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Dostoevsky and Tolstoy: The Professionalization of Literature and Serialized Fiction

Our overall topic at this conference is the elegantly entitled “Dostoevsky: Philosophical mind, writer’s eye.” Our evidence for knowing this “mind” and “eye” is, obviously enough, *the printed page*. And our title suggests that we are accustomed to look quickly past that page, however we encounter it (periodical, book, translation) to our construction of that mind and eye. In my brief remarks today I would like to stop for a few minutes on a crucial and oft-neglected moment in the literary process of the later nineteenth-century, namely that part of the process that brought the writer’s text to the readers of the “thick journal” *The Russian Herald* [*Russkii vestnik*] in which each of our two writers, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, published major works. In Dostoevsky’s case all of his late novels except *The Raw Youth* [*Podrostok*]; in Tolstoy’s case the first part of *War and Peace* [*Voina i mir*], *The Cossacks* [*Kazaki*], “The Morning of a Landowner” [“*Utro pomeschika*”], “Polikushka,” and, famously, the first seven parts of *Anna Karenina*.

Those of us who study Russian literature are sometimes frustrated that comparisons between these two writers neglect any number of excellent and not-so-excellent writers who entered significantly into the literary process of their times. But I will risk contributing to this neglect, first of all out of time constraints, second because our two writers provide useful asymptotes, or boundary cases, in the possibilities for the professionalization of elite, non-trivial literature in the second half of the nineteenth century. As we consider these possibilities, we will do well to remember Dostoevsky’s highly accurate estimate in 1863 that only one Russian in

500 was able to read the work that he and his fellow writers were producing.¹

I will limit myself to three subtopics today: first, a definition of professionalism and how it fits our two writers; second, comments on how they manifested their positions in the process of publishing two major novels during the 1870s, *Anna Karenina* and *The Brothers Karamazov*; and, third, how they moved from serial version to separate edition.

But first a note on sources for such a comparison. The most important of these sources is the writers' correspondence with their publishers, editors, friends, and family. Robert Belknap taught us long ago that a writer's correspondence with his editor is a special genre, a largely *fictional* one, and this is indisputable, but it is also at times a *metafictional* genre, offering perceptive comments on the writing process and on the rhetoric of the novel. In Tolstoy's case, his best comments were shared not with his publisher and editor, but with such colleagues as Nikolai Strakhov or Afanasy Fet or with his cousin Alexandra. These correspondences with the publisher, Mikhail Katkov, and the editor, Nikolai Liubimov, are fairly complete, although Katkov's former house burned down with the journal's records in 1905. He had saved copies of his correspondence with Tolstoy. But a few of Tolstoy's letters to Liubimov seem to have been lost. Memoirs are a second important source of information on the writers' approach to publishing and serialization. Especially illuminating are those of those of Dostoevsky's typesetter M. A. Alexandrov, published in *Russkaia starina*. The Russian State Archive of Literature and Art [RGALI] has Alexandrov's copy, which he planned to expand to give even more detail on his work with Dostoevsky between 1871-1881.² His memoirs are important because editors and typesetters functioned at times as coauthors, leaving traces in the editions and translations we read today as we seek the minds and eyes of our authors. Alexandrov's memoirs confirm our colleague Vladimir Zakharov's thesis, expressed in his paper for this symposium, that Dostoevsky cared deeply about his writing, down to details of punctuation. But they also show that Dostoevsky didn't always have time to oversee properly the setting of his books and journal. A final important source of information on

¹ F.M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972-90) 5:51. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

² M. A. Aleksandrov, "F.M. Dostoevskii v vospominaniakh tipograficheskogo naborshchika v 1871-1881gg.," *Russkaia starina*, 1892, tom lxxiv (April), 177-207. See also RGALI, fond 212, op. 1, ed. khr. 256.

serialization is, of course, the manuscript and printed texts of our authors with their own corrections. This is especially important in the case of the separate edition of *Anna Karenina*, for which Nikolai Strakhov did the initial editing and the final proofreading, while Tolstoy had the chance to check and correct Strakhov's initial editing.

My first topic is the profession of literature. I have argued elsewhere, and will repeat here, that one should think of "profession" in three aspects: vocational, economic, and ethical.³ The *vocational* aspect involves a sense that writing is one's "calling," one's "*prizvanie*," whatever one's formal occupation, such as government minister (Derzhavin) or army officer (Batiushkov). The *economic* aspect involves being paid for one's writing, even using it as a principal means of support. We see the third aspect of professionalization, the *ethical*, as constitutive in the liberal professions, law and medicine, for instance. Here the profession establishes norms of behavior and has primary responsibility for overseeing them. In the US this involves the Bar Associations or the American Medical Association with their various examinations and ethical panels. Such professions were in the process of formation in the Russian empire when our writers were active; the imperial government was highly suspicious of independent organizations. For our writers this aspect of professionalization would involve a sense of responsibility toward colleagues, publishers, and readers.

On the issue of professionalization we can draw a sharp contrast between Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, but also some similarities. In *vocational terms*, Dostoevsky's commitment to a writing career was unwavering, however much the content and genre of what he wrote may have changed over the decades. Tolstoy, famously, entertained grave doubts about the value of a career in elite literature. His correspondence during the writing of *Anna Karenina* amply illustrates this, and he would suspend writing of novel during peak agricultural seasons, surrendering to what he called his "summer condition"⁴ ["letnee sostoianie"]. Writing would take second place to his agricultural work and to his educational projects with the peasantry.

In *economic terms*, both writers supported themselves by income from their fictional writing. However aristocratic his behavior and attitudes, his "habitus," to borrow a term from Pierre Bourdieu, Tolstoy was a cash-poor farmer who needed money to support his growing

³ William M. Todd III, "Dostoevskii kak professional'nyi pisatel': professiia, zaniatie, etika," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 58 (2002) 15-43.

⁴ See, for instance, Tolstoy's letter to Strakhov of 8 April 1976.

family's life in Moscow, especially the education of his children. He commanded the highest honoraria in Russia, 500 rubles a signature [pechatnyi list], and he demanded payment up front for *Anna Karenina*, a novel he projected to be 40 signatures in length. This would yield 20,000 rubles, or enough for a writer to support himself and his family for ten years, according to the estimate of their contemporary S. S. Shashkov.⁵

Dostoevsky's financial struggles are well known to Dostoevsky scholars, and I won't rehearse them here. His honoraria came third in the hierarchy of the 1870s: 300 rubles a signature, after Tolstoy's 500 and Turgenev's 400. *The Russian Herald* was reluctant to pay him more, because it would have upset the hierarchy, so it offered him 400 rubles for *The Raw Youth*, but only if he would keep quiet about it.⁶ As is well known, Dostoevsky took this novel to another journal, *The Fatherland Notes* [*Otechestvennye zapiski*] instead of accepting this clandestine raise.

In terms of *professional ethics*, the two writers differed considerably. Dostoevsky, the former editor of two journals, respected the fragile nature of their journal publishing in Russia, and he did his best to meet deadlines, to finish his novels within a subscription year. When he failed to do so, the fault was not always his. When serialization of *The Brothers Karamazov* spilled over into a second year, Dostoevsky published a letter of apology in *The Russian Herald* (December 1879). Dostoevsky, moreover, was one of the most active members of the Literary Fund [Literaturnyi fond], founded in 1859 to support writers in difficulty and their families. He gave public readings in support of the fund and served as its secretary. Later, he himself had to call on it for support.

Tolstoy, by contrast, by the 1870s avoided professional and institutional engagement with literary life, as Eikhenbaum has chronicled in his study of the author during that decade. Unlike Dostoevsky, he did not present himself as a "collaborator" [*sotrudnik*] of *The Russian Herald*, and, despite earlier social contacts with Katkov, he treated serial publication in the journal merely as a financial arrangement, a prelude to the publication of *Anna Karenina* as a separate volume. He had done something similar with *War and Peace*, serializing only the 1805 section in the journal. When serialization of his novel *Anna Karenina* spilled out over three years, 1875-1877, it was Katkov, not Tolstoy, who had to apologize to readers. When Katkov took ideological issue with the final

⁵ S.S. Shashkov, "Literaturnyi trud v Rossii," *Delo* 1876, No. 8, 43.

⁶ N.A. Liubimov, "Pis'mo k F.M. Dostoevskogo ot 4 maia 1874g," OR RNB Fond 93, R. II, K. 6, Ed. Khr. 33, L. 14.

part of *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy abruptly withdrew it from the journal and published it as a separate brochure.

Turning to the serialization of their novels, we see that this process for each writer embodies, as I have already noted, their attitudes toward professionalism and toward the institution of the “thick journal” [*tolsty zhurnal*]. Both writers missed deadlines, although Tolstoy did it more frequently. And this resulted in their sometimes not being able to read the proofs of their installments. This bothered Dostoevsky, who was very much concerned in his letters with the rhetoric of the novel, how its sequence would impact readers, especially the sequence between “The Grand Inquisitor” and the “Life of Zosima,” books V and VI. He was particularly disturbed when the journal’s typesetter printed “The Grand Inquisitor” as one uninterrupted passage rather than dividing it into sections, as was done in “The Life of Zosima.” This lack of sectioning makes it more difficult to follow Ivan’s argument, leading some critics, such as Victor Terras, to find it less than coherent.

Tolstoy was much more casual about the fate of his proofs. In one instance he invited Katkov to sequence a set of chapters in any way Katkov saw fit,⁷ a casual attitude, but one that fits Tolstoy’s poetics of “linkings” and “arches,” a poetics famously outlined in his letters to Strakhov. It is as if time is reversable or time’s possibilities are omnipresent in his thinking. Where Dostoevsky’s letters are concerned with plot sequence and rhetoric, Tolstoy’s show an almost lyric concern for pattern and design. Tolstoy’s concern is not with rhetorical impact, but with what he calls “falsehood” and, by extension, truth. Thus he defends what he calls the “graphic realism” [*iarkii realizm*] of the scene in which Vronsky and Anna have just consummated their affair (PSS 62:139). To have done it otherwise, he tells Katkov, would have been “false.”

As a consequence of this attitude toward serialization, *Anna Karenina* is segmented very differently in the journal version than in the final, separate edition. As the chart below shows, the journal foregrounded sensational moments, whereas the final version ended parts on moments of separation or the relaxation of tensions. Dostoevsky was able to do this with the installments of *The Brothers Karamazov*, but Tolstoy, treating the serial version as a draft for the separate edition, was at the mercy of the journal’s decisions.

⁷ L. N. Tolstoy, letter to M.N. Katkov, 1875-April 1877, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 90 vols. (Moscow: GIKhL, 1928-58) 62:325. Subsequent references to this edition are included in the text, marked PSS.

As a general thesis, one might suggest that both Dostoevsky and Tolstoy were concerned with part/whole issues and with the integrity of their works of novelistic art. Dostoevsky tended to solve these issues as he wrote and serialized, so that he rarely changes his novels for publication as separate volumes. He revises, so to speak, by writing the next novel, by planning cycles of novels, such as his projected "Life of a Great Sinner" or his projected continuation of *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Tolstoy, I repeat, viewed his serialized novel as a draft for the final version, and, in a letter to his cousin early in the serialization process he told her that he planned the separate volume to appear in about five years. For that volume his collaborator was not the editor and typesetters of *The Russian Herald*, but Nikolai Strakhov. It was Tolstoy himself, however, who redivided the parts and reworked his famous short chapters to focus on individual incidents, moods, or situations, thereby giving them greater intensity and setting them, like the stanzas of a poem, in juxtaposition with each other. He reworked his larger parts in order to set the contrast of the Anna and Levin plot lines in sharper relief.

Each novelist, in short, managed to write a magnificent work of fiction, but they did it in very different ways -- as professionals, as theoreticians of the novel, and as practicing artists.

APPENDIX.

The Serialization of *Anna Karenina* *Русский вестник [Russian Herald] 1875-1877*

1875

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|----|---------------|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. | January 1875 | I:i-xiv [sep. ed. - xxiii] | Anna leaves the ball |
| 2. | February 1875 | I xv - IIx [sep. ed. - xi] | Consummation of the affair of Anna and Vronsky |
| 3. | March 1875 | IIxi - xxvii [sep. ed. - xxix] | Anna tells Karenina of her affair with Vronsky |
| 4. | April 1875 | IIxxx - IIIx [sep. ed. - xii] | Levin sees Kitty in a carriage |

1876

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|----|---------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 5. | January 1876 | IIIxi-xxviii [sep. ed. - xxxii] | Levin thinks of death, goes abroad |
| 6. | February 1876 | IVi-xv [sep. ed. - xvii] | Vronsky visits Anna, who appears to be dying |
| 7. | March 1876 | IVxvi-Vvi [sep. ed. - same] | Kitty and Levin leave for the country |

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|----|---------------|--------------------------|--|
| 8. | April 1876 | Vvii-xix [sep. ed. - xx] | Nikolai Levin dies, Kitty pregnant |
| 9. | December 1876 | End of Part V | Vronsky and Anna leave for the country after the scandalous scene in the theater |

1877

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 10. | January 1877 | Vli-xii [sep. ed. xv] | Expulsion of Vasen'ka from Pokrovskoe |
| 11. | February 1877 | Vlxiii-xxix [sep. ed. xxxii] | Anna and Vronsky leave for Moscow |
| 12. | March 1877 | VIIi-xv [sep. ed. xvi] | Birth of the Levins' son |
| 13. | April 1877 | VIIxvi-xxx [sep. ed. xxxi] | Death of Anna |

Part VIII appeared as a separate booklet during the summer of 1877. The first separate edition of the novel appeared in January 1878. Only with installments 5, 9, 11 13 did the end of the installment coincide with the end of one of the novel's eight parts.

*The Serialization of The Brothers Karamazov
Russian Herald, 1879-80*

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|----------------|--------------------------------|--|
| January 1879 | "From the Author," Books I, II | Scandal at the monastery |
| February 1879 | Book III | Alyosha reads Lise's note |
| March 1879 | | |
| April 1879 | Book IV | Snegyrev tramples the money, Alyosha picks it up |
| May 1879 | Book V, 1-4 | Ivan's rebellion against God's world. |
| June 1879 | Book V, 5-7 | Fedor's hopes |
| July 1879 | | |
| August 1879 | Book VI | Death of Zosima, suspense over "event" |
| September 1879 | Book VII | Alyosha's rebellion ends, he leaves monastery. |
| October 1879 | Book VIII, 1-4 | Dmitry strikes Grigory rushes after Grushenka. |
| November 1879 | Book VIII, 5-8 | Dmitry arrested for murder of father. |
| December 1879 | [apology for delay] | |
| January 1880 | Book IX | Dmitry driven away. |
| February 1880 | | |
| March 1880 | | |
| April 1880 | Book X | Alyosha and Kolya |
| May 1880 | | |

June 1880		
July 1880	Book XI, 1-5	Ivan leaves Alyosha for 3 rd meeting with Smerdyakov.
August 1880	Book XI, 6-10	Alyosha tells Ivan of Smerdyakov's suicide; Ivan ill
September 1880	Book XII, 1-5	Katerina Ivanovna's outburst at the trial
October 1880	Book XII, 6-14	End of the trial. Dmitry convicted.
November 1880	Epilogue	Alyosha's speech at Ilyushechka's stone.

Dec. 1880 (dated 1881) -- first separate edition. Books 5, 8, 11, 12 are halved. Otherwise installment endings and book endings coincide.