Introduction

"Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them."[1]

A few years ago, I discovered in the introduction to one of Oliver Sacks's books that his unique approach to the science of the brain was indebted to the work of Russian neuropsychologist Alexander R. Luria (1902–1977).[2] To follow the example of Luria, if a patient in Sacks's office mistook his wife for a hat, he took this bizarre misperception as a dysfunction of the brain that could help him understand the way this individual actually perceived the world. In a totalitarian Communist regime that valued the individual not at all, Luria worked with his neurologically impaired patients by discussing their injuries with them and taking their comments seriously. (In one case that he eventually published, for two decades he collaborated with one L. Zasetsky, who had been shot in the head in the Second World War and suffered a devastating brain injury, with consequences that Zasetsky himself set out to describe and study.[3]) As a young man studying at Kazan University, Luria turned against the descriptive psychology of the nineteenth century because it was not scientific enough, but he was also wary of the reductionist thought of such dogmatic physiological psychologists as Vladimir M. Bekhterev (1857–1927) and Ivan P. Pavlov (1849–1936), "who did not allow the subjective in psychology—did not allow the *psyche* in psychology—and insisted on an objective, reflexological viewpoint."[4] Luria's discovery of Freud and psychoanalysis helped him resolve this crisis, because Freud combined a biological perspective with "the legitimization of the subjective, in all its richness, as a proper subject of science."[5] Luria's first book manuscript, written in 1922 in Kazan and never published, was on psychoanalysis, and he angered

Pavlov with another book, *The Nature of Human Conflicts* (1928–29), because, Pavlov complained, Luria "was describing behaviour as a whole" rather than reducing it to its "elementary parts." With his "un-Pavlovian" and "anti-Soviet" methods, Luria was able to publish very little for the next two decades. Nonetheless, he applied his broader perspective to his clinical practice and research, with results that changed how he treated brain-related ailments, and he began to publish his results in the relatively freer atmosphere after World War II.[6] He labeled his own approach "romantic science," which Sacks, encouraged by Luria in personal correspondence from 1973 to 1977, has introduced as a valuable corrective into Western neuropsychology.[7]

Freud himself was influenced by nineteenth-century Russian literature, and especially the writings of Dostoevsky, about whom he wrote a famous and still controversial essay. Luria was of course aware of this connection. In his autobiography, where he discusses his early enthusiasm for Freud and the psychoanalytic circle that he formed in Kazan, he mentions as "interesting" the fact that a granddaughter of Dostoevsky's was his patient in the psychoanalytic clinic at Kazan University and that he "had filled whole notebooks with her 'free associations'" with the intention of "[using] these materials for the detection of 'the concrete reality of the flow of ideas'."[8] Luria also records how impressed he was as a youth by William James's books, especially The *Varieties of Religious Experience* (first published in 1902).[9] James (1842–1910), whose father was a Swedenborgian, and who grew up among the New England Transcendentalists, was an earlier version of a romantic scientist who tried to keep the "psyche" in psychology. In 1896, James wrote a friend about his enthusiasm for *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*.

> During the past month I have only read Tolstoi's two great novels, which, strange to say, I have never attacked before. I don't like his fatalism and semi-pessimism, but for infallible veracity concerning human nature, and absolute simplicity of method, he makes all the other writers of novels and plays seem like children.[10]

James praised Tolstoy as a "[witness] testifying to the worth of life as revealed to an emancipated sympathy."[11] By this he meant that Tolstoy's writing lends credence to the essential assumptions of the individual about himself. Tolstoy and James, the one in art and the other in science, defended human subjectivity against scientific methods that excluded it. Luria may have taken note of James's interest in Tolstoy. In any case, his attraction to James speaks to a possible connection between Luria's early mentors in romantic science and classic Russian psychological prose.[12]

I was very struck by the evidence in Sacks's introductions and other writings of the indirect effect of Russian literature on Western science, especially because his story was a variation of my own. Although I hadn't

realized it at the time, as an American college student from the state of Maine I was attracted to Russian literature partly because of its resemblance to New England Transcendentalism, which locates access to the sacred in the inner life of each individual. Luria was not a transcendentalist,[13] and neither were Freud and James, but all three are linked to transcendentalism through their romantic science, a term that Luria borrowed from the German physiologist Max Verworn (1863–1921).[14] The first romantic scientists were influenced by German preromantics such as Herder (1744–1803), Novalis (1772–1801), and Goethe (1749–1832), and connected through them to the attempt in German *Naturphilosophie* to defend subjectivity from materialism.[15] American Transcendentalism, itself related to developments in homegrown American Puritanism, complicated and to some extent opposed the Classical Liberalism of the American founding and in the process greatly enriched American culture.[16] In Russia, where there was no tradition of liberalism, a version of transcendentalism that arose at the same time as in New England, in the 1830s, defended the sanctity of the individual as never before in Russian culture.

I begin a book of literary criticism from a personal perspective as a tribute to its subject: subjectivity and its validation in midnineteenth-century Russian psychological realism. By subjectivity I mean facts that Mr. Gradgrind (until he gets his comeuppance in Dickens's novel) would not accept as real: the inner life and perspective of each individual. Anyone who is reading this introduction most likely still has a passion for classic Russian psychological prose, and we might ask ourselves why this is still so. For Russians, the answer is first of all one of cultural identity; to understand themselves in their modern incarnation, and indeed to redefine themselves after the downfall of the Soviet regime, they must connect in new ways with founding writers whose works had immense political and social consequences for their country. (This applies to such masters as Tolstoy and Turgenev, whom the Soviets canonized, as well as authors whom they overlooked or shunned.) Non-Russians without this urgent national imperative are still drawn to Russian prose writers of the nineteenth century because of their contributions to modern psychology and its expression in art. What the Russian critic D. S. Mirsky wrote in the 1920s still obtains: "A sympathetic attitude to human beings, without distinction (not only of class but) of intrinsic moral significance, became a principal characteristic of Russian [realists]," and "what Europe accepted as their message to mankind when they were first revealed to the West."[17] This book looks at the ideas behind this message and how the Russian psychological realists dramatized them. Unearthed from the works of literature that they inspired, these ideas seem as relevant today as they did in the midnineteenth century.

Rather than attempting a cross-section of many writers in order to expose these ideas, I mostly concentrate on the three greatest prose writers of the time: Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Leo Tolstoy.[18] I follow a paper trail of communications between them to parse out how each viewed the others and what use each made of the others in his art. These communications are occasionally direct, but they are generally indirect, or even in the form of hidden commentaries within fictional works, often, although not always, in early works in which the authors are still developing their distinctive voices. What links them is the questions that preoccupied them about the psyche, not their particular solutions, which often differed from one another. The triangulation yields a complex if not complete picture of a formative moment in Russian cultural history. It also provides new readings of the lesser known works of all three authors, and new insights into their masterpieces.

With such a vast subject, my challenge has also been to say something significant about it that relies for its ultimate authority on individual texts. I am obviously interested in ideas, but in deference to my topic and also to the dynamics of any artistic text I develop the particularities of my ideas through close readings. This book evolved out of a series of graduate seminars, and I have tried to retain the balance of generalization, background, and close reading characteristic of them. I hope that readers (like my students) will participate actively in the many close readings in the book; the readings are intended as checks of the validity and usefulness of the ideas. At the same time, I do not expect all my readers to be experts in the field, and the ideas I treat are ones of general interest that should illuminate the texts and also allow readers to judge their usefulness for themselves. Also, in deference to readers who are not specialists, the book begins with a general chapter that sets the stage for the detailed analysis in later ones.

Russian realism has usually been understood as a reaction to romanticism, although critics have identified a phenomenon that Donald Fanger named romantic realism.[19] Fanger does not consider the heightened psychologism of Russian realists among the symptoms of this romanticism, and Lidiia Ginzburg regards the interest of these authors in psychology as scientific and therefore realistic. Although Ginzburg is one of my inspirations for this book, and I agree with her that Russian realists treated the psyche analytically, science cannot explain their abiding respect for subjectivity, the celebration of which is usually understood as romantic. This respect is due to the German philosophical roots of modern Russian culture, which developed under the influence of Hegel (1770–1831) and his many disciples. Russian writers, even those who rejected Hegelian rationalism for Schelling's "positive reality" of prerational emotion, framed their ideas within the structure of the Hegelian dialectic of thesis, anti-

thesis, and synthesis.[20] This was true of psychological realists, who built their works around juxtaposition of opposites, including most importantly the inner (subjective) and outer (objective) worlds. The interaction between these two rather than the romantic preference of the former over the latter was a central theme for the realist school in Russia, the more so because its greatest representatives did not treat subjectivity as simply a delusion. They considered it "real": the reality of subjectivity is a cardinal principle of all great works of Russian psychological realism.

Why is this so? As Karl Löwith explains, Russian thinkers such as Ivan Kireevsky (1806–1856), not restrained like counterparts in the West by a backward drag exacted by centuries of dogmatic philosophy, directly confronted the gap in Hegelian thought between analytical reason and the "real" emotional material on which it supposedly operates and that therefore gives it legitimacy. At this particular moment in the development of nineteenth-century thought, according to Löwith, the "Slavs" understood and began to articulate this dynamic better than anyone else.[21] The emotional, prerational material to which Löwith refers is the stuff of subjectivity; it is a fleeting target that reason never catches and never stops pursuing, and it becomes the inescapable reality of Russian realism.

In Chapter 1, I examine how and why Russians took up the chase in the first place. Before they could analyze their own psychological "reality," Russians had to separate themselves from the realm of spontaneity within which it supposedly resided. I maintain in this book that the self-consciousness that resulted and its consequences gave Russian psychological prose its distinctive shape as well as one of its principle themes. I confine myself to one explanation for this complex development, namely, its foreign origins. For most Europeans, Russian literature, with its unusual point of view, seemed to arrive from nowhere in the middle of the nineteenth century. In fact, the groundwork for this spectacular launch onto the world stage was under preparation for more than a century. Russians had been interested in French and German thought from early in the eighteenth century, and Freemasonry was important from the 1760s until the 1820s. Russians first appeared in relatively large numbers in the philosophical centers of Germany in the 1830s, and then a generation later Russia leapt ahead of Europe in literature. This chapter traces how Russian prose began to describe the effects of foreign influence on the personality.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 look at how the Russian authors developed narrative strategies to depict subjectivity without demeaning it. I begin with Turgenev, who so often articulates problems that the other two undertake to solve. Turgenev himself protects subjectivity by declining to analyze his characters, or even explore their inner life beyond a certain point; I discuss his reasons for this reticence and the consequences of it for his aesthetics.

By contrast, and to Turgenev's frequent dismay, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy both rummage in the dark crannies of the subject. Yet Turgenev's concerns notwithstanding, the other two are able to maintain respect for subjectivity as well as distance on it even as they pry and poke. Dostoevsky in particular is less intrusive than all the psychological details in his fiction would imply, but at the same time his author operates dextrously behind the scenes to guide the reader to certain conclusions unavailable to any one character in his texts. How he does this is the subject of Chapter 3. If Dostoevsky as author prefers to work behind the scenes, Tolstoy flaunts his presence in a way that is also misleading. Contrary to first impressions and even to his own rhetoric, Tolstoy too limited the role and power of the author's voice in his fiction. In Chapter 4 I discuss the development of his narrative techniques for doing so, first under the influence of Plato and his dialogues and then of Turgenev, starting in the latter case with the appearance, in 1852, of *A Sportsman's Sketches*. It is my contention that among the other challenges Turgenev's first book posed to Tolstoy was a bold realism that protected the complexity of human subjectivity, which Tolstoy could not as yet match in practice, although he had already embraced it in theory.

The self as Russians conceived it is not an individualist one; this is the subject of Chapters 5 and 6. The one thing that Russians are not, says Russian thinker Nicholas Berdiaev (1874–1948), is bourgeois.[22] By this he means that they are neither rationalist in principle nor self-contained. They acquired the idea of individualism from the West, but none of them could simply embrace a Cartesian model of the soul according to which it is self-sufficient and the source of all meaning. No man can be an island in Russia, which, despite the popularity of Daniel Defoe's masterpiece *Robinson Crusoe* there, has produced no fantasy of independence comparable to it. Acknowledging the existence in their own culture of a vigorous and even anarchic willfulness, the Russian psychological realists were nonetheless leery of the individualism that Romanticism often valued, and even though they all adopted it in some form they exposed its dark side more thoroughly than writers from other traditions. They also tried to overcome its limitations in various ways. Even such fervent individualists as the political activist and essayist Alexander Herzen privileged communal life over one based on contracts among individuals.[23] Martin Malia claims that Herzen embraces early socialism because an "emphasis on the 'collective' was simply an insistence that *all* men have the right to become complete human beings,"[24] but I will be arguing that Russian individualism by its very nature requires external support, which is why even Herzen became a communalist. Dostoevsky advocated both Orthodox Christianity and Russian nationalism as an antidote to what ailed the

modern Russian soul. Tolstoy eventually called for life organized according to general Kantian principles that honored individuals without privileging them. The Russian self is fundamentally sociable, not individualist, and the reasoning behind this stance provides a valuable corrective to contemporary attitudes.

The self as it appeared in the 1840s in the works of Turgenev and Dostoevsky was not the ape man in Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), who stands up and triumphantly throws a bone into the sky to indicate his newfound power. The Russian self in the person of Makar Devushkin of Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk* (1846) feels alone and incomplete. Unlike Gogol's Akakii Akakievich ("The Overcoat," 1842), of whom Makar is a descendant, he is more concerned with his dignity than with material needs, and unlike Akakii he is ashamed of his lowly status and even his inability to express himself. (He reads "The Overcoat" and indignantly takes it personally.) By making Makar self-conscious in this way, Dostoevsky makes him psychologically more complex and closer to the reader and narrator than other characters within the 1840s Russian school of Sentimental Naturalism of which *Poor Folk* is the finest product.

Makar is more dignified than Akakii, but he is still pathetic; hence his pained identification with Gogol's character. Two years after the appearance of Dostoevsky's story, and probably influenced by it, Ivan Turgenev began to write his "Diary of a Superfluous Man" (published in 1850). The type of the superfluous man, a term coined by Turgenev to designate nineteenth-century Russian gentry alienated from tradition and nature alike, remains relevant to readers today. Chulkaturin, the hero of "Diary of a Superfluous Man," represents modern man as he first appears in a Russian setting. Like an adolescent shaking himself loose from the dependency of childhood, he has a strong but negative identity; he defines himself by what he is not, and by what he does not have. Unlike a teenager, however, this Russian individual emerging in an essentially still premodern milieu does not have a peer group or social institutions to assist the transition to adulthood. He is alone but wants company; he is without dignity but desperately craves it; he has no family and no friends, so much so that he tells his story in a diary rather than letters, and we have no idea whom he thinks his readers might be. He lacks the solace of religion; aware of his mortality and in fact dying of tuberculosis as he writes, the superfluous man has no God and feels alienated from nature, which supports only the young and healthy.

Chulkaturin's surname, related to the Russian word for "stockings," links him to Gogol's pathetic clerk Akakii Akakievich, whose last name, Bashmachkin, is derived from the word for "shoe," *bashmak*. But no longer a clerk (as Akakii Akakievich and Makar Devushkin were), Chulkaturin is

simply a minor official and a pathetic outsider. Although, as always with Turgenev, his social position is important, he is a loser not just because of it, but because of his character. He relates a "novel" of how he lost his girl to a rival—appropriately named Biz'myonkov, a comic name based on the English word "business"—in the same social class as himself but socially more adroit. While Chulkaturin first dithers and then foolishly indulges his irritability at the prince who is courting Liza and will subsequently abandon her, Biz'myonkov, in the same position as Chulkaturin at the beginning of the novel, lays low, plays his cards right, and comforts Liza on the rebound. Chulkaturin, by contrast, falls into all the traps that excessive self-consciousness lays for any sustained effort of the will.

In this character and his kin in Turgenev's fiction, "the native hue of resolution is sicklied over with the pale cast of thought," as self-consciousness unmans and makes cowards of them all.[25] Turgenev recognized Hamlet as an ancestor of his superfluous men; one of them who appears in *Sportsman's Sketches* is called Hamlet in the title of the story, and he wrote an influential article called "Hamlet and Don Quixote" (1860). But he and his contemporaries attributed the psychological disease of excessive self-consciousness to what they called "reflection" (*refleksiia*). In Chapter 5, I discuss the philosophical origins of romantic longing in the "eros for wholeness" in the foundations of Modernity by Descartes (1596–1650). "Reflection" is another and related consequence of Cartesian thought that characterizes the modern psyche for worse, but also, as we shall see, for better. Without it there could be no romantic longing or any self-consciousness, because human beings would be unable to contemplate their own thoughts and actions. As I argue in Chapter 7, this makes it an essential tool in the construction of psychological prose.

The eighth chapter of the book examines childhood, a concern of Russian realism connected to the defense of both morality and subjectivity. Although an emphasis on childhood may not strike today's readers as unusual, in midnineteenth-century Russia it was practically unprecedented. Both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky were indebted to Charles Dickens (1812–1870) and his portraits of children, and I discuss this; but they both also had their own reasons for the attention they paid to childhood. Both regarded it as a privileged and less corrupted stage of life. If, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) proclaimed most prominently in his *Émile* (1762), and in other works as well, human beings were born good and then corrupted by their upbringing, then we should be able to observe both natural goodness and its disappearance in children. This is what the authors of a young nation, Russia, set out to depict. The authors of Russian classical psychological prose differ from their twentieth-century descendants in that all of them believed human beings wanted to be good even when

they could not be so. In this respect, all of them are students of Rousseau; even Dostoevsky, who influenced Friedrich Nietzsche, nonetheless would not have followed Nietzsche beyond good and evil.

But if they did not condone evil, the authors of Russian psychological prose did not deny its existence, and none of them, not even Tolstoy, blamed evil solely on society. It has a psychological origin, and this is the subject of Chapter 9, in which I compare the treatment of evil in the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. As with the English and German romantics, it is related to the alienating effects of self-consciousness,[26] which Dostoevsky explored more thoroughly than any previous writers.

The parents of the newly minted modern Russian individual fretted greatly about his future. Seductive though modern freedom may be, there is a steep price to be paid for it in the sense of alienation and the fear of a lonely death that accompanies it. The acquisition of such truths comes through suffering; indeed, early Western readers often complained that Russian authors seem to compete among themselves to provide the gloomiest scenarios and most unhappy endings.[27] In *Anna Karenina,* Tolstoy summarized the denouement of the typical English novel: "The hero of the novel was already beginning to achieve his English happiness, a baronetcy and an estate. . . . "[28]

Unlike a typical English novel as Tolstoy parodies it here, great Russian novels and stories replace material self-sufficiency with the need for meaning, or outside ballast, as the goal for which characters strive. At first, Western readers did not understand the Russian shift away from self-sufficiency—or a failure to achieve it—and therefore found Russian novels to be unstructured: loose baggy monsters, as Henry James called them.[29] Yet plotless though they may have seemed to their first Western readers, these monsters soon sprawled prominently on Western bookshelves. This is because they tapped into anxieties that happy endings help us forget only temporarily. We awake from such fantasies still anxious, whereas Russian novels such as *Anna Karenina* and *The Brothers Karamazov* provide strange comfort by thoroughly airing our deeper insecurities. Their plots move us through events that upset a hero's self-confidence and then may replace it with something deeper, truer, and grounded in more than the entitlement that mere self-love makes us feel. An advance in self-understanding is one key to the enjoyment we feel from reading great Russian novels. Wild though they may seem, they are not mere romantic melodramas that please us by playing to our passions. If we are willing to follow the clues of the authors laid down in the fictional narrative (the *siuzhet,* in the helpful terminology of Russian formalism), we come away with a sense that we have a handle on our feelings and actions because we understand them better.

It is enough to compare the atmosphere of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1875–1877) to that of a comparable masterpiece of European realism, Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857), to appreciate the greater respect accorded subjectivity in the Russian novel, and also to begin to understand the consequences of this. In both novels, the eponymous heroine follows her subjective daimon wherever it leads her and perishes as a result. Both characters are loved by their creators and consequently by readers, yet only Anna rises to the level of tragic heroine, while Emma remains a victim of her surroundings and her own delusions. Flaubert's respect is reserved for true science, as represented by the great doctor who arrives too late to save Emma at the end of the novel but sizes up the situation at a glance. Tolstoy loves Anna as the repository of sincere feeling but also respects her as a free agent, and he therefore holds her accountable for her own demise. Not until the very end of her life does Emma appreciate Charles's devotion to her. (She never notices the adolescent love of Mr. Homais's nephew Justin.) Anna, by contrast, has many chances in the course of the novel to hearken to a moral voice that competes within her with other, louder ones determining her behavior, and she does not do so decisively. (She dithers from moral anxiety, leaving her husband but not asking him for a divorce, and longing for her son while cohabiting with Vronsky.) She can choose to rise above simple self-interest and self-love, and as she flings herself under the train she is still debating her options. Even as an emotive being, Anna differs from Emma. The essential love of life that wells up in her at the end is fundamentally moral, while Flaubert counts such love of life as amoral. So Tolstoy judges Anna more harshly than Flaubert does Emma, but in so doing the Russian author honors his heroine more than the French one does his.

Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy all share this complex attitude toward subjectivity; it affects every aspect of Russian psychological realism. The self that Russian realists construct is made up of matter not visible under a microscope, and we confirm its existence only because we feel its motive power in ourselves. Contemporary European naturalist realism with its links to science tended by contrast to be reductive and therefore to undercut or distort the inner life it was describing. In Russian realism, objective distance is suspended to an unprecedented degree by the author; as a result the subject retains its original "subjective" appearance and complexity. Simply put, the irreducible facts that the Russian author analyzes are broader than those that were allowed by science because the author takes what subjects feel as seriously as what they think or do. Because human beings have direct access only to their own feelings, the prose we will be examining is ipso facto autobiographical to the extent that it depends on the author's ability to examine himself. The defense of subjectivity

posed a unique challenge: both Russian authors and their readers had to resist, to some extent, the temptation to dissect what they found in the brave new world of the psyche. At the same time, they had to avoid self-serving sentimentality. The works of Russian realism had to be objectively true and yet remain sympathetic to subjectivity.

Russian psychological realism helped lay the groundwork for what Luria first named "romantic science," which counts as "real" the facts of subjectivity as well as those derived from empirical observation.[30] This explains why such thinkers as William James in America and Sigmund Freud in Vienna acknowledged their debt to it. To answer the question posed earlier, this is why people still read Russian novels today. The Russian psychological novel has its roots in romanticism: like the Germans whom they emulated in this regard, the Russian realists interpolated analysis and theory into their novels but avoided systems. Rather than subordinating the insights of feelings to those of reason, Russians treated the two as complementary.[31] Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time,* with its complex representation of the hero, Pechorin, from many points of view, is the swallow that heralds the spring in this regard. As we shall learn in the chapters to come, the very shape of Russian psychological prose may mirror that of human subjectivity, which is the result of a combination of mind and feeling.