

14 *Vision in His Soul*

Vyacheslav I. Ivanov's Dostoevsky

Finally, it must be asked concerning every artist how he is in relation to the highest knowledge and to those laws which do not take holiday because men and times forget them.

James Joyce



Vyacheslav Ivanov's study *Dostoevsky* (1932), a composite of writings extending over twenty years, is one of the few significant literary-philosophical studies in the twentieth century on the great Russian novelist. Written in the majestic prose of one of Russia's great poets, it is perhaps the finest example of the ontological and metaphysical school of Dostoevsky criticism that flourished in Russian writing at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, a body of writing that includes the work of such thinkers as Vasily Rozanov, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Nicholas Berdyaev, and Leo Shestov. At the same time, Ivanov's study stands on the threshold of modern Dostoevsky criticism. The appearance of Ivanov's *Dostoevsky* in German translation in 1932,¹ nearly coinciding with the publication of M. M. Bakhtin's rigorously formal *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* in 1929,² might indeed be regarded as symbolic of the meeting and parting of ways of the old and new. Ivanov himself took note of the new prevailing critical directions: "In our modern and more sober times, investigation is directed almost exclusively towards matter of fact problems of form; that is to say, on the one hand towards biography, and on the other hand towards the technique of narration, towards questions of style, subject, artistic methods and literary-historical derivations. The investigation of Dostoevsky's religious philosophy remains as a serious task for the future."³

Yet if Ivanov's work with its interest in the ethical and religious dimensions of Dostoevsky's novels may be considered characteristic of the "old criticism," it also anticipated the new criticism of Bakhtin, Leonid Grossman, and others in its concern with the form of Dostoevsky's novels and their roots in tragedy and myth. It is no surprise that Bakhtin, then a relatively unknown author, placed Ivanov at the head of a list of writers in whose critical works "attempts are made at a more objective approach to Dostoevsky's works—not only to the ideas in and of themselves, but also to the works as artistic entities."⁴ Indeed, a perusal of Ivanov's *Dostoevsky* suggests that he anticipated the concept of the polyphonic novel of Dostoevsky. Further, with his conception of the "thou art" principle as central to Dostoevsky's worldview, Ivanov laid a foundation upon which Bakhtin would construct his fine model of Dostoevsky's poetics.

Vyacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov was born in Moscow February 16/28, 1866, and died in Rome July 16, 1949. Major Russian poet, theoretician of the Russian symbolist movement, classical philologist, historian, and translator—a veritable Renaissance figure—Ivanov was also a religious thinker who in the last decades of his life in Rome embraced Roman Catholicism (though he continued to observe the Eastern rites). Referring to the general condition of Europe and Russia, he wrote in his well-known "Lettre à Charles Du Bos" in 1930: "In this atmosphere where the spiritual torpor of the bourgeois world corresponded by some sort of diabolical counterpoint with the revolutionary fever [in Russia], that familiar call sounded again imperiously in my soul; it was the persistent call which, ever since my youthful contact with that great and saintly man who was Vladimir Solovyov, had led me slowly but inexorably towards joining the Roman Catholic church."⁵

Ivanov studied Roman history for five years with the renowned Theodor Mommsen in Berlin in the late 1880's and early 1890's, working at the same time in his favorite area of classical philology. Nietzsche soon engaged his attention, but Ivanov quickly struck out on his own path away from him, particularly where matters of religious consciousness were concerned. Yet later, in *A Correspondence from Two Corners* (1922), he could still write of Nietzsche as "one who joins the company of the great modelers of the ideal; from an iconoclast he

turns into an icon painter."⁶ Ivanov wrote again in the same work: "It is most doubtful whether in today's cultural milieu any personal initiation can take place without the initiate . . . meeting [Nietzsche] as the 'guardian of the threshold.' Nietzsche has said: 'Man is something that must be overcome'—thereby testifying once more that the way of personal emancipation is a path up to the heights and down into the depths, a vertical movement."⁷

Ivanov's deep involvement with all aspects of European culture, history, and literature, particularly the Hellenistic period, continued throughout his life (he spent forty-four years of his life abroad, living and traveling in Germany, Italy, France, England, Greece, Egypt, and Palestine, even though during these years he made frequent trips to Russia). A signal example of this concern for European culture was his *Correspondence from Two Corners*, a work which the German cultural historian Ernst Robert Curtius referred to as "the most important statement about humanism since Nietzsche."⁸ In this unique epistolary dialogue with the distinguished literary and cultural historian M. O. Gershenzon (each exchanged six letters with the other) Ivanov set forth his views on the nature of culture and tradition and on the questions of decline and continuity in Western culture:

What is "decadence"? It is a feeling of the most refined organic bond with the grand tradition of a past high culture together with a painful and proud consciousness that one is the last of a line. In other words, decadence is memory benumbed, its promotive capacity gone, not allowing us to participate in our fathers' initiations, no longer providing impulses for any real creativity. It is the knowledge that prophecy has ceased, as, indeed, the decadent Plutarch suggests in the title of one of his works, "The Cessation of the Oracles."⁹

Ivanov's work—his poetry, criticism, and literary-philosophical writings—is itself deeply situated in, and conscious of, cultural tradition; it is in its own way "oracular" in spirit and deeply concerned with the problem of memory and oblivion. "Memory is a dynamic principle," Ivanov observes in his *Correspondence from Two Corners*, "oblivion is weariness and the interruption of movement, decadence and a return to a state of relative stagnation."¹⁰ Looking back into the past, Ivanov wrote in an essay, "On the Law and Connections" (1908), the man who has lost touch with life "encounters at its end a gloom

and vainly tries to distinguish in that gloom forms resembling recollection." Then he experiences that "impotence of exhausted thought that we call oblivion. Nonbeing is directly disclosed to [his] consciousness in the form of oblivion which negates it." This tragedy is the direct result, Ivanov believes, of not recognizing that life is "embodiment," that "man lives for those who have passed and for the future, for ancestors and descendants alike. . . . Every moment changes everything preceding him in time. Hence the obligation *to live* is the only obligation. Because 'obligation' is 'connection.'" ¹¹ The ethical idea expressed here was to remain a constant in Ivanov's writing and lies at the center of his fundamentally religious understanding of Dostoevsky. Bakhtin, it may be noted, echoes some of these same ideas of Ivanov's in his perception of Dostoevsky. "[The Russian novelist]," he wrote in 1961 in "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book," "asserts the impossibility of solitude, the illusory nature of solitude. The very being of man (both external and internal) is the *deepest communion*. *To be* means to *communicate*. Absolute death (non-being) is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered." ¹²

Not everything that is new is innovatory. Innovation for Ivanov, as he demonstrates in his examination of myth in his Dostoevsky book, is rooted always in a profound cultural memory, a sense of history and tradition. Ivanov was fond of citing Goethe's words: "The truth has been found long ago; it unites the august company of spiritual minds. Grasp it, the age-old truth" (*Vermächtnis*).

Ivanov first emerged as a poet with the publication of two collections of poetry in 1904 and 1905. In the same period, he took up the study of the history of religion, in particular the Dionysian cults, publishing in 1904 *The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God*. Ivanov's most important work on Greek religion and myth was his *Dionysus and the Origin of his Worship* (1924). His preoccupation with Hellenistic religion, culture, and myth also found direct expression in his three early essays on Dostoevsky and his Dostoevsky book.

The first part of his book, "Tragedic Aspect," remains, with some additions, changes, and excisions, the brilliant excursus on Dostoevsky's "novel-tragedy" that dates back to 1911 (the original essay was divided into two sections entitled "The Principle of Form" and "The

Principle of World View"). In it Ivanov discusses the form and dynamics of Dostoevsky's "novel-tragedy": "Each cell carries within it the germ of an agonistic development; and, if the whole is catastrophic, so then is each synapse of the particular. This is the explanation of Dostoevsky's law of epic rhythm, which exactly accords with the essential nature of tragedy: the law of the progressively gathering momentum of events."¹³

The thematic structure of Ivanov's book has a rhythm that gives expression to his conception of Dostoevsky's art and his notion of "realistic symbolism." In art this type of symbolism "leads the soul of the spectator *a realibus ad realiora* . . . from reality on the lower plane, a reality of lesser ontological value, to the more real reality."¹⁴ Thus in his book there is the movement *from tragedy*, with its "liberating final convulsion of the spirit" (pt. 1, "Tragedic Aspect"), *through myth*, where mythic archetypes emerge as patterns of the human spirit disclosing a higher reality (pt. 2, "Mythological Aspect"), *to theology* (pt. 3, "Theological Aspect")—that is, to a moment of the highest knowledge. Ivanov signals this moment with a line from Dante: "Reader, sharpen here your vision of truth, for the veil is now so fine that indeed it is easy to pierce"¹⁵ (*Purgatory*, 8, 19). Here Ivanov's own deep commitment to Christianity takes center stage. This is a book about Dostoevsky. It also represents in important respects a crystallization of Ivanov's spiritual and religious ascent.

What is noteworthy about Ivanov's book is its holistic approach to Dostoevsky. It combines philosophical, biographical, and formalistic analysis. Throughout, Ivanov posits the unity of the man, artist, and thinker. "[Dostoevsky's] work," Ivanov writes early in the book, "is the most striking example we know of the identity of form and content—in so far as by content we mean the original intuitive perception of life, and by form the means of transmuting this by art into the flesh and blood of a new world of living entities."¹⁶ Toward the end of his study, Ivanov speaks of the "infallible criterion" for his interpretation of Dostoevsky's religious thought: "the accord between what Dostoevsky had to teach [*der didaktischen Formel*] and the living artistic imagery in which he clothed it."¹⁷ For Ivanov, Dostoevsky is a fundamentally religious writer, but one whose religiosity emerged as much

from the fundamentally tragic nature of his art as from the depths of his experience and being. "Art once served religion and wholly rested on it," Ivanov wrote in his first Dostoevsky study, *Dostoevsky and the Novel-Tragedy*. "If it were possible to tear art from religion, it would perish because it would be torn from its roots,' say the defenders of a connection between art and religion . . . [But] is such a disengagement itself possible? Here the decisive voice belongs to tragedy. It says, no: it is impossible."¹⁸ Ivanov's thought leads him to a consideration of "tragic guilt"—a theme that enters into Ivanov's discussion of *Crime and Punishment*.

Ivanov's early preoccupation with Nietzsche yielded, partly under the influence of the religious philosopher Vladimir Solovyov, to a literary and ethical outlook based on the principles of *sobornost'*—the idea of ecumenicity. In "The Crisis of Individualism" (1905), he argues that "individualism, in its contemporary, involuntary and unconscious metamorphosis, is acquiring features of spiritual union or ecumenicity."¹⁹ "Serve the spirit, or the true 'I' in you," he writes, "with the same faithfulness that you would wish from every person in his service to the spirit inhabiting him."²⁰ A year later, in "Presentiments and Portents," he welcomes the arrival of "a new organic epoch and theater of the future," one that would foreground the choral and ecumenical element.²¹

"The one through the other we found ourselves—each found himself and more than only self: I would say we found God," Ivanov wrote in his "Autobiographical Letter" (1917) about his relationship with Lydia Dmitrievna Zinovieva.²² Ivanov's central metaphysical theme, at once personal, aesthetic, and religious, emerges in this simple line as it does in more complex ways in his poetic and philosophical writings (for example, in "Thou art" [*Ty esi*] in Ivanov's long poem "Man" [Chelovek, 1915–1919] and in an article, "Thou Art" [1907]). Thus, too, in his Dostoevsky book the idea of "the one through the other we found ourselves" is embodied in the concept of Dostoevsky's realism as based on the notion of "Thou art." Ivanov maintains that Dostoevsky's "higher realism" is based not upon theoretical cognition, with its constant antithesis of subject and object but upon an act of will and faith approximately corresponding to the Au-

gustinian *transcende te ipsum*. Ivanov likens this process to the idea conveyed by a Russian word, a favorite of Dostoevsky's, *proniknovenie* (penetration, perception, discernment, sagacity), a word which for Ivanov is conveyed to some extent by the German word *Sich einsetzen*.

Proniknovenie is a transcension of the subject. In this state of mind we recognize the other Ego not as our object, but as another subject. It is therefore not a mere peripheral extension of the bounds of individual consciousness, but a complete inversion of its normal system of coordinates. The authenticity of this transvaluation is demonstrated primarily in one's inner life: in the experience of true love. . . . The spiritual penetration finds expression in the unconditional acceptance with our full will and thought of the other-existence—in "Thou art." If this acceptance of the other-existence is complete; if, with and in this acceptance, the whole substance of my own existence is rendered null and void (*exinanitio*, *kenosis*), then the other-existence ceases to be an alien "Thou"; instead, the "Thou becomes another description of my "Ego." "Thou art" then no longer means "Thou art recognized by me as existing," but "I experience thy existence as my own, and in thy existence I again find myself existing." *Es, ergo sum*.²³

In his essay "The Religious Work of Vladimir Solovyov" (1911), Ivanov expresses his idea through the example of an individual observing the reflection of himself through two mirrors:

The individual looking into a mirror finds a true reflection of himself only when a reflection in a second image is created. It is this second mirror, correcting the first—*speculum speculi*—that is "the other" for the man who wants to know. Truth is only authenticated if it is seen in another. Where two or three are together in the name of Christ, there among them is Christ Himself. Thus an adequate cognition of the secret of being is possible only in mystical communion, that is, in the Church.²⁴

Ivanov, one might say, in certain respects anticipates Bakhtin's later theory of the polyphonic perception of the human image. In his notes "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book," discussing the "impossibility of the existence of a single consciousness," Bakhtin writes: "I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. . . . I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself (in mutual reflection and mutual acceptance)."²⁵

Dostoevsky himself, Ivanov believes, arrived at "transcension" through his personal experience. His "realism was his faith, which he received after he had lost his 'soul', that is to say, his selfhood." Ivanov alludes to Dostoevsky's experience just before he expected to be executed.

It is only through the realism founded on "Thou art," through the affirmation of the consciousness of "the other," Ivanov believes, not as object but as subject—in a word, through love—that the individual can overcome solipsism.

Ivanov posits a direct authorial presence in Dostoevsky's novelistic universe, one in which literary form is a function of an ethical-religious worldview. This is evident in the way Ivanov understands the artist Dostoevsky's polyphonic interrelations with the world. In a passage in *Dostoevsky and the Novel-Tragedy*, one that was later omitted from his 1932 study, Ivanov, contrasting the creative methods of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, writes that Tolstoy

placed himself like a mirror before the world, and everything that entered the mirror entered into him: thus he wants to fill himself up with the world, absorb it, make it his own through appropriating it, and after having overcome [the world] in consciousness, return to people both the world that passed through him and that which he learned while it was passing through—the norms of relating to the world. This act of return is the second act, an act of concern for the world and love for people, understood as service; but the first act of return was pure observation and contemplation. Dostoevsky's path was a different one. His whole striving was not to absorb the given world and life around him, but on coming out of himself, to *penetrate and enter into the multitudes of life* around him; he does not need to fill himself up, but *to lose himself*. Living beings, access to whom was immediately opened up to him, are not things of the world, but people—human personalities; because they are really of the same nature as he. Here the energy of the centrifugal movements of the human "I" which make up the Dionysian pathos of character evoke in the soul of the genius a realization of self that reaches into the uttermost depths, into deposits inherited from ancient times; as a result the *soul seems to itself like a many-stringed instrument*, wondrous and all-accommodating; to all the experiences of the other's "I" it seems to find in itself a corresponding echo and on the basis of these similarities and features of a kindred likeness, *can create in itself any state of the other's soul*. The spirit, listening with strained attention to how the prisoner in the next room lives and moves

about, demands of his neighbor but a few slight signals in order to divine the unexpressed, the unsaid.²⁶ [*Italics mine*]

Ivanov perceives Tolstoy's creative process as consisting of two separate acts or actions: the first, aesthetic, consists of "pure observation and contemplation"; the second, ethical, is one of love. Dostoevsky's *penetration* of reality, by contrast, is one in which the aesthetic and ethical impulses are joined into one. Important in this connection is Ivanov's formal representation of Dostoevsky's muse as a "many-stringed instrument" capable of sounding out, and responding to, many and diverse voices. The artist, indeed, can incarnate any state of "the other's soul." He does not reach out coldly as if "to things of the world" (objects); he reaches out to "people—human personalities." Ivanov's idea is clear: where Dostoevsky is concerned, *the creative act is a human or humanizing act*. The aesthetic impulse is indistinguishable from the ethical impulse. The artist is not aloof from his creations: rather he loses himself in them.

The concept of Dostoevsky's artistic muse as "many-stringed," or multivoiced, and of his world as polyphonic is also expressed in another way in Ivanov's first Dostoevsky essay and later in his book. Ivanov represents Dostoevsky as the union of an empirical or external self, one prey to worldly sin and error, and a new inwardly free and transcendent self. He goes on to define the relation between these selves on the one hand and that existing, on the other, between Dostoevsky's new self, or artistic muse, and his creations:

Not only did Dostoevsky give his double, who faced the outer world, full freedom to live as he chose, or as he was compelled, to live: we actually find the artist ever busy creating new doubles for himself, all of them contained behind the polymorphous masks of his own many-faced and all-human Ego, which is no more bound to *one* face. For the more the inner Ego is freed from the outer, the more closely it feels itself allied to all humanity; since, in the boundless wealth of individual differences, it recognizes only variously conditioned forms of its own subjection to the law of separate existence. The expression: "Nothing that is human is alien to me" becomes a complete truth only when a new Ego, free from all taint of human limitations, is brought to birth.²⁷

Dostoevsky lets his "double"—in this case, his outer, empirical self which faces the external world—live its own life. Duality here

is not evidence of a pathological state of being but a manifestation of a hard-won freedom of the spirit; "the inner Ego" has been freed from the outer external or empirical self. The artist Dostoevsky can now give himself over to multiplication of his "doubles" under the "polymorphous masks" of his many-faced, all-human Ego, or "I"—one that can now identify with *all* humanity, whether good or evil ("Nothing that is human is alien to me"). Thus Dostoevsky has the ability to project himself into other beings and personalities while at the same time maintaining his essential spiritual integrity; in other words, his point of view.

Dostoevsky's "doubles" exist independently of him, live their own life in accord with the "law of separate existence." Yet Dostoevsky's "all-human Ego" stands in an active ethical relation to "the other," to his "doubles": the interweaving threads of their free lives fulfill *his* ultimate design—to make manifest ultimate spiritual truth. Thus Ivanov writes:

It is true that Dostoevsky's work gives evidence of violent spiritual struggles, which provide this mighty dialectician with abundant material for the creation of those tragedies of the spirit in which the metaphysical tumult proclaims itself in many a different guise; but these gigantically sprouting antitheses are so balanced that—far from effacing the basic knowledge already won, and branded on the soul—they actually widen and deepen it.²⁸

The effect of the convulsed and warring consciousnesses in Dostoevsky's polyphonic world, the clash of "independent" voices speaking their own truth, the impression created by "doubles" living their own lives, is for Ivanov ultimately a sense of "a deepening and widening" of the way. The reader of a Dostoevsky novel, if he has read deeply and well, is left with a "basic knowledge already won"; he is left, as Ivanov puts it, with the "religious truth of society . . . [Dostoevsky's] truth that relations between the personality and society must be founded on mutual love."²⁹

Ivanov's view of the Dostoevsky novel as a type, then, would seem to fall somewhere between the polyphonic and monological models of Bakhtin. Likewise, Ivanov's Dostoevsky, though a "many-stringed instrument," is a musician who orchestrates his strings to express a very definite worldview. They are wrong, Ivanov writes of certain inter-

preters of Dostoevsky who "by listing contradictory statements that he has put into the mouth of his seekers and deniers of God," seek "to convict him of disbelief" or "radical skepticism and despair."

This theory is tenable on grounds neither of biography, nor of psychology . . . nor yet of logic; and it can be equally well refuted by a study either of the context of the particular passages in which the negative attitude is expressed, or of the great organic unity of Dostoevsky's work as a whole. Indeed, all parts of his "doctrine" have such an inwardly fundamental and living relationship—his ethics, psychology, metaphysic, anthropology, sociology and eschatology so utterly determine and complement each other—that the deeper we penetrate into the nature of the connection between them, the more certain must we come to realize that for Dostoevsky the creation of literary form was only a medium for the polymorphous development of a synthetic idea of the universe, which from the outset he had carried within him as a comprehensive vision and a morphological principle of his spiritual growth.³⁰

These final lines admirably sum up Ivanov's view of the organic unity of Dostoevsky the man, thinker, and artist.

Midway on the path to his exposition of Dostoevsky's "doctrine," in part 2, "Mythological Aspect," Ivanov examines those areas of Dostoevsky's work where higher truth is "refracted in the coloured intermediate plane of myth and imagination."³¹ Ivanov elaborates his theory of "realistic symbolism" according to which "a nucleus [of the epic tragedy] contains from the beginning the full symbolic force of the whole work, its entire 'higher realism'; that is to say, the original intuition of a transcendental reality. . . . To describe this nucleus of symbolic creation, we use the word 'myth.'"³²

Ivanov focuses upon *The Devils*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *The Idiot*. As always, Ivanov works toward a disclosure of the fundamental ethical and religious content of Dostoevsky's work. Taking as his point of departure the biblical concept of the people as a "personality," and conceiving the people as a unity of two principles, feminine and masculine, Ivanov, in the chapter "The Enchanted Bride" locates the basic theme of *The Devils* in the "symbolism of the relationship between Earth's soul, the daring, erring human spirit and the Powers of Evil";³³ he analyzes the triangular relationship between the cripple, Maria Timofeyevna, perceived as a figure of Mother Earth, or symbolic virgin, the satanic Peter Verkhovensky, and the would-be savior, Stavrogin,

the "Russian Faust: but in a negative version."³⁴ In general, Ivanov signals the strong presence of Goethe's *Faust* in Dostoevsky's work.

At the opening of his book, one may note here, Ivanov draws Goethe's *Faust* into his discussion of the metaphysical dimension of Dostoevsky's art:

Not in the earthly stage of being lie the roots of that intellectual and spiritual substance, clothed in flesh, which is known as man, but in an existence beyond this world; and each individual destiny has its "Prologue in Heaven." In that transcendent sphere where God and Devil do battle over the fate of the creature—and "their battlefield is in the hearts of men"—here *incipit tragoedia*.³⁵

Yet man is free. Without free self-determination, Ivanov insists, the word *tragic* cannot properly be used. "Thus it comes about that Dostoevsky sets the real key-point of the tragic tangle in the realm of metaphysics; for only here we are allowed to premise the pure activity of the free will and have an insight into it through the prism of art."³⁶

Ivanov's "Prologue in Heaven," of course, is a direct allusion to Goethe's "Prolog im Himmel" in *Faust* (and beyond that to the Book of Job), the scene in which God and the devil debate the uprightness of the "little earth god" Faust. In this scene the Lord maintains that "a good man in his dark strivings is conscious of the right way." "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" in *The Brothers Karamazov* serves the same function as the "Prologue in Heaven" in *Faust*. In the confrontation between the Grand Inquisitor and his prisoner Jesus, the question of man's capacity to be free and responsible is posed—a question that is lived out in the dramas of the heroes of the novel. Dmitry Karamazov serves Ivanov as an illustration of a person in whom spiritual struggle ends (at least as far as his relations with his father are concerned) with a choice of the "right way." He cites Dmitry: "Well, it was like this: whether it was someone's tears, or my mother prayed to God, or a good angel kissed me at that instant, I don't know. But the devil was conquered." Ivanov links the "angel's kiss" with the memory of Zosima's genuflection before Dmitry in the cell, "the genuflection that foretold to Dmitry the expiatory suffering in store for him." What is central for Dostoevsky, according to Ivanov, is that man lives not in solipsistic isolation but in a unified spiritual field in which all actions and happenings, past and present, are united

through memory. Thus man is ever in communion with "countless spirits," with the living and the dead. Ivanov cites Father Zosima: "What grows lives and is alive only through the feeling of its contact with other mysterious worlds."

Ivanov considers *Crime and Punishment* (in the chapter "The Revolt against Mother Earth," pt. 2) "Dostoevsky's first great revelation to the world, and the main pillar of his subsequent philosophy of life."³⁷ It is significant that Ivanov discusses *Notes from the Underground* only very briefly, and then in a later chapter given over to "Daemonology." Leo Shestov, in *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* (1903), had seen in *Notes from the Underground* "a public, albeit a veiled, renunciation of [Dostoevsky's] past."³⁸ Ivanov not only speaks of *Notes* as "a devastating criticism of present-day social relations," but observes that "the author has no objection to uttering through the character's mouth the religious truth concerning society in its elementary form: the truth that relations between the personality and society must be found on mutual love."³⁹ The Underground Man certainly does not give verbal expression to this religious truth, at least not in the version of the work that has come down to us (it is possible that Ivanov had in mind Dostoevsky's letter to his brother Mikhail in which the novelist declares that the censor had eliminated passages from the novel [chap. 10, pt. 1] where "I deduce . . . the need for faith and Christ").⁴⁰ Yet Ivanov correctly deduces from the text Dostoevsky's basic ethical-religious intention. This idea finds dramatic expression in the pietà episode (chap. 11, pt. 2), the moment when, sobbing, the Underground Man falls into Liza's arms. Clearly the censored passages in chapter 10, part 1, of the original version of *Notes* gave verbal expression to the idea of the pietà episode.

In "The Revolt Against Mother Earth," Ivanov suggests that *Crime and Punishment* and Pushkin's "Queen of Spades" are united not only on the grounds of plot but on the basis of "shared mythical conceptions": "Both [protagonists] incur the guilt of killing the Parca, and must suffer her posthumous revenge." Ivanov links both the countess and the pawnbroker with the theme of the "female avenger . . . emissary of Mother Earth, rising in wrathful resistance."⁴¹ It is in this connection that Ivanov discusses the problematic of guilt and its roots in Aeschylus and Sophocles. In general, the questions

raised by Ivanov on the relationship of Dostoevsky's novels to classical tragedy, for example to *Oedipus*, deserve more attention.

Goethe's *Faust* and Sophocles' *Oedipus* serve Ivanov as valuable points of comparison for discussion of *The Possessed* and *Crime and Punishment*, respectively. Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, a favorite work of Dostoevsky's, leads Ivanov to a consideration of Myshkin in *The Idiot*. Yet Ivanov more centrally locates Myshkin in the "poor fool" of medieval legend, the Ivan-Tsarevich of the old Russian tale, "the simple and true-hearted one." Myshkin is "above all, the type of a spirituality that descends, that seeks the Earth: rather a spirit that assumes flesh than a man who rises to the spiritual. . . . [The] preponderance of the Platonic *anamnesis* over the sense of reality is just what makes him at once a fool and a wise seer amongst men."⁴² In a provocative essay on Ivanov's literary criticism, René Wellek has found in Ivanov's mythopoetic interpretation of *The Idiot* (and of other works of Dostoevsky) an example of "the dangers of arbitrary allegorizing." "One has to conclude that Ivanov is expounding a book which he would have wanted Dostoevsky to have written, rather than the one he actually wrote."⁴³

Wellek's criticism seems unduly harsh. There is no question that Ivanov mythopoeticizes Myshkin, that is, suggests a mythic derivation that Dostoevsky does not literally advance with respect to Myshkin. Yet that derivation, however fanciful from one point of view, does accord with Dostoevsky's highly allegorical representation of Myshkin as a Christ figure, albeit a failed one. Where Ivanov seems to have fallen short in his analysis of *The Idiot* is not in his search for myth in Dostoevsky but in his general unwillingness or hesitation to come to grips with the problem of Myshkin as a Christ figure. Christ, of course, is *not* a mythic figure for Ivanov—and this is probably the nub of the matter. He is not a mythic figure for Dostoevsky, either; yet Dostoevsky the artist has certainly turned Myshkin into a mythic Christ figure, or has woven Christ, or aspects of him, into myth, and this issue must be faced directly in any analysis of Myshkin or interpretation of the novel. Here Wellek's observation that Ivanov "ignores the description of 'the complete breakdown of [Myshkin's] mental faculties,' his imbecility," is very much to the point.⁴⁴ The idea of a crippled or failed Christ must have been inconceivable to Ivanov. The

very idea that a fictional character could be a Christ figure may also have bothered him.

In the final section of his book, "Theological Aspect," Ivanov focuses directly on the basic assumption of his entire book: Dostoevsky's commitment as man, thinker, and artist to a Christian religious outlook. The two chapters of part 3, "Daemonology" and "Hagiography," are largely given over to a discussion of the symbolic presence of Lucifer and Ahriman in Dostoevsky's works on the one hand and *The Brothers Karamazov* on the other. Ivanov develops a rich discussion of the problem of evil in Dostoevsky's novelistic universe around the ideas associated with Lucifer and Ahriman (though Dostoevsky himself does not use the second, Zoroastrian term).

If the names of Goethe, Byron, Pushkin, Sophocles, or Aeschylus appear with frequency in the first two parts of Ivanov's book, it is Dante, along with Dostoevsky, who occupies the center of the stage in the third and final part. In a provocative introduction to part 3 entitled "Theological Aspect" (the essay does not appear in any of the earlier Dostoevsky pieces), Ivanov insists that "we are . . . entitled to speak—*mutatis mutandis*—of a 'doctrine' propounded by Dostoevsky."⁴⁵ He acknowledges that Dostoevsky can comprehend the "inner form and true essence" of his doctrine only "when it is mirrored in myth: [in this he is] like all artists whose task it is, in the words of Plato, to create myths (μυθουφ) and not doctrines (λογουφ)."⁴⁶ Yet with this qualification in mind, Ivanov argues that both Dostoevsky and Dante "see the way to this end [i.e., leading mankind to a state of bliss] in religious truth. Both have taken the veil of poetry from the hand of truth; . . . both alike are teachers of the Faith; both peer down into the deepest chasms of evil; both accompany the sinful and redemption-seeking soul along the difficult paths of its ascent." In contrast, however, to Dante's teaching—"rigid as the order of Hell"—"Dostoevsky's apologetics . . . are essentially dynamic and tragic."⁴⁷ Yet Dostoevsky's works, from *Crime and Punishment* to *The Brothers Karamazov*, when considered in terms of the movement of living thought within them, form "the links of a dialectical chain, of theses and antitheses, the ladder of one continual ascent of the self-perceiving idea."⁴⁸ That idea, according to Ivanov, finds its supreme embodiment in Christ.

Ivanov's concept of Dostoevsky's art as Greek in its roots and Christian in its flowering is a rich one. In the more than half century since Ivanov's book was written, critical scholarship has disclosed the multiple ways Dostoevsky's ethical-religious thought has entered into the conception and design of his art. Ivanov, however, posits a religious "doctrine" directly binding all aspects of Dostoevsky's work and providing the key to its architectonics. There is, without doubt, a rigidity to this formula, one that transforms the artist into a teacher of the faith and his art into an unambiguous fulfillment of intentional design. Ivanov speaks convincingly about the religious foundations of Dostoevsky's artistic thought but for the most part discounts the moral-philosophical pressures and tensions, or "contradictions," that also manifest themselves in his novels. Dostoevsky himself, it is interesting to note, in spite of the Christian character of his higher aesthetics and worldview, rejected the notion that he was "one of those people who save souls, settle spiritual problems [*razreshit' dushi*], put grief to flight. Sometimes people write this about me," he wrote in a letter to A. L. Ozhigina February 28, 1878, "but I know *for certain* that I am capable of instilling disillusionment and revulsion. I am not skilled in writing lullabies, though I have occasionally had a go at it. And, of course, many people demand nothing more than that they be lulled."⁴⁹

Dostoevsky of course is not addressing the question of deep Christian design in his work, but he is surely suggesting the complexity of his work *as art*, the central concern of his novels with raising and exploring questions as opposed to resolving them in some didactic way. He is certainly recognizing that his works deal with a disturbing or disturbed reality and may in turn have disturbing and unanticipated effects on the reader. Though we are under no obligation to accept Dostoevsky's view of the potential for the negative impact of his work, the history of the reception of Dostoevsky suggests that more than misunderstanding is at the root of the wide and passionate diversity of opinions on him. Even the philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev, one of the great religious interpreters of Dostoevsky, recognizes the unpredictable nature of Dostoevsky when he warns that one must read him "in an atmosphere of spiritual emancipation."⁵⁰ Berdyaev's remark leaves open the door to the view that misunderstandings of Dostoev-

sky are simply misreadings: the more emancipated we are, the less likely we are to draw misleading conclusions. Yet even among emancipated readers there has been no consensus about Dostoevsky. Nor should there be.

Ivanov, to be sure, was fully aware of the problematic side of Dostoevsky's work. In the introduction to his 1916 study, *Dostoevsky and the Novel-Tragedy*, he emphasizes the complex character of Dostoevsky's art and the way it not only gives expression to, but creates and shapes, the Russian mind and spirit.

He dwells in our midst, because from him or through him comes everything that we are living through—both our light and our underground. He is the great founder and definer of our cultural complexity. Before him, everything in Russian life, in Russian thought, was simple. He made complex our soul, our faith, our art; he invented, just as "Turner invented the London fog," that is, he discovered, disclosed, realized in form, our developing and still unrecognized complexity.⁵¹

Ivanov revised this passage in his introduction to his 1932 Dostoevsky book. Viewing Dostoevsky in a universal rather than specifically Russian context, he writes more broadly of Dostoevsky's contribution to contemporary "intellectual and spiritual complexity." He notes the "peculiar effects of the ferment he induced, which had the power to stir up all the depths of our conscious and subconscious existence," but drops the reference to the "underground."⁵² Ivanov in the late 1920's seems increasingly drawn to aspects of Dostoevsky that concord with his own spiritual and religious development. At the same time, his view of our understanding of Dostoevsky is a dynamic one. "Dostoevsky dwells in our midst," he writes as he did in 1916, but this time adds, "and changes as we do."⁵³ "An author," Bakhtin wrote in his "Answer to a Question from the Editorial Board of *Novy Mir*" (1970), "is a prisoner of his epoch, of the world about him. Subsequent times liberate him from the imprisonment, and literary scholarship is called upon to assist in this liberation."⁵⁴ Ivanov had a profound appreciation of this truth. He recognized, too, that Dostoevsky was not merely a prisoner awaiting liberation in this or that time dimension, but liberated his liberators.

Whether all of Dostoevsky—the explosive and antinomian character of his artistic thought and creation—can be encompassed by

Ivanov's thesis on the role of religious doctrine in his art is a question. Indeed, all of Dostoevsky's work is a question. What is certain, however, is that Vyacheslav Ivanov's book remains one of the great entrances to Dostoevsky's artistic and spiritual universe. "Beside it," Isaiah Berlin has rightly observed, "Gide's famous study as well as all the well-meaning essays of the interpreters of the Russian soul, seems trivial and shallow." Ivanov's study has widened and deepened our understanding of the tragic foundations of Dostoevsky's art, the universal language and symbolic forms that give it shape, and the ethical-religious principle that informs it. Profound and provocative, Ivanov's book has opened the way to new insights into old truths. Few are the works that attain these goals. More than this we cannot ask.

14 *Vision in His Soul*

Vyacheslav I. Ivanov's Dostoevsky

Finally, it must be asked concerning every artist how he is in relation to the highest knowledge and to those laws which do not take holiday because men and times forget them.

James Joyce



Vyacheslav Ivanov's study *Dostoevsky* (1932), a composite of writings extending over twenty years, is one of the few significant literary-philosophical studies in the twentieth century on the great Russian novelist. Written in the majestic prose of one of Russia's great poets, it is perhaps the finest example of the ontological and metaphysical school of Dostoevsky criticism that flourished in Russian writing at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, a body of writing that includes the work of such thinkers as Vasily Rozanov, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Nicholas Berdyaev, and Leo Shestov. At the same time, Ivanov's study stands on the threshold of modern Dostoevsky criticism. The appearance of Ivanov's *Dostoevsky* in German translation in 1932,¹ nearly coinciding with the publication of M. M. Bakhtin's rigorously formal *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* in 1929,² might indeed be regarded as symbolic of the meeting and parting of ways of the old and new. Ivanov himself took note of the new prevailing critical directions: "In our modern and more sober times, investigation is directed almost exclusively towards matter of fact problems of form; that is to say, on the one hand towards biography, and on the other hand towards the technique of narration, towards questions of style, subject, artistic methods and literary-historical derivations. The investigation of Dostoevsky's religious philosophy remains as a serious task for the future."³

Yet if Ivanov's work with its interest in the ethical and religious dimensions of Dostoevsky's novels may be considered characteristic of the "old criticism," it also anticipated the new criticism of Bakhtin, Leonid Grossman, and others in its concern with the form of Dostoevsky's novels and their roots in tragedy and myth. It is no surprise that Bakhtin, then a relatively unknown author, placed Ivanov at the head of a list of writers in whose critical works "attempts are made at a more objective approach to Dostoevsky's works—not only to the ideas in and of themselves, but also to the works as artistic entities."⁴ Indeed, a perusal of Ivanov's *Dostoevsky* suggests that he anticipated the concept of the polyphonic novel of Dostoevsky. Further, with his conception of the "thou art" principle as central to Dostoevsky's worldview, Ivanov laid a foundation upon which Bakhtin would construct his fine model of Dostoevsky's poetics.

Vyacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov was born in Moscow February 16/28, 1866, and died in Rome July 16, 1949. Major Russian poet, theoretician of the Russian symbolist movement, classical philologist, historian, and translator—a veritable Renaissance figure—Ivanov was also a religious thinker who in the last decades of his life in Rome embraced Roman Catholicism (though he continued to observe the Eastern rites). Referring to the general condition of Europe and Russia, he wrote in his well-known "Lettre à Charles Du Bos" in 1930: "In this atmosphere where the spiritual torpor of the bourgeois world corresponded by some sort of diabolical counterpoint with the revolutionary fever [in Russia], that familiar call sounded again imperiously in my soul; it was the persistent call which, ever since my youthful contact with that great and saintly man who was Vladimir Solovyov, had led me slowly but inexorably towards joining the Roman Catholic church."⁵

Ivanov studied Roman history for five years with the renowned Theodor Mommsen in Berlin in the late 1880's and early 1890's, working at the same time in his favorite area of classical philology. Nietzsche soon engaged his attention, but Ivanov quickly struck out on his own path away from him, particularly where matters of religious consciousness were concerned. Yet later, in *A Correspondence from Two Corners* (1922), he could still write of Nietzsche as "one who joins the company of the great modelers of the ideal; from an iconoclast he

turns into an icon painter."⁶ Ivanov wrote again in the same work: "It is most doubtful whether in today's cultural milieu any personal initiation can take place without the initiate . . . meeting [Nietzsche] as the 'guardian of the threshold.' Nietzsche has said: 'Man is something that must be overcome'—thereby testifying once more that the way of personal emancipation is a path up to the heights and down into the depths, a vertical movement."⁷

Ivanov's deep involvement with all aspects of European culture, history, and literature, particularly the Hellenistic period, continued throughout his life (he spent forty-four years of his life abroad, living and traveling in Germany, Italy, France, England, Greece, Egypt, and Palestine, even though during these years he made frequent trips to Russia). A signal example of this concern for European culture was his *Correspondence from Two Corners*, a work which the German cultural historian Ernst Robert Curtius referred to as "the most important statement about humanism since Nietzsche."⁸ In this unique epistolary dialogue with the distinguished literary and cultural historian M. O. Gershenzon (each exchanged six letters with the other) Ivanov set forth his views on the nature of culture and tradition and on the questions of decline and continuity in Western culture:

What is "decadence"? It is a feeling of the most refined organic bond with the grand tradition of a past high culture together with a painful and proud consciousness that one is the last of a line. In other words, decadence is memory benumbed, its promotive capacity gone, not allowing us to participate in our fathers' initiations, no longer providing impulses for any real creativity. It is the knowledge that prophecy has ceased, as, indeed, the decadent Plutarch suggests in the title of one of his works, "The Cessation of the Oracles."⁹

Ivanov's work—his poetry, criticism, and literary-philosophical writings—is itself deeply situated in, and conscious of, cultural tradition; it is in its own way "oracular" in spirit and deeply concerned with the problem of memory and oblivion. "Memory is a dynamic principle," Ivanov observes in his *Correspondence from Two Corners*, "oblivion is weariness and the interruption of movement, decadence and a return to a state of relative stagnation."¹⁰ Looking back into the past, Ivanov wrote in an essay, "On the Law and Connections" (1908), the man who has lost touch with life "encounters at its end a gloom

and vainly tries to distinguish in that gloom forms resembling recollection." Then he experiences that "impotence of exhausted thought that we call oblivion. Nonbeing is directly disclosed to [his] consciousness in the form of oblivion which negates it." This tragedy is the direct result, Ivanov believes, of not recognizing that life is "embodiment," that "man lives for those who have passed and for the future, for ancestors and descendants alike. . . . Every moment changes everything preceding him in time. Hence the obligation *to live* is the only obligation. Because 'obligation' is 'connection.'" ¹¹ The ethical idea expressed here was to remain a constant in Ivanov's writing and lies at the center of his fundamentally religious understanding of Dostoevsky. Bakhtin, it may be noted, echoes some of these same ideas of Ivanov's in his perception of Dostoevsky. "[The Russian novelist]," he wrote in 1961 in "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book," "asserts the impossibility of solitude, the illusory nature of solitude. The very being of man (both external and internal) is the *deepest communion*. *To be* means to *communicate*. Absolute death (non-being) is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered." ¹²

Not everything that is new is innovatory. Innovation for Ivanov, as he demonstrates in his examination of myth in his Dostoevsky book, is rooted always in a profound cultural memory, a sense of history and tradition. Ivanov was fond of citing Goethe's words: "The truth has been found long ago; it unites the august company of spiritual minds. Grasp it, the age-old truth" (*Vermächtnis*).

Ivanov first emerged as a poet with the publication of two collections of poetry in 1904 and 1905. In the same period, he took up the study of the history of religion, in particular the Dionysian cults, publishing in 1904 *The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God*. Ivanov's most important work on Greek religion and myth was his *Dionysus and the Origin of his Worship* (1924). His preoccupation with Hellenistic religion, culture, and myth also found direct expression in his three early essays on Dostoevsky and his Dostoevsky book.

The first part of his book, "Tragedic Aspect," remains, with some additions, changes, and excisions, the brilliant excursus on Dostoevsky's "novel-tragedy" that dates back to 1911 (the original essay was divided into two sections entitled "The Principle of Form" and "The

Principle of World View"). In it Ivanov discusses the form and dynamics of Dostoevsky's "novel-tragedy": "Each cell carries within it the germ of an agonistic development; and, if the whole is catastrophic, so then is each synapse of the particular. This is the explanation of Dostoevsky's law of epic rhythm, which exactly accords with the essential nature of tragedy: the law of the progressively gathering momentum of events."¹³

The thematic structure of Ivanov's book has a rhythm that gives expression to his conception of Dostoevsky's art and his notion of "realistic symbolism." In art this type of symbolism "leads the soul of the spectator *a realibus ad realiora* . . . from reality on the lower plane, a reality of lesser ontological value, to the more real reality."¹⁴ Thus in his book there is the movement *from tragedy*, with its "liberating final convulsion of the spirit" (pt. 1, "Tragedic Aspect"), *through myth*, where mythic archetypes emerge as patterns of the human spirit disclosing a higher reality (pt. 2, "Mythological Aspect"), *to theology* (pt. 3, "Theological Aspect")—that is, to a moment of the highest knowledge. Ivanov signals this moment with a line from Dante: "Reader, sharpen here your vision of truth, for the veil is now so fine that indeed it is easy to pierce"¹⁵ (*Purgatory*, 8, 19). Here Ivanov's own deep commitment to Christianity takes center stage. This is a book about Dostoevsky. It also represents in important respects a crystallization of Ivanov's spiritual and religious ascent.

What is noteworthy about Ivanov's book is its holistic approach to Dostoevsky. It combines philosophical, biographical, and formalistic analysis. Throughout, Ivanov posits the unity of the man, artist, and thinker. "[Dostoevsky's] work," Ivanov writes early in the book, "is the most striking example we know of the identity of form and content—in so far as by content we mean the original intuitive perception of life, and by form the means of transmuting this by art into the flesh and blood of a new world of living entities."¹⁶ Toward the end of his study, Ivanov speaks of the "infallible criterion" for his interpretation of Dostoevsky's religious thought: "the accord between what Dostoevsky had to teach [*der didaktischen Formel*] and the living artistic imagery in which he clothed it."¹⁷ For Ivanov, Dostoevsky is a fundamentally religious writer, but one whose religiosity emerged as much

from the fundamentally tragic nature of his art as from the depths of his experience and being. "Art once served religion and wholly rested on it," Ivanov wrote in his first Dostoevsky study, *Dostoevsky and the Novel-Tragedy*. "If it were possible to tear art from religion, it would perish because it would be torn from its roots,' say the defenders of a connection between art and religion . . . [But] is such a disengagement itself possible? Here the decisive voice belongs to tragedy. It says, no: it is impossible."¹⁸ Ivanov's thought leads him to a consideration of "tragic guilt"—a theme that enters into Ivanov's discussion of *Crime and Punishment*.

Ivanov's early preoccupation with Nietzsche yielded, partly under the influence of the religious philosopher Vladimir Solovyov, to a literary and ethical outlook based on the principles of *sobornost'*—the idea of ecumenicity. In "The Crisis of Individualism" (1905), he argues that "individualism, in its contemporary, involuntary and unconscious metamorphosis, is acquiring features of spiritual union or ecumenicity."¹⁹ "Serve the spirit, or the true 'I' in you," he writes, "with the same faithfulness that you would wish from every person in his service to the spirit inhabiting him."²⁰ A year later, in "Presentiments and Portents," he welcomes the arrival of "a new organic epoch and theater of the future," one that would foreground the choral and ecumenical element.²¹

"The one through the other we found ourselves—each found himself and more than only self: I would say we found God," Ivanov wrote in his "Autobiographical Letter" (1917) about his relationship with Lydia Dmitrievna Zinovieva.²² Ivanov's central metaphysical theme, at once personal, aesthetic, and religious, emerges in this simple line as it does in more complex ways in his poetic and philosophical writings (for example, in "Thou art" [*Ty es'*] in Ivanov's long poem "Man" [Chelovek, 1915–1919] and in an article, "Thou Art" [1907]). Thus, too, in his Dostoevsky book the idea of "the one through the other we found ourselves" is embodied in the concept of Dostoevsky's realism as based on the notion of "Thou art." Ivanov maintains that Dostoevsky's "higher realism" is based not upon theoretical cognition, with its constant antithesis of subject and object but upon an act of will and faith approximately corresponding to the Au-

gustinian *transcende te ipsum*. Ivanov likens this process to the idea conveyed by a Russian word, a favorite of Dostoevsky's, *proniknovenie* (penetration, perception, discernment, sagacity), a word which for Ivanov is conveyed to some extent by the German word *Sich einsetzen*.

Proniknovenie is a transcension of the subject. In this state of mind we recognize the other Ego not as our object, but as another subject. It is therefore not a mere peripheral extension of the bounds of individual consciousness, but a complete inversion of its normal system of coordinates. The authenticity of this transvaluation is demonstrated primarily in one's inner life: in the experience of true love. . . . The spiritual penetration finds expression in the unconditional acceptance with our full will and thought of the other-existence—in "Thou art." If this acceptance of the other-existence is complete; if, with and in this acceptance, the whole substance of my own existence is rendered null and void (*exinanitio*, *kenosis*), then the other-existence ceases to be an alien "Thou"; instead, the "Thou becomes another description of my "Ego." "Thou art" then no longer means "Thou art recognized by me as existing," but "I experience thy existence as my own, and in thy existence I again find myself existing." *Es, ergo sum*.²³

In his essay "The Religious Work of Vladimir Solovyov" (1911), Ivanov expresses his idea through the example of an individual observing the reflection of himself through two mirrors:

The individual looking into a mirror finds a true reflection of himself only when a reflection in a second image is created. It is this second mirror, correcting the first—*speculum speculi*—that is "the other" for the man who wants to know. Truth is only authenticated if it is seen in another. Where two or three are together in the name of Christ, there among them is Christ Himself. Thus an adequate cognition of the secret of being is possible only in mystical communion, that is, in the Church.²⁴

Ivanov, one might say, in certain respects anticipates Bakhtin's later theory of the polyphonic perception of the human image. In his notes "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book," discussing the "impossibility of the existence of a single consciousness," Bakhtin writes: "I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. . . . I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself (in mutual reflection and mutual acceptance)."²⁵

Dostoevsky himself, Ivanov believes, arrived at "transcension" through his personal experience. His "realism was his faith, which he received after he had lost his 'soul', that is to say, his selfhood." Ivanov alludes to Dostoevsky's experience just before he expected to be executed.

It is only through the realism founded on "Thou art," through the affirmation of the consciousness of "the other," Ivanov believes, not as object but as subject—in a word, through love—that the individual can overcome solipsism.

Ivanov posits a direct authorial presence in Dostoevsky's novelistic universe, one in which literary form is a function of an ethical-religious worldview. This is evident in the way Ivanov understands the artist Dostoevsky's polyphonic interrelations with the world. In a passage in *Dostoevsky and the Novel-Tragedy*, one that was later omitted from his 1932 study, Ivanov, contrasting the creative methods of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, writes that Tolstoy

placed himself like a mirror before the world, and everything that entered the mirror entered into him: thus he wants to fill himself up with the world, absorb it, make it his own through appropriating it, and after having overcome [the world] in consciousness, return to people both the world that passed through him and that which he learned while it was passing through—the norms of relating to the world. This act of return is the second act, an act of concern for the world and love for people, understood as service; but the first act of return was pure observation and contemplation. Dostoevsky's path was a different one. His whole striving was not to absorb the given world and life around him, but on coming out of himself, to *penetrate and enter into the multitudes of life* around him; he does not need to fill himself up, but *to lose himself*. Living beings, access to whom was immediately opened up to him, are not things of the world, but people—human personalities; because they are really of the same nature as he. Here the energy of the centrifugal movements of the human "I" which make up the Dionysian pathos of character evoke in the soul of the genius a realization of self that reaches into the uttermost depths, into deposits inherited from ancient times; as a result the *soul seems to itself like a many-stringed instrument*, wondrous and all-accommodating; to all the experiences of the other's "I" it seems to find in itself a corresponding echo and on the basis of these similarities and features of a kindred likeness, *can create in itself any state of the other's soul*. The spirit, listening with strained attention to how the prisoner in the next room lives and moves

about, demands of his neighbor but a few slight signals in order to divine the unexpressed, the unsaid.²⁶ [*Italics mine*]

Ivanov perceives Tolstoy's creative process as consisting of two separate acts or actions: the first, aesthetic, consists of "pure observation and contemplation"; the second, ethical, is one of love. Dostoevsky's *penetration* of reality, by contrast, is one in which the aesthetic and ethical impulses are joined into one. Important in this connection is Ivanov's formal representation of Dostoevsky's muse as a "many-stringed instrument" capable of sounding out, and responding to, many and diverse voices. The artist, indeed, can incarnate any state of "the other's soul." He does not reach out coldly as if "to things of the world" (objects); he reaches out to "people—human personalities." Ivanov's idea is clear: where Dostoevsky is concerned, *the creative act is a human or humanizing act*. The aesthetic impulse is indistinguishable from the ethical impulse. The artist is not aloof from his creations: rather he loses himself in them.

The concept of Dostoevsky's artistic muse as "many-stringed," or multivoiced, and of his world as polyphonic is also expressed in another way in Ivanov's first Dostoevsky essay and later in his book. Ivanov represents Dostoevsky as the union of an empirical or external self, one prey to worldly sin and error, and a new inwardly free and transcendent self. He goes on to define the relation between these selves on the one hand and that existing, on the other, between Dostoevsky's new self, or artistic muse, and his creations:

Not only did Dostoevsky give his double, who faced the outer world, full freedom to live as he chose, or as he was compelled, to live: we actually find the artist ever busy creating new doubles for himself, all of them contained behind the polymorphous masks of his own many-faced and all-human Ego, which is no more bound to *one* face. For the more the inner Ego is freed from the outer, the more closely it feels itself allied to all humanity; since, in the boundless wealth of individual differences, it recognizes only variously conditioned forms of its own subjection to the law of separate existence. The expression: "Nothing that is human is alien to me" becomes a complete truth only when a new Ego, free from all taint of human limitations, is brought to birth.²⁷

Dostoevsky lets his "double"—in this case, his outer, empirical self which faces the external world—live its own life. Duality here

is not evidence of a pathological state of being but a manifestation of a hard-won freedom of the spirit; "the inner Ego" has been freed from the outer external or empirical self. The artist Dostoevsky can now give himself over to multiplication of his "doubles" under the "polymorphous masks" of his many-faced, all-human Ego, or "I"—one that can now identify with *all* humanity, whether good or evil ("Nothing that is human is alien to me"). Thus Dostoevsky has the ability to project himself into other beings and personalities while at the same time maintaining his essential spiritual integrity; in other words, his point of view.

Dostoevsky's "doubles" exist independently of him, live their own life in accord with the "law of separate existence." Yet Dostoevsky's "all-human Ego" stands in an active ethical relation to "the other," to his "doubles": the interweaving threads of their free lives fulfill *his* ultimate design—to make manifest ultimate spiritual truth. Thus Ivanov writes:

It is true that Dostoevsky's work gives evidence of violent spiritual struggles, which provide this mighty dialectician with abundant material for the creation of those tragedies of the spirit in which the metaphysical tumult proclaims itself in many a different guise; but these gigantically sprouting antitheses are so balanced that—far from effacing the basic knowledge already won, and branded on the soul—they actually widen and deepen it.²⁸

The effect of the convulsed and warring consciousnesses in Dostoevsky's polyphonic world, the clash of "independent" voices speaking their own truth, the impression created by "doubles" living their own lives, is for Ivanov ultimately a sense of "a deepening and widening" of the way. The reader of a Dostoevsky novel, if he has read deeply and well, is left with a "basic knowledge already won"; he is left, as Ivanov puts it, with the "religious truth of society . . . [Dostoevsky's] truth that relations between the personality and society must be founded on mutual love."²⁹

Ivanov's view of the Dostoevsky novel as a type, then, would seem to fall somewhere between the polyphonic and monological models of Bakhtin. Likewise, Ivanov's Dostoevsky, though a "many-stringed instrument," is a musician who orchestrates his strings to express a very definite worldview. They are wrong, Ivanov writes of certain inter-

preters of Dostoevsky who "by listing contradictory statements that he has put into the mouth of his seekers and deniers of God," seek "to convict him of disbelief" or "radical skepticism and despair."

This theory is tenable on grounds neither of biography, nor of psychology . . . nor yet of logic; and it can be equally well refuted by a study either of the context of the particular passages in which the negative attitude is expressed, or of the great organic unity of Dostoevsky's work as a whole. Indeed, all parts of his "doctrine" have such an inwardly fundamental and living relationship—his ethics, psychology, metaphysic, anthropology, sociology and eschatology so utterly determine and complement each other—that the deeper we penetrate into the nature of the connection between them, the more certain must we come to realize that for Dostoevsky the creation of literary form was only a medium for the polymorphous development of a synthetic idea of the universe, which from the outset he had carried within him as a comprehensive vision and a morphological principle of his spiritual growth.³⁰

These final lines admirably sum up Ivanov's view of the organic unity of Dostoevsky the man, thinker, and artist.

Midway on the path to his exposition of Dostoevsky's "doctrine," in part 2, "Mythological Aspect," Ivanov examines those areas of Dostoevsky's work where higher truth is "refracted in the coloured intermediate plane of myth and imagination."³¹ Ivanov elaborates his theory of "realistic symbolism" according to which "a nucleus [of the epic tragedy] contains from the beginning the full symbolic force of the whole work, its entire 'higher realism'; that is to say, the original intuition of a transcendental reality. . . . To describe this nucleus of symbolic creation, we use the word 'myth.'"³²

Ivanov focuses upon *The Devils*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *The Idiot*. As always, Ivanov works toward a disclosure of the fundamental ethical and religious content of Dostoevsky's work. Taking as his point of departure the biblical concept of the people as a "personality," and conceiving the people as a unity of two principles, feminine and masculine, Ivanov, in the chapter "The Enchanted Bride" locates the basic theme of *The Devils* in the "symbolism of the relationship between Earth's soul, the daring, erring human spirit and the Powers of Evil";³³ he analyzes the triangular relationship between the cripple, Maria Timofeyevna, perceived as a figure of Mother Earth, or symbolic virgin, the satanic Peter Verkhovensky, and the would-be savior, Stavrogin,

the "Russian Faust: but in a negative version."³⁴ In general, Ivanov signals the strong presence of Goethe's *Faust* in Dostoevsky's work.

At the opening of his book, one may note here, Ivanov draws Goethe's *Faust* into his discussion of the metaphysical dimension of Dostoevsky's art:

Not in the earthly stage of being lie the roots of that intellectual and spiritual substance, clothed in flesh, which is known as man, but in an existence beyond this world; and each individual destiny has its "Prologue in Heaven." In that transcendent sphere where God and Devil do battle over the fate of the creature—and "their battlefield is in the hearts of men"—here *incipit tragoedia*.³⁵

Yet man is free. Without free self-determination, Ivanov insists, the word *tragic* cannot properly be used. "Thus it comes about that Dostoevsky sets the real key-point of the tragic tangle in the realm of metaphysics; for only here we are allowed to premise the pure activity of the free will and have an insight into it through the prism of art."³⁶

Ivanov's "Prologue in Heaven," of course, is a direct allusion to Goethe's "Prolog im Himmel" in *Faust* (and beyond that to the Book of Job), the scene in which God and the devil debate the uprightness of the "little earth god" Faust. In this scene the Lord maintains that "a good man in his dark strivings is conscious of the right way." "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" in *The Brothers Karamazov* serves the same function as the "Prologue in Heaven" in *Faust*. In the confrontation between the Grand Inquisitor and his prisoner Jesus, the question of man's capacity to be free and responsible is posed—a question that is lived out in the dramas of the heroes of the novel. Dmitry Karamazov serves Ivanov as an illustration of a person in whom spiritual struggle ends (at least as far as his relations with his father are concerned) with a choice of the "right way." He cites Dmitry: "Well, it was like this: whether it was someone's tears, or my mother prayed to God, or a good angel kissed me at that instant, I don't know. But the devil was conquered." Ivanov links the "angel's kiss" with the memory of Zosima's genuflection before Dmitry in the cell, "the genuflection that foretold to Dmitry the expiatory suffering in store for him." What is central for Dostoevsky, according to Ivanov, is that man lives not in solipsistic isolation but in a unified spiritual field in which all actions and happenings, past and present, are united

through memory. Thus man is ever in communion with "countless spirits," with the living and the dead. Ivanov cites Father Zosima: "What grows lives and is alive only through the feeling of its contact with other mysterious worlds."

Ivanov considers *Crime and Punishment* (in the chapter "The Revolt against Mother Earth," pt. 2) "Dostoevsky's first great revelation to the world, and the main pillar of his subsequent philosophy of life."³⁷ It is significant that Ivanov discusses *Notes from the Underground* only very briefly, and then in a later chapter given over to "Daemonology." Leo Shestov, in *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* (1903), had seen in *Notes from the Underground* "a public, albeit a veiled, renunciation of [Dostoevsky's] past."³⁸ Ivanov not only speaks of *Notes* as "a devastating criticism of present-day social relations," but observes that "the author has no objection to uttering through the character's mouth the religious truth concerning society in its elementary form: the truth that relations between the personality and society must be found on mutual love."³⁹ The Underground Man certainly does not give verbal expression to this religious truth, at least not in the version of the work that has come down to us (it is possible that Ivanov had in mind Dostoevsky's letter to his brother Mikhail in which the novelist declares that the censor had eliminated passages from the novel [chap. 10, pt. 1] where "I deduce . . . the need for faith and Christ").⁴⁰ Yet Ivanov correctly deduces from the text Dostoevsky's basic ethical-religious intention. This idea finds dramatic expression in the pietà episode (chap. 11, pt. 2), the moment when, sobbing, the Underground Man falls into Liza's arms. Clearly the censored passages in chapter 10, part 1, of the original version of *Notes* gave verbal expression to the idea of the pietà episode.

In "The Revolt Against Mother Earth," Ivanov suggests that *Crime and Punishment* and Pushkin's "Queen of Spades" are united not only on the grounds of plot but on the basis of "shared mythical conceptions": "Both [protagonists] incur the guilt of killing the Parca, and must suffer her posthumous revenge." Ivanov links both the countess and the pawnbroker with the theme of the "female avenger . . . emissary of Mother Earth, rising in wrathful resistance."⁴¹ It is in this connection that Ivanov discusses the problematic of guilt and its roots in Aeschylus and Sophocles. In general, the questions

raised by Ivanov on the relationship of Dostoevsky's novels to classical tragedy, for example to *Oedipus*, deserve more attention.

Goethe's *Faust* and Sophocles' *Oedipus* serve Ivanov as valuable points of comparison for discussion of *The Possessed* and *Crime and Punishment*, respectively. Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, a favorite work of Dostoevsky's, leads Ivanov to a consideration of Myshkin in *The Idiot*. Yet Ivanov more centrally locates Myshkin in the "poor fool" of medieval legend, the Ivan-Tsarevich of the old Russian tale, "the simple and true-hearted one." Myshkin is "above all, the type of a spirituality that descends, that seeks the Earth: rather a spirit that assumes flesh than a man who rises to the spiritual. . . . [The] preponderance of the Platonic *anamnesis* over the sense of reality is just what makes him at once a fool and a wise seer amongst men."⁴² In a provocative essay on Ivanov's literary criticism, René Wellek has found in Ivanov's mythopoetic interpretation of *The Idiot* (and of other works of Dostoevsky) an example of "the dangers of arbitrary allegorizing." "One has to conclude that Ivanov is expounding a book which he would have wanted Dostoevsky to have written, rather than the one he actually wrote."⁴³

Wellek's criticism seems unduly harsh. There is no question that Ivanov mythopoeticizes Myshkin, that is, suggests a mythic derivation that Dostoevsky does not literally advance with respect to Myshkin. Yet that derivation, however fanciful from one point of view, does accord with Dostoevsky's highly allegorical representation of Myshkin as a Christ figure, albeit a failed one. Where Ivanov seems to have fallen short in his analysis of *The Idiot* is not in his search for myth in Dostoevsky but in his general unwillingness or hesitation to come to grips with the problem of Myshkin as a Christ figure. Christ, of course, is *not* a mythic figure for Ivanov—and this is probably the nub of the matter. He is not a mythic figure for Dostoevsky, either; yet Dostoevsky the artist has certainly turned Myshkin into a mythic Christ figure, or has woven Christ, or aspects of him, into myth, and this issue must be faced directly in any analysis of Myshkin or interpretation of the novel. Here Wellek's observation that Ivanov "ignores the description of 'the complete breakdown of [Myshkin's] mental faculties,' his imbecility," is very much to the point.⁴⁴ The idea of a crippled or failed Christ must have been inconceivable to Ivanov. The

very idea that a fictional character could be a Christ figure may also have bothered him.

In the final section of his book, "Theological Aspect," Ivanov focuses directly on the basic assumption of his entire book: Dostoevsky's commitment as man, thinker, and artist to a Christian religious outlook. The two chapters of part 3, "Daemonology" and "Hagiography," are largely given over to a discussion of the symbolic presence of Lucifer and Ahriman in Dostoevsky's works on the one hand and *The Brothers Karamazov* on the other. Ivanov develops a rich discussion of the problem of evil in Dostoevsky's novelistic universe around the ideas associated with Lucifer and Ahriman (though Dostoevsky himself does not use the second, Zoroastrian term).

If the names of Goethe, Byron, Pushkin, Sophocles, or Aeschylus appear with frequency in the first two parts of Ivanov's book, it is Dante, along with Dostoevsky, who occupies the center of the stage in the third and final part. In a provocative introduction to part 3 entitled "Theological Aspect" (the essay does not appear in any of the earlier Dostoevsky pieces), Ivanov insists that "we are . . . entitled to speak—*mutatis mutandis*—of a 'doctrine' propounded by Dostoevsky."⁴⁵ He acknowledges that Dostoevsky can comprehend the "inner form and true essence" of his doctrine only "when it is mirrored in myth: [in this he is] like all artists whose task it is, in the words of Plato, to create myths (μυθουf) and not doctrines (λογουf)."⁴⁶ Yet with this qualification in mind, Ivanov argues that both Dostoevsky and Dante "see the way to this end [i.e., leading mankind to a state of bliss] in religious truth. Both have taken the veil of poetry from the hand of truth; . . . both alike are teachers of the Faith; both peer down into the deepest chasms of evil; both accompany the sinful and redemption-seeking soul along the difficult paths of its ascent." In contrast, however, to Dante's teaching—"rigid as the order of Hell"—"Dostoevsky's apologetics . . . are essentially dynamic and tragic."⁴⁷ Yet Dostoevsky's works, from *Crime and Punishment* to *The Brothers Karamazov*, when considered in terms of the movement of living thought within them, form "the links of a dialectical chain, of theses and antitheses, the ladder of one continual ascent of the self-perceiving idea."⁴⁸ That idea, according to Ivanov, finds its supreme embodiment in Christ.

Ivanov's concept of Dostoevsky's art as Greek in its roots and Christian in its flowering is a rich one. In the more than half century since Ivanov's book was written, critical scholarship has disclosed the multiple ways Dostoevsky's ethical-religious thought has entered into the conception and design of his art. Ivanov, however, posits a religious "doctrine" directly binding all aspects of Dostoevsky's work and providing the key to its architectonics. There is, without doubt, a rigidity to this formula, one that transforms the artist into a teacher of the faith and his art into an unambiguous fulfillment of intentional design. Ivanov speaks convincingly about the religious foundations of Dostoevsky's artistic thought but for the most part discounts the moral-philosophical pressures and tensions, or "contradictions," that also manifest themselves in his novels. Dostoevsky himself, it is interesting to note, in spite of the Christian character of his higher aesthetics and worldview, rejected the notion that he was "one of those people who save souls, settle spiritual problems [*razreshit' dushi*], put grief to flight. Sometimes people write this about me," he wrote in a letter to A. L. Ozhigina February 28, 1878, "but I know *for certain* that I am capable of instilling disillusionment and revulsion. I am not skilled in writing lullabies, though I have occasionally had a go at it. And, of course, many people demand nothing more than that they be lulled."⁴⁹

Dostoevsky of course is not addressing the question of deep Christian design in his work, but he is surely suggesting the complexity of his work *as art*, the central concern of his novels with raising and exploring questions as opposed to resolving them in some didactic way. He is certainly recognizing that his works deal with a disturbing or disturbed reality and may in turn have disturbing and unanticipated effects on the reader. Though we are under no obligation to accept Dostoevsky's view of the potential for the negative impact of his work, the history of the reception of Dostoevsky suggests that more than misunderstanding is at the root of the wide and passionate diversity of opinions on him. Even the philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev, one of the great religious interpreters of Dostoevsky, recognizes the unpredictable nature of Dostoevsky when he warns that one must read him "in an atmosphere of spiritual emancipation."⁵⁰ Berdyaev's remark leaves open the door to the view that misunderstandings of Dostoev-

sky are simply misreadings: the more emancipated we are, the less likely we are to draw misleading conclusions. Yet even among emancipated readers there has been no consensus about Dostoevsky. Nor should there be.

Ivanov, to be sure, was fully aware of the problematic side of Dostoevsky's work. In the introduction to his 1916 study, *Dostoevsky and the Novel-Tragedy*, he emphasizes the complex character of Dostoevsky's art and the way it not only gives expression to, but creates and shapes, the Russian mind and spirit.

He dwells in our midst, because from him or through him comes everything that we are living through—both our light and our underground. He is the great founder and definer of our cultural complexity. Before him, everything in Russian life, in Russian thought, was simple. He made complex our soul, our faith, our art; he invented, just as "Turner invented the London fog," that is, he discovered, disclosed, realized in form, our developing and still unrecognized complexity.⁵¹

Ivanov revised this passage in his introduction to his 1932 Dostoevsky book. Viewing Dostoevsky in a universal rather than specifically Russian context, he writes more broadly of Dostoevsky's contribution to contemporary "intellectual and spiritual complexity." He notes the "peculiar effects of the ferment he induced, which had the power to stir up all the depths of our conscious and subconscious existence," but drops the reference to the "underground."⁵² Ivanov in the late 1920's seems increasingly drawn to aspects of Dostoevsky that concord with his own spiritual and religious development. At the same time, his view of our understanding of Dostoevsky is a dynamic one. "Dostoevsky dwells in our midst," he writes as he did in 1916, but this time adds, "and changes as we do."⁵³ "An author," Bakhtin wrote in his "Answer to a Question from the Editorial Board of *Novy Mir*" (1970), "is a prisoner of his epoch, of the world about him. Subsequent times liberate him from the imprisonment, and literary scholarship is called upon to assist in this liberation."⁵⁴ Ivanov had a profound appreciation of this truth. He recognized, too, that Dostoevsky was not merely a prisoner awaiting liberation in this or that time dimension, but liberated his liberators.

Whether all of Dostoevsky—the explosive and antinomian character of his artistic thought and creation—can be encompassed by

Ivanov's thesis on the role of religious doctrine in his art is a question. Indeed, all of Dostoevsky's work is a question. What is certain, however, is that Vyacheslav Ivanov's book remains one of the great entrances to Dostoevsky's artistic and spiritual universe. "Beside it," Isaiah Berlin has rightly observed, "Gide's famous study as well as all the well-meaning essays of the interpreters of the Russian soul, seems trivial and shallow." Ivanov's study has widened and deepened our understanding of the tragic foundations of Dostoevsky's art, the universal language and symbolic forms that give it shape, and the ethical-religious principle that informs it. Profound and provocative, Ivanov's book has opened the way to new insights into old truths. Few are the works that attain these goals. More than this we cannot ask.

Dialogues with Dostoevsky
The Overwhelming Questions



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