firstly that the majority of existential philosophies were expressly and self-consciously anti-systematic and interrogative or even antithetical in nature. Secondly, what Patisson shows an awareness of in the above quotation (though speaking of it in terms of an ‘atmosphere’ is perhaps unconstructive) is that ‘existential’ describes not a rigorous system of ideas but a complex of interconnected concerns and a specific language and mode of expression, coupled with a specific emotive drive. It was a movement, which corresponds to a specific period of history, but as a movement it was in perpetual motion. As with any movement, it is the intercommunication itself, between various writers and texts, that stitches it together, rather than any overarching schema. In intercultural terms, dialogue surrounding Dostoevsky’s fiction represented a series of such stitches.

Various aspects of Dostoevsky’s dissemination and penetration in France have, of course, been broached by a number of scholars. Due to the broad scope of the current study, specific literature reviews detailing the numerous existing comparative studies of Dostoevsky and specific French writers and movements will be addressed in separate discussions within the appropriate chapters. A genealogy only of reception histories with similar objectives to this one will here be outlined, followed by an overview of existing studies of Dostoevsky in relation to French existential and existentialist movements.

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<sup>8</sup> George Patisson, *Anxious Angels: A Retrospective View of Religious Existentialism* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1999), p. 4.

## Literature Review

Even before the turn of the century, Charbonnel (1897) produced a first and fairly documented denunciation of the pervasive influence of a neo-mystic revival he perceived to be influencing French culture, instigated by the translation of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy.<sup>9</sup> Hemmings (1950) offered a more scholarly approach to the same phenomenon, tracing the same, initial period of reception.<sup>10</sup> Seely (1966) then produced an unpublished thesis treating the critical reception of Dostoevsky in France, which contains some useful observations but also numerous factual inaccuracies with regards to chronology, and overlooks key publications.<sup>11</sup> The most expansive and rigorous study to date is Backès's (1972) doctoral thesis, which carried out much of the ground work necessary for the initial chapters of the current study.<sup>12</sup> Backès's findings remain relevant, if unpublished, though his methodological stance restrains him from interpretation of the data amassed and the work concludes on a statement of its own provisional nature.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, Backès also terminated his study at 1930, claiming that this is when Dostoevsky's reception 'fossilised', an assumption the current study will challenge.

Two Soviet studies from the same period also tackled the question of a connection between Dostoevsky's fiction and the French philosophical novel of

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<sup>9</sup> Victor Charbonnel, *Les Mystiques dans la littérature présente* (Paris: Mercure, 1897).

<sup>10</sup> F. W. J. Hemmings, *The Russian Novel In France (1884-1914)* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1950).

<sup>11</sup> Kay Gee Seely, "Dostoevsky and French Criticism" (Doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 1966).

<sup>12</sup> Backès, "Dostoïevski en France 1880 – 1930" (Doctoral thesis, Sorbonne-Paris IV, 1972).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 679.

the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup> Methodologically, these have aged less gracefully than their French counterparts, ideologically bound as they were to defend a social humanitarian conception of Dostoevsky from bourgeois misinterpretation. They also omit numerous important French publications.

Another significant gap in the field is that existing serious reception histories terminate by 1930. As such, they are completely dissociated from any of the absurdist and existentialist writers that followed and that drew directly both from Dostoevsky's thought and from the existential re-interpretations of Dostoevsky of the 1920s. While comparativists have delved into the relationship between Dostoevsky and French existential thought, this has not been assessed historically. For example, Erofeev's study (1975) remains the most astute comparative study of Dostoevskian, Sartrean and Camusian thought; however, these have yet to be reincorporated into France's intellectual history.<sup>15</sup>

A third deficiency of existing literature is that the influence of Russian émigré literary thought has yet to be incorporated both into the history of Dostoevsky's French reception and into the history of French existential movements. The existential readings of Shestov and Berdyaev are largely absent from the French narrative. In Backès's study, a rare exception, a brief discussion of Shestov's interpretation of Dostoevsky is included, with an apology excusing the liberty on

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<sup>14</sup> Y. A. Mileshin, *Dostoevskii i frantsuzskie romanisty pervoi poloviny XX veka* (Cheliabinsk: Cheliabinskii Rabochii, 1984). A. N. Lantynina, "Dostoevskii i ekzistentsializm," in *Dostoevskii: khudozhnik i myslitel'*, ed. K. N. Lomunov (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1972) pp. 210-259.

<sup>15</sup> References throughout are from the more recent re-edition: V. V. Erofeev, *Naiti v cheloveke cheloveka* (Moskva: Zebra E, 2003). Erofeev's research dates to his doctoral project "Dostoevskii i frantsuzskii ekzistentsializm" (1975).

the grounds of interest and pertinence of the reading, rather than its participation to French discourse as a French-language publication. Russian scholars, on the other hand, have explored the profound impact of Dostoevskian thought on Russian existential thought of the Silver Age as well as of the post-Revolutionary diaspora; however, this has rarely been considered as a participating voice in French discourse.

### Methods

Evaluating the existing literature, the following under-researched issues become apparent: How did consecutive generations of readers in France interpret and draw from the fictional thought of Dostoevsky? How is this reflected in the history of his French translation? What was the role of émigré interpreters of Dostoevsky in his French reception history? To what extent, and in what ways, might Dostoevsky have functioned as a platform for intercultural dialogue between French and Russian existential movements? In order to broach these questions, a historical methodology has been chosen. Findings are arranged chronologically. This presupposes a conception of intellectual history whereby ideas and their modes of expression may be meaningfully associated with specific times and places through an association with individuals and movements. Such a conception, like any, poses a number of problems. The first is that chronological presentation of periodised ideas and aesthetic values tends to disguise the fact that narratives pertaining to the rise and fall of intellectual tendencies are often projected retrospectively. Consequently, it would perhaps be more scrupulous to tell the story from end to start in acknowledgement of the historical telescope in

operation. Narrative history and chronology have traditionally been used to denote or connote causal relations, which, in the context of ideas, become difficult if not impossible to qualify. Nonetheless, intellectual history is peopled, and people are situated and form collectives with shared values and concerns which, contextualized historically, represent moods and movements, informed by pre-existing moods and movements.

As reception history has emerged as a historic genre, a number of strategies have been devised to confront this difficulty. Notions of passive influence have ceded to those of active reception.<sup>16</sup> These have in turn been neutralised by text-centric concepts of intertextuality, which have in turn come into question as reader-centric projections of little use to the literary historian.<sup>17</sup> The current study makes self-conscious use of all of these conceptual mechanisms, using historical evidence (drafts, diaries, correspondence) to establish authorial intent where possible, but without fearing a composite methodology that incorporates intertextual readings of fictional and philosophical texts. The study observes methodological awareness of the stance that translated texts contribute to national discourse, and thus fully incorporates, for example, émigré writings published in French as integral to French reception history. In such cases, translators and translations are also discussed at length. A final consideration is that this reception history, unlike the more tentative studies to date, treats critical reactions, adaptations, translations and intertextual references both in fictional and

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<sup>16</sup> Gide contributed to this debate as early as 1900 with his 'De l'influence en littérature' in Gide, *Essais critiques* pp. 403-417.

<sup>17</sup> Graham Allen, *Harold Bloom: A Poetics of Conflict* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 160-162.



philosophical texts, as comparable processes of interpretation. The goal in the analysis of any such retelling is to establish the philosophical and ideological assumptions underpinning the retelling through the analysis of alterations, and to situate these historically.

### Contexts

This approach presupposes, on the part of the current researcher, that the fiction of Dostoevsky has a philosophical and an ideological content (however multifaceted and ambiguous this may be) and that a retelling will emphasise or remove certain aspects. The polyphonic nature of Dostoevsky's fiction is such that debates continue, and will continue, as to "which voice resounds loudest."<sup>18</sup> These debates are misguided insofar as they presuppose an objective answer. The more pertinent question is which motifs *resonate* (i.e. subjectively) loudest with specific readers and historical contexts. As such, when speaking, throughout this thesis, of Dostoevsky's novelistic thought, the assumed understanding is not of a coherent philosophical system, but of a polyphonic and open-ended source from which other thinkers and writers drew inspiration.

The notion that Dostoevsky's fiction has a specific philosophical content, and that, as such, Dostoevsky can be spoken of as a philosopher, dates to his early Russian reception. This must here be analysed in order to understand the philosophical readings of Russian philosophers in emigration. Dostoevsky's writings had a

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<sup>18</sup> I. I. Evlampiev, *Istoriia russkoi filosofii* (Moskva: Vysshaia shkola, 2002), p. 99-100.

great impact on movements in literary philosophy associated with the Russian Silver Age at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. Beginning with Vasily Rozanov's seminal reading of the philosophical reflection on conceptions of human freedom and the irrational nature of human existence as presented by Dostoevsky's fiction, a tradition was established of reading Dostoevsky as a profoundly philosophical novelist. Merezhkovsky, Berdyaev, Shestov and Ivanov, following Rozanov, all developed readings of Dostoevsky that brought to the fore the religious existential problematics within Dostoevsky's work, with regard firstly to the irreconcilability of the human condition to any rational conception of a meaning of life, and secondly to the limitations of human interaction. The corresponding generation of philosophical theologians also interacted fruitfully with the existential problematics set out in Dostoevsky's fiction.

The prevalent place of Dostoevsky in the history of Russian thought has attracted due scholarly attention. Zenkovskii's canonical overview (1948) spoke of Dostoevsky belonging as much to philosophy as to literature in both the national and global context, adding that his influence, felt by all subsequent Russian thinkers, literally opened a new era of Russian thought.<sup>19</sup> Recent histories such as Hamburg and Poole's (2010) continue to confer to Dostoevsky the privileged position of the single most significant literary influence on Russian philosophy.<sup>20</sup>

Oleg Marchenko has observed that for a generation of Russian philosophers,

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<sup>19</sup> V. V. Zenkovskii, *Istoriia russkoi filosofii*, 2 vols. (Parizh: YMCA Press, 1948), I, pp. 414-5, 430, 436. Of course, the fact that Zenkovskii's work was authored in Paris, in immersion in the émigré context, cannot be overlooked.

<sup>20</sup> G. M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole, eds., *A History of Russian Philosophy (1830-1930)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 14.

Dostoevsky's fictional thinkers functioned as philosophers in their own right:

Художественный мир, созданный гением Ф.М.Достоевского, настолько завораживал русских религиозных мыслителей начала XX века, что грань между художественным вымыслом и действительностью становилась для них условной, зыбкой, проницаемой.<sup>21</sup>

Evlampiev goes as far as to compare Dostoevsky's impact on Russian thought of the Silver Age to the Renaissance in Western Europe. He writes:

[П]очти вся русская философия конца XIX - начала XX века занималась тем, что развивала и углубляла ту новую концепцию человека, основу которой заложил Достоевский.<sup>22</sup>

Ivanov and Berdyaev both attributed to Dostoevsky's fiction a profound impact on the intellectual development of their generation.<sup>23</sup> Not all witnesses of this historical moment were of this opinion.<sup>24</sup>

A historical narrative has thus been long established, running from Dostoevsky's novelistic thought, through the Silver Age and into the intellectual culture of the diaspora. This narrative became a highly important one in the 1990s, during the collective search for an alternative history and a link back to pre-Revolutionary

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<sup>21</sup> Oleg Marchenko, *Ocherki po istorii filosofii* (Moskva: Mir Knigi, 2002), pp. 74-75.

<sup>22</sup> Evlampiev, *Istoriia russkoi filosofii*, p. 132.

<sup>23</sup> "Новый человек должен принять и пережить тему Достоевского." writes Berdyaev: "После Достоевского что-то радикальное меняется в человеке. Мир проходит через тьму." See "*O Dostoevskom*". *Rech' N. A. Berdiaeva na sobranii Rel. Fil. Akademii v Parizhe v pamiat' Dostoevskogo*, 1931, RGALI, Fond 1496 Opis' 1 Ed.Khr. 95, p. 3. Ivanov wrote, in 1911: "Достоевский жив среди нас, потому что от него или чрез него всё, чем мы живём, - и наш свет, и наше подполье. [...] Он сделал сложными наши душу, нашу веру, наше искусство [...]. Он принёс нам откровение личности." See Viacheslav Ivanov, *Rodnoe i vselenskoe* (Moskva: Respublika, 1994), p. 283.

<sup>24</sup> It may be observed that many of the thinkers and writers associated with the Silver Age were entirely exterior to the existential faction, but drew equally from Dostoevsky's fiction. This includes Soloviev's Slavophile reading, as well as Florovskii's romantic reading. Florovskii argued against the notion of a 'Dostoevskian renaissance' that was prevalent among the thinkers associated with Russian existentialism. See Georgii Florovskii, "Khitrost' Razuma" (1921), reprinted in Georgii Florovsky, *Vera i kul'tura* (Sankt Peterburg: RKhGI, 2002), p. 45.

culture. A prime example of this is Ivanova's 1999 study, which termed this strand 'Russian classical philosophy'.<sup>25</sup> Despite this movement of Russian existential thought and existential criticism having generated an extensive body of secondary literature during recent decades, this secondary literature has often been ideologically coloured by the collective search for an alternative narrative of Russian intellectual history to Soviet intellectual life. As such, the continuation of the religious philosophical thought of the Silver Age into the émigré thought and culture has been thoroughly explored but in complete isolation from intellectual developments in the 'host cultures' of the diaspora.

The interest of an intercultural reading of this history lies above all in the fact that Russian and French modes and structures of discourse differed traditionally. This is one of the reasons that literary sources, including Dostoevsky, have often been overlooked or omitted from French histories of philosophy and of existentialism as a philosophy. The second reason is that the colossal figure of Sartre, in defining, terminologising and dominating the existentialist terrain, became the retrospective representative of a movement that overtly rejected his leadership. Reception history can bring these issues to light. Through the reception history of Dostoevsky, this study represents a counter-narrative that subverts long-standing assumptions regarding the relationship between the existential and existentialist movements in France around the early-mid 20th century, simultaneously reassessing relations between French and Russian branches of existential philosophy, through their common interest in the fiction of Dostoevsky.

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<sup>25</sup> A. A. Ivanova, *Russkaia klassicheskaia filosofii: Ot F. M. Dostoevskogo k I. A. Il'inu* (Moskva: Dialog MGU, 1999).

## Outline

Chapter one treats the two initial decades of Dostoevsky's reception beginning with an in-depth analysis of Derély's translation of *Crime and Punishment* on account of its significance in securing Dostoevsky's reception. Early critical responses are then compared and contrasted, giving particular attention to Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé's seminal overview of Dostoevsky's fiction in *Le Roman russe*. The ideas of the oriental and the irrational emerge from this analysis, and are explored in particular depth. Other early translations and adaptations are then compared in order to assess the assumptions underpinning them and the various ideological forces at work, before drawing conclusions as to the overall impact of Vogüé and his legacy in terms of Dostoevsky's French reception.

Chapter two centres around the figure of André Gide and his reading in the context of other contemporary readings, such as those of Élie Faure and André Suares, from the turn of the century to the 1920s. These readings are situated thematically between the earlier orientalist readings and existential readings to come. The evolution of Gide's reading is traced biographically on account of Gide's significance in later chapters, as a proto-existentialist writer and as an active agent in intercultural communication between French and Russian émigré literary thinkers, as well as the vast body of material available pertaining to Gide's personal and intellectual development.

Chapter three begins with the arrival of Russian émigré thinker Lev Shestov and

his existential, anti-rationalist interpretation of Dostoevsky. Existential thinker and translator Boris de Schloezer's subsequent re-translation of *Notes from Underground* is analysed as an 'existential translation.' Nicolas Berdyaev's romantic existential reading is then discussed in comparison to Shestov's. Gabriel Marcel's writings on Dostoevsky, particularly a little-known essay on Dostoevsky and Viacheslav Ivanov, is analysed in relation to Marcel's proximity to Russian émigré circles and thinkers, and in relation to Marcel's emerging religious existential philosophy. Finally, chapter three examines the transcripts of the meetings of the Studio Franco-Russe and the broad significance of Dostoevsky's fiction as a platform for Franco-Russian intercultural dialogue in Paris in the 1920s and 30s.

Chapter four presents an analysis of critical and intertextual dialogue around Dostoevsky's fiction (specifically *Notes from Underground* and *Brothers Karamazov*) among writers associated with France's atheist existentialist movements in literature and philosophy. Jean-Paul Sartre's early fiction, Louis-René des Forêts's *Le Bavard*, and Camus's *La Chute* are compared in relation to the shared hypotext of *Notes from Underground*. The prominent place of Dostoevsky in Camus's two philosophical essays is then discussed in relation to earlier readings by Gide and Shestov. Finally, Camus's theatre adaptation of *The Devils* is discussed.

Through the lense of the interactions of readers and writers with Dostoevsky's fiction emerge new perspectives on the history of literature and criticism, of translation practice, of shifting French perspectives on the legitimacy of Russian

cultural production, and of shifting modes of literary and philosophical expression.

## Chapter One: The moralist readings: Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé and the first translators (1880-1900)

*Comme si quelque chose existait dans ce monde indépendamment de la valeur morale!*

E.-M. de Vogüé<sup>26</sup>

The *Fin de Siècle* was a crucial period in the internationalisation and cosmopolitisation of literature in France. The rise of prose fiction throughout the nineteenth century meant that for the first time the dominant mode of literary expression lent itself readily to translation. Up until this point Franco-Russian intercultural relations had been fairly uni-directional. Cadot has analysed the superficial writings of French aristocratic visitors to Russia published in the mid-nineteenth century (which Dostoevsky had been scathingly critical of).<sup>27</sup> This uni-directionality changed from the 1880s, however, in part due to the unprecedented quality of original literature that Russia's Golden Age had produced and in part due to a general wave of interest in 'oriental' literatures that typified literary tastes from the decadents through the Belle époque. This interest was, crucially, far more interrogative and assimilative than its superficial Romantic predecessor: a step away from exoticism and towards cosmopolitanism.<sup>28</sup>

*Les Russes*, were by far the most successful of 'oriental' literatures in France

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<sup>26</sup> E.-M de Vogüé, *Le Roman russe, Slavica* (Montreux: Ganguin et Laubscher, 1971), p. 242.

<sup>27</sup> M. Cadot, *L'Image de la Russie dans la vie intellectuelle française (1839-1856)* (Paris: Fayard, 1967), pp. 42-43.

<sup>28</sup> William Leonard Schwartz, *The Imaginative Interpretation of the Far East in Modern French Literature (1800-1925)* (Paris: Champion, 1927), p. 212.



during this period. This cannot be dissociated from the concerted efforts of Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, the French diplomat who quite literally introduced contemporary Russian literature to France at the pivotal period of the forging of the Dual Alliance. This is not to say that Russia's developing national literature was entirely unknown in France prior to Vogüé's publications: Turgenev was already well-established and translated due to his personal proximity to French literary circles, meanwhile Pushkin and Gogol had been translated by Prosper Mérimée, in collaboration with Turgenev.<sup>29</sup> Dostoevsky, nonetheless, remained almost entirely unknown in France until the mid-1880s.<sup>30</sup>

The broad cultural impact of Vogüé's *Le Roman russe* was widely acknowledged by his contemporaries in France as well as abroad, to the extent that Charbonnel's 1897 exposition of the neo-mystic revival associated with French decadentism opens with the sentence: "En 1886, parut *Le Roman russe*, de M. le vicomte de Vogüé." Despite this, the work has received little in-depth scholarly attention.<sup>31</sup> Hemmings' (1950) still relevant study of the very earliest French reactions to Russian fiction gives Vogüé his rightful prominence, as does Backès's thesis (1972). By far the most profound study of Vogüé and his *Roman russe* was carried out by Röhl (1976), who drew together much of the above together with

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<sup>29</sup> Waddington has researched this at length: see for example, Patrick Waddington and Florence Montreynaud, "A Bibliography of French Translations from the Works of I. S. Turgenev, 1854-1885," *Slavonic and East European Review* 58, no. 1 (1980); Patrick Waddington, *Turgenev & George Sand: An improbable entente* (London: Macmillan, 1981). See also M. Cadot, "E.-M. de Vogüé," in *France-Russie, Après-midi d'étude du 10 mars 2005* (Bibliothèque François Mitterrand, Paris: 2005) [audio-recording] vol. II.

<sup>30</sup> Dupuy's 1885 overview of 19th century Russian literature for example does not feature Dostoevsky. See Ernest Dupuy, *Les grands maîtres de la littérature russe du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Lecene et Oudin, 1885). It is perhaps not surprising that Dostoevsky remained unknown, given Turgenev's role in the initial stages of the introduction of Russian literature to France and his famous personal animosity towards Dostoevsky.

<sup>31</sup> Charbonnel, *Les Mystiques dans la littérature présente*, p. 11.

an array of archival resources. Certain early French translations have also attracted critical attention.<sup>32</sup> However, these studies, preceding as they did the paradigmatic shift in translation studies of the 1980s, are invariably concerned with assessing quality, defined as the achievement of a permissible compromise between fidelity to authorial intention and readability. Since the Death of the Author and the work of Lefevere, emphasis has shifted to the more meaningful task of assessing the implications of variations between the ideological content of the novels and of the translations concerned.

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<sup>32</sup> Backès compared and appraised a number of Dostoevsky's French translators, in particular Bienstock's and Pascal's renderings of *The Adolescent*. See Backès, "Dostoïevski en France 1880 – 1930", pp. 292-304. Hemmings denounced the infidelities of Harpéline-Kaminsky's Brothers Karamazov highlighting the numerous deviations from the original, only to conclude that "for thirty-five years [till the publication of Mongault and Laval's unabridged translation] Dostoevsky passed for something other than he was, in France." Thus he did not engage in any way with this data. For early translation analyses, denouncing deviation from the original was an end in itself, rather than a field of enquiry. See F. W. J. Hemmings, "Dostoevsky in disguise. The 1888 French version of the Brothers Karamazov," *French Studies. A Quarterly Review* IV (1950).

## Initial translations

The initial translations of Dostoevsky in French have received some critical attention following their fierce public denunciation by a second generation of critics and translators (not least Gide, discussed below) during the process of canonisation that followed throughout the 20s and 30s. Until then, Dostoevsky had been received as a barbaric, oriental writer. This perceived barbarism had several implications for translations. Firstly, western critics and translators made less recognition of authorship when ‘oriental’ literature was concerned: there was no aesthetic mastermind for translators to be faithful to, but rather a ‘raw talent’ to be improved by the translator, as well as cultural anomalies to be accentuated or normalised at the translator’s discretion.<sup>33</sup> International copyright laws, only recently introduced for translated texts, did not extend beyond Western Europe. This meant that oriental literatures were not only marketably fashionable but also considerably cheaper to publish.

*Crime and Punishment*, the text that was principal in sealing and sustaining Dostoevsky’s popularity in France, appeared in Plon in 1884 (contemporaneously to Vogüé’s *Le Roman russe* discussed below) translated by Victor Derély.<sup>34</sup> Though fairly abridged, the translation in fact contains fewer substantial omissions (or additions) than the more liberal adaptations of the other works that

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<sup>33</sup> Selim observes that judgement as to the quality of translations of European literature to non-European languages in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was based on fidelity to the “romantic genius” of the author, whereas translation in the opposite direction was a process of ‘improving’. See Selim, “Pharoah’s Revenge: Translation, Literary History and Colonial Ambivalence,” p. 225.

<sup>34</sup> *Humiliated and Offended* was the very first of Dostoevsky’s novels to appear in French print, also in 1884, though its appearance went comparatively unnoticed. Vogüé alludes to this unenthusiastic reception in Vogüé, *Le Roman russe*, p. 232.

were to follow. It does, however, contain a quantity of highly significant liberal renderings, which serve to limit the scope for interpretation of the enigmatic original. Derély's modifications influence (or indeed remove) all of the major mysteries that *Crime and Punishment* presents: the inspiration behind Raskolnikov's crime, the motivation for his surrender, and Dostoevsky's ultimate critique of rational materialism. For each example cited in the following analysis, Dostoevsky's original features in the first column, Derély's (1884) in the second, and the corresponding quotation from Chuzeville's (1931) translation is included for comparison in the third column.

Beginning with the principal philosophical enquiry of the novel, the theoretical basis for Raskolnikov's crime, a striking modification can be observed in Derély's translation:

У меня тогда одна **мысль выдумалась, в первый раз в жизни, которую никто и никогда еще до меня не выдумывал! Никто!** Мне вдруг ясно, как солнце, представилось, **что как же это ни единый до сих пор не посмел и не смеет, проходя мимо всей этой нелепости, взять просто-запросто все за хвост и стряхнуть к черту!** Я... я захотел осмелиться и убил... я только осмелиться захотел, Соня, вот вся причина!<sup>35</sup>

Du jour où cette **vérité** m'est apparue, claire comme le soleil, j'ai voulu *oser* et j'ai tué... j'ai voulu seulement faire acte **d'audace** Sonia, tel a été le mobile de mon action!<sup>36</sup>

**“Une idée alors m’est venue pour la première fois de ma vie, une idée que personne jusqu’à ce moment n’avait eue encore. Personne!** J’ai compris soudain, clair comme le jour que **personne n’avait encore osé, voyant combien tout est absurde, prendre tout simplement ce monstre par la queue et s’envoyer au diable!** Moi... moi... j’ai voulu tenter un coup d’audace... et j’ai tué... je ne voulais que *tenter le*

<sup>35</sup> F. M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh*, 30 vols. (Leningrad: Nauka, 1973), VI, p. 321. Throughout the following translation analyses I use underlining to highlight

Thus, while in the original text and the 1931 translation, Raskolnikov acts in protestation, setting his rebellious will against the absurdity of human existence (“проходя мимо всей этой нелепости, взять просто-запросто все за хвост и стряхнуть к черту!”), the 1884 translation permitted him only to dare an act of “audacity”, the notion of which presupposes the existence of the very transcendental values that Raskolnikov’s ‘absurd’ universe does not recognise. The notion of absurdity is key to Raskolnikov’s experience both before and after his crime and to the theoretical basis for his crime. The difference between the two French translations with regards to the concept of the absurd corresponds with the broader, modernist shift in the concept of the absurd in terms of *Begriffsgeschichte*. In addition to removing the notion of an absurd universe, Derély’s choice of “faire acte d’audace” as a rendering of “осмелиться” does not concede that the ethical codes subverted are overthrown, while Dostoevsky’s “стряхнуть к черту” metaphor clearly does. In the same vein, Derély has chosen to translate “мысль”(subjective) as “vérité” (objective) and to completely remove Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov’s emphatic assertions of his idea’s originality. The self-consciously individualistic, subjectivist aspect of the theory is thus silenced. Dostoevsky had presented a man killing not for a conviction of a universal truth, but rather in order to proudly validate his *own* original thought in full awareness precisely of its non-universality. This seems to have been either misunderstood or else consciously censored through Derély’s striking omissions.

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words and phrases for comparison. Italics throughout are the authors’ and translators’ own.

<sup>36</sup> F. M. Dostoevsky, *Le Crime et le châtement*, trans. V. Derély, 2 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1885), II, p. 163.

<sup>37</sup> F. M. Dostoevsky, *Crime et châtement*, trans. J. Chuzeville, 2 vols. (Paris: Bossard, 1931), II, p. 719.

When translating Raskolnikov's exposition of the theoretical motivation for his philosophical murder (i.e. that human freedom is limited only by psychological weaknesses ordained by no universal ethical values) the hero's ideas are altered curiously in both French translations. Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov elucidates that the *необыкновенный человек* has the right to transgress societal codes of conduct; in a world with no transcendental guarantor of ethical systems, individual will-to-power and individual capacity *is* law. Both translators normalised this subversive content:

Но те люди вынесли свои	Mais ces gens-là sont allés	Mais ces gens-là ont
шаги, и потому <i>они</i>	jusqu'au bout, et c'est ce	continué dans leur voie,
<i>правы</i> <sup>38</sup>	qui les justifie <sup>39</sup>	c'est ce qui les a justifiés <sup>40</sup>

In both of the above French translations, Dostoevsky's emphatically non-processional *they are right* (the italics are Dostoevsky's) is reduced to a process of justification: the act is *rendered* just retrospectively by virtue of accomplishment. History thus functions as the transcendental justifying force, as opposed to the Dostoevskian representation of the individual capacity to 'bear out' the burden of the act. Two disparate conceptions are thus revealed. At one extremity is Dostoevsky's protagonist's stress on the dependence of the definition of the just on the will and capacity of the agent. In both translations, however, the far less subversive conception that the individual act is justified historically by virtue of accomplishment: a radically subjective relativism has been replaced by historical relativism.

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<sup>38</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, VI, p. 417.

<sup>39</sup> Dostoevsky, *Le Crime et le châtement*, II, pp. 299-300.

<sup>40</sup> Dostoevsky, *Crime et châtement*, II, pp. 933-934.

Plunged by his transgressive act into a reality that he no longer has any means of interpreting, Raskolnikov loses all capacity to identify ‘truth’ not only in his theories, but in his own words and acts. Truth per se becomes problematic, paradoxical and out of reach for Raskolnikov in the world his act has brought into being. This is best expressed in his confession to Sonia, throughout which he constantly repeats and contradicts himself, both characters finding themselves face to face with what would come to be termed the Absurd. Again, the translators significantly alter Raskolnikov’s experience:

- Ох, это <b>не то, не то</b> , в тоске восклицала Соня, - и разве можно так... <b>нет, это не так, не так!</b>	-Est-ce que c’est possible?... Non, il y a <b>autre chose!</b>	-Non, <b>ce n’est pas cela, ce n’est pas cela!</b>
- Сама видишь, что <b>не так!</b> .. А я ведь искренно рассказал, правду!	- Tu juges toi-même qu’il y a <b>autre chose!</b> Pourtant je t’ai dit la vérité!”	-Tu dis toi-même que <b>ce n’est pas cela! Pourtant je t’ai sincèrement raconté tout, c’est la vérité.</b>
- Да <b>какая ж это правда!</b> О господи! – Да <b>какая ж это правда!</b> О господи!	- <b>La vérité!</b> Oh! seigneur!	- <b>Et quelle vérité!</b> Ô! Seigneur!
- Я ведь только вошь убил, Соня [...]	-Après tout, Sonia, je n’ai tué qu’une vermine [...]	-Après tout je n’ai tué qu’un pou [...].
- Это человек-то вошь!	- Cette vermine était une créature humaine!	-Ce pou était un être humain.
- Да ведь и я знаю, что не вошь [...] А впрочем, я вру, Соня, [...] <b>давно уже вру...</b> Это <b>все не то; ты справедливо говоришь. Совсем, совсем, совсем тут другие причины!</b> .. <sup>41</sup>	- Eh, je sais bien que ce n’était pas une vermine <b>dans le sens littéral du mot</b> [...] du reste, <b>ce que je dis n’a pas le sens commun</b> [...] <b>tu as raison, Sonia, ce n’est pas cela.</b> <sup>42</sup>	-Et je sais bien que ce n’était pas un vrai pou (...) D’ailleurs, <b>je mens, Sonia (...)</b> <b>Ce n’est pas encore cela. Tu as raison.</b> <sup>43</sup>

Derély’s rendering reveals fascinating differences between his and Dostoevsky’s

<sup>41</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, VI, p. 320.

<sup>42</sup> Dostoevsky, *Le Crime et le châtement* (trad. Derély), II, p. 161.

<sup>43</sup> Dostoevsky, *Crime et châtement*, II, p. 716.

notions of truth. Raskolnikov and Sonia’s repetitions of “это не то; все не то” (that’s not it/this is all wrong) are rendered by Derély as “il y a autre chose”. The problem appears to Derély that the *entirety* of the truth has not yet been *unveiled*, whereas in Dostoevsky’s text, a multitude of conflicting interpretations battle hopelessly for supremacy where no yardstick remains by which to measure them.<sup>44</sup> Consequently, where Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov finds that each of his attempted interpretations is a “lie”, the C19th translation has him question the “common sense” of his judgments. Derély thus rejects that in Dostoevsky’s fictional world common sense is (emphatically) non-equivalent to truth. A second manifestation of this difference may be noted in Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov’s admission that Sonia has “spoken justly”, rendered in both French translations via *avoir raison*. Herein lies a linguistic disparity between the russophone and francophone conceptualisations of ‘being right’: the former by reference to the *prav- seme* (justice/truth/right); the latter by reference to reason.

Accordingly, when Raskolnikov directly draws Sonia’s attention to the absurdity of the equally possible and dubitable reality, the 1884 translation simply removes the sentence, replacing it with a repetition of “tu as raison”:

<p>И это точь-в-точь так и было! Тебе смешно? Да, Соня, тут всего смешнее то, что, может, именно оно так и было...<sup>45</sup></p>	<p>Tu trouves ça risible? Tu a raison, Sonya.<sup>46</sup></p>	<p>Cela te semble drôle? Oui, Sonia, le plus drôle est que peut-être cela s’est passé exactement ainsi.<sup>47</sup></p>
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<sup>44</sup> Chuzeville's 1931 translation is faithful to the original but for the replacement of *vse ne to* with *ce n’est pas encore cela*, again conveying a temporary ignorance of the truth rather than a more definitive inaccessibility.

<sup>45</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, VI, p. 319.

<sup>46</sup> Dostoevsky, *Le Crime et le châtement*, (Trans. Derély) II, p. 160.



Thus where Dostoevsky’s text expresses the impossibility for judgment, the early French translation simply imposes judgment. Where Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov’s confession is littered with self-interruptions (“Нет, это не так! Я опять не так рассказываю!”<sup>48</sup>) Derély simply removes them, along with the repetitions and stammerings of the protagonist.<sup>49</sup> The fact that Raskolnikov himself is at a loss to interpret his own absurd reality, even his own actions, finding no stable means by which to judge them, has also been removed by Derély’s translation.

In the same vein, the translator’s treatment of Raskolnikov’s final police-station confession is also telling. The unanswerable question of *Crime and Punishment* remains that as to Raskolnikov’s genuine principal murder motive, problematised through Dostoevsky’s ambiguous representation of the relation between Raskolnikov’s economic hardship, his ‘humanitarian’ ambitions, and finally his aristocratic theoretical impetus to transgress. Raskolnikov’s confession, in Dostoevsky’s version, had syntactically emphasized the disconnectedness of these motives. Derély’s protagonist opts instead to close the question in favour of the least unsettling conclusion: a causality between economic necessity and transgression.

Это я убил тогда  
старуху-чиновницу и

C’est moi qui ai assassiné à  
coups de hache, **pour les** C’est moi qui ai assassiné  
à coups de hache la vieille

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<sup>47</sup> Dostoevsky, *Crime et châtime*nt, (Trans. Chuzeville) II, p. 715.

<sup>48</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, VI, p. 320.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, *Ibid.*, Dostoevsky, *Le Crime et le châtime*nt, VI, pp. 21, 98, 104, 320-321. and Dostoevsky, *Le Crime et le châtime*nt, (Trad. Derély) I, pp. 91, 164, 308, II, p. 161.

*сестру ее Лизавету  
топором, и ограбил.*<sup>50</sup>

**voler**, la vieille prêteuse  
sur gages et la sœur  
Elisabeth.<sup>51</sup>

prêteuse sur gages, et sa  
sœur Elisabeth, **et qui les  
ai volées.**<sup>52</sup>

Syntactically, Derély's parenthetical clause functions in diametric opposition to Dostoevsky's. In the original, it serves to emphasise the unconnectedness of the two acts and motives, as accurately translated by Chuzeville. Derély, contrarily, introduces a parenthetical excuse incongruous to Raskolnikov's own, theoretical interpretation of his crime in the original, as he had stated explicitly: "я только осмелиться захотел, Соня, вот вся причина!"<sup>53</sup>

Thus, in Derély's version, Raskolnikov's murder-motives have been clarified, his theory simplified, and his paradoxical, proto-absurdist experience reduced to a more familiar monistic system. However, Derély's greatest liberty concerns Raskolnikov's confession, and with it, the enduring mystery of Dostoevsky's novel. In the original, Raskolnikov clings, even in the epilogue, to the conviction that if he had been strong enough to bear the burden of his act no higher judge would stand above him. Raskolnikov expresses a distinct lack of guilt during his so-called confession, which is radically transformed by both French translators:

Ну... ну, вот и все... Ну,  
разумеется, что я убил  
старуху, - это я худо  
сделал... ну, и довольно!<sup>54</sup>

Eh, bien, voilà tout...  
Naturellement j'ai eu tort  
de tuer la vieille... allons,  
assez.<sup>55</sup>

Eh, bien, voilà tout...  
Naturellement j'ai eu tort de  
tuer la vieille... Allons, en  
voilà assez!<sup>56</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, IV, p. 410. The emphasis is Dostoevsky's, indicative of the importance attached to the statement and its specific wording. A literal translation might read: "It was I who killed [back then] the old lady [of rank] and her sister Lizaveta with a hatchet, and robbed them."

<sup>51</sup> Dostoevsky, *Le Crime et le châtement* (Trans. Derély), II, p. 286.

<sup>52</sup> Dostoevsky, *Crime et châtement* (Trans. Chuzeville), II, p. 914.

<sup>53</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, VI, p. 321.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., VI, p. 319.

<sup>55</sup> Dostoevsky, *Le Crime et le châtement*, (Trans. Derély) II, p. 161.

Raskolnikov, in the French, admits the natural quality of the *wrongness* of his act, i.e. admits that his act breached an indubitable, ‘natural’ ethical code. This is the direct opposite of the Russian phrase, in which it is not the ‘wrongness’ that seems self-evident to Raskolnikov, but rather the decision to kill. Furthermore, *razumeetsja* implies not the naturalness (*estestvennost’*) of the act, which would connote an innate system of natural values governing human action, but rather the role of reason (*razum*) that provoked the crime. Meanwhile, ‘*ja khudo sdela!*’ jars in the context of a would-be confession as might ‘I messed up’ in colloquial English.

Raskolnikov’s eventual capitulation is also stripped of its amoralistic and anti-humanistic dimensions. When Sonia, in the original, poses the question: ‘but how will you live without man,’ the meaning is not merely without ‘other men’ in a practical sense, but rather, beyond the conception of man that his idea and its enactment have shattered: how to live in a world in which human life has been stripped of any absolute value. This aspect both translators have missed:

Ну как же, как же без человека-то прожить! <sup>57</sup>	Eh bien, comment rester dehors de la société humaine? <sup>58</sup>	Et comment vivre en dehors de toute présence humaine? <sup>59</sup>
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In a final dream, Dostoevsky represents Raskolnikov’s ideology as a plague sweeping Europe, allegorically depicting the author’s conviction of the impossibility of moral truth independent of Christianity, and a consequent impossibility of ethical human coexistence in an individualistic, atheist world.

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<sup>56</sup> Dostoevsky, *Crime et châtime* (Trans. Chuzeville), II, p. 716.

<sup>57</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, VI, p. 323.

<sup>58</sup> Dostoevsky, *Le Crime et le châtime* (Trans. Derély) II, p. 166.

<sup>59</sup> Dostoevsky, *Crime et châtime* (Trans. Chuzeville) II, p. 723.

Either the early translators' miscomprehension of the argument or else (equally conceivably) a distaste for the dream device of authorial quasi-supernatural didactic intervention in an otherwise refreshingly ambiguous novel, is revealed in the following startling translations:

Не знали, кого и как судить, не могли согласиться, что считать злом, что добром. Не знали, кого обвинять, кого оправдывать. <sup>60</sup>	On ne pouvait s'entendre sur le bien et sur le mal <sup>61</sup>	Chacun croyait posséder seul la vérité et discerner ce qui était le bien ou le mal. <sup>62</sup>
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In the first translation, and to only a slightly lesser degree in the second, the loss of moral truth, and the impossibility of the humanist project to construct society from man up rather than from God down – clearly the essential problem Dostoevsky had wished to depict with *Crime and Punishment* – has been reduced to a general difficulty in agreeing on ethical questions.

This analysis of Derély's alterations to – and corresponding interpretation of – Dostoevsky's text has been far from exhaustive. Further examples could have been provided to show a general neutralisation of the contradictions and paradoxes, in which the original is so rich, and a drastic reduction in the agency of characters, resulting in a loss of polyphonic poetics. However, analysis has been limited to the task of tracing changing interpretations of the philosophical ideas expressed in Dostoevsky's works rather than to assess the reception of his aesthetics. Clearly, Derély's 1884 version of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, the only version available in French for almost half a century, represented on this

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<sup>60</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, VI, p. 420.

<sup>61</sup> Dostoevsky, *Le Crime et le châtime*nt (Trans. Derély), II, p. 303.

<sup>62</sup> Dostoevsky, *Crime et châtime*nt (Trans. Chuzeville), II, p. 938.

plain a drastic simplification. Raskolnikov's individualistic and amoralistic conception of human reality is neutralised, and the philosophical prerogative of his crime has ceded to the more consoling and ostensibly logical hunger motive.

This comparison highlights that what later commentators will term Raskolnikov's experience of the Absurd, and his struggle with a multiplicity of subjectivist truths and interpretations, have been appropriated by the C19th translation to an incomplete or obscured vision of a monistic conception of empirical truth. Furthermore, Dostoevsky's ultimate attack on the humanist notion of man and his capacity to rationally construct a moral world independent of religion is reduced to an expression of the difficulty of the endeavor. As to whether Derély made these modifications consciously or unconsciously, conjecture would be futile. In any case, the vast majority of French readers would have little choice but to accept this interpretation for decades to come.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> In the autumn of 1888, an adaptation of *Crime et châtime* (based on Derély's abridged and 'rationalised' translation) was staged by Paul Ginisty and Hugues Le Roux, to great success. Backès has analysed this, noting the addition of a crucial detail: when Raskolnikov enters the pawn-broker's flat to kill her, Sonya is in the room, and he witnesses her being humiliated. His murder is an act of passion, motivated by indignation at the treatment of Sonya by the pawn-broker. Thus the subversive, philosophical motive for the crime, in the original, is normalised, replaced by a banal and conventionally heroic psychological motive. Similarly, Backès observed that the play ended not on a compassionate love between Raskolnikov and Sonya, but in a trite romantic outburst. See Backès, "Dostoïevski en France 1880 – 1930", p. 181.

## Initial Criticism

Derély was not the only interpreter to stress the economic motive of Raskolnikov's crime and diminish the act's philosophical dimension. Arvède Barine's 1884 article went to equally great lengths to normalise Raskolnikov's crime. Quoting (in her own translation) the passage from Raskolnikov's confession to Sonia concerning his poverty, Barine saw fit to entirely omit the three crucial lines in which Raskolnikov confesses to refusing food out of spite. Barine has been obliged to censor these lines in order to preserve her thesis - namely that Raskolnikov and his compatriots are innocent victims of a gulf between received enlightened European ideologies and contemporary Russian social reality (understood by Barine as poverty, despotism and injustice).<sup>64</sup> Barine has had to turn a blind eye to the fact that Raskolnikov's poverty was self-inflicted, that he did not rob his victim effectively nor, in any case, make any use of the spoils. The difficulty lies in the fact that Dostoevsky's protagonist's rebellion extends to the point of undermining even to his own pragmatic needs. This presented a challenge to the positivist culture of the French critic of 1880s France. Dostoevsky's rebellious philosophers have rather, according to Barine, been driven mad: "à force de retourner ces idées [those of the French and German Enlightenment], l'estomac vide et la tête chaude".<sup>65</sup> Barine thus, by slight of hand, transforms *Crime and Punishment* into a critique of Tsarist Russia's failure

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<sup>64</sup> Arvède Barine, "Dostoievski: un grand romancier," *La Revue Politique et littéraire (Revue bleue)* 2<sup>e</sup> semestre (3<sup>e</sup> série), no. 26 (1884), 805. Compared to Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, VI, p. 320.

<sup>65</sup> Barine, "Dostoievski: un grand romancier," p. 805.

to live up to rationalist western ideologies as opposed to the critique of these very ideologies' incapacity to account for the experience of individual reality that Dostoevsky makes so explicit throughout his writings. Barine attempts to reassure her reader that Raskolnikov "pensait moins au crime et plus à ses conséquences bienfaitantes,"<sup>66</sup> a notion that the protagonist himself rejects in his confession and that his consequent actions refute. This motive is, furthermore, given only minimal attention in Dostoevsky's exploration of the killer's mind, while the details of the act itself and its theoretical justification are explored down to the minute detail.

True to the positivist tradition, Raskolnikov's rebellion is reduced to a result of his social condition, and its non-conformity to the more 'developed' western ideologies he had read:

s'épuiser le cerveau à chercher des conciliations impossibles entre les exigences d'une imagination du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, nourrie de théories socialistes et humanitaires, et la condition de sujet de l'empereur Nicolas.<sup>67</sup>

Madness, particularly a nineteenth-century French conception of madness, becomes crucial to such a reduction of Dostoevsky's fiction: Raskolnikov having *perdu la raison*, hatches an insane solution to his economic situation. However, as observed in relation to the dream of the plague, and as Dostoevsky endlessly underlined, the nihilist's madness *is* his atheistic positivism: Raskolnikov's act was necessitated by his reason. To escape such a conclusion, Barine once again carefully misquotes Raskolnikov, having him 'confess' to his madness – an

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.p. 805.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.p. 805.

alteration which few could verify, Derély's translation having taken a similar liberty:

Original:	Derély:	Barine:
- это не то! <b>А лучше... предположи (да! Этак действительно лучше!), предположи</b> , что я самолюбив, завистлив, зол, мерзок, мстителен, ну... и, <b>пожалуй</b> , еще склонен к сумасшествию. <b>(Уж пусть все зараз! Про сумасшествие-то говорили и прежде, я заметил!)</b> <sup>68</sup>	ce n'est pas cela! Figure-toi plutôt que je suis rempli d'amour-propre, envieux, méchant, vindicatif et, de plus, enclin à la folie. <sup>69</sup> [remainder omitted by Derély.]	il n'avait déjà plus en ce moment l'esprit tout à fait sain: "j'avais des dispositions à la folie.", dit-il dans sa confession. <sup>70</sup>

Thus, in the hands of both the translator and the critic, one of the numerous interpretations, with which Raskolnikov quite literally *toys* linguistically, melding with the perspective of the onlooker through the third person plural, is transformed into a genuine 'confession' of his own insanity. The far more crucial idea, explicit from Raskolnikov's final dream - that this insanity *is* the positivist ideology dominating European thought - was either lost on both commentators. Perhaps it was deemed too blasphemous to retransmit. Raskolnikov, along with his nation, is reduced to an imbecile, and as such the representative of Russia and "la plainte d'un peuple malade, qui se sent devenir fou",<sup>71</sup> broken by its state's failure to live up to enlightened ideals. It is not within the scope of this study to assess any possible socio-political validity of such a reading, but rather to

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<sup>68</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, VI, p. 320.

<sup>69</sup> Dostoevsky, *Le Crime et le châtement*, (Trans. Derély) II, p. 162.

<sup>70</sup> Barine, "Dostoievski: un grand romancier," p. 805.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.p. 801.



highlight the reduction it implies of Dostoevsky's exploration of the human condition to a commentary on Russian social reality.

Two tendencies in Barine's article, namely a demarche in search of an image of Russian life and a conclusion of Russian collective insanity, were highly typical of the early responses to Dostoevsky by the French in the 1870s and 1880s. As for the notion that the philosophical insights expressed through Dostoevsky's various '*fous*' might be of value, there was no question:

Dostoïevski est souvent prolix et diffus; en vrai réaliste, il ne nous fait grâce de rien, pas même des bavardages des sots et des déviations des fous. Il dédaigne trop l'art de la composition. Il est quelque fois ennuyeux.<sup>72</sup>

Philosophical ideas, particularly in the mouths of lunatics, have no place in the novel: they are simply seen as diversions from the narrative.

Courrière's 1875 monograph on Russian literature had taken the same line in her section on *Crime et châtement* and *Les mauvais esprits* (her telling rendering of '*Besy*'). 'Cauchemar', 'rêve affreux', 'délire': this is the world we are plunged into by Dostoevsky, and this is automatically equated to a symptom of socio-political nihilism rather than contemplation of the human condition.<sup>73</sup> *The Idiot, A Weak Heart*, and Dostoevsky's various explorations of other brinks of human consciousness, are not mentioned:

Tous les héros du romancier sont fous, malades ou épileptiques...Tous les types qui vont passer sous nos yeux ont chacun leur maladie, quelque chose

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.p. 817.

<sup>73</sup> Céleste Courrière, *Histoire de la littérature contemporaine en Russie* (Paris: Charpentier, 1875), p. 326.

dans le cerveau de brisé ou de détraqué. Tous sont gâtés par cette gangrène dont nous avons vu se produire les effets chez Raskolnikof.<sup>74</sup>

As observed of Barine's reading, Courrière's conclusion concerning *Crime and Punishment*, as well as *The Devils* is unequivocally socio-political. Courrière has identified in Dostoevsky only an attack on political nihilism, concluding with great emotion, that while this disease is present elsewhere, in Russia the nihilists do not look for economic and social equality like the socialists of the west, but for the equality of reduction to ignorance, nothingness and vice.<sup>75</sup>

### **E.-M. de Vogüé and *Le Roman russe***

Viscount Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, the undisputed herald of the Russian novel in C19th France, was the figure that most influenced the French conception of Dostoevsky's thought from the 1880s to the end of the century. His diplomatic career had brought him in 1877 from Constantinople to St. Petersburg where he would remain for almost six years, marry and integrate into a noble family, master the Russian language, and set about devouring the wealth of new literature that surrounded him. A frequent guest at the literary salon of the Countess S. A. Tolstaya, the viscount also had ample opportunity to *causer* with many important authors and thinkers of the era, including Dostoevsky himself.<sup>76</sup> On his resignation from diplomatic service, Vogüé returned to Paris and played the key

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 328-9.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>76</sup> Letter from Vogüé to Harpéline-Kaminski (1892), "Lettre inédite sur les études russes," *Revue hebdomadaire*, 9 Apr 1910, p. 149.

role in the introduction of the most part of Dostoevsky's oeuvre in France. However, Vogüé's own ideological interests greatly shaped his presentation of the thought of the Russian novelist, not to mention Vogüé's representation of Russian culture in general. His five articles on Turgenev, Pushkin, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Gogol for the *Revue des Deux Mondes* between 1883 and 1885, compiled into the phenomenally successful *Roman russe* in 1886, would not only seal Vogüé's own literary destiny (resulting in his election to the Academy in 1888) but also that of Russian literature in France for a quarter of a century to follow.<sup>77</sup>

It would be an error to approach Vogüé's study as a straightforward work of literary criticism. Textual analysis was not its objective, even if on this level it constitutes a formidable achievement for its time. In order to appreciate its place in the intellectual history of France, *Le Roman russe* must be considered in the context of a broader movement of literary cosmopolitisation, alongside, for example, Taine's study of English literature and Staël's *En Allemagne*. All three advocated alternative perspectives on the barbaric literary creations of Northern Europe, in opposition to ever-enduring Latinist-protectionist factions at the peak of the age of European nationalisms. As Vogüé said in his preface to *Le Roman russe*:

Il se crée, de nos jours, au-dessus des préférences de coterie et de nationalité, un esprit européen, un fonds de culture, d'idées et d'inclinations communes à toute la société intelligente.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Vogüé's article on Dostoevsky was first printed in *La Revue des deux mondes* in 1885. It also appeared individually in 1891 (Paris: H. Gautier) in the collection *Nouvelle bibliothèque populaire*, No. 256.

<sup>78</sup> Vogüé, *Le Roman russe*, p. XLVIII.

*Le Roman russe* must also be viewed as the strategic work of a patriotic diplomat in the wake of 1870 and the shadow of Prussian expansion. The Franco-Russian alliance was the ambitious political project of the day and part of this project was the establishment of two-way intercultural dialog. Numerous other works of the period shared this goal – some more overtly anti-Prussian than others.<sup>79</sup> As to their role in the eventual realisation of the Dual Entente in 1894, this thesis refrains from qualifying. However, the desire in Vogüé's case to present Russia as an enigmatic, vibrant and alien culture, from which France might draw in order to fortify its literature, cannot be separated from the desire to introduce a morally sound cultural and political ally. This dual objective shaped the image of Russian literature that Vogüé projected in *Le Roman russe*.

The former of the two objectives takes precedence. Vogüé was first and foremost a Christian moralist *homme de lettres* and had a clear aesthetic agenda: to oppose, on the one hand, the lingering vestiges of a morally demotivating romanticism and to undermine, on the other hand, the despotic rule of a cold, cynical and predominantly atheistic naturalist school. In their place, he proposed a more sentimentally charged, morally instructive realism: narratives that pity their victims, while remaining ultimately subservient to reason, measure, and *bon ton*. It thus becomes clear why a vast section of Dostoevsky's fictional output would not meet Vogüé's requirements.

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<sup>79</sup> Corbet discusses, for example, Michel Delines' 1887 publications (*Nos amis les Russes* and *La France jugée par la Russie*) as works the same political ends as Vogüé's *Roman russe*. See Charles Corbet, *L'Opinion française face à l'inconnue russe (1799-1894), A l'ère des nationalismes* (Paris: Didier, 1967), p. 419. Cadot has gone as far as to suggest that Bismarck could claim as much responsibility for la mode russe as Vogüé. An audio-recording of his paper is available in the Bibliothèque François Mitterand: Cadot, "E.-M. de Vogüé," *France-Russie, Après-midi d'étude du 10 mars 2005*. Bibliothèque François Mitterand, Paris, 2005.

Before broaching Vogüé's treatment of Dostoevsky's work, a few words must be spared to his general approach to Russian culture. The startling otherness with which Vogüé's writings present the mind of the Russian at first glance may seem to jar with his cosmopolitanist project:

En vérité, le désespoir me prend quand j'essaye de faire comprendre ce monde au nôtre, c'est-à-dire de relier par les idées communes des cerveaux hantés d'images si différentes pétris par des mains si diverses.<sup>80</sup>

His task was not to bring Russia and its cultural production closer to France, but to rouse curiosity in a radically different literature. From the beginnings of his diplomatic and literary career, Vogüé would fall into the vague category of the professional orientalist. His exoticising travel writing on Syria, Palestine and Egypt reveal a nostalgia for the predominant place of religion in what he broadly perceived as oriental society. Russia, he saw as a synthesis between this oriental religiosity and Christian values. Russia's otherness is constantly raised by Vogüé's work, but this otherness has a specific value. In his obituary of Soloviev, he writes: "L'homme est un animal étrange. L'homme russe en est de doublement étrange."<sup>81</sup> The implication is thus that Russians possess an excess of a strange "humanity," an idea inherited from the Slavophiles. The predominantly Slavophile circles Vogüé moved in, particularly the salon of the Countess S. A. Tolstaya (widow of Alexei Tolstoy), further reinforced his notion of Russia as a 'bridge' between Europe and a mythically loosely defined Orient.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Vogüé, *Le Roman russe*, p. 231.

<sup>81</sup> Obituary of Soloviev entitled 'Un Docteur russe: Vladimir Soloviev' (1900) reprinted in E.-M de Vogüé, *Sous l'horizon, hommes et choses d'hier* (Paris: A. Colin, 1904), p. 19.

<sup>82</sup> Vogüé wrote with fondness of Slavophilia as "une religion patriotique très respectable." See Vogüé, *Le Roman russe*, p. 234. His own self-perception as an authority, even a practitioner of the

Vogüé's *Le Roman russe* consequently begins with the curious theory that the roots of Russia's otherness are to be found in India. Summarising theories of Slavophile origin, Vogüé informs his readers that the inherent nihilism in the Slav comes from the same roots as the *nirvana* of "les pères hindous":

Si l'on veut bien connaître la Russie, il faut se remémorer tout ce que l'on a appris de l'Inde ancienne.<sup>83</sup>

This theory he supports with allusions to connections between Russian and Sanskrit and even the statement that the future of Russia may be divined from the history of India.<sup>84</sup> The term *nihilism*, which Vogüé melds with a vague notion of asceticism and complacency, is even supposed to have been coined as a translation of 'Nirvana'.<sup>85</sup> These connections, appearing as they did at the beginning of the work, had the aim of presenting an ancient, deeply rooted and radically different cultural and intellectual tradition: the alternative to Greco-Roman antiquity that the imagination of an emerging Belle Epoch generation craved. The successful synthesis, however, for Vogüé is not in Dostoevsky but in Tolstoy: "on dirait l'esprit d'un chimiste anglais dans l'âme d'un bouddhiste hindou; se charge qui pourra d'expliquer cet étrange accouplement: celui qui y parviendra expliquera toute la Russie."<sup>86</sup>

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orientalism shines through *Le Roman Russe*. Of the heroine of Tolstoy's *Cossacks* he challenges "toux ceux qui ont pratiqué l'orient" to judge authenticity of her oriental naivety. See Vogüé, *Le Roman russe*, p. 264. For a deconstruction of Vogüé's Orient see Magnus Röhl, *Le Roman Russe de Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, Stockholm Studies in History of Literature* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell Int., 1976), pp. 70-72.

<sup>83</sup> Vogüé, *Le Roman russe*, p. 68.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261. For Vogüé, Tolstoy was superior to Dostoevsky in his more complete break from Romanticism. See Vogüé, *Le Roman russe*, pp. 263-4.

Vogüé's confused notions of 'Buddhist' abnegation, Orthodoxy, political nihilism, and vibrant aesthetic barbarity set the tone for the entrance of Vogüé's Dostoevsky, whom he presents as the literary equivalent to St. Basil's Cathedral: "cette monstrueuse cathédrale de Saint-Basile, découpée et peinte comme une pagode chinoise, bâtie par des architectes tartares, et qui abrite pourtant le Dieu chrétien."<sup>87</sup> A condescension toward conglomerated oriental 'barbarisms' is evident, and a typically homogenised notion of the Orient emerges from Vogüé's comparison of Russian, Chinese and Tartar architecture, as it was in the connecting of Hindu, Islamic and Orthodox abnegation and asceticism.<sup>88</sup> In Vogüé's study of Dostoevsky in *Le Roman russe*, this exoticising and othering has an aim beyond attention grabbing. It serves as the device by which Vogüé discounts all of Dostoevsky's mature output as formless fanatical fantasy and, as such, suppresses the subversive themes therein addressed, focusing rather on his early fiction, which corresponded less problematically to Vogüé's own cultural agenda.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Vogüé, *Le Roman russe*, p. 207.

<sup>88</sup> In a later preface to *The Idiot*, this would take on a further 'ethnographic' colouring: "elle [la pensée russe] fait songer au roman qu'écrirait un Peau-Rouge, si le don d'écrire lui venait subitement." See E.-M de Vogüé, "Préface," to F. M. Dostoïevski, *L'Idiot* (Paris: Plon, 1987), p. vii.

<sup>89</sup> It cannot be overstressed that despite the ethnographic aspect of his reading, Vogüé was significantly ahead of his contemporaries in the degree to which he surmounted such intercultural barriers and achieved a degree of textual penetration. Albert de la Berge, for example, criticised *Le Roman russe* for not having sufficiently explained the otherness of Dostoevsky's literature in terms of social and cultural differences between France and Russia ("cet enfer sans limites et sans portes") in order to render it accessible to the French mind "fait de synthèses et de clarté") In seeing Russian literature as legitimate art in its own right, rather than ethnographic material, Vogüé was as yet alone. See Albert de la Berge, "Variétés: La Russie politique et littéraire," *Le Siècle* 22 juillet 1886, p. 3. Berge's article makes it clear that if Vogüé's reading of Russian literature was refracted through preconceptions of l'âme russe and turned away from the aesthetic to the ethnographic and the moral, he nonetheless did so far less than his generation expected and indeed demanded. See also Arvède Barine, "M. Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé," *La Revue Politique et littéraire (Revue bleue)* (3e série) 2e semestre, no. 26 (1884), which sums up

Vogüé clearly used Dostoevsky to uphold his own aesthetic and moral doctrines. The superior works he identified as *Poor Folk*, *Memoirs from the House of the Dead*, and above all *Crime and Punishment*. In Dostoevsky's first novel, Vogüé declares his art of characterisation and prose fully-developed.<sup>90</sup> Vogüé identified in it the sentimentality he searched, combined with a conservative fidelity to realism. *Humiliated and Offended* he defends from the criticism it had received, though it lacked, for Vogüé, the simplicity and clarity of the *Poor Folk*, and the psychology of its characters, commenting that he cannot understand that one could prefer a desperate romantic liaison to a rational, mutually beneficial one.<sup>91</sup> Clearly this is not a critic who appreciated the twisted romantic intrigues of Dostoevsky's mature fiction.

The *Memoires from the House of the Dead* received Vogüé's firm stamp of approval, and he includes an original translation of a large extract.<sup>92</sup> Tellingly, he identifies the most successful of the stories therein contained as the two 'crimes of love', Akulina and Bakluchin, whilst "pour d'autres, le philosophe ne s'inquiète pas de fouiller dans leur passé."<sup>93</sup> The implication is that Dostoevsky's 'philosophical' interference with the narrative is unwelcome; as is confirmed by

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all of Vogüé's oeuvre as a tracing of the necessary religious spirit of each nation.

<sup>90</sup> Vogüé, *Le Roman russe*, pp. 115-6.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>92</sup> Vogüé published no translations of Dostoevsky's works other than these excerpts inserted into the article, however, his Journal refers, in the summer of 1881, to a translation of Dostoevsky he had undertaken, which he speaks of, alongside his study of Pushkin, in relation to his desire to resign from his post and dedicate himself wholly to literature. See E.-M de Vogüé, *Journal du Vicomte E.-M. de Vogüé: Paris-Saint Petersburg: 1877-1883* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1932) . p. 260.

<sup>93</sup> Vogüé, *Le Roman russe*, p. 233.



the collocation “digressions philosophiques” testifying to a conception of fiction that cannot integrally comprise philosophical reflection.<sup>94</sup>

*Crime and Punishment* he also received with enthusiasm, however, his reading was striking in its reductiveness. The rubric of “La religion de la souffrance” that Vogüé lends to the chapter is the aspect that he accentuates, focusing his reading on the figure of Sonia and Raskolnikov’s prostration before her as an image of human suffering. Vogüé’s reading is, however, remarkably astute for his time in recognising the subversive fact that Raskolnikov’s confession is motivated not by remorse but by a need for reconciliation with humanity via the figure of Sonia.<sup>95</sup> However, on Raskolnikov’s fate, Vogüé enforces a causality that Dostoevsky took pains to avoid. For Vogüé, the act of killing robs Raskolnikov of his “capacité de sentir et de raisonner comme les autres, de trouver sa place stable dans la vie”.<sup>96</sup> However, it was not “le fait irréparable d’avoir supprimé une existence humaine” that transformed Raskolnikov: his psychological and ontological insecurity preceded the crime, and indeed the time frame of the narrative.<sup>97</sup> It was not an incapacity to reason that Dostoevsky embodied in Raskolnikov, but rather a capacity to rationalise to the extremity, as would also be the case with the underground man and Ivan Karamazov: Dostoevsky’s rebellious heroes each embody an emphatically unsuccessful attempt to synthesise abstract reason and existence.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>95</sup> This is evident from Raskolnikov’s maintenance of the stance that his confession was a personal failing, described in the novel’s epilogue.

<sup>96</sup> Vogüé, *Le Roman russe*, p. 238.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 238.

Vogüé recognises the fantastic element of Dostoevsky's realism as a challenge ("duel"<sup>98</sup>) to the reason of the reader but expresses this if not as a negative aspect of his fiction, at least as one that will alienate it from the contemporary French novel-reading public: "mais le lecteur des romans n'est pas tenu d'être philosophe... En France, au moins, nous ne prendrons jamais notre parti de ce spectacle".<sup>99</sup> Certainly, there is a facetious aspect to Vogüé's statement; a challenge to the readership accustomed to effortless reading and as such to superficial fiction. However, at *Humiliated and Offended* and *Crime and Punishment*, Vogüé draws the line:

Avec ce livre [*Crime et châtime*], le talent avait fini de monter. Il donnera encore de grands coups d'aile, mais en tournant dans un cercle de brouillards, dans un ciel toujours plus trouble, comme une immense chauve-souris au crépuscule. Dans l'*Idiot*, dans les *Possédés*, et surtout dans les *Frères Karamazof*, les longueurs sont intolérables, l'action n'est plus qu'une broderie complaisante qui se prête à toutes les théories de l'auteur, et où il dessine tous les types rencontrés par lui ou imaginés dans l'enfer de sa fantaisie.<sup>100</sup>

Vogüé clearly saw the intrusion of philosophy in fiction as a lack of *bon ton*. The *Notes from Underground*, unsurprisingly, receive no mention throughout. Thus from the point that Dostoevsky severed himself from sentimental moralist fiction and launches his attack on humanist ethics, Vogüé turns away. The *Devils* is described as "confus, mal bâti, ridicule souvent et encombré de théories apocalyptiques," and granted the only possible "value" of providing an accurate depiction of the nihilist movement.<sup>101</sup> The radical individualism and resultant philosophical suicide of Kirilov is correspondingly reduced to conform to

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

Vogüé's moral system:

[L]es pessimistes logiques, comme l'ingénieur Kirilof, ceux qui se tuent par impuissance morale de vivre, et dont la partie exploite la complaisance; l'homme sans principes, décidé à mourir parce qu'il ne peut pas trouver de principes"<sup>102</sup>

Kirilov's redefinition of man and the limits of human freedom are thus neatly swept under the carpet. In general, the intervention of philosophical ideas in Dostoevsky's novels perturbed and inconvenienced Vogüé: "le lecteur des romans n'est pas tenu d'être philosophe... En France, au moins, nous ne prendrons jamais notre parti de ce spectacle."<sup>103</sup>

The sentimentalist critic likewise disowns the *Brothers Karamazov* on account of its "digressions sans excuses," permitting only the beauty of certain touching "scènes digne" such as "celle de la mort de l'enfant."<sup>104</sup> As with *Crime and Punishment*, the disturbing philosophical core of the novel has been removed; the morally consoling epilogue retained. This dismissal Vogüé justifies with the argument that: "De l'aveu commun, très peu de Russes ont eu le courage de lire jusqu'au bout cette interminable histoire".<sup>105</sup> It seems possible that Vogüé here thinly masks a personal confession. However, whether Vogüé did or did not read the *Brothers Karamazov* in full, his recommendation to France to abstain from doing so would have a serious impact on the translation (adaptation) and publication of the work in French. Henri Troyat indeed cites a letter from Vogüé

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 250. It is perhaps owing to this passing comment by Vogüé that this chapter was published as a self-standing short story, translated by Harpéline-Kaminsky in 1889 as *Les Précoces* and omitted from his translation of *Brothers Karamazov* (see below).

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

to Plon, dated 30 Oct 1884 beseeching not to publish the *Brothers Karamazov* in French:

[C]'est le plus faible, le plus lourd et le plus long des romans de Dostoïevsky; peu de Russes en soutiennent la lecture, il rebuterait à coup sûr le goût français. Je ne saurais assez vous conseiller, si vous êtes en mesure de le faire, d'entreprendre de préférence la publication des *Souvenirs de la Maison des Morts*. Il y a là une peinture éloquente de la vie des condamnés en Sibérie, qui intéresserait notre public plus encore, peut-être, que les œuvres de pure imagination du romancier russe.<sup>106</sup>

In his preface to the 1886 translation of *Souvenirs de la Maison des Morts*, Vogüé gives a clear indication of his reasoning for this and of his role as critic in general:

C'est si rare et si bon de recommander un livre où l'on est certain que pas une ligne ne peut blesser une âme, que pas un mot ne risque d'éveiller une passion douteuse; un livre que chacun fermera avec une idée meilleure de l'humanité, avec un peu moins de sécheresse pour les misères d'autrui, un peu plus de courage contre ses propres misères.<sup>107</sup>

It is perhaps clear, in light of this desire to provide positive and unambiguous moral instruction to the readership, why Vogüé swept such works as *Notes from Underground* under the proverbial carpet.

In *Le Roman russe*, *The Idiot* is likewise altered to fit Vogüé's moral system. Dostoevsky had no doubt presented his Christ-inspired protagonist as a light shining into the darkness, but (emphatically) the darkness did not understand it. Vogüé, however, imposes an optimistic, socially and morally constructive vision of Myshkin's presence in society: "ils subissent son influence et deviennent

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<sup>106</sup> Letter from Vogüé to Plon dated 30 Oct 1884, cited in Henri Troyat, *Dostoïevsky* (Paris: Fayard, 1940), p. 615.

<sup>107</sup> E.-M de Vogüé, "Préface," to F. M. Dostoïevski, *Souvenirs de la Maison des Morts* (Paris: Plon, 1886), p. xv.

meilleurs.”<sup>108</sup> It is difficult to imagine how such a conclusion could genuinely be construed from Rogozhin’s murderous jealousy, Nastasia’s demise and Aglaya’s fall from innocence: the influence of the idiot on those around him was rather an acute and entirely destructive awareness of the inescapability of personal vice.

Vogüé’s desperate attempts to bring Dostoevsky’s works round to a coherent morally instructive doctrine, even permitting the removal of the most part of his mature output, thus fall tragically short. With the declaration: “comme si quelque chose existait dans ce monde indépendamment de la valeur morale!”<sup>109</sup> he concludes of Raskolnikov’s crime that “[c]erte, l’intention de Dostoïevski n’est pas douteuse, il espère détourner de pareilles actions”<sup>110</sup> expressing, nonetheless, his personal misgivings as to the genuine utility of such literature.

Vogüé’s final verdict on Dostoevsky reveals his lack of understanding of the latter’s anti-rationalist stance: “il avait jeté son cœur à la foule, ce qui est bien, mais sans le faire précéder de la sévère et nécessaire compagne du cœur, la raison.”<sup>111</sup> The force of Dostoevsky’s fiction may resemble genius at first glance, “mais on se souvient vite que le génie n’existe pas dans les lettres sans deux dons supérieurs; la mesure et l’universalité.”<sup>112</sup> Literature that expresses the subjective experience of the individual in the face of individual existence, is thus firstly deemed of no social utility, and secondly fails to achieve the supreme goal of art;

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<sup>108</sup> Vogüé, *Le Roman russe*, p. 235.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

namely to represent reality in its stable, objective entirety.<sup>113</sup> Thus as Voltaire had once presented and rejected Shakespearian drama to France, Vogüé would now turn from a barbarous Dostoevskian anti-rationalism, to the synthesis he had in mind from the outset: the sentimental realist par excellence and the *aboutissement* of *Le Roman russe*: Lev Tolstoy, bidding farewell to Dostoevsky with a dignified bow and a mildly ironic: “ce n’est pas devant toi que je m’incline, mais devant toute la souffrance de l’humanité.”<sup>114</sup>

It was ultimately in Tolstoy, and not in Dostoevsky, that Vogüé found his preferred antidote to the excesses of contemporary French realism. The naturalism of Zola’s generation he found unbearable, and *Le Roman russe* is clearly an expression of this. More directly, in a review of Zola’s *La Débâcle*, Vogüé writes: “en achevant *La Débâcle*, ayant souffert par cette lecture dans mes plus tristes souvenirs, j’ai pris instinctivement un volume de *Guerre et Paix*.”<sup>115</sup> The article goes on to compare Zola to the Dead Sea and Tolstoy to the Jordan.<sup>116</sup>

Behind Vogüé’s dismissive and slightly condescending regard for Dostoevsky is also an element of lingering resentment from a personal encounter. A diary entry from between 17 - 19 January reads:

Discussion avec Dostoïevski. Curieux type d’obstiné russe, se croyant plus profond que toute l’Europe parce qu’il est plus trouble. Composé de *Medviédév* et *d’ioj*. Infatuation qui permet de mesurer à quelles extrémités se portera l’esprit slave dans son prochain grand mouvement sur lui-même.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>115</sup> E.-M de Vogüé "Le Débâcle" (15-8-1892) reprinted in E.-M de Vogüé, *Heures d'histoire* (Paris: A. Colin, 1893), p. 281.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 281.

“Nous avons le génie de tous les peuples et en plus le génie russe, dit Dostoïevski, donc nous pouvons vous comprendre et vous ne pouvez pas nous comprendre.”<sup>117</sup>

Vogüé’s personal correspondence also indicated a lack of desire to reread Dostoevsky’s works when required to provide a preface for a publication: “il me faut remordre sans grand appétit un Dostoïevsky.”<sup>118</sup>

The preface in question is that to *L’Idiot*, translated by Derély for Plon in 1887. Vogüé discusses therein the turbulent reception Dostoevsky has had in France, chastising the extremities of hostility and of fanaticism that have typified it.<sup>119</sup> He then dissuades the *littre* from reading the novel on account of its lack of unity and form, but recommends it to psychologists and philosophers.<sup>120</sup> This reveals the telling distinction that would, in the next periods of reception, be broken down. Vogüé was aware of this breaking-down and found in Dostoevsky’s *Idiot* an innovation in this direction:

[...] un roman qui fait penser autant qu’un traité de philosophie, et travailler l’esprit autant qu’un texte hiéroglyphique! Notre éducation littéraire nous a enseigné le respect des genres, et nous ne souffrons pas qu’on les mêle.<sup>121</sup>

Röhl has convincingly demonstrated that *Le Roman russe* is underpinned essentially by a conflict between materialism and spiritualism.<sup>122</sup> Röhl consequently read the whole of Vogüé’s oeuvre as a search for a synthesis between the material and the spiritual; science and faith; the rational and the

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<sup>117</sup> Vogüé, *Journal du Vicomte E.-M. de Vogüé: Paris-Saint Petersburg: 1877-1883*, p.164

<sup>118</sup> Unpublished Letter from Vogüé to his wife dated 12 March 1887. Cited in Röhl, *Le Roman Russe de Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé*, p. 129.

<sup>119</sup> Vogüé, "Préface," to *L’Idiot*, trans. V. Derély (Paris: Plon, 1887), p. i.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. p. ii.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. p. xi.

<sup>122</sup> Röhl, *Le Roman Russe de Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé*, p. 58.

mystic.<sup>123</sup> Rather than a synthesis, it may be more accurate to say that Vogüé desired scientific fact to accommodate faith. In an elucidating article commenting on the construction of the Eiffel Tower, Vogüé addressed the iconic structure:

Et toi, fille de savoir, courbe ton orgueil. Ta science est belle, et nécessaire, et invincible; mais c'est peu d'éclairer l'esprit, si l'on ne guérit pas l'éternelle plaie du cœur. Ton aînée donnait aux hommes ce dont ils ont besoin, la charité et l'espérance. Si tu aspirés à lui succéder, sache fonder le temple de la nouvelle alliance, l'accord de la science et de la foi. Fais jaillir l'âme obscure qui s'agite dans tes flancs, l'âme que nous cherchons pour toi dans ce monde nouveau. Tu le possèdes par l'intelligence; tu ne régneras vraiment sur lui que le jour où tu rendras aux malheureux ce qu'ils trouvaient là-bas, une immense compassion et un espoir divin.<sup>124</sup>

This thesis, underpinning Vogüé's preface to *Le Roman russe* and his opposition to naturalism, seems to have been what eventually secured his place in the Académie:

On continue de me dire que ma préface a eu une grande pénétration. J'ai reçu un mot de Thureau-Dangin, me disant que j'avais écrit un manifeste et une prophétie, et bien de compliments dans une autre lettre d'A. Duruy. Le vieux peintre Lamy, que j'ai rencontré, m'assure que tous ses amis de l'Académie parlaient de moi et se disposaient à me donner leurs voix.<sup>125</sup>

However, it seems to have been above all his cosmopolitanist stance on intercultural politics that the Académie was warming to: Vogüé succeeded classisist and cultural protectionist Jean Marie Napoléon-Desiré Nisard. The heated debate surrounding this appointment on the 22 Nov 1888 is revelatory in this respect. The transcripts of the speeches on the occasion of his inauguration have until now been overlooked by previous Vogüé scholars.

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>124</sup> E.-M de Vogüé, "À travers l'exposition. I. Les portes. La tour," *Revue des deux Mondes* (1 juillet 1889), p. 201.

<sup>125</sup> Unpublished letter from Vogüé to his wife (26 mai 1886) cited in Röhl, *Le Roman Russe de Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé*, p. 34.



Vogüé's speech, pronounced 6 June 1889, makes direct reference to the fact that his appointment on Nisard's death was highly symbolic. Vogüé talks of the translation of Shakespeare and the introduction of German romanticism by Staël (modestly refraining from explicitly listing his own *Roman russe*) as examples of cosmopolitanist renaissance currently taking place in France.<sup>126</sup> He predicts that Latin will be replaced in schools by the study of modern foreign languages, and that consequently: "Plusieurs d'entre nous verront grandir à leurs foyer des petits-enfants nourris d'un autre lait, qui nous comprendront mal et que nous ne comprendrons plus."<sup>127</sup> Edmund Rousse's speech in response to Vogüé's was scathingly ironic. Rousse warns, in response to Vogüé's insufficiently mournful declaration of the death of Latin: "Le latin se meurt," Monsieur! Oui sans doute, comme bien d'autre choses encore, comme mourront notre langue et nore pays, si nous ne savons pas les défendre."<sup>128</sup> Rousse continues:

Au nom de la raison, ils ont dit que si l'on enseigne le latin aux enfants... [c'est] parce que, depuis trois mille ans, il n'est aucune vérité morale, aucun secret de l'intelligence et de la conscience humaine que cette langue généreuse n'ait reçu et transmis au monde entier par ses écrivains et par ces poètes...<sup>129</sup>

On Vogüé's descriptions of Russia he noted facetiously that Vogüé had or affected a slight foreign accent: "avec cette pointe d'accent étranger qui donne un charme de plus à tous vos discours".<sup>130</sup> Rousse's closing word is extremely elucidating. Following Vogüé's claim that the French novel had begun to sell poorly in the European

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<sup>126</sup> E.-M de Vogüé, "Discours pour la réception de E.-M. de Vogüé à l'Académie Française," in *Recueil des discours (1889)* (Paris: Palais de L'Institut, 1889), p. 27.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>128</sup> M. Rousse, "Réponse au discours pour la réception de E.-M de Vogüé à l'Académie Française," in *Recueil des discours (1889)* (Paris: Palais de L'Institut, 1889), p. 55.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

market in comparison to English or Russian literature of the period, Rousseau retorted:

Vous, Messieurs, qui comptez dans le monde entier tant d'amis [...] dites-leurs bien que tout notre esprit n'est pas dans nos romans, tout notre cœur dans nos vaudevilles. À côté des Français qui les amusent et leur font la vie plus légère, montrez leur les Français qui les instruisent et les rendent meilleurs, - nos poètes et nos savants, nos philosophes, nos historiens et nos orateurs.<sup>131</sup>

The argument hinges on a preconception of the novel as a frivolous genre that was not a place for philosophy or politics, but for light entertainment. The rest was the domain of the poet, philosopher or essayist, but not the novelist. Gide would make the same observation, but as a criticism of the restrictive structure of French discourse. For Gide, Pascal and Baudelaire had captured existential angst as effectively as Dostoevsky; however, the French *novel* had not learned how to do this.<sup>132</sup> What came from abroad was thus a redefinition of the novel and its philosophical potential.

A similar debate would arise in the Académie on 17 Jan 1907 at the reception of Maurice Barrès, when it would fall to Vogüé to make the reception speech.

Malgré cet inconvénient [1871], notre seule qualité de Français nous conférait la prééminence sur tout le genre humain: pas un de nous qui n'en fût persuadé; cet axiome ne se discutait pas. [...] la superbe confiance de ce roi de l'univers, un jeune Français, ne s'abattait pas pour si peu. Je constate, je ne défends pas notre préjugé; nous l'avions sucé avec le lait, il était dans notre sang, dans l'air que nous respirions. Rien n'efface ces premières impressions.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 61-62.

<sup>132</sup> Gide, *Dostoïevski*, p. 71.

<sup>133</sup> E.-M de Vogüé, "Réponse au discours pour la réception de M. Barrès à l'Académie Française" in *Recueil des discours (1907)* (Paris: Palais de L'Institut, 1907), p. 48. Vogüé opposes this to the doctrines of the Saints, and self-renunciation, quoting from an unidentified source: "renoncement total de la personne, sacrifice volontaire des égoïsmes", ou l'un de vos parrains cherchait naguère

For all the limitations of Vogüé's reading of Dostoevsky, his critique of the arrogance of late-nineteenth century Franco-centrism and his appeal to the next generation had an undisputed impact.

Regarding the resounding success of *Le Roman russe*, Corbet observes: "Le livre de Vogüé renforça la cause de l'alliance, et le désir de l'alliance multiplia le succès du *Roman russe*. Jamais livre ne tomba mieux à son heure."<sup>134</sup> René Wellek's history of criticism identified Vogüé as "a turning point in East-West literary relations".<sup>135</sup> Charbonnel, writing in the wake of the *mode russe* in 1897: "jamais une œuvre de critique, pas même l'*Histoire de la Littérature anglaise*, n'eut si puissante prise sur les intelligences et sur les cœurs".<sup>136</sup> *Le Roman russe*'s attack on naturalism was also, evidently, a timely one. René Lalou writes retrospectively in 1929 that at its appearance:

le public français était tout à fait dégoûté du réalisme [...] on adopta Dostoïevski et Tolstoï en bloc. On en tira essentiellement une conception mystique de la souffrance, une conception de la pitié, comme la médiatrice et la consolatrice de tous.<sup>137</sup>

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la meilleure définition de la vertu." See E.-M de Vogüé, "Réponse au discours pour la réception de M. Barrès à l'Académie Française," p. 40.

<sup>134</sup> Corbet, *L'Opinion française face à l'inconnue russe (1799-1894)*, p. 420.

<sup>135</sup> René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism (1750-1950)*, 5 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971), IV, p. 21.

<sup>136</sup> Charbonnel, *Les Mystiques dans la littérature présente*, p. 18.

<sup>137</sup> René Lalou, "Dostoïevski et L'Occident (Paper delivered at 3e Réunion du Studio Franco-Russe, 18 déc 1929)," in *Le Studio Franco-Russe*, ed. Leonid Livak (Toronto: Toronto Slavic Review, 1929), p. 102. The hostility of the French naturalists themselves towards the Russian realists could no doubt be related to the change in literary fashions that they heralded. Edmund de Goncourt expressed himself bitterly with regard to the *mode russe* in his *Journal* "Ah! si un roman de Dostoïevski, pour lequel on est si admiratif, si indulgent pour son *noir*, était signé Goncourt, quel éreintement sur toute la ligne! Or, l'homme qui a trouvé cette habile diversion, qui a si peu nationalement fait profiter une littérature étrangère de la sympathie et – oui! – de l'admiration qu'on nous devait, est M. de Vogüé. Aussi a-t-il mérité de l'Académie, qui l'appellera prochainement dans son sein." See Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *Journal: mémoires de la vie littéraire*, 3 vols. (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1989), III, p. 153. Goncourt's prediction concerning the Académie proved correct.

What can be asserted with still greater conviction is that with regards to Russian literature, Vogüé's authority went predominantly unchallenged. Léon Sichler's *Histoire de la littérature russe* (1886) contents itself to quote Vogüé at length on the intolerable philosophical digressions and apocalyptic theories of Dostoevsky's output post-*Crime and Punishment*.<sup>138</sup> The works he had condoned, *Poor Folk* and the *House of the Dead*, appeared in more or less faithful translations by Derély and Neyroud in 1883 and 1886 respectively. As for the 'unbearably long' and poorly composed *Brothers Karamazov*, the *Devils* and the unmentioned *Notes from Underground*, they were to appear only in radically adapted forms, their translators seeing fit to remove the 'deviations' Vogüé had found so arduous, and along with them, the undesired philosophical dimension of Dostoevsky's originals.

Pierre Pascal and Nikita Struve are among later, authoritative commentators who identified wholly with Vogüé's 'religion de la souffrance' reading of Dostoevsky's creation.<sup>139</sup> Charles Somond's preface to the 1891 publication of the Dostoevsky article commented:

Je me souviens du retentissement qu'eurent les articles publiés en 1885 dans la *Revue des Deux-Mondes* sur Dostoïevsky. Il n'était question que de cet événement, et il y avait dans tous les esprits une espèce d'éblouissement. Ce fut en définitive M. de Vogüé qui créa chez nous le courant russe et slave [...] M. de Vogüé fut le promoteur d'une tendance qui va s'accroissant profondément dans le roman français, et qu'à lui seul revient l'honneur, nous n'exagérons pas en ajoutant la gloire, d'avoir jeté notre jeune génération

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<sup>138</sup> Léon Sichler, *Histoire de la Littérature russe* (Paris A. Dupret, 1886), p. 319.

<sup>139</sup> N. Struve, "Vogüé et Dostoïevski," in *Eugène-Melchoir de Vogüé: Le héraut du roman russe*, ed. M. Cadot (Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 1989), p. 78; P. Pascal, "Préface," in *Le Roman russe*, ed. E.-M de Vogüé (Montreux: Ganguin et Laubscher, 1971), pp. 19, 21-22.

littéraire hors de chemins battus.<sup>140</sup>

Paul Bourget, closely acquainted with Vogüé from 1883, joined the ranks of the rising “mystic” opposition to naturalism and recognised Vogüé’s role in the movement.<sup>141</sup> Bourget himself was among the first French novelists to attempt a ‘variation’ on *Crime and Punishment* in his *Le Disciple*.<sup>142</sup>

Charbonnel writes: “peu à peu, Dostoïewski et Tolstoï changèrent nos bohêmes, nos réalistes, nos athéniens de lettres, en ‘néo-chrétiens’ ou mystiques. Ce fut bien d’eux ce miracle.”<sup>143</sup> He traces this mystic revival through the work of Paul Margueritte, Eduard Rod, Paul Bourget and Joris-Karl Huysmans. Hemmings further explored the connection between Dostoevsky and the same French writers with the addition of Charles-Louis Philippe, though his comparisons often feel somewhat forced. The franco-centric, dominant history of French literature certainly has generally not placed special emphasis on such a relationship between Russian literature and the French decadents. It may therefore strike the contemporary literary historian that so many contemporary commentators, along with Charbonnel considered that Vogüé “orienta pour vingt ans, pour plus de temps encore peut-être, la littérature française elle-même.”<sup>144</sup>

Desjardins, writing in 1889 at Vogüé’s reception to the Académie, describes the impact of Russian culture on France, associating the revival of religious thought,

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<sup>140</sup> Charles Somond, "Préface" to E.-M. de Vogüé, *Dostoïevski* in *Nouvelle bibliothèque populaire*, No. 256, (Paris: H. Gaultier, 1891), p.2. Reprinted in Vogüé, *Le Roman russe*, p. 398.

<sup>141</sup> P. Bourget, "Préface," in *Pages Choisies*, ed. E.-M. de Vogüé (Paris: Plon, 1912), p.XXVIII.

<sup>142</sup> See Georgii Mikhailovich Fridlender, *Dostoevskii i mirovaia literatura* (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1979), pp. 257-268.

<sup>143</sup> Charbonnel, *Les Mystiques dans la littérature présente*, p. 20.

<sup>144</sup> E. Faguët, "Melchior de Vogüé," *Le Gaulois*, 25 mars 1910, p. 1.

psychology and neo-Kantianism with this.<sup>145</sup> For Desjardins, this intercultural dialogue was unambiguously opened by Vogüé: "Lui, il apporte un monde nouveau, la Russie, et derrière elle l'Orient";<sup>146</sup> "Quant à la Russie, on peut dire que c'est à M. de Vogüé que nous la devons."<sup>147</sup> In this respect, Desjardins identified Vogüé as "prophète de la jeunesse,"<sup>148</sup> in light of the extent to which his cosmopolitanism, his spiritualism, and his fanaticism for Russian literature, all anticipated tendencies that would dominate a rising and enduring movement in French intellectual life. Desjardins also identified in Dostoevsky and Tolstoy a redefinition of the novel. He wrote that in France, up until the arrival of Russian literature, the novel was still preconceived as a source of entertainment.<sup>149</sup>

Vogüé's influence on the younger generation of the Belle époque seems to have been significant. His official and emblematic appeal to them, 'A ceux qui ont vingt ans', dated 31 Dec 1889, and published in the new year in the *Journal des Débats*, cried out to the next generation of *hommes de lettres* to look abroad for a means to restore to French literature its former strength.<sup>150</sup> A twenty-year-old

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<sup>145</sup> Paul Desjardins, "Sur M. E. Melchior de Vogüé. À propos de sa réception académique," *Revue politique et littéraire (Revue Bleue)*, 8 juin 1889, p. 719. Of course, one must remain sceptical with regards to such questions of influence: René Lalou inversely pinned the blame for the anti-intellectualist misreading of Dostoevsky associated with this period on Bergson, specifically on 'vulgarised Bergsonism'. See Lalou, "Dostoïevski et L'Occident (Conférence lors de la 3<sup>e</sup> réunion du Studio Franco-Russe, 18 déc 1929)," p. 103. The notion of a vulgarised Bergson resulting in a vulgarisation of Dostoevsky seems a dubious stance, and in any case a rather backwards approach to the phenomenon. A more meaningful observation might be that the same anti-intellectualist drive of the period refracted readings of both Bergson and Dostoevsky in the same direction, rather than that one 'misreading' begot another. What can be said however is that a great number of commentators experienced and described the wave of anti-intellectualism of the fin de siècle as an influence from Russian literature, whether a causal relationship can be established or not.

<sup>146</sup> Desjardins, "Sur M. E. Melchior de Vogüé. À propos de sa réception académique," p. 713.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 717.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 713.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 717.

<sup>150</sup> E.-M de Vogüé, "A ceux qui ont vingt ans," *Journal des Débats*, 1 Jan 1890

André Gide would note the article in his reading diary and recall its influence on his own literary ambitions in his memoirs.<sup>151</sup> The influence of the fictional world he had uncovered in Dostoevsky, was of course greater still. Likewise, Vogüé's great influence on the reception of Dostoevsky abroad cannot be overlooked.<sup>152</sup>

### **Dostoevsky's reception in the wake of *Le Roman russe***

The 1880s and 90s were a prolific period in the translation of Russian literature. This was part of a larger translation boom and a broader increase in curiosity for 'oriental' literatures; however, the reception of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy was a phenomenon that surpassed all others. Corbet writes that no foreign literature had or has ever succeeded in "gnawing" on French minds so "profoundly" as the Russian greats towards the turn of the century.<sup>153</sup> First translations and adaptations followed Vogüé in removing philosophical 'diversions'.<sup>154</sup> In line with Vogüé's preference, Tolstoy enjoyed instant popularity, along with the early,

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<sup>151</sup> André Gide, *Si le grain ne meurt* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 248.

<sup>152</sup> Sergia Adamo, *Dostoevskij in Italia: il dibattito sulle riviste (1869-1945)* (Pisapia di Prato: Campanotto Editore, 1998), p. 13; Sophie Ollivier, "Les Essais d'Ortega y Gasset sur Dostoevskij," in *Dostoevsky and the Twentieth Century: The Ljubljana Papers*, ed. Malcolm V. Jones (Nottingham: Astra Press, 1993), pp. 289-290; Pieter Boulogne, "The French influence in the early Dutch reception of F. M. Dostoevsky's *Brat'ja Karamazovy*: A case study," *Babel* 55, no. 3 (2009); Helen Munchnic, *Dostoevsky's English Reputation* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), pp. 13-17. Munchnic further notes that such influential introductions to Russian culture as Brandes (1888) and Bazàn (1890) relied on Vogüé for their readings of Dostoevsky. See Munchnic, *Dostoevsky's English Reputation*, pp. 31-35.

<sup>153</sup> Corbet, *L'Opinion française face à l'inconnue russe (1799-1894)*, p. 456.

<sup>154</sup> C. Bushueva, "Dostoevskii na zarubezhnoi stsene," in *Dostoevskii i teatr*, ed. A. A. Ninov (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1983), p. 465.

humanitarian works of Dostoevsky, up to *Crime and Punishment*. His mature fiction, however, had a turbulent translation history.

Along with Vogüé and the critics of this first period, those who proceeded to translate Dostoevsky deemed it necessary to ‘protect’ the public from certain subversive – if not ‘unseemly’ – aspects of his post-exile writings. More even than Derély’s greatly adapted *Crime and Punishment*, Ely Halpérine-Kaminsky’s and Charles Morice’s *L’Esprit souterrain* exemplifies the sanitisation that Dostoevsky’s thought underwent in its translation into French at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The translation appeared in Plon in 1886, with the cover labeled, in a minuscule font: “traduit et adapté”. No further sign, preface or disclaimer alerted the reader as to the extent to which the translation deviated from the original in content. The work is in fact a rather awkward synthesis of Dostoevsky’s *The Landlady* (1847) and the *Notes from Underground* (1864).<sup>155</sup> The two protagonists are rolled into one through a bridge section, entirely fabricated by the translators:

Cette mélancolique aventure d’un amour sans espoir et jamais guéri devait avoir sur la caractère et la vie d’Ordinov une triste influence. Ce cœur ardent, cette âme de poète furent aigris et stérilisés; il vécut inutile aux autres, insupportable à lui-même, et mourut à soixante ans, seul, pauvre...<sup>156</sup>

The adaptors continue in this vain, inventing Ordynov/the underground man’s failed attempts to travel, and one further failed love story, providing no indication

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<sup>155</sup> Backès went as far as to exclaim: “*L’Esprit souterrain* ressemble au monstre que le Frankenstein de Mary Shelley construit en dépeçant différents cadavres.” See Backès, “Dostoïevski en France 1880 – 1930”, p. 162.

<sup>156</sup> F. M. Dostoïevski, *L’Esprit souterrain*, trans. E. D. Halpérine-Kaminsky and Charles Morice (Paris: Plon, 1886), p. 154.



as to the fabrication of these sections other than a very tangible drop in literary credentials. Further cross-references to the misadventure of *The Landlady* are superimposed throughout the translation from *Notes from Underground* to further reinforce the fusion. The reason for this splicing is two-fold. Firstly, the underground man, an unprecedented psychological type, had to be *accounted for*: a causal explanation had to accompany the narrative. Ordynov's tale is essentially used as a *rationale* for the composite character's later 'underground' mind state, as the altered title and invented bridge section make explicit. Dostoevsky's original, however, had consciously done precisely the opposite: in reversing the chronology of the two halves of his *Notes*, Dostoevsky's original structure discouraged from approaching the underground man's polemics (the first half of the work) in terms of psychological causality. Even the origins of the physical 'notes' themselves are normalised and accounted for: the notebooks are reported (by the translators' fabricated third-person narrator) to have been found (to the narrator's feigned surprise) by Apollon, the underground man/Ordynov's servant, who had inherited it along with the deceased protagonist's belongings and sold it to the narrator.<sup>157</sup> The second reason for embedding the *Notes from Underground* within *The Landlady* is that the *Notes* were aesthetically subversive and explicitly anti-romantic, particularly in their parody of Rousseau. *The Landlady*, dating from the 1840s was an unproblematically 'romantic' novella in every sense. By so forcing the modernist romantic realism (or proto-existentialism) of the *Notes* into a familiar romantic frame, much of its aesthetic subversiveness was neutralised.

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

The *Notes* section of their adaptation is re-entitled ‘Lise’ (the *Landlady* section having been entitled ‘Katia’) immediately giving the love story precedence over the polemical aspect, while the first half of the *Notes*, are introduced with the following abashed disclaimer from the translation’s narrator:

[...] le récit était précédé d’une assez longue et un peu désordonnée discussion qu’Ordinov supposait entre lui-même et des lecteurs imaginaires. Je n’ai pas cru devoir retrancher ces pages qui jettent de vives lumières sur l’âme de cet homme extraordinaire... C’est donc le manuscrit même d’Ordinov qu’on va lire.

This is clearly addressed to a reader expected to wonder why they were not removed altogether. An interpretation of the title is then imposed on the work by the translation’s narrator:

Aussi retrouvera-t-on souvent dans ses notes le mot souterrain. Il vivait, en effet, en une sorte de *souterrain spirituel*, il avait un ESPRIT SOUTERRAIN, toujours creusant plus avant et plus profond dans les mystères de sa conscience: “la conscience, cette maladie!” écrit-il quelque part.<sup>158</sup>

The translation’s narrator goes to describe the notes as “une triste réponse à l’antique maxime: ‘Connais-toi.’ –Non, il n’est pas bon à l’homme de se connaître lui-même.”<sup>159</sup> The contemporary critic may indeed wonder at the translators’ claim to such license as to fold what is essentially a translator’s preface into the diegesis, and, as such, to dictate a particular reading of the work in the author’s name. This is wholly indicative of their much less reverent stance towards an uncanonised novelist from a peripheral literary tradition. The

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<sup>158</sup> Dostoïevski, *L’Esprit souterrain*, p. 155.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

translator's task has clearly been interpreted as rendering of an obscure and exotic artifact accessible.

Equally consequential as these striking additions are the translators' numerous omissions, which greatly detracted from Dostoevsky's anti-rationalist thesis in the translation. The first significant omission consists of the last five sentences of the second chapter; the famous discourse on the laws of nature, in which the underground man set out the thesis that one cannot be reconciled with the injustice of existence.<sup>160</sup> They are replaced with the following sentence: "Et puis j'étais innocent parce que... Eh bien! Parce que j'étais innocent!..."<sup>161</sup> The effect of replacing an exposition of a sophisticated critique of positivism with a childish "just because" argument is that the underground man becomes irrational rather than irrationalist. The role of will and indeed that of reason in the underground man's arrival at a valourisation of caprice is diminished.

Half of chapters nine and eleven were removed entirely, and all that remains of chapter ten is a conspicuous single paragraph, taken completely out of context. This curious, stand-alone paragraph-chapter is none other than underground man's apology for his own philosophising. Much of the mathematical imagery and philosophical terminology employed by Dostoevsky to attack positivism and utilitarianism are removed from the translation. The *desired* effect was clearly to reduce an anti-rationalist polemic to a far more accessible and far less subversive irrational 'outburst'. Consequently it is hardly surprising that so few readers of

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<sup>160</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, V, p. 103.

<sup>161</sup> Dostoïevski, *L'Esprit souterrain*, p. 166.

the period recognised any import in the text, and a fuller translation did not appear until Bienstock's in 1909, i.e. a quarter of a century later.

Perhaps Lefevre's writings on the translation of poetics and universes of discourse may elucidate the matter of why such amendments might have seemed necessary.<sup>162</sup> It is possible that the form of *Notes from Underground* having no direct precedent in French literary discourse seemed aesthetically untranslatable. Vogue's genuine hostility toward the philosophical 'deviations' in Dostoevsky's fiction would fit with this hypothesis.

This first translation of *Notes from Underground* marks a vital moment in the history of Dostoevsky's French reception, particularly that of the existential themes that would take on such significance for subsequent generations of interpreters. The names of Harpéline-Kaminsky and Charles Morice have thus become somewhat infamous in Russian-French translation studies on account of their handling of the text. Their 1888 *Frères Karamazov* has already been assessed in terms of its multiple deficiencies.<sup>163</sup> Aside from the practices of tactical omissions witnessed in the above analyses of other translations, Harpéline-Kaminsky and Morice again felt the need to improve Dostoevsky's original by providing it with a 'proper' ending. Alesha's sermon by the rock was removed,<sup>164</sup> and in its place are added six chapters recounting Mitja's escape,

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<sup>162</sup> André Lefevre, *Translating Literature: Practice and Theory in a Comparative Literature Context* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1992) p. 87-88.

<sup>163</sup> Hemmings, "Dostoevsky in disguise. The 1888 French version of the Brothers Karamazov"

<sup>164</sup> This the translators published as a separate work of fiction under the title *Les Précoces* in 1889 with Victor Havard and republished with Flammarion in 1897. Not only was the source of the chapter not signaled anywhere on the stand-alone volume, but the protagonist's name was altered

Alesha's trial and Lise's miraculous healing, all events entirely absent from the original.<sup>165</sup>

When a second generation of translators and critics challenged Harpéline-Kaminsky, he provided prefaces to subsequent re-editions justifying his choices and claiming that his 'mitigation' of Dostoevsky's fiction had been necessary to attain the author's success in France: "ce chef-d'oeuvre rendu... mettons, moins 'foisonnant' est devenu classique aux yeux du public"<sup>166</sup> A highly curious correspondence between Gide and Harpéline-Kaminsky concerning this matter survives in the Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet. Gide was unsurprisingly critical of the translator-adaptor's significant omissions and additions. However, he was not altogether critical of the translation in terms of tone:

Une fois admises ces coupures et ces remaniements il m'est aisé de louer votre traduction qui sait, autant que je puis m'en rendre compte, rendre exactement le ton de ces ouvrages et, particulièrement dans *L'Esprit souterrain*, l'accent spasmodique de l'auteur.<sup>167</sup>

Gide, however, had no access to the original and could only compare Harpéline-Kaminsky's attempt to its German counterpart. In fact,

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to Chestomazov, presumably in order to throw the readership off the scent. *Les Précoces* was a significant commercial success in its own right, going to at least 35 editions, with the name of Karamazov being reinstated only in 1930. See Boulogne, "The French influence in the early Dutch reception of F. M. Dostoevsky's *Brat'ja Karamazovy*: A case study," p. 269. The original eding was only reinstated into Harpéline-Kaminsky and Morice's *Les Frères Karamazov* in a 1932 edition: forty four years and over fifty editions since the original 1888 version. See Vladimir Bouchik, ed., *Bibliographie des œuvres littéraires russes traduites en français* (Paris: Messages, 1935), p. 32.

<sup>165</sup> Hemmings, "Dostoevsky in disguise. The 1888 French version of the Brothers Karamazov,"

<sup>166</sup> Harpéline-Kaminsky, 'Préface' to F. M. Dostoïevski, *Les Frères Karamazov*, trans. Harpéline-Kaminsky and Charles Morice, 2 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1929), I, p. xii.

<sup>167</sup> André Gide, "Lettre à Harpéline-Kaminsky," (5-2-1929), Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet, Fond Harpéline Kaminsky, Gama.583.5.

Harpéline-Kaminsky's translation, as the above analysis demonstrated, was significantly more "spasmodic" than the original. It is also telling that Gide attributes this spasmodic aspect not to the narrator but to the author. With regard to the "butchered" version of the *Karamazovs* that Harpéline-Kaminsky and Morice produced, Gide even agreed that the nineteenth century French public was not ready for the full text: "Je crois, en effet, qu'une traduction intégrale des *Karamazov* eût risqué, dans le premier temps, de rebuter les lectures, et de décourager très fâcheusement l'éditeur."<sup>168</sup> Nonetheless, and despite Vogüé's desire both to protect the public from Dostoevsky's more subversive ideas and to protect Russian literature's reputation from the wrath he anticipated this to elicit from the public, he did speak critically concerning the numerous liberal translations that were being produced. His preface to the *Souvenirs de la Maison des Morts* described the 1886 translation as one of the only integral ones to date, chastising the "adaptors" of other works for altering texts to suit public taste rather than allowing the texts to challenge reading habits.<sup>169</sup>

Erneste Combes, in his highly typical indictment of Dostoevsky, wrote that "[*Crime et châtement*] est très convenable... aux souteneurs et aux filles publiques qui ont pu le voir, mise en drame, joué, en 1888, dans un théâtre faubourien de Paris, au *Bouffes-du-Nord*. C'était sa place."<sup>170</sup> Combes employs an age-old argument that proved perennial to detractors of many a work of literature in the nineteenth century. Francisque Sarcey made a similar pronouncement:

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid. It is possible that this same fear and similar 'strategic' thinking was behind Vogüé's beseechment to Plon not to undertake publishing *Les Frères Karamazov*. See above.

<sup>169</sup> Vogüé, "Préface," to F. M. Dostoïevski, *Souvenirs de la maison des morts*, trans. V. Derély (Paris: Plon, 1886), p. xiv.

<sup>170</sup> Ernest Combes, *Profils et types de la littérature russe* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1896), p. 346.

*Le Crime et le Châtiment* est le livre d'un Gaboriau qui serait philosophe: c'est l'œuvre d'un Balzac barbouillé de mysticisme. *La Guerre et la Paix* est une admirable épopée. *Le Crime et le Châtiment* est un roman très amusant et très curieux. Les femmes préféreront *Le Crime et le Châtiment*. *La Guerre et la Paix* plaira mieux aux hommes.<sup>171</sup>

Like Charbonelle, Combes lamented the imitation of Dostoevsky by the French writers of the 1890s: "Un nom célèbre ne m'effraie pas, et j'attaque résolument ce représentant d'une école nauséabonde; puisqu'il est le chef, il paiera pour sa séquelle."<sup>172</sup> Like Goncourt, he resented the fact that readers found a novelty in a Russian literature that he esteemed to be an imitation of French works:

Le succès de ces romans ne prouve rien, sinon la bêtise humaine; nous n'avons chez nous que l'embarras du choix. À propos, mais ce sont les mêmes! Ce bric-à-brac romantique ne nous vient pas, il nous revient de la Russie (...) sentez, vous reconnaîtrez l'odeur.<sup>173</sup>

Hector Pessard lamented the same tendency for opposite reasons: a Russian influence on French literature could only devalue it in decreasing its typically French qualities:

L'imitation des Russes, et particulièrement celle de Dostoïevski, risque de nous amener à faire trop bon marché de nos qualités nationales de clarté, de bon sens, de droiture intellectuelle, de grâce et de charme.<sup>174</sup>

Maurice Barrès's diaries express a similar fear in rather more emotive terms: "L'Orient nous envahit. L'Asie! son flot vint mourir dans l'*Iphigénie* de Racine. Sa grande vague moderne, c'est Tolstoï, c'est Dostoïewski. [...] *Le mal d'Asie!* J'en suis envahi."<sup>175</sup> Armand de Pontmartin also bemoaned Dostoevsky's influence on a generation:

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<sup>171</sup> Francisque Sarcey, "Les Livres," *Nouvelle revue* 35 (1885), p. 855.

<sup>172</sup> Combes, *Profils et types de la littérature russe*, p. 342.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 347-8.

<sup>174</sup> Hector Pessard, "Chronique théâtrale," *Revue Bleue*, 22-9-1888, p. 380.

<sup>175</sup> Maurice Barrès, *Mes Cahiers* (Paris: Plon, 1963), entry for March 1897, p. 149.

Ne laissons pas dire que, dans la patrie de Montaigne et de Racine, de Bossuet et de Molière, de Voltaire et de Montesquieu, on n'est plus bon qu'à créer ou à copier une littérature d'épileptiques, de malades, de visionnaires, de possédés, d'assassins, de filles, de forçats, de monomanes et d'imbéciles.<sup>176</sup>

This “littérature d'épileptiques” argument was also a common one. Combes made use of it: “Laissons à d'autres le plaisir d'analyser les âmes slaves. Ces arcanes effraient ma simplicité qui n'aime que la lumière. Il faut être néo-psychologue pour apprécier un psychopathe, pour entrevoir le génie sous l'hallucination.”<sup>177</sup>

## Conclusions

By 1900 the majority of Dostoevsky's oeuvre had been translated, to some extent, into French. However, these translations were often highly liberal, translators clearly approaching texts as an aesthetically flawed brute material to be moulded to correspond to more refined French tastes. Moreover, analysis of Derély's *Crime et châtime*nt and Harpéline-Kamisky's *L'Esprit souterrain* revealed significant attempts to neutralise the subversive philosophical discussions these texts contain, specifically Dostoevsky's critique of positivism. Initial critics made the same assumptions with regard to Dostoevsky's aesthetics. His aesthetic ‘barbarism’ and his philosophical ‘digressions’ – seen as unseemly and morally questionable – were viewed as limiting factors on the value of his work. Both of these flaws were directly attributed to his Russianness.

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<sup>176</sup> Armand de Pontmartin, *Souvenirs d'un vieux critique* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1881-1889), p. 285.

<sup>177</sup> Combes, *Profilis et types de la littérature russe*, p. 353.



The triple task of translator and critic was therefore to root out the morally problematic, underline the morally instructive, and to mitigate (in the case of translation) or accentuate (in the case of criticism) the clash of Volksgeists that Dostoevsky's fiction represented to the French. In all three respects Vogüé was no exception. His reading isolated the moralist in Dostoevsky from his subversive philosophical questioning, and actively sought to dissuade both readers and publishers from venturing near Dostoevsky's mature fiction, retaining a fundamental prejudice that the novel was no place for philosophising.

What Vogüé did achieve, was to present Dostoevsky's opposition to nineteenth century culture as modern rather than backward or reactionary. By the 1890s, a shift had begun. The heyday of naturalism was at its end; Russian literature was intensely fashionable, and decadents were beginning to explore similar challenges to those launched by Dostoevsky. By the time of Vogüé's appointment to the Académie, he had come to represent not only the herald of the Russian novel, but also to a certain extent of a new chapter of French literary history. His association between the Russian Orient and the Modern, as a historical force in opposition to both franco-centrism and classicism, would continue and develop throughout the subsequent, pivotal period of Dostoevsky's reception.

## Chapter 2: André Gide and “ceux qui avaient vingt ans” (1898-1926)

Paul Valéry, writing retrospectively on the year 1900, recalled: “C’est en 1900 que le mot *Beauté* a commencé à disparaître. Il a été remplacé par un autre mot, qui, depuis a fait son chemin: le mot ‘Vie’. Et cela est capital.”<sup>178</sup> The decline of the cult of beauty and the rise of the cult of life, widely recognised by commentators of modernism, had a favourable impact on Dostoevsky’s reception, the vivacity of his fiction becoming more important than aspects of composition thus far read as deficiencies. The cult of life of which Valéry spoke did not survive the Great War; a parallel cult of the immediate, the spontaneous and *l’informe* continued to grow in magnitude. These shifts in values would radically alter the ‘modern’ readings of Dostoevsky. The most renowned and influential of these was that of André Gide. His reading and its development thus form the backbone of this chapter.

In light of the novelty and broad influence of Gide’s reading, numerous studies have broached the issue. Fayer (1946) was among the earliest to fully appreciate the place of Dostoevsky in Gide’s intellectual development, positing a Dostoevsky-informed conception of freedom as the central pillar of Gide’s worldview in a study to which Gide responded: “Je ne me suis jamais si bien compris moi-même qu’en vous lisant.”<sup>179</sup> Despite the purport of Gide in the

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<sup>178</sup> From Valéry’s contribution to *Enquête sur 1900*, special edition of *Les Marges* (10-6-1932) vol. I, reprinted in Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), II, p. 1553.

<sup>179</sup> ‘Letter from André Gide’ published as a preface to Fayer’s monograph. Harry Micha Fayer, *Gide, Freedom and Dostoevsky* (Burlington: The Lane Press, 1946).

French modernist milieu and despite his own overt recognition of the centrality of Dostoevsky in his thought, the implications of the Gide-Dostoevsky dialog in the context of French intellectual history have never been traced. Backès's (1972) previously mentioned doctoral thesis compiled a wealth of data in relation to Gide and his contemporaries' readings of Dostoevsky; however, his corpus terminates at 1930.<sup>180</sup> The reverberations of Gide's thinking on Dostoevsky remain to be explored. Moutote's (1976) article explored possible influences of Dostoevsky's shorter fiction on Gide's satirical writings.<sup>181</sup> However, the philosophical component of their intertextual dialogue as well as more major works such as *L'Immoraliste* and *Crime and Punishment* were omitted. Cadot's (1993) paper on the subject drew from several of the above studies, stratifying Gide's engagement with Dostoevsky into periods of 'discovery', 'criticism' and 'assimilation'.<sup>182</sup> However, due to the small scale of his study it could not assess the breadth or depth of implication that the present thesis undertakes to explore.

In this chapter, Gide's early reading of and thinking on Dostoevsky are traced from the youthful moralist's reception of Vogüé through his sensualist awakening towards a paradoxalist reading. Gide's violent revolt against Vogüé's moralist reduction of Dostoevsky's thought is explored in comparison to key contemporaneous analyses and adaptations by Suarès, Faure and Copeau. War, Revolution and Russian immigration are then discussed as factors respectively in

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<sup>180</sup> Backès, (1972) "Dostoïevski en France 1880 – 1930".

<sup>181</sup> Moutote, "Dostoïevski et Gide," *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* vol. 76, no. 5 (1976).

<sup>182</sup> Michel Cadot, "Lectures stratifiées de Dostoïevsky par André Gide," in *Dostoevsky and the Twentieth Century: the Ljubljana Papers*, ed. Malcolm V. Jones (Nottingham: Astra Press, 1993).

Dostoevsky's increased significance both in Gide's thought and in French discourse throughout the 1920s. Finally Gide's mature interpretation and corresponding literary output of the mid-20s are discussed in relation to other key publications of this crucial period of re-formation in Dostoevsky's French reception.

### **Containing two voids: Gide's initial readings (1887-1902)**

Like most of his generation, Gide's initial reading of Dostoevsky was informed by Vogüé. On reading *Le Roman russe* in August 1890, Gide's reading diary records his initial appreciation: "très remarquable – notes tout au long."<sup>183</sup> Following Vogüé's advice, Gide and his generation directed their enthusiasm towards Tolstoy.<sup>184</sup> His *Journal* records his completion of *War and Peace* in August 1891: "Jamais, je crois, je n'ai tant vécu dans le livre..."<sup>185</sup> In the entry of the following day, Gide discovers Schopenhauer with considerably less enthusiasm, affronted by the latter's critique of Kantian ethics: "Cette morale de Schopenhauer (*Fondement de la morale*) toute empirique, m'agace... Une morale doit être *a priori*."<sup>186</sup> Gide's thinking at this stage<sup>187</sup> was steeped in the neo-Platonic idealism prevalent in the symbolist circles whose sway he was under,

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<sup>183</sup> André Gide, "Subjectif," *Cahiers André Gide* vol. 1, *Les Débuts littéraires d'André Walter à L'Immoraliste* (1969). See also the thorough reading records throughout the early years of André Gide, *Journal 1887-1925* (Paris: Pléiade, 1996).

<sup>184</sup> Gide, "Subjectif," pp. 99-100.

<sup>185</sup> Gide, *Journal 1887-1925*, p. 138.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p.139.

<sup>187</sup> In a journal entry dated 20 Dec 1924 Gide would express an appreciation for Schopenhauer over Kant and a refusal to indulge in the 'mysticism' of idealism. *Ibid.*, p. 1271.

as evidenced in his contemporaneous *Traité du Narcisse* (1892):

Tout s'y cristallisait en une floraison nécessaire, et tout était parfaitement ainsi que cela devait être. – Tout demeurait immobile... Chaste Eden! Jardin des Idées! où les formes, rythmiques et sûres, révélaient sans effort leur nombre; où chaque chose était ce qu'elle paraissait; où prouver était inutile.<sup>188</sup>

Striving towards the unadulterated and the *a priori* in epistemology as in ethics, it is hardly surprising that Gide's reading of *Crime and Punishment* in 1891 (during the preparation of the *Traité du Narcisse*) left an ambiguous to negative impression. Dostoevsky's radical experiment in relativism struck the idealistic writer, still heavily under the influence of the symbolists, as "une des choses les plus morbides."<sup>189</sup> Gide, nevertheless, seems to have been compelled to reread the disturbing work that same year.<sup>190</sup> At this time, however, no mention of Dostoevsky appears in Gide's intimate diaries, normally such a rich source of commentary on his intellectual development. Gide's affiliations seem to have remained closer to Kant than to Raskolnikov. This would soon change.

On 13 September 1893, the Gide's *Journal* interrogates Goethe:

Disons-nous donc maintenant que le bonheur s'obtient par la suppression des scrupules? Non. Supprimer les scrupules ne suffit pas à rendre heureux; il faut mieux. Mais les scrupules suffisent à nous empêcher le bonheur...<sup>191</sup>

Emerging doubts as to the validity of the *a priori* conceptions in ethics that he had thus far defended herald the crisis that his memoirs recall as "la période la

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<sup>188</sup> André Gide, *Romans, récits et contes, œuvres lyriques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), p. 3.

<sup>189</sup> Cited in D. Moutote, "Dostoïevski et Gide," *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* vol. 76, no. 5 (1976) p. 769. Gide's early proximity to symbolism is evident throughout the *Traité*. See also André Gide, *Si le grain ne meurt*, pp. 263-4.

<sup>190</sup> Gide, "Subjectif," p. 69.

<sup>191</sup> Gide, *Journal 1887-1925*, p. 173.

plus confuse de ma vie” and Gide’s intellectual shift towards subjectivism.<sup>192</sup> One burning question was beginning to undermine his idealism: “au nom de quel Dieu, de quel idéal me défendez-vous de vivre selon ma nature?”<sup>193</sup> In 1893, Gide rose to his own challenge in a sensualist awakening: “Volupté! Ce mot, je voudrais le redire sans cesse; je le voudrais synonyme de *bien-être*, et même qu’il suffit de dire *être* simplement”<sup>194</sup> is the existential outcry of the resultant *Nourritures Terrestres* (1896). Along with Nietzsche, a contemporaneous discovery through Gide’s knowledge of German, Gide attacks the classical and theological education that had led him to hide behind Kantian ethics from the potentialities of embodied existence:

Certes, il m’a plu souvent qu’une doctrine et même qu’un système complet de pensées ordonnées justifiât à moi-même mes actes; mais parfois je ne l’ai plus pu considérer que comme l’abri de ma sensualité.<sup>195</sup>

Dostoevsky’s fiction, until this moment, had occupied at best a marginal place in Gide’s thought. However, a series of traumatic events was to throw Gide into his greatest spiritual crisis, and to plunge him into Dostoevsky. His contraction of tuberculosis during his voyage of sexual self-discovery brought his scandalised, puritanical mother to North Africa,<sup>196</sup> bringing Gide’s two opposed moral frameworks – and two ‘Karamazovian extremes’ – into direct conflict. Depressed, repressed, uprooted and morally cleaved in two, in 1896 Gide returned to Dostoevsky.

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<sup>192</sup> Gide, *Si le grain ne meurt*, p. 252.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p.284.

<sup>194</sup> Gide, *Romans*, p.174.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>196</sup> Gide, *Si le grain ne meurt*, pp. 309-312.

Gide's initial ambiguous response to *Crime and Punishment* had not prevented him from continuing with Vogüé's censored, sentimentalist's reading list: he had read *Humiliated and Offended* by 1893 and *Memoirs from the House of the Dead* by 1895.<sup>197</sup> However, it was only at this moral impasse of 1896 that he was drawn finally to the murkier works that Vogüé had 'forbidden'. In Gide's correspondence with Paul Valéry, he writes: "Lis donc *L'Idiot* de Dostoïevsky. J'attends pour en parler d'avoir fini *Les Karamazof* – mais jusqu'à présent, je trouve ça presque très mauvais – procédés et... intéressant. Lis donc *L'Idiot*."<sup>198</sup> Appreciation was clearly not immediate, but Gide's curiosity had been roused profoundly. Gide seems to have recognised something of his own duality in the Dostoevskian conception of man, even finding something of a working model in Dostoevsky's conception of the human self 'containing two voids' as opposed to representing psychological dualisms in dialectical conflict, as he would later recall.<sup>199</sup> This realisation would take decades to reach fruition, however, as early as the turn of the century Gide was ready to publish his first tentative pages of interpretation.

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<sup>197</sup> Gide, "Subjectif." For detailed chronologies of Gide's reading of Dostoevsky see also Moutote, "Dostoïevski et Gide"; Michel Cadot, "Lectures stratifiée de Dostoïevsky par André Gide," in *Dostoevsky and the Twentieth Century: the Ljubljana Papers*, ed. Malcolm V. Jones (Nottingham: Astra Press, 1993).

<sup>198</sup> Letter to Paul Valéry (26-10-1896) in André Gide, *Correspondance avec Paul Valéry (1890-1942)*, *Cahiers André Gide* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), p. 417.

<sup>199</sup> This claim may seem farfetched, however, by the twenties Gide was writing overtly of the influence Dostoevsky's paradoxalist characterisation had had on the psychological reality of his generation: "vraiment, je crois que Dostoïevsky nous ouvre les yeux sur certains phénomènes, qui peut-être ne sont même pas rares – mais que simplement nous n'avions pas su remarquer." See André Gide, *Dostoïevsky* (Paris: Plon, 1923), pp. 53, 180. Ivanov had said the same of his Silver Age generation in Russia. See page 18, footnote 24 of the current thesis.

***Que peut l'homme? Delineating the human: Gide's first writings on Dostoevsky (1898-1902)***

Gide's often overlooked sixth 'Lettre à Angèle' appeared in January 1899 in *L'Ermitage* accompanying the first French translations of *Also sprach Zarathustra* (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*) and *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (*Beyond Good and Evil*). This early interpretation of Dostoevsky's thought bears the decisive mark of the spiritual crisis through which it was formed: his struggle to simultaneously appropriate both the ideal of Nietzschean self-affirmation and that of Evangelical abnegation.<sup>200</sup> In the context of a discussion of Nietzsche, Gide offers his first published analysis of Dostoevsky's thought. Significantly for the present study, this was also French criticism's first association of Nietzsche and Dostoevsky. Arriving as it did in the same volume as the first translations of the primary texts that would secure Nietzsche's reputation in France, Nietzsche's reception was to some extent refracted through Dostoevsky from the earliest stage.<sup>201</sup> The comparison of Dostoevsky's fictional philosophers (Raskolnikov, Ivan Karamazov, Kirilov) to their German 'nephew' has since become a commonplace. Gide, however, was among the earliest readers to identify its significance, presenting to the French readership, alongside *Zarathustra*, the controversial theories of Kirilov. As observed in the previous chapter, Gide's predecessors had for the most part disregarded these as pure satire, incompatible

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<sup>200</sup> This dialectic continues throughout Gide's writing on Dostoevsky and is a prominent feature of his Gide's fictional output at the turn of the century, particularly *L'Immoraliste* and *La Porte étroite*.

<sup>201</sup> For the article's significance in terms of Nietzsche's reception in France see Rider, *Nietzsche en France: De la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle au temps présent* pp. 97-99; Douglas Smith, *Transvaluations: Nietzsche in France 1872-1972* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 187.



with a humanitarian preconception of their author's ethical stance.

As Gide asserts, Nietzschean thought fell on "terrain préparé",<sup>202</sup> reception preceding translation thanks to German-reading French writers (like himself) who were already expounding interpretations of Nietzsche's ideas. This, as Gide was all too aware, was also the case for Dostoevsky: Vogüé's much smaller generation of Russian-reading *hommes de lettres* in France had 'prepared' his own generation to receive a censored reading of Dostoevsky. This reading, Gide would now subvert: "Nul plus que Dostoïevski n'a *aidé* Nietzsche."<sup>203</sup> Gide's italics testify to the extent to which the notion clashed with established conceptions of both writers. It seems highly improbable that Gide could have known at this early stage of the archival evidence of Nietzsche's enthused reading of French editions of *Les Possédés* and *L'Esprit souterrain*.<sup>204</sup> But as Moutote has postulated, no-one more than Dostoevsky helped Gide to come to terms with Nietzsche's thought.<sup>205</sup>

Not surprisingly, Gide identifies Nietzsche as an embodiment of the selfsame moral dilemma that he himself had lived through since his sensualist awakening and his rift with traditional conceptions of ethics, both Kantian and Evangelical, however, Gide concludes that "Nietzsche, prisonnier dans sa cage de philosophe, dans son hérédité protestante, y devient fou."<sup>206</sup> Gide's implication is that any

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<sup>202</sup> André Gide, *Essais critiques* (Paris: Pléiade, 1999), p. 35 (Gide's emphasis).

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>204</sup> F Nietzsche, *Briefwechsel: Friedrich Nietzsche, Franz und Ida Overbeck* (Suttgart; Weimar Metzler, 2000), p. 354; Fridlender, *Dostoïevskii i mirovaia literatura*, pp. 233-235.

<sup>205</sup> Moutote, "Dostoïevski et Gide," p. 774.

<sup>206</sup> Gide, *Essais critiques*, p. 40.

reconciliation of ethics, and specifically protestant ethics, with lived experience lies beyond the reach of speculative philosophy, but perhaps not beyond the limitations of artistic representation. This explains Gide's appreciation of Nietzsche's endeavour and reservations, with regards to his conclusions: "Œuvre admirable? Non – mais préface d'œuvres admirables."<sup>207</sup>

It is here that Gide turns from Nietzsche to Dostoevsky, including a long excerpt from Kirilov's now famously 'proto-Nietzschean' discourse. Kirilov herein develops the idea that in admitting the non-existence of God, the atheist individualist succeeds God, inheriting absolute freedom over subjective existence. Kirilov concludes that the herald of such a truth (Kirilov himself) must first validate it through an ultimate act of will: a purely philosophically-motivated suicide.<sup>208</sup> However, Gide's account of this discourse differs decisively from the original. Dostoevsky had left no doubt that Kirilov's theory, along with his serene intent to realise it, long preceded Verkhovensky's plot to exploit the event for political gain.<sup>209</sup> Gide's presentation is contrarily compelled to stress that Kirilov is forced by external circumstance into a state of mind that simultaneously provokes both the theory and the act:

Kirilov *doit* se tuer... *doit* signer un papier où il se déclare coupable [...] tout est perdu pour Pierre, l'écouteur, s'il ne remet pas Kiriloff *en état* de se tuer. (Tant il est vrai que tout état pathologique inconscient peut proposer à l'individu des actes neufs, que sa raison s'ingéniera aussitôt à admettre, à

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p.39. It is here that Gide describes Nietzsche's oeuvre as "d'une admirable monotonie" (p.37), an epithet that Camus would recycle in reference to Nietzsche, Pascal and Shestov, suggesting a connection between this essay of Gide's and Camus's later critique of religious existential thought. Albert Camus, *Œuvres complètes*, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 2006-8), II, p. 931.

<sup>208</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, X, p. 470.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., X, pp. 187-8.

soutenir, à systémiser).<sup>210</sup>

As if Gide's pathological interpretation were not already explicit from his italics and parenthesis, he then introduces Kirilov's monologue thus: "Voici ce que, poussé par Pierre, Kiriloff arrive à dire, superuomo d'un instant".<sup>211</sup>

The final, deciding motivation for Kirilov's suicide is one of the great lingering controversies of *The Devils*, Dostoevsky having taken pains to problematise the event through Kirilov's momentary hesitation and his ambiguous penultimate act of biting Verkhovensky's finger. Whether this can be deemed the philosophical suicide Kirilov had theorised, whether it is marred by the spite towards his witness, or whether the act was philosophically discredited by the suggested association with an altered state of consciousness (pre-epileptic trance), Dostoevsky's text offers no final comment. What is clear is that while Kirilov's reasoning may be irrational, his state of mind is in no way induced by Verkhovensky, as Gide would recognise in his mature reading.

This initial misconception on Gide's part is telling, and his treatment of the relationship between pathology and reason in this parallel interpretation of Kirilov and Nietzsche is worthy of attentive analysis:

Je sais bien que Dostoïevski met ses paroles dans la bouche d'un fou; mais peut-être une certaine folie est-elle *nécessaire* pour faire dire une première fois certaines choses; peut-être Nietzsche l'a-t-il senti. L'important c'est que ces choses-là soient dites, car maintenant il n'est plus besoin d'être fou pour les penser [...] je préfère dire que Nietzsche *s'est fait fou*.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Gide, *Essais critiques*, p. 41 (Gide's emphasis).

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p.42

Such efforts to defend Kirilov or Nietzsche's reflections from disregard on account of madness seems unnecessary to the post-modern (or even modern) critic. However, Gide's first essay preceding the twentieth-century rehabilitation of non-rational modes of thought, he faced the initial and formidable task of convincing his reader that the thought of madmen might be of some degree of value. To still prevalent conservative critics observed in the first chapter to attack "une littérature d' épiléptiques, de malades, de visionnaires"<sup>213</sup>, Gide retorts with comparison to the taunters of Christ: "Si tu es le Christ, sauve-toi toi-même."<sup>214</sup> Gide's provocative argument maintains that just as the human limitations of Christ do not diminish the divine truth of his teachings, so the verdict of madness does not detract from his elected prophets of modernity.

Gide's fictional world was meanwhile grappling with the same question that Kirilov and Nietzsche embodied in his critical writing: could a single act of individual will indeed redefine man, and is man free to commit such an act? The problem receives its first, somewhat burlesque treatment in the 'gratuitous act' of the *Prométhée mal enchainé*, published in the following year. Edmond Jaloux for one did not hesitate to trace back to this novella (and through it directly back to Dostoevsky's Kirilov), the concept of the gratuitous act that would be of such consequence to a subsequent generation of writers.<sup>215</sup> Significantly, the 'gratuitously' administered punishment and reward that set the *Prométhée* in motion are carried out not by a man as such, but by a capricious deity, suggesting

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<sup>213</sup> Pontmartin, *Souvenirs d'un vieux critique*, 7e serie, p. 285.

<sup>214</sup> Gide, *Essais critiques*, p. 43.

<sup>215</sup> Jaloux traced back Gide's concept of gratuitous action to Dostoevsky's Kirilov. See Edmond Jaloux, "André Gide et le problème du roman," in *Hommages à André Gide*, ed. Bernstein et al (Paris: Editions du capitolé, 1927 ) p. 114.

that while gratuity may be within the means of divine action, human action remains bound by psychological causation and rationality.<sup>216</sup> However, the conclusion of the sixth *Lettre à Angèle* with its comparison of Kirilov and Nietzsche to Christ suggested ample room for the negotiation of this boundary within Gide's conception of man and God. Dostoevsky's Kirilov and Stavrogin had also achieved a quasi-divine status (as Man-God and *Übermensch* respectively), permitting gratuitous acts of violence: the former's finger-biting and the latter's ear-biting. The 'creaturely' character of their super-human acts is indicative of their departure from a definition of the human. As Aristotle famously wrote: "he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state."<sup>217</sup>

Gide's interrogation of this boundary would receive a more cathartic exploration in *L'Immoraliste* (1902), in which Gide's dialogue with Dostoevsky is again apparent. The work is most obviously a fictional application of the Nietzsche-informed proto-existential sensualist doctrine that Gide had espoused in *Les Nourritures*: "Avant, pensais-je, je ne comprenais pas que je vivais. Je devais faire de la vie la palpitante découverte."<sup>218</sup> As such, Gide's interaction with *The Devils*, and the debate he had staged three years earlier between

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<sup>216</sup> Referred to variously as Zeus; le miglionnaire; le banquier and on one ambiguous occasion le Bon Dieu: "moi seul, celui-là seul dont la fortune est infinie peut agir avec un désintéressement absolu ; l'homme pas." Gide, *Romans*, p. 329. Dostoevsky's Kirilov and Stavrogin had also achieved a quasi-divine status (as Man-god and übermensch respectively) permitting gratuitous act of violence: the former's finger-biting and the latter's ear-biting. The 'creaturely' character of their super-human acts is indicative of their departure from a definition of the human.

<sup>217</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics and the Constitution of Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), p. 14.

<sup>218</sup> Gide, *Romans*, p. 318.

Dostoevsky and Nietzsche (and thus during the preparation of *L'Immoraliste*) continues beneath the surface.

Gide's protagonist Michel's perceived conquest of death (survival of tuberculosis without recourse to prayer) functions in counterpoint to Kirilov's suicidal conquest of life. In proving his wilful independence (albeit through continued existence rather than self-destruction) Michel, like Kirilov, transcends human ethics. The liberated superman's existence then spirals towards cynicism, paedophilia and eventual confession, a last-ditch attempt to reintegrate with the conception of humanity his defiance had transcended. Comparison with Stavrogin is only too evident, and far from circumstantial, though this has not been addressed by comparativists thus far. This is not surprising, since Stavrogin's censored confession of his similar paedophilic transgression did not appear in French (or indeed Russian) print until 1922. Some confusion has arisen in the limited scholarship surrounding this question.<sup>219</sup>

Thus, while Gide's own experiences and sexual exploits in North Africa were the source of material for *L'Immoraliste*, the literary 'licence' (to exploit Gide's own terminology of reception)<sup>220</sup> for Michel's representation had been granted by Dostoevsky's Stavrogin. The confessional structure of *L'Immoraliste*, and notably

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<sup>219</sup> Rayfield picked up on the Dostoevskian flavour of *L'Immoraliste* and mentions that Gide had read 'At Tikon's' by the 1920s Donald Rayfield, "A Virgil to his Dante: Gide's reception of Dostoevsky," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* xxxvi, no. no.4 (2000), pp. 343, 345. Lachasse, in his notes to Gide and Jaloux's correspondence, mistook Jaloux's allusion to a letter by Stavrogin as a reference to the censored chapter, however, the letter in question is that of Stavrogin to Daria. See Edmond Jaloux, "Sur André Gide," in *André Gide - Edmond Jaloux: Correspondance (1896-1950)*, ed. Pièrre Lachasse (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2004), p. 187.

<sup>220</sup> See 'De l'influence en littérature' in Gide, *Essais critiques*, pp. 403-417.

the misgivings expressed by Michel's listener with regard to the excess of style with which it was delivered, mirror Tikhon's reception of Stavrogin's confession.<sup>221</sup> Conceptually, Michel's desperate, last-ditch attempt at even an insincere, guiltless confession in the hope not of grace, but of a bearable earthly existence, is entirely in keeping with Raskolnikov and Stavrogin's confessions.<sup>222</sup> Jaloux (with whom Gide corresponded frequently on the topic of Dostoevsky throughout this period) did not miss the connection, seeing in Michel the first character in French literature that could be compared to Stavrogin, acknowledging that Dostoevsky had clearly "helped if not influenced" Gide in his creation.<sup>223</sup>

Thus, at this early stage of Gide's dialogue with Dostoevsky's fiction his preoccupation remains with the Nietzschean problem encapsulated by "que peut l'homme? Que peut un homme?" However, Gide's conclusions, in 1902, seem far closer to Raskolnikov and Stavrogin than to Zarathustra. Just as in his comparative essay Gide had rejected Nietzschean self-affirmation in favour of an evangelical reading of Kirilov's abnegatory nihilism, in Michel, his own fictional Man-God experiment, his conclusion coincides with Dostoevsky's. While an auto-affirmative act may indeed redelineate the human, the liberated perpetrator of such an act proves hubristically incapable of bearing the burden of his own

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<sup>221</sup> Gide, *Romans*, pp. 470-471 ; Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, XI, p. 24-25.

<sup>222</sup> Shestov has convincingly argued the case that, as the epilogue to *Crime and Punishment* makes explicit, Raskolnikov never repented for his crime. See Dostoevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, VI, p. 417.

<sup>223</sup> Letter from Jaloux to Gide dated 22 Sep 1902 in Pierre Lachasse, ed., *André Gide - Edmond Jaloux - correspondance (1896-1950)* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2004), p. 187. Letter from Jaloux to Gide dated 1 Aug 1902 in Lachasse, ed., *André Gide - Edmond Jaloux - correspondance (1896-1950)*, pp. 181-182.

liberation.<sup>224</sup> This tragic, Dostoevskian conclusion, however, was not one that Gide was prepared to accept indefinitely.

### **Overcoming *Crime and Punishment*: Gide's reactive re-reading (1908-1914)**

Gide's intellectual development had a somewhat pendular character, oscillating between the extremes of self-effacement and self-affirmation. The ideological component and final conclusions of *L'Immoraliste* seemed to warn of a bankruptcy in Nietzschean self-affirmation and suggest a turn to Dostoevskian confessionism. However, the next stage of Gide's engagement with Dostoevsky's thought can be seen as a violent revolt against his own initial conclusions. In his criticism this took the form of a violent polemic against Vogüé's moralistic reduction of Dostoevsky's thought to the closing pages of *Crime and Punishment*. By this time, Gide had established himself as an authority on Dostoevsky among his peers. His correspondence abounds with recommendations of works by Dostoevsky, at times abbreviated to 'Dost' or simply 'D,' testifying to the frequency of reference. He reads Dostoevsky's novels aloud to the future *NFR* group, sowing the seeds of moral and aesthetic values that would so influence the review, and with it, the dominant aesthetic values of an era.<sup>225</sup> Fayer has observed that "through [Gide's] influence on his disciples of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, who begin to see Dostoevsky with

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<sup>224</sup> On the tragic modality of *L'Immoraliste* as well as the performative aspect of Michel's confession see James Day, "Theatre, Texts and Ambiguity in Gide's *L'Immoraliste*," *The French Review* 62, no. 2 (2002)

<sup>225</sup> A. Anglès, *Gide et le premier groupe de La Nouvelle Revue Française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), p. 284.



Gide's eyes, his devotion becomes the source of an important revisionist movement in French literature."<sup>226</sup> Hermetet has also investigated Gide's dissemination of his reading of Dostoevsky within his circle as a decisive factor shaping the development of the *NRF* and its values.<sup>227</sup>

In 1903, Gide and Jaloux correspond over Merezhkovsky's recently translated *Dostoïevsky et Tolstoï*, the latter beseeching Gide:

Toute la partie consacrée à Tolstoï est admirable, mais que *notre* Dostoïevski est donc incomplètement compris! Vous seul, cher ami... Mais quand ferez-vous votre volume?<sup>228</sup>

The emphatic "*notre*" is suggestive of the circle's self-conscious adoption of the Gidian reading. Gide was at this time hatching two projects: a full-scale study of Dostoevsky and a 'real novel' that would depart from the *roman à thèse* tradition in which his previous fiction was rooted. The first intertwined attempts at both projects would appear in the following years.

Gide's first large-scale critical work on Dostoevsky appeared in 1908 in *La Grande Revue*.<sup>229</sup> The article launches an attack against Vogüé's moralistic reading, quoting (loosely) at length from the *Le Roman russe*, to the end of denouncing the injustice the critic had committed in delaying France's reception of the richest of Dostoevsky's novels. Gide disavows Vogüé's pronouncement

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<sup>226</sup> Harry Micha Fayer, *Gide, Freedom and Dostoevsky* (Burlington: The Lane Press, 1946), pp. 73, 86-87.

<sup>227</sup> Anne-Rachel Hermetet, *Pour sortir du chaos: Trois revues européennes des années 20* (Rennes: Presses Univ. De Rennes, 2009), pp. 29-30, 45-57.

<sup>228</sup> Letter to Edmond Jaloux in Lachasse, ed., *André Gide - Edmond Jaloux - correspondance (1896-1950)*, p. 198.

<sup>229</sup> 'Dostoevsky d'après sa correspondance,' May-June edition, Vol 49. References are to reprint in Gide, *Dostoïevsky* (Paris: Plon, 1923).

that with *Crime and Punishment* “le talent de Dostoïevsky avait fini de monter”, challenging his dismissal of the *Notes from Underground*, *The Adolescent*, *The Eternal Husband* and, above all, the ‘interminable’ *Brothers Karamazov*.<sup>230</sup> Gide condemns the academician’s claim, made to a trusting French readership, that his task was to highlight in Dostoevsky’s oeuvre “les trois parties qui montrent le mieux les divers aspects de son talent: [...] *Les Pauvres Gens*, *Souvenirs de la maison des morts* et *Crime et Châtiment*”.<sup>231</sup> It is above all against Vogüé’s (and, following him, a generation’s) reductive reading of *Crime and Punishment* that Gide launched his offensive. “Pour faire réussir une idée, il faut ne mettre en avant qu’elle seule... Trouver la bonne formule ne suffit pas; il s’agit de n’en plus sortir”.<sup>232</sup> Gide pours scorn on the fact that Dostoevsky found success in France only thanks to Vogüé’s readily accessible *religion de la souffrance*:

La doctrine qu’il trouvait incluse dans les derniers chapitres de *Crime et Châtiment*. Qu’elle y soit, je le veux croire, et que la formule soit heureusement trouvée... Par malheur, elle ne contenait pas son homme; il débordait de toutes parts.<sup>233</sup>

Gide devotes considerable attention to the phenomenon of Dostoevsky’s delayed reception in France, which he attributes to the complexity of Dostoevsky’s aesthetics and the paradoxalism inherent in his novelistic thought: “elle renferme de contradictions pour l’esprit occidental, peu accoutumé à ce désir de conciliation des extrêmes.”<sup>234</sup> In this observation the seeds for Gide’s mature, anti-binary reading of the twenties can already be gleaned.

<sup>230</sup> Gide, *Dostoïevsky*, p. 2; Vogüé, *Le Roman russe*, p. 242.

<sup>231</sup> Gide, *Dostoïevsky*, p. 2; Vogüé, *Le Roman russe*, pp. 230-233.

<sup>232</sup> Gide, *Dostoïevsky*, pp. 51-2.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

From as early as 1902, Gide's acquaintances had eagerly awaited the fruition of his project to produce a full-scale novel.<sup>235</sup> From May of this year dates Francis de Miomandre's "André Gide et l'inquiétude philosophique" in *Mercure de France*, which speaks of Gide's undertaking of a novel of complex moral discourse in the fashion of Dostoevsky.<sup>236</sup> The initial conception of *Les Caves du Vatican* in fact dates back to 1893, though serious work did not begin until 1911.<sup>237</sup> Thus, the novel's gestation period coincides with Gide's avid research on Dostoevsky. By the 1908 appearance of Gide's 'Dostoïevsky d'après sa correspondance' the principle character of the *Caves* was clearly formed in Gide's notes.<sup>238</sup> The novel's fruition period, 1911-1914, also coincides with Gide's collection of material for his *Vie de Dostoïevsky*, which was never realised on account of the outbreak of war.<sup>239</sup>

Though Gide refused to classify the finished product as a *roman*, associating it through a subscript rather with his satirical *soties* (*Paludes* and *Prométhée*), it nonetheless represents Gide's first large-scale work and his first experiment in the unfolding of a complex plot using multiple narrative perspectives. The work is steeped in direct intertextual reference to Dostoevsky. However, Gide does not offer the moral discourse that Miomandre and his readers awaited, Gide's interpretation of Dostoevskian enquiry having far less to do with Good and Evil

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<sup>235</sup> Anglès, *Gide et la NRF*, p. 67.

<sup>236</sup> Francis de Miomandre, "André Gide et l'inquiétude philosophique," *Mercure de France* 42, no. 149 (1902), p. 370-371.

<sup>237</sup> Yvonne Davet's 'Notice' to *Les Caves* in Gide, *Romans*, p. 1565.

<sup>238</sup> Anglès, *Gide et la NRF*, p. 103.

<sup>239</sup> Gide, *Dostoïevsky*, p. 77.

than the established reading. Gide's approach was rather to engage with Dostoevsky's thought via a rich, parodic pastiche of several of his works. In their abundance and openness, these clearly conscious citations of Dostoevsky have escaped few of the work's critics. However, the majority have limited themselves to flagging up 'borrowings' without engaging with the full import of *Les Caves* as a parodic commentary on Dostoevsky's thought. Moreover, they have overlooked the striking fact that *Les Caves* contains, as shall be shown, direct references to Dostoevsky's French reception, to Vogüé and to his reading.

Of existing comparative studies, Fridlender's remains the most thorough.<sup>240</sup> Fridlender reads Lafcadio as a "своеобразный вариант современного Аркадии Долгоруки," noting particularly the Lambert-Protos parallel.<sup>241</sup> The nature of this relative *svoeobraznost'* and *sovremennost'* sadly, Fridlender did not develop (all differences between Dostoevsky and Gide, he was methodologically obliged to attribute to the latter's *burzhuaznost'*). In recreating Dostoevsky's illegitimate son not as a social outcast with an inferiority complex, but as a superman, liberated from all social and moral restraints, Gide's intent was to rehabilitate and affirm bastardy as a state of being. Gide's intertextual dialogue with *Brothers Karamazov* functions on the same level. Both Moutote and Fridlender observed the family unit of Gide's *sotie* as a transmutation of the Karamazovs:<sup>242</sup> three step-brothers (as opposed to estranged half brothers) together with the illegitimate Lafcadio, an inverted Smerdiakov. In both novels, the illegitimate brothers

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<sup>240</sup> Fridlender, *Dostoevskii i mirovaia literatura*, pp. 268-276.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, p.269; Moutote, "Dostoïevski et Gide," p. 784.

commit parallel murders within the family unit, both murderous acts finding their theoretical legitimation in the thought of the intellectual among the three brothers (Ivan and Julius). Far more than the ‘borrowing’ that critics of a bygone age denounced, Gide’s work is a conscious inversion of Dostoevsky’s: through Lafcadio Wluiki, Gide *rachète* Smerdiakov. While the former (etym. *smerdet*: stink) was an eternal underdog, driven to suicide following his crime, the latter (etym. *Wlk*: wolf, according to Rayfield) displays a superman’s capacity for transcending criminality.<sup>243</sup> It is in the consequent polemic on criminality and culpability that Gide most directly engages with Dostoevsky, tackling *Crime and Punishment* head on, and in particular the dominant reading of it epitomised for Gide by Vogüé.

The oft-cited references to *Crime and Punishment* are strikingly overt. Lafcadio’s spontaneous rescue of two children from a burning house is a direct pastiche of Raskolnikov’s. The aristocratic theories expounded by Protos refer to Raskolnikov’s doctrine. If Lafcadio is a rewriting of Raskolnikov, Gide has made a number of significant amendments. Early in the narrative Gide bestows upon Lafcadio financial security, removing the ‘hunger motive’ from the criminal act. His level-headed charm and general psychological balance, coupled with his complete lack of humanitarian pretensions, read intertextually, are further mitigations of Raskolnikov’s motives. Lafcadio’s resultant complete and unproblematic lack of remorse for his murder is the final inversion. Consequently, the conclusion of *Les Caves* is overtly parodic. The grisly end met by Carla,

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<sup>243</sup> Rayfield, "A Virgil to his Dante: Gide's reception of Dostoevsky," p. 353.

Gide's noble prostitute is an inversion of Sonya's redemption of Raskolnikov and, as such, a rejection of Vogüé's *religion de la souffrance*. Meanwhile Lafcadio, following a momentary mock-consideration of confession, reassures himself of his total moral independence through the sexual conquest of his victim's (and his own) niece. The work ends with cutting irony and a direct quotation from the closing paragraph of *Crime and Punishment*:

Quand bien même j'échapperais à la police, je n'échapperais pas à moi-même [...] j'ai tué comme dans un rêve; un cauchemar où, depuis, je me débats...

— Dont je veux vous arracher, cria-t-elle. [...] C'est à Dieu qu'il faut vous livrer, non aux hommes. [...] L'Église est là pour vous prescrire votre peine et pour vous aider à retrouver la paix, par-delà votre repentir.

[...]L'amour la pousse, l'élançait vers lui. Lafcadio la saisit, la presse, couvre son pâle front de baisers...

Ici commence un nouveau livre. [...] Au loin, dans les casernes, le clairon chante. Quoi! va-t-il renoncer à vivre? et pour l'estime de Geneviève, qu'il estime un peu moins depuis qu'elle l'aime un peu plus, songe-t-il encore à se livrer?<sup>244</sup>

Но тут уж начинается новая история, история постепенного обновления человека, история постепенного перерождения его, постепенного перехода из одного мира в другой, знакомства с новой, доселе совершенно неведомою действительностью. Это могло бы составить тему нового рассказа, — но теперешний рассказ наш окончен.<sup>245</sup>

Gide's ironic 'immoralist' rewriting of Sonya's salvation of Raskolnikov in many ways corresponds to Shestov's critical treatment of the same passage, as explored in the next chapter. Andler's reading of Nietzsche and Dostoevsky can shed light on Gide's references to Dostoevsky's thought in *Les Caves*.<sup>246</sup> Dostoevsky never broached truly gratuitous crime, or indeed truly gratuitous action (as discussed with reference to the ambivalence surrounding Kirilov's suicide). In this respect,

<sup>244</sup> Gide, *Romans*, p. 873.

<sup>245</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, VI, p. 422.

<sup>246</sup> Charles Andler, *Nietzsche et Dostoïevsky* (Paris: Champion, 1930), p. 9.

Gide's novel can be seen as a Nietzschean rewriting of Dostoevsky's novel. If Raskolnikov proved incapable of escaping guilt and punishment for his intellectually motivated, philosophical crime, Lafcadio's spontaneous, capricious murder is entirely guiltless, and as such, crimeless.

In light of this it makes little sense to speak of *Caves des Vatican* as a novel 'influenced' by Dostoevsky, nor to speak (as Bettinson and many of Gide's contemporaries did)<sup>247</sup> of Gide's borrowings and plagiarisms. In its rich pastiche and parodic inversions it offers a direct challenge to the Russian novelist, or rather, to a particular reading of the novelist. What comparativists have neglected is that through the satirical appearance of Vogüé in the novel, *les Caves* is a direct discussion of Dostoevsky's French reception. Despite his overt criticism in 1908, Gide's resentment toward Vogüé had clearly not been fully vented. If Gide's aristocratic literary fop, Julius de Baraglioul's title, paternal connection to the foreign office, publications in *La Revue des deux-mondes* and his ambitious drive towards L'Academie Française were not enough to associate the fictional second-rate novelist with Vogüé, Gide name-drops his predecessor in the opening pages of the chapter entitled to Baraglioul. As the character laments the ambiguous to negative general response to his *L'Air des Cimes*, his wife reminds him of the positive response it had received from the church, and reminds him of the words M. de Vogüé had written in its favour: "Une plume comme la vôtre, contre la barbarie qui nous menace, défend la France mieux qu'une épée."<sup>248</sup> Clearly the critic's Christian conservative politics are implied to have determined

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<sup>247</sup> Catherine Bettinson, *Gide: A Study* (London Heinemann, 1977), p. 10.

<sup>248</sup> Gide, *Romans*, p. 710.

his judgement rather than the work's aesthetic valour. Furthermore, a hypocritical discrepancy between Vogué's officially cosmopolitan literary politics and his nationalism is also clearly suggested: the champion of the Russian novel is presented by Gide as an ideological protectionist, in keeping with Gide's representation of the Viscount's 'censorship' of Dostoevsky in his own 1908 article.

**Contemporary readings: André Suarès, Jacques Copeau, Élie Faure (1911-1914)**

In the period immediately preceding the outbreak of war a number of other 'modern' French intellectuals began to reassess the oeuvre of Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky was becoming increasingly central to the conception novelistic modernity in opposition to aesthetic clacissism, nationalised as French.<sup>249</sup> As Akio Yoshi has observed, this association was particularly strong among the writers associated with Gide and the *NRF*.<sup>250</sup> In terms of scope and profundity, Gide's reading was undeniably the most developed of the period, as comparison with contemporaneous readings by André Suarès, Jacques Copeau and Élie Faure will serve to illustrate.

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<sup>249</sup> See for example Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, "Mauvaises habitudes" in *Journal de Genève*, 10 fév 1912, reprinted in Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, *Critiques littéraires* (Genève: Slatkine, 1997), p. 231. See also Daniel Maggetti, "Ramuz et les romanciers russes," *Tangence* 86 (2008). pp. 89-103.

<sup>250</sup> Akio Yoshi, "Gide et Tolstoï " *Bulletin des Amis d'André Gide* xxxviii, no. 166, Avril 2010 (2010), p. 212.



André Suarès

In 1911, Suarès published a rival interpretation of Dostoevsky in the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*. Despite Suarès' overt claims to a long-standing and considered acquaintance with his author's works<sup>251</sup> his analysis leaves considerable room for doubt. The 100-page work not only lacks specific citations from works; it makes almost no reference even to the titles of Dostoevsky's novels nor the names of his characters. One rare exception is a footnote (afterthought?) on the thirty-sixth page, listing *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot* as chefs-d'oeuvre, *Le Joueur* as a 'roman confus' and *L'Eternel Mari* as a 'livre médiocre'. However, all of these judgments could equally have been extracted from Vogüé's *Le Roman russe*. Like Vogüé, Suarès omits, for example, *Notes from Underground* and *The Adolescent*. On one occasion, in a disjointed and suspiciously wedged-in paragraph, Suarès announces "Dostoïevski est riche en mots inoubliables"<sup>252</sup> before enumerating three 'memorable lines' from *The Idiot*, three from *Crime and Punishment* and two from the same page of *Brothers Karamazov*. This is the only occasion on which he cites directly from the oeuvre he is supposedly interpreting, and all of these "mots inoubliables" come from between the first and seventh pages of the tomes from which they have been selected. He does make several general references to Myshkin, suggesting a greater familiarity with the *Idiot* than other works; however, most of these references have the ends of equating the attributes of this one character to their author.<sup>253</sup> Clearly, such a study cannot be

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<sup>251</sup> André Suarès, *Dostoïevski* (Paris: Cahiers de la Quinzaine, 1911), pp. 13, 31.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., pp. 38-39.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-8, 55.

considered seriously in terms of any critical contribution to the study of Dostoevsky. It does, nevertheless, provide a wealth of insight into the various prejudices that surrounded the Russian author, as well as highlighting the upper hand Gide had over his contemporaries.

Suarès shares with Vogüé and Gide the tendency to equate any sensation of aesthetic unfamiliarity in Dostoevsky's work to its Russian-ness, a category extrapolated more often than not towards a more general Asianness, observing, for example: "la simplicité familière et la douceur d'Orient [...] Ils [les russes] ont cette faculté d'émotion si générale en Orient."<sup>254</sup> Suarès' superficial comparison of Dostoevsky's "passions qui se passionnent" to Stendhal, where "tout est clair; tout est ordre; toute est esprit"<sup>255</sup> indicates that traditional conceptions of 'l'esprit français' and 'l'âme russe' dominate his thinking: "Ce que l'Occident connaît par la mesure, le Russe le devine par le sentiment".<sup>256</sup> Suarès's ethnocentrism even extends to the assumption that Russia has been significantly civilised by the fact alone that Dostoevsky's fictional world has reached French readers:

Dostoïevski a créé pour nous la Russie mystique [...] entre l'Europe et l'Asie, qui porte à l'ennui du crépuscule occidental le feu et l'âme divine de l'Orient. Quel roi, quel politique ou quel conquérant a plus agi pour ça race? C'est dans Dostoïevski, enfin, que la Russie cessant, d'être cosaque, se manifeste une réserve pour l'avenir, une ressource pour le genre humain.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., p. 29-30, 41.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., p. 26. That this 'civilisation' is insured by French (rather than international) reception is clarified in a section postulating that "[n]i les Juifs charnels, ni les Yankees ne pourront jamais l'entendre." Suarès, *Dostoïevski*, p. 63.

Suarès's fantasy does not limit itself to ethnography. He dedicates, for example, almost an entire page (more than was spared for his textual analysis) to a presumably entirely imagined (if embellished) description of Dostoevsky's eyes.<sup>258</sup> Suarès, doubtlessly following Gide, then ends with a general comparison of Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, seeing the later as "un Nietzsche racheté": an affirming force capable of overcoming the "mort et négation" of Nietzsche's thought.<sup>259</sup> Saurès concludes by writing off Nietzsche with the same perennial argument that Francisque Sarcey had used to dismiss Dostoevsky in 1885: "Il n'est bon qu'aux femmes de lettres et aux jeunes gens."<sup>260</sup>

The conclusion of the study (addressed directly to "O Féodor Mikhaïlovitch, si ardent, si aigu et si humble") is revelatory: "Où tout est amour, tout est vie! Par delà le néant de tous les objets éphémères, c'est là-dessous enfin que notre espoir se fonde."<sup>261</sup> Of Dostoevsky's affirmation of existence, of redemption within lived human reality, and of the various overt polemics against transcendentalism in his fiction, Suarès's sources seem to have told him nothing.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Suarès, *Dostoïevski*, p. 28.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid. p. 86, 90.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid. p. 89. See page 68 of the current thesis.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid. p. 93-94.

<sup>262</sup> Gide reacted critically to Suarès's reading, and notably saw Saurès's later, more developed reading in *Trois hommes* (1921) (of which Dostoevsky was one, alongside Ibsen and Pascal) as a deliberate attempt to rival his 'Allocution'. See 11-12-1921 entry in Gide, *Journal 1887-1925*, p. 1145. On the conflict between the two competing interpreters of Dostoevsky see also Fayer, *Gide, Freedom and Dostoevsky*, p. 87.

## Jacques Copeau

Copeau and Croué's adaptation of *The Brothers Karamazov*, first staged at the Théâtre des Arts in 1911 (6<sup>th</sup> April), marks an important event in the reception of Dostoevsky in France.<sup>263</sup> Comparison of the adaptation to the original text also offers a revealing insight into the playwright's interpretation of the Russian novelist. Like Suarès, and most of the circle associated with the *NRF* at its creation, Copeau's enthusiasm for Dostoevsky had been formed and kindled by Gide. Gide was, of course, close to Copeau and wrote enthusiastically of his adaptation project in *Le Figaro* in 1911. Less widely-known is that Gide was also actively involved in the early stages of the scripting of the adaptation, as his correspondence to Harpéline-Kaminsky in the Jacques Ducet literary archive indicates: "C'est avec moi que Copeau commença de travailler à son drame, et, comme vous le dites, il n'a eu, le plus souvent, qu'à reproduire textuellement vos phrases."<sup>264</sup>

While wrestling with the ambitious task of adapting the colossal novel for the stage in 1910, Copeau wrote to Peter Gast, challenging the common opinion that Dostoevsky lacked in compositional skill: "Dire des livres de Dostoïevsky qu'il sont mal composés, c'est pratiquement n'en rien dire, ou plutôt, c'est soumettre son esprit à une idée toute faite de la composition littéraire."<sup>265</sup> The adaptation is

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<sup>263</sup> Following his foundation in 1913 (13 May) of the Théâtre du Vieux-Collombier, Copeau restaged his *Frères Karamazov* in 1914 (10 March). The adaptation was restaged on numerous occasions and toured abroad in the 1920s. See Jean Delay, ed., *Correspondance de Jacques Copeau et Roger Martin du Gard* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), pp. 375, 427, 430.

<sup>264</sup> Gide, "Lettre à Harpéline-Kaminsky," (5-2-1929)

<sup>265</sup> Cited in Anglès, *Gide et la NRF*, p. 322.

remarkably loyal, given the precedent set by previous adaptors and translators, indicative of a significant shift in the status of Dostoevsky's fiction among the younger generation of writers. In his correspondence, Copeau noted a broad intellectual debt to Dostoevsky: "j'ai été profondément marqué par ce Dostoïevsky, et qu'en me rapprochant de lui c'est de moi-même que je me rapproche."<sup>266</sup> He did, however, qualify this debt slightly more ambiguously in a subsequent letter: "Oui, D. est un géant. Il m'a marqué. Mais peut-être d'un coup de talon sur la nuque..."<sup>267</sup> Copeau's choices throughout the adaptation process permit speculation as to possible points of divergence from Dostoevsky's thought and its fictional representation.

The most striking alteration concerns Copeau's characterisation of Ivan. The editor of Copeau and du Gard's correspondence has noted that Copeau had been seduced by the "ardent" and "empassioned" youths of Dostoevsky's fiction.<sup>268</sup> This is evident in his approach to Ivan, which stresses his Romantic psychology but omits all of his philosophical expositions. His famous discourses, 'Rebellion' and 'The Grand Inquisitor', are reduced to the following lines: "Pas la révolte! On ne peut vivre dans la révolte. Et je vis, en dépit de tout. Pas la révolte, oh! non... Mais le désespoir, ou plutôt... l'indignation, oui: un refus! Voilà: je n'accepte pas le monde!"<sup>269</sup> The practical necessity for abridging Ivan's diatribe for the stage is evident; what is curious, however, is the choice to remove the

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<sup>266</sup> Letter from Copeau to Roger Martin du Gard (29-12-1943) in Delay, ed., *Correspondance de Jacques Copeau et Roger Martin du Gard*, p. 695.

<sup>267</sup> Letter from Copeau to Roger Martin du Gard (11-1-1944) in *ibid.*, p. 700.

<sup>268</sup> Delay, 'introduction' to *ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>269</sup> Jacques Copeau and Jean Croué, *Les Frères Karamazov; drame en cinq actes* (Paris: L'Illustration, 1911), p. 20.

question of freedom and theodicy, the dialectics that provoked Ivan's revolt in the original and which Dostoevsky had identified as the question that tormented him most throughout his life.<sup>270</sup> All that remains in the adaptation is Ivan's anguished rejection of earthly existence which, without its original context, reverts Ivan to the paradigmatic Romantic hero. While Dostoevsky's Ivan's revolt was famously directed against the supposed divine justice of creation, Copeau's Ivan redirects his revolt against the inconsistencies of his own psychology.<sup>271</sup> As such, Copeau rewrites him as a 'rebellious type': a psychological paradox, as opposed to the mouthpiece of a philosophical paradox. This extends to Ivan's language: as in the above quotation, eloquently developed discourse is replaced to surprisingly disjointed outbursts that verge on incoherence. Ivan's uncanny interlocation with the devil is correspondingly rendered unambiguously as the raving monologue of a hamletesque madman.<sup>272</sup>

A second significant adaptation is the augmented role of Smerdiakov. The shadowed and deliberately sketchily-traced character of the original takes on a leading role (that was first interpreted by Charles Dullin). Humiliation is accentuated as Smerdiakov's psychological driver<sup>273</sup> and indeed seems to underpin the entire play, particularly the Katerina-Mitia-Grushenka plotline.<sup>274</sup> Psychological motives are thus accentuated throughout while

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<sup>270</sup> Letter to A. N. Maikov (25-3-1870) in Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, XXIX, I, p. 117.

<sup>271</sup> Copeau and Croué, *Les Frères Karamazov; drame en cinq actes*, p. 20.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 23. This aspect of Copeau's interpretation is particularly significant in light of Gide's later writings on humiliation in the œuvre of Dostoevsky. See page 112 of the current thesis.

philosophical motives (the various expositions of ideas that the playwrights referred to as “certains épisodes secondaires”<sup>275</sup>) are removed. It is noteworthy that the critics commended this: the play was perceived to have retained “les deux choses essentielles: d’une part, la violence du drame, de l’autre la psychologie des personnages.”<sup>276</sup>

The set and costumes were exoticised by designer Maxime Dethomas, who explained this choice in the following terms: “Au dix huitième siècle, on avait créé une chinoiserie et une turquerie très savoureuse, nullement documentée. J’ai pensé que je pourrais faire de même [pour la Russie] à notre époque. [...] Je souhaite que les héros de Dostoïevski s’y détachent en vigueur. Je les ai fait dater par leurs costumes, car ils ne pouvaient être tout à fait modernes dans cette Russie imaginée.”<sup>277</sup> Dethomas’ kitch paraphernalia of *russerie* perhaps assisted Joseph Galtier to identify in the staging: “ce je ne sais quoi de troublant qui caractérise l’âme russe. Devant elle, nous nous sentons à la fois dépayés et attirés, comme lorsque nous pénétrons dans l’empire des tsars.”<sup>278</sup>

Ultimately, the adaptation steered Dostoevsky back towards more familiar Romantic territory both in terms of cultural representation and characterisation. Copeau also shared much of Suarès’ romantic enthusiasm with regards to the figure of the novelist himself. His reaction to Suarès’ article attests to this. For both writers, Dostoevsky represented:

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<sup>275</sup> Cited in Gaston Sorbets, “*Les Frères Karamazov* au Théâtre des Arts,” in *Les Frères Karamazov*, ed. Jacques Copeau and Jean Croué (Paris: L’Illustration, 1911), p. 1.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

le plus homme de tous les hommes, le plus enfoncé que l'on puisse concevoir au sien même de l'humanité, le plus prédestiné à la pure connaissance et le plus sacrifié, mais le plus libre aussi, car toutes les formes de la vie et tous les drames se rencontrent en lui, le traversent et le transpercent.<sup>279</sup>

Gide is thus the only French *homme de lettres* in a position to offer comparatively level-headed commentary of Dostoevsky's.

### Élie Faure

One potential contender to Gide arose in 1914 with art historian Élie Faure's chapter on Dostoevsky in his *Constructeurs*. The book places the Russian novelist alongside Nietzsche, Michelet, Lamark and Cézanne as the forgers of a neo-modern conception of man. Regrettably, these essays have no comparative element. Like Suarès, Faure finds Dostoevsky's 'self-portrait' in the *Idiot*: "Il faut lire *L'Idiot*, Il fut *L'Idiot*" ; "il écrit *L'Idiot* pour essayer de se saisir lui-même, mais là surtout il se dérobe, et les autres avec lui."<sup>280</sup> At times the comparison becomes deliberately confused, Dostoevsky melting into Myshkin.<sup>281</sup> However, like Gide, it is in the *Possédés* that Faure finds the clearest expression of Dostoevsky's thought and his most forceful representation of his opposition between "la certitude, la calme architecture morale et le rationalisme objectif" and "l'irrésolution déchirante, le tragique, sentimental, l'incessant débordement de l'âme hors des cadres de la loi."<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Jacques Copeau, "Sur le Dostoïevsky de Suarès," *Nouvelle Revue Française*, no. 38 (1912), p. 230.

<sup>280</sup> Élie Faure, *Les Constructeurs, Collection 'Les Proses'* (Paris: George Crès, 1914), pp. 116, 121.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122-3.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.



Faure is among the first in France to integrate the *Notes* into his reading of Dostoevsky's conception of man. Faure reads it in rather Rousseauist terms as an interrogation of human nature: "Dieu des humain, suis-je noble ou suis-je vil?"<sup>283</sup> In line with this moralistic reading of the *Notes*, Faure recounts the *Brothers Karamazov* as the tale of Dmitri's struggle between sensualism and personal moral standards.<sup>284</sup> In placing the stress on Dmitri over Ivan and Aliosha, the philosophical interrogation that they embody is downplayed. As with Copeau's adaptation, the novel's interrogation of the existence and legitimacy of God (that Dostoevsky deemed the crux of the novel)<sup>285</sup> is omitted from Faure's reading. When it comes to *Crime and Punishment*, Faure does go a step beyond the moralistic reading of his predecessors. He recognised ahead of his generation that Raskolnikov did not repent on any spiritual level for his act, but rather is forced to confess by a need to reunite with the collective, having, like Sonya, been severed from society by: "quelque chose que les hommes appellent 'crime' et dont on ne peut se délivrer qu'en se confessant à eux."<sup>286</sup>

As with the other critical responses explored thus far, appeal to the *Volksgeist* dominates here again: "comme les autre Russes, il a besoin de pardonner, besoin d'aimer, besoin de souffrir et qu'on souffre pour consoler et être consolé";<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., pp. 118-119.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., pp. 143-144.

<sup>285</sup> Letter to A. N. Maikov (25-3-1870) in F. M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh*, 30 vols. (Leningrad: Nauka, 1973), XXIX, I, p. 117.

<sup>285</sup> Copeau and Croué, *Les frères Karamazov; drame en cinq actes*, p. 20.

<sup>286</sup> Faure, *Les Constructeurs*, p. 118; Dostoevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, VI, p. 417.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

“Tout Français a l’esprit architectural”.<sup>288</sup> Faure, like Vogüé and Suarès, invests considerably more energy in accentuating Dostoevsky’s alterity as opposed to bridging the gap to the readership.<sup>289</sup> Dostoevsky’s aesthetic deviation from the European tradition is automatically and necessarily attributed to an Asian conception of art in opposition to “l’esprit régulateur de l’Occident”.<sup>290</sup> The conventional conception of Dostoevsky as a barbarian possessed by a talent he cannot understand shines through Faure’s reading:

Avec lui, on n’a pas le droit de parler de ce qu’on appelle le style. Il ne sait pas écrire, il n’écrit pas. Sa forme n’est pas neuve. Elle n’a pas besoin de l’être. Une puissance interne anime tout, incorporant les scories et les pierres mortes à l’organisme primitif lui sort de son incessante action.<sup>291</sup>

Like Voltaire’s Shakespeare, Faure’s Dostoevsky can only have written *malgré lui*. Though the value judgement has been reversed, the underlying assumption remains that aesthetics that do not refer to Rome are fortuitous barbaric accidents. Ultimately, Faure’s study ends where Vogüé’s began: with an image (this time a visual illustration) of St. Basil’s cathedral imposing on the final page as an ultimate symbol of Russia as orient.<sup>292</sup>

### **Gide’s mature reading (1914-1925)**

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>289</sup> One of the few French commentators of the pre-War period who rejected the *âme russe* reading outright was Paul Claudel. Writing to Gide in response to his 1908 article on Dostoevsky, Claude remarks: “chez tous les Russes que j’ai connus, et ils sont nombreux, je n’ai trouvé qu’une chose vraiment remarquable, c’est leur goût pour la boisson. Autrement, ce sont des gens comme les autres. Ils jouent très bien au bridge, mais les Belges aussi.” Letter to Gide (4-8-1908). See Paul Claudel, *Correspondance, 1899-1926: Paul Claudel et André Gide* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 88.

<sup>290</sup> Faure, *Les Constructeurs*, pp. 134-5.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

Gide's most developed reading of Dostoevsky came to fruition in the early 1920s, shortly followed by his most engaged novelistic dialog with Dostoevsky, in the form of *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*. The personal crisis that coincided with the Great War and the conclusions Gide drew from this in his reflective work *Numquid et tu...* fed directly into his mature interpretation of Dostoevsky. The title of the reflexive work, an allusion to the interrogation of Christ in John 7. 46. and John 7. 52., establishes Gide's introspective interrogation of the nature of his faith and personal ethics.

On 15<sup>th</sup> February Gide comes to a deeper understanding of John 12. 24. and John 12. 25.: “*Si le grain de blé ne meurt... et encore Celui qui aime sa vie la perdra. Ici le Christ renonce à l'homme; ici vraiment il devient Dieu.*”<sup>293</sup> This significant passage, which Dostoevsky had chosen as his epigraph for *Brothers Karamazov*, and that Gide would later choose as the title for his famous memoirs, contains the idea that would permit him to reconcile his until now opposed conceptions of individualism and Christianity: “C'est dans la négation de soi que bondit et se réfugie l'affirmation de soi la plus haute.”<sup>294</sup> Gide had encountered this paradox in Dostoevsky's thought, specifically in his ‘Essay on the bourgeoisie,’ which he had cited and discussed this in relation to Christ in his ‘Dostoïevsky d'après sa correspondance’ eight years previously.<sup>295</sup> As Gide would reveal in the *Numquid*, his own eventual conclusion was the same: “Résurrection dans la vie totale. Oubli de tout bonheur particulier. Ô réintégration parfaite!”<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> Gide, *Journal 1887-1925*, p. 989.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 990.

<sup>295</sup> Gide, *Dostoïevsky*, pp. 54-5; Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, V, p. 79.

<sup>296</sup> Gide, *Journal 1887-1925*, p. 994.

Another idea to reach fruition in this period was Gide's notion that:

La vie éternelle n'est pas seulement à venir. Elle est dès à présent toute présente en nous; nous la vivons dès l'instant que nous consentons à mourir à nous mêmes, à obtenir de nous ce renoncement qui permette la résurrection dans l'éternité. *Celui qui hait sa vie dans ce monde la conservera pour la vie éternelle* (Jean, XII, 25)<sup>297</sup>

This too was informed by, and would in turn inform, Gide's readings of Kirilov and Zosima, and is thus another key to his *Dostoïevsky*. He continues:

Celui qui aime sa vie, son âme, - qui protège sa personnalité, qui soigne sa figure dans ce monde – la perdra; mais celui-là qui en fera l'abandon, la rendra vraiment vivante, lui assurera la vie éternelle; non point la vie futurement éternelle, mais la fera déjà, dès à présent, vivre à même l'éternité. *Amen, amen dico vobis, nisi granum frumenti cadens in terram, mortuum fuerit, ipse solum manet: si autem mortuum fuerit, multum fructum affert.* (Jean XII, 24)<sup>298</sup>

At this troubled time, Gide seems unaware of any connection between his new understanding of the Christian faith and Dostoevsky's thought. The figure of Dostoevsky is far from his thoughts and writings, which are dominated by reflections on the war, inner struggle and the Gospels. Political circumstances would soon change this.

The following year the Bolshevik Revolution would turn all eyes to Russia,<sup>299</sup> and with it, to Dostoevsky, its 'prophet'. Lalou recalled an "explosion de dostoïevskisme" in France following 1918.<sup>300</sup> Rather than seeing in Dostoevsky

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid., p. 991.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., p. 994.

<sup>299</sup> For the French reception of the Russian Revolution see Sergei Leonidovich Fokin, "*Russkaia ideia*" *vo frantsuzskoi literature XX veka* (Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'skii dom S.-Peterburgskogo gosudarstvenogo universiteta, 2003).

<sup>300</sup> Lalou, "Dostoïevski et L'Occident (Paper delivered at 3e Réunion du Studio Franco-Russe, 18

a depiction of the early stages of the Revolution as he witnessed them in development, many French commentators, for whom the Russian Revolution seemed to appear suddenly from nowhere, now perceived Dostoevsky as its prophet and the *Demons* as a recording of his revelation.<sup>301</sup> In any case, the French literary scene, to use Bataille's expression, was now "pregnant with revolution."<sup>302</sup> History seemed to have validated Dostoevsky's oeuvre, which was rapidly becoming an undisputed modern classic. Gide's long expressed preference for the *Devils* would likewise confirm his status as France's leading authority on the Russian novelist, a position he was jealously keen to preserve. A final, vital factor in this rapid reassessment of Dostoevsky's work was that the Revolution, via the 'philosopher's steamboat', discussed in the next chapter, would bring Gide and his generation in to contact with the fruits of Russia's Silver Age rethinking of Dostoevsky's fiction.

### **Dostoevsky's Centenary and Gide's Lectures (1921-23)**

The occasion of the centenary of Dostoevsky's birth was to spark a new wave of critical publications, among them a special edition of the *NRF* in February 1922. The edition is of special interest to the current study as the first place of

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déc 1929)," p.104. 'Dostoïevskisme' was not an uncommon term in the 1920s. Céline, for example, used it to promote his *Voyage au bout de la nuit*. See L.-F. Céline, *Lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), pp. 307-308.

<sup>301</sup> Backès notes the exploitation of this in the marketing of Dostoevsky's fiction around this time: "On sait que pour vendre un ouvrage sur Dostoïevski une allusion quelconque, fût-elle indirecte, fût-elle mensongère, au bolchevisme, est un adjuvant non négligeable." See Backès, "Dostoïevski en France 1880 – 1930," p. 431.

<sup>302</sup> "La Littérature et le mal" (1957) in Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes*, 12 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), IX, p. 170.

publication of Shestov's existential reading of Dostoevsky, explored in depth in the next chapter. Having collaborated with Shestov on the edition, Gide thus came into early contact with the existential interpretation, which elicited his high praise and an invitation to Shestov to attend his series of lectures on the subject of Dostoevsky, commencing that month at the Vieux Colombier.<sup>303</sup> The ensemble of Gide's 1908 and 1911 articles, the introduction to his *Allocution* in the *NRF* centenary edition, and the stenographed text from the *Allocution* itself were compiled in 1923 and published under the title of *Dostoïevsky* with Plon, constituting Gide's most enduring contribution to Dostoevsky scholarship.

The change in Gide's tone by 1922 is striking. Gide, like Shestov, now confronts the challenge that Dostoevsky's irrational conception of man poses to the rationalist tradition and discusses the place of subjective and non-rationalist modes of thought in Dostoevsky's fiction, all in accordance with Shestov's existential reading.<sup>304</sup> Significantly, Gide for the first time here turns attention to the *Notes from Underground*: "Je crois que nous atteignons avec *L'Esprit souterrain* le sommet de la carrière de Dostoïevsky. Je le considère, ce livre (et je ne suis pas le seul), comme la clé de voûte de son oeuvre entière."<sup>305</sup> This is evidently a reference to Shestov's recent collaboration, which read Dostoevsky's thought, for the first time in France, through *Notes from Underground*. However, Shestov's reading does not appear to have penetrated Gide's deeply. Gide does not engage with Dostoevsky's anti-rationalism on epistemological terms, but

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<sup>303</sup> N. Baranova-Shestova, *Zhizn' L'va Shestova: po perepiske i vospominaniiam sovremenikov* (Paris: La Presse Libre, 1983), I, p. 230.

<sup>304</sup> Gide, *Dostoïevsky*, p. 68.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

remains bound to his now elaborate orientalist reading.<sup>306</sup> Gide's primary concerns are thus the healthy experience of culture shock that the cosmopolitan French readership might obtain from Dostoevsky's fiction and, ultimately, the points of contact between Dostoevsky's characters' ideas and Gide's own conception of the Christian self, as developed in his contemporaneous personal writings. As Gide avowed in his *Journal* (22 Apr 1922) from the outset: "Ce sera, tout autant qu'un livre de critique, un livre de confessions, pour qui sait lire: ou plutôt; une profession de foi."<sup>307</sup>

The meandering form of Gide's study, consisting as it does of six dictographed, largely improvised lectures, problematises analysis somewhat. However, Gide's reading strategy itself is fairly clear, as are his ultimate aims. The inverse of his 1911 study, Gide now tackles *l'oeuvre* almost independently of *l'homme*, disregarding chronology and context:<sup>308</sup> It is not the genesis of particular works that is under scrutiny, but the confrontation between the texts and the French reader. Like Vogüé before him, Gide uses Dostoyevsky to launch a critique of French intellectual culture and, following Rivière, he raises up an 'aesthetics of complexity' in opposition to French classicism.<sup>309</sup> Gide goes considerably further than Vogüé and Rivière, however, and further than his own 1908 attempt, in

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<sup>306</sup> The "clé de voute" comment is often cited by critics wishing to draw the Notes and Gide together, for example in François Ouellet, "Ecrire Dostoïevski: Miomandre et Bouve au tournant de 1930," *Tangence*, no. 86 (2008), p. 49. However, this one, undevelopped comment and the superficial reading later discussed excepted, the work remains peripheral to Gide's interpretation.

<sup>307</sup> Gide, *Journal 1887-1925*, p. 1175.

<sup>308</sup> Crémieux highly praised Gide's "réaction contre le parallélisme entre la vie et l'oeuvre à la mode depuis cinquante ans." *Bulletin des Amis d'André Gide* –xxxvii, 162 – Avril 2009 'Le Dossier de Presse de Dostoïevski P.250 original publication: Benjamin Crémieux, 'Les Lettres françaises', *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, no. 439, 14 juillet 1923, p. 2.

<sup>309</sup> Gide, *Dostoïevsky*, p. 180.

developing the idea of a resultant ‘psychology of complexity’.<sup>310</sup> Not only our knowledge of psychology, but our very thought processes and behaviour are thus conceived to be limited by learned patterns. Gide posits that, in receiving Dostoevsky, a generation had not only learned to depict fictional characters with more complexity and precision, but consequently to experience and perform psychological reality differently.<sup>311</sup> The implications of Gide’s statement are strikingly reminiscent of Ivanov’s expression of the influence of Dostoevsky on the Russian Silver Age: “Он сделал сложными наши душу, нашу веру, наше искусство”.<sup>312</sup> From this stance Gide can launch his attack on lingering protectionists in abhorrence of the formless and disorderly, on the grounds that innovative forms seem necessarily formless.<sup>313</sup> Gide’s reading is typically modernist in embracing what he calls Dostoevsky’s psychological ‘chasms’ and narratological ‘vortex,’<sup>314</sup> in defiance not only of classicism in literary terms, but against a conception of man there entrenched and perpetuated. Gide’s lectures are among the first in France to genuinely engage with Dostoevsky’s novelistic thought. Gide relates this to Pascal and Baudelaire, noting that in the French tradition:

un certain ordre de problèmes, d’angoisses, de passions, de rapports, soient réservés au moraliste, au théologien, au poète et que le roman n’ait que faire de s’en laisser encombrer.<sup>315</sup>

Anticipating Bakhtin, Gide sees the Dostoevskian novel as an innovative, novelistic presentation of a chorus of contradictory philosophical ideas:

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., pp.180-181.

<sup>312</sup> Ivanov, *Rodnoe i vseleskoe*, p. 283.

<sup>313</sup> Gide, *Dostoïevsky*, pp.283-284.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., pp.166-7.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., p. 71.



Je ne connais pas d'écrivain plus riche en contradictions et en inconscéquences que Dostoïevsky; Nietzsche dirait: "en antagonismes." S'il avait été philosophe au lieu d'être romancier, il aurait certainement essayé de mettre ses idées au pas et nous y aurions perdu le meilleur.<sup>316</sup>

However, as the quote betrays, Gide has not appreciated that the breadth of thoughts surpassed the convictions of their creator: "il s'est éperdument donné dans son oeuvre. Il est perdu dans chacun des personnages de ses livres; et c'est pourquoi dans chacun d'eux, on le retrouve."<sup>317</sup> This is why, as we shall see, Gide's own attempt at the polyphonic novel was comparatively unsuccessful. However, the critical licence Gide permits himself through such a conception makes for an original, if rather refractive reading.

Gide feels obliged to disregard Dostoevsky's problematic journalistic endeavours (on the grounds of poor style and inaccuracy),<sup>318</sup> maintaining that the author's genuine worldview found expression only through fictional voices. These voices he then organises structurally into three planes, corresponding to the intellect, the passions and the soul. Gide's language betrays his conceptualisation of these in hierarchical arrangement: he refers repeatedly to the intellectual plane as "la région la plus haute"; to the passions as "intermediary" and the soul as the "deepest" plane.<sup>319</sup> This imagery is directly at odds with Dostoevsky's own linguistic treatment of these 'planes': Dostoevsky had made it explicit throughout his works that the intellect constituted the 'lowest' plane. Its conceptual specialisation is the "подполье"; Dmitri Karamazov's conversion and Ivan's

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., pp. 150-4.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., pp. 115-117, 192, 214.

demise are related to the moral structure summed up by “ум подлец.”<sup>320</sup> Raskolnikov eventually associates his self with a louse, the underground man with a mouse, and so on. Gide’s structural arrangement thus elucidates his own thought, which in this regard is opposed diametrically to Dostoevsky’s.

A revelatory curiosity is that it is on the psychological plane that Gide broaches ethics. Gide presents the dichotomy of humility and humiliation (the latter a renunciation of pride in opposition to the former, its spiteful reinforcement) at the heart of Dostoevskian ethics. All of Dostoevsky’s characters, Gide posits, can be arranged along this axis.<sup>321</sup> This dialectics of humility and humiliation is traced to the underground, specifically to the injury of its protagonist by the officer in the pool hall. Clearly this is a fairly reductive reading of the work, especially in light of the reversal of psychological causality that Dostoevsky had fostered through the chronological inversion of the two halves of the work. Likewise, Gide follows Varvara Petrovna in reducing Stavrogin’s “ironic life” to a case of injured pride.<sup>322</sup>

It is likewise on the psychological plane of the passions that Gide tackles Dostoevsky’s paradoxalism. Gide sets this in opposition to traditional French character psychology, which he conceives to be rooted in a fundamental dialectical struggle between opposed forces, most classically desire and duty.<sup>323</sup> What Dostoevsky offers, on the contrary, is a natural coexistence of contrary

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<sup>320</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, p. 215.

<sup>321</sup> Gide, *Dostoïevsky*, p. 135.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

impulses, with no necessary dialectical struggle nor synthesis: “le déconcertant, c’est la simultanéité de tout cela, et la conscience que garde chaque personnage de ses inconséquences, de sa dualité.”<sup>324</sup> Gide thus pinpoints Dostoevsky’s innovation as a step away from binary psychologies.<sup>325</sup>

Following Pascal and Baudelaire, Dostoevsky and Blake, Gide revels in the dual nature of man, a simultaneous embodiment of the divine and the demonic, thus making his transition from psychology to ethics.<sup>326</sup> The self Gide sees as a battleground between continuity and sincerity, i.e. between conventional desire reactions based on learned self-perception, and sincere desire reactions based on spontaneous urges, the latter of which Gide clearly values more highly. It is crucial to an understanding of how Gide interprets Dostoevskian ethics that moral questioning takes place uniquely on the plane of the passions. Behaviour is the affair of psychology, where all urges and actions are subjectively permissible, while the only value that presides over them is sincerity, understood as spontaneous reactions to desire. The intellectual plane is seen as necessarily egotistical. This is in keeping with Dostoevsky’s own representation; however, the plane of the soul differs dramatically. Gide’s “deepest region” is entirely personal, having no interaction with either desire or reaction, but only with a strictly metaphysical understanding of abnegation. The opposite end of Gide’s

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>325</sup> Jaloux followed Gide in this: “lorsque beaucoup de critiques français déclarent que Dostoïevski est spécifiquement russe et imperméable à l’âme française, ils le font par une ignorance presque systématique de la psychologie humaine en voulant uniquement s’enfermer dans les bornes d’une convention morale.” See Jaloux, “Sur André Gide,” pp. 318-319. Jaloux wrote that it was through Gide that he learned of the works of Dostoevsky, with the exception of *Crime and Punishment*. Jaloux, “Sur André Gide,” pp. 364-365.

<sup>326</sup> Gide, *Dostoïevsky*, pp. 246-7, 261.

spectrum, the intellectual region, is likewise dissociated from action insofar as reflection is deemed to lead essentially to a paralysing egoism and inaction, thus returning to the thesis of *Notes from Underground*.

Despite his assertion of the centrality of this text in Dostoevsky's thought and his oblique reference to Shestov's 'underground' interpretation, Gide offers no genuine analysis of this supposed *clé de voûte*. Indeed, his only discussion of its philosophical implications is to reduce it to the epithet: "celui qui pense n'agit pas" before extrapolating this to the whole of Dostoevsky's novelistic thought.<sup>327</sup> However, the conclusions Gide wishes to draw from this go considerably further, and require a wizardly slight of hand. Gide turns his discussion away from Dostoevsky on a detour via Nietzsche and Browning in order to reach the conclusion that "l'esprit n'agit point, il fait agir", which he then presents as a Dostoevskian dictum.<sup>328</sup> Thus, Gide presents the Dostoevskian intellectual not as an incapacitated perversion, as Shestov had done, but as a higher race of Supermen leading the herd from inactive heights. Clearly this is fairly removed from Dostoevsky's fictional representation.

The most obvious counter-argument of Raskolnikov Gide pre-empts and writes off the novel as an early, immature work. The underground man is left in obscurity. Meanwhile, Stavrogin is presented as the intellectual driver of Verkhovensky, when in fact Dostoevsky makes it clear that while the latter

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid., pp. 236-7. See also my discussion of Gide's correspondence with Harpéline-Kaminsky regarding the latter's liberal adaptations of *Notes from Underground* and *Brothers Karamazov* on pages 67-68 of the current thesis.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

desires to exploit the persona of the former for political gain, Stavrogin's thought is immaterial to Verkhovensky's careerist ends. Gide's previously observed scale of values, with intelligence at the structural top, is again in evidence. While Gide displayed an infatuation with Dostoevsky's presentation of paradoxical states of mind, he could not accept the epistemological critique implied in Dostoevsky's anti-intellectualism.

This inversion does not imply that Gide disregards or underestimates the region of the soul; however, his discussion of it is isolated from the rest of the analysis. For Gide, the Christian thought at the 'deepest' level of Dostoevsky's fiction exists in a kind of bubble. Gide identifies the teachings of Zossima, along with Alesha and Myshkin, as the core of Dostoevsky's thought. He stresses the immanentism that Dostoevsky's Christian thought implies (in opposition to Suares' transcendentalist reading) and the possibility of conciliation and paradise on Earth in the immediate present, all in resonance with his own writings in *Numquid et tu...* However, there is a strong sense in Gide's reading of Dostoevsky that faith is equivalent to abnegation and as such represents a renunciation of intelligence, which he equates to egoism, creativity and the diabolical. It is for this reason that Gide read's Zossima as "un saint, non pas un héros. Il n'atteint à la sainteté précisément qu'en abdiquant la volonté, qu'en résignant l'intelligence."<sup>329</sup> Gide's conception of will is revealed as synonymous to egoism; intelligence as synonymous to rationality, and as such incompatible with faith. Likewise, this betrays Gide's presumption of intelligence as an

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

essential facet of heroism.

For Gide, the Christian ideal is abnegation, which he opposes relentlessly to individualism. The divine is thus not to be found in the individual personality but in its negation, as the *Nourritures* had expressed: “Ne souhaitez pas, Nathanaël, trouver Dieu ailleurs que partout. Chaque créature indique Dieu, aucune ne le révèle. Dès que notre regard s’arrête à elle, chaque créature nous détourne de Dieu.”<sup>330</sup> For Gide, the self *is* the ego, and exists in opposition to creation. This is the opposite of Dostoevsky’s Christian thought, as expressed by Dmitri Karamazov following his spiritual and existential awakening:

И кажется столько во мне этой силы теперь, что я все поборю, все страдания, только чтобы сказать и говорить себе поминутно: я есмь! В тысячи мук — я есмь, в пытке корчусь — но есмь! В столпе сижу, но и я существую, солнце вижу, а не вижу солнца, то знаю, что оно есть. А знать, что есть солнце — это уже вся жизнь.<sup>331</sup>

Maxence was perhaps not unjustified in accusing Gide of “portestantising” Dostoevsky.<sup>332</sup> Nevertheless, Gide’s was the first reading in France of the religious aspects of Dostoevsky’s thought that went significantly beyond “la religion de la souffrance”.<sup>333</sup>

For Gide, the third and deepest plane is fundamentally personalistic. This presents a number of problems in his reading of Dostoevsky. The Christian thought that Gide posits at the ‘core’ of Dostoevsky’s oeuvre, he dissociates

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<sup>330</sup> *Les Nourritures Terrestres* in Gide, *Romans*, p. 154.

<sup>331</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, XV, p. 31.

<sup>332</sup> Jean Maxence, “L’Influence de la littérature russe sur les écrivains français,” in *Le Studio Franco-Russe*, ed. Leonid Livak (Toronto: Toronto Slavic Library, 2005), p. 77.

<sup>333</sup> Lalou, “Dostoïevski et L’Occident (Paper delivered at 3e Réunion du Studio Franco-Russe, 18 déc 1929),” p. 104.

entirely from Orthodoxy, and entirely from ethics. As observed, Gide conceives of ethics strictly in terms of desires and a dichotomy of convention vs. spontaneous, sincere action. All that remains of Dostoevsky's Christian thought is what Gide repeatedly refers to as "une sorte de Bouddhisme".<sup>334</sup> Vogüé's orientalist legacy is in evidence: Orthodox doctrine is once again extrapolated back toward supposed Vedic roots. "L'individu triomphe dans le renoncement à l'individualité," writes Gide, "Résurrection dans la vie totale, oubli de tout bonheur particulier, O réintégration parfaite."<sup>335</sup>

In concurrence with Vogüé and the Belle Epoque critics, Gide persists in reading Dostoevsky as an oriental force, repeating the notions that he had received from the Slavophiles via Vogüé. In Gide, these serve the same rhetorical function that they did for Vogüé: the regeneration of Europe is deemed to necessarily come from outwith. As such, Dostoevsky is located "plus près de l'Asie que de Rome"<sup>336</sup> in order to give his thought the required metaphysical 'leverage' to budge the French tradition. For all the innovative force of Gide's comments on psychology and performativity, any notion that cultural distinctions may be equally performative eludes him.

These comments differ little from those of Vogüé's, such that Gide's reading cannot be described as a significant step towards a more cosmopolitanist reading. Gide's innovation lies in his positing (informed by his own theological reflections

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<sup>334</sup> Gide, *Dostoïevsky*, pp. 226, 258.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

in *Numquid et tu*) of a paradoxical connection in Dostoevsky's thought between self-affirmation and religious abnegation, in opposition to the traditional reading whereby self-affirmation leads directly to atheism and to self-destruction. To substantiate this reading, Gide returns to where his interrogation of Dostoevsky's fiction had begun in 1899: to the riddle of Kirilov.

It is noteworthy that Kirilov, in Gide's reading, is not associated with Dostoevsky's egomaniacal intellectuals but with the various holy fools that populate the 'deepest plane'. As stated, this personalistic plane Gide conceived to be impervious to moral concerns. The renunciation of the self – Kirilov's suicidal project – Gide sees at the centre of Dostoevsky's religious thought. Remnants of Gide's early parallel reading of Kirilov and Nietzsche remain intact: the role of illness in revelation is stressed, again, not as a literary device but as a fundamental aspect of Dostoevsky's gnosticism and, for Gide, of genius in general.<sup>337</sup> The opposition that Gide had initially established between Nietzsche and Kirilov is strengthened. Gide highlighted that both draw fundamentally opposed conclusions from the same revelation of human freedom: the former referring to self-will, the latter to abnegation.<sup>338</sup> However, certain crucial elements of Gide's understanding of Kirilov have been honed. The mistaken notion of force from the part of Verkhovensky has been removed. More importantly Gide's definition of gratuity has been refined:

Le suicide de Kiriloff est un acte absolument gratuit, je veux dire que sa motivation n'est point extérieure. Tout ce que l'on peut faire entrer d'absurde dans ce monde, à la faveur et à l'abri d'un "acte gratuit", c'est ce que nous

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., p. 260.



allons voir [...] cet acte, pour être gratuit, n'est pourtant point immotivé.<sup>339</sup>

Gide's conception of the absurd is here in evidence: the absurd in this context is neither a latent attribute of reality nor a discrepancy between a rationalist outlook and an un-rationalisable reality. Rather it is *willed* and actively generated through gratuitous action, which is understood as action motivated exclusively to this end.

Gide's analysis of Kirilov's project fills almost all of his final lecture, which is in turn his final critical engagement with Dostoevsky. Kirilov was also the subject of his first critical work dealing with Dostoevsky: his 6<sup>e</sup> lettre à Angèle of 1899. Therefore, the place of Kirilov in Gide's reading cannot be over-stated. The same fundamental concerns of both studies – suicide, abnegation, revelation and gratuitous action – would resurface in the *Faux-Monnayeurs*, Gide's last fictional interaction with Dostoevsky's thought.

### ***Les Faux-Monnayeurs (1925)***

In 1922, Roger Martin du Gard urged Gide to draw from Dostoevsky in his next work of fiction: “Voyez ce que votre *Dostoeïvski* a fait de *L'Idiot*. [...] Vous avez pourtant tout ce qu'il faut pour écrire un livre comme celui-là. Cependant [...] vous auriez procédé tout autrement. Petitement.”<sup>340</sup> Du Gard observed that Gide would have presented the material of a Dostoevskian novel as five or six concise

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid., pp. 269-270.

<sup>340</sup> Letter from Roger Martin du Gard to Gide dated 22-6-1920 in Roger Martin du Gard and André Gide, *Correspondance (1913-1934)* (Paris: NRF, 1968), I, pp. 154-5.

*romans à thèse*, but that: “l’extraordinaire force de *L’Idiot* vient surtout de l’enchevêtrement hardi de tous ces sujets divers.”<sup>341</sup> Moutote and Mileschin were justified in interpreting *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* as Gide’s attempt to meet du Gard’s challenge.<sup>342</sup> Du Gard continued to correspond extensively with Gide on the emerging novel over the following years, regularly evoking Dostoevsky, urging Gide, for example, towards a Dostoevskian use of *clairs-obscur*.<sup>343</sup> It is not unreasonable to assume that Gide took considerable heed of this aesthetic guidance given that he dedicated the finished *Faux-Monnayeurs* to du Gard.

The novel’s reception also testifies to a tangible Dostoevskian ‘flavour’, numerous critics having drawn attention to this from the novel’s first appearance. Curiously, this was particularly true of the novel’s detractors. Those more sympathetic to Dostoevsky saw in the *Faux-Monnayeurs* a failed attempt at imitation, while those hostile towards Dostoevsky lamented his influence on Gide. Jaloux was in the former camp, raising the problem of the ‘unfrenchness’ of the *Faux-Monnayeurs* with relation to Dostoevsky:

M. André Gide a certainement été, dans cette oeuvre, profondément influencé par Dostoïevski, mais justement un Russe ne se trouve jamais dépaysé devant Dostoïevski, et aucun Français qui lira *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, en dehors des lettrés, n’aura l’impression de se trouver entouré d’êtres sinon pareils à soi, du moins assimilable à son esprit.<sup>344</sup>

Jaloux’s statement betrays several curious assumptions: that Dostoevskian

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid. I, pp. 154-5.

<sup>342</sup> Moutote, "Dostoïevski et Gide," p. 785; Mileschin, *Dostoïevskii i frantsuzskie romanisty pervoi poloviny XX veka*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>343</sup> Letter from Roger Martin du Gard to Gide dated 22-6-1920 in Gard and Gide, *Correspondance (1913-1934)*, I, p. 178.

<sup>344</sup> Edmond Jaloux, "Les Faux-monnayeurs, par André Gide," *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 13 Feb 1926, No. 174, p. 5.

characterisation is universally accepted by Russians; that Russian literature in France is appropriate only for an elite whilst the masses should restrict themselves to more accessible French literature. The further implication is that this French literature ought to correspond to their expectations. While these conclusions may be debatable, Jaloux's critique of Gide's characterisation is nonetheless valid: despite his expressed desire, Gide could never achieve polyphony, insofar as he could never dissociate his ego from his characters. This is why, while Lalou was not unfounded in receiving *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* as Gide's 'French version' of *The Devils*, Fayer was perhaps equally justified in observing that there could be no Shatovs or Kirilovs in Gide's fictional world.<sup>345</sup>

Comparisons to Dostoevsky abounded in the Russian émigré reception of the *Faux-Monnayeurs*. Zaitsev's reading was typical, as Livak has shown, in mobilising cultural stereotypes. He starts from the assumption that, as a French rewriting of Dostoevsky, Gide's work was doomed from the outset to fall short of attaining ['Russian'] profundity, and achieve only ['French'] superficiality.<sup>346</sup> Inversely, for Adamovich, Gide's work was praiseworthy precisely for its 'Russian' traits and greater still than Dostoevsky's owing to the authenticity of experience Gide recounted.<sup>347</sup> Livak's comparison of Zaitsev's and Adamovich's articles shows how Gide's quality was assessed by the benchmark of Dostoevsky, and both clearly operate within the binary system of oppositions surrounding the Franco-Russian literary relations; namely that of the French mind-Russian soul

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<sup>345</sup> René Lalou, *André Gide* (Paris: Heissler, 1928), pp. 33-34; Fayer, *Gide, Freedom and Dostoevsky*, p. 92.

<sup>346</sup> Kirill Zaitsev, "Fal'shivomonetchiki," *Vozrozhdenie* 11 Mar 1926, p. 3.

<sup>347</sup> Guéorgui Adamovich, "André Gide," in *Le Studio Franco-Russe* (Toronto: Toronto Slavic Library, 2005), p. 197.

dichotomy already discussed in chapter one.<sup>348</sup>

Numerous French critics less predisposed towards Dostoevsky blamed Gide's infatuation with the Russian for the scandalous novel, again in accordance with the established cultural mould. Louis Reynaud's *Crise de notre littérature* asserted that Gide "s'annexa simplement Dostojevski, s'agrandit de ce barbare."<sup>349</sup> Camille Mauclair violently attacked the novel as an "enormous poisoned gâteau" populated only by "repugnant individuals" that leave the reader with "nausea in the soul", concluding that "Dostoevsky is to blame... you have to have monsters."<sup>350</sup> Edmund Gosse, on reading the novel, wrote to Gide beseeching him:

Try to release yourself from your bondage to the Russians, and particularly to Dostoevsky[.] We have all in time been subjected to the magic of this epileptic monster. But his genius has only led us astray, as I should say to any young writer of merit who appealed to me. Read what you like, only don't waste your time reading Dostoevsky. He is the cocaine and morphine of modern literature.<sup>351</sup>

Comparatists have set out to account for this 'Dostoevskian flavour', often with unconvincing results.<sup>352</sup> Numerous parallels between characters and images have

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<sup>348</sup> Leonid Livak, *How it was done in Paris: Russian Emigré Literature and French Modernism* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), p. 22.

<sup>349</sup> Louis Reynaud, *La Crise de notre littérature* (Paris: Hachette, 1929), p. 214.

<sup>350</sup> Camille Mauclair, 'La Vase Littéraire' in *La Dépêche* (Toulouse), 19 Feb 1926, p. 1. Here cited from Leighton Hodson's translation in Leighton Hodson, *Marcel Proust: the critical heritage* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 42. The following week, Mauclair published an article entitled describing the need to combat the homosexual tendency in literature and warning against giving too much liberty to "pornographers" (Gide and Proust) under the guise of intellectual leaders. Again, the Dostoevsky (along with Freud) receives the blame if not for the homosexuality of the two French authors, at least for encouraging the representation of mental illness (i.e. homosexuality) in literature. See Camille Mauclair, "Le poison Dostoievsky," *La Semaine Littéraire*, 27 fév 1926, p. 105.

<sup>351</sup> Letter from Edmund Gosse to André Gide (22-8-1926) in *The Correspondence of André Gide and Edmund Gosse (1904-1928)* ed. Linette Brugmans (London: Peter Owen, 1960), p. 183.

<sup>352</sup> See for example Catherine A. Barry, "Transpositions of Dostoevsky in Gide's Faux-Monnayeurs," *The French Review* 45, no. 3 (1972), pp. 582-585.

been evoked; however, intertextual dialogues and thematic reverberations are in this case simply insufficient substantiation for the more fundamental and broadly acknowledged *Dostoïevskisme* that the work was deemed by contemporary critics to incarnate.<sup>353</sup> If Gide's *Caves* engaged with Dostoevsky's oeuvre intertextually via pastiche and parody, *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* did so on a less textual level.

A number of critics have tackled the connection in terms of narrative aesthetics, again without drawing satisfactory conclusions. Betisson posits potential structural parallels without tracing them, while Sheridan is unjustified in regarding *les Faux-Monnayeurs* as aesthetically categorically "undostoevskian" without defining the term.<sup>354</sup> Jaloux penetrated deeper, seeing in Gide's novel a failed attempt at a Dostoevsky-inspired narrative dissolution of the self. What Bakhtin identified as the polyphony of Dostoevsky's narrative was an aspect of his fiction that Gide revered as an aesthetic embodiment of his Christian, quasi-metaphysical virtue of abnegation. However, Gide's own authorial ego could never concede to this.<sup>355</sup> As such, Gide's fiction remains dialectical and discursive rather than dialogical in the Bakhtinian sense.<sup>356</sup> The result is a conglomeration of *romans à thèses* rather than a suspension of narrative judgement. Gide's novel is thus obliged to use structural contraption in order to generate the aesthetic value of 'complexity': the attribute of Dostoevsky's fiction

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<sup>353</sup> See footnote 300.

<sup>354</sup> Sheridan, *André Gide: A Life in the Present* (London Hamish Hamilton, 1998), p. 354; Barry, "Transpositions of Dostoevsky in Gide's *Faux-Monnayeurs*," pp. 581.

<sup>355</sup> Jaloux comments that Gide, unlike Dostoevsky, could never "s'effacer." His authorial ego could not permit his own philosophy to cede to that of his characters. See Jaloux, "Sur André Gide," p. 310.

<sup>356</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problemy tvorчества Dostoevskogo in Sobranie Sochinenii*, 5 vols. (Moskva: Russkie slovari, 2000), II, pp. 43-56.

that he and Rivière has so highly praised and that their generation sought.

The novel remains, nevertheless, fairly unambiguous in ethical terms. However, it is possible that in the *Faux-Monnayeurs* Gide no longer sought the ethical ambiguity he cultivated in earlier works. At the time of his 'Allocution' on Dostoevsky, Gide had criticised Dickens's fiction for the over-simplicity of its "échelle des valeurs", which he contrasted to Dostoevsky's more problematic characterisation and moral interrogation.<sup>357</sup> However, by the mid-Twenties, Gide seems to have outgrown the ironic mode of his earlier works in favour of a less ambiguous depiction of his own moral values. As such, the *Faux-Monnayeurs*, for its convoluted structure, operates within a surprisingly simple ethical framework. This can be divided fairly easily into three moral trajectories, all of which find precedents in Gide's earlier fiction and, particularly, in his contemporaneous writings on Dostoevsky. These trajectories, broadly speaking, run from material egoism to cynicism; from pious selflessness to self-loss; from revolt to sincerity and reintegration.

The first trajectory is represented by Vincent, Passavant and Lady Griffith. In contrast with Dostoevsky, Gide's novel contains fairly unproblematic villains, rendering its moral landscape infinitely easier to map. Lady Griffith tells the tale of a ship evacuation to account for her doctrine of ruthless egoism. Passavant requires no such legitimising narrative for his own, innate, inherited egoism (inherited along with his name's etymology). Vincent, the biologist who abandons

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<sup>357</sup> Gide, *Dostoïevsky*, p. 141.

his inseminated mate, represents a third, positivist path to the same conclusion of rational egoism. Gide's account of Vincent's descent, from positivism to cynicism is curiously conveyed in numbered bullet points, aesthetically attesting to the fact that his "culture positive" is especially susceptible to corruption by the forces of evil that it refuses to acknowledge.<sup>358</sup> In consideration of Gide's writings on Dostoevsky's ethics in his lectures, the trajectory of Vincent (who goes on to kill Lady Griffith) is clearly that of Dostoevsky's various Raskolnikovs and Piotr Verkhovensky's. Both authors represent rational approaches to ethics as instantly corruptible and blind to this corruption: tragically so in Dostoevsky; farcically so in Gide.

Gide is here continuing a discourse he had begun with *L'Immoraliste* in a now unambiguously satirical representation of conglomerated material egoism, positivism and aristocratism. This is further satirised in the narrative strand of the child-counterfeiters and their epithet "l'homme fort ne tient pas à la vie" which results in the death of Boris. Dostoevsky's *The Devils* is clearly an intertextual referent for the children's criminal brethren, their Kirlilovian epithet and the conspired suicide. In representing this Nietzschean brethren of *hommes forts* as children, Gide employs a satirical technique that he had observed in Dostoevsky's characterisation of Kolia Krasotkin in *Brothers Karamazov*: that of attributing the convictions of his adversaries to misguided child characters.<sup>359</sup> The culmination of the *Faux-Monnayers* in the tragic death of Boris at the hands of his schoolmates has a clear precedent in that of Iliusha at the end of *Brothers*

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<sup>358</sup> Gide, *Romans*, p. 1045.

<sup>359</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, XIV, p. 473-4.

*Karamazov.*

If the first moral trajectory (that of the Griffith-Passavant-Vincent and the George-Ghèridanisol-Philippe triumverates) related back to Michel of *L'Immoraliste*, the second is the reincarnation of Marcelline, Alésia – and, of course, Emanuelle – in Rachel. This is the abnegatory Christian ideal that Gide had praised so fervently in his *Numquid* and his subsequent writings on Dostoevsky. However, this he seemed to deem inaccessible if not, indeed, unbecoming of his own ego. As always, this abnegatory path of humility Gide at once idolises beyond reach and femininises through Rachel (and to a lesser degree Laura).

Gide shared with Dostoevsky this ideal of Christian self-effacement as well as its feminine engendering. Dostoevsky, until his final novel – and at that only debatably – cast predominantly female characters in this role of the selfless sufferer. It was this that attracted a first generation of readers to Sonya. However, and despite his great efforts, Dostoevsky struggled to represent a masculine character in this idealised role. The self-effacing male ego he could only accommodate within monasteries, or else within the confines of the sexless, ‘ridiculous’ holy fool model of Myshkin, Makar Dolgorukii, the unnamed ‘ridiculous man’ of *Son Smeshnogo Cheloveka*. Only with Alesha did he make his final attempt to send masculine humility from the monastery out into a gendered world.

Gide, having completely isolated the religious element of Dostoevsky’s thought



in his 'Allocution' and privatised its Christian ethics in a "région profonde," continues in this vein by confining piety and abnegation to the most domesticated of female characters. Rachel's comparatively minor role in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* to her predecessors in Gide's earlier fiction, coupled with her increased domestic confinement, indicates that Gide had further isolated his religious abnegatory ideal from his moral framework by further burying it in the "région profonde".

Barry attempted a more feminist reading of the *Faux-Monnayeurs* in relation to Dostoevsky's cult of [feminine] self-effacement:

The rebel Sarah, Rachel's sister, mirror of Gide's revolt against the Calvinistic gospel, ultimately crushes Rachel, and her "religion de la souffrance" drowns midway through the novel as a disconcerting myth.<sup>360</sup>

While Catherine Barry is justified in reading Sarah as Gide's representation of a destructive, individualistic, anti-religious force, the 'diabolical' aspect of his creative thought that lashes out at Rachel, it must be recalled that Sarah does so explicitly in shame at her own comparative moral bankruptcy. As such, the feminine moral ideal for Gide remains firmly abnegatory.

The third moral trajectory is that of Bernard, from insincere revolt to sincere reintegration. It is in this trajectory that the moral framework of Gide's novel most differs from that of *Brothers Karamazov* and *The Devils*. Bernard's initial rebellion against a received identity (the act of writing an insulting letter to his adoptive father) is presented as an affected act. The letter is stained with a drop of

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<sup>360</sup> Barry, "Transpositions of Dostoevsky in Gide's *Faux-Monnayeurs*," p. 587.

sweat that “joue la larme”.<sup>361</sup> The tear image reappears throughout the novel, accompanying spontaneous acts of sincerity in juxtaposition to cynicism.<sup>362</sup>

His second significant act of revolt is against his re-defined identity as a rebel, preceding his prodigious return to the family hearth. This vanquishing of the self is represented as wrestling with an ambiguous angel-devil.<sup>363</sup> This ambiguous sparring partner can be read as a transformation of Ivan Karamazov’s debate with Satan. Just as Ivan’s wilful affirmation of the self in defiance of the father (his complicity in parricide; his metaphysical revolt against God) was tested, so is Bernard’s. However, while Ivan proved no match for his adversary, Bernard successfully overcomes his otherworldly opponent. Bernard’s victory over the devil/angel is a paradoxical self-affirmation that permits an act of submission (his consequent return to the father). Thus, the victory of the self over the self, or rather, over the preconception of the self that prevented his return, is also Gide’s overcoming of Ivan and his hubristic incapacity to abnegate or to accept personal responsibility for existence (*‘Bunt’*). Bernard’s ‘conversion and return is clearly a representation of Gide’s overcoming of the romantic hero and his proposition of an engaged proto-existential one: Gide’s first and final character with a capacity for overcoming his own characterisation.<sup>364</sup>

Bernard’s willful overcoming is presented in opposition to La Pérouse. The latter

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<sup>361</sup> Gide, *Romans*, p. 933.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 952, 964, 966, 979, 1034.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1208.

<sup>364</sup> In Charles du Bos’s words, “Bernard représente le rachat de Lafcadio.” See Charles du Bos, *Le Dialogue avec André Gide* (Paris: Au sans pareil, 1929), p. 185.

also metaphorically wrestles with a divine entity, however, his struggle is that of Job rather than Jacob, and unlike Bernard he has no hope of victory. The theodistic outcry with which La Pérouse closes the novel refers back to Ivan's, as well as to the existential revolt of Shestov's philosophical writings. La Pérouse's revolt is a clear inversion of Kirilov's, in his incapacity to abnegate, to transcend the human condition: he is a slave to his own existence.

La Pérouse's purely abnegatory, impassionate suicide proves impossible; Olivier's impassioned attempt also fails; only Boris's self-affirmative suicide is successful. It is also the most resemblant of Kirilov's in its motivation, as a paradoxical test of the limits of self-affirmative abnegation. It is also wrapped in the same context of nihilist criminal conspiracy. It is thus no coincidence that Gide's novel's successful suicide is characterised as a Russian and mystic: Boris is Gide's final, fictional tribute to Kirilov.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has followed Gide's reception of Dostoevsky, both from the perspective of his reading, his commentary, and intertextual reverberations of Dostoevskian motifs in his fiction. His discovery of Dostoevsky and initial reading list was at the discretion of Vogüé and his "religion de la souffrance" interpretation, which had an influence over Gide's and his generation's first period of reception: an influence Gide would later rue. The second period was a

critical and fictional parallel interrogation of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, evidenced in Gide's '6e lettre à Angèle' and *L'Immoraliste*. Contemporaneous interpretations and adaptations by Suarès, Faure and Copeau represented an emerging 'modern' reassessment of Dostoevsky's work, in which Gide took on a flag-bearing role. From 1908, Gide launched a violent backlash against Vogüé, the first translators and the previously widely admitted moralist reading of Dostoevsky. This took the form of a subversive re-casting of the figure of Dostoevsky himself in 'Dostoïevski d'après sa correspondance' in 1908, followed by Gide's parodic representation of *Crime and Punishment* (and specifically of Vogüé's reception of it) in *Les Caves du Vatican*. Gide's mature reading of Dostoevsky in the 'Allocution' and his final fictional engagement with Dostoevsky's oeuvre in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* revealed that the fundamental concerns with which he initially broached *The Devils* in the late 19th century were still intact, significantly informed by his now mature religious thought, as expressed in *Numquid et tu*.

Gide raised in his study of Dostoevsky the problematisation of dichotomous conceptions of self-affirmation and abnegation, in the constitution of selfhood, in the conceptualisation of the divine and in Gide's highly abstract ethics. On the psychological plane, this took the form of humility and pride, which transposed in ethical terms into altruism and egoism. Unlike Dostoevsky, however, Gide represented both of these ethical extremes as equal forms of moral deadend. These extremities were engendered – affirmation masculine; abnegation feminine – in their characterised manifestations.

The abstract ideal, shared by Gide and Dostoevsky, of a self-affirmative abnegation lay beyond the reach of any of their characters. In Dostoevsky, only the innately meek, or the holy fool, could hope to achieve humility and quietism, while the rest are tragic victims of egoism and consuming pride. Gide took a less polarised view, which drew him to the paradox of Kirilov. Gide found an evangelical seed of hope in Kirilov's mystical suicide and in Dostoevsky's famous claim that self-effacement and reintegration required the highest development of individualism. Between the extremities of abnegation and of self-development, Gide's diametrically opposed and conflicted moral ideals, Kirilov's philosophical suicide represented a mystical point of contact, a reconciliation that preoccupied Gide for almost thirty years. This reconciliation is never rationalised in either Gide or Dostoevsky: it remains an intuition somewhat beyond reach. It is an ideal that finds only ironic representation in either oeuvre as it is unrealisable and fictionally unrepresentable. However, these two axes, like parallel Lobachevskian lines, find in Kirilov's mystic suicide an imaginary, scriptural meeting point.

### Chapter 3 – The Existential Reading (1920-1940)

The arrival of Russia's exiled religious intelligentsia to Paris in the early 1920s brought with it significantly more developed interpretations of Dostoevsky, the Russian reception predating the French and benefiting, no doubt, from a degree of domestic insight. Dostoevsky's critique of the post-enlightenment intellectual tradition had been a key source of inspiration to the 'Silver Age' generation of Russian existential thinkers. This continued and increased in emigration, a curious phenomenon that has duly attracted considerable attention in recent analyses of the culture of the Russian diaspora, underlining the importance of Dostoevsky's fictional world to the émigré conceptions of Russianness and modernity.<sup>365</sup>

What has generally been overlooked, however, in studying the diaspora in isolation from its 'host' cultures, is the significance of Dostoevsky's fiction as a platform for intercultural discourse. Parisian salons had long been animated by discussion of Dostoevsky, and it was principally as his authoritative interpreters that such thinkers as Lev Shestov were first invited into the high profile French journals through which they accessed the francophone readership. As such, the

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<sup>365</sup> See, for example, Zhan-Filipp Zhakkar and Ul'rikh Shmid, "Dostoevskii i Russkaia zarubezhnaia kul'tura: k postanovke voprosa," in *Dostoevskii i Russkoe Zarubezh'e xx veka*, ed. Zhan-Filipp Zhakkar and Ul'rikh Shmid (Sankt-Peterburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2008), p. 7-26; Livak, *How it was done in Paris*, p. 16; T. I. Blagova and B. V. Emel'ianov, *Filosofemy Dostoevskogo: Tri interpretatsii. L. Shestov, N. Berdiaev, B. Vysheslavtsev* (Ekaterinburg: Izdatel'stvo Ural'skogo Universiteta, 2003), p. 7.

longevity of Dostoevsky's centrality to émigré culture cannot be exclusively explained as a quasi-metaphysical aspect of alienation and uprootedness – an experience which in itself had as much to do with European modernity as with exile.<sup>366</sup> This oversight is in part due to the spiritual bent of the first wave of post-soviet scholarship on émigré thought. The task that remains is to situate the existential émigré readings in dialogical relation to existing cults of Dostoevsky in French discourse, bringing to the fore the historical significance of Russian émigré contributions to the author's French reception and, as such, to the development of existential thought in France.

Livak's various studies have demonstrated that the exiled Russian intelligentsia was far less isolated from the intellectual life of Paris than has often been assumed.<sup>367</sup> He argues that the cultural construct of the alienated émigré had more to do with émigré poets fashioning themselves on a modernist cult of alienation, than with the reality of the French milieu.<sup>368</sup> Livak's work indicates that throughout the 1920s and 30s cultural dialogue between Russian and French elites was highly developed. What is constantly evidenced, if not specifically examined, is that throughout this period Dostoevsky's fiction remained an important and ever-present reference point – a meeting ground – particularly for an influential proto-existential faction of religious thinkers. The following chapter traces this dialogue, beginning with the seminal existential reading of Lev

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<sup>366</sup> One exception is Livak's introduction to Leonid Livak, ed., *Le Studio Franco-Russe, Toronto Slavic Library* (Toronto: Toronto Slavic Quarterly, 2005), p. 12. Livak notes the importance of Dostoevsky in Franco-Russian intercultural dialogue.

<sup>367</sup> Leonid Livak, "K izucheniiu uchastiia russkoi emigratsii v intellektual'noi i kul'turnoi zhizni mezhuvennoi Frantsii," in *Russkie pisateli v Parizhe: vzgliad na frantsuzskuiu literaturu (1920-1940)* (Geneva, Moskva: Russkii Put' 2007), p. 200; Livak, ed., *Le Studio Franco-Russe*

<sup>368</sup> Livak, *How it was done in Paris* p. 26-27.

Shestov, and its reception by French readers. It then examines the canonical retranslation of *Notes from Underground* by Boris de Schloezer – Shestov’s close friend, follower and translator – in relation to Shestov’s reading. I then analyse Berdyaev’s interpretation and its reception in terms of existential and romantic thought, before examining Gabriel Marcel’s reception both of Dostoevsky as an existential thinker and of the existential thought of Russia’s Silver Age tradition.

### **Shestov’s ‘underground’ philosophy**

It was through his writings on Dostoevsky that philosopher Lev Shestov’s anti-rationalist revolt first came into contact with rising existential currents in French literary thought of the early twenties. Shestov’s main French publications on his predecessor, ‘Dostoïevsky et la lutte contre les évidences’ (1922)<sup>369</sup> and *La Philosophie de la tragédie: Dostoïevsky et Nietzsche* (1926),<sup>370</sup> thus played a key role in establishing the philosopher’s voice in the French intellectual milieu, meanwhile positing, for the first time in France, a central place for the Dostoevskian underground man in the history of European philosophy.

Shestov’s contribution to the 1922 centenary edition of the *NRF*, briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, constituted a crucial first step in opening this dialogue simultaneously between French and Russian readings of Dostoevsky

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<sup>369</sup> An extract from “Preodolenie samoochevidnosti” appearing in the *NRF* in Feb 1922, translated and prefaced by Schloezer. The article was translated and published in full in *Les Révélations de la mort* in 1923.

<sup>370</sup> Originally published in Russian in 1902.



and between French and Russian existential movements. Like the readings of the generation discussed in the previous chapter, Shestov's reading of Dostoevsky was amoralistic. However, Shestov went significantly further than previous French interpreters in textually substantiating his reading, which on many levels equates to actively silencing the voice of Christian moralism that arguably resounds as loudly in Dostoevsky's fiction as any conceivable amoralism.<sup>371</sup>

'Dostoïevsky et la lutte...' is a radical existential reading of the yet little-discussed *Notes from Underground*, raised up by Shestov to no less than "une des œuvres les plus extraordinaires de la littérature universelle".<sup>372</sup> This 'universalisation' of Dostoevsky's thought was critical to Shestov's success in France in comparison to other commentators (both native French and émigré), many of whom persisted along 19th-century Volksgeist lines of interpretation.<sup>373</sup> In radically dissociating Dostoevsky's anti-rationalist revolt from any ultimate Christian moral objectives and analysing it instead in epistemological terms, Shestov's reading, while religious in its ultimate conclusions, opened the way for more secular existential readings of Dostoevsky's revolt, significantly broadening the scope of its impact.

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<sup>371</sup> Shestov gave the following explanation for his 'liberal' reading style in an unpublished letter to Markovich: "Чем я старше становлюсь, чем больше научаюсь я читать КНИГИ, тем больше я в этом убеждаюсь. Даже великие, величайшие мастера языка – не только наши современники, а и древние авторы, всегда только приблизительно рассказывали то, что хотели рассказывать. Возьмите кого хотите – Платона, Аристотеля, Плотина, Декарта, Спинозу, Паскаля [–] все, как только брали перо в руки, чувствовали, что либо нужно совсем отказаться от писания, либо – идти на компромиссы." See Léon Chestov, "Lettre à A. Markovitch" (11-08-1926), Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne, Fond Léon Chestov, MS2116, pp. 197-198.

<sup>372</sup> Léon Chestov, "Dostoïevsky et la lutte contre les évidences," in *Nouvelle Revue Française*, XVIII/101 (fév. 1922), p. 142.

<sup>373</sup> Livak, *How It Was Done in Paris*, pp. 14-18.

In interpreting the *Notes from Underground* as an expression of individual existential revelation, Shestov disentangles the anti-rationalist drive of Dostoevsky's thought from the 'Russian Soul' construct, from Slavophilism and from the religious fanaticism previous Romantic anti-rationalist readings had hinged on. Furthermore, by dealing almost exclusively with the first section of the *Notes* in isolation from the second, thus militating against any possible moralistic reading, Shestov's representation of the work comes to resemble an anti-rationalist manifesto, which he explicitly refers to as European philosophy's first authentic "critique of pure reason".<sup>374</sup> In juxtaposing Dostoevsky's critique to Kant's, Shestov targets the validity of rational approaches to ethics, in order not to proclaim the suprarational supremacy of Christian ethics (as Dostoevsky had doubtlessly intended) but to present a religious existential reading that attempted to go beyond the moral dimension of Dostoevsky's oeuvre. Shestov's target is drastically different from Dostoevsky's; crimes and punishments are entirely secondary to the initial moment of absurd revelation and indignation that sets Dostoevsky's rebellious characters against social and religious laws.

In Shestov's thought, this conception of the absurd is not an end in itself. Shestov extends Dostoevsky's critique of the post-enlightenment intellectual tradition in order to launch his own metaphysical attack on transcendentalism and ideals. Having set underground philosophy in opposition to Kantian idealism's 'praise' of pure reason, Shestov then extrapolates his argument back to Plato. In a creative use of metaphor, Shestov melds Dostoevsky's 'underground' with Plato's 'cave'

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<sup>374</sup> Shestov, "Dostoïevsky et la lutte contre les évidences," pp. 150-151.

using the former to subvert the latter.<sup>375</sup> For Shestov, the underground is not the cave in which the ignorant are enchained but a space of revelation. However, contrary to Plato's allegory, this revelation is individual and subjective. Left in the cave are the prejudices of *vsemstvo*, collective conscience which, following Dostoevsky, Shestov conceives in rationalist terms. By Shestov's inverted allegory, any philosophy dependent on universal laws (in this he does not differentiate between idealism, rationalism or indeed positivism) is left in the cave with the idyllic transcendental 'shadows' Plato had inadvertently venerated. In confining universality to the cave, Shestov aims to debunk not only platonic idealism but rational thought per se.

The result is not necessarily irrationalism nor radical scepticism. Shestov and his underground man revolt not against the validity of rational thought processes, but the presumption of the *authority* that truths obtained rationally claim over any conception of truth that lies outwith these boundaries (in this case, the existential revelation that Shestov posits behind Dostoevsky's underground polemics). In pitting the underground man against the entirety of the European philosophical mainstream, from the Greeks to Kant and from idealism to positivism, Shestov evidently indulges in a fairly radical extrapolation of the underground man's original thesis.<sup>376</sup> Dostoevsky's polemicist had focused his attack against various contemporary utilitarianist attempts to rationalise human interaction. He had employed psychological realism against assumptions as to the infallibility of

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<sup>375</sup> Shestov, "Dostoïevsky et la lutte contre les évidences," p. 144.

<sup>376</sup> Jean Grenier entered into debate with Shestov on this point drawing similar conclusions; see Jean Grenier, 'La liberté absolue' in *L'Existence malheureuse*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 180.

human reason and human science to the ultimate end of reaffirming the pre-eminence of Christian anthropology over secular humanism.<sup>377</sup> In Shestov's reading, however, Christian dogma is rejected as yet another universalism with a view to challenging both ethics and epistemology with a near-anarchistic subjectivism.<sup>378</sup>

Shestov's 'Dostoïevski et la lutte contre les évidences' is typical particularly of his early writings in the precarious balance it strikes between mysticism and agnosticism. A surviving, unpublished draft of the article in the archives of the Sorbonne indicates that many final amendments to the article concerned the quasi-religious vocabulary throughout. Curiously, much of this was a late addition to a more secular initial draft.<sup>379</sup> Varying conclusions could, of course, be drawn from this, depending on whether last-minute additions are interpreted as afterthoughts straying from an initial essence or as laboured finishing touches straining towards a particular communicative goal. The latter seems more plausible. What can, in any case, be deduced is that striking such a balance between the religious and the secular was of paramount concern for the Shestov as a prose writer.

Shestov's goal is no more gratuitous (and ultimately no less religious) than

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<sup>377</sup> See Dostoevsky's 26 March 1864 letter to Mikhail Dostoevsky: "Свиньи цензора, там, где я глумился над всем и иногда богохульствовал для виду, – то пропущено, а где из всего этого я вывел потребность веры и Христа – то запрещено." F. M. Dostoevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh*, (Leningrad: Nauka, 1973), XXVIII, II, p. 73.

<sup>378</sup> For Shestov, only an adogmatic, absurd faith – "unfounded" faith, to tentatively employ Piron's term, is admitted. See Geneviève Piron, *Léon Chestov: Philosophe du Déracinement*, (Lausanne: Age de l'homme, 2010), p. 75.

<sup>379</sup> Léon Chestov, "Preodolenie samoochevidnosti (premièr état)," Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne, Fond Léon Chestov, MS2105 fasc 29-30.

Dostoevsky's. It is to challenge what he sees as the despotic governance of rationalism over thought: the pretensions of science to exclusive rights to truth and the tendency of philosophy to accept them. His methodological recourse to literary criticism in revolt against the philosophical mainstream is a further means of undermining the authority of the objectivising rationalist mode (its language, methods, values) over individual will, caprice and creativity. Shestov is well aware that his critical method, like Dostoevsky's fictional method before him, implies an undermining of the structure of philosophical discourse:

Vous n'êtes pas habitué à de tels arguments; vous êtes même offensé peut-être qu'en parlant de la théorie de la connaissance je cite ces passages de Dostoïevsky. Vous auriez raison si Dostoïevsky n'avait pas soulevé la question de droit. Mais deux fois deux quatre, la raison avec toutes ses évidences ne veulent justement pas admettre qu'on discute la question de droit.<sup>380</sup>

Shestov's philosophical approach to Dostoevsky is thus perhaps a less significant innovation than his 'literary' approach to philosophy, which, rooted in Russia's non-academic tradition and informed by Nietzsche, represents a challenge to disciplinary boundaries that were arguably still more institutionally entrenched in French than Russian discourse at this time.

This aspect of Shestov's writing seems to have made an impression. An unpublished letter from G. Bessière to Shestov in 1925 writes of the influence his critical method has had on his own: "Votre critique est toute nouvelle, et captive autant que les oeuvres dont vous parlez. Je ne peux pas vous cacher qu'elle m'influence beaucoup."<sup>381</sup> Shestov's anti-rationalist, existential interpretation of

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<sup>380</sup> Léon Schestov, "Dostoïevsky et la lutte contre les évidences," *Nouvelle Revue Française* 18, no. 101 (1922), p. 156.

<sup>381</sup> George Bessière, "Lettre à Chestov" (12-6-25), Fond Léon Chestov, Bibliothèque de la

Dostoevsky quickly began to make an impact. Its influence on Gide's reading has been discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>382</sup> Critics noted a resemblance between the readings of the two critics, which both seem to have appreciated.<sup>383</sup>

The following year, in 1923, Shestov, along with his translator, close friend and philosophical follower Boris de Schloezer, was invited to Paul Desjardin's *Décade* at Pontigny, an elitist ten-day conference on the question "Y a-t-il dans la poésie d'un peuple un trésor réservé[sic], impénétrable aux étrangers?"<sup>384</sup> Dostoevsky was naturally top of the agenda. Shestov's correspondence with Eitingon recalls his amazement at the enthusiasm of his French contemporaries for Dostoevsky and for Russian culture:

Поразило меня тоже отношение французов к русским и к русской литературе. Все знают, во всем чудесно разбираются – и как все любят. Я прислушивался к частным разговорам за столом или в отдельных группах и часто ушам своим не верил. Когда еще восхваляют Достоевского – куда ни шло.<sup>385</sup>

Shestov described the *Décade* at Pontigny as his first genuine experience of "настоящий контакт с французами."<sup>386</sup> Shestov's correspondence from this period, particularly with du Bos, sheds light on the number of influential French thinkers that responded favourably to his reading of Dostoevsky.<sup>387</sup> For the next

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Sorbonne, MS2115, fasc 276.

<sup>382</sup> See page 108 of the current thesis.

<sup>383</sup> Baranova-Shestova, *Zhizn' L'va Shestova: po perepiske i vospominaniiam sovremenikov*, I, pp. 230, 348-9.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid. I, p. 256. The *Décades* at Pontigny were of no small significance in fostering Franco-Russian intercultural dialogue and lasting intellectual friendships among elites. Berdiaev was also a participant in a later year; see O. D. Volkogonova, *N. A. Berdiaev: Intel'ktual'naia biografiia* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 2001), p. 51.

<sup>385</sup> Letter to Eitingon (7-9-1923) in Baranova-Shestova, *Zhizn' L'va Shestova: po perepiske i vospominaniiam sovremenikov* I, p. 263.

<sup>386</sup> Letter to Lovtski (29-8-1923) in *ibid.* I, p. 261.

<sup>387</sup> Du Bos lists Gide, Desjardins, Jean Schlumberger, André Maurois, Martin du Gard, Jacques

five years Shestov would disseminate this reading through his teaching at the Institut des Études Slaves, the Université Populaire and the Sorbonne. His second significant commentary, *La Philosophie de la tragédie: Dostoïevski et Nietzsche*, would appear in French in 1926. This comparative and psychological study of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche's thought had in fact appeared in Russian over 20 years previously, in 1902, making it roughly contemporary to Gide's 'lettre à Angèle' on the same topic (and of course, to *L'Immoraliste*) while the translation of Shestov's study entered the French discourse more contemporaneously to Gide's mature reading of 1923.

The crux of Shestov's 'Philosophy of Tragedy' is that the human condition, particularly individual mortality, is an irreducible effrontery to which the humanist tradition turns a blind eye. The expression of this indignation Shestov identified in the Dostoevskian underground ("ведь дважды два четыре есть уже не жизнь, господа, а начало смерти."<sup>388</sup>) and in Nietzsche's anti-humanist revolt. The irremissibility of the death of the individual was for Shestov, as for Dostoevsky, the essence of the Absurd.

The sharp contrast between Shestov's comparison of Nietzsche and Dostoevsky and others such as Gide's and Merezhkovsky's is that Shestov's firstly draws surprisingly little distinction between the two. This he achieves by utterly disregarding their moral dimensions, whether Dostoevsky's Christian ethics or

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de Lacretelle as French writers who reacted with enthusiasm to Shestov's first French publications on Dostoevsky and Pascal. See Charles du Bos, "Lettre à Chestov" (27-4-1923 and 24-7-1923) in Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne, Fond Léon Chestov, MS2115 fasc. 262.

<sup>388</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, V, p. 119.

Nietzsche's infamous doctrines (through which most commentators to date had refracted the oeuvres). Shestov sees their 'preachings' – equally in both cases – as entirely extraneous to their thought. As with Shestov's reading of Tolstoy, the more forceful these preachings become, the more they are revealed as a testimony of a struggle against the void. This is the most significant divergence between Shestov's and Gide's parallel treatment of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche: Gide, more in line with Merezhkovsky and Suares, saw in Dostoevsky something of an antidote to Nietzsche.<sup>389</sup>

A second divergence is that, while both *La Philosophie de la Tragédie* and the '6e Lettre à Angèle' centre on pathology and revelation, Gide's comparison is quintessentially modernist in its historicity, reading Dostoevsky and Nietzsche as heralds of a new psychology, while Shestov's existential reading of revelation is entirely individualistic and ahistorical. Moreover, Shestov recognises only negative (or absurdist) revelation.

Sadly, little remains of the dialogue that took place between Gide and Shestov on the matter of Dostoevsky, and only second-hand accounts of Gide's enthusiasm for Shestov's interpretation. This is partly because Gide's critical engagement with Dostoevsky ended entirely on the arrival of the émigré thinkers. Seely justly identified a "jealous possessiveness" in Gide's approach to Dostoevsky in

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<sup>389</sup> Charles Andler responded to Shestov's interpretation in reverential terms, though he found that Russian interpreters tended to exaggerate Nietzsche's debt to the Russian novelist. Andler's own comparison, published in French in 1930, sadly read Dostoevsky purely on psychological terms, meanwhile reading Nietzsche philosophically, reaching the conclusion that the former had stopped short of Nietzsche's conclusions, while, curiously, most of the interpreters discussed in this chapter found Dostoevsky to pre-empt Nietzschean thought. See Andler, *Nietzsche et Dostoïevsky*.



relation to Copeau and Suarès.<sup>390</sup> It is thus not improbable that Gide's interest was dependent on a self-appointed role as France's leading authority on Dostoevsky, to which his claim was lost when Russian intellectuals arrived in Paris. Fondane relates Shestov's account of a pivotal encounter between the two writers in *Conversations avec Léon Chestov*:

C'est un des hommes les plus intelligents que je connaisse, il devine tout; on ne peut rien lui cacher, Son livre sur Dostoïevski avait paru. Nous étions à Pontigny. Un jour, il me demandait ce que j'en pensais. Alors je lui ai dit que c'était très bien écrit, etc. Il a compris tout de suite. Il a changé de conversation. Mais depuis, il ne m'a jamais plus parlé...<sup>391</sup>

Dostoevsky remained a crucial reference for Shestov, spanning his entire oeuvre. In *Athens and Jerusalem*, his final work, he gives an account of Dostoevsky's existential thought wholly consistent with that of 'Dostoïevsky et la lutte contre les évidences':

Греческая философия здесь осанавливается. Тут остановилась и *Критика чистого разума*. Но Достоевский чувствует, что тут остановиться нельзя, что здесь именно должна начинаться 'критика'<sup>392</sup>

*Notes from Underground* continues to form the basis of Shestov's argument that since reason restricts thought, 'free' analysis cannot be rational:

Thus to the end of his career Shestov never ceased to underline the importance of the underground man. In 1937 he was requested to select texts for the Dostoevsky

<sup>390</sup> Seely, "Dostoevsky and French Criticism", p. 167.

<sup>391</sup> Benjamin Fondane, *Rencontres avec Léon Chestov* (Paris: Plasma, 1982), p. 77. Fondane goes as far to speculate, presumably facetiously, that this offence was the reason Gide then turned from Dostoevsky to communism. Fondane's own reading of Dostoevsky was greatly influenced by Shestov's. His essay 'Sur la route de Dostoïevski: Martin Heidegger' (first published in *Les Cahiers du Sud*, 41 (1932), pp. 378-392; pp.195-222) applied Shestov's 'underground' reading strategy to Heidegger's work, (see Salazar-Ferrer's annotations to the revised, 1936 edition of the article reprinted in Benjamin Fondane, *La Conscience malheureuse* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2013), p. 195).

<sup>392</sup> Lev Shestov, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow: Nauka, 1993), p. 567.

section of a Radio France series on Russian literature, which would be read on air (by Shestov's daughter) and discussed. On his choice – *Notes from Underground*, *Krotkaia* and *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* – Shestov wrote:

Вы знаете, что обыкновенно никто не говорит об этих текстах. Ни Жид, ни другие, когда говорят о Достоевском, никогда не упоминают “Записки из подполья”<sup>393</sup>

While these have now entered the canon (indeed, comprising the three Dostoevsky novellas in the Folio Bilingual series) they were little known in France into the late thirties, and of *Notes from Underground* in particular, little had been said in France prior to Shestov's publications. If, by contrast, the subsequent generation of existentialist and absurdist writers was to draw extensively from *Notes from Underground*, it would seem that Shestov's efforts were not in vein.

### **Boris de Schloezer and *La Voix souterraine***

Shestov's initial article on Dostoevsky appeared in the *NRF* thanks to the recommendation of his close friend Boris de Schloezer. Schloezer played a decisive role in connecting Shestov to French intellectual circles and in disseminating his thought. Extensive research on their correspondence in the archives of the Sorbonne and the Bibliothèque Louis Notari has confirmed that

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<sup>393</sup> Letter to Fondane (17-2-1937) published in Baranova-Shestova, *Zhizn' L'va Shestova: po perezpiske i vospominaniiam sovremenikov* II, p. 167.

Schloezer was far more than Shestov's translator; Schloezer was among Shestov's closest philosophical followers.<sup>394</sup> It was Schloezer who translated the bulk of Shestov's oeuvre into French, including 'Dostoïevski et la lutte contre les évidences' in 1922 and *La Philosophie de la tragédie: Dostoïevski et Nietzsche* in 1926. The significance of this is that Schloezer retranslated *Notes from Underground* into French in the same year under the clear influence of Shestov's existential reading. Furthermore, it was the resultant 'existential' translation that became and remains the canonical French translation of the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade.

Born of a Russian and Belgian parentage, Schloezer was entirely bilingual, with a remarkable gift for translation. His rendering of Dostoevsky's texts is linguistically reliable enough to have been recently published in Gallimard's Folio Bilingue collection.<sup>395</sup> However, it is this assiduous fidelity to the original that makes his various modifications in the direction of Shestov's existential interpretation all the more readily identifiable, particularly when compared in parallel with previous French translations of the work.

That Schloezer was under the sway of Shestov's thought is evident in many of his writings. Among his manuscripts in the archives of the Bibliothèque Notari in Monaco, are pages writing off the *Diary of a Writer* on account of unoriginality and exalting the philosophies of Ivan Karamazov, Kirilov, Pierre Verkhovensky)

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<sup>394</sup> Alexander McCabe, "Léon Chestov and Boris de Schloezer," *Cahiers Léon Chestov*, no. 11 (2011), pp. 47-50.

<sup>395</sup> F. M. Dostoïevski, *Carnets du sous-sol*, tr. Boris de Schloezer (Paris: Gallimard, 1995).

as “beaucoup plus intelligentes, audacieuses, et originales que lui [Dostoïevski]” and they “nourrit toujours notre pensée.” In keeping with Shestov’s reading, Myshkins, Zossimas and Alyoshas are overlooked.<sup>396</sup>

The choice of translation for the title, *La Voix souterraine*, immediately introduces a dissociation between the protagonist-narrator and his utterances. Dostoevsky had emphatically presented the work as the *zapiski* (notes, jottings) originating from a place (*podpol’e*) rather than an author. Harpéline-Kaminsky and Charles Morice’s choice of *L’Esprit souterrain* for their rendering of the near-untranslatable Russian title, clearly envisioned underground thought as the fruits of a mind deranged by isolation. Schloezer’s choice of “the underground voice” dissociates the reflections within the narrative from any specific consciousness, truer to Dostoevsky’s original. However, the evocation of a disembodied voice (in opposition to the original ‘*zapiski*’) lends these reflections an air of revelation concurrent to Shestov’s reading.

As observed above, Shestov’s anti-rationalist reading of the *Notes* had hinged on his decision not to distinguish between the underground man’s treatment of rationalists and unthinking men of action (in that they are both “convinced in advance that they know what truth is”).<sup>397</sup> This association, essential in Shestov’s philosophical writings, permeates Schloezer’s translation of Dostoevsky:

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<sup>396</sup> "En Marge d'une traduction", Fond Schloezer, Bibliothèque Louis Notari, BSM1, Doc. 1650143, p. 12.

<sup>397</sup> Lev Shestov, *Sochinenii v dvukh tomakh* (Moskva: Nauka, 1993), p. 379.

Original

Известно, многие из этих **любителей [человеческого рода]**, рано ли, поздно ли, под конец жизни **изменяли себе**, произведя какой-нибудь анекдот, иногда даже из самых неприличнейших. (As is known, many of these philanthropists sooner or later, towards the end of their lives, betrayed themselves, producing some ridiculous incident, even of the least respectable kinds.)<sup>398</sup>

Initial translation

[Entirely omitted]<sup>399</sup>

Schloezer's translation

On sait que nombre de ces **amateurs de sagesse** finissent tôt ou tard par **trahir leurs idées** et se compromettent dans de scandaleuses histoires.

(As is known, many of these lovers of wisdom end sooner or later in betraying their ideas and compromise themselves in scandalous incidents.)<sup>400</sup>

Dostoevsky's image of lovers of mankind letting themselves down has been replaced by philosophers betraying their doctrines. The suggestion of such a comparison was not entirely absent from the original; however, Schloezer's liberal rendering clearly takes its cue from Shestov's reading. Where Dostoevsky had thus placed equal stress on the ethical consequences of the fundamental irrationality of man, Schloezer follows Shestov in homing in on the epistemological stakes.

With regards to anti-rationalist revolt the original and the two translations clearly operate within disparate ideological frameworks:

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<sup>398</sup> Dostoevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, V, p. 116.

<sup>399</sup> F. M. Dostoïevski, *L'Esprit souterrain*, tr. Halpérine-Kaminsky and Morice (Paris: Plon, 1886), p. 185.

<sup>400</sup> F. M. Dostoïevski, *Carnets du sous-sol*, tr. Boris de Schloezer (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 89. (References to Schloezer's translation are to the recent reprint in Folio Bilingue for ease of comparison. The retranslated title differs from the 1926 edition).

...вполне понимая свои настоящие выгоды, отставляли их на второй план и **бросались на другую дорогу, на риск, на авось**, никем и ничем не принуждаемые к тому, а как будто именно только не желая указанной дороги, и **упрямо, своевольно пробивали другую, трудную, нелепую**, отыскивая ее чуть не в потемках. Ведь, значит, им действительно это **упрямство и своеволие** было приятнее всякой выгоды...

(...fully understanding their own interests, they set them aside and launched out on another path, on a risk, on a perhaps, obliged by nothing and no-one, but precisely as if they simply did not wish [to walk] the path indicated to them, and stubbornly, willfully, [lit. 'self-willedly'] they beat out a different, difficult, absurd path, searching for it almost in the dark.

Surely this means that this stubbornness and self-will was more pleasant to them than any interests...)<sup>401</sup>

...sans se leurrer de leurs véritables intérêts, sans y être poussés par rien, pour **se détourner exprès, dis-je, de la voie droite**, en cherchant à tâtons, **le mauvais chemin, des actions absurdes et mauvaises**. C'est que ce **libertinage** leur convient mieux que toute considération d'intérêt réel.....

(...without deluding themselves as to their genuine interests, without being forced by anything, in order, I tell you, to turn away from the right road *on purpose*, groping their way along, they took the wrong path, of absurd and wrong actions.

It is that this libertinage suited them better than any consideration of genuine interests.....)<sup>402</sup>

...tout *en se rendant compte* de leur intérêt, le rejettent au seconde plan, et **s'engagent dans une toute autre voie, pleine de risques** et de hasards? Ils n'y sont pourtant pas forcés; mais il semble qu'ils veuillent précisément éviter la route qu'on leur indiquait, pour en **tracer librement, capricieusement, une autre, pleine de difficultés, absurde**, à peine reconnaissable, obscure. C'est donc que cette **liberté** possède à leurs yeux plus d'attraits que leurs propres intérêts...

(...*fully aware* of their interests, did they not set them aside and engage themselves in an entirely different path, full of risks and dangers? They were not forced, however, but it seems they wanted precisely to avoid the route indicated to them, in order to freely, capriciously trace another, absurd route full of difficulties, barely recognisable, obscure. It is that this freedom thus possessed more attraction than their own advantage...)<sup>403</sup>

Harpéline-Kaminsky and Morice's rendering slides the original in the direction of

<sup>401</sup> Dostoevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, V, p. 110.

<sup>402</sup> Dostoïevski, *L'Esprit souterrain*, tr. Harpéline-Kaminsky and Morice, p. 79.

<sup>403</sup> Dostoïevski, *Carnets du sous-sol*, tr. Boris de Schloezer, p. 61.

conventional romantic rebellion, which it in turn overtly condemns. Their underground speaker draws attention only to the fact that there have been cases when men have gone against the grain, choosing ‘the wrong path’ (note also their choice of the definite article, completely at odds with Dostoevsky’s ‘*drugaiia doroga*’) of ‘*libertinage*’ where the same section in the original had referred to a ‘different,’ ‘difficult’ path, suspending moral judgement on either path. Schloezer’s translation slides the text in the opposite direction. His rebels stray ‘freely and capriciously’ from the beaten track (where Dostoevsky’s had strayed stubbornly and ‘self-willedly’ (*svoevol’no*, with its Kantian overtones) superimposing positive connotations on the original. Where Dostoevsky’s rebels had (lit.) ‘thrown themselves on a risk’ Schloezer’s ‘engaged themselves on a path full of risks’, thus lexically implicating the rebels in a ‘mission’; while Dostoevsky’s throw themselves somewhat arbitrarily ‘at a perhaps’ in self-affirmation, Schloezer’s seem to have another, unspoken objective: they are not on ‘their own’ paths of self-will, but rather engaged in a somewhat predefined *alternative* path ‘full of risks’.

Schloezer’s consistently higher register and more confident expression than the voice Dostoevsky had consigned to the underground man, is evidenced in the above example in Schloezer’s addition of a rhetorical question and a semi-colon (where Harpéline-Kaminsky and Morice had lowered the tone, and consequently the content’s gravity, with the addition of an interjected ‘*dis-je*’). This is another means by which Schloezer systematically raises the text to the philosophical manifesto of Shestov’s reading. The underground man’s famously idiosyncratic tone has been significantly refined throughout Schloezer’s translation. Though

the translator is even strikingly faithful to the original syntax in most aspects, time and again he freely omits an expression of uncertainty, a *kak by*, a *mozhet byt'*, a *tak skazat'*, or a *kak-to* even a whole “*nu, i... nu khot' by dazhe i'*”<sup>404</sup> adding a causal *car*, or a *parce que*.<sup>405</sup> Commas are systematically upgraded to colons; ellipses to periods; periods to exclamation marks.<sup>406</sup> Discrete and indeed permissible alterations these may be; however, they are not inconsequential. These subtle but systematic alterations serve to significantly polish the underground man's rhetoric, where Dostoevsky had taken pains to confer to his character a relatively grotesque linguistic persona. Just as Shestov had extended the character's argument towards philosophical discourse, so Schloezer has edged his language towards a philosophical register. Thus France's most authoritative translation of *Notes from Underground* was impregnated with Shestov's existential worldview. If Marcadé was correct in considering Shestov's penetration into French intellectual history to run deeper than that of his fellow émigré writers,<sup>407</sup> Picon was perhaps more justified than he knew in suggesting that his francophone followers such as Camus, Marcel, Ionesco, could not have been reached without Schloezer.<sup>408</sup>

Following the key publications surrounding Dostoevsky's centenary, the twenties saw a second wave of translations, in which Schloezer played a significant role,

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<sup>404</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-29, 38-39, 46-47, 80-81.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., pp. 38-39 (three examples).

<sup>406</sup> Ibid. pp. 18-19, 22-23, 24-25, 46-47.

<sup>407</sup> J.-C. Marcadé, "Proniknovenie russkoi mysli vo frantsuzskuiu sredu: N. A. Berdiaev i L. I. Shestov" in N. T. Poltoratskii (ed.) *Russkaia religiozno-filosofskaia mysli' XX veka* (Pittsburghh: Pittsburghh Univ. Press, 1975), p. 150.

<sup>408</sup> Gaëtan Picon, "Les Formes et l'esprit: La pensée de Boris de Schloezer," *Le Monde*, 7-8 decembre 1969, p. 13.



bringing out the first French version of *La Confession de Stavroguine* (1923) and retranslating *Le Mari éternel* (1923) *Les Frères Karamazov* (1929) followed by the *Les Possédés* (1933), all of which (with the exception of the *Les Frères Karamazov*) entered the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade alongside his *La Voix souterraine* (later retitled *Le Sous-sol*).<sup>409</sup> Picon recalled that Schloezer's role in the dissemination of Russian literature and of Dostoevsky in particular, was consequential in France:

Il y eut, à partir des années trente, et continûment, un épanchement du roman russe dans la littérature française. Cela va de Gide à Camus (le Camus de *la Chute*) en passant par le Malraux de *La Condition humaine*, *le Soleil de Satan*, *le Sang noir*, *le Voyage au bout de la nuit*, *La Nausée*. J'entends par là une dislocation de la forme romanesque, sous la pression des interrogations métaphysiques et éthiques [...] un peu partout, il y a une lecture de *la Voix souterraine*, que Schloezer traduit en 1926.<sup>410</sup>

Picon's observations are of consequence for the current study: he implies that Schloezer was to some extent an intermediary between Russian and French existential currents in literature. The fact that Camus would adapt *The Devils* for the French stage using Schloezer's translation suggests that Picon's observation was not incorrect.

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<sup>409</sup> Backès' unpublished thesis offers an analysis of a number of the other translations from this period, comparing each of the principal translators (Henri Mongault, Albert Mousset, Jean Chuzeville). Dating from the 1970s, Backès' analysis is generally restricted to assessing 'fidelity' to the style and content of the original, rather than exploring any possible ideological or philosophical implications of a translator's choices. For the period of retranslations here in question see Backès, "Dostoïevski en France 1880 – 1930", pp. 462-484.

<sup>410</sup> Picon, "Les Formes et l'esprit: La pensée de Boris de Schloezer," p.13.

## Nicolas Berdyaev and *L'Esprit de Dostoïevsky*

Like Shestov, Berdyaev was of the generation of Russian thinkers that 'grew up on' Dostoevsky.<sup>411</sup> The foreward to *Mirosozertsanie Dostoevskogo*, his most significant work on Dostoevsky's thought, leaves no doubt that he considered the novelist to be the single most significant influence on his philosophical development, particularly with regards to his conception of Christ and that of freedom.<sup>412</sup> Berdyaev further asserted this throughout his autobiography.<sup>413</sup> Commentators from Barrett to Evlampiev have argued that Shestov and Berdyaev's similarity stems from a shared inheritance of Dostoevsky's existential thought.<sup>414</sup> More importantly, however, this 'inheritance' of Dostoevsky was cultivated in the climate of the Silver Age, and coloured by its values.<sup>415</sup>

Berdyaev and Shestov have often been bracketed together under the 'religious existential' rubric, a labelling they both accepted; however, on analysis, antagonisms between their philosophies at crucial points seem to outweigh parities. Their well-known intellectual friendship was indeed a fruitfully dialectical one: Pierre Pascal recalls their heated 'duels' as the highlight of

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<sup>411</sup> It may be noted that Berdyaev describes his upbringing and childhood as Dostoevskian in his autobiography. Meanwhile, Shestov's daughter deemed it fitting to subtitle the first tome of the French edition of her father's biography 'L'Homme du souterrain'. See Nicolas Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality: an essay in autobiography* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1950), p. 9, 17.

<sup>412</sup> Nikolai Berdiaev, *Filosofiiia tvorchestva, kul'tury i iskusstva*, 2 vols. (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1994), p. 8, corresponding to Nicolas Berdiaeff, *L'Esprit de Dostoïevski* (Paris: Stock, 1945), p. 7-8. The original publications in Russian and French were: *Mirosozertsanie Dostoevskogo* (Praha: YMCA Press, 1923) and *L'Esprit de Dostoïevski* (Paris: Editions St. Michel, 1929).

<sup>413</sup> Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality: an essay in autobiography* pp. 49, 80, 83.

<sup>414</sup> W. Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1961), p. 14; Evlampiev, *Istoriia russkoi filosofii*, pp. 132-134.

<sup>415</sup> N. V. Motroshilova, *Misliteli Rossii i filosofii zapada: V Solov'ev, N Berdiaev, S. Frank, L. Shestov* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Kul'turnaia revoliutsiia, 2007), p. 241.

Berdyaev's salon.<sup>416</sup> These tensions are particularly noticeable on comparison of their respective studies of Dostoevsky. Such comparison is facilitated greatly by the fact that Berdyaev's essay makes both direct and indirect commentary on Shestov's reading throughout, particularly as far as concerns the place of *Notes from Underground* in Dostoevsky's thought.<sup>417</sup>

The first divergence between Berdyaev's and Shestov's readings of Dostoevsky is their approach to his problematic 'idealism'. Dostoevsky himself had highlighted the paradox in his 'idealistic realism.'<sup>418</sup> Shestov recognised in Dostoevsky no such paradox: the only 'authentic' aspect of Dostoevsky's thought was the wilful rejection of ideals voiced by his various antipathetic characters, while the Christian ideals expressed through his various holy fools were disregarded as 'annotation'.<sup>419</sup> While Gide had succeeded in incorporating the religious doctrines such as Zosima's into his reading of Dostoevsky by focusing on the immanentism therein, Berdyaev sees Dostoevsky ultimately as a transcendentalist with an immanentist (novelistic) method, drawing comparisons to Plato, to which Shestov certainly would have objected.<sup>420</sup> This disparity stems from disparate conceptions of the idea. Shestov's polemics draw remarkably vague distinctions between idealism, rationalism and positivism insofar as all fundamentally hinge

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<sup>416</sup> P. Pascal, "Berdyaev - l'homme," in *Colloque Berdyaev, 12 avril 1975* ed. O. Clément, et al. (Paris: Inst. d'études slaves, 1978), p. 17.

<sup>417</sup> It is noteworthy that Berdyaev, in a fairly critical article on Shestov, rated his *Dostoevskii i Nitsche: Filosofii tragedii* extremely highly, deeming it to be his greatest work. "Tragedia i obydennost'" (1905) reprinted in Berdyaev, *Filosofii tvorchestva, kul'tury i iskusstva*, II, p. 221.

<sup>418</sup> See Letter to Maikov, 11 (23) Dec 1868 (Letter number 357) in Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, XXVIII, II, p. 329.

<sup>419</sup> Léon Chestov, *La Philosophie de la Tragédie: Dostoïevski et Nietzsche, Sur les confins de la vie: L'apothéose du déracinement* (Paris: Flammarion, 1966), pp. 36, 96-98,

<sup>420</sup> Émigré religious philosopher Ilin would follow Berdyaev's cue to declare Dostoevsky "the Russian Plato." See V. I. Il'in, *Èsse o russkoi kul'ture* (St. Petersburg: Akropol', 1997), p. 428. (Originally published as "Dostoevskii i Berdyaev" in *Novyj zhurnal*, (1971) no. 105).

on transcendentalism and necessarily lead to dogmatism,<sup>421</sup> for which reason Shestov has so often been labelled a sceptic – most famously by Berdyaev himself.<sup>422</sup> Berdyaev's conception of idealism, on the other hand, follows a Platonic tradition that equates the highest ideal to God.

While Berdyaev employs the term 'tragedy' with reference to the form and content of Dostoevsky's novelistic thought, his reading hinges on a rudimentarily moralist method that does not take aesthetics into account. Berdyaev's reading strategy essentially consists in examining how Dostoevsky's plots punish sinful characters. Such a reading undermines the complexity of tragic downfall as a device that does not necessarily serve as indication of authorial judgement on the virtue of a protagonist. In Berdyaev's reductive reading, however, Stavrogin, Kirilov and Raskolnikov are duly punished for venturing down the path of self-will to the instruction of the reader: "Тибель их светоносна для нас. Трагедия их есть гимн свободе."<sup>423</sup>

For Berdyaev, in the 1920s, this 'tragedy of freedom' is the unquestionably central theme of Dostoevsky's oeuvre.<sup>424</sup> Following Shestov and Ivanov, Berdyaev sees Dostoevsky's as a "philosophy of tragedy" which he conceives thus:

Свободное же добро, которое есть единственное добро,

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<sup>421</sup> Monseu has suggested that in philosophical terms Shestov's critique becomes one of reflexion per se, insofar as it refers to a transcendent necessity. See Nicolas Monseu, "Phénoménologie et affectivité: Le problème de l'existence chez Chestov et Levinas," *Europe*, no. 960 (2009), p. 87.

<sup>422</sup> Berdiaev, *Filosofiiia tvorchestva, kul'tury i iskusstva* II, p. 221.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid. II, p. 51.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid. II, p. 44. (Berdiaeff, *L'Esprit de Dostoïevski* p. 80.)

предполагает свободу зла. В этом трагедия свободы, которую до глубины исследовал и постиг Достоевский. В этом скрыта тайна христианства. Раскрывается трагическая диалектика. Добро не может быть принудительным, нельзя принудить к добру. Свобода добра предполагает свободу зла. Свобода же зла ведет к истреблению самой свободы, к перерождению в злую необходимость.<sup>425</sup>

Berdyaev's conception of the tragic in the human condition, as depicted in Dostoevsky's fiction, is thus radically opposed to Shestov's. Indeed, Berdyaev's reasoning on ethics here evokes a neo-Kantian opposition between negative and positive freedoms. In his autobiography, Berdyaev places Kant alongside Dostoevsky as principle influences on his conception of freedom.<sup>426</sup> Ultimately, Berdyaev's conception hinges on the intuition that freedom to choose evil and freedom to choose good are fundamentally distinct and opposed freedoms; the latter liberating and the former enslaving.<sup>427</sup> Following Kant (and on the basis of intuition rather than argumentation) Berdyaev's reading of Dostoevsky attaches positive freedom to reason and negative freedom to irrationalism: "существует не одна, а две свободы, первая и последняя, свобода избрания добра и зла и свобода в добре, или свобода иррациональная и свобода в разуме."<sup>428</sup> This association informs Berdyaev's reading of Ivan Karamazov: his 'revolt' is conceived of and described as 'irrational' on account of its wilful rejection of God, and thus (by a purely structural reference) of the Good and of Reason. This is precisely the structural assumption prevalent in both Christian and secular moral philosophy that Shestov's oeuvre attempts to deconstruct.

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<sup>425</sup> Berdiaev, *Filosofia tvorcestva, kul'tury i iskusstva*, II, p. 46. (Berdiaeff, *L'Esprit de Dostoïevski* p. 82).

<sup>426</sup> Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality: an essay in autobiography*, p. 49.

<sup>427</sup> Berdiaev, *Filosofia tvorcestva, kul'tury i iskusstva*, II, p. 45.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 45.

For Berdyaev the concepts of freedom, love and truth seem to overlap. Freedom is not merely imbued with religious significance: it becomes, as Pattison observed, “virtually synonymous with the religious aspect of human existence.”<sup>429</sup> This is the source of the contradiction in Berdyaev’s interpretation: while Berdyaev repeats that freedom is the ‘centre’ of Dostoevsky’s thought,<sup>430</sup> this freedom is preconceived within a moral framework (thus pre-divided into positive and negative freedoms). Berdyaev’s reading is that of a moralist rather than an existential philosopher, since freedom is subordinate to moral universals. In Shestov’s more radical reading, freedom is indivisible and transcends the sphere of ethics, to the result that morals lose any claim to universality. Berdyaev seems to have come to a realisation of the contradiction in his stance by the 1930s. In a paper given at the Religious Philosophical Academy in Paris in 1931, the manuscript of which remains in RGALI, Berdyaev now writes of Dostoevskian freedom not as the essence of man but as divine stipulation:

Человек подвергается опасности, образ его затемнен и потрясен. Достоевский, который был и великим метафизиком, сознавал необходимость новой антропологии. Тема о человеке и было тема о Боге. Тема о человеке преходящем через все испытания свободы, было для него так же темой о кризисе гуманизма ... Бог, а не человек требует свободы.<sup>431</sup>

This more accurate reading of Dostoevsky in the 30s seems to have left behind the heady radical relativism, typical of both Silver Age decadentism and the *Années folles*, to return to traditional Christian anthropology in the face of the

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<sup>429</sup> George Pattison, *Anxious Angels: A Retrospective View of Religious Existentialism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p. 180.

<sup>430</sup> Berdiaev, *Filosofia tvorchestva, kul'tury i iskusstva*, II, p.44. (Berdiaeff, *L'Esprit de Dostoïevski* p. 80.)

<sup>431</sup> "O Dostoevskom: Rech' N. A. Berdiaeva na sobranii Rel. Fil. Akademii v Parizhe v pamjat' Dostoevskogo" (1931) RGALI, Fond 1496 Opis' 1, Ed.Khr. 95.

looming culmination of the ‘crisis of humanism’. The fact that Shestov made no such alteration, remaining stubbornly faithful to his conceptions while the ethos of the 1930s became increasingly wary of celebrating the crisis of humanism, contributed to a slump in his career in the 1930s.<sup>432</sup> It is Shestov’s unwillingness to make such a compromise in his conception of freedom to ethics that rendered his thought at once the most “integral” – in Pattison’s words – of existential philosophies but, as such, the least useful.<sup>433</sup>

Berdyaev’s notion of freedom is far more elastic, which leads to a further paradox in his interpretation of Dostoevsky. Berdyaev claims that freedom, in the works of Dostoevsky, does not need to be tested. This assertion is clearly at odds with a substantial element of Dostoevsky’s fictional project. Berdyaev turns a blind eye to the fact that in Dostoevsky’s oeuvre, while there are certain innately meek characters driven by a natural will to righteousness, a significant number of his characters have an utterly irresistible desire to transgress, to dare to test individual freedom. Such characters as Raskolnikov may perhaps find salvation – but only *via* transgression, guilt and repentance. Father Zosima’s biography, in

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<sup>432</sup> Berdiaev commented of Shestov that “поразительна была его независимость от окружающих течений времени” in “Osnovnaia ideia L’va Shestova,” (1938) reprinted in *Tipy religioznoi mysli v Rossii* 3 vols. (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1989), III, p. 714.

<sup>433</sup> Pattison, *Anxious Angels: A Retrospective View of Religious Existentialism* p.191; McCabe, “Léon Chestov and Boris de Schloezer,” p. 50. This ‘uselessness’ was indeed also ‘integral’. Shestov confronts this in his essay on Dostoevsky: “Истину, подобные тем, которые открылись подпольному человеку, по самому своему происхождению таковы, что их можно указать, но нельзя и нет надобности делать их предметом общего, постоянного достояния [...]. Их, как я уже указывал, не удаётся сделать своей собственностью даже тому, кому они открылись.” See Lev Shestov, *Na vesakh Iova* in *Sochineniia* 2 vols., II, p. 32. It is perhaps noteworthy that this phrase did not come easily to Shestov: from the manuscripts it is evident that the assertion came about with more syntactical struggle and reworking than any other in the essay, and as such is uncharacteristic of Shestov’s drafts in general. See Léon Chestov, “Preodolenie samoochevidnosti (premièr ètat),” Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne Fond Léon Chestov, MS2105 fasc 29-30.

which his conversion follows the beating of his servant, serves as Dostoevsky's final word on the foundations of righteousness in transgression and guilt, the theme first posited by Raskolnikov's revolt and confession.

The notion of revolt is essential to the readings of both Shestov and Berdyaev. However, both thinkers understand this in very different ways. While Shestov had venerated the revolt of Job as a state of being, Berdyaev states that self-will can only bring violence and undermine freedom. Again, Berdyaev's Kantian subtext maintains that freedom to choose evil reduces the superior freedom to choose good. In the 'capricious' freedom venerated by Shestov and the underground man, Berdyaev sees necessarily a road to evil:

Свобода как произвол и своеволие, свобода безбожная не может не породить "безграничного деспотизма". Такая свобода включает в себе величайшее насилие. [...] Бунтующая свобода привела к отрицанию самой идеи свободы, к невозможности постигнуть тайну мира и тайну Бога в свете свободы.<sup>434</sup>

Berdyaev is thus in opposition to Shestov, insofar as Berdyaev's is a domesticated freedom that bends to ethics, and as such a non-freedom from any perspective preclusive of the "mystery" of divine will. Berdyaev sheds light on this when he writes in his autobiography: "Unlike my friend Leo Shestov, who engaged in the undoing of philosophy for the sake of liberating man (he did so, however, by means of philosophy!), I discovered in philosophy a source of freedom."<sup>435</sup> What Berdyaev has misinterpreted is that Shestov was battling not for the liberation of man via philosophy but for the liberation of philosophy from an established

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<sup>434</sup> Berdiaev, *Filosofia tvorchestva, kul'tury i iskusstva* p. 55-7.

<sup>435</sup> Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality: an essay in autobiography* p. 88.



narrow definition. For Berdyaev such an endeavour was unnecessary, insofar as he was at ease with bending reflections into line with his intuitions and religious dogmatism, seeing no need to defend such a stance from secular critique.

In their correspondence, Berdyaev criticised the secularism inherent in Shestov's psychological reading strategy:

Ты упорно не желаешь знать, что безумие Паскаля, как и апостола Павла, было безумием во Христе. Благодать ты превратил в тьму и ужас. Опыт ап. Павла, Бл. Августина, Паскаля, Лютера не имел ни малейшего смысла вне христианства, вне бесконечно серьезного принятия христианских реальностей.<sup>436</sup>

Berdyaev continues in a subsequent letter.

Это мое главное возражение против Тебя. Ты роковым образом обречен на непонимание Паскаля, поскольку Ты сам не находишься внутри христианского опыта. Никакой ум, никакой талант, никакая душевная изощренность тут не поможет. Ты слишком умно, слишком тонко, слишком психологично пишешь о Паскале. Для Тебя раскрывается Паскаль лишь со стороны психологического, а не религиозного опыта. Верующий есть для Тебя лишь психологический эксперимент.<sup>437</sup>

Thus from the perspective of Berdyaev, Shestov was mistaken in reading Christian thinkers from an agnostic, epistemological position exterior to Christian experience. This was Berdyaev's main issue with Shestov's epistemological searchings and the reason for his famous dubbing of Shestov as a sceptic.<sup>438</sup>

Arjakovski has commented that Shestov has no deffence against Berdyaev's critique:

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<sup>436</sup> Letter from Berdyaev to Shestov (end 1923-early 1924) in Baranova-Shestova, *Zhizn' L'va Shestova: po perepiske i vospominaniiam sovremenikov* I, p. 286.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.* I, p. 290-1.

<sup>438</sup> Berdiaev, *Filosofia tvorchestva, kul'tury i iskusstva* II, p. 222.

[Chestov] veut permettre à l'homme souterrain de boire son thé. Or il a les mains nues. Il ne peut et ne veut rien expliquer. La seule arme dont il dispose et qui permet d'esquiver toutes les attaques de Berdiaev est son talent littéraire.<sup>439</sup>

Indeed, if Shestov's stance is indefensible from Berdyaev's perspective, the reverse is equally true, a fact which no doubt accounts for the perpetual debate built into their tempestuous friendship.

A final critical divergence between the two thinkers' readings of Dostoevsky is that Berdyaev's, like so many before it, hinges on the notions of cultural and historical relativism observed in the 'modernist' readings of the previous chapter, while Shestov's existential reading is radically ahistorical. In keeping with the overarching historicity of Berdyaev's worldview, Dostoevsky's thought is interpreted as a turning point in intellectual history and the beginning of a new era in the history of Christianity. This he conceives as a transition from transcendentalism to immanentism, and as the historical end of humanism.<sup>440</sup>

Typical of previous modernist readings, historicity comes hand in hand with cultural relativism. Berdyaev's thought is underpinned by the subtext of the 'Russian idea' inherited from Romantic discourse. Berdyaev shares Dostoevsky's idea that the Russian soul is inherently other to its European counterpart. Typically this opposition is equated to geographical expansiveness, and notes that the 'more astute' minds of Europe are aware of this.<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> Antoine Arjakovski, "Léon Shestov et Nicloas Berdiaev: une amitié orageuse," in *Léon Chestov: Un philosophe comme les autres?*, Cahiers de l'émigration russe (Paris: Inst. des études slaves, 1996), p. 145.

<sup>440</sup> Berdiaev, *Filosofia tvorcestva, kul'tury i iskusstva*, II, p. 49.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 105.

Достоевский исследовал бесконечные возможности человеческой души, формы и пределы души западно-европейской, ее культурная связанность и рациональная затверделость были бы препятствием для такого рода исследований. Вот почему Достоевский мыслим только в России и только русская душа может быть материалом, над которым он совершал свои открытия.<sup>442</sup>

Berdyayev thus retained certain Romantic assumptions regarding Russian culture. Shestov was highly critical of this.<sup>443</sup> If Shestov's thought penetrated more deeply in France than the more widely-read Berdyayev, as Mercadé has argued,<sup>444</sup> it is doubtlessly due to the comparative cosmopolitanism and 'secularism' of his religious existential enquiry: dogmatic in essence, Berdyayev's reading is accessible only to those already on his side.

What this comparison has brought to light is that such fundamental differences exist between Shestov's and Berdyayev's readings of Dostoevsky, that the question arises as to whether they may indeed be meaningfully bracketed together as 'existential'. The most significant novelty of the existential reading in relation to earlier romantic readings lay in its conception of the 'void,' the psychological trauma associated with a rejection of objectivity; the resultant loss of the absolute and of certainty per se: the 'death of God' that Nietzsche's madman had proclaimed. Most other aspects of existential thought, literature and criticism, intertwine closely with the tenets of romanticism. Berdyayev's reading interacts with no such void: *a priori* moral values remain for him supreme and indubitable.

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<sup>442</sup> Ibid., II, p. 107.

<sup>443</sup> See, for example, Shestov's 1907 critique of this aspect of Ivanov's thought in "Viacheslav Velikolepnyi" (1907) (omitted from French and English editions of *Potestas Clavium*) in Shestov, *Sochineniia*, p. 243-4.

<sup>444</sup> Jean-Claude Mercadé, "Proniknovenie russkoi mysli vo frantsuzskuiu sredu: N. A. Berdiaev & L. I. Shestov" in *Russkaia religiozno-filosofskaia mysl' XX veka*, ed. N. T. Poltoratskii (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Univ Press, 1975), p. 150.

As Zenkovsky rightly observed:

Гносеология и метафизика очень гибки у него – они послушно следуют за его чувствами, а в чувствах своих он прежде всего и больше всего моралист.<sup>445</sup>

Berdyaev's reading, like his philosophy, remains that of a romantic moralist, for all his recourse to a more fashionable existential vocabulary. Ultimately, Valevičius was not unjust in contrasting the novelty of Shestov's subjectivist existential reading of Dostoevsky, to Berdyaev's reduction of the novelist to conventional Christian anthropology.<sup>446</sup>

The work was successful and widely read in France: Berdyaev was among the most thoroughly integrated of Russian émigré thinkers in the French milieu and his study of Dostoevsky went to numerous editions<sup>447</sup> Berdyaev's correspondence in the archive at RGALI contains a number of elucidating private critiques of his study by key French intellectuals. Maritain, in an undated letter, also offered criticism of Berdyaev's moralist reading of Dostoevsky:

Ce livre sur Dostoïevski me semble très important pour comprendre votre conception du monde. Il est plein de ---- [mots?] admirables et merveilleusement stimulants. C'est sur le chapitre concernant la liberté que j'ai le plus de réserves à faire. Cette dialectique dostoïevskienne de la liberté est certainement chrétien [sic.], mais d'un christianisme qui se pense grâce à une idéologie hégélienne. Je crois que si Dostoïevski avait eu de l'acte supernaturel une conception plus explicite, il n'aurait pas transporté ainsi dans la trame de la nature et si j'ose ainsi parler métaphysique la doctrine paulinienne de la loi et de la liberté (car c'est toujours à cela qu'on revient.)<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> Zenkovskii, *Istoriia russkoi filosofii*, II, p. 304.

<sup>446</sup> Andrius Valevičius, *Lev Shestov and his Times: Encounters with Brandes, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Ibsen, Nietzsche and Husserl* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), p. 41.

<sup>447</sup> G. Struve, *Russkaia literatura v izgnanii* (Parizh: YMCA-Press, 1984), p. 194-5.

<sup>448</sup> "Pis'ma Maritena Zhaka (Maritain Jacques) N. A. Berdiaevu na frants. iazyke," (Menton,

A letter from Charles du Bos describes re-reading *L'Esprit de Dostoïevsky* during a “crise de foie,” suggestive that Berdiaev’s prose has more potential for soothing than stimulation for the Christian reader.<sup>449</sup> Schloezer, as a partisan of Shestov’s thought, wrote critically of Berdiaev’s reading.<sup>450</sup> Berdiaev defended his book from Schloezer’s attack in a letter to Shestov:

Шлецер, твой переводчик, единомышленник, написал в *Соврем. Записки* рецензию о моей книге о Достоевском. Заметь, что то, что он говорит обо мне и против меня, он мог бы сказать против всякого верующего человека, всякого христианина. Он не принимает самого факта веры.<sup>451</sup>

Jean Wahl, French existential philosophy’s academic exponent, writes to Berdiaev in an unpublished letter that “Aucun écrivain n’a pour moi un plus grand intérêt [que Dostoïevski]”.<sup>452</sup> Wahl’s principle issue with Dostoevsky coincides with Nietzsche’s: Dostoevsky’s conception of humility and abnegation (though Wahl does not specify whether this is a repugnance for an implied slave psychology or slave morality). “C’est là ce qui m’éloignerait d’une partie de l’oeuvre de Dostoïevski,” writes Wahl, in line with Shestov’s removal of this theme from his reading of Dostoevsky. Wahl goes on to question Berdiaev’s ethical universalism, again in parallel to Shestov’s and also Gide’s ‘Nietzschean’ readings:

Si je me permettais de poser une interrogation ce serait celle-ci: le bien et le mal sont-ils toujours aussi séparés pour Dostoïevski qu’il semble d’après vos pages? N’ont-ils pas tous deux leur principe réel? ---- [Dieu?]

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Dimanche), *Fond 1496* (Moskva: RGALI, [1930?]) *Opis’ 1*, Ed. Khr. 605, Dok. 71, p. 2.

<sup>449</sup> "Pis'ma diu Bosa Sharla (du Bos Charles) N. A. Berdiaevu na frants. iazyke," *Fond 1496* (Moskva: RGALI) *Opis’ 1*, Ed. Khr. 367, Dok. 4.

<sup>450</sup> Baranova-Shestova, *Zhizn' L'va Shestova: po perepiske i vospominaniiam sovremenikov*, I, p. 286.

<sup>451</sup> Letter from Berdiaev to Shestov (end 1923 – early 1924) in *ibid.*, I, p.286.

<sup>452</sup> "Pis'ma Valia Zhana (Wahl Jean) N. A. Berdiaevu na frants. iazyke," *Fond 1496* (Moskva: RGALI, 1920-1930 [1929-30]), *Opis’ 1*, Ed. Khr. 378.

Ne valent-ils pas l'un par l'autre? Et le pêché n'est-il pas d'après les paroles de Zossime que vous citez la ressemblance de l'amour dévoué? Et l'amour dévoué ne transfigure-t-il pas tout ou plutôt ne conserve-t-il pas tout? La boue resplendit dans le soleil; l'âme basse a un puits infini;- et les ---- [gens?] des ----- n'ont-ils pas donc un aspect de --- -----? - Peut-être par ça aussi Dostoïevski se rapprochait il de certaines sectes gnostiques?<sup>453</sup>

The most interesting reaction for the current study would have been that of Marcel. Sadly little remains of his correspondence with Berdiaev, despite their well-known affiliation. What does, however, remain in the archive at RGALI is a letter clearly indicating that Marcel took efforts such that the work might be republished.<sup>454</sup> The correlations between the two thinkers have received insufficient critical attention, despite Wahl having observed long ago that Berdiaev and Marcel stood apart from other philosophers of existence in France in that they identified a genuine possibility for communication between the self and the other (the 'I' and the 'thou').<sup>455</sup> If Marcel was unique among French existential thinkers in this regard, the fact that his reading of Dostoevsky and Ivanov hinges on this notion invites further, in-depth research into both his historical and conceptual connection to Berdiaev and to Russian émigré thought at large.

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<sup>453</sup> Ibid.

<sup>454</sup> "Pis'ma Marselia Gabrielia (Marcel Gabriel) N. A. Berdiaevu na frants. iazyke," (28 Oct.), *Fond 1496* (Moskva: RGALI) Opis' 1, Ed. Khr. 608, Dok. 18.

<sup>455</sup> Wahl, *Philosophies of Existence*, p.81.

## Gabriel Marcel, Dostoevsky and Russian thought

The contribution of Gabriel Marcel, France's highest profile religious existential philosopher, to the existential interpretation of Dostoevsky in France, was particularly marked by his close involvement in Russian émigré circles. Marcel was as a participant at the Studio Franco-Russe (see below) an attendant at Berdyaev's salon, a close friend of Schloezer, an enthused reader of Ivanov and Shestov.

In an early essay on Pushkin in 1923, Marcel offers an insight into his initial, cosmopolitan approach to Russian culture: "nous autres qui occupons une position excentrique par rapport au slavisme, la Russie est tout autre chose: c'est une note singulière de la gamme universelle, une note à la fois pure, plaintive et très légèrement désaccordée."<sup>456</sup> Following the war, Revolution and the arrival of the émigrés, national stereotypes were increasingly coming into question, being discussed and gradually unravelled. In 1924, Marcel's first essay on Dostoevsky hinges refreshingly little on the Russianness that had been of such importance to previous commentators (with the exception of Shestov). Marcel offers a sober and insightful psychological reading, pre-emptive of aspects of what he would later term inter-subjectivity: a crucial aspect of his existential philosophy.

Marcel's essay, a review of Schloezer's translation of *The Eternal Husband*, on

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<sup>456</sup> Gabriel Marcel, "La Dame de Pique de Poushchine, introduction d'André Gide, traduit par Schiffrin et B. de Schloezer », *Nouvelle Revue Française* 2 no. 21 (1923), p. 626.

one level resembles Gide's treatment of the same work (the previous year) in its focus on Dostoevsky's modernism and his radical expansion of existing psychological categories. However, Marcel penetrates considerably further than Gide towards an understanding of the workings of this new psychology. Marcel's conception is inter-relational rather than individualistic. As such Marcel moves a step away both from Gide's and from Shestov's readings, towards his developing concern for inter-subjectivity. For Marcel, the Dostoevskian relationship is an "être qui existe par lui-même, qui commande les actes des personnages entre lesquels elle s'est créée et dont ils sont au fond incapables de prendre tout à fait conscience."<sup>457</sup> Such a conception of relationships as agents 'commanding' participant-subjects subverts Cartesian conceptions of the individual agent-subject. This marks a significant transition between individualist readings of Dostoevsky such as Gide's and Shestov's, towards later, post-modern readings such as Girard's, in emphasising inter-subjectivity.

Marcel's reading also resonates with Bakhtin's in recognising this inter-subjectivity as the quintessence of Dostoevsky's aesthetic and psychological innovation, and also as an inalienable aspect of the human condition historically misrepresented in Western thought.<sup>458</sup> Marcel draws comparison to Proust as the epitome of [French] individualist psychology and its corresponding aesthetics of the novel:

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<sup>457</sup> Gabriel Marcel, "L'Eternel mari de Dostoïevski trad. B. de Schloezer," *Nouvelle Revue Française* 2, no. 22 (1924), p. 767.

<sup>458</sup> While it seems improbable that Marcel could have encountered Bakhtin's writings (that were little-known and untranslated in France until shortly after Marcel's death), Vizgin observes that Bakhtin was a sympathetic reader of Marcel; see V. P. Vizgin, *Filosofīia Gabriēlia Marselia: Temy i variatsii* (Sankt-Peterburg.: Mir, 2008), p. 488.



Nos catégories sont ici en défaut, mais surtout sans doute ce monadisme spontané dont l'œuvre de Proust est peut-être l'expression la plus rigoureusement cohérente. Pour un Proust il n'y a rien, il ne peut rien y avoir *entre* des êtres; ce mot *entre* est ici absolument vide d'application; pour Dostoïevski c'est, semble-t-il, le contraire qui est vrai; et peut-être ce qui est *en moi* n'est-il concevable qu'en fonction de ce qui est entre moi et les autres.<sup>459</sup>

Marcel's perspective has the potential to be highly productive: Dostoevsky's impassioned characters are no longer victims of their passions; rather they respond to a matrix of contending, often internally dysfunctional relationships. The intersecting love triangles of *Brothers Karamazov*, for example, are clearly an exploration of this.

There is a definite 'dramatological' aspect to Marcel's perception of Dostoevsky's psychological innovation - as was the case with Ivanov and Bakhtin. From Marcel's perspective, Dostoevsky's outlandish plots, rejected by so many previous critics, are plausible insofar as actions are driven by relation rather than character. Such an approach to the psychological workings of *The Eternal Husband* is justified by the very title. 'Eternal husband' designates a character type, coined by Velchaninov to describe Trusotsky. The term proves insufficient when the characters' relationship develops beyond its initial boundaries, positing an insufficiency of 'character' as determinant of action, or more precisely, to the subordination of character to relation; of subjectivity to inter-subjectivity.

In this initial essay of 1924, Marcel has chosen one of Dostoevsky's most secular

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<sup>459</sup> Marcel, "L'Eternel mari de Dostoïevski trad. B. de Schloezer," p. 767.

works of fiction for analysis, and relationships are understood from a secular perspective. This would change by Marcel's next essay on the Russian novelist. It was not until 1929 that Marcel (and a curious cross-section of French modernists) converted to Catholicism.<sup>460</sup> From around this time, inter-subjectivity took on a decidedly more religious slant in Marcel's philosophical writings.

In 1932, Marcel read Ivanov's *Dostoevsky: Tragedy – Myth – Mysticism* upon its publication in German translation.<sup>461</sup> Marcel's reaction appeared in Italian translation just a year later. Marcel's intention had been to initiate (and preface – presumably with the French original of the Italian article) the publication of Ivanov's influential study in French.<sup>462</sup> Ivanov's reading of Dostoevsky dates from the first wave of proto-existential interpretations of the Silver Age. It seems to have resonated significantly with Marcel, to the extent that when reading his article it is difficult to disentangle Ivanov's reflections from Marcel's.

The metaphysical focus of Ivanov's reading strategy corresponded to Marcel's. Both see in Dostoevsky's novels “un certo misterioso messaggio, riferentisi alla più intima struttura della realtà.” (a certain mysterious message referring to the most intimate structure of reality).<sup>463</sup> Ivanov's reading, while expressed in the

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<sup>460</sup> See Stephen Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Post-war Paris (1919-1933)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 273.

<sup>461</sup> The edition was Ivanov, V., *Dostojevskij: Tragödie-Mythos-Mystik* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1932).

<sup>462</sup> Vizgin informs that this project was interrupted by a publishing crisis in the early-mid 1930s and never saw fruition; see Vizgin, *Filosofia Gabriella Marselia: Temy i variatsii*, p. 499.

<sup>463</sup> Gabriel Marcel, "L'Interpretazione dell'opera di Dostoievski secondo Venceslao Ivanov," *Il Convegno. Rivista di letteratura e di arte*, no. 8-12 (1933), p. 274. Extended quotations with translations (kindly provided by Paola Vacca and Emily Ryder) have been included in the following discussion on account of the unavailability of the text in translation and because the text remains little-known to Marcel scholars (it is, for example, absent from the 1984 bibliography of

lexicon of symbolism with its reference to archetypal myths, hinges on a conception of the Self and Other that Marcel and other existential thinkers would reiterate:

Проникновение есть некий transcensus субъекта, такое его состояние, при котором возможным становится воспринимать чужое я не как объект, а как другой субъект. [...] ‘Ты еси’ — не значит более ‘ты познаешься мною, как сущий’, а ‘твое бытие переживается мною, как мое, твоим бытием я снова познаю себя сущим’. Es, ergo sum.”<sup>464</sup>

Marcel found the essence of Dostoevsky’s conception of human existence in Ivanov’s notion that the recognition of the other as a fellow subject represents both an affirmation and negation of the self:

Da cui la formula paradossale e per un cartesiano radicalmente inintelligibile: *Es, ergo sum*. L’idealismo che dichiarandola impensabile sopprime la priorità del *Tu sei* di fronte all’*Io sono*, di regola finisce nella solitudine, nella disperazione, nell’odio. La tragedia dostoevskiana mette in luce la dialettica catastrofica che ha origine da un irrealismo del *Tu*; se io mi limito a sognare l’altro, tutto mi è lecito; il sogno non ha diritti sul sognatore, che è libero ma di una libertà distruttrice, non creatrice; io posso uccidermi e assieme col mio io posso uccidere un mondo che ha stanza solo in me – e non io, certamente, ho le radici in quel mondo.

(Hence, the paradoxical formula that is radically unintelligible for a Cartesian mind: *Es, ergo sum*. The idealism that outrules the possibility of this conception suppresses the priority normally given to the ‘you are’ in favour of the ‘I am’, and usually ends up in loneliness, desperation, hate. Dostoevsky’s tragedy highlights the catastrophic dialectic that originates in the unrealism of the ‘you’; if I limit myself to dreaming the other, everything is legitimate; the dream has no rights over the dreamer, who is free but whose freedom is destructive, not creative; I can kill myself and together with my ‘I’ I can kill a world that is real only for me, and it is not me, of course, who has roots in that world.)<sup>465</sup>

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Marcel’s works and from the current bibliography of the Gabriel Marcel Society: <http://gms.lemoyne.edu/biblio.htm#bibfr>.

<sup>464</sup> Viacheslav Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 4 vols. (Brussels: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1987), IV, p. 502.

<sup>465</sup> Marcel, "L'Interpretazione dell'opera di Dostoevski secondo Venceslao Ivanov," p. 276.

Marcel's words are pertinent to the discussion of Sartre's thought below, in which the possibility of an individualist solution to the problem of the Absurd is contrasted to religious and inter-subjective models.<sup>466</sup> It is in this contrast that Ivanov and Marcel identify the crux of Dostoevsky's indictment of humanism:

L'umanesimo avrà [...] preparato l'avvento di una società che sarà invero solo una super-animalità, e che si distinguerà per la sua forza di accentramento, di subordinazione.

(Humanism will have [...] prepared the advent of a society that is indeed nothing but a super-animality, distinguishable for its force of centralisation and subordination).<sup>467</sup>

In Dostoevsky's fiction, Marcel follows Ivanov in positing the development of a conception of man radically opposed to individualism:

Infatti la personalità ha, agli occhi di Dostoevski, una natura antinomica. Indubbiamente, come sostanza, essa è una, malgrado tutte le possibili divisioni interiori di cui è suscettibile; è una, perchè riflette o esprime a suo modo un'unità superiore e infrangibile; ma nello stesso tempo non forma un mondo chiuso; anzi, proprio dal fatto di essere fondata su di un principio d'unità assoluta, essa trae il potere di *singularizzarsi* nel senso metafisico di questo termine, di isolarsi, di tagliare i legami che la uniscono alle altre personalità.

(Each personality has, according to Dostoevsky, an antinomical nature. Undoubtedly, in essence, it is one, despite all the possible interior divisions that it is susceptible to. It is *one* because it reflects or expresses in its own way a superior and unbreakable unity. Nevertheless, it does not form a closed world; in fact, due to being founded on a principle of absolute unity, a personality takes its power from its ability to exist *singularly* (in the metaphysical sense of the word); to isolate itself; to cut the ties that bind it to other personalities.)<sup>468</sup>

Citing Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer* on the impossibility of delineating Self from Other, Marcel comments:

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<sup>466</sup> See pages 195-198 of the current thesis.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

Vi è qui, oso affermarlo, una concezione straordinariamente profonda, che anticipa le più recenti e ardite dottrine filosofiche. Dostoevski ha visto con inaudita chiarezza che l'idea di una specie di delimitazione oggettiva delle personalità [...] contraddittoria.

(Here I find an extremely profound conception that, in my opinion, anticipates the most recent and courageous philosophical doctrines. Dostoevsky has seen clearly that the idea of an objective delimitation of personalities [...] is contradictory per se.)<sup>469</sup>

This notion takes on metaphysical purport insofar as the embodied subject comes into being in a necessarily peopled world: a world which presents itself to the subject via the other. This conception takes on a mystic quality in his writings, as Being can only be conceived as a unity by reference to the unity of divine Being, such that, in Pattison's words, "God is [...] conceived in the language of ontology."<sup>470</sup> Inter-subjectivity thus also takes on a religious significance, which resonates closely with the Silver Age discussion of *sobornost'*, a key aspect of Berdyaev's and Ivanov's readings of Dostoevsky.<sup>471</sup>

Marcel was critical of philosophical stances that conceived of individual being-in-the-world prior to the consideration of the other (since the world presents itself to the *I* as a *Thou*). His mystic and 'harmonious' conception of inter-subjectivity is opposed to the antagonistic self-other relations in the understanding of atheist existentialism (such as Sartre's dissociable *être pour soi* and *être pour les autres*). Dostoevsky's fiction had explored the disparity between these stances at length. The Self, if alienated from Christ, Dostoevsky conceived as capable of only an antagonistic relation to the Other. For Dostoevsky, this was

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<sup>469</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>470</sup> Pattison, *Anxious Angels: A Retrospective View of Religious Existentialism*, p. 264.

<sup>471</sup> Vizgin agrees that the distinction between the two notions is 'stylistic.' See Vizgin, *Filosofia Gabrielia Marselia: Temy i variatsii*, pp. 501-502.

the inescapable paradox of secular humanism.

In Dostoevsky's thought there exists a similar notion to *sobornost'*, comparable to Ivanov's or Berdyaev's and to Marcel's inter-subjectivity. The key to this, contrary to later religious thinkers, was guilt, as per Zosima's doctrine: "всякий из нас пред всеми во всем виноват, а я более всех."<sup>472</sup> To this *sobornost'* Dostoevsky opposed *vsemstvo*: secular collective consciousness, the source both of rational thought and of the cynicism that precludes the unconditional love of the other. It is this secular and Cartesian conception of the other that Marcel criticised in Sartre's *L'Être et le néant*.<sup>473</sup> Sartre had presented human relations as power struggles and manipulations, flights and chases, leading down the dead end of "l'enfer, c'est les autres."

The crux is that in Marcel's existential reading of Dostoevsky, Being is not an ontological given, but an ontological exigency: not merely existence but a complex of existence and subjective experience of existence, necessarily coloured by the mystery of an urge to exist *for*.<sup>474</sup> This mysterious exigency to exist *for* could, of course, have been conceived and expressed as the revelation of an absence of a comprehensible ontological motive. From this perspective, Marcel can be observed to use the positive vocabulary of ontology to express the same absence that Shestov expressed in the negative vocabulary of absurdism. The unpublished correspondence of Schloezer and Marcel makes reference to the

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<sup>472</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, XIV, P. 262.

<sup>473</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, 2 vols. (London: Harvill Press, 1950), II, p. 9.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, II, pp. 34-35.

initial allure of Shestov's stance to Marcel. An undated letter addressed simply to "cher ami" contains a wealth of Schloezer's reflections on the author of "Positions et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique" (thus Marcel, late 1933–early 1934). Schloezer's commentary again echoes the thought of Shestov. Explicitly, he writes:

En vous lisant, j'ai pensé parfois à quelqu'un que vous n'aimez pas beaucoup, je crois, mais que j'aime, et pour qui, pour de multiples raisons dont je vous parlerai peut-être un jour, j'ai une immense reconnaissance, c'est Chestov. Je lui passe votre livre.<sup>475</sup>

Marcel's response is indicative of the influence Shestov had on his own intellectual development: "Quant au rapprochement avec Chestov – [ce] qui me porterait à penser que vous avez raison c'est la très vive émotion, l'énergie de choc que j'ai ressentie lorsque j'ai pris contact initialement avec sa pensée."<sup>476</sup>

The disparity between the conclusions reached by each philosopher in his thought parallels the conclusions of their readings of Dostoevsky. Marcel's article concludes on Ivanov's reading of Aliosha's sermon by the grave of Iliusha:

Il ricordo di Iliusha, in quanto egli resta vivo nell'intimo di ognuno, li preserverà dalla disperazione, permetterà loro di resistere allo Spirito di Negazione; ognuno conserva in sè la presenza di Iliusha come un tesoro personale e che non si può perdere. Ma dietro questa presenza ce n'è un'altra, che è la vera Presenza – quella del Cristo.

(The memory of Iliusha, insofar as it remains alive in each of them, will save them from despair, and will allow them to resist the Spirit of Negation; each of them conserves in himself the presence of Iliusha as a personal treasure that cannot be lost. Behind this presence, however, there

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<sup>475</sup> Bibliothèque Louis Notari, Fond Schloezer (unclassified document).

<sup>476</sup> Gabriel Marcel, "Lettre à Boris de Schloezer" (19-2-1934), Bibliothèque Louis Notari, Fond Schloezer, BSC13bis.

is another one, the real Presence: that of Christ.)<sup>477</sup>

It is fitting that Marcel chooses to grant the final word to Aliosha's sermon since this was the closing argument of Dostoevsky's fiction (the final chapter of his final novel), which had for so long been removed from the French version of the text in Harpéline-Kaminsky's translation/adaptation. However, much like the dislocated publication of the sermon as *Les Précoces*, Marcel alters the meaning of the sermon by removing it from the context of the plot. His reading focuses on the memory and a resultant 'presence' of the deceased Iliusha as a foundation for the boys' spiritual communion. However, this interpretation undermines the importance of sin and guilt in this episode and indeed in Dostoevsky's thought. The significance of Aliosha's sermon by the grave is not Iliusha's presence but his absence: what the children experience, and what binds them together is a haunting experience, intrinsically connected to their own complicity in Iliusha's death. Thus *sobornost'* is founded on guilt. One religious existential thinker who did appreciate this aspect of Dostoevsky's worldview was Rachel Bepaloff, writing in 1938: "Dans le monde de Dostoïevski, seul la passion sans limite du repentir peut scruter l'abîme de la cruauté."<sup>478</sup> Inversely, at the other end of this spectrum, Bepaloff places Stavroguine: "Chez Stavroguine, 'le défi orgueilleux du coupable au destin' est ancré dans l'indéracinable connaissance du péché."<sup>479</sup> So as Gide had understood Dostoevsky's fiction along the axis of pride and humility (an individualistic axis) so Bepaloff interprets it along the axis of cruelty and guilt (an inter-subjective axis).<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> Marcel, "L'Interpretazione dell'opera di Dostoievski secondo Venceslao Ivanov," p. 280.

<sup>478</sup> Rachel Bepaloff, *Cheminements et Carrefours* (Paris: Vrin, 2004), p. 63.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>480</sup> Marcel regarded Bepaloff's thought highly and was the initiator of her posthumous



Marcel is perhaps the only existential interpreter of Dostoevsky to turn a blind eye to Ivan's infamous theodicean revolt. As he wrote in his *Journal Métaphysique*:

La théodicée, c'est l'athéisme. Mais ceci implique-t-il (en un sens quelconque) que l'on doive penser Dieu comme étant par-delà le bien et le mal? Il n'y a pas d'expression plus ambiguë que celle-là.<sup>481</sup>

While this interrogation is similar to Dostoevsky's in *Brothers Karamazov*, Marcel's conclusion (that theodicy is atheism) is incongruous to Dostoevsky's, who famously proclaimed that his Hosana had been tempered by the fires of doubt.<sup>482</sup> Marcel is also here in opposition to Shestov, for whom doubt – up to the revolt of Job – was an essential element of meaningful faith. While Shestov found meaning in the confrontation of reason and revelation, Marcel refused to allow religious experience to be confronted by the 'Euclidian mind', as his writings on Dostoevsky and Ivanov express:

le verità religiose non diventano costrittive per la mente, se non quando degenerano in principi astratti, cioè se perdono il loro carattere fondamentale. Qui siamo vicinissimi alla filosofia di un N. Berdiaev, quale si esprime, per esempio in *Spirito e Libertà*. La ragione euclidiana è tutta formale, e si potrebbe forse dire che essa si riferisce solo ai possibili.

(religious truths become constrictive for the mind only when they degenerate, transform themselves into abstract principles. That is when they lose their fundamental principle (character). Here we are very close to Berdiaev's philosophy, as explained in *Spirit and freedom*. Euclidian reason is all formal and one could maybe say that it refers only to the possible.)<sup>483</sup>

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publications, as an unpublished letter to Schloezer elucidates. See letter from Marcel to B. de Schloezer (25-3-[1949?]). Bibliothèque Notari, fond Schloezer, BSC13bis.

<sup>481</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Journal Métaphysique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1927), p. 65.

<sup>482</sup> Dostoevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, XXVII, p. 86.

<sup>483</sup> Marcel, "L'Interpretazione dell'opera di Dostoevski secondo Venceslao Ivanov," p. 277.

Simone Weil, another thinker who has on occasion been situated in the margins of the religious existential tradition, read Ivan's theodicy sympathetically:

Discours d'Ivan dans les *Karamazov*: "Quand même cette immense fabrique apporterait les plus extraordinaires merveilles et ne coûterait qu'une seule larme d'un seul enfant, moi je refuse." J'adhère complètement à ce sentiment.<sup>484</sup> Aucun motif, quel qu'il soit, qu'on puisse me donner pour compenser une larme d'un enfant ne peut me faire accepter cette larme. Aucun absolument que l'intelligence puisse concevoir. Un seul, mais qui n'est intelligible qu'à l'amour surnaturel: Dieu l'a voulu. Et pour ce motif-là j'accepterais aussi bien un monde qui ne serait que mal, qu'une larme d'enfant.<sup>485</sup>

Weil, along with Berdyaev, seems in line with Marcel's stance that: "Religion is only for the person who surrenders himself to it."<sup>486</sup> Religious experience cannot interact with reason. Dostoevsky had fictionalised this very interaction, but ultimately came to the same conclusion with his famously audacious proclamation that if Christ were proven to lie outwith truth he would choose Christ over Truth.<sup>487</sup> Shestov's writings likewise brought faith and reason into conflict, but unlike other religious existential thinkers he rejected any such 'choice' as Dostoevsky's, any consolation that would reduce the conflict, finding the meaning of faith rather in the conflict itself.

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<sup>484</sup> Weil rarely speaks in the first person in this work. The question of theodicy is clearly deemed to be an emphatically personal one.

<sup>485</sup> Simone Weil, *La Pesanteur et la grâce* (Paris: Plon 1988), p. 90.

<sup>486</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, trans. Bernard Wall (London: Rockliff, 1952), p. 84.

<sup>487</sup> Dostoïevski, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, XXVIII, I, p. 176.

## Dostoevsky at *Le Studio Franco-Russe*

In 1929 the Studio Franco-Russe was established to foster and develop existing intercultural dialogue between French and Russian-émigré literary elites. The Studio's monthly debates, which continued until 1931, centered on questions pertaining to contemporary intercultural exchange, often with a strong religious slant. These debates brought together such high profile thinkers and writers as Berdyaev, Schloezer, Adamovitch, Tsvetaeva, Teffi, Marcel, Bernanos,<sup>488</sup> Crémieux, Valéry, Mauriac and Malraux.<sup>489</sup> The transcripts, originally published by Péguy in the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, have recently been republished with an informative introduction by Leonid Livak (2005). As observed with the *Décades* at Pontigny, Dostoevsky was top of the Studio's agenda, especially emerging 'modern' and proto-existential conceptions of the novelist's religious thought.

The inaugural meeting, held on the 29 Oct 1929, was a heated debate on the question of "l'inquiétude dans la littérature contemporaine." The controversial proposition that post-WWI French intellectual culture, for better or worse, shared a certain anguish and uncertainty with a predating Russian tradition set the tone for the meetings to follow. The topic was a hot one: Adamovich had already posited in 1925 that the post-war climate in French literature meant Russians no

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<sup>488</sup> Several commentators have grouped the religious thought of Bernanos with Dostoevsky, Orthodox thought and existential philosophy. See Pattison, *Anxious Angels: A Retrospective View of Religious Existentialism*, pp. 220-221; Robert Speaight, *George Bernanos: A Study of the Man and the Writer* (London: Collins & Harvill Press, 1973), pp. 19-20, 27, 75. The current thesis has not explored Bernanos's reception of Dostoevsky as he seems to have left no critical writings on the Russian novelist. Three doctoral theses currently underway in France will soon contribute to the field of their comparative study.

<sup>489</sup> For a detailed list of participants see Livak, ed., *Le Studio Franco-Russe*, pp. 587-612.

longer held the “monopoly” on angst.<sup>490</sup> Perhaps an easier claim to defend would be that intellectuals were increasingly aware of ‘modernity’ as a common European experience, and that, in the Franco-Russian context, Dostoevsky became something of a common language. The following meeting (26 Nov 1929) on French-Russian and Russian-French literary ‘influence’, centred so heavily around Dostoevsky that the need to hold a separate meeting on the subject of the novelist became clear, which took place on 18 Dec 1929. A later meeting on the subject of Gide (25 Mar 1930) also focused heavily on his relation to Dostoevsky. The following discussion will examine the transcripts of these three meetings in terms of the place of Dostoevsky in each debate.

### **‘Influence’**

The first occasion for detailed debate on Dostoevsky, on the extremely broad theme of intercultural literary influence, was an enlightening disaster. Jean Maxence opened with the age-old anti-cosmopolitanist arguments of Vogüé’s early opponents, asserting the danger of cross-cultural contamination in the literary sphere:

Rien ne défigure en effet une littérature et une pensée comme l’influence qu’elle peut prendre à l’étranger [...]. Aussi faut-il soigneusement nous garder des interférences subtiles de la compréhension française et de la

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<sup>490</sup> “Our monopoly on anxiety, on ‘sacred distress’ (‘sviatoe bespokoistvo’) ceases to be a monopoly.... While there may not be much sanctity in contemporary French literature, its anxiety is not fake – hence the word inquiétude in every French article about literature” cited in translation in Livak, *How it was done in Paris*, p. 25 from Adamovich, G., “O frantsuzskoi ‘inquiétude’ i o russkoi trevoze” 2; idem, ‘Literaturnye besedy’ *Zveno* 133:2 (25-8-1925).

vision slave du monde.”<sup>491</sup>

Note the typical opposition of French ‘comprehension’ (connoting reason, objectivity, accuracy) to a Slavic ‘vision’ (connoting the mystic and subjective). Significantly, in order to depict the fundamental difference between the national character of France and Russia, Maxence refers to the French reception of Dostoevsky:

Il suffit pour s’en apercevoir de mesurer toute la distance qui sépare des interprétations russes de Dostoïevski, celles de Chestov par exemple et de Berdiaev – pourtant opposée en tant de points – de l’interprétation française que tente d’en donner M. Gide.<sup>492</sup>

Personal and historical factors are utterly removed and national intellectual types alone remain.

Contact with the Russian novel, Maxence asserts, has had a lamentably denaturing influence on French intellectual life, turning the French against their own values: “Il n’en est pas qui ait mieux aidé les Français à mépriser leur patrimoine intellectuel et à méconnaître les lois profondes de leur génie propre.”<sup>493</sup> To the ‘profound laws’ of French aesthetics, Maxence opposes the ‘chasms’ of Dostoevsky’s fiction, again making use of the established lexicon dating back to Vogüé. When comparing Romain Rolland to *les Russes*, Maxence states “[Celui de Rolland n’a rien en] commun avec l’œuvre de Dostoïevski. On n’y trouve pas les gouffres, les abîmes d’un Ivan Karamazov, ni les élans d’un

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<sup>491</sup> Maxence, “L’Influence de la littérature russe sur les écrivains français,” in Livak, ed., *Le Studio Franco-Russe*, p. 73.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

Aliocha.”<sup>494</sup> This ‘chasmic’ reading of Dostoevsky seems to have become entrenched by the end of the 1920s, to the extent that probing this ‘abyss’ and identifying its workings was deemed futile from the outset. Maxence tellingly expresses his preference for Suarès’s interpretation over the developed readings of Gide’s or Shestov’s.<sup>495</sup> As observed in the previous chapter, Suarès had contributed positively nothing to the understanding of Dostoevsky’s work or thought, but merely regurgitated second-hand truisms concerning *l’âme russe*.

The debate that followed was somewhat shambolic. Discussants on either side of the cultural divide, having fumbled around an impossibly vast and vague topic, fell back on the old national stereotypes. Michel Dard proclaimed that:

Jusqu’à présent, on n’a pas abordé dans le débat le fond de la question, car il s’agit en fait de deux pays qui sont profondément étrangers l’un à l’autre: ‘La Russie représente jusqu’à nos jours la soumission au destin; la France représente la lutte de la volonté contre le destin.’<sup>496</sup>

The stenographer records at this point a reassuring guffaw from Gabriel Marcel. The debate then descended into tragi-comedy as leading intellectuals grappled with an impossible topic. Marcel emerged as a voice of critical insight:

Il ne suffit pas de découvrir chez Mauriac le sens du péché pour affirmer qu’il a été influencé par Dostoevski. Il est dangereux de chercher une influence de chaque écrivain étranger sur un écrivain français sensible à l’atmosphère générale de son époque.<sup>497</sup>

He chastised the sweeping judgements and general lack of critical rigour of prevalent approaches to questions of influence in the 1930s.

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<sup>494</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>496</sup> Livak, ed., *Le Studio Franco-Russe*, p. 85.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

## ‘Dostoevsky’

The following meeting opened with a paper by Kiril Zaitsev offering a fairly typical émigré reading, reverent of Rozanov’s seminal Silver Age interpretation,<sup>498</sup> and echoing the tones of Shestov’s existential reading. Again, a ‘chasmic’ lexicon dominates, militating against critical engagement with Dostoevsky’s aesthetics:

[S]’il vous arrive de plonger votre regard, ne fût-ce que pour un instant, dans le gouffre, dans le néant de Dostoïevski, vous en recevez un choc inoubliable et dont les traces sont ineffaçables.<sup>499</sup>

Dostoevsky, he continues, must be understood not alongside novelists but religious philosophers such as Plato, Pascal and Nietzsche.<sup>500</sup> Zaitsev’s choice of fairly ambiguous ‘religious philosophers’ again evokes Shestov’s reading and the Silver Age. Zaitsev further emphasises the theme of revolt against God as a path to religious truth, again concurrent with Shestov’s existential thought:

La différence entre Dostoïevski et Platon, Pascal ou Nietzsche ne se confine pas dans la forme romancée de la philosophie [...]. Dostoïevski n’est pas une recherche, ni un hymne, une affirmation logique, une angoisse, une aspiration, une terreur, une négation de Dieu; c’est la révolte titanique contre Dieu qui, sous l’influence de l’amour du Christ, se transforme en ‘hosannah’ retentissant.<sup>501</sup>

Despite these echoes of Shestov in Zaitsev’s paper, he concludes on a critical note towards an unnamed, recent, ‘entirely negative’ commentator (most likely Shestov), stressing the final victory of faith in Christ over atheism in

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<sup>498</sup> Kirill Zaitsev, "Le Problème de Dostoïevski: paper presented at the Studio Franco-Russe, Troisième Réunion 18 déc 1929," in *Le Studio Franco-Russe*, ed. Leonid Livak (Toronto Slavic Review, 2005), p. 97.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid. p. 92.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid. p. 93.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid. p. 93.

Dostoevsky's life and works.<sup>502</sup>

René Lalou's paper saw Dostoevsky's thought as a sustained attack on western values.<sup>503</sup> He suggests that France's initial enthusiasm for Dostoevsky was based on a misunderstanding:

Devant certains personnages de Dostoïevski, nous avons l'habitude de nous écrier: 'Comme ils sont Russes!' Quelle surprise que d'entendre à présent Stavroguine nous répondre: 'Rien ne m'attache à la Russie.' De même, nous avons admiré Ivan Karamazov. Nous voyons maintenant qu'il n'existe que pour se faire écraser. Donc, il nous fallut sur plusieurs points faire machine en arrière, admettre que le vrai héros pour Dostoïevski était Aliocha.<sup>504</sup>

He nonetheless concludes on the value of French Ivan-centric readings, for all their distance from Dostoevsky's authorial intention: "Français, je constate un tel enrichissement dans ces diverses images de 'notre' Dostoïevski, que je demande la permission de les garder toutes, avec leurs contradictions."<sup>505</sup>

Once again, the debates that followed were heated. Vladimir Pozner was highly critical of Zaitsev, for following the Silver Age tradition of reading Dostoevsky as a metaphysician and prophet rather than as a novelist. Pozner goes as far as to lament that psychologists and theologians have presumed the right to interpret Dostoevsky rather than leaving this business to literary critics:

La critique littéraire n'est pas un prétexte à des conversations sur des sujets philosophiques à propos d'un livre donné. [...] Un théologien, qui n'admettrait jamais qu'un historien de la littérature fit des théories sur la

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<sup>502</sup> Ibid. pp. 99-100.

<sup>503</sup> Lalou, "Dostoïevski et L'Occident (Paper delivered at 3e Réunion du Studio Franco-Russe, 18 déc 1929)," in (ed.) Livak, *Le Studio Franco-Russe*, p. 106.

<sup>504</sup> Zaitsev, "Le Problème de Dostoïevski: paper presented at the Studio Franco-Russe, Troisième Réunion 18 déc 1929," in (ed.) Livak, *Le Studio Franco-Russe*, p. 100.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid. p.108.



Divinité d'après l'oeuvre romanesque d'un écrivain, se croit autorisé à faire des incursions dans un domaine qui lui est étranger<sup>506</sup>

While Pozner's exclusionist stance is extreme, he does highlight a deficiency in the dominant interpretations of Dostoevsky of the period: their failure to incorporate aesthetics into their readings. Berdyaev's study, for example, had at no point meaningfully engaged with Dostoevsky's literary aesthetics.<sup>507</sup>

Much of the discussion centred on Dostoevsky as a moralist. R.P. Léon Gillet, a French orthodox priest, comments that many Frenchmen have turned to the Orthodox church, inspired by Dostoevsky, and that for them, Aliosha is not only the protagonist of the *Brothers Karamazov*, but a way of life.<sup>508</sup> Gaïto Gazdanov, like Shestov, rejects any moralist reading:

En ce qui concerne cette éternelle question: 'comment faut-il vivre?' Dostoïevski ne nous a rien dit de positif, et, d'ailleurs, il est tout à fait évident que le phénomène de Dostoïevski est quelque chose qui se trouve de l'autre côté de la vie pratique. [...] Dire que le chemin de Dostoïevski est celui qu'il faut suivre, c'est le voir sous une lumière absolument fausse.<sup>509</sup>

The conclusion reached by K. Zaitsev is that while the debate surrounding Dostoevsky's fiction was a heated one, the divisions and affiliations that it revealed did not relate to the nationalities of the participants:

Il y a ici des Français qui étaient avec moi et des Russes qui approuvaient M. Lalou. [...] [N]otre réunion d'aujourd'hui démontre que cette différence échappe à nos origines nationales. C'est une observation très précieuse, et qu'il faut marquer comme un pas essentiel dans le rapprochement intellectuel

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<sup>506</sup> "Les Débats" in Livak, ed., *Le Studio Franco-Russe*, pp. 111-112.

<sup>507</sup> It is for this reason, for example, that his romantic interpretation of the Grand Inquisitor as 'revelation' can remain oblivious to Dostoevsky's exploitation of the uncanny in the preceding chapter and the means of the ambiguous embedded text through which Ivan's 'poem' attains its supra-textual narrative status.

<sup>508</sup> Livak, ed., *Le Studio Franco-Russe*, pp. 113-114.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

entre Russes et Français.<sup>510</sup>

This conclusion is indeed of purport, as it proves that Dostoevsky served successfully as a platform for meaningful intercultural communication.

### **‘André Gide’**

The question of the connection between Dostoevsky and Gide was a key one for the participants of the Studio Franco-Russe. In his discussion of ‘influence’, Maxence had judged that:

[O]n ne retrouve dans aucune des œuvres de Gide une influence vraiment authentique de Dostoïevski [...]. Aucun [de ses personnages] ne vit de cette vie des profondeurs qui donne aux héros de Dostoïevski une si étrange puissance humaine.<sup>511</sup>

Maxence gives little indication of what an ‘authentic’ influence might constitute other than an achievement of the “étrange puissance” of Dostoevsky. Maxence’s approach was thus to assess whether Gide ‘measured up’ to Dostoevsky (in the vaguest of terms) rather than examining how Gide’s novels were in dialogue with Dostoevsky’s. Maxence is highly representative in this respect: most of the subsequent discussion of the two novelists focused on whether or not Gide had passed the Dostoevsky test. Once more, the debate was naïve and polarised. However, once again the polarisation was often along refreshingly non-national lines in comparison to previous discussion of Dostoevsky in France. Adamovich, for example, addressed Gide's unpopularity in Russia, which he accounts for as a

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<sup>510</sup> Ibid., pp. 119-120.

<sup>511</sup> Maxence, "L'Influence de la littérature russe sur les écrivains français," p. 77.

non-adherence to stereotypes Russian readers expected from French literature.<sup>512</sup>

He also spoke of a superiority of Gide's fiction to Dostoevsky's, in terms of the personal authenticity of experiences conveyed.<sup>513</sup>

The significance of the Studio Franco-Russe, as the transcribed debates attest at every page, is that they brought all of the cultural and national stereotypes discussed in the previous two chapters to the surface where their deconstruction could begin. Dostoevsky was crucial to this insofar as he split participants along non-national lines.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted that Russian Silver Age thought in emigration and France's developing religious existential movement were in dialogue in the 1920s and 30s, and that Dostoevsky was both a common source of inspiration to both and a meeting ground. Pattison warns against the tendency to interpret the history of religious existentialism as "a progressive domestication of the nineteenth-century experience of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Dostoevsky."<sup>514</sup> He adds, however, that such an interpretation would nonetheless be "much more plausible" than the commonly held notion that religious existentialism was a second-order, pious counterpart to Sartre and Heidegger's projects.<sup>515</sup> My

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<sup>512</sup> Adamovich, "André Gide," p. 197.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>514</sup> Pattison, *Anxious Angels: A Retrospective View of Religious Existentialism*, p. 262.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid., p. 262.

analysis has clearly shown that the existential readings of Dostoevsky, such as Shestov's and Schloezer's, were far from "domestications," but rather radicalisations of existential motifs in Dostoevsky's thought. Berdyaev's more romantic reading attempted to reunite this experience to Christian dogma. Marcel, drawing from Dostoevsky's fiction through the lens of Russian philosophical commentary, homed in on the concepts of inter-subjective religious experience. The analysis of the discussions of Dostoevsky at the Studio Franco-Russe has suggested that national stereotypes continued to pervade and at times obstruct intercultural dialogue. However, in the case of Dostoevsky, a common ground was achieved: Dostoevsky did divide discussants, passionately, but along non-national lines; an experience that participants themselves recognised as an important step towards meaningful, cosmopolitan intercultural exchange.

#### Chapter 4: Dostoevsky and the French existentialist novel

Proto-existentialist readings such as Shestov's and Gide's had dissociated the Christian humanism of Dostoevsky's fiction from his subversive, anti-humanist representations of atheist thought. From the late 1930s the latter became increasingly important to the thinkers and writers associated with France's non-religious existentialist movements as they came to the fore. The backlash that 'modern' interpreters like Gide had launched against Vogüé and his generation had been remarkably successful. André Malraux recalled:

Nous avons d'abord connu Dostoïevski par des traductions élémentaires, des œuvres amputées de murs entiers, des préfaces qui l'éclairaient à contre-jour en le présentant comme un Dickens russe."<sup>516</sup>

Mistrustful of initial readings and translations for their humanitarian bent, they embraced the modern reading, refracted through Gide and Shestov, despite this being equally slanted in the opposite direction. The resultant existentialist readings of Dostoevsky have the same focus on existential revolt and (secularised) theodicy as the religious forerunners. However, they differ crucially from the readings of Gide, Berdyaev and Marcel with regard to the concepts of abnegation and intersubjectivity. The focus remains on Ivan Karamazov, Kirilov and, of course, the *Notes from Underground*.

I have chosen to restrict analysis to three authors – Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis-René des Forêts and Albert Camus – not only in light of their extensive intertextual engagement with Dostoevsky's oeuvre, but also their parodic intertextual

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<sup>516</sup> André Malraux, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), p. 740.

dialogue with each other via the Dostoevskian hypotext. Through their respective ‘rewritings’ of *Notes from Underground* and the dialogue that takes place between these works, a multifaceted image emerges of the significance of Dostoevsky’s *Notes* to the French existentialist tradition. Firstly, the point of contact between Dostoevsky’s and Sartre’s fiction is demonstrated via an intertextual reading of *La Nausée*, *Erostrate* and Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground*. Forêts’s *Le Bavard* is then analysed as a parody at once of Dostoevsky’s *Notes* and of Sartre’s *La Nausée*. Camus’s rewriting, *La Chute*, is then observed to critique Sartre’s existentialism by reconfronting it with the Dostoevskian hypotext. Comparative analysis permits an assessment of the significance of their intertextual dialogue surrounding Dostoevsky’s work as a contribution to existentialist interpretation of Dostoevsky’s fiction.

Discussion of the existentialist reception of Dostoevsky necessitates contextualisation within the complex intellectual history of the interchange of ideas between prominent French, Russian and German existential movements spanning the first half of the century. Boschetti has observed that alongside the more well-known intermediary roles of Koyré and Kojève in the reception of German philosophy in France at this time, the thought of Shestov and Berdyaev in many respects prepared the terrain for existentialism.<sup>517</sup> Meanwhile, the Studio Franco-Russe was among the very earliest incubation grounds for discussion of Kierkegaard in France.<sup>518</sup> Shestov was also among the first to

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<sup>517</sup> Anna Boschetti, *The Intellectual Enterprise: Sartre and Les Temps Modernes*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 62-63.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

introduce the thought of Husserl to France.<sup>519</sup>

What has often been viewed as a bilateral exchange between German and French thinkers could thus be reconsidered as a triangular exchange in which Russia's existential movement in literature and religious philosophy played an active role. The influence of Russian émigré thought on the development of French existentialism has rarely received due attention. Boschetti's work is an exception to this, underlining the émigré influence on the works of Gabriel Marcel in the late 20s and early 30s and stressing, at the roots of Sartre's philosophy, "the collective labour rooted in an imported train of thought".<sup>520</sup>

Dostoevsky has often been omitted from discussions of the history of existentialism. As observed in the introduction, this has primarily been because he was not a philosopher in the strict sense of the institutionalised discipline. However, the very fact that French existentialism constituted such an irrefutably synthetic literary-philosophical movement begs a reassessment of the place in this history of Dostoevsky and the philosophical literary criticism of Russian émigré philosophy, especially since it is perhaps above all in this transmodality that French existentialism distinguished itself most distinctly from its German counterpart, as represented by Heidegger and Jaspers. The significance of this merging of literary and philosophical discourses in the context of the intellectual history of an emerging post-modernity is of no small purport. Existential and

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<sup>519</sup> Léon Chestov, "Memento mori," *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, no. 1/2 (1926) See also Ramona Fotiade, "Evidence et conscience: Léon Chestov et la critique existentielle de la théorie de l'évidence chez Husserl," in *Léon Chestov: un philosophe pas comme les autres?*, ed. N. Struve (Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 1996), pp. 111-25.

<sup>520</sup> Boschetti, *The Intellectual Enterprise: Sartre and Les Temps Modernes*, p. 64-65.

existentialist movements represented a crucial transition towards a more genuinely philosophical literature and genuinely literary philosophy, Bataille and Ricoeur, for example, drawing directly from the existential tradition of Shestov and Dostoevsky.<sup>521</sup>

The difficulty in situating Dostoevsky's fiction within the history of French existentialism arises from the fact that by the 1930s, as a direct result of the publications discussed in the previous two chapters, the author had been firmly established as a modern classic. It would therefore be a more difficult task to identify French authors that did not read and actively engage to some extent with Dostoevsky's oeuvre around this period.<sup>522</sup> In the years when WWII unfolded, Dostoevsky's representation of a fundamental incompatibility between rationalism and human experience again came to the fore. As Malraux wrote:

Comme tous les écrivains de ma génération, j'avais été frappé par le passage des *Frères Karamazov* où Ivan dit: 'Si la volonté divine implique le supplice d'un enfant innocent par une brute, je rends mon billet.'<sup>523</sup>

Thus, while the religious conclusions of Dostoevsky's thought were far removed

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<sup>521</sup> Georges Bataille's *Bleu du ciel* and its 'Dirty' is another work that has been interpreted with *Notes from Underground* as "l'intertexte capital". See Jean-François Louette, "Bataille et Dostoïevski via Thibaudet, Gide, Chestov. Jalons," *Tangence*, no. 86 (2008), p. 96. On the publication of *Bleu de ciel*, two years after that of *Le Bavard*, Louis-René des Forêts wrote of Bataille as the greatest of French novelists, "où l'univers angoissé et nocturne des grands romans de Dostoïevski s'ouvre sur la plénitude aérienne et lumineuse du ciel de midi." See Louis-René des Forêts, *La Ciguë*, no. 1 (janvier, 1948) pp. 35-6. Had the chronological boundaries of this study been broader, the arrival of Bakhtin's reading of Dostoevsky and its contribution to the thought of Kristeva and Ricoeur could also have been an extremely fertile field of study.

<sup>522</sup> Among key authors of the period that recognised Dostoevsky's influence over their work and thought are Malraux and Céline. See, for example, André Malraux, *Antimémoires* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), pp. 570-3. See also Shervashidze, *Ot romantizma k ekzistentsializmu: Tvorchestvo Andre Mal'ro i Al'bera Kamiu*, pp. 65, 98. Céline himself spoke of the "dostoïevskysme" of his *Voyage au bout de la nuit* in his letter to the NRF accompanying the manuscript in April 1932. (See Céline, *Lettres*, p. 307-8). It is noteworthy that Céline's novel has in turn been identified as the key French influence on Sartre's redrafting of *La Nausée*. (See Rhiannon Goldthorpe, *La Nausée* (London: Harper Collins Academic, 1991), p. 47).

<sup>523</sup> Malraux, *Antimémoires*, p. 570.



from those of the secular thinkers discussed in this chapter, the importance of ideas expressed through Dostoevsky's novels in the formulation and expression of existentialist thought in France cannot be overlooked.

### **Jean-Paul Sartre**

Sartre announced, in 'L'Existentialisme est un humanisme' (1945): "Dostoïevski avait écrit: 'si dieu n'existait pas, tout serait permis.' C'est là le point de départ de l'existentialisme."<sup>524</sup> It is thus in his conception of the human condition, and specifically the interrogation of the limits of human freedom, that Sartre's thought drew from the tradition of Dostoevsky and the religious existential thinkers that had fed more directly from Dostoevskian roots. Though Sartre's subsequent ethical systemisations would take him in a very different direction, in his earliest works of fiction a dialogue with Dostoevsky's thought is distinctly manifest, and has already attracted a degree of scholarly attention.<sup>525</sup> Comparison of Sartre's first novel to Dostoevsky, indeed, preceded its publication: Brice Parain, an editor at Gallimard, on reading the draft of *La Nausée* compared it immediately to Dostoevsky.<sup>526</sup>

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<sup>524</sup> J.-P. Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 39.

<sup>525</sup> By far the most profound of these is Erofeev's, which tackled the two authors in terms of their opposition to secular humanism. Mileschin has also broached the question, and, more recently, Nikolaevskaia's doctoral research: see Erofeev, *Naiti v cheloveke cheloveka*; Mileschin, *Dostoevskii i frantsuzskie romanisty pervoi poloviny XX veka*; T. E. Nikolaevskaia, "F. M. Dostoevskii kak predtecha evropeiskogo ekzistentsializma" (Tesis, Kandidat filosofskikh nauk, Moskva, RGGU, 1999). Goldthorpe also highlights Sartre's "fascinated reading of Dostoevsky alongside that of Jaspers" as the inspiration for Sartre's representation of madness. (see Goldthorpe, *La Nausée*, p. 30).

<sup>526</sup> Lettre à Simone de Beauvoir (30-4-1937), in J.-P. Sartre, *Lettres au Castor et à quelques autres (1926-1939)*, ed. Simone de Beauvoir, 2 vols., (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), I, p. 115.

Since first publication, *La Nausée* has been recognised as a radical departure from the French tradition of the philosophical novel, in which questions of *mœurs* were discussed within the strict confines of the novelistic form. This is not the tradition to which Sartre adheres: the form and conception of the novel is remodelled around its philosophical subject matter, something on which all critics, sympathetic or otherwise, seem to have agreed.<sup>527</sup> Paul Nizan's review in particular stressed that Sartre's fiction bore no resemblance to the frivolity of the genre as it existed from Voltaire to the twentieth century.<sup>528</sup> The 'new literatures of the North' were often cited by critics observing this innovation – most often with reference to Kafka, as in Nizan's above cited review. The name of Dostoevsky and his contribution to the development of the modern philosophical novel is more rarely raised, no doubt owing to the marked aesthetic disparities discussed below and, of course, the religious-atheist opposition between Dostoevsky and Sartre. Pinning down historical connections between Sartre and Dostoevsky is further problematised by the fact that, unlike Gide, Marcel or Camus, and despite his extensive critical oeuvre, Sartre offered no significant critical analysis of Dostoevsky's oeuvre.<sup>529</sup> Nonetheless, Sartre's early fictional output is in dialogue with *Notes from Underground* with regard to the questions of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, freedom and human motivation.

This dialogue is opened by the second paragraph of Roquentin's journal:

Je ne pense pas que le métier d'historien dispose à l'analyse psychologique.

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<sup>527</sup> See the 'Dossier de presse' compiled by Contat and Rybalka in J.-P. Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), pp. 1701-11.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid., p. 1701. Originally published in *Ce Soir* (16-5-1938).

<sup>529</sup> The numerous references to the Russian in his ten volumes of *Situations* are disappointingly superficial.

Dans notre partie, nous n'avons affaire qu'à des sentiments entiers sur lesquels on met des noms génériques comme Ambition, Intérêt. Pourtant si j'avais une ombre de connaissance de moi-même, c'est maintenant qu'il faudrait m'en servir.<sup>530</sup>

Roquentin's enquiry into the workings of his own consciousness is thus expressly set out in opposition to totalising, rationalising theories of human motivation. 'Interest' was the precise target of the underground man's offensive. He pitted a subversive subjectivist theory of human behaviour against utilitarianism and theories of historical progress:

[X]отеть же можно и против собственной выгоды, а иногда и положительно должно (это уж моя идея). [...] вот это-то все и есть та самая, пропущенная, самая выгодная выгода, которая ни под какую классификацию не подходит и от которой все системы и теории постоянно разлетаются к черту.<sup>531</sup>

*Notes from Underground* thus postulates that the individual can, does and must oppose personal and collective advantage, being at least equally motivated by entirely irrational impulses. It is the extremity of this conception of the human condition that *La Nausée* investigates.

Both texts, having established an opposition to scientific perspectives on human action and interaction, develop their arguments to radically challenge any presumed correspondence between objectivising, universalising perspectives and the experience of the individual human subject. As observed in the previous chapter, Dostoevsky's text expressed this as a rejection of  $2 \times 2 = 4$ , perceived as an effrontery to human dignity, and this argument had become a pillar of the religious existential thought that arrived in Paris during the twenties. The

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<sup>530</sup> Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 8.

<sup>531</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, V, p. 110.

subsequent Heidegger-informed, atheist branch of existentialism that Sartre's novel heralded did not inherit this polemic directly in as much as it did not reproduce it in the polemical terms of his religious forerunners. However, the argument is no less present despite being expressed in a more integrated aesthetic mode. *La Nausée* contests objective truth, by means of poetics that highlight an insurmountable division between subjective experience and facticity.

This is achieved at the level of perception and at the moment of perceiving. Where Dostoevsky's protagonist – and following him, Shestov – had polemicised overtly against empiricism, Sartre's novel embodies this argument aesthetically on two levels. Firstly, Roquentin's voice, his subjective consciousness, is pitted against his own body, his objective existence. Meanwhile, perceptions (sensory data collected by the body) are presented in a pre-rational suspension, subverting the empirical process:

Je domine les deux colonnes de toute la tête et je vois des chapeaux, une mer de chapeaux. La plupart sont noirs et durs. De temps à l'autre, on en voit un qui s'envole au bout d'un bras et découvre le tendre miroitement d'un crâne; puis, après quelques instants, d'un vol lourd, il se pose.<sup>532</sup>

Estrangement here surpasses poetics: it represents a dissociation between perceived sensory data and knowledge insofar as it rejects the process of rationalisation that connects them. Herein lies the link between the phenomenological component of the existentialist thought of the 1930s and 40s and the anti-rationalist polemics of Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard and Shestov that preceded it.

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<sup>532</sup> Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 54.

The above quotation also raises the question of the problematic relation to the body that such a conceptualisation of perception implies. In *La Nausée*, this ambivalence stems from an antagonistic conception of the relation between consciousness and body where the rationalising step of the empirical process has been rejected. The condition of the Nausea itself can thus be read as the narrativisation of a traumatic encounter between subjective consciousness and embodiment within an objective world. Roquentin makes various attempts to shelter himself from these attacks of existential Nausea. His principal consolation from the Nausea is the jazz record *Some of these days*, which he listens to in the café. The singing voice that comes forth from the record has the capacity to stave off an attack of the Nausea. The consoling effect is directly related to what Roquentin perceives as the immateriality of the music, which he in turn perceives in contrast to facticity. Everything and everyone in the café, including Roquentin's own body, is described as being "de la même matière [...] d'une espèce de souffrance moche"<sup>533</sup> while the music alone differs. The recorded voice has escaped from the degrading realm of the ephemeral and, as such, has achieved a degree of comparative 'necessity'. It is the enviable necessary quality of the disembodiment of the voice of the record that eventually inspires Roquentin to attempt a similar transcendence: the disembodiment of his own subjective voice through the act of writing a novel.

A key disparity is herein evident between religious existential and atheist

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<sup>533</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

existentialist thought. Atheist existentialists like Sartre, particularly in his early work, retained a deep nostalgia for the immutable and the necessary. The fact that man was indisputably unnecessary was an affront. With the humanist myth overthrown, man and his temporary bodily existence belonged only to the realm of the arbitrary. Existential thinkers like Shestov and the underground man did not see the creative act as a naive attempt at transcendence, but as a subjective outcry against the injustice of the human condition.

In both cases, however, the target is the myth of humanism. Roquentin's ambivalent relationship to his own factitious body is indivisible from his ambivalence to every-body (experienced factitiously as expressed in the first quotation). This misanthropic aspect connects him to his Dostoevskian predecessor and his tirade against *vsemstvo* (omnitude), understood at once as collective consciousness and the rational-empirical worldview it favours. Like the underground man, Sartre's protagonist sets his will against this. In his case, this takes the form of a sophisticated act of will set against the contingent status of his own embodiment.

In a central passage, Roquentin narrates an act of self-harm.<sup>534</sup> The act is provoked by a particularly linguistic bout of the Nausea. The narrator stabs his hand with a knife in an attempt to interrupt the gushing forth of words that is his consciousness. To his satisfaction, blood spills onto the page beneath four lines of writing. Critics have questioned the paradox of the spontaneous present-tense

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<sup>534</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

narration of this sequence (which implies simultaneous writing and cutting) as a lapse in verisimilitude, since it requires four hands.<sup>535</sup> As they have observed, the narrative thus undermines its own veracity. However, what they overlook is that the paradox, together with the clear image of spilt blood on the page, clearly implies that the act of self-harm *is* the act of writing. Writing itself becomes a wilful act of violence committed by the subjective voice against the body; an act of defiance precisely because it disembodies the voice. Immediately following this act of revolt, Roquentin goes to the cafe and listens to the jazz record:

La voix, grave et rauque, apparaît brusquement et le monde s'évanouit, le monde des existences. Une femme de chair a eu cette voix, elle a chanté devant un disque dans sa plus belle toilette et l'on enregistre sa voix. La femme: bah! elle existait comme moi [...] mais il y a ça.<sup>536</sup>

The implication is that while subjective being is undermined by the arbitrariness of factitious existence, i.e. while *l'être pour soi* is bound to and dominated by *l'être en soi*, subjective sincerity is beyond reach. However the disembodiment of the subjective voice implicit in the recording of words, on a disk or on paper, is suggested to entail a potential for subjective transcendence.<sup>537</sup>

Un livre. Un roman. Et il y aurait des gens qui liraient ce roman et qui diraient: "C'est Antoine Roquentin qui l'a écrit, c'était un type roux qui traînait dans les cafés", et ils penseraient à ma vie comme je pense à celle de cette négresse: comme à quelque chose de précieux et d'à moitié légendaire.<sup>538</sup>

This conception of the possibility for subjective transcendence contains the crux

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<sup>535</sup> Paul Reed and Roger McClure, "'La Nausée' and the Problem of Literary Representation," *The Modern Language Review* 82, no. 2 (1987) p. 344; Denis Hollier, *Politique de la Prose: Jean-Paul Sartre et l'an quarante* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), p. 182.

<sup>536</sup> Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 122.

<sup>537</sup> This could in turn be read as a dubious attempt to overcome the Cartesian dualism inherent in *La Nausée*.

<sup>538</sup> Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 210.

of the fundamental oppositions between religious and atheist branches of existential philosophy. The former, particularly as represented by Dostoevsky, Berdyaev and Marcel, takes the search for intersubjectivity as point of departure and of arrival, whereas the atheist existentialism of Sartre, beginning with the notion of the transcendence of the Ego, struggles eternally for any meaningful reconnection to the other.<sup>539</sup> A comparison of the conclusions of the *Notes* and of *La Nausée* illustrates this disparity. Sartre's ray of hope lies at once in the separation of consciousness from body (following the jazz singer's example and disembodied consciousness by writing) as a means of subjective transcendence, and also in the notion that through the resultant literary statement, the novel, the author might validate his existence in the eyes of the other, thus achieving, through transcendence, recognition and privileged memorial as opposed to reintegration. Roquentin's desire is thus not to communicate meaningfully with the collective, but to transcend it and his situation within it.

Dostoevsky had already pre-empted this conclusion in *Notes from Underground*. The underground man's confessional monologue to Lisa fails because the protagonist's insurmountable spite towards the other ultimately militates against genuine communion, regardless of the sincerity of the content of his confession.<sup>540</sup> His consequent act of writing down the event is also presented in a satirical light, implying that this too is an affected and thus futile gesture,

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<sup>539</sup> Hence the constant impression in *L'Être et le néant* that being-for-oneself somehow precedes, is somehow superior to or more desirable than being-for-the-other, for example, Sartre introduces the "problem" of the existence of the other into his philosophy with: "Nous avons découvert, en suivant ce fil conducteur, que la réalité humaine était-pour-soi. Est-ce là tout ce qu'elle est?" J.-P. Sartre, *L'Être et le néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), p. 259.

<sup>540</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, V, pp. 173-175.



permitting neither communion nor transcendence:

Но довольно; не хочу я больше писать “из Подполья”... Впрочем, здесь еще не кончаются “записки” этого парадоксалиста. Он не выдержал и продолжал далее. Но нам тоже кажется, что здесь можно и остановиться.<sup>541</sup>

Dostoevsky seems to have preempted Sartre’s hope of a secular, individualist route out of alienation from the collective via literature. For Dostoevsky, fraternity without religious faith was an impossibility. The religious, abnegatory road to intersubjectivity that Dostoevsky’s monastic characters advocated, and that Gide’s reading had stressed, was alien to Sartre particularly at this stage in the development of his thought. However, he reached a greater understanding of the abnegatory prerequisite to intersubjectivity during the war. His *Carnets de la drôle de guerre* recount an experience during which Sartre came to an understanding of this abnegation and relate it to Dostoevsky and Gide.<sup>542</sup>

This illustrates out the fundamental tension between the two conceptions of the individual self and the collective that are inherent to existential thought and existentialism respectively. Berdyaev developed this opposition in the essay ‘Sartre et le destin de l’existentialisme,’ expressing his fear that Sartre’s thought threatened to eclipse the established tradition of existential thought to which Shestov, Dostoevsky and he belonged.<sup>543</sup> It is significant that Berdyaev here

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<sup>541</sup> Ibid., V, p.179.

<sup>542</sup> Fokin writes that the war provided Sartre with the opportunity to grasp collectivism, with personal abnegation as its prerequisite. He perceived this through the lens of Dostoevsky and Gide. Fokin quotes Sartre, saying that there is a ‘sick and peaceful joy’ in the resignation of the individual, that Gide and Dostoevsky talk about, and that he himself encountered it on a train with soldiers during the war. He concludes that war gives one the opportunity for abnegation. *Carnets de la drôle de guerre* (Paris: 1995) p.66 cited in Fokin, « *Russkaia ideia* » *vo frantsuzskoj literature XX veka*, p. 179.

<sup>543</sup> Citations are from the drafts in the Berdyaev archive at RGALI, Moscow. Fond 1496, Opis’ 1,

identified *La Nausée* as Sartre's best work, undoubtedly because it resonated most closely with existential thought: "Il y pose déjà le problème de l'activité créatrice de l'homme, issue d'une existence basse et écoeurante."<sup>544</sup> However, Berdyaev raised the opposition with regards to the inherent Cartesianism in Sartre's worldview.<sup>545</sup> It was in this that Berdyaev identified the disparity between Russian existential thought and that of Sartre: "Il ne saurait y avoir, dans la pensée russe, un existentialisme du type de Heidegger et de Sartre. Nous sommes enfants de Dostoïevski."<sup>546</sup>

The fundamental distinction is not, however, as Berdyaev suggests, rooted in an inherent rationalism of the latter, nor is it in stylistic expression. Rather, the key disparity lies in the fundamental experience of the self and the collective. An intertextually significant motif in *La Nausée* serves to highlight this distancing from Dostoevsky's representation of the human condition in *Notes from Underground*. Roquentin, observing the spectacle of the Sunday promenade from an exterior perspective ("mais, après tout, c'était leur dimanche et non le mien"<sup>547</sup>) narrates:

Les négociants et les fonctionnaires marchaient côte à côte; ils se laissaient couloyer, heurter même et déplacer par de petits employés à la mine pauvre. Les aristocraties, les élites, les groupements professionnels avaient fondu dans cette foule tiède. Il restait des hommes, presque seuls, qui ne représentaient plus.<sup>548</sup>

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ed. khr. 233, RGALI. The article was published only in translation, (in both French and German) in 1947. See Tamara Klépinine, ed., *Nikolas Berdiaev: Bibliographie* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1978), p. 67-68.

<sup>544</sup> RGALI, Fond 1496, Opus' 1, ed.khr. 233, p. 22.

<sup>545</sup> RGALI, Fond 1496, Opus' 1, ed.khr. 233, p. 23.

<sup>546</sup> RGALI, Fond 1496, Opus' 1, ed.khr. 233, p. 36.

<sup>547</sup> Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 65.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

This precise image features prominently in *Notes from Underground*. The protagonist (also a ‘shabby looking clerk’) goes out of his way to bump into an officer on the Nevsky Prospect, in a feeble attempt to avenge a past humiliation. Several crucial differences distinguish the two events. In *Notes from Underground*, the instigator of the crucial bump is the spiteful narrator himself, longing at once for revenge and to forgive and be forgiven, to ‘unite’ fraternally with the six-foot tall officer who had previously casually moved [*perestavil*] him from his position to another in a tavern.<sup>549</sup> The act of colliding in the street is intended to redress the inequality that separates him from his physical and social superior. The protagonist becomes utterly obsessed by the idea of carrying out the collision, and tries and fails numerous times, having dressed with dignity for the fateful occasion when the courageous bump will finally be accomplished.<sup>550</sup>

It is significant that Dostoevsky had used this image as an intertextual reference to Cherneshevsky’s *Chto delat’* in parody of the latter’s socialist New Man, Lopukhov and his epithet: “turn aside for nobody except women” which he put to violent practice.<sup>551</sup> Sartre, employing the same image but from the perspective of a detached spectator, accentuates Roquentin’s alienation from the social interactions of the collective. In Sartre’s representation of the act, the social structure that gives the gesture pertinence in Dostoevsky has emphatically “melted away,” at least from the detached perspective of the narrator, for whom it holds no sway. Such petty offences and interactions as the underground man’s

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<sup>549</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, V, p. 128.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid. V, p. 130-132.

<sup>551</sup> Irina Kirk, *Dostoevskii and Camus: the themes of Consciousness, Isolation, Freedom and Love* (München Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1974), p. 30.

have become meaningless to Roquentin.

This key motif of bodily collision returns in Sartre's short story 'Erostrate' in his next significant work of fiction, the collection *Le Mur*. The protagonist here experiences collisions not as the offence of a specific officer but as the assault of the crowd at large, a hostile mass of humanity:

Il y en a eu qui me guettaient depuis longtemps: les grands. Ils me bouscullaient dans la rue, pour rire, pour voir ce que je ferais. Je ne disais rien. Je faisais semblant de ne pas avoir compris.<sup>552</sup>

As such, Hilbert's obsessive act of vengeance is against the crowd at large. The entirety of the crowd is the enemy of the individual, and his loathing indignation is directed against it in its entirety: an extremity of misanthropy has been reached. The significance of 'Erostrate' in understanding Sartre's commentary on Dostoevsky's representation of an individual will set against humanity does not end here.<sup>553</sup> The underground conception of the self and the collective ("Я-то один, а они-то все"<sup>554</sup>) has evolved to a new level. The underground man had proclaimed:

Да я за то, чтоб меня не беспокоили, весь свет сейчас же за копейку продам. Свету ли провалиться, или вот мне чаю не пить? Я скажу, что

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<sup>552</sup> Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques* p. 263. A further example: "Le boulevard Montparnasse était plein de gens. Ils me bouscullaient, me repoussaient, me frappaient de leurs coudes ou de leurs épaules. Je me laissais balloter, la force me manquait pour me glisser entre eux. Je me vis soudain au cœur de cette foule, horriblement seul et petit. Comme ils auraient pu me faire mal, s'ils l'avaient voulu!" p. 274. Again the crowd is an aggressive whole in opposition to the individual.

<sup>553</sup> The connection between the two texts is marked enough to have already attracted some critical attention. Katz deemed it significant enough even to include an excerpt of Sartre's short story as a complementary appendix to his critical edition of the work: F. M. Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Michael R. Katz (New York and London: Norton and Company, 2001). Erofeev offers an anti-humanist analysis of the connection, which the current analysis concurs with and expands. (see Erofeev, *Naiti v cheloveke cheloveka*, pp. 42-50).

<sup>554</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, V, p. 125.

свету провалиться, а чтоб мне чай всегда пить.<sup>555</sup>

‘Erostrate’, like *Notes from Underground*, consists structurally of two planes: an anti-humanist diatribe and a confession of a misanthropic act of arbitrary aggression. Hilbert’s letter to the humanist writers of his day is strikingly resonant with the underground man’s tirade against “мудрецы и любители рода человеческого”.<sup>556</sup> The premise of Hilbert’s argument is that the humanist’s innate fondness of man has no rational foundation, and that the misanthropy of the protagonist is equally innate and equally valid, if arbitrarily detested by the cultural mainstream:

[V]ous aimez les hommes. Vous avez l’humanisme dans le sang: c’est bien de la chance. [...] Vous avez le goût [...] pour ses mains surtout: ça vous plaît qu’il ait cinq doigts à chaque main et qu’il puisse opposer le pouce aux autres doigts. [...] Mais ce qui vous attire en eux me dégoûte. [...] Quand il mâche en gardant la bouche close, les coins de sa bouche montent et descendent, il a l’air de passer sans relâche de la sérénité à la surprise pleurarde. Vous aimez ça, je le sais.<sup>557</sup>

Hilbert’s case is set out with the same scathing sarcasm as that of the underground man:

Какая каменная стена? Ну, разумеется, законы природы, выводы естественных наук, математика. Уж как докажут тебе, например, что от обезьяны произошел, так уж и нечего морщиться, принимай как есть. Уж как докажут тебе, что, в сущности, одна капелька твоего собственного жиру тебе должна быть дороже ста тысяч тебе подобных и что в этом результате разрешатся под конец все так называемые добродетели и обязанности и прочие бредни и предрассудки, так уж так

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<sup>555</sup> Ibid., V, p. 174.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid. V, p. 116.

<sup>557</sup> Erofeev has noted that Hilbert uses the same ‘ape’ argument that Soloviev famously used to undermine (atheist) humanism’s presumption of a fundamental human dignity: “Человек происходит от обезьяны, а потому положит душу за други своя.” See Erofeev, *Naiti v cheloveke cheloveka*, p.44. Shestov, in his *Dnevnik moikh myslei*, also wrote at length concerning the notion that Darwinism was incapable of guaranteeing human dignity, seeing in it the same insult that Dostoevsky and Sartre’s narrators toy with. See Lev Shestov, “Dnevnik moikh mislei,” in *Kontinent*, no. 8, 1976, p. 242.

и принимай, нечего делать-то, потому дважды два - математика.  
Попробуйте возразить.<sup>558</sup>

Both thus argue that the mere existence of the human (exploiting Darwinism and the absurdity of human facial expressions in both cases to ironic effect) is insufficient grounding for a theoretical humanism. Having debased humanism, the polemicists go in different directions. Dostoevsky's ultimately defended the right of the individual to free irrational will, and not to arbitrary action, the intelligent man being conceived as incapable of action (as in the above "Свету ли провалиться, или вот мне чаю не пить?"); Sartre's protagonist goes a significant step further, to instigate direct anti-humanist action:

Vous serez curieux de savoir, je suppose, ce que peut être un homme qui n'aime pas les hommes. Eh bien, c'est moi et je les aime si peu que je vais tout à l'heure en tuer une demi-douzaine.<sup>559</sup>

However, Hilbert eventually finds himself in the same dead-end situation as the underground man: he is incapable of the ultimate act of will, that of suicide (or indeed of killing as cool headedly as intended) and finds himself surrendering in a café toilet to the mercy of the society he had imagined himself in transcendence of.

There are likewise significant parallels within the confessional texts ('По поводу мокрого снега' in Dostoevsky's novella; the narrative-proper in Sartre's). Both characters represent social recluses, the modernist inverted and introverted *flâneurs* that Precilla Ferguson associated with the arrival of modernity.<sup>560</sup> They

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<sup>558</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, V, p. 105.

<sup>559</sup> Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 271.

<sup>560</sup> Precilla Ferguson, "The flâneur on and off the streets of Paris," in *The Flâneur*, ed. Kieth Tester (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 39.

cut themselves off from society and confine themselves to small spaces: the former to his underground ‘corner’, the latter to his 6<sup>th</sup> floor balcony. Hilbert’s love of high places (the Eiffel tower, the Sacré Cœur etc.) is representative of his presumed superiority, in contrast to the underground man’s self-perceived moral inferiority which he similarly expressed through the ‘underground’ as a spatial metaphor, further associating himself with an insect and a mouse.<sup>561</sup> Hilbert’s height metaphor in turn refers his thought to Nietzsche’s rapturous writings concerning high altitude and moral superiority in *Zarathustra*, his “book of the air and the heights.”<sup>562</sup> Hilbert narrates: “Au balcon d’un sixième: c’est là que j’aurais dû passer toute ma vie. Il faut étayer les supériorités morales par des symboles matériels, sans quoi elles retombent.”<sup>563</sup> Sartre thus uses Nietzsche’s metaphor periodically: aristocratism is suggested to be as unfounded as humanism. Erofeev was thus mistaken in concluding that Hilbert’s philosophy was dogmatic in opposition to Dostoevsky’s protagonist’s anti-dogmatic approach.<sup>564</sup> Sartre makes clear from the first page that his protagonist is aware that his thought stems from sentiment and that it can be conceived as a moral superiority only entirely arbitrarily.

A Nietzschean reworking of the underground is a more fruitful approach to *Erostrate*. This is not to say that the Will to power was absent from Dostoevsky’s text: Hilbert’s domination of prostitutes was not without precedent in the underground man’s treatment of Lisa. However, the egotistical and sadistic

<sup>561</sup> Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 262; Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, V, p. 104.

<sup>562</sup> F Nietzsche, *Why I am so Wise* (London: Penguin, 2004) p.5. Camus will do likewise in *La Chute*. See pages 225-226 of the current thesis.

<sup>563</sup> Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 262.

<sup>564</sup> Erofeev, *Naiti v cheloveke cheloveka*, p. 49-50.

component is drastically augmented in Sartre's text. Hilbert's murderous ambition can also be read as an anti-humanist rewriting of Raskolnikov. The nineteenth-century predecessor had used humanism (Raskolnikov's presumed future Napoleonic works) to justify careerist killing, while the twentieth-century rewriting murders unambiguously and overtly in the name of anti-humanism. However, the argument is unchanged: atheist humanism, as Sartre and Dostoevsky agree, cannot guarantee the value of human life as it has no guarantor. It is in light of this that Sartre will later state, echoing Ivan and Alesha Karamazov's famous debate, that: "L'existentialiste, au contraire, pense qu'il est très gênant que Dieu n'existe pas, car avec lui disparaît toute possibilité de trouver des valeurs dans un ciel intelligible."<sup>565</sup>

Ultimately, the conclusions of both the *Notes* and *Erostratus* suggest that the misanthropic urge of the individual is more forced, more affected, and ultimately more limited than the protagonist imagines. On encountering a corpse in the street, Hilbert attempted to transcend all empathic responses but found himself fainting and being resuscitated by doctors (society). This personal failure anticipates his eventual failure to kill entirely arbitrarily (he shies away from killing a family with young children) and his failure to kill himself, landing him in prison, again at the mercy of society: the individual proves incapable of transcending society. This is precisely Raskolnikov's conclusion. Hilbert's decision not to kill the two children echoes Raskolnikov's saving of the children

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<sup>565</sup> Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* p.38. It may also be recalled that Nietzsche's fictional representation of the pronouncement of the Death of God is equally far from jubilatory. See F Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), pp. 181-182.



from the fire, while his eventual surrender to the collective, not through repentance but by inability to do otherwise, is precisely the ‘blunder’ of Raskolnikov. Both supermen can indeed turn their hand against human life, but they are mistaken in theorising that in so doing they might transcend the definition of man that they have rejected: both remain all too human despite their attempts to transcend humanism.

Misanthropic perversion of the humanist ideal is romanticised in none of the three texts, but rather it is presented as an illness. In *Notes*, as in *Nausea*, consciousness itself, or at least the perverted consciousness of the protagonists, is perpetually in antagonistic relation to its object, particularly the other.<sup>566</sup> It is in this aspect that existential novels go beyond their romantic roots: subjectivist conceptions of truth are equally problematic and equally satirised. In *Notes*, the subjective realm receives a brutally parodic treatment. The *podpol'e* or “underground” of the title is a symbolic inversion of transcendence, and a further anticipation of Sartre’s novel’s ultimate return to romantic idealism. The underground, fraught with paradox, uncertainty and destructive irrational impulse, while ostensibly defended by the narrator, is caustically satirised throughout the work and eventually denounced for an unattainable third option:

Конец концов, господа: лучше ничего не делать! Лучше сознательная инерция! И так, да здравствует подполье! [...] Эх! да ведь я и тут вру!

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<sup>566</sup> Dostoevsky had written in *Notes from the Underground*: “я крепко убежден, что не только очень много сознания, но даже и всякое сознание болезнь”; see Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* t.5, p.101-2. Adamo describes the underground man’s stream of consciousness as, “una malattia congenita tenuta per tanti anni in incubazione e incurabile.” See Adamo, *Dostoevskij in Italia: il dibattito sulle riviste (1869-1945)*, p. 33. Huisman sees Sartre’s conceptualisation of phenomenological ‘nausea’ as an inheritance from Levinas: “La nausée comme affect de révélation ontologique est discrètement empruntée à Lévinas, lu un peu vite,” (see D. Huisman, *Histoire de la philosophie française* (Paris: Perrin 2002), p. 490).

Вру, потому что сам знаю, как дважды два, что вовсе не подполье лучше, а что-то другое, совсем другое, которого я жажду, но которого никак не найду! К черту подполье!<sup>567</sup>

Thus there is no attainable mode of being that would present an alternative to a perpetual longing for truth in recognition of the absurdity of such a state of affairs: the underground cannot be reconciled to objectivity and narrative becomes an expression of the resultant exasperation.

In *Notes from Underground*, as in *Nausea*, the narrative culminates in an unsuccessful gesture of outreach on the part of the misanthropic individual to a female other. The former, to Lisa, is immediately perverted; the latter, to Annie, is rejected. Both protagonists then turn to writing, as a further attempt at outreach. The former is disparaged semi-diegetically by the 'editorial' narrative voice discussed above. The latter, undirected and reflexive, seems unlikely to succeed. Sartre later, in *Les Mots*, rejected this conclusion to his youthful novel: writing was not enough to imbue existence with meaning.<sup>568</sup> His later output would pursue this question relentlessly, straying from attempts to systematise existentialist ethics to Marxism and back. In this process, he would again find occasion to speak of Dostoevsky. Following his visit to the Soviet Union in the 1950s, Sartre published five articles in *Libération* (15-20 July 1954) discussing aspects of contemporary Soviet society.<sup>569</sup> The second of these, "De Dostoïevsky à la littérature contemporaine", constituted a brief discussion of Sartre's

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<sup>567</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, V, p. 121.

<sup>568</sup> J.-P. Sartre, *Les Mots* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 210. See also Richard Kamber, "The Creative solution in *Nausea*," *Susquehanna University Studies* IX, no. 4 (1974).

<sup>569</sup> The other four were in praise of USSR's developments in freedom of speech, philosophy, peace and equality, respectively.

impression of the contemporary Soviet reception of Dostoevsky.<sup>570</sup> He expressed his own enthusiasm for the writer and his view that his writings had not lost their relevance, but explained that the issues of the day for contemporary Soviet man were not those of Dostoevsky (nor, implicitly, those of either nineteenth-century Russia nor contemporary France).<sup>571</sup>

It is clear that while Sartre's interest in Dostoevsky endured, his perception of the pertinence of the Russian author's representation of the human condition was transitory, or rather, historical. Dostoevsky's depiction of the irreconcilability of reason and experience coincided with Sartre's interests in the 1930s and into the 40s. However, his subsequent output was a search for a means to overcome this condition. His writings on returning from the USSR speak of a new man and a new culture, innately collectivist and, as such, inherently immune to the Nausea of the initial, negative period of his creation.

### **Louis-René Des Forêts**

Forêts's *Le Bavard* (1946) represents an important literary example of intermingling between the receptions of *Notes from Underground* and *La Nausée*. It constituted a simultaneous parody of the two works, though it has never yet

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<sup>570</sup> J.-P. Sartre, "De Dostoïevski à la littérature contemporaine" in *Libération* (16-7-1954). Citations from the electronic version at: <http://www.sartre.ch/URSS.pdf>, pp. 5-8.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

been analysed as such.<sup>572</sup> The scholarly corpus addressing *Le Bavard* is limited, and most commentators have followed Blanchot's seminal reading.<sup>573</sup> Blanchot approached *Le Bavard* as an outburst of gratuitous language. For Blanchot, the monologue, in acknowledging its own gratuity (as *bavardage*), negates its own literary enterprise and, by extension, undermines literature per se. What this reading deliberately overlooks, however, is that the content of *Le Bavard* is not as monological nor as arbitrary as the narrator himself professes. Richly intertextual and parodic, the bavard's monologue is dialogical; the negation it implies is directed toward particular intertexts, and predominantly *Notes from Underground* and *La Nausée*.<sup>574</sup> Blanchot was not blind to the connection between Forêts and Dostoevsky, though he downplayed it:

Nous ne sommes pas non plus en présence d'un de ces personnages de Dostoïevski, parleurs invétérés qui, dans un désir de confiance provocante, se donnent à tout instant pour ce qu'ils sont afin de mieux le taire, encore que la force exténuante des *Mémoires du souterrain* surgisse souvent ici à nouveau.<sup>575</sup>

If Blanchot was eager to differentiate between Dostoevsky's and des Forêt's narration, the reason is that *Le Bavard's* intertextuality fatally undermines Blanchot's reading, since its *bavardage*, if read in the context of an intertextual

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<sup>572</sup> Passing references to the work as a parody of *Notes* have been made for example by Louette and Fermentelli; see Louette, "Bataille et Dostoïevski via Thibaudet, Gide, Chestov. Jalons," p. 103; George Fermentelli, "Deux lectures du *Souterrain* de Dostoïevski," in *Léon Chestov: un philosophe pas comme les autres?*, ed. G. Struve, *Cahiers de l'émigration russe* (Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 1996) Durand also observes in passing the evident connection between *Le Bavard*, Sartre's *La Nausée* and the Camusian Absurd, though he does not explore this, his post-modern reading continuing on from Blanchot's. See Thierry Durand, "Le Sujet en souffrance dans l'oeuvre de Louis-René des Forêts," *French Forum* 26, no. 3 (2001), p. 93.

<sup>573</sup> Blanchot's "La Parole vaine," reprinted in *L'Amitié*, was first published as a preface to the 1963 edition of the novel. Comina's monograph provides an extensive reception history of des Forêt's which attests to the ubiquity of the 'silent' reading. Marc Comina, *Louis-René des Forêts: L'Impossible silence* (Seysssel: Champs Vallon, 1998), pp. 19-62.

<sup>574</sup> André Breton is also a significant target. (see *ibid.* pp. 284-291).

<sup>575</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *L'Amitié* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 138.

dialogue, can no longer be deemed gratuitous. Indeed, as this section will argue, it becomes polemical.

*Le Bavard* establishes *Notes from Underground* as an intertext by means of a near-direct quotation: “Je suis un bavard, un inoffensif et fâcheux bavard, comme vous l’êtes vous-même”<sup>576</sup> which corresponds, in Schloezer’s translation, to: “Je ne suis donc qu’un bavard inoffensif, un fâcheux, comme nous tous.”<sup>577</sup> The quotation implicates the ‘bavardage’ of Dostoevsky’s narrator as a specific object of parody. *Le Bavard* goes on to mimic his narrative voice. However the polemical dimension of the underground man’s diatribe is conspicuously absent in *Le Bavard*, leaving only a grotesque linguistic surplus. The famous dialogicality of Dostoevsky’s interrupted monologue is also parodied. The narrator of *Le Bavard* repeatedly reminds his readers (“messieurs”) that he requires no more from them than feigned attention and silence, begging them not to interrupt:

Et notez que je ne vous demande pas de me lire *vraiment*, mais de m’entretenir dans cette illusion que je suis lu: vous saisissez la nuance? Alors vous parlez pour mentir? – Non, monsieur, pour parler, rien de plus [...] Mais suffit. Que mon lecteur me pardonne si je n’aime pas qu’on me bourdonne aux oreilles quand je parle.<sup>578</sup>

This subversion of the interrupted monologue, like the whole of *Le Bavard*, is a parodic comment on a radical subjectivism feigning intersubjectivity by means of a narratively contrived dialogism: “j’ai moins besoin de complicité, d’approbation,

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<sup>576</sup> Louis-René des Forêts, *Le Bavard* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), p. 143.

<sup>577</sup> F. M. Dostoïevski, *Carnets du sous-sol/Zapiski iz podpol'ia*, trans. Boris de Schloezer (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 55.

<sup>578</sup> Forêts, *Le Bavard*, p. 28.

de respect, d'intérêt que de silence".<sup>579</sup> And again: "On ne peut me demander de rester dans mon coin, silencieux et modeste, à écouter se payer de mots des gens dont j'ai bien le droit de penser qu'il n'y a ni plus d'expérience ni plus de réflexion que moi-même."<sup>580</sup>

Speech, in *Le Bavard*, is gratuitous and self-indulgent rather than communicative, as Blanchot stressed. However, Blanchot did not recognise that this very gratuity is in dialogue with the Dostoevskian hypotext. The central event of *Le Bavard's* uneventful narrative is a *crise de bavardage* that seizes the protagonist before a female listener in a night club. The diatribe is a self-gratifying confession:

Je parlais et c'était une sensation magnifique. Il me semblait qu'en faisant ainsi étalage de ce que j'osais tout juste m'avouer à moi-même, je me déchargeais d'un fardeau très lourd [...] je me vidais lentement, c'était un plaisir aussi bouleversant que la plus réussie des voluptés érotiques.<sup>581</sup>

The account continues: "sans oublier ce qu'une telle érection verbale pouvait avoir d'enivrant – mon corps était littéralement en transe, j'avais la foudre dans la gorge – ni la volupté positive, mais plus vulgaire".<sup>582</sup> Around ten pages are dedicated to this suggestive account of the bavard's scandalous confession; however, the actual content of his speech is conspicuously omitted. All that remains is a meta-*bavardage*: an extended description of the voluptuousness experienced during the confession.<sup>583</sup> This confession is a parody of the underground man's outpourings to Lisa. The bavard's confessor is also suggested

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<sup>579</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid., pp. 62-3.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid., pp. 62-72.

to be a prostitute.<sup>584</sup> Like Lisa (as well as Sonya) the bavard's prostitute-confessor receives his confession with disbelief and confusion; however, in the case of the parodic hypertext, this is due to a language barrier (the hispanophone listener has limited knowledge of the unspecified local language, presumably French). Ultimately, where Lisa had collapsed in tears at the twisted but profound sincerity of the underground man's confession, that of *Le Bavard* is "inondé de larmes" of mocking laughter at the confession's pomposity and vulgarity.<sup>585</sup> The existential confessional novel is thus likened to a grotesque linguistic masturbation, and parody is presented, through the image of the laughter of the listener, as a just retribution for such indulgence:

j'étais tenté de voir dans ce rire un châtiment pour m'être trop complaisamment abandonné à des confidences que, si agréable qu'eût été l'allègement éprouvé sur le moment, j'allais avoir à payer d'un rude prix.<sup>586</sup>

The protagonist then speaks of his "aversion insurmontable pour les maniaques de la confession".<sup>587</sup> *Le Bavard* then ironically signals its stylistic connection to this confessional tradition: "Ajoutez à cela que mon style naturel n'est pas celui du confessionnal, rien d'étonnant s'il ressemble à une foule d'autres, mais je n'ai pas la prétention, vous êtes avertis."<sup>588</sup>

Whilst clearly parodying *Notes from Underground*, *Le Bavard* simultaneously

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<sup>584</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid., p. 10. It must be recalled that *Notes from Underground* was also a conscious parody of confessional literature, most specifically of Rousseau. It is thus indicative of the new status the Notes have gained in French discourse by the 1940s, that the parody has itself become the target of parody. On the connection to Rousseau see Predrag Cicovacki, *Dostoevsky and the Affirmation of Life* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2012), p. 46. On the functionings of parody in cultural history see Robert Chambers, *Parody: The art that plays with art* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 11.

attacks Sartre's *La Nausée*, implicating both (and the parodic text) as a generic tradition. The representation of the protagonists' *bavardage* as attacks (*crises*) is in direct reference to *La Nausée*, as is clear from an intertextual reading of the conditions under which these occur:

Ce fut donc vers la fin d'une après-midi de dimanche où j'éprouvai une sensation d'ennui particulièrement déprimante que je me décidai brusquement à quitter ma chambre et à aller piquer une tête à la plage voisine. [...] Je ne m'attendrais pas si longuement sur l'état d'euphorie où je me complaisais si je n'avais eu lieu de croire, une heure après, qu'il fut le prologue et en quelque sorte la source de la première manifestation de mon mal sous sa forme active.<sup>589</sup>

Roquentin's first bout of the Nausea had begun:

Samedi les gamins jouaient aux ricochets et je voulais lancer, comme eux, un caillou dans la mer. À ce moment-là, je me suis arrêté, j'ai laissé tomber le caillou et je suis parti. [...] Ce qui s'est passé en moi n'a pas laissé de traces claires. Il y avait quelque chose que j'ai vu et qui m'a dégouté, mais je ne sais plus si je regardais la mer ou le galet.<sup>590</sup>

The resolution of both crises is likewise brought about in a public garden, sitting on a bench under a tree, where the bavard first achieves "un véritable sentiment de détente et de sécurité", a parodic reference to Roquentin's famous public garden revelation.<sup>591</sup> So as Roquentin realised that the Nausea *is* consciousness, *Le Bavard* suggests that consciousness *is* *bavardage*.

The representation of this *bavardage* as an illness Forêts now parodies, implicating Dostoevsky and in Sartre alike in their respective representation of consciousness as an illness. *Le Bavard* thus deconstructs existential

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<sup>589</sup> Forêts, *Le Bavard*, p. 13-15.

<sup>590</sup> Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*, p 6.

<sup>591</sup> Forêts, *Le Bavard*, p. 94; Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*, pp. 150-160.



hyperconsciousness as an aesthetic stance and a slight of hand:

Or à présent, inexplicablement délivré d'une telle hantise et toutes choses cessant de m'apparaître sous un angle tragique, rien ne m'empêchait de jouir en toute tranquillité d'un lieu où je ne me sentais plus traqué ni menacé et que l'évocation de tout un passé dont il était le cadre douait d'un bouleversant prestige en raison de ce qu'il lui conférait de lointain et de printanier.<sup>592</sup>

There is a clear suggestion that existential angst is an aesthetic perspective, a mere perversion of romantic aesthetic rapture. The parodic enters into play when the narrator confesses to the falseness of this contraption:

Sans doute, il m'est trop habituel de tenir mes faiblesses pour des maladies insolites sur lesquelles aucun traitement n'a de pouvoir, et dont je dois me contenter de suivre l'évolution avec une curiosité impuissante (...) En fait, c'est presque ridicule, cette obstination à me croire gravement atteint quand j'ai le cafard, quand une sombre jalousie me dévore, quand une nouvelle révélation de mon insuffisance me donne l'envie de me fourrer sous terre.<sup>593</sup>

Much has already been made of the fact that the actual content of the protagonist's central outburst of gratuitous *bavardage* has been omitted from the novel. Post-modern critics were keen to read this as a telling silence, representative of emptiness inherent to language.<sup>594</sup> However, the content is not so absent as the post-modernists wished it to be. The content is clearly and repeatedly described as a confession, and a scandalous confession, which no one would wish to hear.<sup>595</sup> Confessional monologues are then discussed at great length as a lack of "hygiène mentale" and attempts to disguise this as an illness

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<sup>592</sup> Forêts, *Le Bavard*, p. 94.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>594</sup> See, for example, Philip Beitchman, *I am a process with no subject* (Florida: Univ. Florida Press, 1988), p. 185; Maurice Blanchot, "La Parole vaine" in *L'Amitié* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), pp. 141-145; Eleanor Kaufman, *The delirium of praise: Bataille, Blanchot, Deleuze* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001), pp. 20-22.

<sup>595</sup> Forêts, *Le Bavard*, pp. 62, 63, 65, 67, 71.

are brutally derided.<sup>596</sup> The intertextual existential malady in question is not a nausea but a linguistic incontinence.

In *Le Bavard*, Sartre's contraption of Roquentin's diary as documentation of a crisis is parodied throughout: "si j'ai bien promis d'étudier consciencieusement et sans détours tout le mécanisme de mes crises, je n'ai pas l'ambition de tout rapporter."<sup>597</sup> The notion of documenting changing states of mind is further problematised by the fact that the protagonist-narrator of *Le Bavard* later confesses to having embellished or invented many if not all of these. The speaker's discourse is further coloured by reminders of his state of enibriation.<sup>598</sup> In the closing pages he finally confesses to having falsely represented his own gratuitous desire to speak as a malady: "mes dissertations sur le caractère clinique de mon vice que je me déclarais pleinement satisfait; quelqu'un a pu sans rire m'entendre parler de ce que je qualifie pompeusement de crise?"<sup>599</sup> If the direct parody of the novel of existential crisis were not clear enough, the narrator continues:

La vérité, c'est qu'à court d'imagination et pourtant peu désireux de me taire, je n'ai rien trouvé de mieux que de révéler mon escroquerie à ceux qui en étaient les victimes, et vous avez vous que je n'étais guère disposé à vous faire grâce d'aucun détail [...] je parlais, je parlais, quelle jouissance! Et je parle encore.<sup>600</sup>

Of course, this parody extends to *Le Bavard* itself: it does not lie outwith the tradition that it parodies. Kaufman has asserted that:

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<sup>596</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid., pp. 29, 94.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid., pp. 153-4.

<sup>600</sup> Ibid., pp. 156.

*Le Bavard* might be considered as a *roman à thèse* that marks a notable departure from the Sartrean model. Rather than staging characters as mouthpieces for specific philosophical positions, *Le Bavard* depicts a central character who is of philosophical significance not for what he says but for the way he says it.<sup>601</sup>

While Kaufman's reading of *Le Bavard* is correct, her reading of *La Nausée* is mistaken: as the above discussion has stressed, the phenomenological stance that Roquentin's narrative represents is revealed precisely through novelistic poetics. *Le Bavard* writes specifically into the self-same tradition as *La Nausée* and *Notes from Underground*, using intertextual references in order to subvert the novel of existential crisis from within.

*Le Bavard* can also be read as a parody of the representation of perception of *La Nausée*. The narrator tells that:

la double action de regarder et d'écouter s'accompagnant depuis longtemps pour moi d'une émotion très spéciale [...] Aurait-on alors cherché à m'arracher au doux vertige que me procurait une telle contemplation, peut-être aurais-je réagi violemment par instinct de défense et répondu aux questions les plus inoffensives par des paroles ou des gestes blessants.<sup>602</sup>

Modernist poetics of perception such as that of Sartre's novel are here being clearly parodied. The passage is followed by a sequence of ironic misperceptions, when the bavard diagnoses himself with acute depression on noticing his own tears following a physical beating; with "anguish and desolation" on perceiving himself to be groaning, etc.<sup>603</sup> The protagonist then describes voluntarily cultivating these misinterpreted feelings of melancholy and anguish by contemplating the "ruisseau nauséabond de mon péché" before claiming that the

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<sup>601</sup> Kaufman, *The delirium of praise: Bataille, Blanchot, Deleuze*, p. 20.

<sup>602</sup> Forêts, *Le Bavard*, p. 97.

<sup>603</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113, 115.

aesthetic rapture experienced on hearing his favourite pieces of music is the way he can achieve his personal summit.<sup>604</sup>

Assis seul dans un café à trois violons et un mauvais piano exécutent un morceau en vogue [...] il m'arrive d'être envahi par un délire de tristesse ou de joie auquel je ne puis honnêtement donner mon approbation [...] Aussi me suis-je exercé à demeurer sourd à ce qui, sous couleur d'exalter ma sensibilité, ne faisait de moi qu'un absurde pleurnicheur, mais hélas! j'ai la tête trop chaude<sup>605</sup>

Roquentin's aesthetic rapture at popular music seems to be referenced here. The added suggestion of drunkenness further undermines the revelations of *Le Bavard*. Alcohol was far from absent in *La Nausée*. However, in *Le Bavard* this connection between the chemically altered state of consciousness and the existential revelation (in the parody, *bavardage*) becomes overt to the point of ridicule.<sup>606</sup> This is part of a much larger ideological disparity underpinning the three novels. In Sartre's novel, the subjectivity of the narrator supersedes objectivity, as in the description of the sea of hats above, or of the estranged face in the mirror. In *Le Bavard* this is constantly parodied. The narrator describes his own subjective experience. However, objectivity is constantly round the corner waiting to discredit this. Drunkenness serves this purpose, as do the narrator's constant vain lies.<sup>607</sup>

*Le Bavard*'s primary parodic method is thus to confront subjectivism with objectivity. Such a parody of the existential novel is somewhat naïve. It operates

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<sup>604</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid., pp. 122-3.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid., pp. 83, 86-7.

<sup>607</sup> Chambers identified in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* "the turning point that opened the spigot for modern outpourings of unreliability" (see Chambers, *Parody: The art that plays with art*, p. 148). As such, Forêts is parodying a tradition at its root.

by confronting perception with reality and equating subjective experience with lies or delusions. As such, *Le Bavard*'s workings as a parody of subjectivism can perhaps be better informed by Ivanov's theory of the novel-tragedy as opposed to the Blanchotian anti-novel. Ivanov's conception of the novel-tragedy, which he identified as Dostoevsky's break from the European tradition, departed from the grounds that the European novel, from Quixote to Karenina, was ideologically driven to dramatise the disunity between the individual and the collective; between subjective experience and objective reality.<sup>608</sup> Ivanov identified Dostoevsky as a historic, innovative deviation from this ideology in that, in Dostoevsky, it is not objectivity but inter-subjectivity that transcends and presides over the subjective. Forêts's *Le Bavard* can thus be read as a parodic backlash from the camp of the quixotic ideology that Dostoevsky (and, following him, the existential novel) was subverting. *Le Bavard* constantly confronts the reader with an unproblematic disparity between the subjective experience and the objective world, the narrator's lies and dilusions being parodically transparent.

The fact that *Le Bavard* constitutes such a direct parody of *Notes from Underground* and *La Nausée* indicates that the two works were by this stage received at least to some degree as a unified novelistic tradition. It is also indicative of the status of *Notes from Underground* as a text to contend with and a historical force that it provoked direct parodic attention. In neglecting *Le Bavard*'s intertextual dimension and its positioning within the context of

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<sup>608</sup> Ilya Kliger, "Dostoevsky and the Novel-Tragedy: Genre and Modernity in Ivanov, Pumpyansky and Bakhtin," *PMLA* 126, no. 1 (2011), pp. 75-76.; Robert Bird, "Understanding Dostoevsky: A Comparison of Russian Hermeneutic Theories," *Dostoevsky Studies, New Series V* (2001), p. 135.

existential fiction, post-modern critics falsified numerous elements in their drive to (post-)modernise the text. Avni could not have been further from the mark in seeing in *Le Bavard* a post-modern, Heidegger-informed conception of truth as a becoming rather than an existent.<sup>609</sup> The fact is that the ideology of the text is the opposite, a step back from existential discourse on inter-subjectivity to a pre-dating conflict of reality and interpretation that serves to affirm the former by constantly parodying the latter.

The anti-novel that Bataille and Blanchot so appreciated in the work is no less pertinent for the fact that its negation is directed rather than entirely reflexive, or rather, is reflexive towards a tradition rather than only to itself and fiction in general. The closing pages of the work reveal that the text itself was an example of an extended *crise de bavardage* and furthermore an entirely untruthful one.<sup>610</sup> This final confession is affected by the reminder that it too is not impervious to the same denunciation, *ad infinitum*. The narrator's reminders of the possibility that his narrative is comprised of lies is not the "silence parlant" that Blanchot chose to see in it, since internal suggestions of non-verity by no means nullify a narrative. What such disclaimers do achieve is a further problematisation of *Le Bavard's* already slippery status as parody. In so doing, *Le Bavard* also takes the issue of narrative authenticity beyond previous 'romantic' existential fiction, towards a more post-modern, ironic and paradoxical conception of authenticity, as irresolvable and unattainable, the novel ending: "telle est ma puérilité que je

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<sup>609</sup> Ora Avni, "Silence, vérité et lecture dans l'œuvre de Louis-René Des Forêts," *MLN* 102, no. 4 (1987), pp. 879-880.

<sup>610</sup> Forêts, *Le Bavard*, p. 142.

me réjouis à l'idée que ma revanche consistera à le laisser toujours ignorer si je mentais encore quand je prétendais mentir. Que pourrais-je encore dire?"<sup>611</sup>

### **Albert Camus**

Albert Camus's *La Chute* is the next in the cycle of French existentialist rewritings of *Notes from Underground*. A number of comparative studies have been dedicated to Camus's interaction with Dostoevsky. Camus's active and productive contemplation of the Russian novelist spanned his entire adult life.<sup>612</sup> As early as 1937, he directed a production of Jacques Copeau's *Frères Karamazov* with the Théâtre de L'Équipe, staged the following year, Camus himself performing the role of Ivan. He later recalled this as the favourite role of his career, adding: "je m'exprimais directement en le jouant."<sup>613</sup> As observed above Copeau's adaptation had somewhat accentuated Ivan as an enigmatic romantic hero.<sup>614</sup> It shall be shown that Camus's conception of justice was directly influenced by Ivan's discourse. At the other extremity of Camus's career, his final work prior to his death, is a stage adaptation of Dostoevsky's *Devils*. Dostoevsky's fiction thus literally frames Camus's oeuvre. Camus's two major philosophical works both contain substantial sections dedicated to Dostoevsky's

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<sup>611</sup> Ibid., p. 160. This closing sentence also echoes the enigmatic ending of *Notes from Underground*: the narrator's decision to stop narrating, followed by the author's assurance that he did not in fact stop.

<sup>612</sup> Camus pinpoints his discovery of Dostoevsky at the age of 20 (1933); see 'Pour Dostoïevski' in Camus, *Œuvres complètes*, IV, p. 590.

<sup>613</sup> 'Interview à Paris Théâtre' (1958) in *ibid.*, IV, p. 578.

<sup>614</sup> See pages 99-100 of the current thesis.

fiction, while his major novels have all been duly discussed by numerous critics in terms of their intertextual dialogue with Dostoevsky.<sup>615</sup> Among them, *La Chute*, Camus's final novel, has proved the richest terrain.<sup>616</sup> What remains to be achieved, however, is to integrate Camus's *La Chute* into the broader intertextual discourse between Dostoevsky and the French novel of existential crisis that concerns this chapter, and to assess the Camusian reading of Dostoevsky in the broader context of Dostoevsky's French reception, particularly the points of contact between Camus's readings and those of his predecessors.

Gide, Shestov and Berdyaev were all factors in the development of Camus's reading of Dostoevsky. Camus speaks of loving Gide "boundlessly" and of Shestov as a major influence, while Berdyaev's writings on Dostoevsky are quoted in his *Carnets*.<sup>617</sup> Sartre's *La Nausée* and *Le Mur* have also been identified as major influences on Camus's thought and writing.<sup>618</sup> It is in Camus's *La Chute*, his final novel, that all of these threads come together, making it the most pertinent of his texts in terms of the intertextual discourse analysed in the current study. It is also noteworthy that Blanchot posited *Le Bavard* as a

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<sup>615</sup> Two studies appeared in the 1990s by Davison and Dunwoodie, both of which take the form of intellectual biographies through the lense of Camus's thinking and writing on Dostoevsky. See Ray Davison, *Camus: The Challenge of Dostoevsky* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997); Peter Dunwoodie, *Une histoire ambivalente: le dialogue Camus-Dostoïevski* (Paris: Nizet, 1996). There are also important comparative observations throughout René Girard, *Critique dans un souterrain* (Paris: Age de l'homme, 1976); *L'Etranger* has received attention in relation to *Crime and Punishment*, (see relevant chapters of the above cited, in addition to Fridlender, *Dostoievskii i mirovaia literatura*, pp. 276-294).

<sup>616</sup> Kirk and Gambert have both dedicated in-depth studies specifically to *La Chute* in relation to *Notes from Underground*: Justyna Gambert, "La Confession du je occidental: *Notes d'un souterrain* de F.M. Dostoïevski et *La Chute* d'A. Camus," *Revue de littérature comparée* 1, no. 341 (2012), pp. 25-49; Kirk, *Dostoievskij and Camus: the themes of Consciousness, Isolation, Freedom and Love*.

<sup>617</sup> Camus, *Œuvres complètes*, IV, p. 1184.; Sergei Leonidovich Fokin, *Alber Kamiu. Roman. Filosofiiia. Zhizn'* (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 1999), p. 19.

<sup>618</sup> Fokin, *Alber Kamiu. Roman. Filosofiiia. Zhizn'*, pp. 105-113.



further key hypotext to *La Chute*.<sup>619</sup>

### **Dostoevsky and *La Chute***

It is clear from the frequent references and observations in Camus's *Carnets* that Russian thought, literature and politics were a preoccupation for him in the 30s and 40s. That Camus's thought was interrogating specifically that of Dostoevsky during the writing of *La Chute* cannot be doubted: his *Carnets* cite towards the end of 1948: "Un homme conscient, dit Dostoeïevski, peut-il se respecter tant soit peu?"<sup>620</sup> This question, so fundamental to Dostoevsky's fiction and central specifically to *Notes from Underground*, would constitute the interrogation of *La Chute*, published the following year: both works are bleak interrogations of the possibility of humanism from the perspective of the self-aware individual.

Irina Kirk has made the convincing case that Camus's *La Chute*'s parodic relation to existentialism was parallel to *Notes from Underground*'s relation to Chernyshevsky.<sup>621</sup> Both *Notes from Underground* and *La Chute* share a slippery, parodic, but nonetheless polemical drive, directed against rationalist, progressionist and humanist theories. In *Notes from Underground* the utilitarianist

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<sup>619</sup> Blanchot writes: "ce monologue [Le Bavard] auquel le récit de Camus (*La Chute*) parût avoir emprunté quelque peu, nous donne l'idée la plus forte des rapports ambigus entre lecteur et auteur" (see Blanchot, *L'Amitié*, p. 142). It seems, however, significantly more plausible and certainly more intertextually demonstrable, that the connection between the texts relates back to their common hypotext: *Notes from Underground*.

<sup>620</sup> Camus, *Œuvres complètes*, II, p. 1118.

<sup>621</sup> Kirk, *Dostoevskij and Camus: the themes of Consciousness, Isolation, Freedom and Love*, p. 33.

and socialist thinking of the 1850s was the target, while in *La Chute* it was Sartre's increasingly Marxist existentialism. As Girard has observed, both *Notes from Underground* and *La Chute* represent watersheds in the intellectual biographies of the two authors: a violent and scathing overcoming of an ideology once held.<sup>622</sup> More specifically, both authors had already been shunned as reactionaries by the movements they now parody.<sup>623</sup> As Gambert asserts in her recent study of the two works:

Camus vu par les Sartriens, Dostoïevski par les Occidentalistes radicaux, chacun de nos deux confessions met donc en œuvre un travail polyphonique de désintégration de l'image d'un Moi nécessairement spéculaire, réfléchi dans le regard de l'Autre-juge.<sup>624</sup>

The significance of this parallel for the current thesis lies in Camus's return specifically to the Dostoevskian hypotext in order to highlight where Sartre's thought has turned away from the existential track and back towards the rationalist humanism it had originally set out against.

Camus opens this polemic via another important intertext: the thought of Descartes. *La Chute*'s Dutch setting expressly brings existential polemics to the land of Descartes' refuge. Clamence refers to himself, in passing, as a Cartesian Frenchman and notes that Descartes' Dutch residence now houses an insane asylum.<sup>625</sup> In addition to this, Davison and Kirk have interpreted Camus's Amsterdam as a self-conscious surrogate for Dostoevsky's St Petersburg, with its grimy taverns, misty canals, its uncanny, demonic, stagnant and stifling

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<sup>622</sup> Girard, *Critique dans un souterrain*, p. 13.

<sup>623</sup> Gambert, "La Confession du je occidental: *Notes d'un souterrain* de F.M. Dostoïevski et *La Chute* d'A. Camus," p. 30.

<sup>624</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>625</sup> Camus, *Œuvres complètes*, III, p. 750.

atmosphere.<sup>626</sup> Amsterdam was also notably Peter the Great's prototype for St Petersburg. The contrast in setting to Camus's other, Mediterranean novels is striking. Camus indeed saw the urbanisation of literature as a Dostoevskian innovation:

On cherche en vain les paysages dans la grande littérature européenne depuis Dostoïevski. L'histoire n'explique ni l'univers naturel qui était avant elle, ni la beauté qui est au-dessus d'elle. Elle a donc choisi de les ignorer. Alors que Platon contenait tout, le non-sens, la raison et le mythe, nos philosophes ne contiennent rien que le non-sens de la raison, parce qu'ils ont fermé les yeux sur le reste. La taupe médite.<sup>627</sup>

The meditating mole, recalling Dostoevsky's hyper-conscious subterranean 'mouse', represents modernity's previously mentioned movement indoors, into isolation, and introspection.<sup>628</sup> Camus situated this turning point in literary history specifically at Dostoevsky. This is significant when considering the connection between philosophical thematics and their spacial representation in *La Chute*, in relation to its Dostoevskian, Nietzschean and Sartrean hypotexts. As observed of Hilbert in Sartre's 'Erostrate', a Nietzschean valorisation of altitude distinguishes Clamence from the underground man:

Oui, je ne me suis jamais senti à l'aise que dans les situations élevées. Jusque dans le détail de la vie, j'avais besoin d'être au-dessus. Je préférerais l'autobus au métro, les calèches aux taxis, les terrasses aux entresols.<sup>629</sup>

Rapturing on heights and vertigo, Clamence, establishing his past self (even explicitly) as a "surhomme,"<sup>630</sup> states that: "Les soutes, les cales, les souterrains,

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<sup>626</sup> Davison, *Camus: The Challenge of Dostoevsky*, pp. 163, 167; Kirk, *Dostoevskij and Camus*, pp. 115, 119.

<sup>627</sup> Camus, *Œuvres complètes*, III, p. 599.

<sup>628</sup> Ferguson, "The flâneur on and off the streets of Paris," p. 39. On the underground man as proto-modern see, for example, Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: a literary guide* (Basingstoke Macmillan, 1995), pp. 8, 18.

<sup>629</sup> Camus, *Œuvres complètes*, III, pp. 706-707.

<sup>630</sup> *Ibid.*, III, p. 709.

les grottes, les gouffres me faisaient horreur.”<sup>631</sup> Spatially, this places Clamence’s discourse on the same ‘vertical’ structural axis as Dostoevsky and Nietzsche’s. The ‘fall’ of the title thus takes on a further intertextual nuance in addition to its obvious biblical one: a fall from Nietzsche’s vertiginous heights to Dostoevsky’s underground.

This is presented as a choice. Clamence has wilfully opted for a particular landscape, the ‘infernal’ circles of canals and a city below sea level against his more Nietzschean instincts:

La vérité est que je me force à aimer les canaux. Ce que j’aime le plus au monde, c’est la Sicile, vous voyez bien, et encore du haut de l’Etna, dans la lumière, à condition de dominer l’île et la mer.<sup>632</sup>

The narrator thus professes a Nietzschean predilection to physically transcend the landscape yet chooses to make his home in a city below sea-level. Like Hilbert, Clamence becomes a pathetic rendering of the Nietzschean superman. Clamence has the same need of the other as the underground man. The crucial narratological disparity between *Notes from Underground* and *La Chute* concerns the presence of the interlocutor and consequent orality of the latter. Like Dostoevsky and Forêts, Camus’s narrative employs the device of professed *bavardage* (“Je suis un bavard, hélas!”<sup>633</sup>). The diegetic orality of Clamence’s discourse is counteracted by stylistic bookishness (the narrator employs the imperfect subjunctive from the first page, observing diegetically the wince of his interlocutor-reader,<sup>634</sup> while the written ‘notes’ of the underground man employ ellipsis, repetition and

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<sup>631</sup> Ibid., III, p. 707.

<sup>632</sup> Ibid., III, p. 716.

<sup>633</sup> Ibid., III, p. 698.

<sup>634</sup> Ibid., III, p. 698.

exclamation in imitation of orality. This ambiguity brings to the fore the ambiguous relationship between narrating voice and reader as listener.

*La Chute* thus enters into existential debate with *Notes from Underground* on the same narratological plane as *La Nausée* and *Le Bavard*: that of the self and the other. Narrative in each constitutes an act of confessional outreach. *Le Bavard* was observed to parody the dialogical aspect of Dostoevsky's interrupted monologue, while *La Nausée*'s monologism is indicative of Roquentin's irrevocable dissociation from the other. *La Chute* is a narratological step in the opposite direction: a literal rendering of Dostoevskian dialogism, insofar as the formal interlocutor of the *Notes* is here vaguely diegetically embodied. In Dostoevsky's novella, the abstract interlocutor and interrupter of his monologue is the rational voice of *vsemstvo*. In Camus's text, the interrupter represents a singular rather than a collective reader, and represents no particular stance.<sup>635</sup> However, Clamence subverts this in the closing section of the novel by revealing that he constantly seeks out and lures listeners into this narrative compliance.

*La Chute*, like *Le Bavard*, is also a direct parody of *La Nausée*. The image of the disillusioned humanist-cum-'penitent judge' is, as Camus affirmed, a parodic representation of Sartrean existentialism and the paradox contained in any notion of value systems founded on phenomenological ontology: "L'existentialisme chez nous aboutit à une théologie sans dieu et à une scolastique dont il était inévitable

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<sup>635</sup> Blanchot's analysis of the work in "La Chute: La Fuite," interprets Camus's narrative as a dialogue enveloped in a monologue, but a doubly problematised one: "ses confidences ne confient rien, de même que l'interlocuteur vers qui il est tourné est un mur de brouillard dans lequel ses paroles s'enfoncent, sans avoir été entendues et comme si elles n'avaient pas été prononcées. Que reste-t-il? L'ironie." See Blanchot, *L'Amitié*, p. 229.

qu'elles finissent par susciter des régimes d'inquisition."<sup>636</sup> Camus's choice to attack this by returning to the Dostoevskian hypotext is not arbitrary, as he stated in the same interview:

Si les prémisses de l'existentialisme se trouvent, comme je le crois, chez Pascal, Nietzsche et Kierkegaard ou Chestov, alors je suis d'accord avec eux. Si ses conclusions sont celles de nos existentialists, je ne suis pas d'accord, car elles sont contradictoires aux prémisses.<sup>637</sup>

*La Chute* is thus explicitly an attack on the contemporary existentialist movement in France, from the perspective of existential thought. The significance of the protagonist's self-imposed exile to a Northern European port-town setting again becomes clear. Camus's most Dostoevskian (and most existential) novel reconfronts Sartrean existentialism with the fundamental problem at the origins of existential thought. This is the problem of the absurd, represented in *La Chute* by the disembodied laughter. This follows Clamence as a praying reminder of an intuitively sensed indignity inherent to an absurd human existence.

The connection between this disembodied laughter and suicide is the absurd problematic that Camus developed in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. The 'Fall' from humanist naivety is a representation of the disillusionment associated with the revelation of the absurd. Fruitful comparisons may be observed between *La Chute* and Dostoevsky's own reworking of the myth of the Fall in *Dream of a Ridiculous Man*. In the Dostoevskian version, the myth is embedded as a dream

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<sup>636</sup> Albert Camus, "Dernière interview" in *Oeuvres complètes*, IV, p. 662. It may be observed that Berdyaev said almost the same thing: "I regard my type of philosophy as 'existentialist', even though one should qualify this by pointing out that true existentialist philosophy is represented by St Augustine, Pascal, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche rather than Heidegger, Jaspers or Sartre" (see Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality: an essay in autobiography*, p. 93).

<sup>637</sup> Camus, "Dernière interview" in *Oeuvres complètes*, IV, p. 663.

in a framing narrative in which the protagonist is transformed from cynicism to holy ridicule by a brush with suicide, the dream itself and an encounter with a destitute child. The novella concludes “А ту маленькую девочку я отыскал... И пойду! И пойду!”<sup>638</sup> The Camusian text involves the suicide of another, to which the protagonist bears silent witness, resulting in his fall from humanism to cynicism (the inverse trajectory of the Dostoevskian protagonist of *Dream of a Ridiculous Man*). The centrality of the problem of suicide (the subjective potential decision as to whether life is worth living) in Camus’s conception of humanism is comparable to the problem of the suffering child in Dostoevsky’s thought.<sup>639</sup> The crucial difference is that Camus’s is a reflexive, rational value judgement of one’s own life, in isolation from the other. As such it is ego-centred while Dostoevsky’s response takes a supra-rational inter-subjective empathy as its foundation.

The absurd had been the starting point of Camus’s philosophical engagement with Dostoevsky with *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* in 1942, the essay famously commencing: “Il n’y a qu’un problème philosophique vraiment sérieux: c’est le suicide.” Camus’s initial ground of enquiry is the same as Dostoevsky’s: human mortality implies subjective meaninglessness.<sup>640</sup> The crucial distinction is that for Dostoevsky, this constituted a proof of human immortality while for Camus it

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<sup>638</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, XXV, p. 119.

<sup>639</sup> It is noteworthy that Camus spoke of inheriting the theme of child suffering directly from Dostoevsky, and that were it not from Dostoevsky, this would have been absent from his thought (see Camus, *Œuvres complètes*, IV, p. 547).

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 230. It is noteworthy that this essay on Dostoevsky was added to the volume initially in replacement of an essay on Kafka that was unpublishable under the occupation. The idea that the two studies might be ‘interchangeable’ is in itself of interest. Camus subjected both writers, along with Kierkegaard, to a similar existential reading.

is the inescapable condition of the Absurd.<sup>641</sup> In face of the potential conclusion that life is indeed not worth living, Camus raises Kirilov's self-destruction to the status of an event (albeit fictional) of genuine historical significance.<sup>642</sup> Camus's reading follows Gide's insofar as Kirilov's act is seen as a genuine surpassing of the human condition, its ironic and grotesque side downplayed, or rather, rehabilitated from the perspective of the Absurd. Camus, however, goes a significant step further than Gide in seeing in Kirilov's act a genuine starting point for a paradoxical nihilistic humanism. Gide's Kirilov had killed himself in order to surpass his own humanity; Camus's does so in order that others might do so.<sup>643</sup> What Dostoevsky intended as a grotesque parody of atheist humanism, *reductio ad absurdum*, Camus's absurdist humanism re-appropriates. Kirilov is thus reinstated as a prophet of modern nihilism: the liberating force that permits the subsequent "everything is permitted" of Ivan.

This absurd humanism follows Ivan Karamazov's sentimental validation of justice over God, understood in Camus as the authority of both dogma and fact: "La lutte de la justice contre la vérité est ouverte ici pour la première fois."<sup>644</sup> Absurdist humanism recognises neither rational nor dogmatic approaches to ethics. This irrationalist reading of Ivan's revolt (as a sentiment of justice in revolt against truth) differs radically from Gide's reading of Ivan as a representative of intellectualism. It also contains the seed of the dispute that

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<sup>641</sup> "А высшая идея на земле лишь одна и именно — идея о бессмертии души человеческой, ибо все остальные «высшие» идеи жизни, которыми может быть жив человек, лишь из нее одной вытекают," (Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, XXIV, p. 48).

<sup>642</sup> Camus, *Œuvres complètes*, I, p. 224.

<sup>643</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp. 293-4.

<sup>644</sup> *Ibid.*, III, p. 108.



would eventually divide Camus and Sartre. Revolt, for Camus, is the essence of freedom. It is for this reason that in Kant he recognised only negative freedom, freedom from.<sup>645</sup>

Dostoevsky's conception of the existential predicament, as expressed in his letters, differed from Pascal's 'thinking reed' in recognizing reason itself as a source of suffering rather than a source of dignity.<sup>646</sup> Sartre and Camus both follow this conception, of the overdeveloped consciousness as an illness. Camus, unlike Sartre, retained a degree of hope in the unthinking, the sensory and the pre-rational, that which Sartre had portrayed in such a negative light in *La Nausée*.

Camus's departure from Shestov and existential thought was set out in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. He termed "suicide philosophique" the turn from the revelation of the Absurd to God. Dostoevsky's, Kierkegaard's and Shestov's leaps of Absurd faith ("если б кто мне доказал, что Христос вне истины, и действительно было бы, что истина вне Христа, то мне лучше хотелось бы оставаться со Христом, нежели с истиной."<sup>647</sup>) Camus rejected. The rubric he applied to Shestov, the "admirable monotonie" has remained attached to the Russian philosopher henceforth. It is of significance that this dates from Camus's *Carnets*, as an observation concerning a host of religious thinkers and texts.<sup>648</sup> Prior to

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<sup>645</sup> Ibid., II, p. 1103.

<sup>646</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (Paris: Seuil, 1962), p. 67.

<sup>647</sup> 'Pis'mo H. D. Fonvizinoi, ian-fev 1854' in Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, XXVIII, I, p. 176.

<sup>648</sup> The observation in the diary extends to the monotony of Shestov, Pascal, Nietzsche, the Coran and the Bible, Buddhist texts, Proust and Marquis de Sade, of last works of Tolstoy. See Camus, *Œuvres complètes*, II, p. 931.

this, it dates to Gide's '6ème lettre à Angèle.'<sup>649</sup>

With *La Chute*, Camus realines his thought, on a fundamental level, with the existential interrogations of Dostoevsky's underground man, those of Shestov and those of Nietzsche. Blanchot's essay 'La Chute: La Fuite' brings these concerns to the fore:

Mais que fuit-il? Qu'est ce que cette fuite? Le mot est mal choisi pour plaire. Le courage est pourtant d'accepter de fuir plutôt que de vivre quiètement et hypocritement en de faux refuges. Les valeurs, les patries, les religions et ces certitudes privées que notre vanité et notre complaisance à nous-mêmes nous octroient généreusement, sont autant de séjours trompeurs que le monde aménage pour ceux qui pensent se tenir ainsi debout et au repos, parmi les choses stables.<sup>650</sup>

This rejection of refuge, of the comfort of  $2 \times 2 = 4$  in Dostoevsky's text, is also a rejection of Sartre's early ideal of transcendence and his later ideal of engagement.

Camus's rift with French Existentialism had begun with *L'Homme révolté* – his attempt at a conceptual history of Revolt – and its conclusion regarding the famous *pensée de midi*. Camus's vision of a conciliation, however tense, between the rational and the irrational alienated him from both existential and existentialist camps. His discussion of Dostoevskian revolt is of particular interest in this regard: it was in Ivan Kramazov that Camus pinpointed Dostoevsky's "vrai progrès" with regards to the history of revolt, identifying in Ivan's discourse and demise the question "peut-on vivre et se maintenir dans la révolte?"<sup>651</sup> Like

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<sup>649</sup> See page 79, footnote 206 of the current thesis.

<sup>650</sup> Blanchot, *L'Amitié*, p. 232.

<sup>651</sup> Camus, *Œuvres complètes*, III, p. 110.

Sartre, Camus homes in on Ivan's "tout est permis" as a historical event, which he identifies this as the origin of contemporary nihilism.<sup>652</sup> For Camus, Ivan is in a sense trapped in his revolt:

La lutte de la justice contre la vérité est ouverte ici pour la première fois; elle n'aura plus de cesse. Ivan, solitaire, donc moraliste, se suffira d'une sorte de don-quistisme métaphysique.<sup>653</sup>

The quixotic aspect Camus here refers to is that Ivan's battle is essentially absurd: in the face of universal injustice, subjectively experienced, he can *do* positively nothing of consequence. What served as a fairly unproblematic atheistic starting point for Sartre's humanist existentialism is for Camus far more conceptually complex. Camus, unlike Sartre, does not turn a blind eye on Ivan's recognition of the fundamental paradox between his simultaneous acceptance and rejection of the world and creator.<sup>654</sup> Where Sartre's character had famously declared that "L'enfer, c'est les autres", Camus proclaimed in his *Carnets*, in much more Dostoevskian terms, that, "L'enfer, c'est le paradis plus la mort", clearly in reference to the same inherent injustice of mortal existence that Russian existential thought from Dostoevsky to Shestov had grappled with.<sup>655</sup> Camus's understanding of the Ivan and Alyosha's debate is elucidated by a later assertion in the *Carnets* that: "cela m'ennuierait beaucoup que l'on me force à choisir absolument entre saint Augustin et Hegel. J'ai l'impression qu'il doit y avoir une vérité supportable entre les deux."<sup>656</sup>

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<sup>652</sup> Ibid., III, pp. 108-9.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid., III, p. 108.

<sup>654</sup> Ibid., III, p. 109.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid., II, p. 1145.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid., II, p. 659.

Through his final parody of *La Chute*, Camus had dramatized his dispute with existentialism by returning to its existential, Dostoevskian origins in *Notes from Underground*. Camus's life was to end abruptly just two years after this final novelistic tribute to Dostoevsky, but not before yet another, theatrical tribute: his adaptation of *Les Possédés* in 1959. *Les Possédés* occupies a special place in the oeuvre of "Camus-adapteur," as Ouadia has discussed, insofar as it is his only project of theatre adaptation taken on entirely by his own initiative and following many years of gestation, whilst all the rest were "né au hazard".<sup>657</sup> Indeed, Camus wrote of Dostoevsky's *Devils* in 1959: "je m'en suis nourri et [...] je m'y suis formé. Il y a près de vingt ans en tout cas que je vois ses personnages sur la scène."<sup>658</sup> Camus also said that, unlike most of his work, he adapted *Les Possédés* motivated by desire and personal pleasure.<sup>659</sup>

It is curious to note that, in response to the question as to why he adapted Dostoevsky's novel for the stage, Camus answers by explaining why he did not adapt Tolstoy.<sup>660</sup> While greatly appreciating both, he reads the two writers in the same dualistic terms as his predecessors. In response to the question, during an open debate, as to whether Dostoevsky can be called the father of contemporary French literature, Camus stated:

le problème de l'influence est toujours un problème délicat à traiter parce qu'on ne sait pas où elle commence ni où elle s'arrête. [...] Eh bien, je crois pouvoir dire que si une œuvre est vivante aujourd'hui parmi nous, c'est celle

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<sup>657</sup> Karima Ouadia, *Albert Camus adapteur de théâtre* (Leipzig: Le Manuscrit, 2006), p. 36.

<sup>658</sup> Camus, *Œuvres complètes*, IV, p. 537.

<sup>659</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, p. 552.

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, p. 541.

de Dostoïevski.<sup>661</sup>

Camus expressly saw his *Les Possédés* as a dramatisation of the same reading of Dostoevsky that he had presented in *L'Homme révolté*.<sup>662</sup> His justification of the project, and generally of the interest in Dostoevsky in the 1950s, was largely political: Dostoevsky was seen to have prophesised Stalinism.<sup>663</sup>

## Conclusion

It is clear that by the 1930s and 40s aspects of Dostoevsky's underground had been knitted deep into the fabric of France's existentialist literary tradition. *La Nausée* engaged subtly with the underground man's polemics, fusing a simultaneous critique of rationalism and romanticism with modernist poetics of perception. Sartre, however, returned, in the conclusion of *La Nausée*, to the romantic transcendence the underground had refuted and, in his subsequent technical writings, to rationalist ethics. *Le Bavard* was observed as a parody of *Notes from Underground* and *La Nausée*, targeting directly the dialogical poetics of the former and the subjectivist poetics of perception of the latter to confront, in turn, both radical subjectivism and inter-subjectivism with cold hard objectivity, and, as such, to re-confront the *roman-tragediia* with quixotic ideology. *La Chute* was then analysed as the concluding word in this cycle of parodies, reconfronting Sartrian existentialism with the shared Dostoevskian hypotext by means of

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<sup>661</sup> Ibid., IV, p. 545.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid. IV, p. 536.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid. IV, p. 536.

intertextual reference. Camus, through *La Chute* and all of his oeuvre, fused as it was with Dostoevskian ideas and motifs, ultimately challenged the dogmatism inherent in Sartrean existentialism's rationalistic approach to ethics, to return to an Ivan Karamazov-informed ethics of sentiment, beginning with indignation and revolt, and ending in a suprarational fraternalism.

From this analysis, two principal oppositions between religious existential thought and atheist existentialism have emerged. The first disparity pertains, of course, to the meaning of human existence. In the former, as represented by the underground man and Shestov, this is a mystic and supra-rational possibility lying beyond reach: beyond the stone wall of abstract reasoning. In Marcel and Berdiaev this supra-rational possibility is found in intersubjectivity; in Camus, the same indication is also present, if in a secular sense, though this possibility is – as with Shestov and the underground man – beyond reach. In Sartre's *La Nausée* the opposite conclusion is reached: authorship of a text is seen, over-optimistically, as authorial transcendence of contingency and imbuing of the individual self with the aspect of the necessary.

The second disparity between existential thought and existentialism emerged from their approaches to the problem of the self in relation to the other. Marcel and Ivanov's thought, and particularly their reactions to Dostoevsky's, stressed intersubjectivity and *sobornost'* as the only road out of the destructive impasse of radical subjectivism. Contrarily, Sartre's fictional and philosophical writings explored the same predicament but maintained an antagonistic conception of the relationship between self and other. Camus's *La Chute* and des Forêt's *Le Bavard*

continued this discussion through their narrative exploration of dialogism, exploiting Dostoevsky-informed interrupted monologues to highlight the impossibility of intersubjective communication.

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to trace the reception of Dostoevsky in France from initial translations and critical responses to the existential and existentialist dialogues of the 1930s and 1940s via the modernist and proto-existential readings from the turn of the century. Derély's first translation of *Crime and Punishment* was analysed in parallel to both the original and a later French translation, revealing that key, subversive themes of the original had been normalised and sanitised in translation, altering Raskolnikov's murder motive from the theoretical to the sociological. Hunger and the resultant desire to rob the pawnbroker were emphasised while Raskolnikov's greater motive, that of testing his aristocratic theory, was downplayed. Initial critics made the same modification, including Vogüé's highly influential reading. For the following two decades, Vogüé dominated the reception of Russian literature in France, playing a significant role in the way in which works were translated and disseminated, and how they were read. He contributed significantly to the development of more cosmopolitan readings of Russian literature in France. However, Vogüé reduced Dostoevsky to his earliest works, writing off his far more subversive, mature fiction on account of its cumbersome philosophical deviations: the novel was no place for philosophising and these works were moreover deemed of dubious utility in terms of providing moral instruction.

A subsequent, modern generation of readers, spearheaded by André Gide, reassessed this initial reading and rejected it violently. This generation had encountered Dostoevsky before reaching intellectual maturity. Significantly, they



were also fervent readers of Nietzsche. Increasingly, stress came to be placed on Dostoevsky's later, more morally ambiguous novels, creating an 'immoralist' Dostoevsky in opposition to Vogüé's 'moralist' reading. Post-Nietzsche and Post-Freud, Dostoevsky's investigation of madness became a talking point among his defenders rather than his detractors. Meanwhile, what previous detractors had seen in Dostoevsky's novelistic aesthetics as barbaric formlessness, modernist readers such as Gide and Rivière identified as an aesthetics of complexity to be drawn from and integrated into the French tradition.

Gide admired Dostoevsky's ability to achieve a narrative dissolution of the self into multiple opposed ethical stances of his characters. His literary output often explored the same themes as his various critical works on Dostoevsky. An initial, 'immoralistic' stage centered around the impossibility of an ethics of self-will, in the '6<sup>e</sup> lettre à Angèle' and *L'Immoraliste*. A second stage represented a backlash against Vogüé's "religion de la souffrance" as a reduction of Dostoevsky's thought. Gide launched this directly in the brief reception history that opens his 'Dostoievski d'après sa correspondance.' He then continued it intertextually with *Les Caves du Vatican*: a parody not so much of *Crime and Punishment* as of Vogüé's reading of it – evidenced by Vogüé's characterised appearance in the novel as well as Gide's rewriting of Dostoevsky's ending, on which Vogüé's reading had hinged. Following the Great War and Russian Revolution, Gide's final, mature reading of Dostoevsky was influenced both by his own spiritual awakening, as described in *Numquid et tu...* and by his encounter with Shestov's philosophical interpretation. Ultimately, Gide's reading concluded where it started, with his innovative reformulation of the riddle of Kirilov: a riddle that

stimulated Gide for three decades before finally finding its fictional rewriting in Boris and La Perouse of *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*.

Russian émigré readings arrived around the time Gide's reading reached maturity. Émigré readings, cultivated in the climate of the Russian Silver Age, focused on Dostoevsky as a religious critique of positivism. Shestov's reading, from 1921, was the first in France to suggest *Notes from Underground* as the central pillar of Dostoevsky's thought – a statement Gide would soon reiterate. Shestov's 'Dostoievski et la lutte contre les évidences' homed in on proto-existential, antirationalist aspects of Dostoevsky's work. This led to Shestov's translator, friend and philosophical follower Boris de Schloezer undertaking a retranslation of the novella. The resultant translation, with its existential shading, went on to enter the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, attesting in part to its quality, in part to the positive reception of a more existentialist Dostoevsky.

Berdiaev's was a more traditionally romantic Christian reading, which did not belong to the existential tradition of Shestov's or Schloezer's. Heated debates as to the meaning of Dostoevsky's work and its place in both Russian and French literary history animated the Studio Franco-Russe, bringing about meaningful intercultural exchange via the platform of Dostoevsky's fictional world. Gabriel Marcel, immersed in this intercultural dialogue, and an enthused reader of Berdiaev, Shestov, and Ivanov, wrote a little-known essay on the representation of the self and other (I and Thou) in Ivanov's reading of Dostoevsky: a dialectic that proved essential to Marcel's developing existential philosophy.

Finally, French existentialist fiction from Sartre's *La Nausée* to Camus's *La Chute* continued to dialogue intertextually with Dostoevsky's fiction and particularly with existential readings of *Notes from Underground*. Through their intertextual dialogue with and surrounding the Dostoevskian hypotext, they employ Dostoevsky-informed monological form to explore the possibility of meaningful communication. In *La Chute*, and particularly *Le Bavard*, this is fused with an ironic pessimism that bridges Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* and developing post-modern accounts of dialogue.<sup>664</sup>

Through this analysis, a number of overarching themes have been identified, which warrant further indepth research. The first is the refracting role of 'orientalism' in the early reception of Dostoevsky as an exotic, barbaric, Asiatic artist. Given that Russian literature is, to this day, shelved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France under 'Littératures Orientales et Arts' rather than 'Littérature Étrangère' (the latter being reserved for literature authored in Western European languages), a detailed assessment of how France's perception of Russian culture has evolved as European, Oriental or otherwise, would be a crucial contribution to developing an understanding of these constructs as factors dominating the nineteenth and twentieth century reception of Russian cultural output in France.

A further research theme that this study has uncovered is that of the interwoven nature of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche's reception, both in France, from Gide's '6e

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<sup>664</sup> A significant field of future study will be the arrival of Bakhtin's reading of Dostoevsky and its impact both on the reception of Dostoevsky in France and on cultures of reading in France at large. Pitting the receptions of Dostoevsky and Bakhtin in parallel may yield significant fruits when considering the emergence, for example, of Julia Kristeva and Paul Ricoeur and their respective engagements with Dostoevsky's fiction.

letter à Angèle,' through Merezhkovsky's and Shestov's writings, through to Camus's reception of Dostoevsky. The significance of Nietzsche in the transformation of Dostoevsky from a 'moralist' to an 'immoralist' novelist has been evidenced in the current study. What remains to be assessed is the extent to which Dostoevsky's reception also refracted Nietzsche's, as was clearly the cases of Gide and Suarès. Future study could shed light on whether other key interpreters of Nietzsche in France read his work through that of Dostoevsky, as was certainly the case of the Russian reception of Nietzsche during the Silver Age and into the culture of the post-revolutionary Russian diaspora.

The current thesis carried out detailed translation analyses of two different French translations of *Crime and Punishment* and two of *Notes from Underground*. This showed clearly that early translators attempted to normalise subversive aspects of Dostoevsky's fiction, justifying this as mediation between French and Russian tastes, often referring to Dostoevsky as a barbarous, even confused author in need of improvement and clarification. The remaining translations of Dostoevsky in French from this period will doubtlessly yield further interesting fruits if subjected to modern translation analysis, as, with the exception of early studies from the 50s to 70s (methodologically focussed on assessing the 'fidelity' of translations as opposed to the specific implications of modifications) this has not been carried out. The current thesis also identified in Schloezer's canonical 1926 translation of *Notes from Underground* a clear and significant influence of Shestov's existential reading of the Russian author. Further study specifically into the wave of retranslations in the 1920s could establish whether this was an isolated example or whether this broader wave also took on an existential colouring.

The most significant finding of the current study is the extent to which Russian émigré writings on Dostoevsky did clearly contribute to the French understanding of the novelist in the 1920s and 30s, and the extent to which Gabriel Marcel, broadly recognised as one of the first French philosophers associated with the existential movement, was steeped in the intellectual culture of the Russian diaspora. Further research into intercultural dialog surrounding the Studio-Franco Russe, the Decades at Pontigny, Berdiaev's salon and other such spaces of intercultural dialogue will be essential in dispelling the myth that Russian émigré thought continued seamlessly, in the diasporic bubble, from the Silver Age and back into the Russian culture of the 1990s, when, in fact, this diasporic cultures existed in dialogue with host cultures.

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