9 Illegitimacies of the Novel: Characterization in Dostoevsky's *The Adolescent*

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In 1918, Georg Lukács published an essay on his friend Béla Balázs that includes the following credo: "Dostoevsky's people live, without distance, the essence of their souls. Meanwhile the problem of other writers, including even Tolstoy, consists in how a soul can overcome those obstacles by which it is prevented from an attainment, even a glimpse, of itself. Dostoevsky begins where the others end: he describes how the soul lives its own life."[1]

This comment draws on the extensive notes Lukács had made for his abandoned book on Dostoevsky, to which *The Theory of the Novel* (1916) was originally designated as a preface.[2] Together with the notes, it sheds light on Lukács's enigmatic pronouncement at the end of that essay that "Dostoevsky did not write novels."[3] For Dostoevsky's characters, as Lukács writes in his notes, thought is action; they have no professions and no central marriage plots. They "do not develop" over the course of the narrative; and their actions cannot be genealogically traced back to their family circumstances or environment. Instead, their "adventures" take place "in the soul," on the level of idea and dialogue rather than biographical plot.[4]

Lukács's ideas about Dostoevsky have ethical and political significance for his early thought, but their significance is also aesthetic. Characterized by a direct continuity between action and idea, Dostoevsky's characters place the fictional sphere of action beside the point. They are free from the "instrumental" centrality of the hero of a conventional novel that (as Lukács writes in *The Theory of the Novel*) "comprises the essence of its totality between the beginning and the end, and thereby raises an individual to the infinite heights of one who must create an entire world through his experience" (83). What Dostoevsky escapes is the novelistic simulacrum of the epic "rounded world": the illusion of a world divinely fitted for human selves that the novel imperfectly, because artificially,

projects. He avoids the split between epic and novel by relinquishing the dream of divinely adequate creation itself.

A vital strand of twentieth-century criticism and theory extends both backwards and forwards from Lukács's reading of Dostoevsky's characters. An early predecessor is Dmitry Merezhkovsky's globally influential treatise *L. Tolstoi and Dostoevskii* (1900–2), with its argument that Dostoevsky departs from Tolstoy in building his characters primarily from speech – through characterizing remarks "as a result of which the portrait becomes too live … as if it were just about to stir and step out of the frame like a ghost."[5] The line continues through Merezhkovsky's fellow symbolist Vyacheslav Ivanov, who began his 1911 lecture "Dostoevskii and the Novel-Tragedy" (published 1916) with his own arresting image of Dostoevsky's characters as "living ghosts": "they knock at our doors in dark and in white nights, they can be recognized on the streets in murky patches of Petersburg fog and they settle in to talk with us in insomniac hours in our own underground."[6] The eerie vividness of characters created by their "own" speech exempts Dostoevsky (as both Merezhkovsky and Ivanov suggest) from the novel's generic limitations. Using his characters' words to expose the transcendentally free essence of their personalities, Dostoevsky transposed them into the communal cultural realms of tragedy and myth. It is only a step from here to Mikhail Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* [Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo, 1929; Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo, 1963]. An attentive reader both of Lukács's *Theory of the Novel* and of symbolist Dostoevsky criticism, Bakhtin formalized and canonized the idea that Dostoevsky's characters are created by their "own" words rather than the words of a narrator, and unlike the young Lukács, he associated this apparent autonomy with the revolutionary and indispensable power of the novel form.[7]

And yet, for all his faith in the novel genre as epitomized in Dostoevsky, Bakhtin strikes a rare nostalgic note when he writes about the mimetic completeness, or what he calls the "embodiedness [voploshchennost']," of Dostoevsky's characters:

> The plot of the biographical novel is not adequate to [Dostoevsky's hero], for such a plot relies wholly on the social and characterological definitiveness of the hero, on his full embodiedness in life. Between the character of the hero and the plot of his life there must be a deep and organic unity … The hero and the objective world surrounding him must be made of one piece. But Dostoevsky's hero in this sense is not embodied and cannot be embodied. He cannot have a normal biographical plot. The heroes themselves, it turns out, fervently dream of being embodied, they long to attach themselves to one of life's normal plots. The longing for embodiment

> [zhazhda voploshcheniia] by the "dreamer," [by the "underground man"] born of an idea and by the "hero of an accidental family," is one of Dostoevsky's most important themes.[8]

The very quality that Merezhkovsky, Ivanov, Lukács, and Bakhtin all (differently) celebrate – the Dostoevskian character's "freedom" from narrated social, physical, and biographical traits – here emerges as a moment of loss. Adopting the character's viewpoint, Bakhtin nods towards the vividly "embodying" aspect of realist illusion that Dostoevsky's novels leave behind.

At the origins of the foundational branch of criticism and theory of the novel now associated most strongly with Bakhtin, there is thus a puzzle about Dostoevsky's characters that demands exploration. In one sense, their "reality" is unprecedented; it depends on the sustained illusion that these characters are painted by their *own* thoughts and words, and so (in Bakhtin's well-known argument) always exceed their characterization, retaining a "surplus" unconstrained by any particular plot, narrative circumstance, or trait.[9] In another sense, as readers throughout their reception history have commented, Dostoevsky's characters often seem less "real" than the more extensively narrated protagonists of Turgenev, Goncharov, or (especially) Tolstoy.[10] In the divide between Dostoevsky's indirect and Tolstoy's direct techniques of characterization, Merezhkovsky saw national and religious implications; Ivanov, Lukács, and Bakhtin, equally weighty generic ones.[11] But questions remain. Does a character with the quality of a "living ghost" take more or less vivid shape than a character fully "embodied" in the text that creates him? Did Dostoevsky himself embrace or lament the narrative techniques that set his characters apart from those of his contemporaries?

In this chapter, I will argue that the "longing for embodiedness" of Dostoevsky's characters, most often treated as peripheral to the true work of his novels, was in another sense at the very heart of his thought about characterization and about the novel's capacity to transform the world in which it is read. For Lukács, Dostoevsky bypasses what might be called the *foundling* plot of the novel – the novel as an "expression of … transcendental homelessness" (41), as the epic of a world "abandoned by God" (88). But could there in fact be a better summary of Dostoevsky's writings than (in Lukács's own iconic phrase) "the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer given … yet which still thinks in terms of totality" (56)? In a struggle whose focus was realist characterization, Dostoevsky aimed not just to capture, but also to solidify, the contemporary "types" he saw – to fit them for the very conventional techniques of novelistic mimesis from which he was later

seen to have liberated the genre.[12] I believe that this mimetic ambition has bearing on how we interpret his novels and their intended effects on the reader. In a line of works stretching from *Poor Folk* [Bednye liudi, 1846] to *Brothers Karamazov* [Brat'ia Karamazovy, 1880], Dostoevsky chronicled and strove to overcome what Lukács recognized as the realist novel's most tormenting illegitimacy: its separation from the terms of reality itself.

It is not coincidental that Dostoevsky reflected on this project most directly in a text that is itself about illegitimacy, his second-to-last novel *The Adolescent* [Podrostok, 1875]. Following a discussion of some problems that the reception of his earlier novels and mimetic characters posed, I will show how *The Adolescent* offers a response. Frequently though ever less sidelined in studies of Dostoevsky's works, *The Adolescent* holds out an unfamiliar vision of Dostoevsky as tormented by the limitations of his own novels, and also of the novel genre as such. It suggests a Dostoevsky both more and less conventional than the central line of twentieth-century criticism presents him – aspiring towards a mimetic standard that later readers thought he had far surpassed, but revealing a faith nothing short of radical in the spiritual power that such mimetic representation might hold.

During Dostoevsky's lifetime, his characters were often dismissed as diseased aberrations, drawn from the seediest corners of life and the human soul.[13] This criticism grew more heated throughout his career. While critics from across ideological camps praised the psychological nuance of Raskolnikov, many reviewers of *The Idiot* [Idiot, 1869] criticized the "fantasy [fantastichnost']," "phantasmagoria," and "soul-sickness" of its characters.[14] Thus, D.I. Minaev described *The Idiot* as "a fairy tale in which the less verisimilitude there is, the better. People meet, become acquainted, fall in love, slap one another, and all on the first caprice of the author, without any kind of artistic truth."[15] V.P. Burenin called it "a belletristic composition made up of a multitude of absurd characters and events, without a care for any artistic task at all."[16] By the time of *The Adolescent*'s publication in 1875, the hostile (Westernizer) critic V.G. Avseenko could treat the implausibility of Dostoevsky's novels as a known fact, seamlessly linking the charge of "abnormality" with the language of the insubstantial: "It has often been said that Mr. Dostoevsky succeeds best with the representation of phenomena of life that stand on the boundary separating reality from the world of ghosts … It is *not people* acting, but some degenerates of the human race, some *underground shadows*."[17]

As in the cases of Minaev, Burenin, and Avseenko, such denunciations of Dostoevsky's realism were often politically and ideologically

motivated. However, critics consistently couched these attacks – and Dostoevsky consistently received them – in terms of artistic technique. In an unpublished draft preface to *The Adolescent*, Dostoevsky responded to Avseenko's charges (among others) with a defence of his own "fantastic realism":

> Facts. They pass by. They don't notice. *There are no citizens*, and no one wants to make an effort and force himself to think and notice. I could not tear myself away, and all the cries of critics that I am representing an unreal life [nenastoiashchuiu zhizn'] have not deterred me … Our talented writers, who have been representing, with high art, the life of our mid-upper-class (family) circle – Tolstoy, Goncharov – thought that they were representing the life of the majority – I think it was they who were representing the life of exceptions. On the contrary, their life is the life of exceptions, and mine is the life of the general rule. Future generations who are less partial will recognize this; the truth will be on my side. . . I am proud that I was the first to depict the real man of the *Russian majority* [nastoiashchego cheloveka *russkogo bol'shinstva*] and the first to lay bare his monstrous and tragic side. The tragic element lies in his consciousness of monstrosity. (22 March 1875; 16:329; italics in original)

Dostoevsky answers the accusation of "unreality" by claiming that he is the one representing the "real man of the Russian majority," and the accusation of "ghostliness," by claiming that his unconventional subjects dictate these unconventional techniques. Raskolnikov, Stepan Trofimovich, and the Underground Man (paradigmatic examples that he lists elsewhere in the passage) become "tragic" not because of their monstrosity, but because of their *consciousness* of monstrosity; the representation of this consciousness fits them for literature when no pre-existing patterns can. In effect, Dostoevsky here inaugurates what would become the symbolist critics', and later Bakhtin's, explanation and argument for the vividness of his own characters. They are "real" precisely because they transcend the conventions of realist narrative and description. Because there is no template for these subjects' representation, the author has no choice but to characterize them (tautologically) through their "own" thoughts and self-perceptions.

However, in both his aesthetic writings and criticism and his art, Dostoevsky had long grappled with the question of whether these same contemporary subjects could be brought together with a different, less tenuous mode of representation. As Robert Louis Jackson suggests, Dostoevsky's "quest for form" – his reach towards a classical ideal of beauty from the depths of contemporary chaos and moral ugliness – was, by the

same token, a quest for literary mimesis. In Dostoevsky's understanding, the writer introduces order and beauty into the human reality he sees by crystallizing it into literary "ideals" or types. The autonomous "life" of these typical characters reflects the aesthetic unity of the work itself, and types (in turn) are the work's main avenue for shaping readers' understanding and consciousness of their society.[18] But if a type is still historically unfinished, can it take compelling aesthetic shape? In their well-known exchange of letters on this question (February 1874), Ivan Goncharov had argued no and Dostoevsky yes – but Dostoevsky's own identification of "artistic truth" with finished aesthetic form suggests that he must (on some level) have shared Goncharov's misgivings.[19] The critics' failure to recognize the typicality of his "real men of the Russian majority" may demonstrate their incompetence as readers, but it also opens the possibility that something is missing from these protagonists' unconventional characterization.

Though Dostoevsky's draft preface to *The Adolescent* is most often read as an appeal (soon resoundingly answered) to "future generations" of readers, it thus also draws attention to a mimetic inadequacy by the standards of nineteenth-century realism – an illegitimacy resulting from the very "self-"characterization with which we now associate the vividness of Dostoevsky's characters. I think Dostoevsky not only acknowledged, but also used this inadequacy to further his vision of the realist novel's aesthetic, social, and spiritual task. The novel that inspired his defensive preface, *The Adolescent*, both thematizes his experimental (illegitimate) techniques of characterization, and deliberately stages their disintegration. In the process, *The Adolescent* places him closer to the conventional hopes and anxieties of the European novel than its wild eccentricity suggests.

The narrator-hero of *The Adolescent,* Arkady Dolgoruky, announces his illegitimate birth in the novel's first pages, together with his name:

> My last name is Dolgoruky, and my legal father is Makar Ivanovich Dolgoruky, a former household serf of the Versilov family. Thus I'm a legitimate, though in the highest degree illegitimate, son, and my origin is not subject to the slightest doubt. (13:6)[20]

This laborious opening statement, in divorcing Arkady from the line of his legal peasant father, also places him in a line of protagonists as old as the novel itself. Like Julien Sorel, Arkady faces "a choice among possible fathers from whom to inherit"; like Tom Jones or the Dickensian foundling, "he is characterized by desire, rather than possession."[21] By tracing the process of embodying the hero within his proper biography,

illegitimacy plots underscore the fit between fictional character and fictional world that Lukács saw as the novel's foundational illusion.[22] As previous analyses have noted, in *The Adolescent* and through his choice of an illegitimate child as protagonist, Dostoevsky grappled unusually directly both with the legacy of his own work as a novelist, and with the legacy of the Russian novel itself.[23] We can extend this argument to suggest that he was engaged, further, with the legacy and purpose of the entire genre. A *Tom Jones* (1749) or *Oliver Twist* (1838) begins with a hero who must be restored to his rightful place; *The Adolescent* begins by asking what this narrative restoration would achieve.

This questioning stance springs, in part, from the additional historical and cultural weight that Dostoevsky lent to the narrative metaphor of illegitimacy. Arkady Dolgoruky realizes a set of fragmentary characters from Dostoevsky's notebooks – chief among them a draft version of Prince Myshkin, and the projected hero of the never-written epic "The Life of a Great Sinner [Zhitie velikogo greshnika, 1869–70] – whose "accidental families" underscore their kinship with post-Reform Russia. The image of Russia as the illegitimate child of East and West traces back at least as far as Pyotr Chaadaev's "First Philosophical Letter" [Lettres philosophiques adressées à une dame, Lettre première, 1829]: "We others [Russians], like illegitimate children, come to this world without patrimony… Each one of us must himself once again seek to tie the broken thread of the family line [le fil rompu de la famille]."[24] For Dostoevsky, the idea of Russia's inherent illegitimacy – its "isolation in the European family of peoples" (21:70) – was compounded after the 1861–4 Great Reforms' break with accumulated tradition. The illegitimately born hero as sketched in his 1860s–'70s notebooks and novels sees himself as both better and worse than everyone else; as a passage from the *Idiot* notebook put it, "To master everyone, to triumph over everyone and to get revenge on everyone (and for what – who knows). (He is an illegitimate son.) [Ovladet' vsemi, vostorzhestvovat' <nad> vsemi i otomstit' vsem (a za chto – neizvestno). (On pobochnyi syn.)] (9:178). This personal sense of rancour and exclusion also signals the bitter *national* bind of post-Reform Russia as Dostoevsky saw it, faced with the task of reconstructing foundations that it had never fully owned.

The illegitimate protagonist thus makes tangible a set of problems – individual, national, generic, and narrative – that run the length of Dostoevsky's career. Arkady caught between his legal peasant and his natural noble father allegorically mirrors Russia caught between its homegrown ("Eastern") traditions and its adopted Western ones. His illegitimacy, in turn, makes literal the plight of many Dostoevskian characters whose birth does not give them an identity – from the cripplingly "ordinary"

Ganya Ivolgin to the dramatically unmoored Raskolnikov – and these characters pose a challenge to the novelist akin to the challenge of Russian history itself.

It is no surprise, then, that Dostoevsky was determined to make the nonentity Arkady the protagonist of *The Adolescent* rather than his father Versilov, who was conceived as "already a genuine heroic type" (16:7). However, in a process recorded in unusual detail in his notebooks for *The Adolescent*, he found that he could place Arkady at the centre of the novel only by also making him its narrator (16:47 ff.) Arkady thus epitomizes (lastly) the formal plight of the "illegitimate" Dostoevskian character as such – of "real men of the Russian majority" who take shape only when they tell their own stories, and are thus cut off from any conclusively defining or omniscient narrative origin. As Dostoevsky's writings about type suggest, if the novelist could "embody" such characters in coherent and memorable figures, it would be a sign that he had found in them (and in the rootless aspects of contemporary Russia) something that answers to the vivifying form of the beautiful work of art. *The Adolescent* with its illegitimate protagonist shows especially clearly how, for Dostoevsky, conventional realist characterization took on a messianic national and spiritual significance. It is an extreme case, but just for that reason, an emblematic one – a vortex of all the complexities that Dostoevsky associated with mimetic representation in and of 1870s Russia. But with the stakes raised so high and made so visible, it is striking how spectacularly Dostoevsky lets the act of representation fall apart.

The Adolescent recounts the first year that Arkady Makarovich Dolgoruky spends in St Petersburg with his natural father, the dissolute landowner Andrei Petrovich Versilov, and his mother, born a peasant on Versilov's estate. While Arkady arrives intending to discover the truth about Versilov's moral character, he soon becomes infatuated with Katerina Nikolaevna Akhmakova, who is also an object of Versilov's affection. Arkady's "notes" tell the increasingly sordid story of the rivalry between himself and Versilov, and of his idyllic encounter with his legal peasant father, Makar Ivanovich Dolgoruky, just before the latter's death. An elaborate blackmail plot, revolving around a "document" in Arkady's possession that could give him power over Katerina Nikolaevna, runs through the novel and culminates in a crisis, averted by chance, in which Katerina Nikolaevna is almost raped by Arkady's former schoolmate Lambert and almost murdered by Versilov. The story ends, inconclusively, with the implication of a future relationship between Arkady and Katerina Nikolaevna and of Versilov's reunion with (though not marriage to) Arkady's mother; the novel's last section is the comments of Arkady's former tutor, Nikolai Semyonovich, on the manuscript of his "notes" (the main text of the novel).

This summary gives only the barest impression of the multitude of figures and events that crowd Arkady's narrative. Digressions and repetitious subplots hang from the basic plotline – suicides, other blackmails, gambling episodes, several other rumoured rapes, a host of abandoned or illegitimate children. Nevertheless, as many have argued, Arkady's "notes" follow a coherent pattern: they are structured as a Bildungsroman, a series of tests that attempt to illuminate Versilov's true character, and so to establish the chief model available for Arkady to define his future path on or against.[25] From the beginning, it is clear that Arkady's portrait of Versilov – "even now… in a great many ways a complete riddle to me" (13:6; 6) – will be inconclusive. However, the task of describing Versilov is the impetus from which the narrative unfolds.

It is notable, then, that Arkady's weaknesses as a narrator cluster around the introduction of new characters into his story. The incidental character Olimpiada is symptomatic:

> I looked at her quite closely and found nothing special: not a very tall girl, plump, and with extremely ruddy cheeks. Her face, however, was rather pleasant, the kind that the materialists like. Her expression was kind, perhaps, but with a wrinkle [so skladkoi]. She could not have been especially brilliant intellectually, at least not in a higher sense, but one could see cunning in her eyes. No more than nineteen years old. In short, nothing remarkable. We'd have called her a "pillow" in high school. (If I describe her in such detail, it's solely because I'll need it in the future.) By the way, everything I've been describing so far, with such apparently unnecessary detail, all leads to the future and will be needed there. (13:33; 39)

This passage is a parody of a realist character-portrait. Arkady qualifies each feature he mentions, blurring it even as it meets the page. Moreover, although he is putatively writing a year after the events he recounts, he misleads the reader about Olimpiada's significance – the *size* of the "character-space" she will occupy in his narrative.[26] Olimpiada demands close attention, but she turns out to be "nothing special"; the details of her appearance will be necessary "in the future," but as it happens, she returns only once. Arkady begins by signalling the conventions of omniscient characterization, but in the same breath, he disrupts them.

The same trend continues throughout the narrative. Arkady introduces almost every new character with a portrait like Olimpiada's, offering concrete physical details (as Dostoevsky dubbed them in notebook plans) "à la L[eo] T[olstoi]" (16:87; 16:73). But a reader attempting to associate these details with a stably recurring figure in a stably sized space (à la Leo Tolstoy) will be disappointed: Arkady's technical difficulties

with characterization reflect and exacerbate the convolution of the story he is trying to tell. His frequent confusion at the changeability of faces culminates in the suspicion (as he writes of the blackmailer Stebelkov) that individual physical traits "not only did not personalize his character, but seemed precisely to endow it with something general, like everyone else … He passes quickly from a laughing to a grave look, from a grave to a playful or winking one, but it is all somehow scattered and pointless [... ne tol'ko ne sposobstvovali ego kharakternosti, no imenno kak by pridavali emu chto-to obshchee, na vsekh pokhozhee … So smeshlivogo on bystro perekhodit na vazhnyi vid, s vazhnogo na igrivyi ili podmigivaiushchii, no vse eto kak-to raskidchivo i besprichinno]" (13:118; 142). The mobile face is a standard feature of physiognomic character-portraits in Dostoevsky's novels.[27] But in *The Adolescent* this mobility infects the entire project of characterization; the narrative, like a kaleidoscope, shifts among constellations of minor figures without specifying the connections between them.[28] There are two Princes Sokolsky, no relation to each other. Stebelkov, whose schemes dominate the middle third of the novel, is eclipsed without notice by a second blackmailer, Lambert. Incidental characters unfurl from their functional roles to give speeches that touch on the novel's most central preoccupations, then vanish for good. Even Makar Dolgoruky, the legal father who, late in the novel, offers Arkady a "seemly" alternative to the disorder around Versilov, dies before his influence can crystallize. Names too are unstable: the suicide Olya's mother, called Darya Onisimovna in Part One, becomes Nastasya Egorovna in Part Three.

The novel's secondary characters thus fail to satisfy one of the most basic definitions of realist character ever formulated, as that which results "when identical semes traverse the same proper name several times and appear to settle upon it."[29] Much of this chaos results from the circumstances of serial publication, but its effect on a reader's ability to construct a coherent fictional world is none the weaker for being unintentional. In a Bildungsroman built around two central projects of characterization – Versilov, and Arkady himself – it emerges that Arkady is telling a story in which almost *all* the figures struggle to take shape. Indeed, Versilov's hiddenness is the clearest preoccupation of Arkady's narrative – emblematized by the "wrinkle" that conceals whether he is sincere or mocking, sane or mad (13:171, 13:223, 13:372; 209, 244, 463). He ends as the most elusive of the novel's shifting points: still unmarried to Arkady's mother, still an uncertain Christian, and still shadowed by Arkady's attempts at explanation.[30]

The thrust of this analysis may be simply that Dostoevsky's approach to the novel's structure, as laid out in his notebooks, was successful. The

narrator Arkady emerges as protagonist, characterized primarily by his own first-person "notes [zapiski]" In turn, the other characters (and notably Versilov) are screened or fragmented by the very text that pursues them, revealing the teller at the expense of the tale. In Dostoevsky's first published work of fiction, *Poor Folk*, he had brought new life to the Gogolian titular councillor by making him responsible for his "own" epistolary narration. In *The Adolescent* he takes this technique a step further, by making Arkady responsible for the cast of an entire novel. The result is hyperbolically "dialogic," a concatenation of voices cut off from the narrative selves that Arkady can only fleetingly make cohere. But perhaps it does lead to the single coherent character of Arkady himself, who spends the narrative mastering the technique of his "own" characterization and, in the process, his identity and future path.[31]

However, there is an aspect of the novel that this relatively optimistic reading does not capture: *The Adolescent*'s orientation (beginning with its title) on its own present inadequacy – on the condition of not yet being fully instated or grown. Age is the hopeful metaphor for this condition. It is shadowed throughout by the more insidious trope of illegitimacy: a suggestion that the lack may never be fully remedied, the gap between "desire and possession" never entirely bridged. First attached to Arkady's birth, the image of illegitimacy shades into his "idea" of compensating for his lack of nobility by becoming "as rich as Rothschild," accumulating the capital that will turn him into an extraordinary man. He quickly becomes distracted from his "idea," but its logic does not end with him; it is mirrored in the theories of the intellectual Kraft, who kills himself because he has concluded that "the Russian people are a second-rate people … whose fate is to serve *merely as material for a more noble race*" (13:44; 51; my italics). More surprisingly, Versilov's paean to his own nobility reflects a similar pattern of thought:

> I repeat to you that I can't help respecting my nobility. Over the centuries we have developed a high cultural type never seen before … the type of universal suffering for all [tip vsemirnogo boleniia za vsekh] … It preserves in itself the future of Russia. There are perhaps only a thousand of us … but *the whole of Russia has lived up to now only to produce this thousand* … Only the Russian … is capable of becoming most Russian precisely only when he is most European. (13:376–7; 468–9; my italics)

A distortion of Dostoevsky's treasured notion of Russian "pan-humanism [vsechelovechestvo]," Versilov's vision of an élite "thousand" who are "most Russian" precisely when they are "most European" distinctly recalls the image of his own illegitimate son Arkady, kissing the hands

of the French tutor who used to beat him to remind him of his lowly origins. What unites Arkady, Kraft, and Versilov is the dream of accumulation – the suppliant wish to live into [nazhit'] something that will compensate for the deficiencies of the present. In his representation of an "accidental family," Dostoevsky thus shows the sense of illegitimacy spreading outward, from the narrator-hero's birth to the entire world and historical moment that he portrays.

In the novel's enigmatic epilogue, Arkady's former teacher Nikolai Semyonovich invites us, at last, to extend the logic of illegitimacy and accumulation to its central narrative, the text of Arkady's first-person "notes [zapiski]":

> Yes, Arkady Makarovich, you are *a member of an accidental family* [chlen sluchainogo semeistva], as opposed to our still-recent hereditary types, who had a childhood and youth so different from yours. I confess, I would not wish to be a novelist whose hero comes from an accidental family! Thankless work and lacking in beautiful forms. And these types in any case are still a current matter, and therefore cannot be artistically finished … What, though, is the writer to do who has no wish to write only in the historical genre and is possessed by a yearning for what is current? To guess … and be mistaken. But "Notes" such as yours could, it seems to me, serve as material for a future artistic work [materialom dlia budushchego khudozhestvennogo proizvedeniia], for a future picture – of a disorderly but already bygone epoch … the future artist will find beautiful forms even for portraying the past disorder and chaos. It is then that "Notes" like yours will be needed and will provide material – as long as they are sincere, even despite all that is chaotic and accidental about them. (13:455; 563–4; italics in original)

With this implicit comparison to the "beautiful forms" of the Tolstoyan family novel, Nikolai Semyonovich frames Arkady's *zapiski* as "material for a future artistic work." Subtitled "A Novel [roman]," *The Adolescent* dares us to read this "future artistic work" as a reference to its own text. With equal daring, however, it challenges us to justify this reading. If Arkady's *zapiski* on their own are not a novel, then perhaps it is the self-reflexive epilogue that creates the "work of art." "Notes" become novel with the very move that delegitimizes them by the standard of "beautiful form" – insisting on what they are not yet, and what they could still become.

Read as a consistent aesthetic credo rather than an aberration, a failure, or even an innovative departure from Dostoevsky's previous work, *The Adolescent* lends a new slant to Lukács's idea that "Dostoevsky did not write novels," or, in Bakhtin's revision, that his works provide a basis for redefining what novels are. It suggests that far from portraying a world

"remote from any struggle against what actually exists," or describing people who "live, without distance, the essence of their souls," Dostoevsky strove to rediscover the narrative "distance" and legitimating authority that could lend those souls fictional bodies. He imagined less that the novel could change to become more like the modern world than that the world could change to become more like the historical novel.

Dostoevsky's boldest generic move in *The Adolescent* thus depends, counter-intuitively, on compounding the sense of inadequacy figured in his protagonist's illegitimate birth and reflected in the "accidental" form of his *zapiski*. With the zealous self-abasement of a Fyodor Karamazov, *The Adolescent* trumpets its own distance from the vivid, ordered solidity of a Tolstoyan fictional world. But I believe that in the process, Dostoevsky grasps beyond both the finished beauty of Tolstoyan mimetic form, and the techniques by which he himself captures contemporary disorder, for a still bigger prize – the reclamation of the divinely "given" world of what Lukács calls the epic. As he has Versilov lament in a revealing notebook draft:

> I have, my dear, one favourite Russian writer. He is a novelist, but for me he's almost a historiographer of our nobility … He takes a nobleman from his childhood and youth, he draws him in his family … and all so poetically, so unshakably and inarguably. He is a psychologist of the nobleman's soul. But the main thing is that this is given as inarguable, and of course, you agree. You agree and you envy. Oh, how they envy! There are children who from childhood already begin to become pensive about their families … and, the main thing, already in childhood begin to understand the disorder and accidental quality [sluchainost'] of the foundations of their life, the absence of established forms and inherited wisdom [ustanovivshikhsia form i rodovogo predaniia]. These should envy my writer, envy (my) his characters and, perhaps, dislike them. Oh, these are not characters [eto ne geroi], they are sweet children, who have wonderful, sweet fathers, eating at the club, entertaining around Moscow ... (17:143)

Conceived in the generic setting of Arkady's *zapiski,* Versilov looks covetously over to the characters narrated "so unshakably and inarguably" by Tolstoy, and he sees "not characters, but sweet children, who have wonderful sweet fathers." Versilov's envy implies a mimetic standard that even Tolstoy could not meet: in the idyll he imagines, to be narrated authoritatively is to be not just vivid, but real. I suggest that the desire that he voices coincides with Dostoevsky's own: that a "future novel," filled with mimetically embodied characters, could restore a vision of contemporary reality as equally susceptible to benevolent divine creation. Much

as (in Derrida's famous variation on Plato's *Phaedrus*) all claims to the transparency and legitimacy of speech hinge on the space that is opened by the illegitimacy of writing, so here, this extravagant hope for transcendence is grounded in the aesthetics of accident.[32]

On this interpretation, mimetic characterization in Dostoevsky traces the same dialectic between earthly, "living" struggle and heavenly, immortal perfection that (as many have argued) lies at the centre of his religious philosophy, articulated most directly in the 1864 notebook passage written while Dostoevsky was keeping vigil with the body of his first wife Mariya Isaeva ("Masha is lying on the table" [20:171–4]). Earthly life presupposes a state of "development" and struggle towards the ideal of Christlike "love for another as oneself"; immortality in paradise must be imagined as the state where this ideal has been achieved (20:172–3). A similarly absolute split between present imperfection and future transformation seems to structure Dostoevsky's thought about characterization and the novel. While the novelist can realize contemporary types only partially – as voices or ghosts rather than "embodied" characters – he is then free to envision their full "embodiment" as leading to the redemption of the very fallen world he represents.[33] Crucial to this vision, however, is an insistence on what is missing from the Dostoevskian character. In the space opened by these deficiencies, Dostoevsky imagines overleaping the bounds of the novel genre itself.

The Adolescent is unique among Dostoevsky's novels in laying bare this ambition, placing the metaphorical illegitimacy of all his characters at the visible centre of its narrative. His far more celebrated final novel, *Brothers Karamazov,* pursues a different strategy. Here the trope of illegitimacy is buried – albeit at the heart of the plot – in the person of Smerdyakov, Fyodor Karamazov's murderer and probable unrecognized son. A shadow fourth brother, Smerdyakov is excluded from the novel's title and its key family name; the suspense of the detective plot depends upon a calculation that the reader will ignore him. But his crime and eventual suicide serve to set Dmitry, Ivan, and Alyosha Karamazov on paths towards the living "struggle" for spiritual salvation. At once essential to the narrative and obscured by it, Smerdyakov raises the the possibility that by the end of his career, Dostoevsky was caught between the "illegitimacy" of his own characters, and the "illegitimacy" of the European novel. With its near-Tolstoyan composition around the Karamazov family and (so to speak) the "breed-force" of *karamazovshchina*, *Brothers Karamazov* comes close to endowing the autonomous Dostoevskian character with the fleshy vividness and stability of a conventional realist hero.[34] Might Smerdyakov's concealment help compensate for this change? Now using rather than deconstructing the established resources for mimetic

"embodiment," does Dostoevsky hope to finesse the separation they make inevitable – the separation between the realist novel's wilfully "rounded" world, and chaotically unauthored contemporary reality?

A more detailed discussion of *Brothers Karamazov* lies beyond the scope of this essay. However, holding *Brothers Karamazov* or *Crime and Punishment* [Prestuplenie i nakazanie, 1866] in mind together with *The Adolescent* clarifies how completely Dostoevsky was committed to his indirect methods of characterization in his second-to-last novel – and how firmly his legacy is identified with other novels that actually put them *less* fully into practice. At its most experimental, his approach to the novel genre meant replacing the imitation of "embodiedness" with the longing for it. The revolutionary form of Dostoevsky's works undoubtedly outstrips the author's conservative nostalgia. But the structuring presence of nostalgia within those works should not be ignored.[35] Much as Dostoevsky deplored the absence of established forms in his chronicles of "real men of the Russian majority," many of his novels seem, when compared with *The Adolescent*, to take a more conventional approach to characterization than has often been acknowledged. When the barrier of the "rounded" novelistic world truly is eroded, as it is in *The Adolescent*, the prevailing mood is not triumph at an illusion overcome, but hope for its eventual restoration as reality.

Of course, it would be fruitless to hold that only one of these sides of Dostoevsky's approach to characterization and the novel is relevant – either the adventure of seemingly authorless fictional being, or the fantasy of the author's redemptive rediscovery. Nevertheless, the persistent dream of mimetic embodiment in Dostoevsky reveals something about the enduring source of the realist novel's power over its reader. In particular, it calls into question the vision (dominant since the symbolists, and especially since Bakhtin) of Dostoevsky's characters as the point where the novel genre comes closest to crossing into the reader's life. Dostoevsky himself holds out a vision of realist characters not as the most detachable elements of the novel, but rather as that which will always reach towards a "body," the stable textual presence that comes from the interchange between fictional hero and fictional world. On this view, characters at their most seductively embodied are woven into the act of reading – an act that separates them from the rest of what Bakhtin calls "the ongoing event of current life [prodolzhaiushcheesia i seichas sobytiie zhizni]."[36] The Dostoevsky who hopes to overcome the boundary between authored novel and created world challenges the Dostoevsky who makes characters look autonomous from their texts. Neither impulse may triumph, but equally, neither vanishes. Instead, they ensure one another's perpetual homelessness: the foundling plot of the novel, whose dimensions Dostoevsky ingeniously and anxiously explored.

NOTES

1 "Béla Balázs and His Detractors," 1918. Quoted and translated from Hungarian into German in G. Lukács, *Dostojewski: Notizen und Entwürfe,* ed. J.C. Nyiri (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1985), 27–8. All English translations in the chapter are mine unless stated otherwise.

2 See the introductory note to the first journal publication of *The Theory of the Novel* in 1916, as discussed in Galin Tihanov, "Ethics and Revolution: Lukács's Responses to Dostoevskii," *Modern Language Review* 94, no. 3 (July 1999): 610 ff., and Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukács, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of Their Time* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 165–87.

3 Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 152. Further citations to this edition appear parenthetically in the text.

4 Lukács, *Dostojewski,* 42–62. In her chapter in this volume, Anna Berman takes up the theme of Dostoevsky's "missing marriage plots," and particularly his characters' failure to continue their family lines by producing legitimate children.

5 The immediate context for Merezhkovsky's reflection is the phrase "and to my little chicken [*i tsyplenochku*]" at the end of Fyodor Pavlovich's note for Grushenka in *Brothers Karamazov*. D.S. Merezhkovskii, *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii*, ed. E.A. Andrushchenko (Moscow: Nauka, 2000), 144. On the fundamental influence of his treatise on Dostoevsky criticism in Russia and Europe, see for example G.M. Fridlender, "D.S. Merezhkovskii i Dostoevskii," in *Dostoevskii: Materialy i isledovaniia* 10 (1992): 9–14; V.A. Keldysh, "Nasledie Dostoevskogo i russkaia mysl' porubezhnoi epokhi," in *Sviaz' vremen: Problemy preemstvennosti v russkoi literature kontsa XIX-nachala XX v.*, ed. V.A. Keldysh (Moscow: Nasledie, 1992), esp. 91–3; and Z.A. Feher, "Georg Lukács's Role in Dostoevskii's European Reception at the Turn of the Century" (PhD diss.,University of California, Los Angeles, 1978), 87n10.

6 V.I. Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 4 vols., ed. D.V. Ivanov and O. Deshart (Brussels: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1971–87), vol. 4, 400.

7 On Bakhtin's knowledge and "appropriation" of Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*, see Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave,* 11–13.

8 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 101–2 (translation modified); 1963 additions to the 1929 version in brackets. Cf. M.M. Bakhtin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. S.G. Bocharov and N.I. Nikolaev, 7 vols. (Moscow: Russkie slovari, 1996–), vol. 2, 72–3. For the parallel passage in Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, see vol. 6, 115. Further citations to this edition appear parenthetically (by volume and page) in the text.

9 See especially chapter 2 of Bakhtin's Dostoevsky book, where he writes of the Dostoevskian hero's "non-coincidence with himself" (6:70). In the 1941 essay "Epic and Novel," Bakhtin extended this "surplus of humanness" (3:640) to all novelistic characters.

10 Vladimir Nabokov makes an eager twentieth-century spokesman for this position: "Dostoevski characterizes his people through situation, through ethical matters, their psychological reactions, their inside ripples … One feels that he does not see his characters physically, that they are merely puppets, remarkable, fascinating puppets plunged into the moving stream of the author's ideas." See Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature,* ed. Fredson Bowers (London: Picador, 1981), 104, 129.

11 I borrow these terms from Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, who opposes characterization by "direct definition" (through overt "naming of qualities" by an authoritative narrator) to characterization by "indirect presentation" (through the narration of action, speech, appearance, etc.). She builds on work of Joseph Ewan, unfortunately available only in Hebrew. See Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Methuen, 2002), chapter 5.

12 For a different approach to the question of how Dostoevsky creates an impression of his characters as "embodied beings," see Sarah J. Young's essay in this volume. Young shows how Dostoevsky uses references to characters' sense perceptions to construct their embodied selves as well as the physical world around them. However, she argues that Dostoevsky "uses embodied characters to make the fantastic and imaginary more real" and that corporeal "instability" is key to the work of his novels. Here, I focus instead on the author's (and characters') vexed reach toward the solidity, vividness, and narrative authority that are more conventionally associated with realist illusion.

13 For a summary of this frequent criticism, see Keldysh, "Nasledie Dostoevskogo," 77–88.

14 I cite Dostoevsky's critics from the commentary notes to *The Idiot* in F.M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh*, 30 vols., ed. G.M. Fridlender et al. (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972–90), vol. 9, 410–20. Further citations to this edition appear parenthetically (by volume and page) in the text.

15 *Iskra,* May 1868; Dostoevskii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 414.

16 *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti,* September 1868; Dostoevskii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 415.

17 V.G. Avseenko, "Ocherki tekushchei literatury," *Russkii mir*, 1875, no. 55. Quoted in A. S. Dolinin, *Poslednie romany Dostoevskogo* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1963), 197–8.

18 I am drawing on Robert Louis Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form: A Study of His Philosophy of Art*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Physsardt, 1978), 40–123. A

particularly important text for Jackson is Dostoevsky's 1861 essay "Mr. —bov and the Question of Art [Gospodin —bov i vopros ob iskusstve]," which notably focuses the question of artistic integrity through the question of mimetic characterization; see Dostoevskii, *PSS*, vol. 18, 89–98.

19 Jackson, *Quest,* 108–18; see I.A. Goncharov, *Sobranie sochinenii,* 8 vols. (Moscow: Gosizdat. khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1952–5), vol. 8, 456–8 and 459–61.

20 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Adolescent*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Knopf, 2003), 6. Subsequent citations to this translation of *The Adolescent* are parenthetical in the text following the *PSS*.

21 On Julien Sorel, see Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (New York: Knopf, 1984), 64; on Dickens's foundlings, see J. Hillis Miller, *Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 251.

22 On realist narrative's dependence on the family line (and modernist narrative's subversions), see Patricia D. Tobin, *Time and the Novel: The Genealogical Imperative* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978).

23 Kate Holland offers a pivotal discussion of illegitimacy, narrative, and genre in *The Adolescent,* with which my account frequently intersects: Kate Holland, *The Novel in the Age of Disintegration: Dostoevsky and the Problem of Genre in the 1870s* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 101–30. *The Adolescent* has long been read as Dostoevsky's most direct engagement with the legacy of the Russian novel, and especially with Tolstoy; see A.L. Bem, "Khudozhestvennaia polemika s Tolstym (K ponimaniiu 'Podrostka')," *O Dostoevskom*, vol. 3, 192–214 (Petropolis, 1936); K. Mochul'skii, *Dostoevskii: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1947), 409 ff.; and others. Suzanne Fusso further illuminates *The Adolescent* as Dostoevsky's dialogue with his own early work in *Discovering Sexuality in Dostoevsky* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 62–8.

24 P.Ia. Chaadaev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i izbrannyie pis'ma*, ed. Z.A. Kamenskii et al., 2 vols. (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), vol. 1, 92.

25 On *The Adolescent* as Bildungsroman, see E.I. Semenov, *Roman Dostoevskogo* Podrostok*: Problematika i zhanr* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1979). The argument has recently been renewed by Lina Steiner, *For Humanity's Sake: The Bildungsroman in Russian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 135–73; Holland, *The Novel in the Age of Disintegration*; and others.

26 See Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 13–14 ff.

27 For an exhaustive discussion, see Edmund Heier, *Literary Portraiture in Nineteenth-Century Russian Prose* (Cologne: Böhlau-Verlag, 1993), chapter 7.

28 The kaleidoscope image is developed in T.V. Tsiv'ian, "O strukture vremeni i prostranstva v romane Dostoevskogo 'Podrostok,'" *Russian Literature* 3 (1976): 243.

29 Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. R. Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 67.
30 As Peter Jensen has pointed out, Arkady's relationship to Versilov parodies that of an omniscient narrator to his protagonist; we see Arkady "in pursuit of the scattered potential fragments" of Versilov's biography. See P.A. Jensen, "Paradoksal'nost' avtorstva (u) Dostoevskogo," in *Paradoksy russkoi literatury*, ed. V. Markovich and V. Shmid (St Petersburg: Inapress, 2001), 231.
31 For two very different versions of this argument, see Holland, *Age of Disintegration,* 129–30; and T.A. Kasatkina, "Roman F.M. Dostoevskogo 'Podrostok': 'Ideia' geroia i ideia avtora," *Voprosy literatury*, no. 1 (2004): 181–212.
32 Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 63–171.
33 On this vision, see Robert Bird, "Refiguring the Russian Type: Dostoevsky and the Limits of Realism," in *A New Word on* The Brothers Karamazov, ed. Robert Louis Jackson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 17–30.
34 On Tolstoy and "breed-force," see S. Bocharov, *Roman L. Tolstogo 'Voina i mir'* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1963), 89–100.
35 For a different take on the tension between Dostoevsky's conservative and radical impulses, see Kate Holland's discussion in this volume of failed duel plots in his late novels.
36 "Roman, kak literaturnyi zhanr," 3:634; see Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 31.