

Southern New Hampshire University

How Russian Literature Influenced the Modernist Movement:
A Closer Look at Who Inspired Hemingway, Kafka, Woolf, and Others

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Abstract

The authors of the Modernist era are best known for their unique styles of writing that deviated from the traditional narrative structures of the past. After World War I, the world began to move in a new direction towards modernity. Modernists used their new ways of writing to not only capture Western sentiment during this time, but to also encourage new ways of thinking as the world emerged from chaos and began anew. However, this essay argues that many techniques that the Modernists used were not as new as scholars often make them out to be. In fact, the techniques such as stream-of-consciousness, unreliable narration, and fragmentation, were all inspired by the authors of 19th century Russia. Alongside the analysis of these literary devices, this essay also examines the influential relationships between certain authors of these eras such as Gogol and Kafka, Turgenev and Hemingway, and Dostoevsky and Woolf.

Keywords: stream-of-consciousness, fragmentation, Modernism, Russian literature, Dostoevsky, Hemingway

I. Introduction

There have been very few periods in history with writers as powerful as those in 19th century Russia. The influence of the Russian authors can be felt in almost any subsequent literary period, but Modernism was one particular era which was impacted significantly more so than others. Modernist authors played a key role in capturing Western sentiment during the chaotic times following the carnage of World War I and the Russian Revolution. There was an exponential increase in industrialization, urbanization was the rage, bureaucratic institutions grew, technology advanced, and the geopolitical landscape shifted. Besides capturing the societal response to all that was happening, Modernists also led a rebellion against the social institutions of the recent past and aimed to revitalize the way people viewed the world. To encourage new ways of thinking, they started to use new ways of writing that strayed from the typical structure of the Victorian novel. Modernists became famous for their unconventional techniques such as stream-of-consciousness, fragmentation, and unreliable narration; however, it is often ignored that these literary devices, among other techniques and topics, came directly from the Russian authors of the 19th century.

For reasons unknown, the literary relationship between the 19th century Russians and the Modernists is not a widely covered phenomenon. The lack of scholarly discussion on the topic appears almost conspiratorial when one considers how open the Modernists themselves

were in showering their Russian predecessors with praise. The Norton Anthology of Literature states: “Scholars of international modernism frequently trace its rise back to the later nineteenth century, citing works of French symbolists in literature, Friedrich Nietzsche in philosophy, and Charles Darwin in science as examples of radically antitraditional modes of thought and artistic practice” (Levine et al. 13). This is just one example of many that depict the subtle exclusion of Russian literature in the Modernism conversation. This essay will contribute to that conversation by putting forth specific evidence of direct Russian influence on the Western authors of this period.

The American poet and literary critic named Ezra Pound spent much of his career advancing and advocating for the Modernist movement. He encapsulated the spirit of this movement best with his coined slogan: “Make It New.” Pound used this slogan to encourage authors in his era to distance themselves from their predecessors by creating more uniquely individual works, and to break away from previous writing standards to promote literary innovation. Modernism became a literary period focused on experimentation and finding new ways to tell stories that many viewed as unconventional. This essay argues that though techniques of the Modernists were indeed unconventional, they were not new. By analyzing the work of Nikolai Gogol, Ivan Turgenev, and Fyodor Dostoevsky, as well as the writings of the prominent Modernists that they influenced, it becomes increasingly clearer that the Modernists did not “Make It New,” they made it Russian.

II. Gogol and Kafka

In the year of 1809, Nikolai Gogol was born in a small Ukrainian village, which at the time was part of the Russian Empire. He left at the age of nineteen to test his luck in Saint Petersburg where there was a flourishing artistic and intellectual scene. Gogol worked different jobs as a clerk and tried publishing some of his own writing on the side, but it was not until he met Anton Delvig, the publisher of a literary almanac called *Northern Flowers*, that his fortune began to change (Pevear). Delvig introduced the young Gogol, only twenty-two at this point, to Alexander Pushkin and his circle. At the time, Pushkin was Russia's most influential poet, a title that has yet to be taken from him. Gogol and Pushkin quickly became friends and there was a mutual admiration for each other's work. Pushkin saw Gogol's writing as something completely unique to the literature at the time and was fascinated by it. With the stamp of approval from one of Russia's greatest writers, Gogol was launched into fame.

Gogol's uniquely comical satire includes a variety of different characters such as witches, ghosts, talking dogs, a runaway nose turned government official, corrupt bureaucrats, Cossacks, financial tricksters, and evil spirits. Though his stories can appear bizarre at first, and despite his often, but not always, light-hearted tone and laugh aloud humor, Gogol encapsulated the human condition and the spirit of Russia like almost no other. His novel *Dead Souls* is widely considered the first Russian masterpiece in book form, his comedic play *The Inspector General* is still performed all around the world today, and his short stories have brought joy to people for two hundred years. Gogol's ability to use his unorthodox style to provide commentary on relative issues such as the obsession with social status, social stratification, identity, greed, corruption, bureaucracy, and poverty has made his work accessible and relatable to about anywhere it has been read. He has inspired authors like Fyodor Dostoevsky, Flannery O'Connor,

Mikhail Bulgakov, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Albert Camus, but perhaps no one was inspired more by the works of Gogol than the Modernist author Franz Kafka.

Franz Kafka was born in Prague in 1883, which at the time was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His stories can largely be read as modern nightmares, often dealing with the concepts of alienation, isolation, bureaucratic absurdity, and totalitarianism. Kafka's place in literature compares to George Orwell's despite being slightly less well known to the general public. Like the term "Orwellian", a new word was created to describe the unique situations Kafka displayed in his writing, which the world now knows as "Kafkaesque." In a 1991 interview with literary biographer Frederick R. Karl, he describes this term in detail:

"What's Kafkaesque . . . is when you enter a surreal world in which all your control patterns, all your plans, the whole way in which you have configured your own behavior, begins to fall to pieces, when you find yourself against a force that does not lend itself to the way you perceive the world. You don't give up; you don't lie down and die. What you do is struggle against this with all of your equipment, with whatever you have. But of course, you don't stand a chance. That's Kafkaesque." (Edwards)

Kafka was an extremely influential Modernist, so much so that his work was banned under totalitarian regimes like Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. In fact, it was not until 1989 when communism collapsed that his work became widely distributed in Eastern Europe and he began to be read more by people from his home country (Tagliabue). Like Orwell, much of his work was focused on the individual and the terror one faces when they fall into the grasps of the collective. John R. Williams writes that Kafka "prefigured many of the horrors and terrors of twentieth century existence, the angst of a post-Nietzschean world in which God is dead, in

which there is therefore no ultimate authority, no final arbiter of truth, justice or morality” (Williams). Kafka was a leading voice in the period after World War I, popularized for his ability to capture the anxiety that lingered in the hearts and minds of people on a global scale. It is likely though, that without Nikolai Gogol opening the gateway into the absurd during the 1800s, Kafka may not have become the author he turned out to be.

The main similarity between the writing of Gogol and Kafka is how their stories often harmoniously coincide within two worlds, the real and the supernatural. In his short essay titled *Hope and the Absurd in the Work of Franz Kafka*, Albert Camus comments on this topic: “Awaking to the two worlds brought face to face is tantamount to getting on the trail of their secret relationships. In Kafka these two worlds are that of everyday life on the one hand and, on the other, that of supernatural anxiety” (Camus and O’Brien). This coexisting duality of realms is perhaps best exemplified by Kafka’s most famous novella, *The Metamorphosis*, which is often seen as a story of the utmost originality. Mark Spilka, however, argues that this is not necessarily the case.

Spilka writes: “There is growing evidence that Kafka was a synthetic writer, that his greatest works were built on frames supplied by other authors, and that he was original in the best sense, in his development of the latent tendencies in older forms” (Spilka 2). Despite Spilka continuing on to say that Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* was actually influenced more by Dostoevsky’s *The Double*, which was its own interpretation of Gogol, his claim should be strongly considered. All writers throughout history have used the writers before them for guidance and ideas, so this statement is not intended to take anything away from Kafka’s skill as a writer. What it does

intend to do is give more recognition to the authors who Kafka built off of, like Gogol. *The Metamorphosis*, for example, had many similarities to Gogol's short story called *The Nose*.

Referring to the main characters of *The Nose* and *The Metamorphosis*, Marek Tomášik writes that “the predicaments they find themselves in are astonishing to say the least, symptomatically dreamy, grotesque, and often – from a scientific standpoint – absurd” (Tomášik). Though there are also distinct differences in these writings, the similarities are apparent right from the introductory sentences. *The Nose* begins as follows: “On the twenty-fifth day of March, an extraordinarily strange incident occurred in Petersburg.” Right from the beginning, Gogol is setting the boundaries for the game he is about to play. He declares to the reader that what they are about to witness is an unusual story, helping the narrator and reader find common ground in the realm of the abnormal.

In *The Nose*, a barber named Ivan Yakovelich discovers a human nose baked into his morning loaf of bread. His wife is quick to blame him for drunkenly cutting someone's nose off by accident, but the barber is unresponsive, paralyzed by his perplexity. “Devil knows how it happened . . . Whether I came home drunk yesterday or not, I can't say for sure. But by all tokens this incident should be unfeasible: for bread is a baking matter, and a nose is something else entirely. I can't figure it out...” (Gogol 302). Afraid of the repercussions for his seemingly drunken mistake, the barber makes haste to discard the nose and be done with the matter altogether. He ends up making his way to Saint Isaac's Bridge and tosses it into the river below, hoping that this action would close the curtains on this peculiar event; in the world of the absurd, it was just the beginning.

The next day, a collegiate assessor named Kovalev woke up to find a flat surface where his nose used to be. As a man obsessed with his rank in society, any blow to his physical appearance would ruin him completely. During his search, a completely improbable scene unfolded. A carriage stopped in the street, and a gentleman in a government uniform hopped out of it: “what was Kovalev’s horror as well as amazement when he recognized him as his own nose!” (Gogol 306). Kovalev was dumbfounded, which shows another unique characteristic of Gogol’s absurd worlds. Impossible scenarios like the metamorphosis of a human’s nose becomes possible in a Gogol story, however the characters in the story are aware that the event unfolding should be impossible. Another example of this is when Kovalev tries to put an advertisement in the paper about his missing nose turned government official, but the editor dismisses him as a crank, showing yet again that despite the absurd realm all of these characters operated in, they still had a strong sense of objective reality and understood the strangeness of this unlikely tale. Eventually, the nose returns to its original form and makes its way back into its proper place, nestled above the mouth and under the eyes of the collegiate assessor, and all returns to normal.

Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* begins even more abruptly, but the same tactic of setting the tone for the absurd is used. Kafka writes: “One morning, as Gregor Samsa was waking up from anxious dreams, he discovered that in his bed he had been changed into a monstrous verminous bug” (Kafka and Johnson 1). Both authors immediately begin their descent into the fantastic and bring the reader along for the ride. In Gogol’s story, Kovalev undergoes his own metamorphosis, as does his nose. On paper, it is just as absurd of a concept as someone waking up as an insect, but with Gogol’s inspiration Kafka was able to mold the absurd world of Gregor Samsa into something quite unique. This is evidence of a previous point by Mark Spilka that although not as original as perceived to be, Kafka was still a unique and masterful innovator.

Instead of the comical absurdity that Gogol used in *The Nose* to address social conditions like status obsession and self-importance, Kafka creates a much more eerie and psychological realm in his play on the fantastic, addressing issues like alienation and presenting unique ethical dilemmas for readers to wrestle with, such as how one would react and carry on after their family member transformed into some type of cockroach or beetle. His characters are also usually more accepting of the world of the absurd and the rules that govern it. For example, in Gogol's world, characters often think they are losing their minds or dreaming; they have a more difficult time accepting the coexistence between the two realms. By paragraph two in *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa had already concluded that "it was no dream." In his essay titled *The Reality of the Absurd and the Absurdity of the Real*, Roman Karst puts it best: "the basic difference is that Kafka makes illusion real while Gogol makes reality illusory—the former depicts the reality of the absurd, the latter the absurdity of the real" (Karst 9).

Another characteristic of Kafka that ultimately helped define the Modernism period was his intense focus on the absurdity of the bureaucracy as it relates to the individual. In his novel *The Trial*, Josef K. is arrested for a crime that neither he nor the reader are ever informed of. As a successful clerk in a local bank, and a seemingly law abiding, well-to-do citizen, one can only guess what crime he could have possibly committed. Josef K. is told that he can go about his everyday life and carry out his work as usual except for when he is called in for his hearings. The bureaucracy therefore assumes the role of an ominous, omnipresent being in Josef K's life; he is helpless in escaping from the shadow of fear, anxiety, and confusion that had been cast upon him. Macmillan Publishers summarize Josef K's story as "the chronicle of his fight to prove his innocence, of his struggles and encounters with the invisible Law and the untouchable Court" (Macmillan Publishers). The concept of the invisible law brings to light the vulnerability of an

individual who is at the mercy of the faceless figures in charge of enforcing it. This sense of anxiety and helplessness that Kafka depicts in *The Trial* is something people increasingly became aware of as the social institutions grew and regimes became more totalitarian in the Modernist era. People who once only feared the omnipresence of God now began to instead fear the omnipresence of the bureaucracy. This story is the one to best capture the true meaning of the term Kafkaesque, making it a contribution to literature that has proved to be timeless.

What does not appear to be actively discussed in literary circles is that Kafka's *The Trial* was also inspired by Gogol, and it is likely that this is because it is difficult to determine exactly how direct the inspiration was. Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* is a common reference point for the origins of *The Trial*; however, Dostoevsky was not shy in his admittance to the profound impact that Gogol had on him, making it a likely case that a lot of Gogol was indirectly passed through his successor to Kafka. Gogol constructed various works which emphasized the corruption and incompetence within the Russian bureaucracy and made it a focal point for his satire, the most famous of which being *The Inspector General*. In this story, a small provincial town in Russia is plagued with corrupt officials who are expecting the arrival of a government inspector. The inspector is tasked with reporting his findings on the state of the administration in the town back to the capital. In a case of mistaken identity, word spreads that the inspector is staying at the local inn, and the officials are fast to begin bribing and fêting the man to attain good favor. Strong comparisons can be made between the two texts, the first being that although one is dark and one is light-hearted, they are both masterclass parodies (Winterhalter). They both highlight the correlation between the expansion of government and the increase of corruption. Also, potentially the most important similarity, these stories serve as a reminder to the reader that

social institutions are comprised of individuals, all of whom are at risk of mortal sins such as greed, lust, and envy.

Lastly, the final contribution of Gogol to the Modernist movement was the usage of what has come to be known as the unreliable narrator. This technique is most apparent in his short story *The Overcoat*, considered by Vladimir Nabokov as “the greatest Russian short story ever written” (Smith). Upon the beginning of the second paragraph, Gogol writes: “Akaky Akakievich was born, if memory serves me, during the night of the twenty-third of March” (Gogol 395). With this introduction, Gogol immediately adds an extra layer to the story. The tale could potentially be a mixture of hearsay and half-truths depending on how good the information was that the narrator received and how honest he wants to be in his reciprocation of it. Since there is no other source for the reader to refer to about the story, the reader must rely on the narrator for the information despite the narrator admitting it may not all be completely accurate. Gogol also employs this technique in *Diary of a Madman*, where the reader follows the journal entries of a man who is losing his grips on reality, and everything he writes must be looked at skeptically or taken with a grain of salt.

The same situation occurs between the narrator and the reader in many Modernist texts. For example, in Ford Maddox Ford’s *The Good Soldier*, the story is told by the character John Dowell as he recalls traumatic events surrounding his wife’s infidelity. The first sentence of the story is a declaration by Dowell where he states: “this is the saddest story I have ever heard” (Ford 1). As he goes on to retell his own story, one begins to wonder if his declaration was a way to try and distance himself from his own personal narrative, either out of denial, sadness, or the like. As the story jumps back and forth through time with no chronological order, each section

being riddled with the commentary and subjective opinions of the narrator, it becomes evident that the reader is only getting one side of this story. One must try to figure out if Dowell is purposely omitting or changing information, or if he is retelling the story incorrectly as a result of trauma or genuinely bad memory. Şule Özün writes that what makes Ford's story both interesting and difficult to interpret "is the unconventional narrator who brings impressionistic storytelling into play as a narrative technique, and who, for the readers, offers this method as an alternative to changing social order, personal integrity and conventional novel form." (Özün). Once again, although not obvious at first, the influence of Nikolai Gogol presents itself through the Modernist canon.

III. Turgenev and Hemingway

After Nikolai Gogol came Russia's next literary titan, Ivan Turgenev. Turgenev was born about a decade after Gogol, in 1818, and was birthed into a noble family in the Russian city of Oryol. With quite a different socio-economic background than many other Russian authors, Turgenev's family afforded to own an estate with their own serfs, as well as to have their son educated in boarding schools before his entry into Moscow University in 1833. Turgenev eventually decided to finish his degree at Saint Petersburg University, where at the time Nikolai Gogol taught lectures on world history. Upon graduating at the young age of 18, Turgenev sought to further his education even more and began his journey into the heart of Western Europe to study at the University of Berlin. It was in Europe that he thought his education had really begun, and he was captivated by the period of the enlightenment and the modernization of the European way of life (Moser). Throughout his life the countries of Germany and France

influenced him tremendously as he revered everything from their culture, social systems, philosophies, and literature.

It was because of this European influence that Turgenev holds a niche position within the Russian canon and is widely considered the “most un-Russian Russian writer” (*Turgenev – A Giant in the Shadow*). As his literary career began to take off in the 1840s, Turgenev made himself known for his artistry and ability to paint pictures with his words. His skills for describing scenery, nature, and romance were much different than his Russian predecessors and were more aligned with the authors of France, particularly Gustave Flaubert. One of Turgenev’s first big successes that kickstarted his career and made him popular around the world was his collection of short stories titled *A Sportsman’s Sketches*, published in 1852.

A Sportsman’s Sketches was a work of fragmentation, a literary technique that was adopted by the Modernists in their quest to break free from the traditional linear narrative and fixed points of view. In Turgenev’s fragmented work, all of the short stories follow the adventures of an unnamed narrator who has a passion for hunting in the countryside. Instead of one continuous story, tens of separate yet interconnected events are woven together to provide a new perspective on the formation of a novel. These stories seldom have climactic plotlines and are more so focused on the social interactions between the narrator and the people he meets in his travels. Often times these people are serfs, which were essentially unfree laborers who worked on the land of a landowner, and in return received physical and legal protection as well as a separate piece of land to toil for their own basic needs (Cartwright). Serfdom was seen by the rest of the modernized world as something completely medieval, and it was a big reason why Russia was seen as a country incapable of progress until its abolition in 1861. *A Sportsman’s Sketches* played a large part in this monumental change that occurred less than a decade after its

publication; the book detailed the lives of the impoverished and the cruel treatment of the serfs that Turgenev had spent his life witnessing, and it made the plea to instead pursue a more progressive system like the Europeans did.

To highlight not only the range of this novel, but the range of its author, it helps to analyze some of the stories. In *The District Doctor*, the unnamed narrator falls ill and seeks the assistance of a doctor in a small town. In just thirteen pages, Turgenev is able to illustrate the life of the poor in rural Russia, present difficult ethical dilemmas, as well as philosophize on the nature of human communication, romance, and mortality. The tale revolves around the doctor who begins telling a story to the narrator to keep him company. Despite the two being complete strangers, he begins to converse freely, to which the narrator comments:

Queer things happen in the world: you may live a long while with some people, and be on friendly terms with them, and never once speak openly with them from your soul; with others you have scarcely time to get acquainted, and all at once you are pouring out to him – or he to you – all your secrets, as though you were at confession. (Turgenev 2658)

The doctor proceeds to tell the narrator a heartbreaking tale about a poor family that called upon him to save their daughter's life. Despite knowing the family was impoverished and could most likely give him nothing more than a sack of oatmeal for payment, he felt required to assist as it was his sense of duty to help a fellow creature who may be dying. When he arrived at the family's home and set eyes on the patient, he fell in love with her almost immediately. He vowed to stay and do everything he could to save her life even though it was becoming increasingly clear that the girl could not be saved, and other patients needed his assistance. It is here where Turgenev confronts the reader with a laundry list of ethical dilemmas, presented through the empathetic situation of the doctor (Miksanek). Is it right for a professional to give

into his emotions and let their feelings impact their work? Can one control who they fall in love with? Was the doctor justified to stay with just one patient despite others needing him? Was he wrong to lie to the family insisting he could still save the girl once he realized he could not?

The doctor tells the narrator, “You are not a doctor, my good sir; you cannot understand what passes in a poor fellow’s heart when he begins to suspect that the disease is getting the upper hand of him” (Turgenev 2663). As the tale is told, one cannot help but be empathetic for what a terrible situation this is for everyone involved. The doctor goes on to reveal the girl did indeed die, but before that, she told the doctor that she loved him too. They embraced each other, and the doctor spent the last few nights of her life in her room by her side. The doctor reveals to the narrator that he did this all while knowing the girl was not herself, and that despite his genuine love for her, he still felt like he was taking advantage of the situation because she would have not shown him such affection in any other place besides her death bed. The story comes to an abrupt halt, like many of them do in *A Sportsman’s Sketches*, as the doctor decides enough is enough and asks the narrator if he would like to gamble on a game of cards. The ending contributes to the rawness of the story, cleverly portraying it as a snapshot, or sketch, of life in Russian society through the eyes of the doctor, giving the narrator and the reader another glimpse into the diversified experiences of people in the Russian countryside.

In another story called *Raspberry Spring*, the narrator is hunting on a hot August day when he comes across a couple men fishing at the river. One of these men he recognizes as a serf he had met in a neighboring town whose name was Styopushka. The narrator reports on the man’s unfortunate situation by informing the reader of the following:

Every man has some kind of position in society, and at least some ties of some sort; every house-serf receives, if not wages, at least some so-called ‘ration.’ Styopushka had

absolutely no means of subsistence of any kind; had no relationship to anyone; no one knew of his existence. This man had not even a past; there was no story told of him; he had probably never been enrolled on a census revision. There were vague rumors that he had once belonged to someone as a valet; but who he was, where he came from, who was his father . . . on all these questions no one had the least idea; and, to tell the truth, no one took any interest in the subject. (Turgenev 2612)

The plight of Styopushka remains to this day as one of the most powerful passages in *A Sportsman's Sketches*. The way the world had alienated the poor man illustrates the dehumanization process that had to occur in order for serfdom to exist. Despite a fellow human having no friends, no family, nor anything to call his own, no one seemed to think anything of it. The only thing thought to be known about him was that he used to belong to someone else, as their property. This story showcases a couple unique perspectives, one of which is the narrator's and how he casually refers to Styopushka's situation as abnormal but does not think much of it otherwise. It also shows another vantage point of Russian life through the eyes of a serf. Turgenev's unique ability to not only present various perspectives within a short story, but to compound these stories into novel form was extremely helpful to the Modernists in their pursuits to deviate from traditional narrative structures.

One of these Modernists who was inspired by Turgenev was Ernest Hemingway, arguably America's most famous author. Hemingway was born in Oak Park, Illinois in the year 1899. He began his career at the age of seventeen writing for a newspaper in Kansas City, leaving shortly after to serve in Italy as an ambulance driver for the Red Cross during World War I. After the war he resumed his career as a reporter and took a position with the *Toronto Star*. Hemingway moved to Paris in the year 1921 to work as a foreign correspondent for the paper,

and in Paris he joined other expats like Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and Ezra Pound, all of whom formed a coalition of authors whom many consider today to be the voices of the Lost Generation. The Lost Generation is a term that “refers to the generation of people who reached adulthood during or immediately following World War I. In using the term ‘lost,’ psychologists were referring to the ‘disoriented, wandering, directionless’ feelings that haunted many survivors of what had been one of the most horrific wars in modern history” (Longley). Hemingway took a lot of inspiration and received guidance from these Modernist authors who were already established in the literary world, and it was here where his career as an author truly began. Paris became known as the Capital of not only France, but of Modernism as well.

In Paris, an American bookseller and publisher named Sylvia Beach ran a bookstore called Shakespeare and Company. It was here that the expats quenched their thirst for global literature made available in English, and it was the place Hemingway first discovered Ivan Turgenev, which proved to be a career altering discovery. In his novel *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway writes: “I started with Turgenev and took the two volumes of *A Sportsman's Sketches* . . . and Sylvia told me to take more books if I wanted. I chose the Constance Garnett edition of *War and Peace*, and *The Gambler and Other Stories* by Dostoevsky” (Hemingway 36). Records kept by the bookstore show that Hemingway borrowed copies of *A Sportsman's Sketches* four times over an eight year span, and that Turgenev was the most frequently read author by Hemingway (Wilkinson 10). In a letter to American poet Archibald MacLeish, Hemingway said that Turgenev may not have written the greatest books, but was the greatest writer there ever was.

Using the records from Sylvia Beach's bookstore, it becomes apparent that the rise of Hemingway correlated with him beginning to excessively consume Russian literature. His first

book that began to make him popular among critics and establish the Hemingway name as an author was titled *In Our Time*, which was a collection of short stories modeled after Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches*. There are eighteen vignettes that make up the work, a majority of them depicting the life of Nick Adams, a character who became one of Hemingway's most popular. For the first couple years, critics mainly saw the collection of stories as just that, a collection of stories. It was not until fellow Modernist D.H. Lawrence wrote a review in 1927 for the *Calendar of Modern Letters* that truly describes Hemingway's book for what it is: "*In Our Time* calls itself a book of stories. But it isn't that. It is a series of successive sketches from a man's life and makes a fragmentary novel" (Wood 718). It is key here to recognize that Lawrence does not mention Turgenev, but he describes Hemingway's work as a series of *sketches*, making the connection between the two clear.

As Turgenev used *A Sportsman's Sketches* to depict life in the Russian countryside in the time of serfdom, Hemingway used *In Our Time* to capture different vantage points of America during the era surrounding World War I. In *Indian Camp*, a young Nick Adams accompanies his father to a Native American encampment where they find that a tribe woman is in labor. Nick's father is a doctor, and he tries to help the woman deliver the baby, quickly realizing that the baby is coming out feet first and causing the woman overwhelming pain. Nick asks if there is anything he can do to stop the screaming, to which his father replies "No. I haven't any anesthetic . . . But her screams are not important. I don't hear them because they are not important" (Hemingway 17). Nick is exposed to the trauma of his father having to conduct a caesarean delivery on the woman with no anesthetic. Her screams cause her husband to take his own life, something Nick also witnesses. Nick's father feels sorry for bringing Nick on the trip, but also feels that it was important for him to experience the type of stoicism one needs to be strong in difficult situations.

The short story also brings attention to the stark contrast in quality of life between people residing in the same country. Similar to Turgenev's methods, Hemingway depicts the plight of a group of people largely forgotten about with a much lower quality of life and shows things from their perspective.

Though Hemingway may have been the author who was most influenced by Turgenev and was the most open about his praise for the great Russian, he was not the only Modernist to have benefited from the path Turgenev paved. Sherwood Anderson, a Modernist best known for his collection of short stories called *Winesburg, Ohio*, also used Turgenev's fragmentary blueprint. In fact, it is believed that Anderson was the one to convince Hemingway to initially read Turgenev, as Anderson hailed *A Sportsman's Sketches* as "the sweetest thing in all literature" (Wilkinson 13). He also encouraged Hemingway to seek out Sylvia Beach's bookstore upon his arrival in Paris, and even went as far as writing him a letter of introduction. Anderson believed it would be a great place for a young and aspiring Hemingway to visit to help with his writing, and history has proved Anderson's belief to be correct.

Sherwood Anderson took what he learned from Turgenev and put his own twist on things, using the fragmentary technique to depict what life was like in middle America during the Jazz Age. As much of the focus during the Modernist period revolved around industrialization and urbanization, the middle of the country was often forgotten about as the attention of the public became focused on skyscrapers, automobiles, and the fast life within the sprouting cities. In many ways, it was a similar landscape to Turgenev's Russia. Nearly all of the focus within Russia was on the two major cities, Saint Petersburg and Moscow. Most people had little to no knowledge of what life was like in the smaller communities that spanned across the vast Russian terrain. This is a major reason why Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches* became so popular and

created a lot of social controversy relating to serfdom: most people were just unaware until they read his stories. Like Turgenev's work, Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* captured a unique part of the American identity which was often misunderstood or forgotten.

IV. Dostoevsky and Woolf

Fyodor Dostoevsky, born in a lower class district in Moscow during the year of 1821, defied all odds on his way to becoming an author whose influence can only be rivaled by the likes of writers such as Shakespeare, Dickens, and Cervantes. Isabel Florence Hapgood writes that Dostoevsky initially separated himself from other authors in his era because he represented "the plebian, toiling class of society" (Hapgood 9141). His first published novel was titled *Poor Folk*, which was released in 1846 and provided a unique commentary on social stratification and other issues faced in the everyday lives of the Russian people. With the publication of his first book, after previously only publishing translations of other authors, Dostoevsky became an overnight success. Vissarion Belinsky, the most influential literature critic of that time praised Dostoevsky highly for his social awareness and went as far as to declare him the literary successor of Gogol (Teuber). However, his following pieces such as *The Double* and some other short stories were not met with the same acclaim.

In 1848, Dostoevsky joined a group of advanced Russian intellectuals in Saint Petersburg whose progressive ideas opposed Tsarist rule and serfdom. Started by the revolutionary Mikhail Petrashevsky, the group attracted writers, educators, students, military officers, and small time government officials from all different political backgrounds; the group took on the name of the Petrashevsky Circle. After getting wind of the group and their meetings, the government arrested

all the members of the Petrashevsky Circle “for plotting the overthrow of the existing ... laws and system of government” on April 23, 1849 (Trojan 363). Twenty-one members were sentenced to death, and one of them was Dostoevsky.

Kathy Padden writes the following:

The prisoners were removed from their cells on December 22, 1849, bundled into carriages and taken to the Semyonovsky Square. They were sentenced to be shot to death and lined up on the gallows. The condemned men were then given a cross to kiss, the chance to make a last confession to a priest and dressed in peasant shirts and hoods. The first three prisoners in line were tied to stakes. The soldiers took aim and held their positions as the drums rolled. Then, a messenger from the Tsar rode into the square and read the official pardon. It turned out to be a mock-execution that was considered a part of their punishment. (Padden)

After facing the barrel of the government’s gun and thinking the final moments of his life had come, Dostoevsky was exiled for nearly a decade where he spent four years in a Siberian prison camp and was then conscripted to another five years of military service. It was in Siberia where Dostoevsky underwent a spiritual and religious reformation. The only book he had to read was the Russian version of the New Testament, which had a profound impact on his life and his life’s work. When Dostoevsky was allowed to return to Saint Petersburg in 1859, he resumed his literary career with a new inspiration and a new appreciation of life. It was in the period after his exile where Dostoevsky released the books that would immortalize him and change the literary world forever: *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Notes from the Underground*, *The Idiot*, *The Gambler*, and *Demons*.

Dostoevsky's influence can be felt in various schools of philosophy, psychology, politics, theology, and literature. Out of all the Russian authors, his influence on literary Modernism is arguably the greatest. One of the biggest defining characteristics of Modernism was the use of the literary technique known as stream-of-consciousness. Liz Delf, the Senior Instructor of Literature at Oregon State University, defines this technique as a style of narrative that aims to realistically capture the thought process of a character in real time. She writes that because stream-of-consciousness mimics the non-linear way that the human brain works, "it includes a lot of free association, looping repetitions, sensory observations, and strange (or even nonexistent) punctuation and syntax - all of which helps us to better understand a character's psychological state and worldview." (Delf). Stream-of-consciousness was popularized mainly by England's Virginia Woolf and Ireland's James Joyce, but it too was originally a 19th century Russian technique.

The main elements of the stream-of-consciousness technique are evident in Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* as the monologues of the narrator reflect his inner world against the outer reality (Hailekiros). The narrator in this story is a retired bureaucrat, and he is one that has spent his adult life leveraging his position of power over others and making their lives more difficult than necessary. Dostoevsky writes the story in a way that the reader can follow along with the thought process of this narcissistic, nihilistic, and resentful man as he gives his best attempt at a confession. He begins his monologue declaring that he is a sick man, and that he is also spiteful, and unattractive. Regarding his sickness, he writes:

I know nothing at all about my disease, and do not know for certain what ails me. I don't consult a doctor for it, and never have, though I have a respect for medicine and doctors. Besides, I am extremely superstitious, sufficiently so to respect medicine, anyway (I am

well-educated enough not to be superstitious, but I am superstitious). No, I refuse to consult a doctor from spite. That you will probably not understand. Well, I understand it, though. (Dostoevsky 1)

It is clear from the first passage that the reader has a front row seat to the non-linear and often contradicting thought process of the narrator as he wrestles with the truth. As the narrator goes on to explain his story, at times trying to justify his actions and at other times trying to repent, it becomes apparent that the paradoxical nature of this man becomes visible to the reader only because of the extreme self-honesty he exhibits during his monologue. Dostoevsky uses the stream-of-consciousness technique to relay the thoughts of a man who is almost too conscious for his own good. The unnamed narrator holds up the mirror not only to himself, but to the nature of all mankind in his proclamation that the behavior of our species can be defined as anything but rational.

Notes from the Underground is the first novel to reflect the immense power of the stream-of-consciousness technique when used properly. As the reader journeys through the thoughts of the narrator, despite how they feel about him, one cannot help but see some of themselves inside him. All humans are paradoxical, hypocritical, and irrational. If one is willing to dive deep into their consciousness like the underground man, it is an inevitable conclusion that they will come to. Dostoevsky theorizes that in large part, this irrationality stems from the human desire of free will. The narrator writes: “To care only for well-being seems to me positively ill-bred. Whether it’s good or bad, it is sometimes very pleasant, too, to smash things” (Dostoevsky 35). His fundamental point is that humans are irrational, unsatisfiable, and at times a completely insane species, yet this is what makes humans unique to any other creature. Man cannot be codified; this goes against their nature and their desire to make decisions for themselves,

regardless of if they are the correct decisions or mistakes. The underground man declares his belief that the entire existence of man consists of nothing but proving this fact at each given opportunity. Dr. Jordan Peterson sums up Dostoevsky's theory by stating: "If you gave people exactly what they wanted, even what they needed, there is no reason whatsoever to presume that would make them any more sane than they already are" (*Jordan Peterson's Brilliant Breakdown on Dostoevsky "Notes from Underground"*). It is irrational to view humans as rational creatures, and history proves this repeatedly.

Notes from the Underground was published in 1864, and it coincided with a rising belief in the ideology of Utopian Socialism in Russia. This ideology worked on the assumption that "man is indefinitely perfectible and must, therefore, be constantly encouraged by means of education and social reform" (Reeve 375). Dostoevsky's knowledge of human nature assured him that since humans are inherently imperfect beings, this was an ideology that would prove to be destructive in its pursuit of something theoretically impossible. Time has proved Dostoevsky correct on this matter as well, and it was for his analysis of complex concepts regarding human nature that Dostoevsky became one of the most renowned authors in the world and is still influential today. The Modernists found him particularly inspirational in the sense that he was able to create a unique new narrative structure, as well as focus critically on the concept of individualism which the Modernists were so fond of. One of Virginia Woolf's most popular novels, *Mrs Dalloway*, is a Modernist achievement where the influence of Dostoevsky is palpable.

Mrs Dalloway is a stream-of-consciousness narrative published in 1925 that details a day in the life of an upper-class housewife named Clarissa Dalloway set in post-war England. As Mrs. Dalloway spends the day preparing to host a party in the evening, the reader is granted

access to her consciousness where she reflects on her past, her unhappy marriage, her personal and social identities, a changing social order, and the omnipresence of death. After the first World War, many people lost faith in what was once the almighty British Empire, and the country began to stray from Victorian Era ideals in search of a new way for society to operate. This came in many forms ranging from a more powerful working class and women's rights movements to a new way of writing novels. As Clarissa Dalloway was a beneficiary of the Victorian caste system and was a member of England's high society, she spends much of the novel contemplating this rift and how her identity had been molded by the social environment she lived in.

In *A Writer's Diary*, which was a book published as a collection of Woolf's journal entries, she writes: "One must write from deep feeling, said Dostoevsky. And do I? Or do I fabricate with words, loving them as I do? No, I think not. . . I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticize the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense" (Woolf 4265). It is in passages such as these that the influence of Dostoevsky is on full display. Woolf writes with Dostoevsky on her mind with the goal of putting forth work that he would approve of, and to do this she put her own spin on his techniques. One of these techniques, as discussed, was stream-of-consciousness. A primary example of this technique being used in *Mrs Dalloway* is the following excerpt:

For having lived in Westminster—how many years now? Over twenty,--one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning,

musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street. (Woolf 1350)

This passage illustrates the uncontrolled and non-linear thought process of Clarissa Dalloway as it happens in real time. She quickly transitions from thinking about her past in Westminster to her influenza, then reacts to the chimes of Big Ben, followed by a thought that everyone including her is a fool all in a single paragraph. There are sensory observations in the comparison of the clocktower to a musical as it rung. There is also abnormal syntax and sentence structure with an abundance of hyphens, parentheses, commas, and semi-colons, which are all used to depict the raw form of human thought. The stream-of-consciousness does away with the filtering process that many narrators have, in turn creating a chaotic yet more natural experience for the reader.

Like Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, *Mrs Dalloway* too was a novel with a subtle political component used to express the thoughts and feelings of the author. For Woolf's critique of the Victorian social structure, Elena Agathokleous writes that *Mrs Dalloway* "can be considered a highly political novel in the sense that it opposes a social system surviving at the expense of individuality, emotion, and free thinking" (Agathokleous). Modernists were writers who had a strong sense of individualism, and Virginia Woolf was no different in that sense. However, as a woman, much of what she expressed was in defiance of the treatment and expectations of women in Victorian society. Much more so than their male counterparts, women had strict social expectations and their level of obedience to societal standards had a large impact on their future wellbeing. In the aftermath of World War I, however, many women gained a stronger sense of independence making them reluctant to follow the rules of old (Grayzel).

Woolf served as a voice for these women who had served their own critical role in the war and had kept things running at home while a large percentage of the men were fighting in France.

Another literary technique that the Modernists used to break away from the traditional narrative structure and usher in a new generation is called *in media res*, a Latin phrase translating to “in the midst of things.” *In media res* is a technique used to begin the narrative in the middle of the action as opposed to the traditional Victorian opening which often had a definite starting point, usually setting the tone for a chronological story. For example, in *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens, it begins as follows: “Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born . . . on a Friday, at twelve o’clock at night” (Dickens 1). In this Dickens classic there is no room for the narrative to stray from its linear trajectory since its origin point is so definitive. Modernists often chose opening lines that gave the reader more questions than answers, and though Dostoevsky did not create this technique, he is an author whose usage of it inspired Modernists like Woolf.

The best example of Dostoevsky’s usage of the *in media res* technique comes from his novel *The Gambler*, which was published in 1866. It begins: “I’ve finally come back from my two-week absence. Our people have already been in Roulettenburg for three days. I thought they would be waiting for me God knows how eagerly, but I was mistaken.” With this introduction, the reader is given a small amount of information that incentivizes questioning. The reader does not know if the narrator is a man or woman, nor does the reader know where the narrator has been for the previous two weeks. It is not known who the narrator is referring to as “our people”, where the town of Roulettenburg is, nor why these people were not waiting for the narrator as expected. This technique aims to hook the reader by getting them invested into the story early,

causing them to want to read further and get answers to their initial round of questioning (Weiland). In media res was a technique that enabled a lot of creativity when it came to the restructuring of a narrative, and for that reason it became very popular among the Modernists.

Virginia Woolf was a strong proponent of this opening style, using it in many of her famous works, including *Mrs Dalloway*: “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer’s men were coming.” In this situation, the reader is not familiar with any of the characters mentioned, nor are they aware of the events that appear to be unfolding. There is a mystery to uncover when this type of opening is used. Not all the information is given out at once; the reader is encouraged to work for the information and simultaneously become more attached to the narrative. Starting in the middle of things enabled Woolf to jump back and forth between the past and the present, helping the reader gather information incrementally as the story continued out of chronological order.

In a letter to her lifelong friend and fellow writer Lytton Strachey, Woolf refers to Dostoevsky by announcing the following: “It is directly obvious that he is the greatest writer ever born: and if he chooses to become horrible what will happen to us? . . . If he says it – human hope – had better end, what will be left but suicide in the Grand Canal?” (Woolf 4612). This contemplation by Virginia Woolf is one that captures the true essence of Dostoevsky’s influence on the world. His work was so vital that it transcended literature and became a guiding light through the labyrinth of the human heart. Friedrich Nietzsche, who is arguably the most influential philosopher since the Ancient Greeks, admired Dostoevsky as well. In fact, Nietzsche writes in his book *Twilight of the Idols* that Fyodor Dostoevsky was the only psychologist that he had something to learn from, and even goes on to declare that the discovery of Dostoevsky

“ranks among the most beautiful strokes of fortune in my life” (Nietzsche 51). Albert Einstein, widely agreed to be the most influential scientist of the twentieth century, said that “Dostoevsky gives me more than any scientist, more than Gauss!” (Dargie and Einstein). Fyodor Dostoevsky’s name should be mentioned in many areas of influence, especially when it comes to Modernism.

V. Conclusion

Scholars have deemed the Russian novel to be one of the most outstanding achievements in all of literature; it is considered to be on par with the Greek Tragedy, the Shakespearean Drama, and Romantic Poetry. Thanks to the help of the translator Constance Garnett, the greatness of the Russian canon was made accessible to the English speaking world at the turn of the 20th century. The writings of authors such as Gogol, Turgenev, and Dostoevsky came just in time to inspire the new and upcoming generation of Western authors as they began to create the Modernist movement. As revealed over the course of this paper, the direct influence of 19th century Russian authors on the Modernist era is extraordinarily strong. In everything from the way in which the authors thought about the world, to the literary techniques they used to craft a narrative, the Russians played a part.

Dr. Jordan Peterson describes canonical literature as a hierarchy where one can rank order books by the degree in which they influence other books (*Books All Men Should Read* | Jordan Peterson). If one were to look at global literature as a canon, it would not be complete unless the Russian canon was ranked before the Modernist canon based on the number of Modernist books that were influenced by it. Modernists borrowed and expanded upon many of

the literary techniques that they were introduced to by the Russian authors, and they used these techniques to further push the importance of individualism and tackle the pressing social issues of their time. If it was not for their elders in the East, the writings between World Wars could have looked a lot different, as could the entirety of Western culture.

If the past cannot be understood, then neither can the present. With writers like Ernest Hemingway, Franz Kafka, and Virginia Woolf having such a profound effect on the cultural transition out of the first World War and into modernity, it is equally as important to understand how they formed their ideas and their writing. When exploring this topic, it becomes irrefutable that much of the greatness of the Modernist generation was inspired by 19th century Russian literature. The faces of these literary periods made great strides in the progression of world literature and simultaneously contributed to the advancement of social systems, as seen in Turgenev's influence on the abolition of serfdom and Virginia Woolf's fight for female independence. These generations of great authors proved that literature is about more than just telling stories, it is about navigating the human condition and every diverse form that it comes in.

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