

# Dostoevsky in the Judgment of his Contemporaries

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# **I. R. P. Pobyedonoszev to I. S. Aksakov**

“January 30, 1881.

MY DEAR FRIEND IVAN SERGEYEVITCH!

“When you wrote to me that you felt so sick at heart, you as yet knew nothing of Dostoevsky’s death. But I stand by his bier, and my heart is doubly sick. I knew this man well. I had reserved for him my Saturday evenings, and he often came to talk alone with me. I even furnished him with many hints for his ‘Zosima’; we talked of that often and intimately. The time when he was editing *Grajdanim* was that of our intimacy. I pitied him in his desperate state, and worked together with him through a whole summer; in such a way we quickly made friends. In these times, he was the very man for our cause. He cannot be replaced, for he stood entirely alone...”

## II. I. S. Aksakov to R. P. Pobyedonoszev

“Moscow,

“February, 1881.

“The death of Dostoevsky is a real chastisement from God. “Now for the first time it is fully felt what value he had as a teacher of the younger generation. Even those who did not know him personally must perceive it. Those noble ideals which many a youth cherishes unconsciously in his soul, found in him an upholder. For ‘injured and insulted’ is, in very truth, only the religious and moral sense of the Russian intelligence...”

# III. Turgenev on Dostoevsky

## Letter to Slutchevsky of December 26, 1861

“My Bazarov, or to speak more precisely, my intentions, only two men have comprehended: Dostoevsky and Botkin.”

## Letter to Dostoevsky of December 26, 1861

“I am reading with great enjoyment your ‘ House of the Dead.’ The description of the bath is worthy of a Dante; in several figures (for example, in Petrov) there are many most authentic psychological subtleties. I am truly rejoiced at the success of your journal, and repeat that I shall always be glad to give it a helping hand.”

## Letter to Polonsky of April 24, 1871

“I am told that Dostoevsky has immortalized me in his novel; I don’t mind, if he likes to do that sort of thing...”

[Turgenev goes on to tell of his meeting with Dostoevsky at Baden-Baden, and says more than once that he considers Dostoevsky to be mad.]

## Letter to Mme. Milyutin of December 3, 1872

“MY DEAR MARIA AGGEYEVNA,

“I thank you from my heart for the friendly feelings which dictated your last letter. I was not in the least surprised by Dostoevsky’s proceeding: he began to hate me when we were both young and at the commencement of our literary activities, although I did nothing to call forth that hatred. But unreasoned passions are, it is said, the strongest and most persistent of all. Dostoevsky has permitted himself something worse than a parody: he has shown me, under the mask of Karmasinov, as a secret partisan of Netchayev. It is worthy of remark that he selected for this parody the only story which I published in the journal at one time conducted by him — a story for which he overwhelmed me in his letters with thanks and praise. I still have his letters. It would certainly be rather amusing to make them public now. But he knows that I shall never do so.

I am sorry that he should use his undoubtedly great talent for the satisfaction of such unlovely feelings; evidently he does not himself prize his gifts very highly, since he degrades them to a pamphlet.”

## **Letter to Saltykov of November 25, 1875**

“The theme of Goncourt’s novel is very daring. As he says himself, the book is the fruit of a close scientific study of the life of prostitutes. But at all events, it’s something very different from Dostoevsky’s ‘Hobbledehoy.’ I glanced at that chaos in the last number of the *Otetschestvennia Zapiski*; my God, what a welter of hospital stinks! What a vain and incomprehensible stuttering; what a psychological rubbish-heap!...”

## **Letter to Saltykov of September 24, 1882**

“I also read Michailovsky’s article on Dostoevsky. He has rightly divined the characteristic mark of Dostoevsky’s creative work. In French literature, too, there was a like case — namely, the famous Marquis de Sade. This latter depicts in his ‘*Tourments et Supplices*’ the sensual pleasure afforded by the infliction of refined tortures. And Dostoevsky, in one of his books, enlarges on the same sort of delights... And when one thinks that all the Russian Bishops said masses for the soul of this Marquis de Sade, and even preached sermons about his great love for all mankind! Truly, we live in a remarkable age.”

## IV. Leo Tolstoy on Dostoevsky

From Tolstoy's Letters to A. N. Strachov

"September 26, 1880.

"Lately I was ill, and read Dostoevsky's 'House of the Dead.' I have read much, and forgotten much; but I do not know in all modern literature, Pushkin included, any better book. Not the manner, but the point of view, is what is so remarkable; it is so frank, natural, and Christ-like. A fine, edifying book. Yesterday, when I read it, I knew such pleasure as I have not had for a long time. If you see Dostoevsky, tell him that I love him."

At the beginning of 1881:

"I wish I had the power to say all that I think of Dostoevsky! When you inscribed your thoughts, you partly expressed mine. I never saw the man, had no sort of direct relations with him; but when he died, I suddenly realized that he had been to me the most precious, the dearest, and the most necessary of beings. It never even entered my head to compare myself with him. Everything that he wrote (I mean only the good, the true things) was such that the more he did like that, the more I rejoiced. Artistic accomplishment and intellect can arouse my envy; but a work from the heart — only joy. I always regarded him as my friend, and reckoned most confidently on seeing him at some time. And suddenly I read that he is dead. At first I was utterly confounded, and when later I realized how I had valued him, I began to weep — I am weeping even now. Only a few days before his death, I had read with emotion and delight his 'Injury and Insult.'"

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