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# The Science of Sensation: Dostoevsky, Wilkie Collins and the Detective Novel

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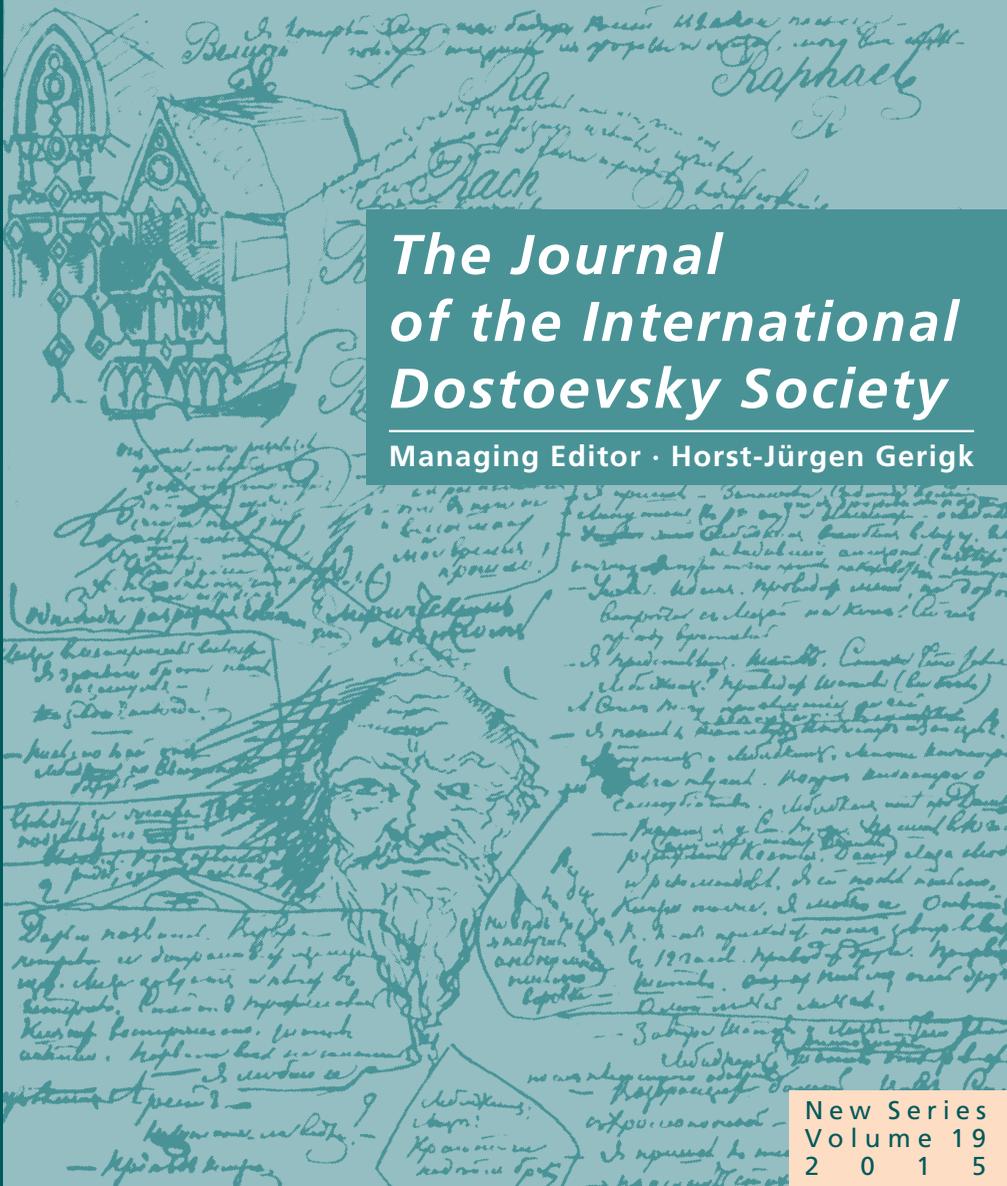
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# DOSTOEVSKY STUDIES 19



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MELISSA FRAZIER

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## The Science of Sensation: Dostoevsky, Wilkie Collins and the Detective Novel

Wilkie Collins's most important publisher in Russia, like Dostoevsky's, was M. N. Katkov.<sup>1</sup> Over the course of 1866, for example, Katkov's *The Russian Herald* (*Русский вестник*) serialized Collins's *Armadale* alongside *Crime and Punishment*; in 1868, when Dostoevsky's *Idiot* was being serialized in the main part of the journal, it was with *The Moonstone* appearing in the supplement or "приложение." This proximity in time and space calls attention to a deep literary affinity. The intense engagement with his readership that Collins displayed on any number of levels, from his dramatic plot twists to his use of multiple narrators, finds a clear parallel in the lures Dostoevsky cast for his own readers, for example, while the issue of women's rights is in different ways of central concern to both.<sup>2</sup> Still more striking is Dostoevsky's and Collins's shared response to the limits imposed by what we might call Positivist science.

Both Dostoevsky and Collins reject a strict, simplistic materialism, as both associate flawed aspirations to "extraordinariness" with an interest in science, in Ivan Karamazov's education as a natural scientist in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), for example, as in Count Fosco's study of chemistry in *The Woman in White* (1859). On this level, Ivan's break-down and confession and Fosco's death represent a defeat for science as well. At the same time, both writers' commitment to a less cut-and-dried yet profoundly scientific world view is evident not just in figures like Ezra

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<sup>1</sup> While Katkov was Collins' most prestigious publisher in Russia, he was not the only one; Collins's first and most prolific publisher in Russia was E. N. Akhmatova in her perhaps second-tier journal, *Collected Foreign Novels, Novellas and Stories in Russian Translation* (*Собрание иностранных романов, повестей и рассказов в переводе на русский язык*, 1856-1885).

<sup>2</sup> Collins' consistent interest in women's rights is perhaps immediately obvious; for Dostoevsky, see Straus.

Jennings in *The Moonstone* or Ivan's devil, but in the very genre that both practice: the novel of sensation.

D.A. Miller defines the novel of sensation as "one of the first instances of modern literature to address itself primarily to the sympathetic nervous system" (Miller 146), and while it is Collins's critics who invented the term, Dostoevsky, too, was frequently accused of bypassing his readers' rational faculties in order to elicit a purely physical response. In other writers this appeal to the sympathetic nervous system might suggest a rigidly materialistic determinism. Dostoevsky and Collins, however, seem drawn instead to the insights an emerging science of physiology offers into fully scientific ir- or extra-rationality, as well as into questions of mind and body and the material underpinnings of subjective perceptions. To recognize Dostoevsky's engagement together with Collins in this more flexible kind of science is to contribute to what Anna Kaladiouk (Schur) calls "a more refined reading of Dostoevsky's view of contemporary science," one that would also "restore to the science of Dostoevsky's times some of its intellectual range and complexity" (Kaladiouk 419-20).<sup>3</sup> Especially the latter move has implications for our reading of a genre that emerged alongside sensation: the detective novel.

It is striking that despite all the detecting that Dostoevsky and even more Collins offer, literary historians tend to position both just a little off to the side of a genre that in its twentieth- and twenty-first century incarnations accommodates a remarkably wide variety of writers. The peculiar limitation that both Dostoevsky and Collins face, I would argue, arises from our association of their century with only one kind of science. Literary historians most often connect the rise of the detective novel with the late nineteenth-century rise of a forensic science that would offer an empirical solution to all mysteries once and for all. As Vanessa L. Ryan writes:

The association of the detective with superior powers of observation, vast scientific and human knowledge, and, above all, the use of scientific method, has made systematic thinking seem indispensable to the detective's art. In the world of Sherlock Holmes – the master of deductive logic and forensic analysis – the figure of the detective tends to correspond to our ideal of the pure scientist (Ryan 29).

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<sup>3</sup> For the on-going re-evaluation of nineteenth-century science in the Western European context, see the seminal works by Beer and Tresch.

“Deductive logic and forensic analysis” play little part in the science that Dostoevsky and Collins advocate, perhaps because, as Lawrence Rothfield argues, Sherlock Holmes marks a real shift in both our literature and our science of detecting.<sup>4</sup> As Rothfield acknowledges, however, to read Conan Doyle’s stories in these terms alone is also to conflate Holmes’ own claims with his author’s effects, to the point of ignoring the very real somatic pleasures that Conan Doyle offers. Dostoevsky’s and Collins’s recourse to sensation reminds us of the more ambiguous and indeterminate science equally essential to detecting, as the detective novel, even in the admittedly idealized world of Sherlock Holmes, was never a simple matter of “scientific method” and “systematic thinking” alone. It was instead always also, in Umberto Eco’s words, of “all model plots ... the most metaphysical and philosophical” (Eco 53).

### Collins and Sensation

Collins is best-known for his invention in *The Woman in White* (1859) of the genre that readers quickly came to know as the “novel of sensation.” In their use of the term, critics then as now emphasized the “sensational” plot turns that, as Richard Fantina puts it, relied “on the themes of inheritance, bigamy, poisoning, drug abuse, and adultery, and ... frequent employment of the *deus ex machina* and other startlingly improbable coincidences...” (Fantina 23). The tag also reflects the phenomenal success enjoyed by *The Woman in White* in particular, not just in Great Britain but across Europe. In Russia, as A. V. Druzhinin wrote, “*The Woman in White* was one of the most widely read novels in all of 1861,” “purchased and gulped down with more greed than Dickens’ *Expectations* or *Framley Parsonage*” (Druzhinin 408).<sup>5</sup> The term nonetheless originally referred to the physiological response that Collins apparently intended to elicit.

To Collins’s critics, *The Woman in White* represented a literature addressed to the body alone. As Ryan explains, “mid-nineteenth-century advances in physiological psychology led both scientists and nonscientists to consider whether ... there is a type of thought, a kind of ‘thinking without thinking,’ that can serve as an epistemological alternative to reasoned and

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<sup>4</sup> Rothfield claims that Sherlock Holmes represents the moment when “the pathologically embodied person of realism” gives way to “the individuated body” (Rothfield 134) as object of knowledge.

<sup>5</sup> Translations from the Russian are mine unless otherwise noted.

logical thought” (Ryan 15). Nancy Armstrong adds that a prime example of this argument can be found in George Henry Lewes’s *The Physiology of Common Life* (1859-60), the second volume of which is largely devoted to “sensation,” or feeling vs. thinking, nervous system vs. mind (Armstrong 142). As Nicholas Daly writes, critics of the day understood the novel of sensation not just to emerge from this conversation but to capitalize on its insights to “conjure up a corporeal rather than a cerebral response in the reader” (Daly 40).

In her 1862 review of Collins’s novel, for example, Mrs. Oliphant marvels at the effect produced when the “Woman in White” reaches out to touch Walter’s shoulder: “Few readers will be able to resist the mysterious thrill of this sudden touch. The sensation is distinct and indisputable. The silent woman lays her hand upon our shoulder as well as upon that of Mr Walter Hartright.” Noting that the effect is then repeated when Walter makes the connection between his chance companion and Laura, Mrs. Oliphant concludes: “These two startling points of this story do not take their power from character, or from passion, or any intellectual or emotional influence. The effect is pure sensation, neither more nor less...” (*Wilkie Collins* 119). Only a year later, the Rev. Henry Mansel argues, sensation had become the marker of all current British writing:

A great philosopher has enumerated in a list of sensations ‘the feelings from heat, electricity, galvanism, &c.’ together with ‘titillation, sneezing, horripilation, shuddering, the feeling of setting the teeth on edge, &c.’; and our novels might be classified in like manner, according to the kind of sensation they are calculated to produce. There are novels of the warming-pan, and others of the galvanic-battery type – some which gently stimulate a particular feeling, and others which carry the whole nervous system by steam. There are some which tickle the vanity of the reader, and some which aspire to set his hair on end or his teeth on edge; while others, with or without the intention of the writer, are strongly provocative of that sensation in the palate and throat which is a premonitory symptom of nausea (Mansel 487).

Like Mansel, most reviewers were highly uncomfortable with the idea that what the sensation novel produced was a kind of “thrill,” what *The Christian Remembrancer* in 1864 described as a “drop from the empire of reason and self-control ... which is a consistent appeal to the animal part of our nature” (*Wilkie Collins* 212). In the terms that Louise McReynolds lays out in her fine study of the changes wrought by the Great Reforms, *Murder Most Russian: True Crime and Punishment in Late Imperial Russia* (2013),

a psychology that gives “the dominant role” to “physiological explanations” (McReynolds 57) marked the Russian tradition in particular. While Collins was perhaps not the most British of British writers – certainly *The Woman in White*, like *Crime and Punishment*, owed a great deal to French true crime stories and also to Balzac – it may also be that the anxious reading offered by Mansel et al. slightly misrepresents his intentions.<sup>6</sup> What sensation more accurately offered Collins was not the elevation of body over mind, but their mutual implication.

In their haste to reassert the “empire of reason and self-control,” Collins’s critics evidently saw his science of sensation in terms borrowed from his most famous villain, Count Fosco in *The Woman in White*. As Fosco explains:

The best years of my life have been passed in the ardent study of medical and chemical science. Chemistry, especially, has always had irresistible attractions for me, from the enormous, the illimitable power which the knowledge of it confers. Chemists, I assert it emphatically, might sway, if they pleased, the destinies of humanity. Let me explain this before I go further.

Mind, they say, rules the world. But what rules the mind? The body. The body (follow me closely here) lies at the mercy of the most omnipotent of all mortal potentates – the Chemist... (Collins, *Woman* 560).

Particularly when he dips into what he calls “the more subtle resources which medical and magnetic science have placed at the disposal of mankind” (Collins, *Woman* 308), Fosco succeeds in instilling in others a kind of “thinking without thinking,” and he radiates both “power and intensity,” not just in his own words or his oft-noted resemblance to Napoleon, but also in his extraordinary influence on both the people and animals around him. Still, the novel suggests that Collins himself didn’t share Fosco’s entirely mechanistic view.

Fosco, after all, is not the hero but the second and more significant villain in a highly involved plot. The first villain, Sir Percival Glyde, marries Laura Fairlie solely for her money and, when that money is not immediately forthcoming, hatches a diabolical plot with his friend Fosco. This plot hinges on Lady Glyde’s uncanny resemblance to the “Woman in White,” one Anne Catherick, a weak-minded young woman whom Sir

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<sup>6</sup> Where Dostoevsky began his literary career with a translation of *Eugénie Grandet* in 1843, Collins introduced readers of Dickens’ *Household Words* to Balzac in 1859; as for the French genre of true crime stories, Dostoevsky drew on Lacenaire (1836) for *Crime and Punishment*, and Collins on Maurice Méjan’s *Recueil des causes célèbres* (1807-14) (Murch 103).

Percival has already institutionalized once. Now at Fosco's urging, Sir Percival purports to send Anne back to the asylum, but sends his wife in her place. Meanwhile, as Fosco knows, Anne is already suffering from a heart complaint, and when she dies under the guise of Lady Glyde, Sir Percival inherits Laura's fortune. Luckily for Laura, however, she is loved by her erstwhile drawing master, Walter Hartright, who conspires with Laura's valiant half-sister Marian Halcombe to support Laura after her escape from the insane asylum, drive Sir Percival to his death, and force Count Fosco to France where he meets his end as a one-time member of an Italian revolutionary organization turned spy.

The plot's complications speak to Fosco's imposing power, and Fosco's science, particularly in its "magnetic," or mesmeric, aspects, is undoubtedly his greatest tool. Fosco ultimately fails, though, largely because his science assumes a strict separation between subject and object when, particularly in the case of the redoubtable Marian, those borders prove more than a little porous. While Marian herself acknowledges Fosco's increasing control over both her mind and her body, it is Fosco's practice of mesmerism that unleashes Marian's own clairvoyant powers in her prophetic dream of Walter's return. It is then also Marian who ultimately achieves mastery over Fosco when what he calls "the one weak place in [his] heart" leads to the discovery of "the one weak place in [his] scheme" (Collins, *Woman* 569).<sup>7</sup> The circumstances of Fosco's failure suggest Collins's investment in a very different kind of science, one where subjects and objects might mutually shape and reflect one another. This commitment is most clear, however, when we juxtapose the collapse of Fosco's schemes in *The Woman in White* with Ezra Jennings' triumph in *The Moonstone*.

Like *The Woman in White*, *The Moonstone* offers not just a famously convoluted plot, but also a famously convoluted narration, as the mystery of Rachel Verinder's stolen diamond is told in thirteen parts by eleven different narrators, each of whom relates only as much of the plot as s/he witnessed first-hand. Only by novel's end does it become clear that the theft was perpetrated by Rachel's two suitors acting as an impromptu tag-team. One suitor, Godfrey Ablewhite, turns out to have been interested only in Rachel's fortune, as his subsequent attempts to raise money on her diamond reveal. The other, Franklin Blake, not only loves Rachel, but also removes the diamond from her room under the influence of a dose of opium that he doesn't know he has taken.

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<sup>7</sup> In my highly condensed argument here I draw on Winters, Taylor, and Pearl but come to slightly different conclusions; I am grateful to my student Jacqueline Guo for connecting Winters' discussion of mesmerism's power dynamics with Marian's dream.

This highly involved mystery is solved in a “bold experiment” planned and executed by the marginalized figure of Ezra Jennings. Laboring under the burden of his own unfairly but irredeemably sullied reputation, Jennings’ scientific work “addressed to the members of my profession – a book on the intricate and delicate subject of the brain and the nervous system” (Collins, *Moonstone* 382) will never see the light of day. Jennings’ origins and appearance, not to mention his addiction to opium, also associate him with the Indian diamond and with an Indian mysticism apparently at odds with good English science. Indeed, when Jennings first proposes awakening Blake’s latent memory, the lawyer Mr. Bruff sees nothing but “a piece of trickery, akin to the trickery of mesmerism, clairvoyance, and the like” (Collins, *Moonstone* 410). Jennings insists, however, that what he offers is real nineteenth-century British science: “Science sanctions my proposal, fanciful as it may seem” (Collins, *Moonstone* 398), he tells Blake, before handing him extracts from the works of two real figures in British medicine, Dr. William Benjamin Carpenter and Dr. John Elliotson.<sup>8</sup>

In his preface to the novel, Collins appropriates Jennings’ claim by emphasizing the empirical underpinnings of “the physiological experiment which occupies a prominent place in the closing scenes of *The Moonstone*” (Collins, *Moonstone* xxiii). It’s not just empirical underpinnings at stake here, however. What the experiment shows is that while Blake objectively stole the diamond, subjectively he didn’t; his responsibility for the theft is exactly like Ivan Karamazov’s responsibility for the death of his father, only in reverse – where Blake committed the crime and yet didn’t, Ivan didn’t commit the crime and yet did. This blurring of the edges of subjective and objective added to the element of “fancy” associated with Jennings introduces into Collins’s science a kind of ir- or extra-rationality that casts a different light on his efforts to elicit from his readers a “drop from the empire of reason and self-control.” Where his critics saw only a Fosco-like “consistent appeal to the animal part of our nature,” Collins evidently sought a more complicated science still grounded in the material reality of bodies in the world. For Dostoevsky the appeal of sensation was exactly the same, a refinement that was lost on his contemporary critics as it was on Collins’s.

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<sup>8</sup> Both well-known, but nonetheless very different. As Jenny Bourne Taylor notes, “[i]n conflating Carpenter and Elliotson in this way Collins is condensing two figures whose names ... would have had very different resonances in the 1860s: Carpenter, the respected voice of mainstream physiological psychology; Elliotson, the marginalized advocate of mesmerism” (Taylor 183).

## Sensation in Dostoevsky

Collins's critics often compared the visceral reaction that his work elicited to an illness that attacked the system. Mansel's "nausea," for example, is a minor symptom compared to Geraldine Jewsbury's 1854 description of Collins's "strength" in his earliest works as "the strength of fever" (*Wilkie Collins* 55); by 1866 the *Westminster Review* described "the Sensational Mania in Literature" as a "virus ... spreading in all directions" (*Wilkie Collins* 158). While the contemporary critical response to Dostoevsky is not as organized, Dostoevsky's readers likewise tended to describe his writing as "morbid" or "sickly" ("болезненно").<sup>9</sup> This sickliness is often associated with Dostoevsky himself, not just in terms of his well-known epilepsy, but also as based on a reading of his works. Dostoevsky's characters are often also seen as sick, a point that Dostoevsky makes himself. The effect of Dostoevsky's writing on his readers is also an issue, perhaps most strikingly in P. I. Tkachev's 1873 review of Dostoevsky's *Demons*, "Sick People" ("Больные люди").

For Tkachev, the "sick people" of his title are first Dostoevsky and then his characters, all of whom he sees as suffering from a sort of schizophrenia. His real concern, however, is for the reader, who apparently suffers in Russia as in Great Britain from the new literature of sensation. Dostoevsky's writing, Tkachev argues, reflects an impoverished literary environment so desperate for "nervous irritation (нервного раздражения): scandals, horrors, piquancy" that it makes recourse to "police agents, examining magistrates, and even just district court stenographers" (Tkachev 75-6). Tkachev summarizes what he sees as Dostoevsky's method: "Give us more and more gossip, scandal, irritate all the more strongly the reader's spinal cord (спинной мозг), make his hair stand on end, entertain him, amuse or frighten him, but just don't make him think or look up from the page" (Tkachev 75). Again he identifies a literature addressed "primarily to the sympathetic nervous system," a point N. K. Mikhailovskii makes more generally in his influential article "A Cruel Talent" ("Жестокий талант," 1882).

Written just after Dostoevsky's death in 1881, "A Cruel Talent" is a first attempt to summarize Dostoevsky's oeuvre. While Mikhailovskii grants Dostoevsky's formal ability, he also sees a deliberate and sustained attempt to inflict suffering on the reader through the use of "excessive and

<sup>9</sup> For example: "The mind of Mr. Dostoevsky has sickly ("болезненные") characteristics"; or: "Many of his thoughts and positions are so strange as could appear only in a sickly-inclined (болезненно-настроенном) imagination," see Volgin 31-32.

entirely inartistic longeurs, introductory scenes ... [and]... digressions” (Mikhailovskii 332).<sup>10</sup> This “cruel talent,” he continues:

will cloud your mind with its images and pictures and make your heart beat faster, and only in those *lucida intervalae* when in the course of reading sobriety returns to us, will you ask yourself: Why is he so tormenting that Sidorov or Petrov? Why is he is titillating (шекочет) me, too, in such tormenting fashion?

In fact, Mikhailovskii explains, there is no purpose to this suffering other than to create “sensations (ощущений) that become a need” (Mikhailovskii 333), as in his estimation Dostoevsky’s writing served Russian society of his day as nothing more than a kind of “narcotic” (“наркотического свойства,” Mikhailovskii 334). The vocabulary is again striking, and if Tkachev and Mikhailovskii as “progressive” critics had other axes to grind with the politically conservative Dostoevsky, still their reading of the formal devices at his command suggests that Dostoevsky, like Collins, deliberately drew on the tools of sensation.<sup>11</sup>

This allegation might surprise readers who more readily associate Dostoevsky with an opposition to the science of his day and especially to the new science of physiology. According to Marmeladov, for example, a copy of *The Physiology of Common Life* forms a large part of Lebezyatnikov’s reading program for Sonya in *Crime and Punishment*. Given that Lebezyatnikov is a particularly hapless Nihilist, there can only be an element of mockery here, and Claude Bernard receives similar treatment in Dmitri Karamazov’s famous reference to the “trembling” of “little tails.” When Alyosha visits Dmitri in prison, he is surprised at Dmitri’s sudden question, ““Who is this Carl Bernard?”” ““No, not Carl, wait,”” he then adds, ““I’ve got it wrong: Claude Bernard. What is it? Chemistry or something?””(15:28; 588).<sup>12</sup>

Claude Bernard is the famous real French physiologist whose *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine* (*Introduction à l’étude de la médecine expérimentale*, 1865) defined the basic principles of the scientific

<sup>10</sup> On the “cunning devices” that Mikhailovskii described in Dostoevsky’s work, see also Kanevskaya 204.

<sup>11</sup> Note that the “scientific” reading of Dostoevsky’s work is not always in terms of “sensation” nor is it always negative; Dostoevsky’s early critic and friend Valerian Maikov, for example, admiringly described his approach as “chemical,” see Frank 207.

<sup>12</sup> All citations from Dostoevsky come from F.M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 30 vols. For non-Russian readers, page numbers from the translations of Richard Pevar and Larissa Volokhonsky are provided. The format is as follows (PSS Vol:page; P&V page).

method. In Michael Katz's summary, Bernard "believed in the absolute determinism of natural science; in his words: 'the conditions of a phenomenon once known and fulfilled, the phenomenon must occur'" (Katz 22), and Rakitin seems to have explained as much to Dmitri. According to Dmitri, Rakitin plans to write an article "with a tendency: 'It was impossible for him not to kill, he was a victim of his environment'" (15:28; 588). Dmitri adds:

Imagine: it's all there in the nerves, in the head, there are these nerves in the brain (devil take them!) ... there are little sorts of tails, these nerves have little tails [...] and when they tremble, an image appears [...] and that's why I contemplate, and then think ... because of the little tails, and not at all because I have a soul or am some sort of image and likeness ... (15:28; 589).

As Robert Belknap notes, Rakitin's teachings, at least in Dmitri's rendering, sound a good deal sillier than anything written by the real Claude Bernard (Belknap 146-7). Still, Dmitri is right to see something Fosco-like here. While Dmitri is apparently convinced by Rakitin's science, his explanation finishes with the anguished cry, "'And yet, I'm sorry for God! ... Chemistry, brother, chemistry! Move over a little, Your Reverence, chemistry's coming!'" (15:28; 589).

Tkachev and Mikhailovskii's reading would suggest, however, that Dmitri's anxious response is not Dostoevsky's own, as would the narrator's use of the very term "sensation" ("ощущение") in *Crime and Punishment*. When Raskolnikov realizes that the police want to question him not about the murder but about his debt, he is at first filled with "complete, spontaneous, purely animal joy" (6:78; 98). This unthinking emotion quickly gives way, however, to something much more troubling:

A dark sensation of tormenting, infinite solitude and estrangement suddenly rose to consciousness in his soul.... What was taking place in him was totally unfamiliar, new, sudden, never before experienced. Not that he understood it, but he sensed clearly, with all the power of sensation, that is as no longer possible for him to address these people in the police station, not only with heartfelt effusions, as he had just done, but in any way at all... Never until that minute had he experienced such a strange and terrible sensation. And most tormenting of all was that it was more a sensation than an awareness, an idea; a spontaneous sensation, the most tormenting of any he had yet experienced in his life (6:81-2; 103-4).

As Raskolnikov walks the streets of St. Petersburg, this “new, insurmountable sensation” becomes “a certain boundless, almost physical loathing for everything he met or saw around him” (6:87; 110) – a physical reaction, the response of his body to the deed his rational mind has led him to perform. This physiological response culminates at the novel’s end when a different “certain sensation” seizes “him all at once,” takes “hold of him entirely – body and mind” (6:405; 525), and he bows down at the crossroads to kiss the earth.

Dmitri’s repeated references to Bernard, as Harriet Murav argues, serve as a kind of shorthand for Dostoevsky’s rejection of a scientific approach that would “reduce phenomena to their simplest possible common denominator and then analyze the relations among them in quantitative terms” (Murav 49). Still, as Dostoevsky in *Crime and Punishment* emphasizes our material existence with his pointed use of the word “sensation,” he doesn’t reject science altogether so much as, like Collins, reach for a science other than the Foscovian/Bernard-ian sort, one that would reflect and inform what Razumikhin calls “the *living* process of life” (6:197; 256). In *The Brothers Karamazov* itself, however, this other kind of science is most clearly expressed in terms not of physiology, but of mathematics.

### Science Beyond Euclid

Shortly before launching into “The Grand Inquisitor,” Ivan Karamazov makes surely the most famous reference to non-Euclidean Geometry in all literature. Ivan begins by assuring Alyosha that he accepts God “pure and simple.” “But this,” he adds, “needs to be noted”:

if God exists and if he indeed created the earth, then, as we know perfectly well, he created it in accordance with Euclidean geometry, and he created human reason with a conception of only three dimensions of space. At the same time there were and are even now geometers and philosophers [...] who doubt that the whole universe, or even more broadly, the whole of being, was created purely in accordance with Euclidean geometry; they even dare to dream that two parallel lines, which according to Euclid cannot possibly meet on earth, may perhaps meet somewhere in infinity. I, my dear, have come to the conclusion that if I cannot understand even that, then it is not for me to understand about God. I humbly confess that I do not have any ability to resolve such questions, I have a Euclidean mind, an earthly mind, and therefore it is not for us to resolve things that are not of this world (14:214; 235).

Accordingly, Ivan explains, he simply believes in God, while at the same time utterly refusing to accept his world, with, as he explains, “one reservation”:

I have a childlike conviction that the sufferings will be healed and smoothed over, that the whole offensive comedy of human contradictions will disappear like a pitiful mirage, a vile concoction of man’s Euclidean mind, feeble and puny as an atom, and that ultimately, at the world’s finale, in the moment of eternal harmony, there will occur and be revealed something so precious that it will suffice for all hearts [...] to justify everything that has happened with men – let this, let all of this come true and be revealed, but I do not accept it and do not want to accept it! Let the parallel lines even meet before my own eyes: I shall look and say, yes, they meet, and still I will not accept it (6:214-5; 235-6).

Diane Oenning Thompson has effectively put to rest the rather extraordinary claim once circulating among scholars of Russian literature that Einstein developed the theory of relativity from his reading of Dostoevsky (Thompson 86-90). We needn’t demonstrate a direct contribution to twentieth and/or twenty-first century science, however, to note something in this passage at odds with the dominant Positivist paradigm of Dostoevsky’s day.

Thompson argues that Dostoevsky most likely encountered non-Euclidean geometry in a review that appeared in the journal *Knowledge* (*Знание*) in 1876 written by the physicist and physiologist Hermann von Helmholtz. I would also note that the second volume of George Henry Lewes’s *Problems of Life and Mind*, also published in Russian translation in *Knowledge* in 1876, includes an article in the appendix on “Imaginary Geometry and the Truth of Axioms.” Either source suggests the scientific principles at stake. While Lewes was at one time a devoted disciple of Comte himself, by *Problems of Life and Mind* he had moved to a more Jennings-like science that would break down what he calls “the assumed distinction between noumenon and phenomenon” (Lewes 168); Helmholtz is perhaps best known for his work on sound and his emphasis not just on the source from which the sound emanates, but also on the receiving capacity of the human ear.<sup>13</sup> Their (qualified) dissemination of a mathematics that cuts off from the world as we know it to imagine other possible kinds of spaces reflects the same belief that perception and what we might call the material world mutually inflect one another, and the challenge that this belief presents to Positivist science is clear in Chernyshevsky’s

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<sup>13</sup> I am indebted to my student Simone Dozier for her thoughtful reading of Helmholtz.

response. While labeling Helmholtz “one of the greatest of naturalists,” Chernyshevsky nonetheless described the article on non-Euclidean geometry as “childish waggery, not worthy of attention” (Kiiko 123).

Chernyshevsky’s sense that science gives fixed answers is, of course, widely shared, perhaps especially by non-scientists, among them Bakhtin. For Bakhtin, science is inherently monologic. While he acknowledges that scientific activity requires that one deal with another’s discourse: “the words of predecessors, the judgment of critics, majority opinion and so forth,” Bakhtin presents the relationship of the scientist to his or her subject as one-way. Because “[t]he entire methodological apparatus of the mathematical and natural sciences is directed toward mastery over *mute objects, brute things*, that do not reveal themselves in words, that do not *comment on themselves*,” Bakhtin writes, “[a]cquiring knowledge here is not connected with receiving and interpreting words or signs from the object itself under consideration” (Bakhtin 351). As Collins’s and Dostoevsky’s sensation would remind us, however, science is not always conceived in those terms.

If Euclidean geometry depends on our belief, in Douglas Hofstadter’s words, that words like “point” and “line” are “necessarily univalent, capable of only one meaning,” non-Euclidean geometry as it developed in fits and starts from the eighteenth century on started exactly from the recognition that “the four postulates of absolute geometry simply do not pin down the meanings of the terms ‘point’ and ‘line’” and “that there is room for *different extensions* of the notions” (Hofstadter 222).<sup>14</sup> It is also the case that science after Einstein, while not endowing the material world with actual “words or signs” of its own, nonetheless reflects an understanding of relativity or point of view on various levels. As Peter Gaffney writes: “Not only does this mean the end of Newtonian universality (the claim that physical laws are applicable throughout time and space), challenging claims and assumptions based on the unity of science, but also it means the end of a mechanistic worldview in which matter passively fills out a set of determinate spatio-temporal relations” (Gaffney 17). A committed Deleuzian, Gaffney argues further that “a particular (historically specific) body of scientific thought has a *reciprocal* relationship with the object it determines, each one participating in the actualization of the other and simultaneously traversing a diversity of social, intellectual, and material processes ...” (Gaffney 3-4). In other words, even in a scientific

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<sup>14</sup> Hofstadter gives the example of elliptical geometry. If we envision geometrical space as a sphere, a “point” would consist of a “pair of diametrically opposed points of the sphere’s surface”; a line is then a “great circle on the sphere” (Hofstadter 93).

context, subject and object may mutually inflect one another in what Hofstadter calls a “strange loop,” and if this post-Positivist scientific irresolution is more than Ivan Karamazov can handle, that is Ivan’s problem. Dostoevsky himself is on home ground here in scientific as well as religious terms and even in the two together, as what is most striking in Ivan’s account is that his “Euclidean mind” apparently limits not just his science but also his religion. The implication is that the two, in certain non-Euclidean forms, might be compatible, and Ivan encounters the same problem when his devil refers to indeterminate equations.

Before recounting Ivan’s apparent exchange with the devil, our unreliable narrator finds it “decidedly necessary” to inform us that Ivan “was, that evening, precisely just on the verge of brain fever” (15:69-70; 634). For all its symbolic value in literary texts ranging from *Wuthering Heights* to *Madame Bovary*, in the nineteenth century, as Audrey C. Peterson explains, brain fever was also a legitimate medical condition, which is not to say that Ivan’s devil is only a symptom of his disease. It is instead that Dostoevsky doesn’t allow us to decide one way or the other: as the devil himself says in one of his best lines, “‘The other world and material proofs, la-di-da!’” (15:71; 636-7). As the devil well knows, however, it is exactly material proofs that Ivan seeks along with definitive answers, above all to the all-important question that he poses to his interlocutor here “with fierce insistence”: “‘Is there a God or not?’” (15:77; 642). Unfortunately for Ivan, with the strikingly underplayed exception of Ilyushechka’s non-corrupting body, the faith that Dostoevsky offers in *The Brothers Karamazov* lacks the final word that he so desires. Still worse from a Positivist point of view, the devil denies Ivan what he longingly wants to see as the certainties of science.

As the devil parrots a certain “young thinker’s” own ideas back to him, he posits a future time when “Man, his will and his science no longer limited, conquering nature every hour, will thereby every hour experience such lofty delight as will replace for him all his former hopes of heavenly delight” (15:83; 649). While, in the devil’s rendering, the “young thinker” questions whether that day will actually arrive, and even decides that, at least in the interim, “everything is permitted,” still he clings to the possibility of eventual certainty: “‘If it does come, then everything will be resolved and mankind will finally be settled.’” Unfortunately, a science that resolves all questions is only that science that would exclude indeterminate equations as it excludes non-Euclidean geometry. “‘[L]ike you, I myself suffer from the fantastic,’” the devil tells Ivan, “‘and that is why I love your earthly realism. Here you have it all outlined, here you have the formula,

here you have geometry, and with us it's all indeterminate equations!" (15:73; 638). Indeterminate equations are equations with more than one variable and an infinite set of solutions, for example  $2x=y$ ; like non-Euclidean geometry, they open up multiple, indeed, infinite possibilities.

Ivan, like all Dostoevsky's would-be "extraordinary men," subscribes to a much more limited and deterministic notion of science. The aspirations of nineteenth-century Positivism are summed up, albeit parodically, in the Underground Man's frustration that "two times two will be four even without my will" (5:117; 31). We see them, too, in Raskolnikov's attempt to see a young girl's abuse and degradation as inevitable: "'They say that's just how it ought to be. Every year they say, a certain percentage has to go ... somewhere...'" (6:43; 50). Ivan is also without God, not because he is, as Thompson describes him, Dostoevsky's "first hero-scientist," but because, like Collins's many scientist-villains, including not just Count Fosco in *The Woman in White*, but also Mrs. Lecount in *No Name*, widow of the famous Swiss naturalist and current care-taker of his reptiles, and especially Dr. Benjulia, the repulsive vivisectionist in *Heart and Science* (1883), he is trapped in a science that would exclude "living life." Dostoevsky himself, however, would seem to subscribe to a more flexible, Ezra Jennings-ish kind of science, one that actually lends itself to his belief in God.

E. I. Kiiko makes the case for the mutual implication of Dostoevsky's science and his religion in his reading of two notes that Dostoevsky wrote to himself on August 17, 1880, shortly after completing work on the chapter "The Devil. Ivan Fyodorovich's Nightmare." The second note is especially striking:

The real (created) world is finite, while the immaterial world is infinite. If parallel lines were to intersect, the law of this world would end.

But they intersect in infinity, and infinity undoubtedly exists. For if infinity didn't exist, neither would finiteness, it would be meaningless. And if infinity exists, then there is a God and a world other than the real (created) world, one that is based on other laws (Kiiko 126).

Kiiko summarizes Dostoevsky's thought: "And so, the existence of God and of the 'other world' results from the recognition of the infinity of space, for which non-Euclidean laws, laws other, than those for Earth, are true" (Kiiko 126). In Liza Knapp's formulation, Dostoevsky "finds in non-Euclidean geometry a geometric embodiment of the yearning for infinity that he felt in his heart" (Knapp 218). What Katz calls a "sophisticated accommodation ... to the discoveries of science" is also apparent in an 1876 letter to V. A. Alekseev where Dostoevsky writes:

By the way: remember the contemporary theories of Darwin and others concerning the descent of man from monkeys. Without engaging in any theories, Christ explicitly declares that in man, in addition to an animal world, there is also a spiritual world. And what of it? What difference does it make where man is descended from ... , God still breathed the breath of life into him (Katz 14).

Where Katz argues that this more “tolerant response” is less evident in Dostoevsky’s fictional works, the juxtaposition with Collins underscores the kind of science that Dostoevsky consistently practices. This science is apparent not just in his characters’ references to mathematics and his own recourse to the tools of sensation, but in the absolutely Deleuzian and Lewesian representation of the city of St. Petersburg in *Crime and Punishment* as simultaneously both viscerally, materially real and entirely a projection or reflection of Raskolnikov’s mind. It is this idea of science that also opens up the question of the detective novel.

### Detective Novels and Knowing

Despite T. S. Eliot’s oft-quoted claim that *The Moonstone* is “the first and greatest of English detective novels,” most scholars push Collins to the margins of the genre (Eliot 136). While the general consensus acknowledges Collins’s contribution in his creation of Sergeant Cuff, Jacques Barzun and Wendell Hertig Taylor express an equally widely held view when they insist): “Pace T. S. Eliot, this marvelous book is not ‘the greatest English detective story.’ It is a good mystery with unforgettable characters and fine melodrama, but Sgt. Cuff (copied from life) is not conspicuously a detective, and the clues, though fairly laid out from the beginning, satisfy only an antiquarian interest in ratiocination...” (Barzun 137-8). The same criticisms then apply also to Dostoevsky, only more so.

Readers have long recognized that Dostoevsky often poses puzzles for his reader, puzzles that in *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov* even involve murder. It is also the case that Porfiry Petrovich in *Crime and Punishment*, like Cuff, clearly suggests the hero-detective starting with Dupin, through Sherlock Holmes and on into the twentieth-century. If, however, as Michael Holquist argues, a tendency towards excessive “novelism” turns a detective novel into something else, Dostoevsky is even more “novelistic” (read also: “high”) than Collins. As A. I. Reitblat points out, Dostoevsky also operated in an entirely different cultural context, one with a considerably less well-developed sense of

personal property and legal culture and entirely lacking in any tradition of private detection. Most importantly even for Reitblat, however, as for many scholar-devotees of the detective novel, what Barzun and Taylor call “ratiocination” is as underdeveloped in Dostoevsky as in Collins.

It is Poe who invents the term when he calls the Dupin stories “tales of ratiocination,” and the word has usually been taken to express a belief in order that informs the genre above all in its “classic,” or nineteenth-century phase. Carl Malmgren writes that what he calls mystery fiction “unfolds in a rational world grounded in laws of cause and effect” (Malmgren 14). Holquist makes the point more strongly, arguing that Poe “is the Columbus who lays open the world of radical rationality,” and his detective “the essential metaphor for order,” “the instrument of pure logic, able to triumph because he alone in a world of credulous men holds to the Scholastic principle of *adequatio rei et intellectus*, the adequation of mind to things, the belief that the mind, given enough time, can understand everything” (Holquist 156-7). Evidently a post-Enlightenment phenomenon, “ratiocination” is equally an investment in science.

The relationship with science is already apparent when Dupin at the climactic moment in “Murders in the Rue Morgue” turns to Cuvier’s “minute anatomical and generally descriptive account of the large fulvous Ourang-Outang of the East Indian Islands” (Poe 498). More strikingly, as a great many scholars post-Foucault note, the detective novel after Poe emerges alongside a science of criminology that by the end of the century has developed the early tools of forensic science, including finger-printing, the lie detector, and Bertillon’s system of anthropometry, in Russia as in the West.<sup>15</sup> As Ronald Thomas puts it regarding *The Moonstone*, Collins’s innovation is not Cuff, but Ezra Jennings, as Collins’s is the “first novel of any kind to demonstrate in a compelling way the emergence of the modern field of forensic science and its growing importance to the new science of criminology” (Thomas 67).<sup>16</sup>

In fact Dostoevsky’s and Collins’s play with the possibilities of subjectivity suggests a science at odds with the aspirations of nineteenth-century criminology, and, indeed, with the notable exception of Thomas, for most scholars of the genre, it is exactly in terms of forensic evidence

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<sup>15</sup> McReynolds offers many examples of the increasing importance of forensic science in the Russian context, including, in a case that Dostoevsky famously refers to in *The Idiot*, in the 1867 trial of the student Danilov where “a cold-blooded killer was identified in part by a cut on his left hand” (McReynolds 54).

<sup>16</sup> See also Thomas’ *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004).

that Collins, like Dostoevsky, falls short. It is not just that Jennings' science is of a troublingly mystical sort, but that Collins and even more Dostoevsky pointedly undermine the combined legal and scientific value of any clues that their investigators unearth. Where Rachel with her eye-witness testimony in *The Moonstone* is at least objectively right, for example, Grigory's eye-witness account of the open door in *The Brothers Karamazov*, apparent proof that Dmitri had been in his father's room, is simply wrong. "Material" evidence in *The Brothers Karamazov* is also entirely lacking, as it is in *Crime and Punishment*, despite Porfiry Petrovich's unsubstantiated claim to have discovered "a little trace" (6:350; 458). If the science and detection in Dostoevsky and Collins are too unwieldy or too "soft" to fit easily into a "world of radical rationality," however, I would suggest that the problem is our own attachment to the very idea of "ratiocination." Not only is nineteenth-century science a great deal more multifaceted than the standard use of that term would suggest, but so, too, is nineteenth-century detective fiction.

While Poe is a canonical figure in the history of the detective novel, the Dupin stories open themselves to more than one interpretation. Where Holquist sees a metaphor for order, Albert D. Hutter finds in Dupin a "relentlessly logical process of ratiocination ... thrown into question by a deeper irrationality" (Hutter 191). Nancy Harrowitz performs a similar reading when she refers to Dupin's allegedly "Bi-Part Soul" to argue that ratiocination is "an operative which can cut through various levels of reality, a creative reverie which transcends positivistic reason and assumptions" (Harrowitz 195). For McReynolds, "Murders in the Rue Morgue" both "celebrate[s] the power of reason" in "fine positivist fashion," and also "provide[s] an alternative to relying on rationale" (McReynolds 116). The problem is not just a perhaps contradictory Poe, however, but a reductive approach that limits our reading of even that most famous of nineteenth-century detectives: Sherlock Holmes.

For all the conventional wisdom that associates Holmes with "deductive logic and forensic analysis," in Thomas Sebeok and Jean Umiker-Sebeok's account Holmes, too, relies not on deduction, but on a kind of inspired guessing that the Sebeoks call after Peirce "abduction." We might also consider Holmes' use of cocaine, not just in terms of Mikhailovskii's claim that Dostoevsky's writing functions as a kind of narcotic, but in Hutter's argument that the opium-addicted Ezra Jennings is "the ultimate detective" in *The Moonstone* "precisely because he is able to see both the significance of the most trivial details and to allow his mind to wander past the boundaries of rational thought" (Hutter 191). I emphasize a persistent

interest in a science shaped by different (sometimes artificially induced) mental states in Poe and Conan Doyle as in Dostoevsky and Collins not so much to make the point that the nineteenth-century detective novel is not as rigidly invested in order as many of its readers maintain, although I think that that is the case. More importantly, I would argue that order in nineteenth-century detective novels as in nineteenth-century science stands not in simple opposition to chaos, but comes in various stripes, above all those that Eco describes in his commentary to his own post-Modern contribution to the genre, *The Name of the Rose* (1980).

*The Name of the Rose* in Eco's estimation offers more than one kind of labyrinth. The labyrinth that is the monastery library is what he calls a "mannerist maze": in a "model of the trial-and-error process," "[t]here is only one exit, but you can get it wrong." This solution is one that Ivan Karamazov could embrace. The actual world as Eco's hero-detective comes to know it, however, is a labyrinth of another sort, one possessed of what Deleuze and Guattari call a "rhizome structure": "The rhizome is so constructed that every path can be connected with every other one. It has no center, no periphery, no exit, because it is potentially infinite." Unlike the monastery library, this greater world "can be structured but is never structured definitively" (Eco 57-8). This ultimately indeterminate world is Dostoevsky's and Collins's as it is Eco's. We may prefer it otherwise, and some readers evidently do. Still, the juxtaposition of Dostoevsky and Collins reminds us that the detective novel, while certainly about science and detecting, above all is and always has been less about a particular way of knowing, than about the very difficulty of knowing at all.

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