

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (1866)

Dr Graeme Macdonald, The European Novel, November 14th 2018

Great Age of Russian Novel: 1856-80

Turgénev *A Nest of Gentlefolk* (1859)
 Fathers and Children (1862)

Goncharóv *Oblómov* (1857)

Tolstoy *War and Peace* (1863-9)
 Anna Karenina (1873-77)

Dostoevsky *Crime and Punishment* (1866)
 The Idiot (1868)
 The Devils (1872)
 The Brothers Karamazov (1880)

Apart from the political and socio-economic significance of the event, it presupposed the liberation of new and multitudinous human forces that brought new and altogether larger dimensions to the backdrop against which the literature was to be understood.

Consequently, there is in the realism and assumption of multiplicity, of spaciousness and depth, to be seen in the sheer plenitude of words or the sheer multitude of persons, lives, relationships and places which the foreground of the fiction subsumes. Hierarchies or even class differences seem blurred or diminished to the point of caricature through the literature's profound concern to enfranchise all conditions of humanity, from the highest to the humblest. Freedom, equality and brotherhood may not have existed in the reality of Russian life, but in the realism of Russian Literature they were the motive forces which determined the veracity of the realism.

Richard Freeborn, 'The Age of Realism' in Charles Moser (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature* (CUP, 1989)

This existence of a mass of lower-class readers was a new and troubling social phenomenon. Together with the prospect of an increase in untutored female reading, it was a source of anxiety for clerics, educators, liberals and politicians. France, it was thought, was reading too much, in the sense that a mass of inexperienced consumers was reading indiscriminately and without guidance. They were considered innocent readers, potentially easy prey for unscrupulous publishers and ruthless propagandists. Workers and peasants could be lured by undesirable ideas such as socialism, legitimism or Bonapartism – the name of the demon changed according to the faith of the polemicist. The problem was defined not only in terms of *what* the new readers read, but also in terms of *how* they read. They would read unwisely, it was feared, unable to distinguish falsehood, truth from fantasy. They might be tempted (in the case of women) by erotic desire and impossible romantic expectations. They would read superficially instead of purposefully without mediating and digesting their texts. The dangers, both moral and political, posed by new readers consuming a mass of cheap popular literature, were disturbing. In the debates on these issues, the social neuroses of the bourgeois were revealed. The anxious dreams of the nineteenth century bourgeois were peopled by all

those who threatened his sense of order, restraint and paternal control. Martin Lyons, *Readers and Society in Nineteenth-Century France* (Palgrave, 2001, p.11)

What ought they to do? What could they do, since she refused any kind of treatment? 'Do you know what your wife really needs?' resumed Madame Bovary senior. 'What she needs is hard work, manual labour. If she was obliged to earn her living like so many have to do, she wouldn't suffer from these vapours, which come from all these ideas she fills her head with and living such an idle life.'

'Still, she's always busy,' replied Charles.

'Huh! Busy! But doing what? Reading novels, wicked books, books against religion, full of speeches from Voltaire that make fun of priests. This is no laughing matter, my poor boy; someone who has no religion always comes to a bad end.'

So it was decided that Emma was to be prevented from reading novels.

Madame Bovary, II, VII

The control of the imagination is umbilically linked to the history of the novel. Insofar as the question of control is a formal one concerning when fiction is acceptable and what its relation may be to factual history, it also becomes an epistemological one [i.e. concerned with what knowledge is, what constitutes knowledge] concerning the nature of truth and the real with which "serious" discourses would be obliged to correspond.

Costa Lima, 'The Control of the Imagination and the Novel' in Franco Moretti (ed.) *The Novel, Vol I: History, Geography and Culture*

The radical critics set forth their own definition of realism [and] encouraged the work of radical writers done for the primary purpose of negating existing reality and pointing toward a better future [...] Dostoevsky considered himself a 'fantastic realist,' one who dealt with the crucial moments of human experience and strange personalities, who, he contended, were none the less genuine for being unusual: did not journalism offer us reports of that which was extraordinary but still real?

Richard Freeborn, 'The Nineteenth Century: The Age of Realism, 1855-80,' in Charles A. Moser ed., *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989; 248-49)

"In his article all men are divided into 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary.' Ordinary men have to live in submission, have no right to transgress the law, because, don't you see, they are ordinary. But extraordinary men have a right to commit any crime to transgress the law in any way, just because they are extraordinary. That was your idea, if I'm not mistaken?"

"What do you mean? That can't be right?" Razumikhin muttered in bewilderment.

Raskolnikov smiled again. He saw the point at once, and knew where they wanted to drive him. He decided to take up the challenge. "That wasn't quite my intention," he began simply and modestly. "Yet I admit that you have stated it almost correctly; perhaps, if you like, perfectly so." (It almost gave him pleasure to admit this.) "The only difference is that I don't contend that extraordinary people are always bound to commit breaches of morals, as you call it. In fact, I doubt whether such an argument could be published. I simply hinted that an 'extraordinary' man has the right . . . that is not an official right, but an inner right to decide in his own conscience to overstep . . . certain obstacles, and only in case it is essential for the practical fulfillment of his idea (sometimes perhaps, of benefit to the whole of humanity). You say that my article isn't definite; I am ready to make it as clear as I can." (*Crime and Punishment*, part 3, ch 5)

'I shall call to Razhumikhin of course; but not now – I shall call on him another time, on the day after I've *done* it, after that has been settled, and when everything is different . . .'

And suddenly he realised what he was saying.

'After *that*? He cried, jumping from the seat. 'But is *that* to be? Will it really happen?'

He left the seat and walked away almost at a run; he was about to turn back home, but the idea of going home suddenly appalled him: it was there, in that awful cubby hole of his, in that terrible cupboard, all *that* had been taking shape in his head for the past month! [...]

When people are in a bad state of health, their dreams are often remarkable for their extraordinary distinctness and vividness as well as for their great verisimilitude. The whole picture is sometimes utterly monstrous, but everything about it and the whole process of its presentation are so amazingly plausible, and all its details are so delicately etched and unexpected, and yet so artistically consistent with everything else in it, that the man who is dreaming it could never have invented it in real life, were he as great an artist as Pushkin or Turgenev [...]

'Good God!' he cried, 'is it possible that I will really take a hatchet, hit her on the head with it, crack her skull, slither about in warm sticky blood, break the lock, steal and shake with fear, hide myself all covered in blood and with the hatchet – Good God! Is it possible?' (*Crime and Punishment*, Pt I, Ch5)

"He murdered, and he murdered two people for a theory." (Porfiry)

Under his pillow there was a copy of the New Testament. Mechanically, he took it out. This book was hers, was the same one from which she had read to him of the raising of Lazarus. At the outset of his penal servitude he had thought she would torment him with religion, talk about the New Testament and press books on him. Much to his great surprise, however, she never once offered him a New Testament. He himself had asked for it not long before he had fallen ill, and she had brought him her copy in silence. Until now, he had never opened it.

Even now he did not open it, but a certain thought flickered through his mind: "What if her convictions can now be mine, too? Her feelings, her strivings, at least...?" (*Crime and Punishment*, Epilogue, Chapter 2)

All novels are in some sense knowable communities. It is part of a traditional method – an underlying stance and approach – that the novelist offers to show people and their relationship in essentially knowable and communicable ways. The full extent of Dickens's genius can then only be realised when we see that for him, in the experience of the city, so much that was important, and even decisive, could not simply be known, or simply communicated, but had, as I have said, to be revealed, to be forced into consciousness. And it would then be possible to set up a contrast between the fiction of the city and the fiction of the country. In the city kind, experience and community would be essentially opaque, in the country kind, essentially transparent. As a first way of thinking, there is some use in this contrast. There can be no doubt, for example, that identity and community become more problematic, as a matter of perception and as a matter of valuation, as the scale and complexity of the characteristic social organisation increased. Up to that point, the transition from city to country – from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban society – is transforming and significant. The growth of towns and especially of cities and a metropolis; the increasing division and complexity of labour; the altered and critical relations between and within social classes: in changes like these any assumption of a knowable community – a whole community, wholly knowable – became harder and harder to sustain. But this is not the whole story, and

once again in realising the new fact of the city, we must be careful not to idealise the old and new facts of the country. For what is knowable is not only a function of objects – of what is there to be known. It is also a function of subjects, of observers – of what is desired and what needs to be known. And what we have then to see, as throughout, in the country writing, is not only the reality of the rural community; it is the observer's position in and towards it; a position which is part of the community being known.'

Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1973)

Raskolnikov went straight to Voznessensky Bridge, stopped in the middle of it, put his elbows on the railing, and gazed into the distance. After parting with Razumikhin, he felt so dreadfully weak that he just managed to get to this place. He wished he could sit or lie down somewhere in the street. Bending over the water of the canal, he watched mechanically the last pink reflection of the sunset, the row of houses, getting darker and darker in the gathering dusk, an attic window on the left bank blazing, as though on fire, in the last rays of the sun, which lit up for an instant, and the darkening water of the canal, on which his whole attention seemed to be more and more concentrated. At length red circles began whirling before his eyes, the houses seemed to move, the passers-by, the quays, the carriages – everything began to dance and rotate before his eyes. Suddenly he gave a start, and was perhaps saved from fainting again by a strange and horrible sight. He became aware that someone was standing close beside him, on his right. He looked up, and saw a tall woman with a shawl on her head and a long, yellow, haggard face and red hollow eyes. She looked straight at him, but she quite obviously saw nothing, nor did she seem to be aware of the presence of anyone. Suddenly she put her right hand on the parapet, lifted first her right, then her left leg over the railing and threw herself into the canal. The dirty water parted, swallowed up its victim for a moment, but in another instant the drowning woman came up again and floated gently down with the current, face downwards, her head and legs in the water, and her skirt gathered up and puffed out like a pillow.

'A woman's drowned herself! A woman's drowned herself!' dozens of voices shouted.

People came running from all over the place; both sides of the canal were thronged with onlookers; a whole crowd of people gathered round Raskolnikov, pressing him against the railing. (*Crime and Punishment* Part 2, Ch6)

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Sometimes the essence of the real is to be found in the fantastic and the exceptional (in the sense of abnormal). In Russia, as a matter of fact, the fantastic is sometimes not exceptional at all (in the sense of rare) but an everyday occurrence. As people become divorced from their native traditions (the soil) they become more fantastic and the depths of the human soul are more easily discerned in them (as, one might say, the psychopathology of everyday life is more easily discerned in the abnormal patient). Indeed, in Russia the truth almost always seems to assume a fantastic character. (Malcolm Jones, *Dostoevsky after Bakhtin: Readings in Dostoevsky's Romantic Realism* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990; 3)