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Proust reading Dostoevsky: references, influences, and literary dialogue

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the reception and influence of Fyodor M. Dostoevsky's works on Marcel Proust's poetics, with particular emphasis on the ways in which Proust reads, interprets, and transforms the experience of the Russian novel within his own literary system. Through an analysis of Proust's correspondence, his explicit references to Dostoevsky in the novel cycle *In Search of Lost Time*, and a comparative reading of their respective poetics, the paper explores the thematic and structural affinities between the two authors. The paper also examines the historical context of the reception of the Russian novel in France at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, when Dostoevsky's works became a significant aesthetic and intellectual model for French writers. Particular attention is devoted to the approaches of Dostoevsky and Proust to the structuring of the novel and the psychological construction of character, as well as to their treatment of the issues of memory, suffering, religion, guilt, love, and the spiritual mystery manifested through female characters. The analysis demonstrates that Proust does not adopt Dostoevsky as a direct poetic model; rather, he establishes a complex dialogue with his work, transforming the metaphysical and moral questions of the Russian novel into aesthetic and psychological concerns of modernist consciousness.

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1. Introduction

Approaching the works of Fyodor M. Dostoevsky (1821–1881) in parallel with those of Marcel Proust (1871–1922) entails confronting the reader with a major challenge in the comparative study of the European novel at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although these authors belong to different cultural and poetic traditions, there exists between them a profound spiritual and aesthetic affinity, particularly in the way they understand the complexity of the inner life of the character and the complexity of the novel's composition as a genre. It is precisely this shared dimension of the emergence of a new form of interiority and narrative composition in the fiction of Dostoevsky and Proust that Nathalie Sarraute would identify as early as 1956:

> The point is that his (Dostoevsky's – A.T.) characters already tend to become what the characters of subsequent novels will increasingly become, (…) messengers of those sometimes still unknown states of the soul that we discover within ourselves (…). It is quite possible that Proust's social snobbery, which imprints itself upon all his characters with the persistence of a manic obsession, is nothing other than a variation of that same obsessive need for penetration, for fusion" [Sarraute 2000, 178–179 in Taganov (2019, pp. 163–164)].[1]

Dostoevsky's influence on Proust cannot be reduced merely to explicit references or direct intertextual borrowings; rather, it constitutes a broader spiritual and poetic interference that develops through the processes of reading, interpretation, and transformation of literary experience. Nevertheless, Proust does not fully adopt Dostoevsky's worldview, and his perception differs fundamentally from that of Dostoevsky, as will be demonstrated in the following discussion.

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This paper focuses on the ways in which Proust discovered and read Dostoevsky, as well as on the traces that Russian literature leaves in the narrative structure and thematic concerns of his novel cycle *In Search of Lost Time*. It examines the historical and cultural circumstances that enabled the strong reception of the Russian novel in France at the end of the nineteenth century, particularly through Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé's *The Russian Novel* (Vogüé, 1886), which contributed significantly to the growing interest in Dostoevsky as a writer of moral and metaphysical crises.

Special attention is devoted to the evidence of Proust's engagement with Dostoevsky found both in his correspondence and in *In Search of Lost Time* itself, where the Russian novelist is mentioned as a writer who attains the depths of human contradiction. The relationship between Proust and Dostoevsky has been explored from different perspectives by scholars such as Philippe Chardin (1990), Pejovic (1987), Haddad-Wotling (1995), and, more recently, Alexander N. Taganov (2019) and Gérard Bensussan (2021), whose studies have examined questions of literary reception, thematic and aesthetic affinities, narrative poetics, and the representation of the modern subject. This paper enters particularly into dialogue with the critical insights of Anne Henry (1981), whose reflections on Proustian aesthetics provide an important theoretical framework for the present discussion, and Juliette Hassine (2000), whose study offers a particularly significant examination of Proust's reading and reception of Dostoevsky. Together, these perspectives help situate the relationship between the two writers within broader questions of poetics, aesthetic transformation, and the development of the modern subject.

The aim is to demonstrate that, although Proust adopts certain themes and motifs from Dostoevsky—such as suffering, jealousy, the mystery of woman, and the multilayered nature of personality—he ultimately redirects them and endows them with different meanings. A particularly significant point concerns the fact that guilt as a concept is almost entirely absent from Proust's poetics, with the exception of guilt associated with procrastination in writing. In Dostoevsky, by contrast, central importance is accorded to religiosity, moral guilt, and the possibility of spiritual redemption. In Proust, the emphasis shifts instead toward memory, sensory experience, perception, and artistic creation.

Through an analysis of the poetic similarities and differences between the two authors, this study demonstrates that their novels, although stylistically and structurally distinct, are united in their aspiration to explore the depths of human consciousness and the plurality of human identity. In this sense, Proust may be read not only as a reader of Dostoevsky, but also as his distant heir in the transformation of the European novel toward modernist forms of psychological representation and interior analysis.

2. Proust's discovery of Dostoevsky and initial parallels

The interferences between the two writers did not begin immediately after Proust's reading of Dostoevsky's novels, as is often the case with literary influences. Rather, they developed through exchanges of letters and recommendations from friends which, even before Proust's direct encounter with Dostoevsky's works, had already introduced the great Russian author into his intellectual horizon. The first significant stimulus for Proust's interest in Dostoevsky may be dated to June 1921, when Proust received a letter from his friend Jacques Rivière, in which the latter suggested that he write a triptych of studies devoted to Gustave Flaubert, Charles Baudelaire, and Dostoevsky (Proust & Rivière, 1976, p. 218). According to Rivière, the study on Flaubert should be placed in dialogue with those on Baudelaire and Dostoevsky and should respond to the spiritual and aesthetic tendencies of the period. He believed that contemporary literature suffered from a lack of profound knowledge of human psychology—a deficiency that could be illuminated through Flaubert and complemented through Baudelaire and Dostoevsky.

This projected triptych was never completed, although Proust had already written and published separate texts on Flaubert (Proust, *CSB*, 1971a, pp. 586–87, 590.) and Baudelaire (Proust, 2006, pp. 161–186). Unlike these published texts, however, there exists an unpublished manuscript essay devoted entirely to Dostoevsky, written in 1922 and worked on until the final days of Proust's life. These pages are contained in Notebook LIX and were composed in response to the February 1922 issue of *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, dedicated to Dostoevsky and featuring contributions by André Gide, Lev Shestov, and Jacques Rivière, as well as two letters from Dostoevsky to his brother. Proust summarizes the arguments advanced in these texts and, in some cases, openly challenges them, as in his response to Rivière's thesis: "Its originality does not lie where Rivière locates it, but rather in its composition" (Proust, 2006, p. 645). This

remark refers to Rivière's essay "De Dostoïevski et de l'insondable" ("Of Dostoevsky and the unfathomable"), published in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1922, in which Rivière argues that the opacity of Dostoevsky's characters is shocking to the Western European mind, for which every nebulous element demands explanation. Contrary to Rivière, however, Proust values the compositional structure of Dostoevsky's works and recognizes his genius in the techniques of literary craftsmanship.

In the same correspondence with Rivière, dating from September 1921, Proust simultaneously expresses both his profound admiration for and his reservations about his own knowledge of the Russian author: "I passionately admire the great Russian, but I know him only imperfectly" (Proust & Rivière, 1976, p. 218 n1). This statement suggests that Proust read Dostoevsky fragmentarily, often through abridged or mediated versions that were not entirely faithful to the original texts—a fact that may be inferred both from his letters and from the allusions scattered throughout *In Search of Lost Time*. Nevertheless, his admiration was genuine and profound, particularly for *The Idiot*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*.

One of the foremost specialists on the works of both authors, Juliette Hassine, observes that it was precisely this limited and unsystematic knowledge of Dostoevsky's writings that led Proust toward a distinctive mode of reception. He bypasses the socio-political themes and historical implications often associated with Dostoevsky, including later critical readings of his characters and political themes as anticipating certain aspects of the revolutionary movement that culminated in the October Revolution of 1917. Consequently, Hassine characterizes Proust's approach as *mythopoetic*.[2] She further argues that Proust adopts from Dostoevsky certain themes related to metaphysics, fate, and religious values, such as humility, forgiveness, and spirituality.

In the context of these observations, it may be useful to introduce a degree of nuance into Hassine's interpretation. Proust does not employ mythopoetics in its traditional sense. While, on the one hand, he rejects the historical matrix through which events in Dostoevsky are interpreted, on the other hand the archetypal symbols conventionally associated with mythopoetic thought appear in *In Search of Lost Time* only at the level of isolated metaphors and do not encompass the work's overall meaning. In *In Search of Lost Time*, one encounters structures that may be associated with figures such as the rebellious hero or disobedient son, or with apocalyptic scenarios—if, for example, the war at the end of the novel is understood metaphorically in such terms. Yet Proust's spiritual allusions are invariably linked to an element that undermines the ideal or introduces a note of blasphemy. It is therefore worth asking whether Hassine's use of the term "mythopoetic" functions less as a precise methodological category than as a designation for the metaphysical and symbolic dimension of a particular historical mode of reception—one that is atypical of contemporary criticism but consonant with the ways in which German scholarship has read Dostoevsky.[3]

Despite this terminological clarification, Hassine's central thesis remains compelling and applicable, provided that the notion of Proustian mythopoetics—or, in some cases, Proustian metaphysics—is understood more broadly. Particularly illuminating in this regard is her observation that "Dostoevsky establishes a relationship between morality, religiosity, and metaphysics; Proust establishes a relationship between psychology, aesthetic creation, and the essence of being" (Hassine, 2000, p. 87). Proust indeed borrows from Dostoevsky certain fundamental questions concerning fate, spirituality, and the human capacity for self-transcendence, yet he redirects them toward different ends. In Proust, the emphasis lies less on the predestination of human destiny than on the metaphysics of vocation: the central question becomes the "calling to become a great writer," whereas in Dostoevsky the dominant concern remains the "calling to become a great human being." Moral striving exists in both authors, but its content and purpose differ fundamentally. Here lies one of the most significant divergences between them—a divergence that nevertheless does not negate the affinity that Hassine identifies on a deeper metaphysical level.

Likewise, aesthetic phenomena—sensory impressions transformed into text—are present in Dostoevsky, for example in the epiphanic experiences described by Prince Myshkin, but in Proust they become an essential element of the novel's poetics. In the texts Proust published between 1920 and 1921, it becomes evident that his interests extend beyond Baudelaire and Dostoevsky to include Beethoven's late compositions, which attracted him because of their mysticism and spirituality. In *Time Regained* we read: "Style, for the writer no less than colour for the painter, is a matter not of technique but of vision" (Proust, 1989,

p. 474).[4] Proust thus suggests that the technique of writing is not mere rhetorical virtuosity but rather a specific mode of experiencing reality. This experience is, above all, intuitive and sensory, far more than rational or conceptual. It is precisely in this primacy of intuition over reason that one recognizes an affinity with mystical experience, which attains truth not through logical analysis but through immediate inner illumination and contemplation. For Proust, however, such experiences must always lead back to the mundane and remain connected to some form of banality—for example, the accidental misstep on an uneven paving stone that triggers an epiphany—which serves as a safeguard against complete immersion in the spiritual realm.

To this essential distinction, the present study adds the question of the archetypes of the masculine and the feminine as principles present in both writers. In Dostoevsky, relations between the sexes are often associated with the metaphysical burden of original sin and with the religious dimension of human fallenness, whereas in Proust central importance is accorded to the problem of alterity and the impossibility of fully knowing another person. It is therefore no coincidence that the epigraph to *Sodom and Gomorrah* cites Alfred de Vigny: "La femme aura Gomorrhe et l'homme aura Sodome."[5] Here again, the metaphysical question does not disappear but is transformed: from a religious drama of salvation in Dostoevsky into an existential and cognitive problem of otherness in Proust. For Proust, this points to the radical otherness of the other—that is, to the impossibility of one human being fully entering the inner world of another. Men and women remain separated not only biologically but also psychologically, affectively, and existentially. No matter how deeply they love one another, they can never fully understand one another. The quotation should not be read as an assertion that men and women are enemies, but rather as an expression of the existential solitude of the human condition. Ultimately, each person remains enclosed within his or her own consciousness.

3. The historical and intellectual climate for the reception of Russian ideas

Within the cultural climate of late nineteenth-century France, a particularly significant event was the publication of *Le Roman russe* (Vogüé, 1886) by the French critic Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé. This work represented a genuine turning point in the French reception of Russian literature and opened new avenues of interest in Russian authors and their spiritual and psychological world. During this period, French criticism and literature increasingly turned toward Russian novels, seeking to capture what imagology would later designate as the "the Russian soul" (*l'âme russe*)—understood, in the French imagination, as an inclination toward sin, repentance, redemption, crime, and mercy, as Anne Henry has noted (Henry, 1981). In a similar vein, a contemporary critic observed: "The Slavic, the Russian, is at once the savagery of societies being born and the neurosis of societies in decline."[6] Such representations of Russia and Russian literature created a specific intellectual environment in which Fyodor M. Dostoevsky gradually became one of the central figures of modern European sensibility.

One chapter (Vogüé, 1986, Chapter 5) of *Le Roman russe* is devoted entirely to Dostoevsky, whose works were continuously translated into French between 1875 and 1906. The lifespan of Marcel Proust (1871–1922) coincided precisely with this period of intense French engagement with the Russian novel. Proust was thoroughly familiar with Vogüé's work, although his attitude toward it remained ambivalent. The name "Vogüé" appears in *Les Plaisirs et les Jours* (*Pleasures and Days*) in the short story "Un dîner en ville" (*Dinner in town*), where the author alludes to the critic (Proust, 1993, p. 153). Vogüé is also mentioned in Proust's essay on Gérard de Nerval (Proust, 1971b, p. 155), while, in his correspondence, Proust refers ironically to *Le Roman russe* (Proust, 1984, pp. 180–181). These references suggest that Vogüé's book served as an important intermediary source in shaping Proust's understanding of Russian literature.

In his interpretation of Dostoevsky, Vogüé focuses particularly on the Russian notion of *otchaïanié* ("despair"), through which he attempts to summarize the essence of the Russian writer's work. He introduces the term and cites Dostoevsky himself in order to describe it: "*Otchaïanié*, that state of heart and mind for which I strive in vain to find an equivalent in our language. Dostoevsky analyses it in many places: "It is the sensation of a man who, from the top of a lofty tower, leans over the yawning abyss and experiences a shudder of voluptuousness at the thought that he might throw himself headlong into it…" (Vogüé, 1986, p. 227).[7] Vogüé goes on to provide examples from various works by Dostoevsky illustrating how this feeling often manifests itself in seemingly ordinary and peaceful individuals who, at a

decisive moment, commit a radical and unpredictable act, thereby placing themselves on the side of sin. Such a definition, in a sense, redeems these characters by resisting their identification as wholly evil—a perspective that would later become central to Proust's own vision of human nature. Already in *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*, Proust expressed his fascination with the ambivalence of human character: "Life is strangely easy and delightful in the company of certain people of great natural refinement, intelligent and affectionate, yet capable of every vice, though they display none of them publicly and no particular vice can be definitively ascribed to them" (Proust 1993, p. 84).[8]

It may therefore be argued that Proust's earliest literary efforts, and later *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*), developed within an atmosphere profoundly marked by the themes of the Russian novel. Nevertheless, Proust's poetics did not emerge through direct imitation of Russian authors but rather through the indirect influence of the philosophical and aesthetic currents that became dominant in the French intellectual milieu at the end of the nineteenth century. What French philosophy sought to articulate theoretically, Proust recognized in Russian writers, who had explored similar existential and spiritual problems much earlier.

According to Anne Henry, Proust's work is deeply shaped by the crisis of the subject—one of the central concerns of modern art and thought (Henry, 2000, pp. 1–2). In his early short stories, this preoccupation is evident through the influence of the philosophical and literary ideas circulating around the journals *Le Banquet* and *La Revue Blanche*, to which Proust himself contributed. Within this context, Maurice Barrès occupied a position that inspired both admiration and irony among the young intellectuals surrounding Proust. His political and anarchist ideas attracted considerable interest, although some reservations remained regarding his fascination with theories of the unconscious, which were then highly influential in European thought. Barrès himself was strongly influenced by Eduard von Hartmann and his *Philosophy of the Unconscious* (Hartmann, 1877). According to Anne Henry, for Hartmann "the unconscious is the foundation of the world; what we call the soul is a nervous process governing all forms of matter, while consciousness is merely the phenomenal manifestation of that principle" (Henry, 2000, p. 18). The development of Freudian psychoanalysis from the 1890s onward, particularly following the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900, further stimulated debates concerning human interiority and psychic life in France.

From this perspective emerges a broader vision of life and the world: all things, from the simplest to the most complex forms of existence, are permeated by a vital energy constituting the deepest level of being. This biological and spiritual dynamism, as Henry concludes, lies at the foundation of civilizations and races and constantly seeks to be awakened and manifested. It is precisely this dimension of unconscious drives in human nature that constitutes one of the principal points of convergence between Proust and Dostoevsky, particularly in the way both writers shape and psychologically deepen their fictional characters.

4. Technical innovations in the novel

Long before Freud theorized the unconscious as a realm of psychic activity that escapes conscious awareness while nevertheless shaping the subject's thoughts, desires, and actions, Dostoevsky and Proust were already experimenting with novelistic form in ways that destabilized the notion of a unified and stable identity. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1999 [1900]), Freud's account of unconscious processes as forms of mental activity that continue to operate beyond the subject's conscious control provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding how both novelists represent the self as internally divided, opaque to itself, and constituted through impulses and memories that cannot be fully apprehended by conscious reflection. This conception of the subject as governed by forces that exceed conscious awareness finds a particularly suggestive expression in Dostoevsky's characterization. Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover (2023) approaches this dimension of Dostoevsky's poetics through the metaphor of the puppet theatre, observing that "The device used by Dostoevsky is to assimilate his fictional characters' visible demeanor to marionette-like expressive features of the puppet theatre." (p. 24). The marionette thus becomes a powerful image for the character's compromised autonomy: what appears as conscious action is, at least in part, determined by invisible forces operating beneath or beyond consciousness. In this respect, Dostoevsky's characters can be understood as dramatizing the Freudian insight that psychic

processes may shape thought and behaviour without being fully accessible to the subject. A related dynamic can be observed in Proust, although it is represented through a markedly different aesthetic and psychological logic. Whereas Dostoevsky externalizes the character's lack of autonomy through the theatrical image of the marionette, Proust internalizes it, locating the determining forces of behaviour in memory, desire, habit, jealousy, and involuntary affect. In both novelists, the apparent unity and autonomy of the self are consequently destabilized: the character does not entirely possess or understand the forces that determine his or her actions.

For both authors, the crisis of the subject simultaneously becomes a crisis of formal coherence: the novel can no longer remain a simple, linear narrative recounted by a reliable and omniscient narrator. Beyond the visible traces of Dostoevsky in Proust's texts, one may also identify deeper structural affinities that, although never explicitly acknowledged, become evident through a comparison of their respective poetics. As a precursor to Proust, Dostoevsky formally belongs to the nineteenth-century realist novel, more specifically to the tradition of psychological realism. Unlike naturalism or social realism, psychological realism extends beyond external reality to explore the inner contradictions of the human subject. Although his novels retain the ambition to depict a concrete historical and social world, Dostoevsky introduces elements that would later become central to modernist fiction: characters who do not fully understand themselves, narrators incapable of completely explaining their protagonists, multilayered narration, and the relativization of ultimate truths.

Mikhail Bakhtin famously described these characteristics through the concept of *polyphony* (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 6-7). Borrowing the term from music, Bakhtin argued that Dostoevsky's novels are not governed by a single dominant voice but by multiple autonomous consciousnesses existing simultaneously. Characters are not merely instruments of the author's message; they are bearers of their own ideas and worldviews. Their inner monologues and external debates create a conflict of equally valid truths. Rather than determining which perspective is definitive, the narrator allows these different viewpoints to coexist in an open dialogue.

In Proust, however, the fragmentation of voices and identities occurs in a different and much more intimate manner. Whereas Dostoevsky's polyphony emerges through the interaction of multiple consciousnesses and through the internal multiplicity of characters who experience temptation, hesitation, repentance, and self-recovery, Proust's polyphony unfolds within the subject itself through memory and through the confrontation between past and present. Proust's novel begins in the liminal state between sleep and wakefulness, where the awakened dreamer gradually attempts to orient himself in time and space. Only when the body begins to remember—through smell, taste, touch, or sound—do past times and places unfold before him, enabling him to narrate his own story.

Thus, multiple layers of narrative identity emerge in Proust. First, there is the awakened dreamer, still moving between sleep and consciousness. Then appears the remembering self, who contemplates the past from a distance. Out of this act of recollection gradually emerges the narrator as a third instance within the novel—a voice that simultaneously experiences and shapes reality through writing. Proust's narrator is therefore never entirely unified or stable; he constantly moves between past and present, between lived experience and its narration.

In this sense, involuntary memory becomes the key mechanism through which the novel constructs its own structure. Remembering is not merely an intellectual recollection of facts. Sometimes a smell, a taste, or a sound unexpectedly restores the entire emotional intensity of the past. In such moments, one does not simply remember but relives experience. The external world enters inner life and becomes part of personal feeling and memory. The task of art, then, is to convey the moment when a minor sensory impression—the taste of the madeleine, the sound of a spoon striking a plate, the quality of light in a room—opens onto a profound inner experience and abolishes the boundary between the external and internal worlds. Proust writes not only about what happened but about how the world is felt within the individual. His long, flowing sentences seek to capture precisely the process by which consciousness comes into being: the moment when sensation becomes memory, and memory becomes literature.

Thus, in both Dostoevsky and Proust, the fragmentation of the unified subject gives rise to new forms of the novel, though in different directions. In Dostoevsky, identity is divided into multiple autonomous voices that confront one another through the moral trials experienced by his characters. This division is not merely a psychological characteristic but a fundamental principle of existence: characters constantly

waver between faith and doubt, good and evil, the aspiration toward the absolute and the descent into nihilism. In many cases, it is as though two consciousnesses or two competing truths collide within a single individual, transforming inner conflict into the driving force of the narrative. In Proust, by contrast, this same division unfolds within the narrator's consciousness itself, which constantly observes, remembers, and recreates itself through the act of writing.

5. Notes from *The Brothers Karamazov* in Proust's novel and the mystery of female characters

Dostoevsky is mentioned three times throughout *In Search of Lost Time*, yet in all three instances the references concern, above all, the portrayal of literary characters rather than broader questions of morality or psychology: once in relation to a woman's inclination toward a man as represented in one of Orvieto's sculptures, a second time as an example of the technique of progressive character revelation, and a third time in connection with a concealed goodness that manifests itself in the form of evil.

The mystery of the female figure is one of the themes that most deeply links Proust and Dostoevsky. In both authors, female characters remain elusive, never fully comprehensible, and enveloped in secrecy. Yet the manner in which this mystery is shaped differs significantly. In Dostoevsky, woman is often situated between humiliation, suffering, and spiritual exceptionality; she appears to bear the burden of an inner destiny that she cannot sustain. In Proust, by contrast, woman becomes the object of endless interpretation: a figure onto whom the male subject projects his fears, desires, and fantasies, without ever fully succeeding in understanding her. A similar elusiveness characterizes Dostoevsky's female protagonists. Katerina (Katya) Nikolaevna from *Humiliated and Insulted*, for example, is a woman of exceptional intelligence and unusual beauty, yet at the same time a character who gradually falls into states of crisis and self-destruction. Her attractiveness remains inexplicable because, in Dostoevsky, woman frequently embodies contradictory forces—love, guilt, pride, suffering, and self-sacrifice. The same complexity appears in Nastasya Filippovna from *The Idiot*, who simultaneously emerges as victim and destructive force, as a person yearning for salvation while continually pushing it away. The same may be said of Grushenka in *The Brothers Karamazov*, whose sensuality and apparent frivolity gradually reveal a profound capacity for love and spiritual transformation. Like Albertine in Proust, these women cannot be reduced to a single psychological formula; they remain open, multivalent, and partially inaccessible to the gaze of those who attempt to understand them. Proust himself does not fail to mention some of these female figures:

> Grushenka, Nastasya—figures at once as original and as mysterious, not only as Carpaccio's courtesans but as Rembrandt's Bathsheba. Observe that he certainly did not know that radiant, dual countenance, marked by sudden releases of pride that make a woman seem other than she is ('You are not like that'), Myshkin says to Nastasya during the visit to Ganya's family, and Alyosha might say the same to Grushenka during the visit to Katerina Ivanovna.[9]

Even more important, however, is the difference in the psychological weight borne by the characters. In Proust, characters are driven by jealousy, vanity, snobbery, and the fear of loss. In Dostoevsky, human beings are haunted by guilt, temptation, obsession, and moral degradation. Consequently, the function of memory differs in the two authors. In Dostoevsky, memory acts as an inner judge: it persecutes, condemns, and torments. In Proust, by contrast, suffering does not arise from moral judgment but from the character's own impasse—from jealousy, longing, and the impossibility of possessing another person. Memory serves instead to reassemble the fragmented self and to transform experience into art.

These differences become especially visible in *The Prisoner*, where the relationship between Marcel and Albertine gradually assumes the form of a silent captivity. Albertine, who at first appeared as an unattainable figure on the beaches of Balbec, now lives in Marcel's home. He takes care of her wardrobe and education, attempting to transform her into a woman worthy of his social world. Yet behind this care there gradually emerges a need for control. Love imperceptibly turns into surveillance, and the desire for intimacy into fear of the other's freedom. In this context, Dostoevsky represents for Marcel an authority of "great literature" and an expert in the darker regions of human nature. Attempting to

introduce Albertine to the secrets of genuine literature, Marcel speaks to her precisely about *The Brothers Karamazov*, dwelling on the motif of Smerdyakov and the mysterious woman who comes to give birth outside the house of old Karamazov:

> Is this not a simple and sculptural motif, worthy of ancient art, an interrupted and resumed frieze in which Revenge and Atonement unfold, such as the crime of old Karamazov by whom the poor madwoman was made pregnant; the mysterious, animal, inexplicable impulse by which the mother, becoming without her own knowledge the instrument of fate's revenge, obeying her maternal instinct, perhaps a mixture of compassion and physical recognition of her violator, goes to give birth at old Karamazov's house? This is the first episode, mysterious and majestic, like the creation of woman in the sculptures of Orvieto. And in response to it, the second episode, twenty years later, the murder of old Karamazov, the disgrace brought upon the Karamazov family by the son of the madwoman, Smerdyakov, followed shortly afterward by the same mysteriously sculptural and inexplicable act, possessing a beauty equally obscure and natural as the childbirth in old Karamazov's courtyard: Smerdyakov hangs himself after his crime has been committed (Proust 1987, p. 882).

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, it is never entirely clarified who the true culprit behind the murder of old Karamazov is, just as the story of the holy fool who gives birth outside his house remains obscure. Proust, however, reads this scene as an implicit story of violence: old Karamazov raped the woman, and the child who is born—Smerdyakov—later becomes his possible murderer. In this way, the story acquires the form of an ancient tragedy, which explains why Proust calls it "worthy of ancient art." (*Ibid*.)

At the same time, Proust compares this scene with the sculptures of the cathedral of Orvieto, depicting the creation of Eve from Adam's rib. Although he probably never visited the cathedral, he was thoroughly familiar with the descriptions provided by John Ruskin, whose works he translated into French.[10] The sculptures are arranged in three scenes: the removal of the rib, the creation of Eve, and her presentation to Adam. Particularly striking is the first moment, in which God opens Adam's chest while he sleeps. As Hassine observes, creation is represented here almost as an act of theft and violence committed by God himself—literally, God steals Adam's rib while he sleeps in order to create Eve—a "crime" inscribed within the very beginning of human history.

Through this parallel between Dostoevsky and Orvieto, Proust links Revenge and Atonement with the Christian problematics of sin, suffering, and the possibility of spiritual transformation. Unlike the traditional Christian conception, however, which begins with original sin, Proust places the emphasis on human relationships themselves, where guilt and redemption arise from the mutual dependence of individuals. Love does not appear as a state of harmony but as a space in which one simultaneously wounds and seeks the other; revenge and atonement are therefore not opposites but two inseparable aspects of the same emotional experience. Human relationships are constituted through transgression, dependency, and mutual vulnerability. For the author, love is not a purely spiritual union but a relation in which affection and violence, attraction and submission, remain deeply intertwined.

In a sense, this reading of Dostoevsky also functions as a concealed justification of Marcel's own behavior toward Albertine. Just as the woman in *The Brothers Karamazov* returns to the one who has harmed her, Marcel expects Albertine to accept his need for possession and control. Her confinement within the apartment appears to him as a natural extension of love rather than as an act of violence. Hence the symptomatic title *The Prisoner*. Furthermore, Albertine is an orphan and a socially vulnerable figure, which brings her closer to Dostoevsky's helpless victims. It is no coincidence that the narrator himself remarks of Dostoevsky's novels: "All the novels of his that I know could be called *The Story of a Crime*" (Proust 1987, vol. 3, p. 881)

Yet it is precisely here that Proust radically distances himself both from Dostoevsky and from the Christian logic of redemption. Albertine does not remain a submissive victim. Instead of a mystical reconciliation with fate, she plans her escape. Her death, which follows shortly thereafter—accidental and almost banal—destroys any expectation of elevated tragic meaning. Nevertheless, despite this banalization of death, one need not conclude that Proust rejects the notion that suffering may lead to salvation or spiritual meaning. Only after Albertine's death is love for her gradually transformed into memory, and memory into literature. For the narrator, spiritual insight is attained not through possession of the beloved but precisely through her loss.

Beyond this conception of femininity, more recent criticism has introduced another perspective on the maternal figure, for example, the Yael Greenberg's (2021) interpretation of a triangular process of

emotional displacement. In this process, rebellion against the mother may be expressed as an unconscious revolt directed towards another figure. Greenberg describes this mechanism as the "about-face dialogue," defined as "the displacement of a young man's unconscious rage against his mother on to society while hiding it from the awareness of both protagonist and reader" (p. 87). Such a displacement entails a partial exclusion—or displacement—of the meaning of the female phenomenon itself: the woman is no longer necessarily confronted directly as the object of hostility, but her symbolic function may be transferred elsewhere. From this perspective, the female figure may function not only as a figure of salvation but also as a figure of abjection. In *Crime and Punishment*, for instance, the pawnbroker constitutes a directly targeted object; elsewhere, however, the hostility originally associated with the maternal figure may be redirected towards another character who need not be female. This interpretation opens a new avenue for reading Dostoevsky. From a Freudian perspective, the transgression of the law so frequently encountered in his characters has traditionally been interpreted as a revolt against the paternal figure, symbolically represented by the Law. Yet, with the introduction of the archetype of the tyrannical mother, the mother assumes a role conventionally associated with masculinity and paternal authority.

Comparable configurations can also be found in Proust, although they emerge through a more fragmented form of motherhood. The maternal function is dispersed among other female figures who, alongside the mother herself, participate in the narrator's early upbringing and emotional formation—Françoise, the grandmother, the great-aunt, and Mme Verdurin. Proust thus displaces and transforms the maternal figure through other women, making it possible to present an objectified and at times threatening version of femininity. Yet, as the narrative unfolds, he also finds a way to reconsider their apparent "cruelty" from another perspective and ultimately to reconcile the conflicting dimensions of his perception of them.

6. "The Sévigné dimension in Dostoevsky," or impressionism in the portrayal of character

In both Proust and Dostoevsky, human character is never fixed or one-dimensional. Characters change, contradict themselves, and reveal different aspects of their nature at different moments of their lives. Yet the manner in which the two authors dismantle the notion of a stable identity differs significantly. In Proust, a character initially produces an impression that is gradually undermined over time; it takes a long period before the reader realizes that the first impression was both illusory and profoundly accurate. As Jean-Yves Tadié observes:

> The novelist thus finds himself at the intersection of two opposing directions: one moves back toward the hero's past, the recapitulation of traits already known, or that should have been known, and summoned in order to understand the present; the other, turned toward the future, welcomes the most surprising revelations. (…) This didacticism of analysis is fortunately opposed by the unexpected revelation of new traits, which break the line of character and recall Dostoevsky's lesson. These revelations remain faithful to the technique of point of view: each character is known only insofar as he reveals himself to an observer (Tadié, 1971, pp. 113–114).[11]

If Proustian characters reveal themselves through the two mechanisms identified by Tadié, it is the second that most clearly links Proust to Dostoevsky. Certain aspects of a character are known only in relation to particular individuals and do not emerge as general traits of personality:

> "One must never hold anything against people, never judge them on the basis of some remembered act of cruelty, for we do not know all that, at other times, their souls may have sincerely wished to do and actually accomplished for good" (Proust, 1988, pp. 829–830).[12]

In Dostoevsky, moreover, characters do not even fully know themselves: they discover new aspects of their nature during a conversation, are surprised by their own contradictions, and constantly oscillate between opposing impulses. In both authors, identity is not a fixed essence but a process of continual revelation and concealment.

Proust addresses this issue particularly clearly in one of the most important moments of *In Search of Lost Time*. While travelling with his grandmother to Balbec, Marcel reads the letters of Madame de

Sévigné and becomes fascinated by their style. It is then that his grandmother makes her famous remark concerning the "Dostoevskian side of Mme de Sévigné's letters" (Proust 1987, p. 14). At that stage of his life, Marcel has not yet read Dostoevsky. Precisely for this reason, the scene is important, for it demonstrates that the narrator and the protagonist do not coincide. The narrator already knows what he will later discover in Dostoevsky's works and retrospectively recognizes the same procedure in Sévigné.[13]

At the same time, Marcel does not yet know that he will soon encounter Elstir, yet the narrator once again establishes a connection between them. In both Sévigné and Elstir, things are presented through perception rather than through a rational explanation of their causes. The world initially appears as a visual or psychological illusion, as something that the eye or the emotions misrecognize. Later, Proust associates this procedure with Dostoevsky as well: his characters frequently create an impression that does not correspond to their true nature, because a human being can never be reduced to the first impression he or she produces. As Gérard Bensussan (2021) observes, both Proustian and Dostoevskian aesthetics privilege "showing" and "making one feel" over psychological explanation, substituting the representation of effects for a direct demonstration of their causes.

Vincent Descombes, however, has shown that Proust does not entirely identify these phenomena (Descombes, 1987, pp. 257-271). In Elstir and Sévigné, the issue concerns a deformation of the visual field: objects and landscapes initially appear in an unstable, impressionistic form before attaining clarity. In Dostoevsky, by contrast, the issue is not an error of perception but a psychological impression. A character genuinely possesses several different potentialities, and at a given moment only one of them becomes visible. The illusion therefore arises not from sight itself but from the conviction that a person can be simply defined.

Proust demonstrates that human nature is never final. Time not only reveals the various layers of personality but also shows how easily an individual may drift away from his better nature under the influence of circumstances, passions, or social pressure. If, in the case of landscape, illusion is beneficial because it enables a more intimate and intense contact with the world, illusion in relation to human beings becomes dangerous, since society constantly judges on the basis of appearances. An emblematic example is the figure of Baron de Charlus, whom Proust explicitly associates with Dostoevsky's characters:

> As a man of the world, he had spent much of his life among worldly people, among respectable people, among men of honor—those who would not deign to shake a scoundrel's hand. He knew both their refinement and their cruelty; he knew them capable of remaining indifferent to the tears of a man they had excluded from their circle or with whom they refused to duel, even if such an act of 'moral propriety' were to cause the death of the black sheep's mother […] while he also knew that morally flawed individuals, scoundrels like certain characters in Dostoevsky, may in fact be better human beings…[14]

This comparison appears in *Time Regained*, during the First World War, when Charlus has gradually become a grotesque figure exposed to ridicule in Parisian salons. Yet for Proust this gradual loss of social esteem does not reveal some final and "true" nature. On the contrary, through Charlus the narrator demonstrates that a human being cannot be reduced to a single quality or label. Despite his vices, the Baron possesses a profound sensitivity and intellectual value that society never manages to recognize: "The fashionable world had grown disenchanted with Monsieur de Charlus, not because it had penetrated too deeply into his character, but without ever having perceived the exceptional nature of his intellectual value."[15] For Proust, human nature always contains the possibility of goodness, justice, and philanthropy, but such impulses often remain imprisoned behind pride, vanity, or social masks. Hence his observation: "One has the impression that, for him, the most fervent love and the most desperate hatred, goodness and betrayal, timidity and insolence, are but two manifestations of a single nature…"[16]

It is precisely in this proximity between virtue and vice that Proust approaches Dostoevsky. In both authors, a person is never simply good or evil; opposing tendencies coexist within the same individual. Yet in Proust, Charlus serves not only as an example of the complexity of human nature but also as a means of demystifying society itself. The Verdurin salon functions as a miniature model of collective life, founded upon appearances, exclusion, and collective illusions.

Nevertheless, a fundamental difference separates Proust's heroes from those of Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky's characters possess an almost missionary impulse: their actions and spiritual crises are always linked to the fate of humanity, to questions of salvation, faith, and morality. They strive toward something that transcends themselves, yet it is precisely in this aspiration that they often fail, because reality does not

correspond to their idealism. In Proust, by contrast, the "mission" is profoundly individual. Marcel's principal obstacle is not the salvation of humanity but his own inability to write. He feels within himself the calling to become a great writer, yet continually postpones its realization, seduced by high society, salons, and the desire for social belonging. In this respect, Proust's protagonist is sometimes closer to Balzac than to Dostoevsky.

This difference also determines the distinct treatment of time in the two authors. In Dostoevsky, time is a pressure that drives characters toward catastrophe; they live with the feeling that they will fail to fulfil their vocation before destruction overtakes them. There is no certainty regarding the future, nor any promise of a redemptive ending. In Proust, by contrast, time functions cyclically. Because the novel is constructed upon an autobiographical structure, the end of the life story becomes the beginning of writing. At the very moment when the protagonist reaches the end of his experience, he finally begins the book that the reader has already read. Thus the end becomes a beginning, and time leads not toward final ruin but toward continual renewal through literature.

7. Inner life, faith, and morality in Proust and Dostoevsky

Although religion occupies a far more central place in Dostoevsky than in Proust, both authors seek, in different ways, to rethink the questions of the sacred, spirituality, and human interiority. In Dostoevsky, mystics, pious women, monks, holy fools, and spiritual teachers appear alongside murderers, prostitutes, thieves, and individuals on the brink of moral collapse. Yet the value of faith is not measured through discipline or outward piety, but through the ability to recognize human suffering and extend a hand to the sinner. True spirituality consists not in moral purity but in the possibility that a person may change and be redeemed even after having fallen to the deepest depths. In Proust, by contrast, religion almost never appears as a living spiritual practice. More often, it exists as a social ritual or as part of collective memory. In Combray, faith is reduced to Sunday Mass, the habits of Françoise, or the hypochondriacal rituals of Aunt Léonie. Churches and cathedrals are objects of aesthetic admiration rather than occasions for religious experience. After childhood in Combray, the spiritual center of the world is gradually replaced by the salon—a space that acquires an almost religious structure in Proust's work. Salon hostesses gather circles of "believers," establish rules of inclusion and exclusion, and transform social rituals into a kind of secular liturgy.

Yet despite the apparent secularization of Proust's world, moments exist that possess the character of revelation. The sudden returns of memory—the taste of the madeleine, the sound of a spoon striking a plate, the sensation of an uneven paving stone—function as epiphanies through which one suddenly perceives that behind the transitory lies a deeper truth. It is from such moments that Proust develops his notion of "time in its pure state" and the necessity of transforming experience into literature. Writing gradually becomes a form of spiritual revelation.

These epiphanies, however, are never entirely religious. They always contain a bodily, sensual, or even erotic dimension that disturbs any purely spiritual meaning. The madeleine, for example, evokes both the maternal body and the figure of Mary Magdalene (Kristeva, 1994, pp. 20–36), while the sensory shocks that awaken memory are frequently linked to touch, taste, or bodily sensation. Proustian revelation does not require a separation from the body; on the contrary, it emerges through an immersion in sensory experience.

Comparable moments of intense spiritual feeling can also be found in Dostoevsky, particularly in *The Idiot* through the experiences of Prince Myshkin. There, however, they serve a different purpose: they point toward pure faith and spiritual goodness. The characters who undergo such experiences are generally neither intellectually superior nor rebellious figures such as Ivan Karamazov or Raskolnikov. Rather, they are individuals who appear vulnerable and maladapted to reality, yet possess an extraordinary capacity for human goodness.

The difference between the two authors becomes even more evident in their treatment of good and evil. Proust adopts a fundamentally relativizing perspective: no character is entirely good or entirely evil. A person may display tenderness and empathy in one relationship while exhibiting cruelty and indifference in another. Evil in Proust usually arises from vanity, jealousy, fear, or unconsciousness rather than

from any essential corruption. Truly dangerous are only those characters incapable of love, emotion, or inner sensitivity, reduced entirely to rational calculation, self-interest, or ambition.

In Dostoevsky, by contrast, good and evil cannot be measured according to social norms. Raskolnikov, who considers himself an exceptional individual, believes he has the right to transgress the moral law. Sonya, although a prostitute, is portrayed as fundamentally pure and sacrificial. Her prostitution is not a sign of moral degradation but a consequence of poverty and of her need to save those closest to her. Thus, in Dostoevsky as well, a person's moral value does not derive from outward behavior but from the depth of suffering, the capacity for love, and the possibility of spiritual transformation.

In this respect, the two authors converge. For both Proust and Dostoevsky, genuine moral condemnation is directed not at the violation of rules but at the absence of an inner life—the inability to experience compassion, guilt, love, or empathy. At the center of their novels lies not action but consciousness itself.

The nature of that consciousness, however, differs profoundly. Dostoevsky's characters exist in a state of continual spiritual and moral turbulence. They are torn between faith and doubt, freedom and determinism, God and rebellion against God. Their inner lives are dramatic and conflict-ridden. In Proust, consciousness is far less dramatic and far more reflective. It moves through sensations, memories, associations, and subtle psychological shifts. Rather than staging a conflict of ideas, Proust traces the manner in which the world gradually accumulates within human sensibility. Consequently, while Dostoevsky constructs the novel through dialogue, conflict, and spiritual crisis, Proust builds it through immersion in experience and through the slow transformation of life into memory and art.

8. Conclusion

The extraordinary importance that Russian literature acquired in France at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century can be traced both in the literary criticism of the period and in the poetics of French writers themselves. Within this intellectual and cultural climate, Russian authors were perceived not merely as foreign literary models but as representatives of a new vision of the human being, psychology, and the crisis of the modern subject. Marcel Proust belonged precisely to the generation of French writers whose intellectual formation took place during the period of intense reception of the Russian novel, particularly the works of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Although his poetics cannot be reduced to a matter of direct influence, Russian literature clearly constituted an important horizon through which Proust reconsidered questions of identity, time, memory, love, and human interiority.

Dostoevsky appears not only explicitly on several occasions throughout *In Search of Lost Time*, but Proust himself offers an original and deeply personal interpretation of his novels, especially *The Brothers Karamazov*. In these interpretations, Proust is concerned less with the political or historical dimensions of Dostoevsky's work than with its psychological and metaphysical structure. In Dostoevsky he recognizes the drama of human contradiction, the existence of hidden impulses, inexplicable inner drives, and dark regions of consciousness that resist rational explanation.

Despite the numerous thematic and formal points of contact between the two writers, however, the differences between Proust and Dostoevsky remain fundamental. In Dostoevsky, human beings are confronted with extreme moral and spiritual trials. His characters live in a state of continual conflict between faith and doubt, good and evil, freedom and guilt. Their psychology is dramatic, explosive, and dialogical; they constantly confront both others and themselves in an attempt to arrive at the truth of human existence. In Proust, by contrast, inner life is quieter, though no less complex. Rather than metaphysical drama, the central focus is the experience of time, memory, and sensibility. Proust's protagonist struggles not for the salvation of his soul but for the possibility of transforming his life into art.

For this reason, their understanding of literature also differs. For Dostoevsky, the novel is a space of confrontation between ideas and spiritual positions, a place where different voices encounter one another without a definitive authorial judgment. For Proust, the novel becomes a space of memory and of the reconstruction of the self. Its task is not to resolve truth but to reveal the manner in which reality accumulates within consciousness and how lived experience is gradually transformed into literary form.

In this sense, the relationship between Proust and Dostoevsky should not be understood simply as one of influence but rather as a profound dialogue between two distinct conceptions of the modern

novel. Both authors abandon the notion of a stable and unified subject; both portray their characters as beings composed of contradictions, hidden desires, multiple masks, and potential identities. Yet while in Dostoevsky this fragmentation leads to moral and spiritual crisis, in Proust it becomes the very condition for the creation of art.

Ultimately, one may conclude that through Dostoevsky, Proust discovered not only a great writer but also a new possibility for the novel as a literary form. The Russian novel enabled him to perceive the depth of the human psyche and the instability of identity, while his own poetics transformed these influences into an entirely different literary world—a world in which time, memory, and sensory experience become the principal pathways toward the truth of human existence.

Notes

1. Все дело в том, что его (Достоевского – А.Т.) персонажи уже имеют тенденцию стать тем, чем персонажи последующих романов будут становиться во все большей мере, (…) вестниками тех порой еще неведомых состояний души, что мы находим в самих себе (…) Вполне возможно, светский снобизм Пруста, который с упор ством маниакального наваждения накладывает отпечаток на всех его персонажей, есть не что иное, как разновидность той же самой навязчивой потребности в проникновении, в слиянии.
2. Hassine, *Proust à la recherche de Dostoïevski*, p. 25.
3. "German critics saw in his work the reign of true being beyond the contingent. As for his life, it was thought to be guided by a transcendent meaning that carried him to the heights of spirituality." (« Les critiques allemands voyant dans son œuvre le règne de l'être véritable au-delà du contingent. Quant à sa vie, elle serait dirigée par un sens transcendant la transportant aux cimes de spiritualité », p. 25.).
4. Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. 4, *Le Temps retrouvé*, ed. Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Gallimard, coll. « Bibliothèque de la Pléiade », 1989), p. 474. ("Le style pour l'écrivain, aussi bien que la couleur pour le peintre, est une question non de technique mais de vision.").
5. "The woman will have Gomorrah, and the man will have Sodom" Vigny (1964, p. 37, lines 103–105). (« La Femme aura Gomorrhe et l'Homme aura Sodome,/Et, se jetant de loin un regard irrité,/Les deux sexes mourront chacun de son côté. »).
6. Edmond and Goncourt (1887–1896, p. 240).
7. (L'*otchaïanié*, cet état de cœur et d'esprit pour lequel je m'efforce vainement de trouver un équivalent dans notre langue. Dostoïevsky l'analyse en maint endroit: « C'est la sensation d'un homme qui, du haut d'une tour élevée, se penche sur l'abîme béant et éprouve un frisson de volupté à l'idée qu'il pourrait se jeter la tête la première… »).
8. Proust, *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*, p. 84. ("La vie est étrangement facile et douce avec certaines personnes d'une grande distinction naturelle, spirituelles, affectueuses, mais qui sont capables de tous les vices, encore qu'elles n'en exercent aucun publiquement et qu'on n'en puisse affirmer d'elles un seul").
9. *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 3, p. 879. ("Grouchenka, Nastasia, figures aussi originales aussi mystérieuses, non pas seulement que les courtisanes de Carpaccio, mais que la Bethsabée de Rembrandt. Remarquez qu'il n'a pas su certainement que ce visage éclatant, double, à brusques détentes d'orgueil qui font paraître la femme autre qu'elle n'est ("Tu n'es pas telle"), dit Mychkine à Nastasia dans la visite aux parents de Gania, et Aliocha pourrait le dire à Grouchenka dans la visite à Katherina Ivanova.").
10. Proust translated the works of the English aesthete who studied Italian sculpture and architecture, namely *La Bible d'Amiens* (1904) and *Sésame et les lys* (1906), both based on works by John Ruskin.
11. ("The novelist thus finds himself at the intersection of two opposing directions: one moves back toward the hero's past, the recapitulation of traits already known, or that should have been known, and summoned in order to understand the present; the other, turned toward the future, welcomes the most surprising revelations. (…) This didacticism of analysis is fortunately opposed by the unexpected revelation of new traits, which break the line of character and recall Dostoevsky's lesson. These revelations remain faithful to the technique of point of view: each character is known only insofar as he reveals himself to an observer.").
12. Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1988), pp. 829–30. ("Il ne faut jamais en vouloir aux hommes, jamais les juger d'après tel souvenir d'une méchanceté, car nous ne savons pas tout ce qu'à d'autres moments leur âme a pu vouloir sincèrement et réaliser de bon.").
13. « Il est arrivé, dit le narrateur, que Mme de Sévigné, comme Elstir, comme Dostoievsky, au lieu de présenter les choses dans l'ordre logique, c'est-à-dire, en commençant par la cause, nous montre d'abord l'effet, l'illusion qui nous frappe. C'est ainsi que Dostoievsky présente ses personnages. (III, p. 880).
14. Proust, *Le Temps retrouvé*, in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. 4 (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1989), p. 81. ("Homme du monde, il avait beaucoup vécu parmi les gens du monde, parmi les gens honorables, parmi les hommes d'honneur, les gens qui ne serreront pas la main à une fripouille, il connaissait leur délicatesse et leur dureté; il les savait insensibles aux larmes d'un homme qu'ils font chasser d'un cercle ou avec qui ils refusent de se battre, dût leur acte de 'propreté morale' amener la mort de la mère de la brebis

galeuse […] tandis qu'il savait que des gens tarés, des fripouilles comme certains personnages de Dostoïevski peuvent être meilleurs…").

15. *Ibid*. ("Les gens du monde s'étaient désengoués de M. de Charlus, non pas pour avoir trop pénétré, mais sans avoir pénétré jamais sa rare valeur intellectuelle").
16. Proust, *La Prisonnière*, in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. 3, p. 377. ("On dirait que pour lui l'amour et la haine la plus éperdue, la bonté et la traîtrise, la timidité et l'insolence ne sont que deux états d'une même nature…").

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