

Close Encounters  
*Essays on Russian Literature*

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*Essays on Russian Literature*

ROBERT LOUIS JACKSON

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*To Leslie*  
*Painter and Poet*  
*Companion of My Life*

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Willst du ins Unendliche schreiten,  
Geh nur im Endlichen nach allen Seiten.

Willst du dich am Ganzen erquicken,  
So musst du das Ganze im Kleinsten erblicken.

(If you would advance into the infinite,  
Go then and explore the finite in all directions.

If you would renew yourself in the Whole,  
Then you must discern the Whole in the smallest of things.)

*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This collection of essays is neither a history of Russian literature in disguise nor is it a collection of separate interpretations of great Russian books. *Close Encounters* is an answer, a new answer to the old question of what to look for in Russian literature. Years ago we had Aaron Copland's *What to Listen for in Music*; and, with quite similar intentions, our author now presents his approaches to "Russian fiction" which, as William Lyon Phelps of Yale University once put it, "is like German music—the best in the world."

The categories are "Freedom and Responsibility" (eight essays covering Pushkin, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Chekhov); "Two Kinds of Beauty" (five essays dealing with Dostoevsky, and one on Solzhenitsyn); "Critical Perspectives" (four essays about the purposes of art, with special reference to Dostoevsky's concept of reality, Gorky's polemic with Dostoevsky, Bakhtin's *Poetics of Dostoevsky*, and 'Dostoevsky's Christian declaration of Faith,' and Vyacheslav I. Ivanov's poem "Nudus Salta!"); and last but not least, "Poems of Parting" (four essays on poems by Tyutchev, Igor Severyanin, the two final stanzas of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, and Nabokov's translation of a poem by Goethe).

Erudite and clear, these twenty-two essays comprise political implications and esthetic theory as well as intimations of mortality and immortality. *Close Encounters* means that the reader feels provoked to react and respond to all these writers of prose and poetry as if they were our contemporaries. And they really are our contemporaries, because tradition is brought to life by Robert Louis Jackson's art of interpretation, turning the scholar of Russian literature into a teller of tales of text, subtext and context. The principle of his hermeneutics

comes to the fore in the motto of his collection of essays, taken from Goethe: “Willst du ins Unendliche schreiten,/Geh nur im Endlichen nach allen Seiten,/Willst du dich am Ganzen erquicken,/So musst du das Ganze im Kleinsten erblicken” (If you would advance into the infinite,/Go then and explore the finite in all directions./If you would renew yourself in the Whole,/Then you must discern the Whole in the smallest of things).

This, and only this, is the real definition of “close reading.” It was the renowned German publisher, Ernst Rowohlt, who really knew how to test a manuscript offered for publication. He would throw it down on the carpet, it is said, and just read the page which opened by chance. If the page was of interest to him he published the manuscript. He was convinced that the reader in a bookstore tested a book the same way; open a chance page: to buy or not to buy. We can test whether Ernst Rowohlt was right here, today, by opening at random any page of *Close Encounters*.

Take, for instance, page 100. We are in the middle of the essay on Anna Karenina’s night train to St. Petersburg. “Anna’s deliriums, her hallucinations, or what we might for convenience’s sake call her nightmare, follow on her recognition and her joyful acceptance of her sexuality, her shame, her passion for Vronsky. Her passion is the focal point of her nightmare, but the nightmare itself centers on the conflict this passion arouses in her, and her inner awareness of the consequences of her passion for Vronsky. We are witness to the convulsions of conscience. The emotional climax of these convulsions is both a vicarious experience of sexuality and a premonition of death—a premonition linked with her encounter with Vronsky at the railroad station and her troubled reaction to the death of the guard.”

The interpretation draws the reader into the whirlpool of emotion going on in Anna Karenina, but at the same time the reader becomes aware of Tolstoy the artist who connects the outer world of an accident at a railway station (death of a guard) with Anna Karenina’s forbidden passion for Vronsky as a premonition of death. The chance passage quoted here arouses the reader’s interest; he does not want to stop reading and will not because the rhetoric of interpretation yields completely to Tolstoy’s rhetoric of fiction. The craft of fiction is fused with the art of interpretation. And this is exactly the governing principle of *Close Encounters*. We are seeing the fictional world with the novelist’s eye guided by the interweaving commentary of the essayist. As a result we turn again, or perhaps for the first time, to Tolstoy’s

novel. The effect is that we learn to criticize the critic by going back to the work in question, since literary essays belong by definition to the liberal imagination.

The range of literary matter offered in *Close Encounters* is extraordinary. Not only are we introduced in several essays to the “big” novels *War and Peace* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, but also to most rewarding miniatures such as Dostoevsky’s “The Peasant Marey” or “Anecdote from a Child’s Life,” both taken from his *Diary of a Writer*. And we pay a visit to Dostoevsky’s *The Gambler* to see Polina and Lady Luck. We get an analysis of Chekhov’s most famous play, *The Cherry Orchard*, placed in the context of his use of verbs of motion, as well as an interpretation of Pushkin’s “little tragedy,” *The Stone Guest*. A microcosmic poem by Tyutchev, “In Parting there is a Lofty Meaning,” is shown to be a universe of its own, while Nabokov’s drama of exile in Berlin is highlighted in his Russian translation in 1923 of a poem by Goethe: See the concluding essay, “From the Other Shore. Nabokov’s Translation into Russian of Goethe’s “Dedication” to *Faust*” — one that combines the worlds of Goethe, Pushkin and Nabokov, and demonstrates again the three leading qualities of our author: erudition, “Einfühlung,” or empathy, and what is called “hermeneutic humility,” meaning patience and attention to every detail. The ever present horizon of Western philosophy, including Plato and Aristotle as well as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Nietzsche, guarantees a rare equilibrium of judgment.

For sheer power of convincing argument and didactic know-how, *Close Encounters*, I think, can only be compared to the essays of T. S. Eliot. They need no introduction. Try reading any single one of them and you will find yourself reading all of them.

*Horst-Jürgen Gerigk*  
(Universität Heidelberg)

## A GLANCE AT THE ESSAYS

*Close Encounters: Essays on Russian Literature*, a selection of writings on Russian prose, poetry, and criticism in four parts, covers the period from my second book, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form: A Study of his Philosophy of Art* (1966), to the present. For reasons of space, I have omitted selections from my earliest period of writing, notably, from *The Underground Man in Russian Literature* (1958). Yet that study, with its core focus on Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* (1864)—a work that both defends free will and criticizes self-will, while pointing to a spiritual path out of the underground—laid the groundwork for one of my most sustained interests in Russian literature: the theme of fate, freedom and responsibility. The first group of essays, centering on works of major Russian writers, consists largely of discussions on this theme, while the second, under the heading “Two Kinds of Beauty,” focuses mainly on Dostoevsky's higher esthetic and its centrality in his worldview. The third group of essays, “Critical Perspectives,” consists of a discussion of Dostoevsky's views on reality and realism, individual essays on two radically different responses, Gorky's and Bakhtin's, to Dostoevsky's work, and the the consideration of a Russian poet's view of the purpose of art. The final group of essays, “The Poetry of Parting,” centers on themes of loss and separation in Russian verse and in translations of Goethe's verse into Russian.

The essays in this book are diverse in theme and content, but all give expression to my binding interest in esthetic and moral-philosophical questions.

### *Fate, Freedom, and Responsibility*

“All's for the best; having accidentally killed Don Carlos. . .” —these are Don Juan's first words in his opening monologue in scene iii of

Pushkin's play, *The Stone Guest*, the last of the Russian poet's "little tragedies." Don Juan is expressing his satisfaction that the way is now open to a conquest of Dona Anna. "All's for the best!" is an allusion to Dr. Pangloss's optimism in Voltaire's *Candide* ("all's for the best in the best of all possible worlds"). The words offer a clue to Pushkin's critique of a rationalism that frees man from moral responsibility. As one of Don Juan's lovers, Laura, remarks: "It's really most vexing. Your eternal tricks—And yet you're never to blame." And yet there is something endearing and affirming about this happy libertine, this boyish lover, this "improviser of the love song": a man whose very existence challenges a rigid and stifling moralistic order. "Moral-Philosophical Subtext in Pushkin's *The Stone Guest*" explores the tension between opposing views of Don Juan. It is with some reluctance, we feel, that Pushkin condemns his liberated and liberating Don Juan. Yet actions have consequences.

"A land primed for fatality, already cursed with it," William Faulkner wrote about the South in his novel *Absalom, Absalom*. The same might be said about Russia's tormented history, yet a deep spiritual legacy in Russian literature and culture argues against such pessimism. The colossal undertow of fatality in Russian national consciousness, nonetheless, is at the center of Ivan Turgenev's early historical-philosophical story, "The Inn" ("Postoialyi dvor," 1855), the melancholy tale of a diligent Russian Job in a land of binding serfdom. Turgenev empathizes not with the resignation or "wise humility" (smirennomudrie) that wells up in his defeated peasant hero at the end of the story, but with the latter's earlier vigorous efforts to forge his own destiny in the face of what appears, at first, to be a hail of accidents and arbitrary blows of fate.<sup>1</sup>

Turgenev's almost hypnotic fascination with fate surfaces again, years later, in his subtle philosophical tale, "Knock... Knock... Knock!.." ("Turgenev's 'Knock... Knock... Knock!..' The Riddle of the Story"). Chance plays an outsized role in the destiny of Turgenev's strange protagonist, Teglev. Yet Teglev, as his creator underscores, stubbornly wills his own fate; he continually turns chance into fate. Ridel, however, the morally ambiguous and rational-minded narrator of Turgenev's tale, plays a subversive role in the drama of his friend,

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of Turgenev's "The Inn," see my article "Turgenev's 'The Inn': A Philosophical Novella," in *Russian Literature* 16 (1984): 411-419.

Teglev: he gambles with Teglev's credulous nature, thereby facilitating his ultimate suicide.

Man's position is a precarious one in Turgenev's bleak and incalculable universe. No one, or "Nobody," responds to our knocking. We must look inwards rather than outwards for an answer, respond to the heart rather than the head, Turgenev believes. We are our brother's keeper.

Through gambling, smuggling, attempts at escape, and other forms of risk, Dostoevsky affirms in *Notes from the House of the Dead* (1861-1862), the convict in his fate-bound prison world seeks to act "according to his own free will." That freedom, however, is "so utterly without foundation as to border almost on delirium." Dostoevsky's convict is a psychological prototype for the Underground Man (Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, 1864), a disillusioned idealist who knocks his head against the walls of rationalist utopia and of a fate-ruled universe of his own making.

Dostoevsky's gambler, Aleksey ("Polina and Lady Luck in Dostoevsky's *The Gambler*"), an educated person who has lost his faith and national roots, is ultimately caught up in roulette's perpetual mobile of challenges to fate; it is a game, however, in which Polina, the woman who is attracted him, albeit very cautiously, becomes a surrogate for the "lady luck" he seeks to conquer at the gambling tables. The results are predictably tragic for the relationship. On discovering his real love in "lady luck," Aleksey continues to seek "salvation" at the gambling tables. Salvation in roulette, however, is a metaphor for spiritual bankruptcy. Man, Dostoevsky insists, will find neither God nor freedom in play with fate.

"If Napoleon is France, if Napoleon is Europe, it is because the people whom he sways are little Napoleons," Ralph Waldo Emerson famously wrote in "Napoleon; Or, the Man of the World." The Napoleon of *War and Peace* is a satirical figure, while the officer Fyodor Ivanovich Dolokhov might be described as a little Napoleon in everyday life, the quintessential gambler in life. He does not lend himself to caricature. A person of keen intelligence and energy, a duelist and calculating killer, he embodies the spirit of the times, what Napoleon, writing about himself to his brother Joseph Bonaparte, August 12, 1795, describes as the "moral state" of France, "the habit of running risks." The duel between Pierre and Dolokhov, a dramatic and philosophical centerpiece in *War and Peace*, juxtaposes an unpretentious, unaggressive, and bumbling amateur, stumbling into trouble with a professional who has an

overweening confidence in himself and in the powers of the mind. The duel, in many respects contrasting eastern and western philosophies of life, echoes in *War and Peace* the larger confrontation between Russia and Napoleon; it underscores, on the one hand, the limits of rational calculation and, on the other, the ultimately unpredictable character of human events.

"A man's character is his fate." Tolstoy dramatizes this ancient truth early in *Anna Karenina* in the chapter treating of Anna's meeting with Vronsky at the railroad station. Vronsky, glancing at Anna as she steps off the train, notes a "restrained animation" on Anna's face, the abundance of something that expressed itself "against her will." Vronsky's appearance upsets the delicate balance between animation and restraint in Anna. She signals her troubled awareness of the impact Vronsky has made on her when, some moments later, she observes to her brother with regard to the accidental crushing of a guard at the railroad station: "It's a bad omen." She immediately follows this remark with the question: "And have you known Vronsky for a long time?" Anna's conflation of the horrendous accident with the agitation aroused in her by Vronsky's appearance underscores a predisposition in Anna herself to a tragic view of life. Her remark casts a long shadow ahead to her suicide at a railroad station. Ever-present chance plays a role in this episode, but Anna unconsciously weaves it into the basic design of her nature.

"Breaking the Moral Barrier: Anna Karenina's Night Train to St. Petersburg" details the triumph of animation over will, even as Anna's violent emotional upheaval attests to her moral resistance to that happening. Nothing is fated in this scene, Tolstoy insists. Anna is free to resist or to yield to temptation. Chance and circumstance play a role in this dramatic episode, but it is Anna who determines the outcome, not as one who wills it, but as one who is caught up in nature's powers of creation and destruction.

Oscar Wilde once wrote that the "dreadful thing about modernity was that it put tragedy into the raiment of comedy, so that the great realities seemed commonplace or grotesque or lacking in style."<sup>2</sup> Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, a story of the commonplace and grotesque which moves from satire to tragedy and then to

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<sup>2</sup> Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis and Other Writings*, With an Introduction by Hesketh Pearson (London: 1986), p. 183.



eleventh-hour redemption; a story that conflates Joban, Aristotelian, and Christian drama in a parable of everyday life, demonstrates that the great realities never take holiday. These realities are at work even in everyday language.

Nobody among Judge Ivan Ilych's middle class entourage is capable of facing the fact of death, the reality of his own death, in particular; nobody is capable of reflecting on the meaning of life that the fact of death poses. The thought of death is repressed. Yet the very language Tolstoy's characters use to cover up their fear and anxiety betrays their inner turmoil.

The language of evasion is at the center of "*Uzhas* in the Subtext: *The Death of Ivan Ilych*." Concentrating on the opening and closing scenes of the story, "*Uzhas* in the Subtext: *The Death of Ivan Ilych*" focuses on the way horror (*uzhas*), penetrates everyday language and manifests itself in veiled and euphemistic forms of speech. The essay begins with an analysis of the way Ivan Ilych's colleagues gingerly process the "news" of his death and concludes with a discussion of the end of the story, where horror is replaced by pity.

"What Time is it?" asks Lopakhin, former serf and now merchant, in *The Cherry Orchard*. "Time is marching on" (*Vremia idet*—literally, *time is coming*), he warns the Ranevsky family with reference to the impending sale of the estate. Nobody in the Ranevsky entourage, however, nobody except Lopakhin, is moving to meet time and the exigencies of the situation. In Act I of the play, everybody is going to sleep.

Yet there is constant movement throughout the play. The Russian verbs of motion *idti* (to go on foot) and *ekhat'* (to go in a vehicle) in all their variant forms, uses, and meanings, literal and figurative, are on everybody's lips. The play is bracketed by the grand actions of coming and going. Remarkably, one can structure the literal and dramatic action of the play almost entirely around verbs of motion.

The verbs of motion become the means of transportation, so to speak, for the motifs of coming and going, arrival and departure, farewell and reunion, sleep and awakening, death and resurrection. Arriving very early in the morning at the estate, Anya wants to go to sleep quickly so as to awaken and run about the cherry orchard—her Garden of Eden. The need for sleep is real, but sleep, the long sleep, dream, death, and awakening form a subtext to the topics of the play. What time is it? It's later than you think. In fact, the Ranevsky family does not so much live in time, in the present, as out of time. Time is apocalyptic in *The Cherry Orchard*. There is no more time ...

### *Two Kinds of Beauty*

The opening essay of the second group of essays, "Two Kinds of Beauty," focuses on Dostoevsky's higher esthetic, the classical and Christian foundation of his view of beauty, and the way in which it is reflected in Dostoevsky's concept of "obraz" (image, form, shape, but also icon) and "bezobrazie" (ugliness, shapelessness, moral disfiguration), its opposite. Dostoevsky's higher esthetic is the organizing element of his worldview: it constitutes a philosophical credo, at once a view of beauty and a statement about the human condition. Dostoevsky's interest in Christian esthetics goes back to his earliest years, when he became familiar with the writings of Schiller and with Chateaubriand's *Genius of Christianity* (*Le génie du christianisme*, 1802). In 1856 he wrote an essay on the "significance of Christianity in art," the "fruit of decades of thought," he noted in one of his letters. The essay was not published or preserved, but elements from it resonate in his critical writings of the early 1860s, in particular his critique of the utilitarian esthetics of the radical critic N. A. Dobrolyubov, and above all in his letters and notebooks, where the religious foundation of his esthetic finds direct and explicit expression. The deeply personal character of Dostoevsky's higher esthetic may be felt in his moving letter to N. D. Fonvizina in 1854 where he speaks of moments, in prison, where he conceived of Christ as the ideal of beauty and perfection. He emerges in this letter as one whose faith is inconstant, but whose striving for it is permanent and passionate. Echoing his own personal outlook, his higher esthetic posits a tragic view of mankind eternally striving, in spite of all setbacks and failures, for the highest ideal. "Mankind on earth strives for an ideal that is contrary to his nature," he wrote in his notebook in 1864.

Dostoevsky dramatizes the concept of "obraz" and "bezobrazie" as moral and esthetic polarities in "Over the Brandy," the chapter Dostoevsky devotes to Fyodor Karamazov's fatal moral and ideological encounter with his sons. The theme of "Over the Brandy" is "bezobrazie"—desecration, the defilement of everything sacred (Russia, the Russian peasant, woman, the mother of Alyosha and Ivan, and, finally, the icon of the Madonna.). "An eclipse as never before," Fyodor himself babbles at the end of this scene in recognition of moral and spiritual catastrophe. "Why is such a man alive!" shouts his son Dmitry Karamazov in an early scene in the novel. In "Over the Brandy," one may say that Fyodor has passed sentence on himself.

A more human image of Fyodor emerges in the course of the novel, but at this point Fyodor's behavior would seem to be evidence in favor of Ivan's deep skepticism over human nature.

The issue of Fyodor's basic nature, and his sons' response to it, is taken up in "The Defiled and Defiling 'Physiognomy' of Fyodor Karamazov." The essay begins with a consideration of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur's anthropological concept of the "indissoluble complicity between defilement and sexuality"—a complicity that is dramatized in Fyodor's unbridled sensuality. The discussion then turns to the narrator's provocative sketch of Fyodor's face, or "physiognomy," as he puts it. The sketch raises a question that was at the center of the so-called art or science of physiognomy in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: do a person's physical features offer the key to his character? Dostoevsky denies a direct correlation of face and character. One must "look into" the face of a person, he insists, to find his spiritual center. Here Dostoevsky's poetics of insight concord with his religious worldview: "Man is created in the image and likeness of God." Man's "obraz," man's image, his likeness to God, may be marred, as in an old icon, but the sacred image retains its essential link with divinity.

The narrator's sketch of Fyodor (a purposeful provocation on the part of Dostoevsky) suggests otherwise; it effectively sets into motion the esthetic and moral-philosophical dialectic of the novel, the issues of good and evil, of the nature of man, of "obraz" and "bezobrazie," that are dramatized in the novel's action and, in one form or another, debated by its main characters.

"Anecdote from a Child's Life," the account of a twelve-year-old girl who unexpectedly leaves her home, goes through harrowing experiences on the dark streets of St. Petersburg, then returns home to tell the tale to her mother, who tells it to Dostoevsky, who tells it with embellishments to his reader, is one of the most important yet least examined sketches in Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer*. Here is fact, but here is fiction (three stories rolled into one). Here, too, we are witness to the process of creation, to threshold art—a mode of writing that marks many of the pages of *Diary of a Writer*. A high-minded excursus on the nature and dangers of preadolescence in a predatory world, a sketch with a focus on child-molestation (a frequent theme in Dostoevsky's work), "Anecdote" on every level—genre, form, content, style, language, imagery, view and presentation of character—is marked by the phenomenon of *duality*.

"Life is a whole art," Dostoevsky writes in "Petersburg Chronicle" in 1847, "and to live means to make an artistic work of oneself." This can be done, he writes, only in accord with "communal interests," in sympathy with the "mass" of people, "with its direct, immediate requirements, and not in drowsiness, not in indifference . . . not in solitude."<sup>3</sup> These remarks are foundational for any consideration of Dostoevsky's life, work, and artistic muse, especially for Dostoevsky's post-prison and exile writings when his personal, and defining, social contract with the Russian people merges with an explicit Christian ethic and faith.<sup>4</sup>

Artistic self-creation in Dostoevsky's early credo finds its apotheosis in social engagement and creation.<sup>5</sup> Dostoevsky's ideal finds explicit expression in the narrator of the semi-fictional *Notes from the House of the Dead* (1861-1862). Here the subjective element of autobiography is subordinated to the objective task of the national biography of the Russian people. The esthetic and spiritual accomplishment of this biography consists in the restoration of the image of the martyred Russian people. The narrator of the main text himself emerges by the end of his memoirs as a man of the upper classes who, through his social and personal testament, through suffering shared with the people, himself has attained spiritual liberation. This result punctuates, as it were, the concluding lines of the memoir devoted to the narrator's release from prison, lines laden with spiritual-religious content and allusion (Dante): "Yes, with God! [a response to the convicts' "God be

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<sup>3</sup> F. M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh*, 30 vols. (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972-1990), 18:13-14.

<sup>4</sup> For a critique of a *negative* interpretation of Dostoevsky's "muse," see my discussion, "A View from the Underground: On Nikolai Nikolaevich Strakhov's Letter about His Good Friend Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky and on Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy's Cautious Response to It" in Robert Louis Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky. The Overwhelming Questions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press: 1993), 104-120.

<sup>5</sup> Dostoevsky's notion of self-creation through social creation or engagement would seem to come under the rubric of the Romantic notion of "zhiznetvorchestvo"—"life" (*zhizn'*) and "[creative] work" (*tvorchestvo*)—a belief later adopted or adapted by the Russian Symbolists. For a discussion of this concept and its various nuances and applications, see Michael Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition. Goethe, Novalis, and the Poetics of Vyacheslav Ivanov* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 37, 143-156.

with you!"] Freedom, a new life, resurrection from the dead... What a glorious moment!"

In this work, however, there is little direct discussion by the narrator of his spiritual life or how he arrived at his populist outlook. "The Peasant Marey" (1876), with its account of a daydream recollection in prison of a childhood encounter with the kindly and earthy peasant Marey, seeks to fill in that gap. That daydream "miraculously" banished all hatred from his heart, Dostoevsky writes; it enabled him to see the Russian convict in a new light. This peasant with shaven head and branded face, "may be the very same Marey: after all, I really can't look into his heart."

In reading "The Peasant Marey," one feels that Dostoevsky's esthetic dream of artistic self-creation through social creation, through merging with the mass, had been realized and, remarkably, in a single moment of the second week of Easter, most likely in April 1851, a year and a half into his terrible prison ordeal. Did this happening, however, take place in historical time or artistic time? Is this a single, or a triple vision? What is the mix, here, of truth and poetry? Such are some of the questions posed in "The Triple Vision: Dostoevsky's 'The Peasant Marey'."

Dostoevsky's concepts of "obraz" (image, form, but also sacred form, the icon) and "bezobrazie" (the ugly, deformed, disfigured, the scandalous) are rooted in the Russian language and spirituality. In "Matryona's Home," one of Solzhenitsyn's finest works, ethical and spiritual truths are expressed more through imagery than in direct authorial statement. Here, the concepts of "obraz" and "bezobrazie" find embodiment respectively in the peasant woman Matryona and in the disfiguring juggernaut of Soviet power. Matryona is destroyed, but her redeeming iconic image survives. Solzhenitsyn's Matryona is not a doll, not a smiling Soviet advertisement, but the Russian peasant woman upon whom Russian life has depended from time immemorial.

### *Critical Perspectives*

"Critical Perspectives," the third grouping of essays, opens with "Dostoevsky's Concept of Reality and Its Representation in Art." The Russian author's omnibus conception of reality lies at the root of his realism. Reality embraces everything from the familiar to the fantastic. It encompasses psychological, social, economic, cultural, scientific,

historical, metaphysical and religious realms. Reality is everywhere, if we only have the eyes to see it.

Dostoevsky depicts life and death fearlessly—"nothing human is alien to me." "Mere realistic truth, however," is alien to him. The artist must "look into" reality and seek out its "main idea," an idea that at its root is inseparable from the ideal. Man "thirsts" for beauty and the ideal; there is no contradiction, he says, between realism and idealism: both have the same ultimate goals. "There is no reason to be ashamed of one's idealism."

Few if any Russian writers carried on a more intense and at the same time self-lacerating polemic with Dostoevsky than did the Russian writer, Maxim Gorky ("In the Interests of Social Pedagogy: Maxim Gorky's Polemic with Dostoevsky"). Here is a tale of attraction to, and repulsion from, one's psychological double. Dostoevsky's artistic genius was never a question for Gorky: he ranked him with Shakespeare. The trouble was Dostoevsky's allegedly gloomy assessment of man and the human condition, the "sadistic" and "masochistic" elements that Dostoevsky allegedly "discovered" in Russian history and human nature. Yet his sense of the cruelty and chaos of Russian man and, it seems, of human nature, runs like a red thread through Gorky's own writings, including his brilliant three-part creative autobiography "Childhood" ("Detstvo," 1913), "In the World" ("V liudiakh," 1916), and "My University Years" ("Moi universitetiy," 1922).

"As a 'judge of the world and of people,'" Gorky declared to an audience of Soviet writers and critics in 1934, "Dostoevsky is easy to imagine in the role of a medieval inquisitor." Yet Gorky at the end of his life naively gave the luster of his name to a modern Soviet inquisition. "In the Interests of Social Pedagogy: Maxim Gorky's Polemic with Dostoevsky" explores the social, esthetic, and philosophical dimensions of Gorky's polemic with Dostoevsky in the first quarter of the twentieth century, a period when a whole section of Dostoevsky criticism confused Dostoevsky the writer with his heroes and anti-heroes. Gorky nonetheless remains one of the most interesting figures of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one who has not yet emerged from the critical clichés of eastern and western criticism.

M. M. Bakhtin was not among the critics who identified Dostoevsky with one or another of the characters in his novels. His Dostoevsky study in 1929 struck a sharp blow at much of earlier Dostoevsky criticism and scholarship. "The present book," Bakhtin wrote in the

opening line of his preface to the 1929 edition of his study, "is devoted to problems of Dostoevsky's *poetics* and surveys his work from that viewpoint *only*." (Bakhtin's italics). In spite of the limitations he placed on his inquiry, one that excluded "ideology that found its direct expression in the pronouncements of Dostoevsky" (or more precisely of his characters), Bakhtin will give real thought to how Dostoevsky's "radically new authorial position" in the novel accommodates 'Dostoevsky's Christian declaration of faith.' Whether he succeeds in integrating this line of thought with his core polyphonic view of Dostoevsky's novels is another question. This topic is at the center of our discussion, "Bakhtin's *Poetics of Dostoevsky* and 'Dostoevsky's Christian Declaration of Faith.'"

"Nudus Salta!", one of the late poems of Vyacheslav I. Ivanov (1866-1949), contrasts an orgiastic-Dionysian view of the "purpose of art" with a lofty, spiritualized Dionysian and Christian view of art. Ivanov certainly embraces the view of art set forth in the second stanza of his poem. On the other hand, though in earlier years he had taken a deep interest in the orgiastic elements of Dionysianism he had never embraced the "all is permissible" program for art trumpeted in the first stanza of his poem. Significantly he distances himself from this stanza by putting it in quotation marks, thus suggesting an alien voice. "Vyacheslav I. Ivanov's Poem 'Nudus Salta!' and the Purpose of Art" brings to the foreground one of Russia's great poets and thinkers.

### *Poetry of Parting*

The final group of essays in this book, "Poetry of Parting," brings together poems of widely differing interests and directions. All, however, share a focus on the themes of parting and loss.

Brevity and compression of artistic thought characterize many of the poems of Fyodor Tyutchev (1803-1873). Such is the case with his microcosmic philosophical poem, "In Parting there is a Lofty Meaning." In five lines, with a working vocabulary of 26 words, Tyutchev offers a poem of astounding complexity on the themes of mortality and immortality. What starts out as an affirmation of the "lofty meaning" of parting ends with an abrupt "awakening." "Here are some bad verses expressing something even worse," Tyutchev wrote his wife in a letter. Yet Tyutchev's poem has its own understanding of what it wants to say. As André Gide observed in his preface to *The Immoralist*: "Really, there are no problems in art for which the work itself does not provide an



adequate solution" (A vrai dire, en art, il n'y a pas de problèmes dont l'oeuvre d'art ne soit la suffisante solution).

Igor Severyanin's poignant and prophetic poem, "No More Than a Dream," about the loss and recovery of the legacy of the great Russian poet Alexander Blok, has an outward simplicity that belies its inner complexity. This dazzling poet of pre-revolutionary Futurism has lost none of his mastery of poetic technique in this post-revolutionary poem of exile and loss. Poetry in Severyanin's poem, however, turns away from provocative "innovation" for its own sake and returns to the roots and role of poetry as inspiration and prophecy. Not without reason does the dream occupy the center of Severyanin's poem, and not surprisingly does it return on its deepest level to the poetry of Alexander Pushkin, Russia's greatest poet.

In the final two stanzas of his great "novel in verse," *Eugene Onegin*, Pushkin bids farewell not only to Onegin and to his, Pushkin's, "faithful ideal," Tatyana, but also to "those to whom at friendly meetings/the first strophes I read . . . /Some are no more, others are distant, /as erstwhile Saadi said." (The translation here is by Vladimir Nabokov). On the historical plane, scholars have seen in these lines a veiled reference to the Decembrists, participants in an abortive insurrection in St. Petersburg in 1825, people with whom Pushkin was intimate. In his Commentary on Pushkin's final two stanzas of *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov gives a good deal of time to searching out the source of the so-called Saadi line. My essay, "Supremum Vale: The Last Stanzas of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*: Goethe, Zhukovsky, and the Decembrists," directs attention to works whose impact on the last two stanzas of *Eugene Onegin* is indubitable, namely, Goethe's "Dedication" (*Zueignung*) to *Faust* and Vasily Zhukovsky's free adaptation of Goethe's "Dedication," entitled "A Dream: An Imitation of Goethe" (1817). The essay focuses on how Pushkin integrated fragmentary literary reminiscences with his own creative design.

The inspiration for the final essay in this book, "From the Other Shore: Nabokov's Translation into Russian of Goethe's 'Dedication' to *Faust*," is quite simply the question: why did Nabokov in his discussion of the final two verses of Pushkin's "novel in verse" ignore Goethe and Zhukovsky, two writers who figure prominently elsewhere in his Commentary on *Eugene Onegin*?

The genius of Nabokov is "strong," not only in "opinions," but in the wizardry of his art and artistic persona; it is famously strong, too, in the art of play, of hide and seek, of mystery and disclosure. One



takes note not only of what Nabokov says, but of what he does not say, as one does of empty space on a chess board. "From the Other Shore" is an effort to fill in this space. My discussion involves Nabokov the man, writer, scholar, critic, and translator of *Eugene Onegin*. It focuses on his tragic loss of family, home and hearth, land and homeland, and, in this connection, on his translation of Goethe's "Dedication"—a poem also dealing with the theme of grief and loss.

In an extraordinary way, the problem content of Nabokov's life and poem-translation merges with the works of Pushkin, Goethe, and Zhukovsky. One becomes aware, again, of the fraternity of great artists and of the way in which images and motifs, through shared concerns, bound and rebound across the centuries.

### A Note on the Text

The twenty two essays brought together in *Close Encounters*, with the exception of the final one on Nabokov written for this book, were taken from my books, from journals, or from collections published over a period of fifty years. In editing this book, I have systematized different styles of footnotes and transliteration. Where citations from Dostoevsky's works were concerned, I have shifted from the use of earlier collections of his works, letters, and notebooks to the most recent Russian edition of his collected works published in the Soviet Union—*Polnoe sobranie sochinenii Dostoevskogo v tridtsati tomakh*, 30 vols. (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972-1990).

In editing *Close Encounters* I have made stylistic changes and adjustments in the text, very occasionally deleting passages or quotations that were redundant in the context of the entire work. However, it was not possible to eliminate all repetitions without damaging the content of the essay. For reasons of space, I had to make significant cuts from "Two Kinds of Beauty" and "Dostoevsky's Concept of Reality and Its Representation in Art," two long essays taken from my second book *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form: A Study of his Philosophy of Art* (1966). In the case of the first essay, I have added a small amount of material from an adjacent essay in *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form* so as to provide a more complete view of my thought.

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**Robert Louis Jackson**

*Truro, Massachusetts, August 27, 2012*

*FATE, FREEDOM,  
AND RESPONSIBILITY*

MORAL-PHILOSOPHICAL SUBTEXT IN PUSHKIN'S  
*THE STONE GUEST*<sup>1</sup>

Who is it that can tell me who I am?

—*King Lear*

*A Question of Identity*

“The beginning is always decisive,” German novelist Theodor Fontane observed well over a hundred years ago. “If one hits it off right, then what follows succeeds through a kind of inner necessity.”<sup>2</sup> One may add that that necessity sometimes carries with it a hint of the inner content of the work. That is eminently the case with the beginning of *The Stone Guest* (*Kamennyi gost'*, 1830) where Pushkin projects a major concern of his play: the question of Don Juan's identity.

The four opening lines of *The Stone Guest*, in contrast to the opening lines of Pushkin's *Mozart and Salieri*, seem disappointingly plain. But plainness in Pushkin always masks complexity. Nothing in Pushkin ever disappoints. He had the uncanny art of making everyday words, speeches, gestures, and actions laden with meanings and

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<sup>1</sup> From *Alexander Pushkin's Little Tragedies: The Poetics of Brevity*, ed. Svetlana Evdokimova (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 191–208. Part one of the present essay was first published as part of a larger essay, “Beginnings: The Opening Lines of *Skupoi rytsar'*, *Motsart i Sal'eri* and *Kammenyi gost'*”) in *Transactions of the Association of Russian-American Scholars in the USA* 30 (1999–2000): 85–96. Part two of the essay originally appeared under the title of “Moral-Philosophical Subtext in *Kammenyi gost'*”) in *Scando-Slavica* 35 (1989): 17–24.

<sup>2</sup> *Der Anfang ist immer das Entscheidende. Hat man's darin gut getroffen, so muss der Rest mit einer Art von innerer Notwendigkeit gelingen.* Letter of March 6, 1879, to Mathilde von Rohr. See Th. Fontane, *Briefe* 4 v., ed. K. Schreinert and Ch. Jolles, vol. 3 (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1971), 190.

resonances inside and outside the text. The opening lines of *The Stone Guest* are remarkable in the way they intimate in their camouflaged way the tragic direction of the action and a basic issue of the play. On the surface, the lines introduce a tale and hero as familiar to the audience as was the story of Oedipus to the ancient Greeks.

Let's wait for night here. Ah, finally  
 We've reached the gates of Madrid! Soon  
 I'll fly through familiar streets,  
 My moustache covered with a cloak, my brows with a hat.  
 What do you think? Could I ever be recognized?<sup>3</sup>

[Dozhdemsia nochi zdes'. Akh, nakonets  
 Dostigli my vorot Madrida! Skoro  
 Ia polechu po ulitsam znakomym,  
 Usy plashchom zakryv, a brovi shliapoi.  
 Kak dumaesh'? Uznat' menia nel'zia?]

The fate of Don Juan, the fatality of the play's action, is prefigured in the words "night," "finally," "gates," "soon" (*noch', nakonets, vorot, skoro*). The first two lines subtly foreshadow the fate of Don Juan at the gates of hell, suggesting, too, that he is "flying" toward that fate, that is, freely accepting and motivating his own fatality; this fact is made explicit in his last words at the end of the play, "I called you, and I am glad to see you" (*Ia zval tebia i rad, chto vizhu*). The last two phrases of the opening lines signal with equal subtlety Pushkin's conscious and unconventional quest in his Don Juan play: the deconstruction of the standard or popular image of Don Juan and its replacement with a morally and psychologically complex figure.

Don Juan, attired in cape and hat that half-masks his face yet at the same time flaunts his conventional signature identity; this familiar Don Juan, ready to fly along "familiar streets," asks lightheartedly, "What do you think? Could I ever be recognized?" Don Juan here puts the question of the entire play: Who *is* Don Juan? Will the reader "recognize" Pushkin's Don Juan? What is the nature of his identity? Not accidentally do the words "know" and "recognize" (*znat', uznat', priznat'*) recur in the text.

To the popular audience, the dashing cavalier that appears at the beginning of *The Stone Guest* is as recognizable as the "familiar streets"

<sup>3</sup> All translations of *The Stone Guest* are mine.

through which he flies. But the question of Don Juan's identity is put, almost mockingly, to the audience: "What do you think? Could I ever be recognized?" The answer will come, slowly but surely, in the course of the play. The audience will ultimately be confronted with a Don Juan who defies conventional romantic or pre-romantic monological labeling; they will find a man, like Odysseus, of many turns, a man of complex and elusive identity, a polyphonic and ultimately tragic Don Juan. The image that Pushkin creates for his reader is that of a man who specializes in masks but who, at the last moment, is unable or unwilling to put on a new disguise, unless it be his own face.

This man of many faces is not apparent to the good-hearted but limited Leporello, a person who, in fact, stands closest to the audience in his monological perception of Don Juan. Leporello takes the mask or myth for the man; loyal to the traditional two-dimensional image of Don Juan, he is certain that his master will be easily recognized. With irony, Leporello replies to Don Juan's question, "Could I ever be recognized?"

Oh yes! It's hard to recognize Don Juan!  
There's a mass of people like him!

[Da! Don Guana mudreno priznat'!  
Takikh, kak on, takaia bezdna!]

Don Juan, carefree but reluctant to be tagged, retorts:

You're joking?  
Now who will recognize me?

[Shutish'?  
Da kto zh menia uznaet?]

Leporello proceeds to name the people who will recognize him:

The first watchman,  
Gypsy, or drunken musician,  
Or one of your own kind, some insolent knight  
In a cape with sword under arm.

[Pervyi storozh,  
Gitana ili p'ianyi muzykant,  
Il' svoi zhe brat, nakhal'nyi kavaler  
So shpagoiu pod myshkoi i v plashche.]

Leporello's Don Juan is the cliché, the familiar Don Juan, the stock image that will be recognized by people of his class or by people who share similar traits with him. Yielding to a fatalism that will characterize him throughout the play, Don Juan gives up the argument with the remark: "Well, what matter, what if I'm recognized" (*Chto za beda, khot' i uznaiut*). Pushkin, however, does not give up the matter. He has just begun his play, one in which a complex Don Juan will defy the expectations of the audience and, indeed, if we are to believe Don Juan's final revelations to Dona Anna, perhaps Don Juan's own image of himself.

Don Juan's encounters with Dona Anna in scenes 3 and 4 witness a dramatic process of unmasking. Confronted by her persistent questioning, he declares at last, "I am Don Juan [and] I killed your husband"; "I am Don Juan and I love you" [*Ia Don Guan . . . Ia ubil supruga tvoego; Ia Don Guan, i ia tebia liubliu*]. Don Juan's strange, seemingly reluctant, yet inwardly driven unmasking of himself leads Dona Anna to respond with amazement, "So this is Don Juan . . ." (*Tak eto Don Guan . . .*) Yet even *this* "Don Juan," the supposedly rock-bottom one, does not strike the reader as the ultimate Don Juan. The removal of one mask after another leaves a gallery of masks. The reader is left to wonder, is the Don Juan who declares, "I am Don Juan," just one more mask, or is he the sum of all the masks that he has worn?

The image Don Juan seeks to present to Dona Anna at the final moment of their encounter before the appearance of the knight-commander is that of a man reborn to virtue and humility. Yet even in confession, Don Juan has difficulty (one might say a constitutional one) in expressing, indeed, in feeling, a direct sense of guilt or remorse for his actions. At first, he flatly and defiantly declares to Dona Anna that he has killed her husband, that he "doesn't regret it," and that "there's no repentance" in him ("*Ia ubil / Supruga tvoego i ne zhaleiu / O tom — i net raskaian'ia vo mne*"). Yet in response to Dona Anna's "So this is Don Juan . . ." he is driven to a strange, even hobbled confession, one in which he speaks of himself, as it were, at a remove:

True, is it not, *he's been described to you*  
 A villain, a monster. — O Dona Anna,  
 Rumor, *perhaps*, is not quite mistaken,  
 On my tired conscience much evil  
 Weighs, perhaps. Thus for long I have been  
 An earnest student of debauchery (my italics—RL).

[Ne pravda li, on byl opisan vam  
 Zlodeem, izvergom.—O Dona Anna,  
 Molva, byt' mozhet, ne sovsem neprava,  
 Na sovesti ustaloi mnogo zla,  
 Byt' mozhet, tiagoteet. Tak, razvrata  
 Ia dolgo byl pokornyi uchenik.]

Don Juan is certain only of his earnest attention to “debauchery.” Not without reason does the reader (to say nothing of Dona Anna) react with a certain suspicion to the affirmation of rebirth that follows Don Juan’s reference to his “tired conscience”:

But from the time I first saw you,  
 It *seems to me* that I have been completely reborn.  
 Loving you, I love virtue  
 And for the first time humbly  
 Bend my trembling knees before it (my italics—*RLJ*).

[No s toi pory, kak vas uvidel ia  
 Mne kazhetsia, ia ves' pererodilsia.  
 Vas poliubia, liubliu ia dobrodetel'  
 I v pervyi raz smirenno pered nei  
 Drozhashchie kolena prekloniaiu.]

Don Juan is at least consistent in indicating, most surely naïvely, the fact that he relates to issues of good and evil in a very vague way. His conscience, it would seem, is “tired” not so much through stress as inactivity.

Does Don Juan really have knowledge of himself when he speaks of being reborn? Is there a perceptive shift toward “virtue” in him? Or does it just seem so to him? Is not the supposedly unmasked face he turns to Dona Anna in these last moments even more of a mask than his other disguises? Everything in Don Juan’s moral nature at this last moment is in the realm of “perhaps,” a realm of flux. What is certain is that his sensitivity to moral problems at this point is not above that of the child-adult (in this Don Juan is emblematic, like Dostoevsky’s Dmitry Karamazov, of the broad human condition) struggling with the names or notions of “good” and “evil,” awkwardly trying to relate them to the confused reality of his own inner feelings and strivings. The concept of a “tired conscience” best describes the deepest stratum of his moral personality at this fatal turning point in his life.

The near-final image we have of Don Juan as he confronts the “stone guest,” the statue of the knight-commander, whom he has

summoned, is that of an untrembling and unrepentant figure boldly and gladly accepting his fate. Yet even this picture of a defiant Don Juan is not the final picture of Don Juan that Pushkin leaves us.

"Who knows you?" (*Kto znaet vas?*), that is, who can make you out, Dona Anna wonders. Her "Who knows you?" is the obverse side of Don Juan's "It seems to me." Don Juan does not fully know himself, and Dona Anna, like the reader, is baffled by appearances. In any case, the figurative meaning of "Who knows you?" masks the practical question of recognition, for Dona Anna accompanies her words, "Who knows you?" with an obvious concern that Don Juan, in coming to her, risks being recognized:

But how could you come here.  
You could be recognized,  
And your death would be inevitable.

[No kak mogli priiti  
Siuda vy; zdes' uznat' mogli by vas,  
I vasha smert' byla by neizbezhna.]

With this practical question we have come full circle to the beginning of the play, where the literal question of Don Juan's recognition, and of his safety in Madrid, masks the figurative question of his identity: will anybody recognize the real, complex, enigmatic Don Juan? The implications of being recognized are spelled out in Dona Anna's concern that recognition of Don Juan would lead ineluctably to his death.

Death, however, will come not from the king of Spain but from the statue of the knight-commander, from the implacable stone guest, an embodiment of a fate that Don Juan has been inviting from the opening lines of the play: "I have come at your call," says the commander. "I called you, and I am glad to see you," replies Don Juan.

Don Juan's question at the opening of the play, "Could I ever be recognized?" has now become moot. He has long discarded the familiar cape and disguise that popularly define him and that are the signs of carefree erotic triumphs. He has made himself vulnerable and disclosed his complexity. He recognizes both his fatality and his free choice of that fatality. All that remains, it would seem, is a proud confrontation with death. Yet here, too, Don Juan defies expectations.

Don Juan's behavior in the last act and in his last moments casts his fate in a tragic light. To the knight-commander's peremptory



"Give me your hand" (*Dai ruku*), Juan answers, "Here it is . . ." (*Vot ona . . .*). Pushkin's suspension points suggest hesitation on the part of Don Juan. *Ona* ("it" when the Russian noun is of the feminine gender but also "she") refers to Don Juan's hand, but it might also refer to the commander's hand, the death-bearing "right hand" (*desnitsa*) of retribution: "Here it is . . . oh, it's heavy / The grip of his stony hand!" (*Vot ona . . . o, tiazhelo / Pozhat'e kamennoi ego desnitsy!*) That is the hand of death.

The same kind of ambiguity a few moments earlier in the text characterizes Dona Anna's "Here it is" (*Vot on*) when Don Juan begs a kiss. *On* ("it" when the Russian noun is of masculine gender but also "he") refers to the kiss—a masculine noun in Russian—Dona Anna gives Don Juan. "Vot on" may also refer, however, to the arrival of the knight-commander, the "stone guest" whose knocking is heard simultaneously with Don Juan's kiss; thus, "Here he is."

In remarkable play with the simplest elements of the Russian language and with the simplest gestures, Pushkin accents at the end of his play the complex and dramatic linkages of love and death in the relationship of Don Juan and Dona Anna.

The phrase "Vot ona" (that is, "Here it is," here is my hand) might also refer in the subtext to the presence of Dona Anna, who, at the appearance of the commander, "falls" (*padaet*). Thus, along with "Here it is" (Don Juan's hand or the right hand of the knight-commander), the same Russian phrase might also read "Here she is" (*Vot ona*), that is, here is Anna lying on the ground. Such an association between *ona* (she, it) and "Anna" is strengthened by the fact that *ona* and "Anna" are similar-sounding words in Russian, differentiated orally only by differences in stress.

Don Juan's "Vot ona" at the end of the play echoes his use of this phrase at the *beginning* of scene 3. Immediately after his evasive but still hubristic description of how he killed Dona Anna's husband, Don Juan sees Dona Anna and remarks, "Ah! Here she is." (*A! vot ona.*) At this point, Pushkin notes, "Dona Anna enters." When one considers the intimate associations in the play between Dona Anna and death, one may say that Don Juan, seeing Dona Anna for the first time immediately after having described his murder of Dona Anna's husband, sees not merely the woman who will arouse a storm of passion in him but his nemesis, that is, "death"—but without recognizing it.

The allusion to Anna at the end of the play (*Vot ona*) suggests Don Juan's human concern for Dona Anna. Thus, "Vot ona"—"Here it is"

or "Here she is" — preludes both approaching death (the death-bearing hand of the knight-commander) and Don Juan's despairing invocation of Anna's name at the end of the play: "O Dona Anna!" — last words that now, poignantly and unambiguously, attest to his attachment not so much to himself as to Dona Anna.

The movement, then, in the development or disclosure of Don Juan's character is bracketed by two signposts — one at the beginning of scene 3 and the other at the end of scene 4: "Vot ona," "Vot ona." Though identical, each pair of words testifies to very different attitudes toward Dona Anna: in the first instance, Don Juan sees Anna as an object; in the second case, as a subject, a shift that hints at a change of consciousness in Don Juan, at least "momentarily." But the moment of change is the moment of death. Death puts an end to the individual's ever-present freedom, a freedom that in Don Juan's case has been systematically abused. It is death, and only death, that makes it possible to invoke the ancient Heraclitian law that "a man's character is his fate."

Actions have consequences, Tolstoy observed in connection with his novel *Anna Karenina*. Pushkin's *Stone Guest* is about many things, but it is also about consequences. Don Juan invites the knight-commander to his tryst with Dona Anna. However, his resoluteness, his almost buoyant defiance of a moment earlier — "I called you, and I am glad to see you" — deserts him. His final appeal to the "stone guest" — "Leave me alone, let go, let go my hand . . ." (*Ostav' menia, pusti—pusti mne ruku . . .*) — and his last words — "I'm perishing — it's the end — O, Dona Anna!" (*Ja gibnu—koncheno—O, Dona Anna!*) — no longer reflect a resolute acceptance of fate.

Don Juan's last words, however, reflect not repentance but regret and concern for Dona Anna. As such, they also undercut any last attempt on the part of the reader to reset the portrait of Don Juan in any of the old conventional moral-didactic frames. Pushkin is never the prescriptive moralist; he is a writer, in this case, a tragedian. The final image we have of the doomed Don Juan is that of a man liberated from literary convention; though a transgressor of higher law (on this point, Pushkin remains firm) this Don Juan is far from being a conventional deceiver or villain.<sup>4</sup> He is psychologically complex, multidimensional;

<sup>4</sup> Relevant here is Pushkin's remark in a letter to Prince P. A. Vyazemsky about the crowd's attitude toward Byron: "It is delighted at the discovery of any kind of nastiness. *He is petty, as we are, he is nasty, as we are!* You lie,

he is strangely appealing; at the same time, he is enigmatic and disturbing in the way anarchy combines in him with a beguiling aspect of innocence. Don Juan is, ultimately, a tragic figure.

The play's conclusion, one that presents Don Juan disappearing or descending (*provalivaiutsia*) into some netherworld, brings the reader back to the opening lines of the play: "Let's wait for night here. Ah, finally / We've reached the gates." These lines, as we have suggested, signify the fact of Don Juan's arrival, "finally," at the gates of Madrid; they also anticipate his arrival at the gates of hell.

### *A Question of Higher Law*

Alas! My God! he said, I have killed my old master, my friend,  
my brother-in-law. I am the best man in the world, and behold,  
I have just killed three men; and of these three, two were  
priests.

[Hélas! Mon Dieu! dit-il, j'ai tué mon ancien maître, mon  
ami, mon beau frère; je suis le meilleur homme du monde,  
et voilà, déjà trois hommes que je tue; et dans des trois il  
y a deux prêtres.]

—Voltaire, *Candide, or Optimism*

Scene 3 of *The Stone Guest* opens with a brief monologue by Don Juan. As the Russian scholar Dmitrii D. Blagoi observed, the monologues in Pushkin's *Little Tragedies* serve the function of psychological self-disclosure. With respect to Don Juan's monologue, however, Blagoi maintains that it has "not so much a psychological as an informational character, leading [us] on into the subsequent course of action."<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, whatever its informational function this monologue, indeed, its opening phrase, goes to the heart of Don Juan's complicated psychology and raises fundamental moral-philosophical issues that underlie Pushkin's whole play. These issues engage Pushkin's complex response to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment.

"All's for the best; having accidentally killed Don Carlos" (*Vse k luchshemu: nechaianno ubiv Don Karlosa*) are Don Juan's opening words in

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scoundrels. He is both petty and nasty—not like you,—but in a different way!" See *Pushkin o literature*, ed. I. V. Bogoslovskii (Leningrad: Academia, 1934), 85.

<sup>5</sup> D. D. Blagoi, *Tvorcheskii put' Pushkina* (Moscow: Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1967), 648.

his brief monologue. This accidental, unintentional, unexpected killing of Don Carlos (this is Don Juan's view of the matter) has annoying consequences: Don Juan is obliged to mask himself as a hermit in a monastery. However, there are compensations: he is now in a position to cast his eyes on the charming Dona Anna. In short, "All's for the best."

The phrase "All's for the best" resonates with meaning. It recalls the social-philosophical, indeed, cosmological, euphoria of the early-eighteenth-century Enlightenment, Voltaire's lethal counterattack in *Candide, or Optimism* (*Candide, ou l'Optimisme*, 1759), and the unforgettable Dr. Pangloss, who in the face of every misfortune insists that "all's for the best" (*tout est au mieux*) "in this best of all possible worlds" (*dans le meilleurs des mondes possibles*).

Voltaire is satirizing the philosophy of Gottfried Leibnitz (1646–1716) as distilled in the writings of Christian Wolff (1679–1754) and others, one that posits a divinely preestablished harmony in which everything has its place and purpose, and everything is directed toward a beneficent end. Moral evil and suffering ultimately dissolve in the universal harmony. "But Pangloss consoled them by the assurance that things could not be otherwise than they are; for, said he, all this must necessarily be for the best. As this volcano is at Lisbon, it could not be elsewhere; as it is impossible that things should not be what they are; as all is good."<sup>6</sup> Optimism here is but the obverse side of fatalism: "All Chance, Direction which thou canst not see," as Alexander Pope put it in his *Essay on Man* (1734).

With fatalism, of course, goes the rejection of the notion of responsibility or accountability. Such a fantastic and shallow outlook is quite congenial to Pushkin's Don Juan, this buoyant and blithe gallant, this happy libertine, this childlike lover who appears to live beyond good and evil. But is this outlook Pushkin's? Pushkin's approach to the question of responsibility lies at the center of his "little tragedies."

"All's for the best; having accidentally killed": Don Juan's evasion of the question of responsibility is implied in the juxtaposition of these two phrases. The problem of responsibility dissipates in the realm of

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<sup>6</sup> "[M]ais Pangloss les consola, en les assurant que les choses ne pouvaient être autrement; car, dit-il, tout ceci est ce qu'il y a de mieux; car, s'il y a un volcan à Lisbonne, il ne pouvait être ailleurs; car il est impossible que les choses ne soient pas où elles sont; car tout est bien" (chapter five).

a larger beneficent purpose. Juan's monologue closes as it opens: with a characteristic evasion of the question of responsibility.

When hard by the Escorial we met,  
He stumbled upon my sword and expired.  
Just like a dragonfly upon a pin.

[Kogda za Eskur'ialom my soshlis',  
Natknulsia mne na shpagu on i zamer,  
Kak na bulavke strekoza.]

Don Juan does not consider himself responsible for killing Dona Anna's husband; rather, he views his opponent as at fault for stumbling upon his, Juan's, sword. Juan, further, distances himself from the moral significance of his act by comparing his opponent to an insect.

The theme of self-will (*samovolie*) is raised obliquely at the play's beginning in Leporello's reference to Don Juan's decision to return to Madrid. "The exiled Don Juan has willfully turned up in Madrid." (*Don Guan iz ssylki samovol'no v Madrid iavilsia.*)

Don Juan's hubris, his moral and social declaration of independence, echoes again in the subtext of Leporello's answer to the monk's question, "Who are you? The servants of Dona Anna?" (*Kto zdes'? ne liudi l' Dony Anny?*) "No, we are our very own masters, / We are out for a stroll." (*Net, sami po sebe my gospoda, / My zdes' guliaem.*) Yet as Pushkin demonstrates in his play, no man is master in this world, and life is not a stroll.

Scene 2 is decisive in establishing the moral-philosophical context of Don Juan's singular psychology. The theme of guilt and responsibility is introduced at first, indirectly, by Laura, a character who in large measure shares the optimistic and carefree nature of Juan, but who nonetheless is not oblivious to moral questions. When Don Carlos objects to Laura's uttering the name of Don Juan, she retorts, "Am I to blame if every moment / That man's name is on my tongue?" (*A vinovata l' ia, chto pomnutno / Mne na iazyk prikhodit eto imia?*) What is spontaneous, happenstance, unpremeditated, Laura seems to suggest, is not subject to moral accountability or censure. This outlook is implicit in Don Juan's behavior and actions. The theme of the accidental, the unintentional, the unexpected is a major one in scene 2. When Don Juan arrives in Laura's apartment, he finds Don Carlos there and exclaims, "What an unexpected meeting! / Tomorrow I'm at your service" (*Vot nechaiannaia vstrecha! / Ia zavtra ves' k tvoim uslugam.*)

But the encounter and its consequences can be viewed only partly as unexpected or accidental. Don Juan, on setting forth to Laura's house unannounced, remarks, "I'll go straight in the door—and if somebody's with her, / I'll suggest that he jump out the window" (*K nei priamo v dver'—a esli kto-nibud' / Uzh u nee—proshu v okno prygnut'*). Don Juan comes looking for trouble. Characteristically, after killing Don Carlos, he puts all the blame for the event on the Spanish grandee: "What's to be done? / He asked for it himself" (*Chto delat'?* / *On sam togo khotel*). "And it is difficult to come up with any rebuttal to this [fact]," Blagoi remarks at this point in his analysis of *The Stone Guest*.<sup>7</sup> The matter is not at all that simple, however. There is much to object to in Don Juan's remark, "He asked for it himself." We have here a typical attempt on his part to sidestep personal responsibility for killing Don Carlos.<sup>8</sup>

Laura grasps the issue more subtly than does Blagoi. To Don Juan's "he asked for it himself," she replies ironically:

Ah, Don Juan,  
It's really most vexing. Your eternal tricks—  
And yet you're never to blame . . . Where have you come from now?  
Have you been here for long?

[Ekh, Don Guan,  
Dosadno, pravo. Vechnye prokazy—  
A vse ne vinovat . . . Otkuda ty?  
Davno li zdes'?]

Laura's words go to the heart of the problem of the capricious child-adult Don Juan: eternal tricks, pranks, spontaneous actions, gambling with love and death—and yet never guilty! Laura brings to the foreground Don Juan's unexpressed assumptions: chance is supposedly at fault. Yet the childish prank committed by an adult is often a stepping outside of law and limits. One may recall, too, in this connection that "tricks" (*prokazy*) are usually mischievous, even

<sup>7</sup> Blagoi, op. cit., 647.

<sup>8</sup> Another typical instance of Don Juan's moral evasiveness is his response toward the end of scene 4 to Dona Anna's question: "How many poor girls did you ruin?" Don Juan replies, "I did not love a single one of them till now"—as though not loving these girls justified his ruining their lives!

malicious. Of significance, in this connection, is that the Russian word for trick (*prokaza*) also means leprosy.

We, too, may ask Don Juan, as Laura does, Where have you come from now? Have you been here for long? That is, from what world or realm comes this man who places himself consciously or unconsciously above all accountability and law? Does Don Juan, variously called “devil,” “a real demon,” arrive with his “eternal tricks” like some fallen angel from exile? “I’ve just arrived, / And on the sly—for I’ve really not been pardoned” (*Ia tol’ko chto priekhal / I to tikhon’ko—ia ved’ ne proshchen*). Precisely, neither king nor God has pardoned this charming but devilish Don Juan.

Laura’s remarks inadvertently bring out the moral dimension of Don Juan’s tricks. She quickly drops the matter but in a manner that recalls Juan’s “All’s for the best.” She goes on:

And you immediately remembered your Laura?  
Well and good. But come now,  
I don’t believe [it]. You were passing by accidentally  
And saw the house.

[I vspomnil totchas o svoei Laure?  
Chto khorosho, to khorosho. Da polno,  
Ne veriu ia. Ty mimo shel sluchaino  
I dom uvidel.]

*Chto khorosho, to khorosho*, “Well and good,” literally, “What’s good is good.” In other words, whatever happened, the end is good. What is good for us, what brings pleasure, however, is not always ethically good. In the hierarchy of things good, esthetic good does not take precedence over ethical good. “What’s good is good” does not address the issue of the corpse on the floor, of murder, although in Dr. Pangloss’s philosophy, “It is demonstrable that things cannot be otherwise than they are, for all things having been made for some end, everything must necessarily be for the best end.”<sup>9</sup> Not in Pushkin’s view, however. Indeed, in his play, the notion that “all is good” (*tout est bien*), “all’s for the best” (*tout est au mieux*), or that man is what he is

<sup>9</sup> “Il est démontré, disait il, que les choses ne peuvent être autrement; car, tout étant fait pour une fin, tout est nécessairement pour la meilleure fin.” Chapter one.



and ought to be is not the end of the matter, but the beginning of the problem.

In Pushkin's active subtext, Laura's "I don't believe [it]" tells us more than the fact that she doesn't believe Don Juan intentionally came to see her. On the moral-religious plane neither Laura nor Don Juan believes firmly in anything except themselves; certainly, they do not "believe" in the religious sense of the word. In any case, they do not strongly believe in a world where is accountable for one's acts.

Scene 2 ends with a mutual confession of infidelity. Don Juan asks Laura how many times she has been unfaithful to him. "What about you?" she asks in return. "Tell me . . . No, we'll talk it over later" (*Skazhi . . . Net, posle peregovorim*), he replies as the scene concludes. What Don Juan wants, feels, desires comes first; other matters come later, if at all. In the presence of the dead Don Carlos, both Don Juan and Laura make love. Significantly, the words "We'll talk it over later" are immediately followed by the phrase that opens scene 3: "All's for the best." That notion is the underpinning of all of Don Juan's actions and behavior.

In fact, Don Juan is not beyond good and evil, either objectively or subjectively, as the play's conclusion demonstrates. Nor is the "improviser of a love song" — one of Don Juan's redeeming disguises — always an improviser. In his monologue at the beginning of scene 3 he wonders how to address Dona Anna, but then decides:

Whatever comes into my head  
That's what I'll say without preparation,  
Like the improviser of a love song.

[Chto v golovu pridet,  
To i skazhu, bez predugotavlén'ia,  
Improvizatorom liubovnoi pesni...]

All the ambiguity of Juan's character is present in this remark: he is an improviser by nature, an impromptu musician of love who bends to the winds of chance. Yet the improvisation can also be a calculated one. With Don Juan, sincerity and guile go hand in hand: "I'll strike up a conversation with her; it's time" (*Vpushchusia v razgovory s nei; pora*). Time for what? Time to entangle, time to seduce, time to love.

"All's for the best," then, is pivotal in the play: it defines Don Juan's underlying amoral outlook; it inaugurates the final movement toward catastrophe in scenes 3 and 4 of *The Stone Guest*, episodes in



which Don Juan challenges the statue of the knight-commander and makes his last gamble with love and death, his final and fatal play for unlimited freedom.

It is clear, however, that Pushkin, like E. T. A. Hoffmann in his novella *Don Juan*, breaks decisively with the traditional perception of Don Juan as mere libertine, a cynical and godless bon vivant. Like Hoffmann, Pushkin posits a complex psychology in Don Juan, one in which the sensual and spiritual elements are contiguous with one another. While sharing Hoffmann's perception of Don Juan's nature, however, Pushkin generally dispenses with the romantic idealization of Don Juan as a superior being hoping to "still through love the [higher] longing that tore at his heart."<sup>10</sup> Pushkin replaces the suggestive but still flimsy romantic and melodramatic paraphernalia with a profound and quite realistic consideration of Don Juan as a complex moral-psychological and cultural type.

"What if Dona Anna had been destined by heaven to let Don Juan recognize the divine nature in him?" asks Hoffmann, and he answers, "Too late."<sup>11</sup> But does the tragedy of Pushkin's Don Juan consist in the fact that he was snatched away at the very moment he was reborn, that is, when he was on the threshold of a new life? There is no question that Pushkin's Don Juan *feels* reborn in his encounter with Dona Anna, but it is a feeling or value he experiences only momentarily—"the value of momentary life" (*tsenu mgnovennoi zhizni*). His tragedy is not that he meets a potential savior, Dona Anna (his "angel," his "goddess," his "heavenly beatitude") when it is too late;<sup>12</sup> this puts the matter back

<sup>10</sup> "Here on earth there is really nothing that so elevates man in his innermost nature as love . . . Little wonder, then, that Don Juan hoped to still through love the [higher] longing that tore at his heart and that the devil here flung the noose around his neck" (*Es gibt hier auf Erden wohl nichts, was den Menschen in seiner innigsten Natur so hinaufsteigert, als die Liebe . . . Was Wunder also, daß Don Juan in der Liebe die Sehnsucht, die seine Brust zerreit, zu stillen hoffte, und daß der Teufel hier ihm die Schlinge über den Hals warf?*). E. T. A. Hoffmann, "Don Juan. Eine fabelhafte Begebenheit die sich mit einem Reisenden Enthusiasten zugetragen," in *Fantasie und Nachtstücke* (Munich: Winkler-Verlag, 1960), 75.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>12</sup> The Russian poet Anna Akhmatova held this view. She writes: "Don Juan's last exclamation . . . 'I'm perishing—it's the end—Oh, Dona Anna' convinces us that he really has been reborn at the time of his meeting with Dona Anna;

into that realm of accident and contingency that is so congenial to Don Juan.

The tragedy of Don Juan is that he *is* Don Juan, that he cannot escape himself. He is forever moving in and out of his multiple disguises and identities, forever gambling, challenging limits, laws, conventions, death itself, in the pursuit of a limitless and illusory freedom, forever experiencing the deceptive self-renewal of the gambler in his momentary triumphs.

What the English critic D. S. Savage has said of the gambler in Dostoevsky's novel *The Gambler* may be said of Don Juan as well, "The seduction which draws his soul is that of an ultimate irrational and groundless freedom which, containing equally within itself every possibility, is devoid of the power to actualize any of these possibilities and can give birth only to an ineluctable necessity."<sup>13</sup> Challenging the ultimate necessity, death, Don Juan brings death to himself; positing a fatalistic universe ("all's for the best"), Don Juan in the end succumbs to fate, to the grip of the "stony right hand" of the knight-commander. He suggests evasively that fate had something other in store for him than beatitude: "Fate decreed something else for me." (*Sud'ba sulila mne inoe*). But Juan, obsessed with death, "relentlessly courting his own death,"<sup>14</sup> has freely brought about that fate through his own actions. His tragedy, again, is that he cannot escape his nature. That nature has much that redeems it. Yet the very elements that redeem it, such as his permanent moral adolescence, hasten his movement as an actual adult to a tragic end.

The ideal of a life without constraints or limits is emotional and moral utopia: the womb, the paradise of the child, the happy world of the playground. Here, indeed, is the "best of all possible worlds," a world seemingly without beginning or end, outside of time, and free, at least ideally, of any perception of causality or consequences.

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the whole tragedy consists in the fact that at this moment he loves and is happy, but instead of salvation that is within an arm's reach he is struck down (*gibel' prishla*)." Akhmatova, "Kamennyi gost' Pushkina," in *Pushkin. Issledovaniia i materialy*, 2 (Moscow-Leningrad: 1958), 190.

<sup>13</sup> See D. S. Savage, "Dostoevski: The Idea of *The Gambler*," in *The Sewanee Review*, 57 (1950): 281-298.

<sup>14</sup> See Barbara Heldt Monter, "Love and Death in Pushkin's *Little Tragedies*," *Russian Literature Triquarterly*, 3 (Spring 1972): 210.

Noteworthy in this connection is Don Juan's response to Dona Anna's willingness to meet with him again: "I am happy! . . . I am happy as a child! . . . I am happy! / I am ready to sing, I am ready joyfully to embrace the whole world" (*Ia schastliv! . . . Ia schastliv, kak rebenok! . . . Ia schastliv / Ia pet' gotov, ia rad ves' mir obniat'*). The child-lover Don Juan is ready to embrace Dona Anna as he would embrace the world. Yet Juan's childlike happiness is a regressive and impossible dream; it can never be realized in lasting love; or if realized momentarily in passive childlike adoration and reverence, it will be quickly replaced by the old and restless search for new conquests and stronger satisfactions.

Yet for all the regressive elements that stimulate Don Juan's passion for Dona Anna, one cannot deny the intensity of his feelings for her in the final scene of the play, that is, in that last encounter when his passion for Dona Anna, one that is manifestly physical as well as platonic, leads him to confession. Pushkin calls into question not so much Don Juan's feelings of the moment, however, but the permanence of the change he experiences within him.

Dona Anna is the apotheosis of Don Juan's quest, one in which love and death are intertwined. "Well? What? What do you want?" Dona Anna asks Don Juan early in their acquaintance. "Death," he replies. "Oh, let me die at your feet" (*Nu? Chto? Chego vy trebuet? / Smerti. / O pust' umru seichas u vashikh nog*). Don Juan utters a romantic cliché, yet one it gives expression to a nature that finds congenial the contiguity of love and death. If we are to speak of a permanent change in Don Juan's inner life, then it is only in the sense of the phrase *death and transfiguration*. The dynamics of Don Juan's nature allow for no other denouement. Don Juan's change can only be anchored in death: here is his final metamorphosis; here is where the true unmasking of Don Juan takes place.

"Poor Inéz," Don Juan remarks in scene 1 of a woman who in her "strange" beauty, her contiguity with death, anticipates Dona Anna. "Well, there were others after her," says Leporello. "That's the truth," replies Don Juan. "And if we go on living, there will be others," remarks Leporello. "That too," Don Juan replies. His "truth" here is not only bravado; it is, in Pushkin's conception, an intuition of his own true nature.

Pushkin's own attitude toward Don Juan is ambivalent. He is drawn to the "improviser of love," the charming, direct, ebullient man of the Renaissance; the life-loving rebel who stands up against the stony, life-destroying prescriptive morality of the Middle Ages; the

adult-child whose god is freedom and who recognizes no laws except those of his own nature. Yet precisely here, the other side of Pushkin's Don Juan emerges: the man of the Enlightenment; the confused child of nature who took the philosophers at their word when they made a cult of nature; the gambler who stakes his own life upon chance and therefore has no qualms about sacrificing others; the man for whom life is a series of chance encounters and "eternal tricks"; the hero for whom chance is fate.

On the narrative historical plane of Pushkin's play, Don Juan is a man of the Renaissance; but he is also a hero of his time, a product of the Enlightenment in his moral-philosophical makeup. Pushkin's attitude, as tragedian, toward Don Juan is one of fascination and apprehension, affection and gloom. His Don Juan is in part a joyous and liberating answer to a restrictive and constrictive past; like the Enlightenment, however, Don Juan embodies the confused answers of the age to the questions raised; he is unable to distinguish between the demands of liberated individual consciousness and those of the community, between the legitimate rights of personality and the limits of self-will. Pushkin's *Stone Guest* was an attempt to maintain a middle ground while at the same time a recognition that for the Don Juans no such middle ground existed.

Pushkin's complex attitude toward his Don Juan might be summed up in two lines of Dona Anna at the end of the tragedy, lines that embody affection and understanding, and at the same time, a recognition of ineluctable necessity. Responding to Juan's astonished question, "So there's no hatred in your heavenly soul, Dona Anna?" Dona Anna responds: "Ah, would that I could hate you!/Nonetheless, we must part." (*Akh esli b vas mogla ia nenavidet'!/Odnako zh nadobno rasstat'sia nam.*)

## TURGENEV'S "KNOCK... KNOCK...KNOCK!..": THE RIDDLE OF THE STORY<sup>1</sup>

We regard each other quite indifferently, that is, when we are in a good mood . . . We do not know how to love or respect one another, we have not developed within us an attentiveness to human beings. Long ago it was said about us, and quite correctly: "We are shamefully indifferent to good and evil."

—Maxim Gorky

As we know, even such an appreciative critic of Ivan Turgenev's writings as Pavel V. Annenkov (1813–1887) placed the Russian writer's "Knock... Knock... Knock!.. A Study" (*Stuk.... stuk.... Stuk...! Studiia*, 1871) among his "weak pieces."<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, "Knock... Knock... Knock!.." belongs to the strongest works of Turgenev and of Russian literature. Complex in its design and brilliant in artistic execution, it is a work of psychological and philosophical depth.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published as "Turgenev's 'Knock!...Knock!...Knock!..': The Riddle of the Narrator," *Transactions of the Association of Russian-American Scholars in the U.S.A.*, Vol. 28 (1996-1997), 1-24.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of Annenkov to M. M. Stasiulevich, May 1, 1871. Cited in the commentary to Turgenev's story in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v dvadtsati vos'mi tomakh*, 28 vols. (Moscow-Leningrad: 1960–1968), 10: 501. Turgenev's works and letters (*pis'ma*) are numbered separately in this 28 volume edition; letters will be referred to as "PSS, *Pis'ma*," followed by volume and page numbers.

<sup>3</sup> Mikhail P. Alekseev's essay "Turgenev and Marlinsky" examines the work in the literary-historical context of the 1830s. See "Turgenev i Marlinskii," in *Tvorcheskii put' Turgeneva. Sbornik statei*, ed. N. L. Brodskii (Petrograd: 1923). Alekseev views Ridel as an autobiographical figure. He does not recognize, however, that Ridel's point of view toward Teglyov, and in general, toward the issues raised by Teglyov's drama, are not those of the mature artist Turgenev. In her discussion of the story, L. I. Poliakova follows in the footsteps of Alekseev who sees Teglyov as a "victim of literary influence," that is, of A. A. Bestuzhev (pseud. Marlinsky), first of all. She also emphasizes autobiographical elements in the story. "Glancing back at the past," she writes, "Turgenev, probably, criticized himself, a passionate champion

Turgenev several times stressed the importance of his story, though not without his usual admixture of apology and self-deprecation where his works were concerned. Although he found it "a bit awkward to be defending one's own things," he nonetheless voiced strong objections to A. P. Filosofova's characterization in 1874 of his story as an "absurdity." "Just what is it, you ask . . . Here's what it is: As strong a study as possible of *Russian suicide*, something that almost always is performed out of pride, narrow-mindedness with an admixture of mysticism and fatalism." Turgenev writes that his "study" may not have succeeded, but nonetheless insists that it was both "right and legitimate" to examine "purely psychic (not political and not social) questions."<sup>4</sup>

Three years later, Turgenev offered a similar defense of his story in a letter to S. K. Briullova. She had characterized Turgenev's story as one of Turgenev's "insignificant trifles." "Do you know," Turgenev replied, "I consider this piece not as one that succeeded—it was, perhaps, weak and inadequate in execution—but as one of the most serious that I have ever written." He offers substantially the same summary of the story's theme he had given to Filosofova and adds, "This is the study of a suicide, precisely a Russian one, contemporary,

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and admirer [in his youth] of Marlinsky, Benediktov, Kukolnik, and lashed out at his own weaknesses." (See L. I. Poliakova, *Povesti I.S. Turgeneva 70-s godov* (Kiev: 1983), 109. Poliakova's analysis does not extend, however, either to a discussion of the narrator, Ridel, a central character in the story's ideological framework, or to the story's rich philosophical content. In one of her studies on Turgenev, Marina Ledkovsky accents the satiric dimension of "Knock... Knock...Knock!.." adding, "Despite the biting mockery, Turgenev achieves in this story, through the clever blending of satire with the theme of forebodings and with skillful nature descriptions, a general effect of the inexorability of fate." See Ledkovsky, *The Other Turgenev: from Romanticism to Symbolism* (Würzburg: 1973), 107. Frank F. Seeley defines Turgenev's story as a "character study." Like Alekseev, he accents the autobiographical nature of the story: "During Turgenev's student years in St. Petersburg, his brother Nikolai was in fact a junior officer in a Guards field artillery regiment. Turgenev will have visited him in camp, and Teglyov no doubt derives from one of Nikolai's fellow officers." Seeley implicitly identifies the author Turgenev with Ridel. He focuses mainly on the psychological features of Teglyov. (Seeley, *Turgenev: A Reading of his Fiction* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 277–280).

<sup>4</sup> Letter of August 18, 1874. PSS, *Pis'ma* 10:282.

vain, obtuse, superstitious. He again defends the appropriateness of its subject for art."<sup>5</sup>

"Knock...Knock...Knock!.." is far from being "une bagatelle," as Turgenev himself capriciously dubbed his work on its appearance.<sup>6</sup> What is more, his defense of his work in the above-cited letters, indeed, his description of its very theme, is a limited one. The work is far more than a "study" of a suicide, though on this level alone it is fascinating. On its deepest level, "Knock... Knock... Knock!.." treats the classical issues of freedom and determinism, character and fate, the limits of will and the imperatives of responsibility. It is concerned with man's age-old passion for certainty in an uncertain and unpredictable world; his effort to define his relationship to an essentially indifferent nature and universe. Turgenev posits a world that lies beyond the reach of absolute human control or mastery, a world in which the play of chance, proverbial "fate," is ever-present and can never be discounted, but a world in which responsible human behavior and action is, therefore, all the more essential. "People without firm character," Turgenev wrote in a letter of June 10, 1856, to E. E. Lambert, "like to invent a 'fate' for themselves; this relieves them from the necessity of possessing their own will and from responsibility toward themselves."<sup>7</sup> Turgenev is critical, then, not only of those who ignore or discount the importance of chance on events and presume that everything is in human hands, but of those who invest "fate" or external circumstances with too much "significance." Both extremes, Turgenev suggests, result in a renunciation of human responsibility.

The sense of uncertainty, of questions that have no definite answers, and of answers that provide no absolute feeling of security, is embodied in the title of Turgenev's story, "Knock... Knock... Knock!.." The sound of knocking on a door is followed, conventionally, by the opening of a door, a reassuring "answer"; somebody presents himself and the mystery of the knocking is resolved. In the world of "Knock...

<sup>5</sup> Letter of January 4, 1877. PSS, *Pis'ma* 12:58.

<sup>6</sup> Letter of August 17, 1871. PSS, *Pis'ma* 9:126. Turgenev wrote this letter in French. In a letter of December 15, 1871, to Ludwig Pietsch, the German translator of his work, Turgenev again writes deprecatingly about his story: "Dieses kleine Ding ['Toc, toc'] hatte eigentlich gar kein Recht auf eine Übersetzung" (PSS, *Pis'ma* 9:181).

<sup>7</sup> PSS, *Pis'ma* 2:364.



Knock...Knock!.." nobody is standing outside the door. Or put another way, "Nobody" knocks. The ellipses that follow each knock in the story's title appropriately give expression to a sense of suspense, anxiety and even dread, the kind that is evoked in Teglyov by the uncanny sound produced by Ridel's drifting hand as it accidentally strikes a hollow spot in a beam.<sup>8</sup> The knocks themselves have a simple explanation, as do other mysterious and seemingly inexplicable occurrences that bedevil the life and mind of Teglyov. However, the philosophical questions raised by the knocks—What, in a phrase, is "out there"? How certain or absolute can our knowledge of reality be? And what certainty or security can man find in the world?—have no simple answer. Turgenev is singularly twentieth century in his disinclination to offer social, scientific or religious assurances to his readers. He affirms that reality is not absolutely knowable or predictable and that to explain a phenomenon is not necessarily to know it or to be able constructively to relate to it. Turgenev, finally, suggests that "modern" man, however richly endowed he may be with the powers of reason and science, faces essentially the same uncertain reality as did his so-called primitive counterpart as he looked out on the unknown world beyond his enclave.

## I

"We all settled down in a circle, and Alexander Vasilevich Ridel, a good friend of ours (his name was German, but he was Russian through and through), began as follows: 'I am going to tell you a story, gentlemen, of something that happened to me in the 1830s . . . about forty years ago, as you can see. I will be brief, and you must not interrupt me.'"<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The title of Turgenev's story "Knock... Knock... Knock!.." has great literary resonance. We may recall moments in Shakespeare that are marked by the same element of uncertainty and dread that is evoked by Turgenev's title: the opening words of *Hamlet*, "Who's there?" or the line from *Macbeth*: "(Knock) Knock, knock, knock! Who's there, i' th' name of Beelzebub?" (II, iii.) "Knock, knock, knock! Who's there" recurs in Turgenev's story in section 7.

<sup>9</sup> Citations from Turgenev's text are from "Knock... Knock.... Knock!..: A Study," in Ivan Turgenev, *First Love and Other Tales*. Translated with an introduction by David Magarshak (New York: Norton, 1988). For purposes of analysis I have emended Magarshak's translation.



Ridel tells the story of his friend Teglyov, a limited, superstitious, insecure, but headstrong man of the 1830s who dreamed of a high Napoleonic “vocation” and ended by committing suicide out of guilt after learning of the death of a poor woman, Masha, whom he loved but had declined to marry. Ridel’s narrative focuses on the last twenty-four hours of Teglyov’s life, a time, July 20, St. Elijah’s Day, when the two acquaintances, by chance, camp together in a hut in the country.

The age-old image of a group of people sitting in a circle sets the stage for the story and its mythic concerns about man and his world. Ridel’s tale, however, has a very precise historical focus: the Russian Romantic literary-cultural landscape of the 1830s, one that he limns in the opening paragraph of the story. What can be inferred from Ridel’s detached and patronizing sketch of this period is the vantage point or point of view from which he surveys the romantic landscape of “forty years ago”: the rationalistic-positivistic world of the 1870s. These are the ideological heights from which Ridel considers the events of the story and his relation to Teglyov. What becomes increasingly apparent to the reader is that the positions from which Ridel judges the events of his tale and its protagonist, Teglyov, are not entirely those of the artist Turgenev, the author of “Knock... Knock... Knock!..” In this story, as opposed to Ridel’s tale, Turgenev has a double focus: Teglyov and the frame-narrator, Ridel.

Ridel’s brisk, somewhat peremptory remark—“I shall be brief, and you must not interrupt me”—anticipates a certain rectilinear pattern of thinking on his part. His injunction comes to the reader’s mind more than once in the course of a narrative that evokes increasing questions with respect both to Ridel’s understanding of Teglyov and his perception of his own capricious role in his friend’s drama. Ridel is an excellent storyteller, but unlike Turgenev, a poor analyst of the problem content of his narrative. Indeed, the inquiring reader increasingly questions the reliability of Ridel’s narrative.

The story, in short, is a box with a false bottom: the reader who mistakes Ridel for the artist Turgenev must inevitably be led astray. Such was the case of M. P. Alekseev who writes in an article on Turgenev and Marlinsky that the story “is put into the mouth of the narrator of the tale, Ridel, while of course, it belongs to Turgenev himself . . . We have Turgenev’s own definitive testimony that the story is narrated in his person.” Alekseev at this point cites a letter of Turgenev to I. P. Borisov dated October 13, 1870, “Meanwhile I dashed off another

small little tale under the title of 'Knock... Knock...Knock!..' Likewise a reminiscence of [my] youth."<sup>10</sup>

Without doubt Turgenev in his story was reaching back into the literary and personal experiences of his youth. It is possible, too, that Ridel embodies certain elements of character of the *young* Turgenev. One must not confuse, however, Ridel's interpretation of Teglyov and his role in Teglyov's drama with the artistic perspective of the mature Turgenev. The artist stands on a far higher level than does Ridel, and indeed, makes a judgment of him, and to the extent that Ridel may resemble the young Turgenev, the young Turgenev as well.

"But no more philosophizing . . .," Ridel remarks after a brief literary-historical preface introducing his listeners to the romantic world of A. A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky (1797–1837) and Mikhail Lermontov (1814–1841) in the 1830s. "I promised to tell a story." In fact, throughout his tale Ridel is unable or unwilling to "philosophize," that is, to look deeply into the meaning of his narrative or to address the questions arising from Teglyov's drama. He leaves it to the reader to do his own philosophizing, that is, to interpret Ridel's tale. There can be no understanding of the story, however, without taking note of the misleading and evasive character of the narratorial voice.

The reliability of narratorial discourse is one of Turgenev's central concerns in his story. The question is raised by Ridel himself with respect to Teglyov. "He was a poor narrator," he remarks of Teglyov after recalling Teglyov's account of his ill-fated affair with Masha—an account delivered in a style that was "unnatural, unnecessary, and indeed, false" and marked by a propensity for extravagant rhetoric. "I was still very young and inexperienced at the time and I did not know that the habit of expressing oneself rhetorically, that falsity of intonation and manner, can become so much a part of a man that he is no longer able to rid himself of it: it is a kind of curse." Yet Ridel's justified skepticism may be redirected at himself. Is he himself a good narrator? Is it only the naïve, confused, and strained rhetoric of banal romantic consciousness that can mar the art of storytelling or conceal and distort the truth? Or may narrative discourse also be marred by the rhetoric of a self-confident and rectilinear "realism," the kind that boldly recites the alphabet of reality, but cannot read its message?

<sup>10</sup> See M. P. Alekseev, "Turgenev i Marlinskii," 170. The citation from Turgenev may be found in PSS, *Pis'ma* 7:285.

Immediately after criticizing Teglyov as a storyteller, Ridel recalls a woman who had once spoken to him about the death of her son with such theatrical anguish and such "boundless" grief that he could only think: "How affected and untruthful this grand lady is." Yet Ridel recalls a week or so after this incident, she went mad: "After that I became much more careful in my judgments and have had much less confidence in my own impressions." Ridel's reflection serves to strengthen the reader's confidence in his reliability as narrator. Yet by the end of his tale, it is clear that forty years after the events of his story, Ridel has not yet absorbed the important lesson he purportedly learned in his youth.

An analysis of Ridel's tale suggests that narrative distortion, lies, fabrication, even fantasy, may be entirely devoid of artificial gesture and other melodramatic signs of romantic stress and strain; indeed, it may take the form of an outwardly objective, sober, and "scientific" realism.

Events move with Aristotelian swiftness in the last twenty-four hours of Teglyov's life. Yet while classical Aristotelian drama presumably excludes chance and accident, Teglyov's drama is marked by an uncanny grouping of chance incidents and coincidences: the meeting between Ridel and Teglyov takes place by chance (Ridel's brother happens to be away); it occurs scarcely two weeks after Teglyov's break with Masha and her threat to kill herself; it occurs shortly after Teglyov had been reprimanded by the commanding officer of his regiment for a proposal he had submitted for improvements of parts to the gun carriage.

By chance, the events take place on July 20, St. Elijah's Day. "It's St. Elijah's Day—my name day . . .," observes Teglyov. "It is always a very difficult time for me." Again, by chance, a heavy fog lays over the landscape on this day—a fog that "put us into the mood for the fantastic." By chance, Ridel strikes a hollow beam that produces a weird sound. By chance, precisely at this moment, a voice in the fog calls out "Iliusha" (the affectionate diminutive form for Il'ia). By chance, Teglyov's girlfriend Masha, had indeed died unbeknownst to Teglyov. Finally, but for the chance foggy night, Ridel might have found Teglyov and prevented him from committing suicide.

Chance, by definition, irrational and incomprehensible to mind and logic, plays an overwhelming role in the tragedy of Teglov. Is Turgenev, then, setting up for the reader a "fate tragedy," the kind in which the individual is a victim of pure accident, a helpless pawn, or

a victim of the gods?<sup>11</sup> The accumulation of accidental or chance factors in the last twenty-four hours of Teglyov's life would seem to support such a view. Yet the causal factors entering into Teglyov's tragedy are varied and complex and include most decidedly Teglyov's own strange and stubborn character. Highly superstitious, predisposed by temperament, culture, and personal experience to a belief in fate and in his own special destiny; burdened by an agonizing sense of guilt over his treatment of Masha, Teglyov, it may be argued, wills his own fate, that is, turns chance into fate. His guilty conscience *organizes* the knocks, the whispered words "Iliusha," the death of Masha and other happenings into a pattern that validates his self-destructive course of action. He obstinately resists all rational explanations of the knocks offered later on by Ridel; he refuses to accept the doctor's statement that the real cause of Masha's death was cholera and not suicide.

Teglyov is a victim of his own obsession. "Homer's inventive gift," writes Erich Auerbach, "carries within it . . . the conviction that every character is at the root of his own particular fate and that he will inevitably incur the fate that is appropriate to him." "The fate of Achilles is Achillean."<sup>12</sup> So too, descending from the grandeur of Achilles to the miseries of Teglyov, one might say that the fate of Teglyov is—"Teglyovian." He brings his fate down upon himself. In this event there is more than an extraordinary accumulation of chance occurrences. Here, in the words of Heraclitus, "a man's character is his fate."

Yet Turgenev by no means excludes the importance of chance in Teglyov's fate, in particular, the chance factor of Ridel and his actions. Like Pechorin in Lermontov's "Fatalist," Ridel plays an important role in laying the groundwork for Teglyov's suicide. Ridel's superstitious view that the "hand of fate really did weigh heavily on this man," that "a tragic fate of which he had himself no suspicion really weighed on him," masks both literally and figuratively his own "hand" in the drama of Teglyov. Noteworthy in this connection is Ridel's almost

<sup>11</sup> "Fate tragedy," Alfred Cary Schlesinger has observed, "should show, if it is to be clear and distinctive, that events occur in spite of human character, and that human action has no important results." See Schlesinger, *Boundaries of Dionysus: Athenian Foundations for the Theory of Tragedy*. Martin Classical Lectures, 17 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 24.

<sup>12</sup> Auerbach, *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*, translated by Ralph Manheim (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971 [original in German, 1929]), 2.

complete silence on the extraordinary play of chance in general in the last twenty-four hours of Teglyov's life. His silence is understandable; any serious speculation on the chance factor entering into Teglyov's tragedy, indeed, any serious discussion of the theme of chance and responsibility, freedom and fate, would have led Ridel inescapably to himself, beginning with the mysterious night that he spent with Teglyov and his knocks on a hollow beam.

When Ridel finally confesses to Teglyov that he was responsible for the mysterious knocks, Teglyov calmly replies that he, Ridel, had "nothing to do with it," that "something else" had moved his hand. For Teglyov, that "something else" is a supernatural sign from Masha manifesting itself *through the hand* of Ridel. Turgenev, of course, disallows any notion of a supernatural force. But the matter does not rest here. Something else does move the hand of Ridel. That "something"—a strange tangle of causality and character—Turgenev analyzes with great care in the scene leading up to the knocking and in the episode of the knocking itself.

## 2

The origin of Ridel's knocking, at least of the random energy that produced the accidental movement of his hand, would seem to be found, first of all, in the fog itself: a fog that envelops the action of the preceding twenty-four hours. The night that both men spent together in storytelling was both objectively and subjectively disorienting. "Everything moved about, became mixed and wrapped up in a strange way; distant objects seemed to be close and close objects distant, large things small and small things large . . . everything became bright and blurred." "The fantastic appearance of that night had its effect on us; it put us into the mood for the fantastic," Ridel recalls. It carried Ridel and his friend Teglyov "into a fairyland kingdom."

Teglyov's fantastic stories, rising from the depths of a deeply superstitious nature and reflecting his own agitated state of mind over Masha, add powerfully to a moment already pregnant with mystery. "Whether his stories had excited my nerves or this strange night excited my blood, I do not know—only I could not fall asleep." Affected by the night and Teglyov's stories, restless and unable to sleep, Ridel's mind yields to a fragmented state of drifting and aimless thought. He lay with his eyes open, "thinking intensely, God only knows about what, of the most senseless trifles." It is in this empty, restless, indeed

haphazard state of mind and body that Ridel, "turning from side to side . . . stretched out [his] hand . . ." One of his fingers "knocked against one of the beams of the wall. A faint but hollow, and as it were, drawn-out sound was heard . . . I must have come down on a hollow place (*popal na pustoe mesto*), I accidentally came down upon a spot which possessed acoustic properties" (*popal na akusticheskuiu zhilku*). The verb *popal* (came down on, fell), one might note in passing, underscores the aimless passive character of Ridel's activity.

The first knock is accidental, the result of a random gesture: its genesis lies in the fog, in the agitated state of mind produced by Teglyov's stories as well as in the chance presence of a real "hollow spot" in a beam. Figuratively speaking, Ridel's hand strikes one of those empty or "hollow" spots that are endlessly present in the everyday flow of life. The second and the third knocks, however, are no longer accidental; they are deliberate, experimental, the result of an elemental, almost scientific curiosity. "I knocked for a second time with my finger . . . this time on purpose. The sound was repeated. I knocked again." At this point, Teglyov raises his head and inquires about the knocking. Ridel, however—his hand lay hidden under the bedclothes—"pretended to be asleep." Suddenly, Ridel recalls, the "desire came over me to make fun of my fatal companion. Anyway, I could not sleep" (*Vse ravno — mne ne spalos'*). It is noteworthy that Ridel describes the impulse to make fun of his "fatal" comrade as something that "came over me" (*mne prishla*). Significant and symbolic is his use of the impersonal and passive verbal form. Ridel evades the question of judgment and responsibility. A moment later, he officially wakes up, but stubbornly continues to pursue his practical joke: "knock... knock...knock! Knock... knock... knock!"

Ridel's curiosity and experimentation, pure and disinterested on his first accidental discovery of the acoustic qualities of the hollow beam, now take on the character of deliberate *play*. The "empty spot" with its unexpected acoustic properties turns out no longer to be a beam but a human being. Thus, we may read Ridel's conscious or unconscious train of thought—how will Teglyov respond to the knocks? What are his acoustic qualities? Ridel's interests have subtly moved into the realm of deliberate psychological experiment, the kind that preoccupies Pechorin in *A Hero of Our Time* (1837–1840) and later Dostoevsky's antiheroes in *Notes from the Underground* (1864) and "A Gentle One: A Fantastic Story" (1876). Ridel's playful joke arises, in part at least, out of boredom and indifference. "Anyway (*vse ravno*),



I could not sleep." Precisely, *vse ravno*, literally "everything is equal," "it's all the same," "nothing makes any difference."

Ridel's joke, half rooted in chance, belongs to the realm of human caprice or play, the first cousin of chance. His bit of play consists of a deliberate implementation in the social realm of a random piece of chance. His character, as in the analogous case of Teglyov, wills chance into fate. In moral-psychological terms, Ridel is engaged in the same kind of play, challenge to fate, interest in domination, or will to power, that we find in the more overtly primitive Teglyov. In Ridel's case, however, this will to power is not accompanied by any stated ideological superstructure of "superstition," any pronounced worldview, any preoccupation with, or belief in, the mysterious "significance" of chance or fate. In various ways (his gambles on the ice floes or with cards), the pathetic Teglyov, inflated with his ego, challenges the status quo, tests himself; he would be happy to impose his will on reality, to discover his Napoleonic "vocation." Ridel, on the other hand, consciously or unconsciously seeks to impose his will directly on Teglyov. In both young men, we discover a curious unity of character, despite their apparent outward differences. In a real sense, indeed, we may speak of them as "doubles."

Caprice, the desire to play pranks is linked with the impact of the fantastic night and a restless head full of "the most senseless trifles." Yet it is also connected with basic traits of Ridel's personality. Just as the fate of Teglyov cannot be explained entirely in terms of the external play of chance and coincidence (inclination and choice is also involved), so Ridel's play cannot be explained entirely by the fog or aimless state of mind or by the chance presence of a hollow spot in the beam. Chance and choice are both involved. Ridel, in short, brings something of his own, a surplus of himself, to the given happening, to the chance configuration of events, just as he brings something of his own, his subjectivity, to his seemingly objective and matter-of-fact narrative forty years later. As in the case of Teglyov, Ridel's character has broad cultural and social dimensions, though like an unexcavated archeological site, they remain largely hidden to the naked eye, but not to Turgenev's. Ridel, like Teglyov, is a hero of his time, or one ought to say, a hero of "two different times"; in him, two different yet contiguous epochs in Russian history (contiguous on the moral-psychological plane) are joined: the romantic epoch of the 1830s and the rationalistic age of so-called Russian Enlightenment of the 1860s. What unites the two Ridel's is his weak sense of right and wrong.

Lermontov signaled the pervasiveness of this mentality in his poem "Meditation" ("Duma," 1838):

Bogaty my, edva iz kolybeli,  
 Oshibkami ottsov i pozdnim ikh umom,  
 I zhizn' uzh nas tomit, kak rovnyi put' bez tseli.  
 Kak pir na prazdnike chuzhom.  
 K dobru i zlu postydno ravnodushny . . .

[Scarcely out of our cradle, we are rich  
 In the mistakes of our fathers and their belated wisdom,  
 And life already oppresses us, like a level path without a goal,  
 Like a banquet on an alien holiday.  
 We are shamefully indifferent to good and evil . . .]

The moral-philosophical implications of the episode of the "knocks" are clear. On the one hand, the episode suggests the impossibility of absolute control over nature or reality: the only predictable thing that one can say about chance is that it is unpredictable. On the other hand, the episode of the knocking indicates that the so-called fatality of chance, where human behavior and actions enter into the picture, is relative. Much, though not all, depends upon our receptivity to the play of chance. Man enjoys a measure of freedom; he often has the option of accepting or rejecting, struggling with, or yielding to, chance. As Shakespeare's Cassius cautiously puts it, "Men at some time are masters of their fate" (*Julius Caesar* I:ii).

Ridel exercises his freedom when he wills chance into fate. He did not desire evil. Yet his *play* and long delay in explaining the source of the knocks, triggers an uncontrollable chain reaction in the morbid consciousness of Teglyov. Turgenev conveys the dread potential of evil-unloosed in a striking image, one which might serve as a metaphor for the action in story. Hearing the knocking, Ridel observes, "[Teglyov] kept turning his face to the window, and then to the door. Really it was difficult to say where the sound came from: it seemed to fly around the room, as though gliding along the walls." As the events in the story demonstrate, the demon of chance, once having broken loose, cannot be easily brought under control again, if at all.

### 3

"Knock... knock... knock!.. 'Who's there?' cried Teglyov. 'Come in!' No one, of course, answered." Whatever the philosophical or metaphysical



significance of the unanswered knocks in this episode, the ethical meaning of this moment is clear: What is lacking in Ridel, both the young Ridel who is Teglyov's companion and the older man who recalls the tale, is the capacity to relate warmly and compassionately to his fellow man, to "answer" to his needs. "No one, of course, answered," Ridel recalls. Why—"of course" (*razumeetsia*)? It is *razum* (reason) hidden in the Russian phrase that explains why nobody answered.

"I grew fond of him," Ridel says of his relation to Teglyov, "I grew fond of him, first, because I myself was quite an unsociable fellow, and I saw in him a kindred spirit (*sobrat*); and second, because he was a good-natured fellow, and a very simple-hearted one at bottom. He inspired a sort of pity in me . . ." Ridel's pity, however, is patronizing; it is not expressed in brotherly solicitude.

The young Ridel considered Teglyov's behavior toward his fiancée, Masha, to be inconsistent and strange: he loved Masha, yet he abandoned her. "Why, then, did you not marry her?" Ridel asks. "Have you fallen out of love with her?" "No, I still love her passionately!" exclaims the distraught Teglyov. Ridel is struck here by Teglyov's irrationality. He is lacking, however, in any empathy with, or psychological understanding of, his friend. He recalls an acquaintance who had married an unattractive, stupid woman without means. When the acquaintance was asked whether he had married for love, he replied, "Not at all for love! I just did it 'for no reason at all!'" (*A tak*) "And yet here Teglyov was passionately in love with a girl and did not marry her," Ridel adds. "Well, was that too 'for no reason at all?'" There is, indeed, something strange in Teglyov's break with Masha. It is characteristic of Ridel, however, that he attributes to Teglyov a kind of irrationality or caprice that characterizes his own behavior toward Teglyov. Why does he play a practical joke on Teglyov? Was it not also *A tak*—For no reason at all? Why does he stubbornly pursue the joke? Why does Teglyov's credulity about the knocks make Ridel want to laugh at a moment when it is clear that the knocks arouse disturbed and dangerous feelings in Teglyov? "Why does Teglyov always go on hinting that he is going to commit suicide? What rubbish! What theatrics!" Ridel remembers thinking to himself. "He refused to marry the girl of his own free will . . . he jilted her . . . and now, all of a sudden, he wants to kill himself! It makes no human sense! (*chelovecheskii smysl*) He can't help showing off!" There is, in fact, a great deal of human sense in Teglyov's remorse. However muddled his character

and motivations, he is human both in his love for Masha and in his feelings of anguish and guilt. The same cannot be said of Ridel in his relations with Teglyov. These relations have a whimsical and quirky character and are lacking precisely in "human sense." Ridel is quick to blame Teglyov—his "free will" (*volia*), for his situation, as though convinced that human beings are in full rational control of their actions. Yet in blaming Teglyov for his dilemma, Ridel conveniently ignores his own moral failure.

A residual concern for Teglyov does slowly manifest itself in Ridel at the time Teglyov returns from St. Petersburg with news of Masha's death. Yet he continues to conceal from Teglyov the secret of the knocks and remains unable to respond earnestly to the emotional and psychological distress that lies beneath Teglyov's rhetoric: "Oh the damned phrase-monger!" he exclaims, as Teglyov slips away into the fog with a solemn "farewell" and broad hints at suicide. "Always trying to show off!" Nonetheless, Ridel's conscience begins to bother him at this point. "Involuntary fear clutched at my heart." And he runs out into the fog to find Teglyov.

#### 4

The fog (*tuman*) is the central image and metaphor in the symbolism and semantics of Turgenev's story, as it is for Tolstoy in crucial battle scenes in *War and Peace* (1863–1868). It signals the ultimately unfathomable character of causality and man's persistent underestimation of the complex nature of things and relations in life and nature.

The fog, first of all, is real: it distorts one's sense of distance and proportions; it literally leads people astray and separates them from each other. The fog, again, figures as a metaphor for psychological and social confusion and blindness, for the human fog that prevents us from seeing ourselves completely. It mocks as it were, Teglyov's inability to face reality, to see through the romantic myths that have deluded him. The fog ridicules Ridel's self-assurance, his no-nonsense realism: the rational pretensions of a man who cannot get beyond a simplistic view of Teglyov's character or get an understanding of himself and his own motivations. The fog, here, is character, and character is fate.

The fog, in short, mocks the effort of immature mind, romantic or realistic, mystical or scientific, to "know" reality in any absolute or definitive sense. Ultimately, however, the fog testifies, figuratively,

to people's inability to find the way in a moral and spiritual sense, to find their way to each other's hearts, that is, to find their way home.

The great drama of the fog that dominates chapters 13, 14, and 15 is a paradigm of human search, error, confusion, and striving. There are scenes of immense artistic power not only on the descriptive plane, but in the manner in which Turgenev's own spiritual statement is indirectly disclosed through everyday language and imagery. Chapter 13 opens with the signal words: "But where to go? The fog embraced me on all sides." Ridel recalls setting out in pursuit of Teglyov who had vanished in the fog. "Where to go?" he recalls wondering. The question relates, too, to the moral and spiritual issues raised in Turgenev's story. Blindly stumbling about in the fog Ridel cries out: "'Teglyov!' 'Teglyov!' My voice died away all round me without any answer. It seemed as if the very fog did not let it go any further. 'Teglyov!' I repeated. No one answered. I walked straight ahead at random." The episode echoes the knocking scene in chapter 7 when Teglyov cried out, "Who's there?" and Ridel failed to respond. Now, it is Teglyov who does not respond. Ridel does what is natural to him and to people in general when life provides no answer: he goes ahead "at random."

Ridel finds Teglyov by chance. After calling out a number of times, he hears a "low voice." "Well, here I am . . . What do you want of me?" Teglyov responds. The question is an important one on the deeper plane of Turgenev's narrative concern: What *does* Ridel want of the lonely and tormented Teglyov? The cruel and prolonged practical joke he had played on Teglyov had nothing to do with communication or friendship. Teglyov's question, "What do you want of me?" —raises the central ethical question of the story and of human relations in general: am I my brother's keeper? "What do you want of me?" is also a concealed plea for some kind of sympathy, empathy or help. Something deep and human, indeed, awakens at this moment in Ridel. "'Thank God!' —I cried in an outburst of joy and seized both his hands. 'Thank God! I had already given up hope of finding you. And aren't you ashamed of frightening me like that! Really [lit. *pomiluite*—I beg you]<sup>13</sup>, Ilya Stepanych!'" Of course, one may ask, where was Ridel's "shame" earlier when he persisted, and now still persists, in deluding

<sup>13</sup> "Pomiluite" —from the verb "*pomilovat*" —spare me, pardon me; "*Gospodi pomilui!*" —"the Lord have mercy."

the naïve and nervous Teglyov about the knocks? But there is more in these lines than irony. "What do you want of me?" Teglyov repeats. As though confronted for the first time with the deeper meaning of Teglyov's question, as though for the first time grasping the hitherto unexamined question of man's relation to his fellow man, Ridel hesitates, and as though groping, replies, "I want . . . I want, first of all, that you come back home with me. And secondly, I want, I demand, I demand of you as a friend that you should at once explain to me the meaning of your behavior . . ."

Strange "demands" from Ridel, a person who felt no need to provide himself with an account of his own behavior toward Teglyov! Yet in this insistence that Teglyov account for his actions as a friend we are nonetheless witness to a real, heartfelt, even if momentary, surge of feeling, warmth and responsibility in Ridel. This moment in the fog, in the open fields—not accidentally does Turgenev evoke King Lear on the heath—is a kind of epiphany, profound, moving, and eloquent in word, image, and symbol: "Thank God," "seized him with both hands," "together," "friend," "shame," "behavior," "despaired," "joy," "I beg of you," "home." All these words, even scrambled, constitute, if not a new ethical vocabulary for Ridel, then a direct and human response for him, one unmarked by caprice, patronizing reflection, or detachment. In his experience of joy at finding the lost Teglyov, we may say that the fog, figuratively speaking, parts, as it does, momentarily, for the wounded Prince Andrei on the field of Austerlitz in *War and Peace*. Ridel's genuine feeling and solicitude for Teglyov at this point in the story answers the question "But where to go?" Turgenev's statement is the same as Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's: the only infallible guide for man on the wild and uncertain heath of human life and history, on that field where he wanders about in search of himself, where he seeks the way back home, is not reason, not pride, not self-assertion, not play, but the dictates of the heart and hearth.

"Let's go home," Ridel says. "Let's go," replied Teglyov. "But how are we going to find the way in this fog?" This is the central and unstated question of Turgenev's story. "There's a light in the window of our cottage and we'll make straight for it. Come along." "You go ahead," replied Teglyov. "I'll follow you." Ridel, of course, is no Virgil, and Teglyov is no Dante. Yet Turgenev's world is marked by symbol, allusion, and irony. "We set off. We walked for about five minutes, and the light which should have served us as a beacon did not appear; at last it gleamed in the distance in two red points." The two red points

in the symbolic design of this episode are ominous. It is at precisely at this moment, Ridel recalls, that "in a fit of repentance and a sort of superstitious fear . . . I confessed to him that I had produced last night's mysterious knocking . . . and what a tragic turn my joke had taken! Teglyov confined himself to remarking that I had had nothing to do with it, that something else had moved my hand."

Teglyov's tragic movement toward suicide seems almost irreversible now. Was it facilitated in some unconscious way by Ridel's confession of his cruelty? In any case, when Ridel and Teglyov arrive at the cottage, Teglyov succeeds in slipping off for a second and last time into the fog, into that mysterious element that seems so congenial to his fantastic nature. "And why did I let him out of my hands," Ridel asks himself. Why, indeed, did Ridel, figuratively speaking, let go of Teglyov's hand? What inner fog prevented him from reaching out to Teglyov in the cottage at night?

For a second time, now with his servant Semyon, Ridel sets out in search of Teglyov, stumbling about with lanterns that were of no use. "The fog confused us (*sbival nas s tolku*), so much so that we wandered as though in a dream . . . The fog seems to have made its way into my very brain, and I wandered about befogged." Ridel and Semyon wander in confusion, circling around the dim landscape. "We turned back again . . . Fields, fields, endless fields . . . I nearly cried . . . The words of the fool in King Lear came to my mind: 'This night will finally drive us mad.'"<sup>14</sup> "Where are we to go? I said to Semyon in despair." "The wood demon must have led us astray, sir," the bewildered servant replied. "There's something behind this. I'm sure, sir, the devil is mixed up in it."

The opening line of chapter 15 signals the tragic universe of "Knock...Knock... Knock!.." "It is impossible to describe how we wandered about in it [the fog], how we kept losing our way!" (*Kak my s nim bluzhdali, kak putalis', to peredat' nevozmozhno!*) The line echoes the opening of Dante's *Inferno*: "Midway in the journey of our life/ I found myself in a dark wood,/ for the straight way was lost./ Ah, how hard it is to tell/ what that wood was, wild, rugged, harsh;/ the very thought of it renews the fear."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The line in *King Lear* reads: "This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen" (III, iv).

<sup>15</sup> Dante's Italian text reads: "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita/ mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,/ che la diritta via era smarrita./ Ahi quanto a dir qual

## 5

"The straight way was lost." Turgenev, like Dante and Shakespeare, signals the true path, but the night ends tragically for Teglyov. As for Ridel, the moment of epiphany, his feelings of "repentance" in the fog, are not accompanied either at the time of the event or later by any sense of shame or soul-searching. At the end of his tale, he fails to draw any conclusions about his own role in Teglyov's tragedy or to reflect on the moral-philosophical implications of the events. He remembers meeting the doctor with whom Teglyov conferred in St. Petersburg at the time of Masha's death. The doctor recalls his conversation with Teglyov:

That gentleman came to see me—that was the first time I ever saw him—and began insisting that that girl had poisoned herself. "Cholera," I said. "Poison," he said. "No," I said, "it was cholera." "Oh, no," he said, "it was poison." I could see that the man was behaving like a lunatic. He had a broad back to his head, which meant that he was a stubborn fellow. Kept pestering me. "It's all the same (*use ravno*)," I thought, "after all, the subject's dead." "Well," I said, "she poisoned herself, if that makes you happy." He thanked me, even shook hands—and disappeared.

The doctor, in short, also *lets go of Teglyov's hand*, that is, lets Teglyov hold on to his delusions. "'It's all the same' (*use ravno*), I thought, 'after all, the subject's dead.'" Of course, everything is not "all the same." Actions and attitudes, even trivial ones, have consequences, often quite unanticipated ones. In this case, the doctor's indifferent acquiescence to Teglyov's delusions about the nature of Masha's death, provides further motivation for Teglyov to commit suicide.

Ridel tells the doctor that Teglyov shot himself that same day. "The doctor didn't turn a hair, merely observing that there were all sorts of eccentrics (*chudaki*) in the world. 'So there are,' I agreed." The narrator Ridel, years later, still echoes the doctor in assessing Teglyov's action as that of an eccentric.

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era è cosa dura/ esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte/ que nel pensier rinova la paura!" I use here Charles S. Singleton's translation in Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno*, translated, with a commentary by Charles S. Singleton, Bollingen Series 80 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 2–3.

This theme of the “eccentric” is established in an important incident earlier when Ridel is searching for Teglyov in the fog. At one point in his search, Ridel encounters a drunken officer who had run into Teglyov:

“Did Teglyov say anything to you?” I asked. “Why, of course he did! I said to him, ‘Greetings, brother!’ And he to me, ‘Farewell, brother!’ Farewell! Why farewell? ‘Because,’ he says, ‘I want to shoot myself in a minute with this pistol.’ ‘An eccentric!’ My breath [Ridel recalls] failed me. “You say, he told you . . . ‘An eccentric!’” the officer repeated, and staggered off.

“An eccentric,” says the doctor; “an eccentric,” says the officer in the fog; “an eccentric,” agrees Ridel. An eccentric in the popular conception is an accidental case, a person who does not fit the norm, a person for whom one is presumably not responsible.

In the last line of his story, Ridel remarks apropos of eccentrics: “Yes, someone has said truly about suicides: when they do not carry out their intention, no one believes them; when they do, no one is sorry for them.” This observation, of course, is wholly consistent with Ridel’s attitude toward Teglyov.

In contrast to Ridel, Teglyov emerges as a human being for whom, in spite of his eccentricities, one can feel compassion. Teglyov, it is noteworthy, “did not let a single beggar pass without giving alms.” Behind the facade of this “fatal,” self-important, posturing little man we see a troubled and insecure person, an orphan who craved affection, a man who was incapable of creating any friendships or lasting relationships, an individual whose veiled threats and warnings about suicide, though preposterous to the casual Ridel, conceal a plea for help. This caricature of a little Napoleon is constantly complaining that “fate has persecuted him.” He is forever seeking to prove himself, to demonstrate his self-determination and self-mastery, to take his fate into his own hands—something he does, finally, when he shoots himself.

Yet whatever else one can say about Teglyov, one cannot deny that he is a man of feeling. The strange pathos of this half-Gogolian, half-Dostoevskian “little man” emerges in the final sealed letter he writes just before his suicide to “the important personage who had at that time been commanding the whole corps of guards.” Teglyov writes how he is about to appear “before our universal, incorruptible, noble-minded Judge, before the Supreme Being, before a Being who



is of infinitely greater importance than even your Excellency, and I will appear before Him without formality, in my greatcoat and even without a cravat round my neck." This last phrase, Ridel remarks, created "a painful and unpleasant impression" on him. Ridel rightly observes that Teglyov had used "all the accumulated epithets and amplifications à la Marlinsky that were fashionable at that time." He finds the letter "rather vulgar," but fails to respond completely to the letter's pathos. "He [Teglyov] went on to mention his 'fate,' his persecution, his vocation which remained unfulfilled, a mystery which he would take to his grave with him."

Forty years later, Ridel patronizingly imagines the "disdainful look of perplexity of the high personage to whom [Teglyov's letter] was addressed; I can imagine the tone of voice in which he uttered the words, 'A worthless officer! Clear the weeds out of the field!'" It was only at the very end of the letter that a sincere cry escaped Teglyov's heart. "Oh, your Excellency I am an orphan. I had no one to love since I was a child and everyone shunned me and I myself destroyed the only heart which gave itself to me!" The pathos of Teglyov is Dostoevskian. Teglyov, without question, is an "eccentric," but an eccentric with a soul.

Whatever Teglyov's confusions, delusions, and posturings, he was not indifferent like Ridel; he did not, like Ridel, act as though "nothing makes any difference (*vse ravno*)." He did not look upon himself or others with a soulless realism. He was not, in Lermontov's phrase, "shamefully indifferent to good and evil." He believed in love, and in part at least, dies because of it; although "fainthearted," Teglyov's servant insists, Teglyov "loves [Masha] too much." He not only feels guilt, but experiences shame—something that cannot be said of Ridel. Teglyov's model of the world, though a romantic construct, has a moral core. In contrast, Ridel's rationalistic model signals an essentially meaningless universe, a world in which man is disconnected from nature and his fellow man. Teglyov, for his part, believes, albeit naïvely and primitively, in some kind of epic unity between man and nature, the individual and the happenings around him. "In a word, Teglyov believed . . . in the significance of life."<sup>16</sup> He is a descendent, and at the

<sup>16</sup> Of interest here is Turgenev's remark to E. E. Lambert in a letter of December 12, 1859: "I recall how in my youth I wanted every moment of my life to be significant... A bold and hardly innocent longing!" (PSS, *Pis'ma* 3:386).



same time, a parody of those people of the past about whom Pechorin speaks in Lermontov's "Fatalist": "What strength of will made them confident that the entire sky with its innumerable inhabitants was looking upon them with at least mute, but still unchanging sympathy."

"Knock... Knock... Knock!.." is a story about two characters, Teglyov and Ridel. It is a story about the 1830s and the 1870s. Both men constitute a kind of unity of opposites. One invests reality with mysterious "significance" and "fatality," the other ignores or negates the role of unpredictable and arbitrary forces on the life of the individual. The outlooks of both men lead to a renunciation of responsibility. Teglyov's deep guilt, anguish, and suffering indicate, however, that human nature does not necessarily follow the prescriptions of ideology. Similarly, for all Ridel's failure to take stock of himself and to inquire into the real issues surrounding Teglyov's tragedy, we recognize in him not only moments of real, if incompletely realized, friendship and concern, but a lingering and troubled feeling of guilt. His tale, in the final analysis, is but the surfacing of a festering memory, an indirect acknowledgment of guilt and responsibility, in short, a kind of unconscious confession. Ridel's tale is not overtly a *mea culpa*. The tale is evasive. Yet here, narrative itself is confession.

The moral axis of the story is a double one involving a juxtaposition of Teglyov's relation to Masha, on the one hand, with Ridel's relation to Teglyov, on the other. Teglyov's moral failure with Masha, a woman whom he loved but failed to marry as he had promised, contrasts with Ridel's relation to Teglyov, a man about whom he speaks warmly, but toward whom he behaves indifferently. Teglyov's moral failure in his relations with Masha fills him with guilt and remorse; it distresses him to the point of delusions and leads him finally to his poignant, albeit grotesque, confession: "I myself destroyed the only heart that gave itself to me." Teglyov's suicide is a form of self-punishment. Moral failure

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Turgenev certainly respected this youthful longing. In *Fathers and Children*, Arkady murmurs "thoughtfully" at one point: "One should structure life so that every moment is significant." The youthful longing to give significance to every moment is rooted, perhaps, in man's earliest—and indeed naïve—efforts to give meaning to his life and to the unknown world that surrounded him. Teglyov's nature with its belief in the occult would seem to reflect, as in a crooked mirror, that "naïve" moment in humanity—a moment, however, that Turgenev sees repeating itself in the hubris of nineteenth century reason and science.

in Ridel's case is not accompanied by conscious remorse or any overt expression of guilt. He suppresses his awareness of the consequences of his actions. Ridel, forty years later, is still unable forthrightly to assess and judge his behavior toward Teglyov. Yet moral truth forces its way to the surface in the veiled form of a story directed, as in the case of Teglyov's letter, at an audience.

## 6

At the end of his tale, after clearing up some of the mysteries of the last twenty-four hours of Teglyov's life, including the question of the identity of the mysterious "Iliusha," Ridel remarks, "So that's who 'Iliusha' was, I thought, sinking into philosophical speculations which, however, I will not impose on you [his circle of listeners] because I do not want to prevent anyone from believing in fate, predestination and other fatalities."

Ridel patronizingly does not consider the issues raised by his story to be deserving of further reflection on the part of sober-minded people. He considers it superfluous to share his "philosophical speculations" with the reader. His stance is clear. The conclusions are self-evident to him. He has told a tale about a ridiculous past when people believed in preposterous things like predestination and even the supernatural. No sensible person, he seems to suggest, can view the issues as other than settled. Yet the moral-philosophical issues of the story have not been settled on the surface plane of Ridel's storytelling.

Entirely different is the case with Turgenev, the real author of the story. Here, too, there are no philosophical speculations in the sense that we are accustomed to find them in Tolstoy or Dostoevsky. Yet Turgenev's literary text is a masterpiece of indirect moral and philosophical discourse. Turgenev's art, rivaling that of his great master Pushkin, lies in his ability to be philosophical without philosophizing, that is, to embed philosophy in language and image, in the juxtaposition of materials, in the interplay of character and situation. It is through these means that he solves the riddle of Ridel (the narrator's name itself is a piece of ironic word play on the part of Turgenev) and deconstructs Ridel's text. Ridel's unconscious subtext is Turgenev's most important artistic text.

Turgenev places man in an unknown and unsettling universe: he posits a world, as we have suggested at the outset of the discussion,

in which chance is ever-present, one that will not submit to exact control or absolute computation. Yet he does not posit a world in which man is completely at the mercy of chance or fate. Turgenev is close in his outlook to Ralph Waldo Emerson on the question of fate. "For if Fate is so prevailing," Emerson wrote, "man is also part of it, and can confront fate with fate . . . If there be omnipotence in the stroke, there is omnipotence of recoil." But Emerson adds, "Fate is only parrying and defense: there are also the noble creative forces."<sup>17</sup> These words could serve to define Turgenev's outlook in "Knock... Knock... Knock!.." Man's exercise of his freedom, he suggests in his story, is maximally effective and responsible only when he is fully cognizant of the permanently uncertain and problematic character of nature and reality, only when he acknowledges the permanent fog that defies any absolute naming or prediction of reality, personal or historical.

Man attains the greatest maturity, however, only when he gives expression to those "noble creative forces" chief among which are love and compassion, that is, only when he recognizes that he is, indeed, his brother's keeper, that he is morally and spiritually free to strive for ethical truth. Both Teglyov and Ridel, each in their own way, are far from these goals. Like the rest of mankind, they are stumbling about not far from home. "We turned back again . . . Fields, fields, endless fields . . . I nearly cried . . .," Ridel recalls. But as he rightly says at one point—and we may interpret his words figuratively as well as literally, "It's true that there's such a fog outside that it's impossible to make anything out a few yards ahead, but all the same (*vse ravno*), we must make an effort." This *vse ravno* unlike the earlier *vse ravno—mne ne spalos'* (Anyway, I could not sleep), one that serves as a rationalization for caprice, contains a margin of hope; this "all the same we must make an effort" is Turgenev's message to man lost in the fog.

## 7

In her memoirs, Lydia Chukovskaya recalls a conversation in which the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966) gave expression to her literary likes and dislikes. After praising the nineteenth-century

<sup>17</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Fate," in *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 340–341.

Russian writers, M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin and Alexander Herzen, Akhmatova adds:

"Yet there are inflated reputations, Turgenev's reputation, for example" (I am ecstatic [writes Chukovskaya parenthetically] over our shared dislike). "How badly he wrote! How badly! Do you remember 'Knock... Knock... Knock!..'? Dostoevsky was right: *merci* through and through. And with what aristocratic disdain (*I kak po-barski*) he depicts people: superficially, contemptuously."<sup>18</sup>

Akhmatova's judgment of Turgenev's story is superficial and badly flawed. One thing is clear: she, like M. P. Alekseev, confuses the narrator, Ridel, with Turgenev. In so doing, she reduces Turgenev's complex tale to a monological text. "They are accustomed to seeing the mug of the author in everything, but I didn't show mine," Dostoevsky wrote to his brother Mikhail, February 1, 1846, apropos of his hero Devushkin in his first novel *Poor Folk*. The artist Turgenev might have said the same of Ridel in his story.

With respect to reading Turgenev, the Russian critic Sergey Andreevsky observed at the turn of the nineteenth century:

Only after pondering every epithet chosen by Turgenev, every color laid down by him, every thought expressed by him will you uncover all the secret wealth of that devilishly light and musical prose—a prose resembling the verse of Pushkin the profound inner content of which only an extremely few people were able to disclose, and then at a very late date. [The poet E. A.] Baratynsky (1800–1844), after going through Pushkin's papers after the death of the poet, was first to note in a letter to one of his friends: "Do you have any idea what amazes me most of all in all these poems? The abundance of thoughts! Pushkin—a thinker! Could one have expected this?!" Precisely the same could be said of Turgenev and his elusively delicate and airy way of expressing himself.

[Tol'ko togda, vdumyvaia's' v kazhdyi izbrannyi im epitset, v kazhduiu polozhennuiu im krasku, v kazhduiu vyskazannuiu

<sup>18</sup> Lidia K. Chukovskaia, *Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoi*, 1 (Paris: YMCA Press, 1975), 23–24.

im mysl', vy raskroete vse tainye bogatstva etoi predatel'ski-legkoi i muzykal'noi prozy, podobnoi stikham Pushkina, v kotorykh lish' ves'ma pozdno i ves'ma nemnogie sumeli raskryt' glubochaishee vnutrennee sodержanie. Baratynskii, razbiravshii bumagi Pushkina, uzhe posle ego smerti, v pis'me k odnomu iz svoikh priiatelei, pervyi skazal: "Mozhesh' ty sebe predstavit', chto menia bol'she vsego izumliaet vo vsekh etikh poemakh? Obilie myslei! Pushkin myslitel'! Mozho li bylo ozhidat'?" Takov zhe tochno i Turgenev s ego mnimym-delikatnym i vozdushnym izlozheniem.]<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> A. A. Andreevskii, "Turgenev: Ego individual'nost' i poeziiia," *Literaturnye ocherki* (St. Petersburg, 1902); quoted in *Sobranie kriticheskikh materialov dlia izucheniia Turgeneva*, ed. V. Zelinskii (Moscow, 1910), 124. Andreevskii inaccurately cites Baratynsky's remark—possibly drawing from an imperfect version of the letter first published in 1869. Baratynsky writes to A. L. Baratynskaya in February 1840, "Can you imagine what distinguishes all [Pushkin's] last plays? Power and depth! He was just coming into his own" (*Vse poslednie p'esy ego otlichaiutsia, chem by ty dumala? Siloiu i glubinoiu! On tol'ko chto sozreval*). See Geir Kjetsaa's selection of and commentary on Baratynsky's letters in his study *Evgenii Baratynskii. Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (Oslo-Bergen-Tromso: Universitetsforlaget, 1973), 623. In his speech on unveiling of Pushkin's memorial in 1880, Turgenev quotes Baratynsky's lines on Pushkin, also inaccurately. See "Rech' po povodu otkrytiia pamiatnika A. S. Pushkinu v Moskve," PSS, 15:72.

## POLINA AND LADY LUCK IN DOSTOEVSKY'S *THE GAMBLER*<sup>1</sup>

Lucky in cards, unlucky in love.

—English saying

In a letter written to the literary critic and philosopher Nikolai N. Strakhov (1828–1898) from Rome in September 1863, Dostoevsky projected the idea of a story that was to evolve later into the novel, *The Gambler* (*From the Notes of a Young Man*) (1866). The story, he wrote, would reflect the “contemporary moment (as far as possible, of course) of our inner life.” The central character would be “a certain type of Russian abroad”:

I take a straightforward nature, a man, however, well-educated, but in all respects immature, who has lost his faith and *not daring not to believe*, rebels against the authorities and fears them. He sets his mind at rest with the thought that he has *nothing to do* in Russia and hence the bitter criticism of people in Russia who summon back our Russians living abroad . . . He's a live character . . . The main thing is that all his living juices, forces, impetuosity, daring have gone *into roulette*. He is a gambler, and not a mere gambler, just as [Alexander] Pushkin's miserly knight is not a simple miser . . . He is a poet in his own way, but the point is that he himself is ashamed of this poetry, because he deeply feels its baseness, although the need for *risk* also ennobles him in his own eyes . . . If [*Notes from the*] *House of the Dead* drew the attention of the public as a depiction of the convicts whom nobody up to then had depicted *graphically*, then this story without

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<sup>1</sup> From Robert Louis Jackson, *The Art of Dostoevsky: Deliriums and Nocturnes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 208-236.

fail will attract attention as a GRAPHIC and detailed depiction of the game of roulette.<sup>2</sup>

Dostoevsky's comparison of this story with his *Notes from the House of the Dead* is of particular interest. The link between *The Gambler* and the earlier work goes beyond the fact that both works provide engaging descriptions of novel institutions: the worlds of the prison and the gambling house. In his letter to Strakhov, Dostoevsky hints at a deeper relationship between these two institutions, or in any case, between the people who inhabit them. "The piece perhaps is not at all bad. After all, *Notes from the House of the Dead* was of real interest. And this is a description of a special kind of hell, a special kind of prison 'bath.'"<sup>3</sup>

The allusion to the world of the gambler as a kind of hell points to the basic metaphysical similarity in the situations of the convict and the gambler: both are prisoners in what appears to be an enclosed fate-bound universe. But whereas the convict lives in a prison world not of his own choice, a world from which, moreover, there is really no way out, the gambler lives in a dead house, or underground, of his own making. In the gambler's world, everybody is possessed by the illusion of freedom, but nobody is really free. Through chance, risk, the turn of the wheel, the gambler challenges fate and seeks to escape its tyranny. Alternatives are offered to Dostoevsky's gambler, Aleksey Ivanovich, in his friend Polina, and in lady luck. But in the end, he condemns himself to hurling himself eternally against the walls of his universe. He becomes an inveterate gambler, doomed to permanent unfreedom and to an endless process of trying to change his lot.

The tragedy of the gambler in Dostoevsky's view is that of a man who has uprooted himself from his nation and people and who has lost faith in God. "The cause of evil . . . is lack of faith," Dostoevsky insisted in a letter to A. F. Blagonravov on December 19, 1880, and "he

<sup>2</sup> Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh*, 30 vols. (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972-1990), 28(2): 51. Henceforth this edition will be referred to as "PSS." Volumes 28, 29, and 30 of this 30 volume edition are divided each into two separate books. Future footnotes to these particular volumes will indicate, as above, first the volume number, then the book number, 1 or 2, in parentheses, and finally the page number.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

who negates the folk element also negates faith."<sup>4</sup> The gambler finds a surrogate father or mother in fate, chance, luck. Yet the abandonment of self to fate is an unmitigated moral and spiritual disaster for man.

The amoral character of gambling is posited by Dostoevsky on three levels. First, gambling is directly equated with the capitalist market. "Why," asks Aleksey, "should gambling be worse than other means of making money—for instance, commerce?" Everything is relative, a "matter of proportion. What is a trifle to Rothschild is really wealth to me, and as for profits and winnings, people everywhere, and not only at roulette, are doing nothing but gaining or taking away something from each other. Whether profits and gain are vile is another question. But I'm not trying to resolve it here."

Gambling is evil, in the second sense, in that it awakens predatory instincts, chiefly greed and the desire for power. The casino strikes Aleksey as "dirty, somehow morally disgusting and dirty." He notes the greedy faces around him. But since he himself was "overcome by the desire for gain, all this covetousness, and all this covetous filth, if you like, were in a sense natural and congenial to me as soon as I entered the hall."

Yet the ultimate evil that preoccupies Dostoevsky in gambling is the evil that is immanent, psychologically speaking, in the gambling itself. The very act of gambling becomes a conscious or unconscious affirmation of the meaninglessness of the universe, the emptiness of all human choice. "All's nonsense on earth!" declares one of the seconds before Pechorin kills Grushnitsky in a duel in Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* (1840). "Nature is a ninny, fate is a henny and life is a penny."<sup>5</sup> The gambler is a fatalist. Moreover, he challenges the very fate he affirms and seeks to find out if he is favored or unfavored by it. The game, the gamble, the risk itself is by its very nature a dangerous inquiry into the sources of power and an arrogant form of self-assertion; making chance king, the gambler in essence strives to become the king of chance.

<sup>4</sup> PSS, 30(1):236.

<sup>5</sup> The Russian reads: "*Natura—dura, sud'ba—indeika, a zhizn'—kopeika.*" (Nature is a fool, fate—a turkey [hen], and life—a kopeck." Vladimir Nabokov's translation. See *A Hero of Our Time. A Novel by Mikhail Lermontov*, trans. Vladimir Nabokov in collaboration with Dmitri Nabokov (Garden City: 1958), 169.



The moral correlative of the belief that everything is possible is that all is permissible. Not without reason does the folk language of the market speak of “making a killing.” Dostoevsky’s gambler speaks of his “hidden moral convictions,” but insists that in the gambling halls “there is no place for them.” “I notice one thing that of late it has become repugnant for me to test my thoughts and actions by any moral standards whatsoever. I was guided by something else.” That something else is fate.

### 1

The action of *The Gambler* takes place in a kind of no man’s land or hell, Roulettenburg.<sup>6</sup> As the fictitious name suggests, the city is nowhere or anywhere in Europe. The mixed French and German components of the name suggest the illegitimate and rootless character of the place. This is the land of Babel, a place without a national language or culture. The gambling salon, the heart of Roulettenburg, is situated, symbolically, in a railway station where people are coming and going, where all is in continuous movement. Everything is in flux in this city: people, languages, currencies, values.

Roulettenburg is the classical city of capitalism: the market is supreme and everyone is engaged in accumulation. Everyone risks money to make money, and what he wins or loses wipes out what he has staked; there are no absolute values, material or moral; everything is relative and changing. Even people, like stakes at the table, move upward or downward in the eyes of other people according to the value judgment of the roulette wheel. Nowhere is the “cash nexus” that Marx discovered in human relations and affairs in bourgeois society more nakedly visible than in Roulettenburg. Aleksey hopes to redeem himself in the eyes of Polina by winning at roulette. “Money is everything,” he declares. “It’s nothing more than that with money I shall be a different person to you, not a slave.” He is convinced that Polina despises him, sees him as a “cipher” and a “zero.” To “rise from the dead” to him means to become a millionaire and to reverse

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<sup>6</sup> Dostoevsky originally entitled his novel “Roulettenburg,” but his publisher insisted on a more Russian title “for the public.” He reluctantly changed the title to *The Gambler*. See PSS, 29(1):213. In a legal contract signed in 1874, however, Dostoevsky still referred to his novel as “Roulettenburg.”

the slave-master relationship that he feels exists between Polina and him.

There are no permanent plateaus in social or psychological status in Roulettenburg, however. There are no social realities that are not subject to change. Nothing is what it seems. General Zagoryansky, considered by everybody an extremely wealthy magnate, is in fact not a magnate at all; he is a pompous muddled man who dyes his beard and moustache and is heavily in debt. The Marquis de Grioux is not a marquis, but an imposter. Madame Blanche de Cominges is not a respectable woman, but a courtesan masquerading as a de Cominges. Polina's Russian name is Praskovya, but she uses the Latinized form of her name. The inner Praskovya is not quite the same as the outer Polina. She has been in love with the Marquis de Grioux, but has taken his outer refined form for his inner soul. Aleksey sees through de Grioux, but takes Polina for somebody else.

At the outset, Aleksey seems to be an objective and trustworthy observer of this strange world. The prestige of the narrative voice is overwhelming and, initially, we accept his version of Polina as cruel and manipulative and of himself as a jilted lover. But our confidence is misplaced. Midway in his notes, he remarks upon the "whirl" that has caught him up and suggests what we have already begun to suspect—that his view of things, people, and events, has not been lucid or wholly rational: "Wasn't I really out of my mind last month, and wasn't I sitting all that time in a madhouse somewhere, and am I not still there perhaps—so that it only seems to me to have happened, and still only seems so?" The whirl of events, at the center of which, both figuratively and literally, is the whirling roulette wheel, has jolted him "out of all sense of proportion and feeling for measure," and sent him "spinning, spinning, spinning." Nothing is what it seems in Roulettenburg. All is deception.

Roulettenburg lies in the shadow of Schlangenberg, that is, "Snake Mountain," the highest elevation in the area. The ominous allusions of the mountain's name are not out of place. The city, in the symbolism of the novel, is in the power of the devil: people have lost their moral and spiritual freedom here. Belief in fate has replaced belief in God, and people are continually yielding to temptation in their pursuit of gold. Furthermore, Dostoevsky identifies the act of gambling or risk with a suicidal leap or "plunge." In *Notes from the House of the Dead*, he speaks of the murderer's feverish delirium and enjoyment of the "most unbridled and limitless freedom." He adds, significantly, that all this

is “perhaps similar to the sensation of a man who gazes down from a high tower into the depths below until finally he would be glad to hurl himself headlong down, as soon as possible, anything to put an end to it all!” In his delirium, in his craving for risk, the gambler, like the raging murderer or rebellious convict challenging their fate-bound universe, is overcome by the same passion for the abyss. At the gambling tables, Aleksey experiences an “instant of suspense, perhaps, sensation for sensation similar to that experienced by Madame Blanchard in Paris when she plunged to the earth from the balloon.” He offers to leap off the Schlangenberg, a one-thousand-foot drop, if Polina but gives the word. “Someday I will pronounce that word,” she remarks, “if only to see how you will pay up.”

She tests him later when she suggests that he publicly insult the Baron and Baroness Wurmerhelm, an act that for Aleksey is psychologically analogous to leaping off the Schlangenberg: “You swore that you would leap off the Schlangenberg; you swear that you are ready to murder if I order it. Instead of all these murders and tragedies I want only to laugh.” Aleksey accepts her “challenge” and agrees to carry out that “crazy fancy.” “Madame la baronne,” he exclaims in the confrontation scene, “j’ai l’honneur d’être votre esclave.” “The devil knows what urged me on?” Aleksey writes of this incident. “It was as though I were flying down from a mountain.” “I can’t understand what has happened to me,” Aleksey writes again in imagery that recalls the convict or murderer who runs amok, “whether I am really in a frenzied state or simply have bolted from the road and am carrying on in a vile way until I am tied up. Sometimes it seems to me that my mind is disturbed.”

Aleksey’s reference to the devil (he is mentioned a number of times in *The Gambler*) is not without deeper significance in the novel’s symbolic religious-philosophical context. The devil, indeed, may be said to have prompted Aleksey to abandon all sense of measure and control and make his leap into the abyss, his irrational underground challenge to fate. Later, he suggests, significantly, that he committed his capricious act out of “despair.”

The deeper meaning of this episode may be illuminated in part by reference to the second temptation of Jesus in the legend of the Grand Inquisitor. The devil suggests that Jesus cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple to prove that he is the son of God, “because it is said that the angels would take hold and lift him up and he would not fall and hurt himself.” But Jesus refuses to prove his faith in this way,

and thus buy men's allegiance. "O, Thou didst know then," declares the Grand Inquisitor, "that in taking one step, in making one movement to cast Thyself down, Thou wouldst be tempting God and have lost all thy faith in Him and wouldst have been dashed to pieces against the earth which Thou didst come to save." But the Grand Inquisitor insists that there are not many like Jesus. "And couldst Thou believe for one moment that men, too, could face such a temptation?" In refusing to leap, in refusing to tempt God and buy men's faith with miracle, Jesus affirms the "free decision of the heart," the principle of freedom that Dostoevsky found at the core of Christian faith.

Aleksey stands in relation to Polina as Jesus to the devil. Yet Aleksey fails the test that Jesus passes. "The devil knows what urged me on?" he wonders apropos of his irrational underground behavior in the confrontation scene with the baron and baroness. Polina, like the devil in the "legend," certainly plays the role of temptress. Even if we assume (as does the Englishman Astley who may, indeed, reflect Polina's view) that she does not anticipate that Aleksey will "literally carry out her jesting wish," her suggestion nonetheless has the character of a challenge, and Aleksey is put to the test. But while Polina may be the devil's advocate, the ultimate responsibility rests with Aleksey. He asks his deity, his devil, to tempt him; and when she gives the command, he leaps—and falls. Aleksey's leap symbolizes his renunciation of free will. It is an act of despair that is comparable in its psychological and philosophical content to the Underground Man's irrational revolt against his "twice two is four" universe. It is an indication of his loss of faith in God, and therefore, in a universe in which man is free to choose between good and evil.

In a conversation with his employer, General Zagoryansky, who is outraged by Aleksey's behavior toward the baron and baroness, Aleksey bristles at the idea that he is answerable in his conduct to the general, "I only wish to clear up the insulting suggestion that I am under the tutelage of a person who supposedly has authority over my free will." The irony of Aleksey's remark (and Dostoevsky's intent is quite clear) is that he is lacking precisely in free will; in all his acts and behavior, he is caught up in an underground syndrome of negation and self-negation. His remark to the general signals indirectly his psychological dilemma: his subservience to Polina, and at the same time, his resentment over that state. "Please observe that I don't speak of my slavery because I wish to be your slave," he remarks to her, "but simply speak of it as a fact that doesn't depend upon me at all."

Aleksey relates to Polina in the same rebellious yet rationalizing way that the Underground Man relates to the laws of nature that have been humiliating him.

As the English critic D. S. Savage has observed, Aleksey “invests Polina with an authority which he refuses to invest in God. Polina must become God in relation to him or he must become God in relation to Polina—and God is the fatal demiurge of cosmic Necessity.”<sup>7</sup> We need only add that this god, in Dostoevsky’s view, is not the God of Christianity, but the devil. And in fact, Polina has become for Aleksey the surrogate for an implacable deterministic fate and as such arouses in him the opposing feelings of love and hate, adoration and revenge. Aleksey is a person who has forfeited his freedom to fate, and his underground relationship with Polina defines that disaster. His symbolic leap from Schlangenberg anticipates his leap at the gambling tables, his transformation into a compulsive gambler and convinced fatalist. At the end of his notes, the penniless gambler, who has renounced “every goal in life excepting winning at roulette,” has driven even his memories from his head. He insists, “I shall rise from the dead.” But there can be no future without a past. And just as Polina is not the devil—that is Aleksey’s illusion—so Aleksey has no hope of salvation. He will never, like Jesus, “rise from the dead.” He will never escape the tyranny of his self-created dead universe.

## 2

“Polina Aleksandrovna, on seeing me, asked why I had been so long, and without waiting for an answer went off somewhere. Of course, she did this deliberately,” remarks Aleksey at the end of the first paragraph of the novel. “All the same, we must have an explanation. A lot of things have accumulated.” The movement of *The Gambler*, on levels of plot, theme, character, and psychology, takes the reader from accumulated mystery and complication (“a lot of things have accumulated”) through tension and expectation to release and disclosure. The center of everyone’s concern is the accumulation of money.

At the outset of the novel, everyone in General Zagoryansky’s “retinue”—Polina, the Marquis de Grioux, Blanche de Cominges,

<sup>7</sup> D. S. Savage, “Dostoevski: The Idea of *The Gambler*,” in *The Sewanee Review* 58 (1950): 296.

and others—is waiting “in expectation” for news of the death of “Grandmamma” in Moscow and of a windfall legacy. Grandmamma arrives in place of the anticipated telegram, however, and loses huge sums of money at roulette, but she leaves the gambling tables at last and returns to Moscow. Zagoryansky’s little retinue then begins to disintegrate. Blanche, who had been preparing to marry into a fortune, abandons the general and attaches herself to Aleksey who has made colossal winnings at the tables. The Marquis de Grioux, who had been anticipating Polina’s legacy and had hoped to get back money he loaned to the general, deserts her. Polina, ill, goes off with the family of the Englishman Astley to live in the north of England. And the now confirmed gambler Aleksey, after a period of dissipation in Paris with Blanche and a “number of absurd blows of fate,” finds himself back at zero, dreaming of rising from the dead “tomorrow”: “Let Polina know that I can still be a man.”

Grandmamma is the structural and ideological center of *The Gambler*. She appears on the scene in the ninth chapter—the exact center of the novel—and dominates everybody around her. Like the roulette wheel, she is the center of attention of the main characters in the general’s retinue, from the beginning to the end of the novel. All are gambling, as it were, on her death, hoping to resurrect their flagging fortunes. “Il a du chance,” Blanche remarks apropos of the general toward the end of the novel. “Grandmamma is now really quite ill and will certainly die.” Fate and death are joined in everybody’s aspirations. The idea of hope in death in the fate-ruled universe of Roulettenburg parodies, of course, the truth of death and resurrection in Dostoevsky’s Christian universe. But there is no resurrection for anybody in Roulettenburg; there is only moral and spiritual death, immersion in the river of Lethe where all memories are washed away.

Grandmamma is the only person in the novel who, figuratively speaking, rises from the dead. Her unexpected appearance on the scene, alive, foreshadows her ultimate escape from Roulettenburg and its moral and spiritual chaos. A dominating, imperial figure to all, she is humbled, finally, in her willful attempt to conquer fate at the gambling tables. “Truly,” she remarks, “God seeks out and punishes pride even in the old.” But in her naïve, simple, and earthy Russian way, she survives the storm of gambling passions, masters her own fate, and returns to Russia, where, significantly, she vows to carry out a promise she had made—to build a church. Like nature, she is full of excess, but also full of the powers of restoration. Grandmamma is, for Dostoevsky, both

symbol and embodiment of Russia's wild abundance, its "breadth," and at the same time, its rootedness and residual spiritual health.

The relationship between Aleksey and Polina forms the axis of the novel. The work begins with the enigma of their relationship and ends with its clarification. Their lives are complex and portrayed in a moment of crisis and transformation. At the outset of the novel, the two characters are enigmas not only to the reader but to each other. Aleksey is continually puzzled by Polina's personality and behavior toward him: "Polina has always been an enigma to me." In turn, Polina's repeated questioning glances at Aleksey point to her deep puzzlement over his character and motivations as they pertain to her. In a certain sense, Aleksey speaks for both of them when he confesses that "there was scarcely anything precise and definite" that he could say about his relations with her. The reader who turns to *The Gambler* for the first time would certainly share Aleksey's view of the relationship as "strange" and "incomprehensible." Yet there is no confusion in Dostoevsky's understanding of his characters.

At the outset of the story, Aleksey and Polina face remarkably similar situations and relate to each other in quite similar ways. Both are in a state of dependency in the retinue of General Zagoryansky; both are in need of money, though for different reasons; and both place their hopes in roulette. Aleksey is hateful to Polina, but she needs him and is drawn toward him. Polina is hateful to Aleksey, but he is irresistibly drawn toward her and needs her for some deeper psychological reasons.

Polina, robbed of monies rightfully hers by her stepfather General Zagoryansky, in debt and in some kind of psychological or emotional bondage to de Grioux, is in desperate need of money: "I need some money at all costs; it must be got; otherwise I am simply lost." "I place almost all hope on roulette," she remarks pensively at one point. She has evidently borrowed some money and wants to return it. Polina's belief that she will win at roulette is linked with her feeling that she has "no other choice left." She wishes to settle accounts, literally and figuratively, with de Grioux, a man whom she had loved and idealized, but whom "for a long, long time" she has found "detestable." "Oh, he was not the same man before, a thousand times no, but now, but now!" she exclaims to Aleksey when she brings him the letter in which de Grioux as a parting gesture crudely pays her off, as it were, with a 50,000 franc IOU note. Could she have expected any other outcome, Aleksey asks. "I expected nothing," she replies in a quiet but trembling



voice. "I made up my mind long ago; I read his mind and knew what he was thinking. He thought I would seek . . . that I would insist . . . I deliberately redoubled my contempt for him."

Wounded pride, contempt, and disillusionment (still touched by the dying fires of an infatuation) mark Polina's attitude toward de Grioux. Her reliance on roulette derives not only from her objective plight, but from the despair of disillusionment. This despair is the origin of her need for Aleksey on the deepest level of their relationship. "Some time back, really a good two months ago," Aleksey notes, "I began to notice that she wanted to make a friend and confidante of me, and to a certain extent really made a try at it. But for some reason things never took off with us at that time; in fact, we ended up instead with our present strange relations." In seeking a friend and confidante in Aleksey, Polina made a first step toward self-knowledge and recovery of her inner freedom. Yet it was not a friend that Aleksey sought in Polina. And her cool and at times even cruel behavior toward him was in large part a recognition of this, as it was also in part a reflex of the resentment and frustration she experienced in her relations with another egotist, de Grioux.

Aleksey, like Polina, sees in roulette his "only escape and salvation." For him, as for Polina, winning seems the "only solution." His need for money, too, is linked with a deep feeling of humiliation and entrapment. Polina's relationship toward de Grioux finds a parallel in Aleksey's toward Polina. But his sense of bondage and need for liberation has a particularly disturbing character; it points to a profound feeling of weakness and inadequacy. He seeks in roulette a "radical and decisive change" in his fate. Money for him is not an end in itself, but a means. What he seeks in gambling is the restoration of a lost sense of being, self-determination, and mastery. Through money, through gambling, he imagines he will become a different man to Polina; he will no longer be a zero and a slave. Yet it is precisely the craving for power, the need to "challenge fate," that poisons his relationship with Polina.

Dostoevsky, then, emphasizes the similarities in the psychological states of Aleksey and Polina. Both find themselves deeply humiliated: Polina before de Grioux and Aleksey before Polina and fate over which he wishes to triumph. Both are drawn toward each other, but the relationship is disfigured by psychological wounds, humiliations, and resentments on both sides. The key to a positive relationship lies in overcoming wounded pride, self-assertion, and the desire to inflict pain. The denouement of the story indicates that Polina is capable of



taking this step. Aleksey, however, is doomed forever to remain in his underground.

### 3

It is possible to single out in the first pages of *The Gambler* Aleksey's two unconsummated passions: the first, his feverish passion for Polina; the second, his obsession with roulette (like Hermann in Pushkin's "Queen of Spades," Aleksey has never gambled before). Put simply, however, we might say that Aleksey has an affair with Polina and an affair with lady luck. Toward the end of the story both affairs are consummated: Aleksey momentarily conquers lady luck in what amounts to an orgy at the gambling tables, and he spends a night with Polina. Both victories are fleeting, however, and they end in reversal and disaster for Aleksey. These two affairs or passions constitute in their interaction the psychological drama of Aleksey.

The reader easily distinguishes between Aleksey's two passions. What is far less apparent, initially, is their overlapping character in Aleksey's subconscious, that is, the manner in which Polina is drawn into the orbit of Aleksey's gambling obsession and made to serve as a surrogate for the lady luck he seeks to conquer. In a word, the image of Polina that emerges in Aleksey's notes is not merely a biased one; it is, as it were, clouded over by somebody else. "When awake we also do as we do in our dreams," remarks Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil*, "we invent and make up the person with whom we associate—and right away forget it."<sup>8</sup> The idea of Polina as a surrogate for an imperious, tantalizing, and at the same time, cruelly inaccessible lady luck or fate, is broadly hinted at the end of the first chapter in *The Gambler*. Aleksey ruminates on the nature of his feelings for Polina:

And now once more I ask myself the question: do I love her? And once more I am not able to answer it, that is, rather, I answered once more for the hundredth time that I hated her. Yes, she had become hateful to me. There were moments (and precisely at the

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<sup>8</sup> "Wir machen es auch im Wachen wie im Träume: wir erfinden und erdichten erst den Menschen, mit dem wir verkehren—und vergessen es sofort." Aphorism No. 138, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, Friedrich Nietzsche. *Werke in Zwei Bänden*. Auf Grund der dreibändigen Ausgabe von Karl Schlechta (Munich: Hanzer, 1967), 2:69

end of every one of our conversations) when I would have given half my life to strangle her! I swear if it had been possible slowly to sink a sharp knife in her breast, I think I would have seized it with pleasure. And yet I swear by all that is holy that if on that fashionable peak of the Schlangenberg she had indeed said to me, "cast yourself down," I should have done so immediately and with pleasure. I know this. One way or another the matter must be settled. She understands all this amazingly well, and the thought that I am clearly and thoroughly conscious of all her inaccessibility to me, of all the impossibility of fulfillment of my dreams—this thought, I am sure, gives her the most extraordinary pleasure; otherwise, could she, cautious and clever as she is, be on such terms of intimacy and frankness with me? I think that up to now she has looked upon me in the manner of the ancient empress who would disrobe in the presence of her slave, not considering him a man . . .

Aleksey's psychological portrait of Polina scarcely accords with the real Polina. Her efforts, two months earlier, to establish more intimate and frank relations with him were certainly not based on a desire to humiliate him. She had sought in him a friend and confidante, but had found instead a man who neither respected himself nor her, who cast himself in the role of an obedient yet deeply resentful slave. "I can't endure that 'slave' theory of yours," she remarks. Aleksey is in the grip of an obsession that only nominally involves the real Polina. He regards her as inaccessible. She is, of course, not inaccessible to the Aleksey she imagines or hopes him to be. But she is certainly inaccessible to the Aleksey who cannot relate to her in any other way than that of a slave or despot. She certainly finds hateful the vindictive slave who sees in her an almost impersonal object of love and hate, an imperious ancient empress who has been humiliating him, and whom he must vanquish in order to become a different man. That ancient empress is not some Cleopatra, but fate—lady luck who flaunts her riches before the rabble. Aleksey's passion for this empress psychologically structures and defines his erotic passion for Polina.

Abjectly and resentfully, characteristically in Joban terms, Aleksey speaks of his relationship with Polina, "Since I am her slave and completely insignificant in her eyes, she feels no offense at my coarse curiosity. But the point is that while she permits me to ask questions, she does not answer them. At times she doesn't even take notice of them. That's how things are between us!" That is how things

are between the despairing Job and God. But while Job ultimately recognizes the true face of God, Aleksey in his spiritual rebellion and psychological blindness never really recognizes the real Polina, at least not until the fatal resolution of his crisis when it is too late.

The psychological character of Aleksey's relationship to Polina and the ancient empress, fate, may be elucidated against the background of Hermann's relationship to the old countess and her ward Lizaveta in Pushkin's profound and seminal work, "The Queen of Spades" (1833). The impact of this work upon *The Gambler* is at least as deep as it is upon *Crime and Punishment*.<sup>9</sup> At the center of Pushkin's story is an affair that Hermann—an ambitious but parsimonious officer who has the "soul of a gambler"—has with a servant girl and with fate. In Pushkin's story, fate is incarnated in the figure of an aged countess (the image of a grotesque card queen of spades) who possesses the secret of three winning cards. In order to gain entrance to the bedroom quarters of the old countess, Hermann strikes up an outwardly passionate, though spurious love affair with the countess's ward, Lizaveta. In a midnight encounter with the countess (the result of arranging a rendezvous with Lizaveta), Hermann implores her to give him her secret of the winning cards, importunes her, waves his pistol before her, but to no avail. The countess dies of fright. Later, she comes to him in a dream and tells him the secret. The story ends with Hermann's defeat—following two victories—at the gambling tables. "The queen of spades signifies secret ill will," reads Pushkin's epigraph to his story.

The amoral character of Hermann's gambling passion is manifested not only in his encounter with the old countess, a meeting that discloses his disordered psychology and utilitarian outlook, but in his heartless manipulation of the feelings of Lizaveta. "You are

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<sup>9</sup> For a general discussion of the impact of Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades" upon Dostoevsky's work, see A. L. Bem's article, "Pikovaia dama v tvorchestve Dostoevskogo," in *O Dostoevskom* (Prague, 1936), 37–81. Bem discusses Pushkin's story and *The Gambler* on pp. 62–69. He finds the link between the two works in the authors' "moral condemnation" of the hero who violates the love of a girl who has given herself to him. Such a link indubitably exists. But Bem has nothing to say about the deep connections between the two works on the psychological and philosophical planes. Dostoevsky had a profound understanding of Pushkin's story, as is indicated by the new synthesis he gives to Pushkinian materials in his novel.

a monster!" she cries to him in their arranged tryst immediately after the countess's death. His motives have become apparent to her. "I did not wish her death," he replies, indifferent to the girl who but a little while earlier had been the object of passionate avowals of love. For the egotist Hermann, Lizaveta is but an incidental sacrifice in his quest for power and wealth. This "hardened soul" feels no pangs of conscience either for the old countess or for Lizaveta.

Hermann masks his gambling passion under a simulated passion for Lizaveta. He quite consciously employs this deception to gain entrance to the dwelling of his real lover—lady luck, fate, the old countess. The object of Aleksey's passion is also lady luck, but she is not incarnated in any independent figure or symbol in his drama (there is an allusion to her, of course, in the reference to the ancient empress). Pushkin's play with the fantastic, or play with the real and fantastic, becomes pure theater of the unconscious in Dostoevsky. What Dostoevsky does in *The Gambler* is endow Polina with the function of a fate-figure in Aleksey's unconscious. Lizaveta and the old countess, as it were, merge into one person.

Aleksey's relation to Polina as a fate-figure is almost identical with Hermann's relation to the mysterious countess. Both Polina and the countess, in the view of their suitors, withhold their favor. Aleksey's comparison of Polina with the imperious ancient empress who expresses her contempt for her slave by calmly undressing in front of him defines what he feels to be Polina's attitude toward him as a lover, and on the plane of his unconscious, as a fate-figure. This is an obvious reminiscence on Dostoevsky's part of the midnight scene in "The Queen of Spades" in which Hermann, concealed in the countess's bedroom, is witness to the "repulsive mysteries of her toilet" as she undresses before her mirror.

In a variety of ways, Pushkin brings out the unconscious erotic dimension in this episode; indeed, Hermann is compared to a lover of the countess's youth. Hermann, now slavishly petitions the countess on his knees, now despotically threatens her with his pistol in his quest for a "favor," the "happiness of his life," the secret of the three cards. He appeals to the countess as "wife, lover, and mother." Though he recognizes that her secret may be linked with a "terrible sin, with the ruination of eternal bliss, with a devil's contract," he announces that he is prepared to take on her sin. As we have noted, the countess does not yield her riches to her impassioned and frustrated suitor. He is not rewarded at this moment by lady luck any more than Aleksey's erotic

interests are rewarded immediately by Polina. Hermann is rewarded by the countess when she comes to him in a dream and tells him the secret of the three cards. Aleksey, too, wants his “empress” to come to him. “I was not at all troubled by her fate,” he remarks about Polina apropos of the moment Grandmamma was about to gamble away her fortune. “I wanted to fathom her secrets. I wanted her to come to me and say, ‘I really love you.’” Polina will, indeed, come to Aleksey and provide the psychological motive for him to rush off confidently to the gambling tables and make his colossal winnings. His erotic strivings will be consummated when he returns to his room where Polina is waiting for him.

In outwardly different but psychologically analogous ways, then, Pushkin and Dostoevsky recognize the interaction of the erotic and gambling impulses in their heroes. In *The Gambler*, the psychosexual dimension of Aleksey’s gambling passion is openly expressed in his relationship with Polina. Yet in the deepest sense, Aleksey’s passion for Polina is no greater than Hermann’s interest in Lizaveta. Hermann simulates a passion for Lizaveta; when she no longer serves as an accessory to his gambling passion, he becomes indifferent to her. It seems to Aleksey that he is in love with Polina and that he cannot live without her. But in fact, she is only a stand-in for lady luck. When he recognizes lady luck, that is, when he recognizes his gambling passion and succumbs to it at the tables, his passion for Polina vanishes. He no longer needs the real Polina. He has found lady luck.

#### 4

The dramatic outcome of Aleksey’s affair with Polina and lady luck is as brilliant in execution as in conception. At a critical moment in Polina’s destiny, after Grandmamma’s huge losses at the tables and at the time de Grioux abandons Polina, Aleksey pens the following note to her:

Polina Aleksandrovna, I see clearly that the denouement is at hand which will of course touch on you too. For the last time I repeat: do you or do you not need my life? If I can be of use, be it in any way—dispose of me as you see fit, and meanwhile I will remain in my room, most of the time at least, and not go out anywhere. If it is necessary, write or send for me.

Shortly after this note is delivered, Polina turns up in Aleksey's room, pale and somber. He cries out, startled, amazed. "What's the matter? What's the matter?" Polina asks. "You ask what's the matter?" he replies. "You? here, in my room!" Aleksey's expression of amazement inaugurates a scene, the climax of their relationship, which is marked by a dramatic reversal of his whole notion of her attitude toward him. "If I come, then I come in my entirety," Polina remarks. "It's a habit with me."

The scene is a significant one. At a critical moment in Polina's life, Aleksey impulsively offers her everything that a lover could offer, the maximum of devotion: his life. In turn, Polina comes to him in her entirety and offers him her life. In the language of the gambling tables both are staking or risking all. But are the wagers equal in value? The action that follows points to the radically different values of the wagers. Polina's gamble, at its deepest level, involves a throwing off of pride, a breaking out from the underground tangle of her relationship with de Grioux and Aleksey, an attempt to find salvation not in roulette, but in a human relationship based upon mutual respect. Her earlier offers to share her winnings at the gambling table were symbolic of the kind of relationship she sought. In coming to Aleksey she is making herself vulnerable, the *sine qua non* in any genuine human relationship; she is risking annihilation to gain a friend, that is, to win Aleksey. Her gamble contemplates neither a play for power nor the annihilation of somebody else's wager or personality.

Aleksey's gamble, on the other hand, on the psychological plane, turns out to be the same as all his other gambles: an affirmation of ego. He wishes only a signal from Polina and he will make his suicidal and murderous leap. His offer to help Polina only masks his desire to win the favor of lady luck and obtain a momentary illusion of freedom and power. Recalling his triumphant win at the gambling tables, he remarks significantly, "I staked my whole life." His pledge of his life to Polina, then, involves not only a symbolic self-annihilation but the annihilation of Polina, her hopes and her high stakes, her last desperate gamble on his love.

In his room, Polina shows Aleksey the letter from de Grioux in which he offers her stepfather's IOU note to be used against him. "Oh," Polina cries out, "with what happiness would I now throw into his vile face those fifty thousand francs and spit at them . . . and grind the spit in!" Aleksey, groping for ways in which Polina can settle accounts with de Grioux, comes up with, among other things, the proposal that she

turn to Astley for 50,000 francs. "What, dost thou thyself really want me to go from thee to that Englishman?" she cries, looking into Aleksey's face with "a piercing glance" and smiling bitterly. "She called me 'thou' for the first time in my life," he recalls. "It seemed to me that she was dizzy with emotion at that moment, and she sat down suddenly on the sofa, as if worn out." Aleksey remembers thinking at this point, "Why, she loves me! She came to me and not to Mr. Astley." The inner content of Polina's gamble for Aleksey is manifested, of course, in her use of the familiar pronoun "thou." But the desperate nature of her gamble is evidenced by her dizziness; literally, "her head was spinning."

Aleksey's notion that Polina is hostile to him is shattered here. The foundations are laid, we might imagine, for a positive development of this strange relationship: the slave is loved and there is no longer any need for self-assertion. Yet Aleksey's actions at this crucial point only confirm that his conception of himself as a slave and of Polina as some kind of arrogant ancient empress is rooted in deep, ineradicable psychological necessities. He does not *want* the love of Polina on the terms of equality that she offers. He does not wish a real human partnership. "She came to me," he recalls. "I still don't understand it." Like the Underground Man, Aleksey can understand love only as a slave or despot. In part, Aleksey had invented Polina. He had mistaken the surface Polina for the real Praskovya, just as Polina had mistaken de Grioux, in the sarcastic words of Aleksey, for the "Apollo of Belvedere."

In order to distinguish "beauty of soul and originality of personality," Aleksey rightly observes, a person needs "independence and freedom." The inexperienced and basically unsophisticated Russian girl Praskovya is attracted to the external elegance and form of the counterfeit Marquis de Grioux even though this beauty is only a part of her imagination. She "takes this form as his own soul," Aleksey remarks, "as the natural form of his heart and soul, and not as dress that he has inherited." But this elegant, "finished, beautiful form," in the deepest spiritual sense, is "no form at all." Aleksey correctly diagnoses the debacle of Polina's affair with de Grioux: she has been carried away by a false notion of beauty and form, what another hero of Dostoevsky, the Ridiculous Man (in "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man," 1877) has called the "beauty of the lie." "It is only among Frenchmen," Aleksey remarks sarcastically, "that form has been so well defined that it is possible to appear with extraordinary dignity and yet be quite a scoundrel."



Polina's near loss of identity in the face of the assault of superficial Western culture, her spiritual immaturity, and to a certain extent, her corruption are signaled in the novel by her use of the Latinized form of her name, Polina. Yet in the case of the Russian heroine, authentic form, all that relates to organic Russian nature and intelligence, lies within. Significantly, it is Grandmamma, the only character in the novel who embodies the element of Muscovite directness and naturalness, who addresses Polina as "Praskovya." "I might get fond of you, Praskovya . . . You're a fine girl, better than all the others, and you sure have a strong will, I'll say! Well, I have a will, too; now turn around: that's not a switch you're wearing, is it?" Polina answers that it is her own hair, and Grandmamma puts in, "Good, I don't like the silly fashions that are current. You're very pretty. I would fall in love with you if I were a young gentleman. Why don't you get married?"

It is Grandmamma who recognizes the authentic Praskovya beneath the surface Polina. Aleksey, who perceives that Polina was taken in by de Grioux's elegant form, ironically is unable to respond to the authentic Praskovya when she turns to him for help. Polina seeks out in him a friend and confidante at a moment when her relationship with de Grioux is crumbling; later, she turns to him in desperation and reveals her attraction to him. But in her moment of crucial need, he deserts her. Polina is necessary to Aleksey, ultimately, only as ground for a limitless egoism. Thus, when she reaches out to him in need and offers him the possibility of love, he instinctively interprets her gesture as a signal from his deity to make his long-awaited leap for power. A "wild idea" flashed through his mind: "Polina! Give me only one hour! Wait here only an hour and . . . I will return! It's . . . it's necessary! You will see!" Aleksey's idea, significantly, is linked with an inner feeling of something "fatal, necessary, predestined."

Polina, of course, has already offered Aleksey his hour by publicly compromising herself and coming to his room. But what Aleksey wants is an hour with lady luck. What he wants is what only gambling can give him: the momentary illusion of power. In essence, Aleksey exchanges happiness with Polina for luck at the tables.<sup>10</sup> "And I rushed out of the room without answering her astonished, questioning glance; she called out something after me, but I did not go back." That questioning glance is one of many that Polina directs at Aleksey,

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<sup>10</sup> The Russian word *schast'e* signifies both happiness and luck.



particularly in their last meeting. These glances reveal the extent of Polina's own perplexity over the nature of Aleksey's strange behavior and psychology. More than any words, they reveal to the reader not a domineering ancient empress sadistically bent on tormenting a passionate lover, but a confused and troubled Russian girl who has not yet fully learned to look beneath surface appearances into the moral-psychological underground.

## 5

Aleksey's state of mind at the gambling tables is frenzied to the point of madness. There is an intoxicated, orgiastic quality about these moments. His winnings are colossal. This kind of storming of the heavens evokes fear in those around him. Two Jews, standing by him, warn him to leave, "You are bold! You are very bold!" But Aleksey, like the Underground Man, rushing off in pursuit of his tormentor Zverkov, is "driven on by fate"; he speaks of the "arrogance of chance," the "craving for risk." As he sets off for the hotel, finally, in the darkness, staggering under the sheer weight of the gold he is carrying, he has no thoughts in his head: "I experienced only some kind of fearful sense of pleasure—of success, victory, power." He is conscious that he is going back to Polina, but only "to tell her, show her . . . but I scarcely remembered what she had been saying to me a while ago, and why I had gone, and all those recent feelings of just an hour and a half before seemed to me now something long past, long since taken care of, obsolete, which we would no longer remember because now everything would begin anew."

Aleksey is not thinking as he emerges from the gambling halls. Rather, he is feeling the sum total of his experience. The image of Polina, significantly, rises out of the sensations of success, victory, power; he is going to show her the gold, the symbol of his achievement, the evidence that he is no longer a zero. There is an infantile, and a hidden erotic, exhibitionism about Aleksey's actions here. There is also a sense of change in his life, as though the experience at the gambling tables had been traumatic and had opened up a new phase in his psychic existence. The words "now everything will begin anew" are ambiguous: seemingly directed toward Polina, they actually point toward an awareness of a radical internal crisis and transformation. Not without reason does Aleksey later remark, "My life has broken into two."

Returning to his hotel room, Aleksey throws the money on the table before Polina. "I remember she looked into my face with frightful intentness." These words, which open chapter 15, strike the keynote for the unfolding scene as far as Polina is concerned: her increasing doubt about Aleksey and about the real nature of his feelings and words. Her glance literally pursues Aleksey throughout their last encounter. As he rushes about, almost completely oblivious of her, tidying up his piles of money and gold, Aleksey notes, she is "attentively" watching him, with a strange expression on her face. "I did not like that look! I do not err in saying that there was hatred in it." When Aleksey suggests that Polina take 50,000 francs and throw it in de Grioux's face, she does not answer but bursts into the kind of mocking laughter that had always greeted his "most passionate declarations." Her laughter, always defensive in character, now points to her growing disillusionment and despair with Aleksey. At last, he writes, she stops and frowns, looking at Aleksey sternly. De Grioux had sought to cancel his sense of obligation to Polina with an IOU note. Aleksey's proposal, in turn, seems to put the cash sign before their relationship. "You think you can buy my respect with money, if not me myself," Polina had remarked to Aleksey in an earlier episode in the novel. Polina refuses the money.

Aleksey seems incapable of understanding Polina's refusal, however. Puzzled by her response, he counters, "I offer it to you as a friend; I offer you my life." But life is not to be measured by the weight of gold or the gambler's bravado at the tables. Again, Aleksey notes, "She looked at me with a long and searching glance, as if she wanted to transfix me with it." Polina is not a commodity to be bought and sold. "You are setting a high price," she says with a bitter smile, "de Grioux's lover is not worth fifty thousand francs." "Polina, how can you talk that way with me?" Aleksey cries reproachfully. "Am I de Grioux?" Of course, that is precisely the question Polina has been trying to resolve: is he any different from de Grioux? "I hate you! Yes . . . yes!" she exclaims. But then she equates him with de Grioux in another way. "I don't love you any more than I love de Grioux." Her paradoxical manner of expressing her hate reveals her deeply conflicting feelings over Aleksey, and indeed even over de Grioux, the man toward whom she had "redoubled her contempt."

In this last encounter with Aleksey, however, it is not hatred, contempt, or even wounded pride that emerges as the dominant note, but a desperate appeal for love, for support, for a genuine human partnership. This is not the Polina that the reader first perceived through

the eyes of Aleksey at the beginning of his notes. In this last encounter with him, she seems delirious, ill. For a brief moment, under the strain of an emotional crisis as profound as that of Aleksey's, she reveals both her inner wounded pride and her deepest, hitherto concealed, hopes. "Buy me! Do you want to? Do you want to? For fifty thousand francs, like de Grioux?" she gasped between convulsive sobs. But significantly, she continues to use the familiar form "thou." Aleksey embraces her, kisses her hands, feet, falls on his knees before her. Her hysteria passes. "She placed both her hands on my shoulders and examined me intently; it seemed that she wanted to read something in my face . . . An expression of concern and contemplation appeared on her face." Polina draws him toward her, and then pushes him away, and again "took up examining me with a somber look." Then she suddenly embraces him:

"But you do love me, you do love me, don't you?" she said; after all, after all you . . . you wanted to fight with the baron for me!" And suddenly she burst out into laughter, as though something amusing and nice suddenly flickered in her memory. She was crying and laughing all at once. Well, what could I do. I was myself almost delirious. I remember she began to say something to me, but I could understand almost nothing of what she said. It was a kind of delirium, a kind of incoherent babble, as though she wanted to tell me something as quickly as possible, delirium interspersed with the gayest of laughter, which began to frighten me. "No, no, you are dear, dear!" she repeated. "You are my faithful one!" And again she put her hands on my shoulders, again began looking at me closely and repeated: "You love me . . . love me . . . You will love me?" I did not take my eyes off her; I had never before seen her in these fits of tenderness and love; it is true, of course, that this was delirium, but . . . on noticing my look of passion she suddenly began to smile slyly.

This dramatic scene lays bare the pro and contra of Polina's feelings toward Aleksey. Her words express tenderness and love, but her questioning glances express her deep doubts and uncertainties, all that she had previously masked in coldness and contempt. Polina's swan song of love, for that is what it is, is full of a frenzied will to believe something that she knows in her heart to be false; it is a last delirious gamble, a last gambler's illusion that forms a counterpart to Aleksey's delirious gamble at the tables—his passionate wooing of lady luck. For his part, Aleksey can understand almost nothing of what

she is saying. But his problem in understanding is not merely due to Polina's incoherence; it is deeply rooted in a neurotic gambling passion that has consumed all his psychic energies.

Polina's half-believing, half-despairing lovemaking evokes no reciprocal mood of love or tenderness in Aleksey, only a "look of passion." The protestations of love, the impulsive gestures of tenderness, the physical advances come almost entirely from Polina. Except for one moment when he tries to calm her and falls on his knees before her (the gesture is symbolic), his behavior is passive and his mood almost disbelieving. "I wanted her to come to me and say, 'I really love you,'" Aleksey confided earlier in his notebook. "And if not, if this madness is unthinkable, well then . . . well, what was I to wish for? Do I really know what I wish? I'm like a person without any perspectives; all I want is to be near her, in her aura, in her radiance, eternally, always, all my life. More than this I don't know! And could I possibly go away from her?" Polina does come and say "I love you." But Aleksey goes off to gamble, and when he returns for the last time, he does not understand her words. Aleksey's whole response to Polina in this episode suggests that he has confused her with the aura of radiance of somebody else, that is, with the dazzling ancient empress, lady luck.

At one point in the episode, Polina impulsively embraces Aleksey and exclaims, "We'll go away, we really will go away tomorrow, won't we? And we'll catch up with Grandmamma, don't you think?" To catch up with Grandmamma, of course, is to go back to Moscow, back to Russian soil, Russian nationality, Russian identity, and away from the artificial, rootless, spiritually dead world of Roulettenburg. Russia, in Dostoevsky's ideological design, means spiritual salvation. Polina's hope that Aleksey will take her back to Russia is an illusion. He will be heading not to Moscow, but to the Sodom and Gomorrah of Paris, and not with Polina, but with the radiant Blanche. Polina is, indeed, delirious, on the brink of illness. After another fit of laughter, Aleksey writes, "She suddenly was kissing and embracing me again, passionately and tenderly pressing her face to mine. I no longer thought of anything or heard anything. My head was spinning . . . I think it was about seven in the morning when I came to my senses."

The night of sex does not dissolve the underlying tensions between Aleksey and Polina: conjunctive physically, it gives expression to a thoroughly disjunctive emotional relationship. For both, it is the denouement of a delusion in which each has mistaken the other for

somebody else. In the morning, after three minutes of looking out of the window, Polina turns to Aleksey with loathing and fury, flings the money in his face, and leaves. This action not only points eloquently to the tragedy of loveless sex, but climaxes a relationship that on every level must be considered a paradigm of human misunderstanding. Aleksey, characteristically, does not comprehend her behavior. He can only conclude that Polina is “out of her mind.” Was it “wounded pride” or “despair,” he wonders, that brought her to him. Vanity, he is sure, prompted her “not to trust in me and to insult me.” And then, of course, it all happened in a “state of delirium.”

Aleksey’s ponderings are deeply evasive, egotistical, and lacking in any insight into Polina. What is chiefly noticeable is the absence of any feeling for her. His last act before leaving his room—he hurriedly tucks his whole heap of gold into his bed and covers it—symbolizes the change that has taken place in him since winning at the gambling tables. When he later learns of Polina’s illness and of the possibility of her death, he takes account of the change in himself:

I was sorry for Polina, I swear, but it’s strange: from the very moment I touched the gambling table last night and began to rake in packs of money, my love retreated, as it were, into the background. I say this now, but at the time I still didn’t see all this clearly. Is it possible that I really am a gambler, is it possible that I really . . . love Polina so strangely? No, to this day I still love her, as God will witness.

Aleksey’s orgy at the gambling tables engulfs him completely. He becomes an obsessive gambler. He discovers his true passion, the pursuit of lady luck, and with that discovery, his driving passion for Polina vanishes.

Aleksey’s gamble for lady luck and his emotional crisis are paralleled by Polina’s gamble for Aleksey and her ensuing crisis and illness. Yet the outcomes of these crises are different. Aleksey wins his gamble at the tables and “breaks in two”; the conflict between the man with hidden moral convictions and the pathological gambler ends in the victory of the latter. In a certain sense, Aleksey does become a different man. Polina, for her part, loses her gamble for Aleksey but retains her integrity. At the very moment Aleksey ceases to regard her as a fate-figure, the incubus of demonism is lifted from her. The hopeful, though by no means optimally positive resolution of her drama—for Dostoevsky this would mean a return to Russia and to her roots—is

suggested by her joining the family of the eminently decent Astley in England, and later, in Switzerland.

In contrast, the psychological and spiritual catastrophe of Aleksey is symbolized by his capitulation to the courtesan Blanche, a carnivalesque embodiment of lady luck, a new fate-figure in his life. He goes with her to Paris, where he spends much of his time lying on a couch. "Is it possible I am such a child?" he wonders at the end of his notes. The slave of Polina becomes the "vil esclave," the "fils," and the "bon enfant" of Blanche, the truly infernal woman of the novel. Not without reason does Aleksey refer to Blanche as a "devil" and speak of her face as "diabolical." She is indeed the very incarnation of the beauty of the lie. Aleksey, who perceives that Polina had been taken in by the superficial elegance and form of de Grioux, is himself taken in by the demon of emptiness and banality, Blanche. She was "beautiful to look at," Aleksey observes. But he remarks further that "she has one of those faces that can be terrifying . . . her eyes are black, with yellowish whites, her glance is bold, her teeth extremely white, and her lips always painted; her perfume is musky . . . She sometimes laughs aloud, showing all her teeth, but usually sits silent with an insolent stare."

Aleksey's capitulation to Blanche symbolizes on the religious-philosophical plane of the novel his falling away from God. "For as soon as the human soul despairs of God," Vyacheslav I. Ivanov has written, "it is irresistibly drawn to chaos: it finds joy in all that is ugly and warped, and is greeted, from the deepest ravines of Sodom, by the smile of a beauty that seeks to rival the beauty of Our Lady."<sup>11</sup>

Aleksey, now basically indifferent to anything outside of gambling, does not stay long with Blanche. In a final encounter with the Englishman Astley, Aleksey learns that Polina had loved him. "You are a lost man," Astley tells him. "You've grown numb, you have not only renounced your life, your own interests, and those of society, your duty as a citizen and a man, your friends . . . you have not only renounced every goal except that of winning, but you have even renounced your memories." The special mention of memory is significant. "Insofar as it is 'forgotten,' the 'past,' historical or primordial, is homologized with death," Mircea Eliade has written in connection with the ancient Greek understanding of memory and forgetting. "The fountain Lethe,

<sup>11</sup> Vyacheslav [I] Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life*, ed. S. Konovalov, trans. Norman Cameron (New York: Noonday Press, 1952), 32.

'forgetfulness,' is a necessary part of the realm of Death. The dead are those who have lost their memories."<sup>12</sup> For Dostoevsky, loss of memory implies a static view of the universe and, ultimately, moral and spiritual death. In turn, restoration of memory, recollection, is linked with a dynamic understanding of human destiny and, ultimately, a vision of Christian truth and a perception of eternal renewal.

Aleksey's renunciation of his memories is symptomatic of his spiritual disintegration. He speaks of himself as dead but can conceive of resurrection only in terms that parody Christian theological reality. "Tomorrow," he insists, "I can be resurrected from the dead and once again begin to live." But he is dying in a spiritual sense. "Is it possible that I do not realize that I myself am a lost man?" The terminology of Christian salvation, however, returns to his lips (in the deepest regions of his unconscious, of course, he has not forgotten the vision of truth). He is certain that he can "rise again." "In one hour I can change my whole fate." He has in mind, however, salvation at the gambling tables, a new challenge to fate. His final words and the final words of the novel, "tomorrow, tomorrow all will be over," testify to his determination once again, like the Underground Man, to hurl himself against the wall of fate. But on the deeper plane of the novel's meaning, these same words signify the despair of unbelief and the unconscious recognition that in a fate-ruled universe, there is no tomorrow, but only a meaningless finality: death without resurrection. Not without reason did Dostoevsky speak of the gambler's world as "a special kind of hell, a special kind of prison 'bath.'"

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<sup>12</sup> Mircea Eliade, "Mythologies of Memory and Forgetting," *History of Religions* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1963): 333.



PIERRE AND DOLOKHOV AT THE BARRIER:  
THE LESSON OF THE DUEL<sup>1</sup>

The focus of our discussion is the duel between Dolokhov and Pierre (book 2, part 1, chapter 5) in *War and Peace*. We will present what happens in the duel; consider its outcome against the background of the psychology of the protagonists; and finally, ask what bearing the duel has on the general theme of chance and design in *War and Peace*.

I

The duel takes place at a moment when the wounded Prince Andrei, in Austria, has been declared a “hopeless case” by Napoleon’s physician, Dr. Larrey. Pierre, in Moscow, also appears to be a hopeless case: not so much physically as morally, psychologically. Sad and depressed, he has been helplessly flopping around in high society, engulfed in an atmosphere of subservience to his wealth and position. Subservience also defines his relation to wife, Helene. On her orders, he has abandoned his spectacles. Glasses are an obvious sign of the need to see. One needs them to look about and know what is going on in one’s presence. Helene’s professional activity is men. At this time, she is cultivating Dolokhov. Pierre is cast in the role of cuckold. He sees and yet does not see what is going on about him. He has no love for Dolokhov, but he cannot quite believe what he senses to be true. However, Pierre recognizes in the indestructible Dolokhov a bully and a cold killer type.

“Yes, he’s a bully . . . it means nothing for him to kill a man.  
He must think that everyone is afraid of him, and this must

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<sup>1</sup> From *Scando-Slavica* 39 (1993): 52-61.



be pleasant to him. He must think that I too am afraid of him. And, in fact, I am afraid of him," Pierre reflected, and with these thoughts he again felt as though something terrible and monstrous were rising inside him.

We know how Dolokhov at dinner in the English Club insults Pierre to his face: "Here's to the health of all beautiful women, Petrusha, and to their lovers." Pierre challenges Dolokhov to a duel, and the latter accepts the challenge. Here is how Tolstoy describes the duel:

"One! Two! Three!" angrily cried [Denisov], and went off to the side. Both men advanced along the trodden tracks, coming closer and closer, recognizing one another through the fog. The combatants had the right to fire when they liked as they approached the barrier. Dolokhov walked slowly, not raising his pistol, his clear, sparkling eyes peering into his opponent's face. His mouth wore its usual semblance of a smile. At the word "three" Pierre moved quickly forward with rapid steps, straying off the beaten path (*sbivaia's protoptannoi dorozhki*) and stepping into untrodden snow. He held the pistol at arm's length in his right hand, obviously afraid of killing himself with it. His left arm he carefully held behind him because he felt inclined to use it to support his right arm, which he knew he must not do. After advancing half a dozen paces and straying off the track into the snow (*sbivshis' s dorozhki v sneg*), Pierre looked down about his feet, glanced rapidly again at Dolokhov and, pulling his finger as he had been taught, fired. Not at all expecting so loud a report, Pierre started at the sound, then smiled at his own sensations and stood still.

Pierre, as we know, wounds Dolokhov who, staggering forward, shoots at Pierre, but misses his mark.

Why does Dolokhov lose the duel? Why does Pierre win it? Or as with a lottery, are such questions irrelevant to the action? We can distinguish at the outset two radically different psychological attitudes toward the duel on the part of Dolokhov and Pierre, each of which contributes toward the outcome. Throughout *War and Peace* Dolokhov, the archetypal gambler, embodies and propagandizes the notion that one can challenge fate and win; that one can control one's own destiny and dominate the lives or fate of others; that one can, at will, and to one's advantage, turn chance into fate. While offering some evidence that such an outlook provides Dolokhov with a psychological advantage

over others, an analysis of Dolokhov's major adventures throughout *War and Peace* suggests that his efforts often lead to unexpected and surprising results—quite different from those anticipated. In any case, Dolokhov approaches the duel with absolute trust in the power of will and skill; with the confidence of the archetypal gambler who believes he is in touch with some ground principle. Dolokhov's philosophy of dueling may be summed up in the words: have the will to kill, and lock your eyes onto your victim. The "secret of dueling," as he puts it, is to go into the duel with no thought that you might be killed, but rather "with the firm intention of killing your man as quickly and surely as possible, then everything will be in good order." So far as Dolokhov actually practices what he preaches, he in fact does meet danger and critical situations with an exceptional, one might say "fateful" advantage over others. The strange viability of Dolokhov has a real foundation. Pierre is perfectly right in sensing the psychology of the killer in Dolokhov, that is, the psychology of a man who has banished all fear and acts with nerveless composure. Dolokhov typically remarks in connection with his secret of dueling:

As our bear-hunter from Kostroma used to say to me: "A bear," he'd say, "why, who's not afraid of a bear, but once you've set eyes on him your fear's all gone, and your only thought is not to let him get away!" Well, that's how it is with me.

Pierre, the bear, approaches the duel as he approached his father's funeral and all the incomprehensible events surrounding it: as a man of instinct, not of intellect; as a person who follows rather than leads; as a person who listens to his deepest, most organic responses. Just before the duel, Pierre's second, Nesvitsky, tries to get Pierre to apologize to Dolokhov for losing his temper at the dinner party, but Pierre finds nothing to talk about. "It's all the same" (*vse ravno*), he says with the curious indifference or resignation of a man caught up in something that he does not fully understand, but cannot avoid. "Only tell me where I am to go, and where to fire," he asks, inquiring at the same time about the working of the trigger, as he had never held a pistol in his hands before.

How could it happen that the awkward and inexperienced Pierre, a complete novice at dueling, could succeed against Dolokhov? How could Dolokhov, the professional duelist and archetypal gambler, fail? Let us answer the last question first. Dolokhov, the gambler, is no fool. In all situations of danger, he calculates his odds with care.

He does not mindlessly jump into an affair. He does not court danger for its own sake, though he certainly enjoys tempting fate. Toward the end of *War and Peace*, he repeatedly warns Anatole that he is playing a dangerous game in trying to elope with Natasha. "This is a dangerous business and, when you come to think of it, a foolish one." After all, Dolokhov's chief aim, like that of every true gambler, is to put chance out of the game. Though fearless, he knows a losing game when he sees one. And Dolokhov likes to win. It is impossible, however, to calculate everything—one of the central moral-philosophical postulates of Tolstoy in *War and Peace*. In this case, Dolokhov, like his historical counterpart Napoleon in the duel with Kutuzov, left the strange and erratic behavior of the bear out of his calculations.

Accident, chance, an element of surprise does enter the duel: Pierre, instead of moving slowly toward the barrier, as does the confident but cautious Dolokhov, moves rapidly forward; instead of keeping to the well-trodden path Pierre strays off into the deep wet snow. Dolokhov, following the bear-hunter's advice, looks calmly into his opponent's face as though to lock Pierre into his sights, to immobilize him with his eyes alone. He is so confident that he does not even raise his pistol. Ninety-nine out of a hundred novices, perhaps, would have quailed before Dolokhov's gaze and brazen self-assurance, but Pierre who has given up his glasses does not appear even to meet that gaze. Most important, he accidentally, though not really accidentally if one considers Pierre's nature and life style, strays off into the deep wet snow. Tolstoy does not say so directly, but the implication is that Pierre's wandering off or going astray (Tolstoy uses the verb *sbit'sia* twice in the description of the duel) gives Pierre an advantage, that is, it momentarily distracts Dolokhov, disrupts his plan, his scenario, his timetable. It was impossible to calculate the possibility of Pierre's wholly unconventional and awkward movements in advance. "Once you've set eyes on him your fear's all gone, and your only thought is not to let him get away!" The bear, however, gets away.

It remains to consider not only the unexpected action that throws Dolokhov off balance, but the reason for the success of the novice Pierre in winging Dolokhov. Pierre, we are told, looked down about his feet, then glanced rapidly at Dolokhov and fired. The bullet found its mark. Proverbial wisdom would say that Pierre was lucky, that is, that he was the recipient of accidental good fortune. "The person who's lucky, well, he's just lucky." (*Komu povezet — tak uzh povezet.*) To be sure, Dolokhov's miscalculation, that is, his complete trust in will and

calculated knowledge, is an important factor in Pierre's success. There is more to the matter, however.

There is the curious phenomenon of "beginner's luck," a fact that is verifiable in many areas of activity and endeavor.<sup>2</sup> The explanation for beginner's luck is rooted in psychological reality or truth. The beginner or novice is not preoccupied with technique; he is free to be unorthodox, unconventional, a fact that in games, for example, can rattle the more experienced player who is used to professional opponents with known techniques. Moreover, the beginner is less likely to be encumbered by the tension or anxiety that may accompany the fear of losing or not doing well. He is less likely to be goal-oriented. In this respect, the mental state of the novice is comparable, paradoxically, to that of the Zen master who is totally at ease and at one with his mind, body and task. In his book, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, Eugen Herrigel recalls that his Japanese Zen teacher exclaimed at one point, "Don't think of what you have to do, don't consider how to carry it out! The shot will only go smoothly when it takes the archer himself by surprise. It must be as if the bowstring suddenly cut through the thumb that held it. You mustn't open the right hand on purpose."<sup>3</sup> Pierre's state of mind in the duel in much reminds us of both novice and master. He is first looking at his feet. His glance at Dolokhov is apparently sudden and unthinking. He does not appear to take aim, but clearly his arm, hand

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Edmund Bergler in his discussion of the pathological gambler advances psychoanalytical explanations for the phenomenon. See his discussion in "The Psychology of Gambling," *The Psychology of Gambling*, eds. Jon Halliday and Peter Fuller (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 197. The phenomenon of beginner's luck has been noted in other areas of activity besides gambling. For example, Charles Chaplin writes in his autobiography: "To an artist complete freedom to do the unorthodox is usually most exciting, and that is why many a director's first picture has freshness, and originality." See *Film Makers on Film Making*, ed. Harry M. Geduld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), 71. Neil Jordan, the writer and director of "The Crying Game" which stars Jaye Davidson, an amateur playing in his first film, observed that Davidson's lack of experience may even have been an advantage. "When you get someone who's never acted before, what you see is their inner dignity. Their spirit is what comes through, because they've got no technique—all they've got is themselves." Quoted by Janet Maslin, in "A Star to Match a Mystery Role," *New York Times*, Home Section C, December 17, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> See Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, introduction by D. T. Suzuki, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Pantheon, 1974), 48.

and eye almost unconsciously line up with the target. His shot takes him by surprise. "The right art," cried the Zen Master to his pupil, "is purposeless, aimless! The more obstinately you try to learn how to shoot the arrow for the sake of hitting the goal, the less you will succeed in the one and the further the other will recede. What stands in your way is that you have a much too willful will. You think that what you do not do yourself does not happen."<sup>4</sup>

The master's words go to the core of Pierre's psychological relation to his goal or target in the duel. If we expand the idea of target to something broader than the archer's or the dueler's target, that is, to life itself, then it becomes apparent that Pierre's orientation to life is not too different from his orientation to his target Dolokhov. In Pierre's life, we are witness to an organic, groping process of living, something that is curiously without a "willful will"; if there is achievement, a forward-movement in Pierre's life, it is always accompanied by an abundance of backward and side movement, much wandering off the track, much "straying," in the literal and figurative sense of the Russian phrase "sbit'sia s dorogi." Yet this is not aimless or chaotic movement. There is in Pierre an ultimately sure, artistic, instinctive consciousness of inner seeking and direction; there is, one might say, some inner moral-spiritual compass that directs him toward true north.

To return to the opening question and to the philosophical questions underlying the duel: why does Dolokhov lose the duel and why does Pierre win it? Did chance, accident play a role in the fateful outcome? Yes, various chance factors did enter into the duel: in the first instance, fog and snow, and in the second instance, at least as far as Dolokhov was concerned, an inexperienced, awkward player—Pierre. These factors, if not in some absolute sense incalculable, certainly were unforeseeable for Dolokhov, a person whose overweening self-confidence and contempt for his opponent could only be self-blinding. The Dolokhoffs cannot calculate their own natures, or to put it another way, they do not know enough to know that at times to calculate is to miscalculate. Pierre, too, fortunately, did not know himself in this situation, did not know enough to walk in a straight line with his eyes on his opponent. Like the Russian people in its duel with Napoleon, Pierre simply did not follow the rules. In this sense, Pierre's partial defeat of Dolokhov in the fog and snow of an empty Russian field is

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 51.

emblematic of the nature of the triumph of Russia and Kutuzov over Napoleon.

## 2

Chance, then, plays a role in the duel between Pierre and Dolokhov. After looking closely at the duel, however; after analyzing the duelists' psychology in this given situation; after acknowledging that we, too, approached the duel unable to predict its outcome (if, indeed, we happened to read *War and Peace* for the first time); after duly considering everything, we nonetheless conclude that though unexpected, it was not entirely accidental that Dolokhov in this duel lost his gamble and that Pierre, just as he half-blindly slogs his way through the chronic crises of his life, fumbled or humbled his way to a successful shot. An underlying design in the action is there for all to see.

"In general," Chekhov wrote to a correspondent who had sent him a poem to evaluate, "there is no logic to the acts of your hero. In art, as in life, too, nothing accidental takes place."<sup>5</sup> Chekhov did *not* mean to say that the creative process or process of living is without accident or chance. The accidental very much enters into artistic creation and life; without it there would be no freedom. *What* the artist selects, however, his acceptance or rejection of the incidental or accidental, is governed in the long run by his developing inner design (such is the case in life, though the process is more fragmentary, less visible than it is in art, and of course, incomplete—until it is complete).

The consistency we come to recognize in Prince Andrei's character, in his psychology and development, is also no accident. "Man does not live his life, but composes himself, *self-composes* himself," Dostoevsky wrote in his notebook in 1880.<sup>6</sup> Andrei's life could have been different at any moment not merely because Tolstoy might have willed it so (as he at one point willed Andrei to survive Austerlitz and die a later death), but because of the essential ingredient of freedom he bears within him. Yet the reader, who has read through *War and Peace* like the author, perceives Prince Andrei simultaneously in movement and in completion. As we

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<sup>5</sup> See Chekhov's letter to B. A. Sadovsky, May 28, 1904, in A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v tridtsati tomakh*, 30 vols. (Moscow: 1974–1983), *Pis'ma* 12:108.

<sup>6</sup> Dostoevskii, PSS, 27:59.

ponder Andrei's total "composition" in *War and Peace*, we are confronted by the paradox of a freely chosen fate, that is, a limited something that has grown out of the material of life and the sum of choices: not what *had to be*, but what finally *was*—Shakespeare's "hatch and brood of time." The life of Andrei bears out the Greek dictum "A man's character is his fate," so much so that Andrei's casual remark at opening of the epic—"je suis un homme fini"—bears a mysterious significance to the reader of *War and Peace*. The reader must first have read through *War and Peace* to appreciate this detail—this dark hint of character and its inner *fatality*. Here, the reading of Andrei's "history" is comparable to Tolstoy's ideal reading of history at large:

History is concerned with the lines of movement of human wills, one end of which is hidden in the unknown while at the other end men's consciousness of freedom in the present moment moves on through space and time and causation. *The more this threshold of movement opens out before our eyes, the more evident do the laws of the movement become.* To grasp and define these laws is the problem of history (my italics—RLJ; Second Epilogue, chapter 11).

It is the task, too, of the reader of *War and Peace*. Thus, the more the "threshold of movement" of character, incident, and event open out before our eyes, "the more evident do the laws of the movement become," laws which Tolstoy apprehends in his own way, to be sure, but laws or regularities nonetheless.

"In art, as in life, too, nothing accidental takes place." What Chekhov meant is that in art every stroke, every incident, every detail, has meaning and inner logic. This is certainly true of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. In this respect, I am only in qualified agreement with Gary Saul Morson when he maintains in his landmark study of *War and Peace* that the "recognition of radical insignificance of many incidents in *War and Peace* is fundamental to an understanding of the work's structure," a structure, he adds, that is "emblematic of the historical process as Tolstoy conceived it."<sup>7</sup> Peripheral incidents and characters, and there are certainly many of these in *War and Peace*, may be said to demonstrate

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<sup>7</sup> See Gary Saul Morson, *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in War and Peace* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 148, 150.



that there are loose threads in history. Plot structure or anti-structure, however, is only one aspect of *War and Peace*. In the broadest sense, there are no loose threads in *War and Peace*. The seemingly insignificant or “unnecessary” incidents and characters have other tasks to perform, and have their function in the tapestry of artistic coherence and linkage. To take one character from our discussion: Dolokhov. This man, “the most striking example of disproportionality to the plot,” as Morson rightly notes, nonetheless is dramatically and quintessentially important in his every act to the exposition of moral-philosophical questions that lie at the center of *War and Peace*; he is vital to the development of the Napoleonic theme. This little Napoleon<sup>8</sup> (Tolstoy identifies Dolokhov with Napoleon in his drafts) is no more able to dominate the scene than the big Napoleon. And this fact, indeed, is “emblematic of the historical process as Tolstoy conceived it.” Yet Dolokhov, this descendent of Pushkin’s Hermann and Lermontov’s Pechorin, is one of the important avenues to an understanding of the psychology of Napoleon and of his epoch—that vast revolutionary upheaval which introduced so much of chance into the historical agenda of whole classes as well as individuals, which gave social situation and life at that time its peculiarly precarious character.<sup>9</sup> What is more, in Dolokhov, we have the opportunity to observe the Napoleonic type at close quarters and to ponder him outside the framework of caricature.

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<sup>8</sup> In his essay “Napoleon: or, The Man of the World,” Emerson observed, “If Napoleon is France, if Napoleon is Europe, it is because the people whom he sways are little Napoleons.” Emerson’s essay delighted Tolstoy. See my discussion of Tolstoy’s attitude toward Napoleon, and the significance for Tolstoy of Emerson’s ambivalent point of view, in my essay, “Napoleon and Russian Literature,” in *Yale French Studies*, 26 (Fall-Winter 1960–1961): 106–118.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Napoleon’s letter to his brother, Joseph Bonaparte, August 12, 1795: “Personally, I hardly care what happens to me. I watch life almost indifferently. My permanent state of mind is that of a soldier on the eve of battle: I have come to the conclusion that, since a chance meeting with death may end it all at any minute, it is stupid to worry about anything. Everything disposes me to face my destiny without flinching. At this rate, my friend, I shall end by not stepping out of the way of a passing carriage. As a reasonable man I am sometimes astonished at this attitude; but it is a natural tendency produced in me by the moral state of the country, and by the habit of running risks.” See *Napoleon’s Letters*, ed. and trans. J. M. Thompson (London-New York: J.M. Dent, 1954), 44.



I have singled out Dolokhov for attention because, along with Pierre, he is at the center of our discussion of chance and design. Yet Tolstoy has endowed even the most *seemingly* irrelevant, peripheral or seemingly enigmatic passages, incidents and details with relevance and meaning, with what Goethe once called the “dignity of significance.”<sup>10</sup>

The paradox of *War and Peace*—a work in which Tolstoy ridicules the possibility of foreseeing, controlling, making sense out of events and history; a work in which chance plays havoc with everybody’s well-laid plans—is that we conclude our reading with a consciousness of freedom; a sense of the exhilarating openness of life, experience and history; an awareness of the vast play of chance; yet at the same time, we come away from the book with an overwhelming and astounding sense of the deep regularities and rhythms not alone of art, but of nature, human experience; we come away with a sense of infinitely complex threading, “linkage,” significance, overarching design in life, and yes, even in history. We have a sense, I would suggest, not of Tolstoy versus Aristotle,<sup>11</sup> but of a strange and novel blending of the two: we are witness not to the exclusion or negation of the irrational or contingent,<sup>12</sup> but rather to its integration into self-regulating processes of life, strange stories and legends of higher meaning and destiny lived out by human beings in their unpredictable and zig-zagging ways; we are witness, one might say, taking a leaf from Bakhtin’s Dostoevsky notebook, to “the activity of God in His relation to man.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> In his notes to a translation of Diderot’s “Essai sur la peinture,” Goethe wrote “Art sticks to the surface of natural phenomena; but it has its own depth, its own power; it crystallizes the highest moments of these superficial phenomena by recognizing in them the character of lawfulness . . . the dignity of significance (die Würde der Bedeutung).” *Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläums-Ausgabe* in 40 Bänden (Stuttgart und Berlin: 1892), 33: 214–215.

<sup>11</sup> See Morson’s discussion, “Tolstoy vs. Aristotle” in *Hidden in Plain View*, op. cit., 144.

<sup>12</sup> I have in mind Aristotle’s observation that “within the action there must be nothing irrational. If the irrational cannot be excluded, it should be outside the scope of the tragedy. Such is the irrational element in the *Oedipus* of Sophocles.” See *Aristotle’s Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, translated and with Critical Notes by S. H. Butcher, with a Prefatory Essay by John Gassner, 4th ed. (New York: Dover, 1951), 57.

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 2 in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson, Introduction by Wayne C. Booth, *Theory and History of Literature*, 8 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 285.

CHANCE AND DESIGN:  
ANNA KARENINA'S FIRST MEETING WITH VRONSKY<sup>1</sup>

In chapter 18, part 1 of *Anna Karenina*, some seventy pages from the beginning of the novel, Tolstoy introduces Anna to the reader for the first time in person. The scene is a Moscow railroad station. Stepan Oblonsky is there to meet his sister Anna who is arriving from St. Petersburg; Vronsky, to meet his mother who is arriving on the same train. All four meet, exchange amenities, and prepare to leave the station; momentarily, a disturbing incident draws their attention: a railroad guard has been crushed by one of the cars. After a brief delay (Vronsky leaves some money for the guard's family), the group departs.

Chance seems to rule this occasion: Vronsky and Oblonsky, though acquainted, have met by chance at the station. Anna, it turns out, had been entrusted by her husband to Vronsky's mother at the station in St. Petersburg and they have made the trip together. Vronsky's meeting with Anna, then, is fortuitous. The death of the guard, apparently, also is an accident.

A view of the surface, or visible structure, of this chapter reflects the unplanned or "natural" character of the action: people alight from a train and greet other people; bits of conversation seem to advance in a kind of meandering movement—in short, build up a sense of the ritualistic, yet banal and basically unstructured character of most meetings and departures at railroad stations. The dramatic incident, the death of the guard, which takes up the final portion of this chapter,

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<sup>1</sup> From *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History*, ed. Peter Demetz, Thomas Greene, and Lowry Nelson, Jr. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), 315-329.

explodes the sense of the casual and ordinary; it provides a momentary focus of attention for the characters. Yet its sudden and alarming intrusion into the casual routine serves only to increase our feeling of the unplanned in chapter 18. Our impression of the unplanned, however, is precisely an impression: on closer analysis, it gives way to a sense of organized movement and design. The action, seen from the artist's point of view, is coherent and saturated with content.

The unifying element in the chapter, indeed its axis, must be sought in Anna. She is the primary focus of the artist's attention; her embryonic relationship with Vronsky constitutes the motive force for the inner action of the chapter. In this action, Anna's character is free to attract, magnetize, and in this sense, introduce "order" in the field of personalities around her; but in this action, too, character is revealed as a determined shape, as an embodiment of an already existing fate. We may define Tolstoy's purpose in chapter 18, then, as twofold: to disclose those elements of character in Anna which will emerge as her fate, and to capture that moment when, under the impact of character and the changes brought about through encounter, the elements of chance group themselves into coherent design. To present this whole action without allowing its inner dynamics to obtrude upon or overwhelm, the "natural" and free flow of surface action—here is the real art of Tolstoy.

At the opening of chapter 18, Vronsky steps up to the door of a train compartment and stops in order to make way for a lady who is coming out. He glances "at the exterior of this lady" who obviously belongs to the upper classes, begs her pardon, and is about to enter the carriage when he feels the need to have another look at her, "not because she was very beautiful, not because of the elegance and modest grace which were evident in her whole person, but because there was something particularly caressing and tender in the expression of her lovely face when she passed him."

Not so much exterior beauty or elegance as a certain compelling interior richness of being, a refined sensuousness defines Anna. Tolstoy's emphasis here is carried over into the crucial characterization of Anna as seen through Vronsky. Anna turns to look at Vronsky, and her dark eyes rest momentarily upon him in a friendly, attentive manner. She then turns to the approaching crowd as if in search of someone.

In that brief glance Vronsky had time to notice a restrained animation which played over her face. It was as though her

nature were so brimming over with an abundance of something that against her will it expressed itself now in a radiant look, now in a smile. She deliberately shrouded the light in her eyes, but it gleamed against her will in a barely perceptible smile.

Tolstoy has drawn Vronsky, and the reader, into the interior of Anna's being. He now calls attention to the welling up from it of a vital life force: animation (*ozhivlenie*), a key word used three times in chapter 18 in descriptions of Anna. It is, however, "restrained animation"; it is held back by "will" and yet makes itself felt "against her will." Precisely, this force of energy, this vitality, this almost animal animation is a distinguishing mark of Anna. At the moment Vronsky meets Anna, these opposite forces of animation and restraint are in a delicate equilibrium. At the end of the chapter, when Anna leaves the station, that equilibrium has been lost.

Contradiction, conflict, tension, between opposite elements, then, are evident in Anna's nature from the outset; they also enter into her social perspective. Tolstoy brings this out obliquely in the scene under discussion. Vronsky, after exchanging glances with Anna, steps into the train, greets his mother, and, while talking with her, overhears a conversation of a woman (Anna) with a man outside the door.

"All the same (*vse-taki*), I do not agree with you," said the voice of the woman.

"That's the Petersburg way of looking at it, Madame."

"Not the Petersburg way, but simply a woman's way."

"Well, anyway, permit me to kiss your hand."

These are the first words uttered by Anna in the novel. We do not know the subject of dispute, but this makes it possible for the words to produce a more general impression upon us. Almost the first word, *vse-taki* firmly establishes that singular quality of contrariety which will define, in a sense, Anna's whole stance before society; *vse-taki* (all the same, nonetheless, however that maybe) is a word which indicates some kind of concession, perhaps, in the sphere of logic, but at the same time implies a stubborn adherence to one's own point of view in spite of logic or of convincing counterargument.<sup>2</sup> The little colloquy we

<sup>2</sup> Tolstoy's use of the word *vse-taki* recalls another occasion on which he uses

have quoted serves also to raise the problem content of Anna's nature to a general intellectual and social level, the level of action of the novel as a whole. What emerges from the colloquy is the image of a woman of tenacious viewpoint, one who rejects identification, significantly, with a "Petersburg" outlook, and who firmly embraces the "woman's" point of view. The opposition between Petersburg and the "woman's" point of view anticipates the major confrontation of Anna in the novel.

Assertiveness, decisiveness, a readiness to take the lead are essential qualities of Anna, and they are manifested throughout her relationship with Vronsky. Tolstoy, at the very first appearance of Anna in the novel, signals these qualities. Vronsky introduces himself to Anna, "You probably don't remember me." "On the contrary," Anna replies.

"I should have recognized you—your mother and I, it seems, talked of nothing but you the whole journey," she said, at last allowing the animation that sought release to express itself in a smile. "But still no sign of my brother." "Do go and call out for him, Alyosha," said the old countess. Vronsky went out onto the platform and shouted, "Oblonsky! here!" But Madame Karenina did not wait for her brother and, as soon as she caught sight of him she stepped down from the train with a resolute step. And as soon as her brother reached her she flung her left arm around the neck of her brother, with a movement that struck Vronsky by its resoluteness and grace, and drawing him quickly to her warmly kissed him. Vronsky could not take his eyes off her and, without knowing why, smiled. But recollecting that his mother was waiting for him, he went back again into the train.

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this word to give expression to a sense of deep contradiction or disjunction in consciousness. In *War and Peace* (Vol. 1, Part Three, Sect. 12), on the eve of the Battle of Austerlitz, Prince Andrey dreams of his happy moment of glory, of his "Toulon." Tolstoy presents his consciousness as a dialectic of voices—one dreaming of glory, the others reminding him of the price: death, wounds, suffering. But the initial voice stubbornly insists that it would give everything for a moment of glory, for triumph over people, for people's love, the people out there. And as Andrey reflects, some good-hearted banter between two peasant-soldiers outside drifts into his consciousness. This bit of small talk, in its simplicity and humanity, clearly strikes at the egoism and vanity of Andrey's aspirations. The implicit challenge of this small talk is recognized but rebuffed. Andrey's reflections conclude: "Yet all the same (*vse-taki*) I love and value only a triumph over them all, I value this mysterious power and glory which now swirls about me in this mist."

Animation,<sup>3</sup> decisiveness, directness are expressed as well in Anna's physical actions and being. What is equally striking in this episode, however, is Tolstoy's emphasis upon Anna's independence. Her readiness to initiate action, significantly, contrasts with the merely responsive action of Vronsky. He steps out onto the platform in response to his mother's request; Anna, on the other hand, "did not wait for her brother." Further, it is in this passage that Tolstoy calls attention to a pattern in Vronsky's relationship with his mother. The final line in the passage cited—"But recollecting that his mother was waiting for him, he went back again into the train"—is the first indication, however slight, of a motif sounded at the conclusion of chapter 17, part 1: the external obeisance and respect Vronsky accords his mother.<sup>4</sup>

This mother-motif, which Tolstoy weaves into the very texture of the most casual actions of Vronsky,<sup>5</sup> forms a brilliant, yet eminently natural prelude to the exchange between Vronsky and his mother on "le parfait amour." Vronsky's mother lets fall a veiled hint apropos of the value of a liaison with a woman like Anna, coupling it with an indirect disapproval of his courting of Kitty. Though Vronsky is irritated by his mother's remarks, he in fact does break off his courtship of Kitty and strikes up an affair (though not in the cynical spirit of his mother) with Anna. The motif of Vronsky's social attachment to his mother's person rises to the surface once again in the exchange which follows between Anna and Vronsky's mother on the question of getting along without their sons. Vronsky's mother tells Anna not to worry about her son, "You cannot expect never to be parted," a remark, of course, that would be better directed to herself and her own obvious concern over Vronsky's apparent interest in Kitty.

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<sup>3</sup> From "restrained" animation to animation finally released in a smile, Tolstoy moves (in chapter 29, part 1) to the "irrepressible joy and animation" which shows on Anna's face when she meets Vronsky during the train trip back to St. Petersburg.

<sup>4</sup> "In his heart he did not respect his mother and, though not acknowledging this to himself, did not love her; but in accordance with the ideas of his set and of his education, he could not imagine any other relations to his mother than those dutiful and respectful to the highest degree, and the more externally dutiful and respectful he was, the less he respected and loved her at heart."

<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy that on three different occasions in chapter 18, Vronsky's contemplation of Anna is interrupted by a shift of attention to his mother.

The final episode of the chapter serves to bring into sharper relief the characters of Anna and Vronsky. Anna and her brother, as well as Vronsky and his mother, prepare to leave the station when they learn of the guard's accident. Vronsky and Oblonsky follow the crowd to find out about the accident. They return:

Oblonsky and Vronsky had both seen the disfigured corpse. Oblonsky, plainly, was suffering. His face was distorted and he seemed ready to burst into tears.

"Oh, what a horror! Oh, Anna, if you had seen it! Oh, what a horror!" he kept repeating.

Vronsky was silent and his handsome face was serious, but perfectly tranquil.

"Ah, if you had seen it, Countess," said Stepan Arkadich. "And his wife is here. It was awful to see her. She threw herself on the body. They say that he supported a huge family. There's the horror of it all!"

"Can't something be done for her," Anna said in an agitated whisper.

Vronsky looked at her and immediately left the train.

"I'll be right back, Maman," he added, looking around in the doorway.

The passage deftly discloses something essential to the character of all participants. "Oblonsky, plainly, was suffering. His face was distorted and he seemed ready to burst into tears." There are no profundities to Oblonsky, yet his reaction is typical of his open, good-hearted, though somewhat two-dimensional nature. His emotions are near the surface and are easily, if not permanently, touched. Anna's "agitated whisper" and her immediate practical concern for the wife of the guard reveal both the depths of her responsiveness to human misfortune and the generosity of her nature. Both Oblonsky's and Anna's reactions have a direct verbal and even physical character. In striking contrast, Vronsky is silent and his handsome face, though serious, "perfectly tranquil."

Is there a dimension of human experience closed to Vronsky, this eminently decent and honorable gentleman? Unquestionably, there is. What is involved here is a certain shallowness, broadly cultural, perhaps, and not one of basic intelligence; even more, a certain unconscious yet organic egoism which prevents him from communicating, or empathizing, with the full depth of feeling of



another. The only moment when Vronsky's face will definitely lose its physical composure, a tranquillity which seems to underscore his limitations, is in his final appearance, after Anna's suicide, at a railroad station. Koznyshev scans the "obviously suffering face of Vronsky." Is Vronsky responding, here, to the tragedy of Anna? Has Anna's action finally broken through the composure of his face and being? It is difficult to answer this question with a yes or a no. It is of paramount significance, however, that Tolstoy observes of Vronsky on this occasion that "a gnawing toothache impeded his speech." Tolstoy's own point of view is clear. He has lowered the threshold of Vronsky's suffering, yet not arbitrarily, not maliciously, but fully in accord with the essential nature of Vronsky.

Anna asks whether something could be done for the family of the guard. "Vronsky looked at her and immediately left the train." But the glance is not one of common sentiment; it is only a glance of recognition of Anna's request. He does not share Anna's deep response to the disaster, and he will never understand or reach Anna at that deeper level on which her question was formulated. This is one of the elements in Anna's tragedy.

Vronsky, gentleman that he is, goes off to fulfill Anna's request, but person that he is, he characteristically leaves the money with an official without indicating that it should be used for the family of the deceased guard. As he leaves to fulfill his duty, he remarks, "I'll be right back, Maman." In a sense, Vronsky's whole relationship with Anna opens on a note of his mother's approval and ends with a return to mother. How important Tolstoy viewed the motif of Vronsky's concern for his mother may be judged alone by the reemergence of this motif in full force at the moment of Vronsky's final break with Anna:

"It's a matter of complete indifference to me what your mother thinks and how she wants to marry you off," she said, putting down the cup with a trembling hand.

"But we're not talking about that."

"No, precisely about that. And let me assure you that I have no interest in a heartless woman—whether she be an old lady or not, your mother or somebody else—and I don't want to have anything to do with her."

"Anna, I beg you not to speak disrespectfully of my mother.

"A woman whose heart does not tell her wherein lies the happiness and honor of her son—such a woman has no heart."



"I repeat my request that you do not speak disrespectfully about my mother, whom I respect," he said, raising his voice and looking at her severely.  
 "You don't love your mother. Those are all words, words, words!" she said looking at him with hate.

The theme of respect for his mother, in short, the problem of *comme il faut* behavior and morality, points to a permanent concern of Tolstoy: the disjunction between form and content (and the atrophy of the latter) in the aristocratic, Petersburg world. Vronsky's unwillingness and inability to come to terms with this hypocrisy in his relations with his mother points to the permanent ambiguity that marks his attitude toward Anna's rebellion, on the one hand, and society on the other. It is because Anna, both in her essential nature and her actions, refuses to tolerate this disjunction of form and content, this rule of hypocrisy and façade, because she insists on full integrity in choice and action, that she pays the price of vengeance. "You're very much a whole man (*tsel'nyi chelovek*), Oblonsky remarks on one occasion to Levin. "It's your virtue and your short coming." The same words, of course, may be applied to Anna.

At their last meeting, Vronsky fails to measure the depth of Anna's anxiety and despair and goes away thinking: "'I've tried everything . . . only one thing remains, to pay no attention,' and he began to get ready to go to the city, and then to his mother's again, to get her signature on the power of attorney." Do we not find here the solution to the enigma of Vronsky's composure at the scene of the accident? In the face of an event or situation that does not yield to rational endeavor, or of one that is beyond the reach of one's feelings—to *pay no attention*?

The conclusion of chapter 18, centering on Anna's reaction to the accident of the guard, provides a brilliant psychological climax to the chapter. Anna gets into the carriage, her lips trembling, barely restraining her tears. Her brother asks her what is the matter.

"It's a bad omen," she said.  
 "What nonsense!" said Stepan Arkadich. "You've come, that's the main thing. You can't imagine how I count on you."  
 "And have you known Vronsky for a long time?" she asked.  
 "Yes. You know we hope that he will marry Kitty."  
 "Really?" Anna said quietly. "Well, now let's talk about you," she added, shaking her head as though she wanted physically to drive away something extraneous, oppressive.

How are we to interpret Anna's remark "It's a bad omen"? Of central importance in any analysis is the fact that the remark is evoked in the context of her meeting with Vronsky. A major preoccupation of Tolstoy throughout chapter 18 is to record the mutual interest of Vronsky and Anna in its embryonic, at first almost unconscious phase. This interest, which first manifests itself almost entirely in terms of basic physical instinct, then rises to the conscious game of "coquetry," suddenly is recognized for what it is by Anna ("she, obviously, did not want to continue in this tone") and suppressed, driven underground, only to reappear again, almost involuntarily, in another seemingly irrelevant context.

Anna's remark "Have you known Vronsky long?" at the time of the accident, suddenly makes us aware that the appearance of Vronsky has upset the internal equilibrium that seems to have been manifest in the tension of animation and restraint. The impact of the accident in the context of her encounter with Vronsky has aroused in Anna a disturbing and pessimistic awareness of her own situation. The thoughts that she wishes to drive away are, of course, not at all "extraneous" to her nature, but of its very essence. Oblonsky's twice-repeated remark at this juncture that he is very much counting on Anna to resolve his marital difficulties, have, in retrospect, an irony to them.

It is obvious that Anna's remark, "it's a bad omen," is drawn from the depths of her nature. It reflects a feature of her personality which the reader often notes: what Dolly calls Anna's "too gloomy" way of looking at things, or what Princess Betsy suggests is Anna's "tendency to look at things too much in a tragic light." There is even a kind of Greek fatality to the character and outlook of Anna. Restlessly, actively, almost physically, she seeks out and creates her own reality, or realm, to play out her drama. The play of chance, such play as we noted at the outset, seems more of an illusion than reality. For such a type as Anna, moreover, the opportunity of chance only provides a consciously or unconsciously anticipated opening;<sup>6</sup> for such a person

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<sup>6</sup> No doubt, too, many combinations or circumstances would have led to a break or crisis in Anna's life, provided an opening gambit to the fulfillment of her nature. Moreover, all the "chance" elements we have noted are very far from being pure chance. Consider the closely interknit family and social relations of all the characters involved: the encounter between Vronsky and Anna could easily occur again in other circumstances. And in fact, Tolstoy lets us know that Vronsky and Anna actually have met before this occasion.

(Lermontov explored a very extreme example of this type in Pechorin) chance is fate. Anna's comment—"it's a bad omen"—is a perfect illustration of this active, willed transformation into fateful actuality of one of those infinite, and endlessly drifting bits of chance that reality holds in continual reserve.

For his part, Vronsky responds to Anna's comment on the level of his own ache, the domestic drama which brings Anna to Moscow. He finds it ridiculous to see in the accident of the guard a "bad omen" for the resolution of his problems. His response—"what nonsense!"—reflects more than just the sober approach of the reasonable man to an admittedly quite subjective, and outwardly at least, superstitious reaction: it serves also to distinguish for us, albeit in a rudimentary and preliminary way, the ordinary consciousness from one with depth and tragic potential. Tolstoy's instructive juxtaposition of Anna and Oblonsky in this interchange, of course, is part of his whole contrast between Anna's tragic drama and Oblonsky's bourgeois domestic drama or melodrama.

Chapter 18, then, constitutes in microcosm the action of the novel as a whole as it pertains to Anna. The movement of the chapter from the buoyant, physically animated, and emotionally surcharged Anna, who steps down from the train, to the emotionally distraught, inward Anna of the chapter's conclusion paraphrases the fall of Anna in the novel at large; it lays the psychological and social groundwork for her real suicide toward the end of the novel. At the end of chapter 18, the purity of Anna's animation has been compromised and the tragic interiority of her nature revealed; by the end of the novel, Anna's "tendency to look at things too much in a tragic light" has become a pathological phenomenon enveloping in darkness her entire worldview.

The principle of realism guiding Tolstoy in this chapter, as elsewhere in his work, is one which Chekhov will develop to perfection: the view that our casual everyday appearance, behavior, conversation, in short, our everyday character and configurations, contain, reflect, anticipate the larger shape of our destiny. An old notion, of course, and one simply expressed by Heraclitus, "A man's character is his fate," but one rarely embodied in art with consummate artistic mastery. Much of what will be recognized as the typical behavior and action of both Anna and Vronsky is discernible in embryonic form in this opening phase of their relationship.

The beauty of the chapter lies in Tolstoy's ability to maintain a primary focus upon the "natural" movement of surface action, of

ordinary, of casual encounter and conversation, while at the same time, disclosing in this seemingly rough and routine material, the texture of a dynamic reality rapidly acquiring design and shape. The themes of Anna, and also to some extent, those of Vronsky, culminate in the episode of the accident. Here, we have an explosion, inaudible and almost invisible, that momentarily smashes the "natural" calm of everyday life and behavior and brings to the surface the full, usually hidden, content of reality: in a single stroke, Tolstoy reveals the tragic outlines of the future. The significance of the chapter as it pertains to Anna is summed up in its final episode: the death of the guard signals the birth of the tragic Anna.

Indeed, the problem of the accident of the guard, Tolstoy's whole choice of the railroad station as a stage to introduce Anna, deserves discussion. The fact that the image of the guard recurs to Anna, and that she ultimately commits suicide in the same fashion as the guard, only points to Tolstoy's vital preoccupation with the psychological motivation of Anna's suicide. But why, specifically, the death of a railroad guard, why a railroad station? Here, Tolstoy's concern is not only with the dramatic and psychological potential of his material, but also with its social content and implications.

The accident of the guard is a symbol and an embodiment, in Tolstoy's novelistic worldview, not of some irrational, metaphysical factor in existence that may at any moment strike us down, but of the rational disorder of modern social and economic existence. It is of cardinal significance that two or three of the most traumatic moments of Anna's existence are played out in interaction with the harsh and discordant rhythms of the railroad. The iron railroad or jarring train, as a symbol of dislocation of life, as an embodiment of new forces ruthlessly destroying the old patterns of patriarchal existence, becomes in *Anna Karenina* (as it does later, in a didactic way, in *The Kreutzer Sonata*) a symbol for the disorders of individual and family existence.

The accident of the guard is not an occurrence of chance (except in the sense that it happens today and not tomorrow, to this guard and not to that one); it emerges, as a concrete possibility, from the actuality of an emerging capitalist existence, that "external civilization"<sup>7</sup> which

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<sup>7</sup> Levin's phrase in *Anna Karenina*, see chapter 25, part five, where he enumerates the features of this "European" civilization carried over into Russia: "in particular the means of communications, the railroad, which

increasingly alienates man from the products of his labor; from the sense of "usefulness" of his labor, and from those organic harmonies of man and labor which Tolstoy extols in his famous collective mowing scene in the novel. (When Levin asks that "we try to think of labor not in the European way," not as "abstract man power, but as the Russian peasant with his instincts," he is appealing also for a rational humanization of the labor process, a return to the "useful" labor of a patriarchal, agricultural existence.) Anna's suicide, likewise, is a final result of an alienation which for Tolstoy is rooted socially in the same dislocations and contradictions that the railroads bring to Russian life, dislocations which somehow acquire a unique and terrifying embodiment, in all its abstraction and senselessness and brutality, in the accident or suicide of the guard . . .<sup>8</sup>

Yet Anna's tragedy is firmly rooted in her own peculiar nature: her decision to commit suicide, as well as her choice of a particular form of suicide, may and must be explained in terms of her nature and of her unique personal history in which chance plays a role (though a minimal one). In short, there had to be a particular person of the nature of Anna Karenina and a particular combination of personal circumstances for there to have been a tragedy of the kind we have in this novel. But it is no less true that the Anna we know is inseparable from the problem content of the Russian society in which she lives; her rebellion, indeed the specific character of that rebellion, is in large part marked by the society which is the object of her rebellion.

In the light of these considerations, chapter 18 emerges as one of the most important and decisive ones in the novel. Here we have

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brought about centralization in the cities, the growth of luxury and as a result—to the detriment of agriculture—the development of industry, the credit system with its concomitant—speculation on the Stock Market."

<sup>8</sup> Tolstoy, it should be noted, is somewhat ambiguous on this point. As omniscient author he writes: "The guard, either because he was drunk or too muffled up against the bitter cold, had not heard the train shunting back and had been crushed." The bystanders, however, have a different impression: "What?.. What?.. Where?.. Threw himself under!.. was crushed!.. people passing by were heard saying." The notion of the suicide of the guard, therefore, is planted, rightly or wrongly, in Anna's mind—a psychological detail that neatly enters into the general motivation of her suicide.

both "complication" and denouement. For the death of the guard and the death of Anna in the stupendous social perspective of Tolstoy are neither mutually detached phenomena nor accidents of chance, but—the one inert, the other conscious—ineluctable phenomena of a society, like the obsessed Ahab, rushing toward catastrophe on iron rails.

In the final summation, one recognizes a distinct parallel and ultimate convergence in the lines of personal, that is, psychological, and also social motivation or fatality in *Anna Karenina*. It is precisely the convergence and organic unity of these lines that provides the tragedy of Anna with its depth, its amplitude, in the final analysis, its grandeur. Yet in positing the overwhelming elements of psychological and social fatality, one does not deny the indispensable elements of freedom in Anna's tragedy. This freedom lies in the conscious choice of a tragic destiny. This will to meet one's destiny (which for the novelist Tolstoy is always concrete, social, historical) is a will to reach out and exemplify one's personal fate through an exploration of the limits of one's reality. A character exercises his enormous potential of freedom, and there are moments of critical choice, when he chooses to explore these limits, whether out of a sense of a lofty ideal, a sense of personal injustice, or a feeling of incompleteness. Such a character, on the subjective plane, tests his freedom and discovers his inherent fatality. But objectively, such a character rises above the purely individual and pedestrian precisely because his discovered fate embodies more of the necessity of social existence. Anna, of course, is revealed in this unique, tragic perspective, one which, through its total illumination of reality, seems to transcend fatality itself.

BREAKING THE MORAL BARRIER:  
ANNA KARENINA'S NIGHT TRAIN TO ST. PETERSBURG<sup>1</sup>

Dante's dramatic situations are not lapses from his subject; they are his moral subject given in images of action . . . The "scenes" in Hell are the true demonstrations of the nature of error. They are "experience"—and as such properly contain the clues to all general ideas.

—Irma Brandeis,  
*The Ladder of Vision: A Study of Dante's Comedy*

Anna's night journey to St. Petersburg (part 1, chapter 29) is one of the great transitional moments in her drama. Her experience dramatizes a state of intense moral and psychological conflict in which a powerful passion crashes through a barrier of will and conscience. Tolstoy's account of this internal experience is remarkable for its representation of Anna's epic crisis. The battle engages her entire being, physical, psychological, moral, and spiritual, drawing in her immediate surroundings and nature in the broadest sense of the term.

In Tolstoy's view, we are never separate from the world around us. We are inextricably a part of reality: we relate to it consciously and unconsciously; it participates in our moods, choices, and decisions. There is the fatality of individual human character, to be sure, but chance and circumstance, playing at its edges, ever seeking an entrance, probe and test our defenses, our strengths and weaknesses, our uncertainties and ambiguities, thus measuring what we are and defining our ever-shifting margins of freedom. We are free but within limits. Tolstoy's art and vision are based on this recognition.

Anna is free and therefore responsible. Yet as this scene discloses almost from its first line, she is increasingly ravaged by the opposite

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<sup>1</sup> The essay published here appeared under the title of "The Night Journey: Anna Karenina's Return to Saint Petersburg," in *Approaches to Teaching Tolstoy's 'Anna Karenina'*, ed. Liza Knapp and Amy Mandelker (New York: MLA, 2003), 150-160. An earlier version of the essay appeared in *Life and Text: Essays in Honour of Geir Kjetsaa on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday*, ed. E. Egeberg, et al. (Oslo: 1997), 159-168.



pulls of her nature: overflowing energy and moral awareness, a sense both for what is right and good and for what she feels is good for her. In this respect, she embodies the human dilemma of all people at all times. One thing is certain: for Tolstoy, actions have consequences.

Anna's journey into the night begins with the words "Well, that's all over, thank God!"<sup>2</sup> Anna is referring to her encounter with Vronsky in Moscow. Two thoughts come to mind with respect to this exclamation: first, nothing is ever completely over or finished, least of all when a passion or obsession is involved. Where temptation and moral conflict are concerned, the moment of imagined freedom is often the moment of greatest vulnerability and danger. Such is the case with Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* when, after his nightmare, he says to himself, "Thank God, it's only a dream!" and, a short while later, exclaims, "Freedom, freedom! He is free from that spell . . . from the temptation."<sup>3</sup> Yet he is not free, as his fervent prayer for help attests, "Lord! . . . Show me my way, and I'll renounce this cursed . . . dream of mine" (part 1, chapter 5). God helps those who help themselves.

Anna thanks God a second time at the end of the first paragraph, "Thank God, tomorrow I shall see Seryozha and Alexei Alexandrovich again, and my good and accustomed life will go on as of old." Here, again, her feeling of release or freedom from the passion that has taken root in her is deceptive. She has not reflected seriously on her real feelings for Vronsky, on her actions in Moscow, or on what lies beneath her "good and accustomed life."

Every aspect of ourselves, even the slightest gesture, Tolstoy believes, belongs to a unity of self. Anna is playing a cunning game with herself. The narrator mentions her "deft (*lovkii*) little hands" as they reach into her red bag. "Lovkii" here may variously be translated as "deft, dexterous, agile," but the word may also suggest "cunning." Anna's deft hands (in this scene, her hands are very expressive of her feelings) at this moment suggest something of her evasive state of mind, her inability to face her feelings squarely. These same deft hands

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<sup>2</sup> Quotations are from the Louise and Aylmer Maude translation of *Anna Karenina*. For purposes of analysis I have occasionally amended this translation.

<sup>3</sup> We have here an interesting version of Dostoevsky's use of the indirect narrative style, one that in this instance underscores Raskolnikov's distance from the reality of his inner, unrecognized inclinations.



take out from her bag “a paper knife and an English novel,”<sup>4</sup> both of which will play a role in her inner drama.

She settles down and tries to read the novel. But to grasp fully her slow descent into a state of profound, if momentary, mental and physical turmoil, one must take into account not only what is on her mind or just beneath its surface, but also the somewhat eerie and disorienting environment in which she finds herself: surroundings that seem at once to impress themselves on her inner world, and increasingly, to express what is going on in that world.

The “semi-light” or “semidarkness” (the narrator uses both phrases) of the train compartment mimics a marginal world of consciousness, one precariously balanced between reality and dream. The invalid and two other women in the compartment; the noise of the train and the bustle of people passing through; the muffled conductor on his way through the train covered with snow on one side; the maid Annushka with her broad hands and a hole in one of her gloves; the snatches of conversation; the movement of the cars; the erratic changes in heat and cold in the compartment; and the talk of “an awful snowstorm . . . raging outside” —all this not only distracts Anna, but also enters into her anxious mental state. As though to underscore the unsettling impact of her surroundings, the narrator reiterates:

And so it went on and on: the same jolting and knocking, the same beating of the snow on the windowpane, the same rapid changes from steaming heat to cold, and back again to heat, the gleam of the same faces through the semidarkness, and the same voices—but at last Anna began to read and to follow what she read.

“My good and accustomed life will go on as of old,” Anna had remarked complacently as she settled down in her seat. However, the unsettling experience of the train and the railroad itself, of this invention of modern industrial capitalism tearing into and tearing up the old agricultural and patriarchal way of life of Russia, an essential ingredient in Tolstoy’s conception of the tragedy of Anna in general, portends a different outcome.

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<sup>4</sup> “Razreznoi nozhik” — a little paper knife or paper cutter (*nozhik* is a diminutive for *nozh* [knife]).

Seated in the semidarkness of the compartment, Anna tries to make her way into the uncut pages of an English novel. "At first she could not read" and only later "began to read and to follow what she was reading."<sup>5</sup> Anna is not actively reading or only a part of her is reading. Her attention is drawn to what is going on around her. Finally, however, "she read and understood, but it was unpleasant to read." Anna wants to live. "She was too eager to live herself." This phrase in Russian (*ei khotelos'*), an impersonal reflexive form of the verb "to want" that is used four times<sup>6</sup> not only underscores Anna's desire but also suggests a drive to live that is almost outside her. "But there was nothing to be done, so she forced herself to read, while fingering (*perebiraia*) the smooth little paper knife."

The paper knife first appears as a utility tool that cuts a path into the romantically engaging English novel. The instrument, however, fits Anna's hands, as it were, lending itself to her deep psychic needs and desires. Her restless fingering of the paper knife speaks of her frustrated desire to make her way into a novel or romance of her own life. "She was too eager to live herself . . . But there was nothing to be done."

What she desires arouses in her a feeling of shame. The question of shame comes up in connection with the English novel and its hero. "The hero of the novel had nearly attained to his English happiness of a baronetcy and an estate, and Anna wanted to go off to the estate with him, when suddenly she felt that he must have been ashamed, and that she was ashamed of the same thing—but what was he ashamed of? 'What am I ashamed of?'" asks Anna, opening up a dialogue with herself. Tolstoy, master of the interior monologue, so often consisting of a dialectic of inner voices disclosing and advancing conflict, opens the processes of Anna's troubled consciousness and conscience.

She conflates the hero and heroine in the English novel with herself and Vronsky. She challenges herself over her shame; indignant, she asks herself, "What am I ashamed of?" "She put down her book,

<sup>5</sup> The use of impersonal or passive constructions (*chitalos'*, *chitaemoe*) in the Russian original accents the passive character of Anna's reading, her distraction or detachment.

<sup>6</sup> On this point see Richard F. Gustafson's discussion in his study, *Leo Tolstoy, Resident and Stranger: A Study in Fiction and Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 304-305.

leaned back, and clasped the paper-knife tightly in both hands. There was nothing to be ashamed of," comes the answer. Appropriately, this declaration of her freedom from shame directly follows the observation that she was clasping the paper knife tightly in both hands, an advance beyond merely fingering it.

The paper knife in Anna's hands now seems to give expression not only to her restlessness and impatience, but also to her will to self-empowerment. The gripping hands point to the destructive character of her passion.<sup>7</sup> What is implicit here is not only the defiance of social convention, but the destruction of family life as a consequence of arbitrarily making her way out of family life and entering another novel or romance of adultery. The pen knife as metaphor unites Anna's physical and mental action of reading, the narrative action of the English novel, and her overpowering will to life, a will that in the nature of things must involve the cutting of bonds.

On the note of no shame, Anna sorts through (*perebrala*) her Moscow recollections. "They were all good and pleasant." Tolstoy's use of the verb *perebrat'*—earlier used in its imperfective form to describe Anna fingering or toying with the paper knife, but now used in the related sense of sorting out or sifting through recollections—is not accidental. Anna undergoes a process of remembering or more tangibly working her way toward the source of her restless feelings and desires: her passionate attraction to Vronsky.

The Anna who has just expressed her freedom from shame now recalls her "good and pleasant" Moscow stay.

She recalled the ball and Vronsky and his humble, enamoured gaze, and their relations with one another; there was nothing to be ashamed of. And yet at that very point of her recollections when she remembered Vronsky, the feeling of shame grew stronger and some inner voice seemed to say to her, "warm, very warm, hot!" "Well, what of it?" she finally said to herself with decision, changing her position on the seat.

Increasingly, Tolstoy suggests the interaction of heat in the compartment and erotic heat in Anna's consciousness. The heat on the train seems to prompt her words and passion as she moves closer to

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<sup>7</sup> See the discussion of the paper knife in Edward Wasiolek, *Tolstoy's Major Fiction* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 135.

the source of her alternating feelings of shame and defiance. Again, Tolstoy, master psychologist, points to the subtle interplay of the objective and subjective worlds, of the physiological and psychological. He also points to the sometimes imperceptible pressures that external experience or phenomena, at critical moments and in the way of chance, may have on the subtle oscillations of an inner conflict.

"Warm, very warm, hot": to this conventional phrase that in the ubiquitous guessing game announces that the player is getting closer and closer to the truth, that is, closer to guessing some place, object, or phenomenon; to this inner voice Anna, resolutely shifting in her seat, answers with a phrase that suggests that she knows very well what the matter is about but doesn't care: "Nu, chto zhe?" — an expression in Russian that may be translated as "Well, so what?" or "Well, what of it!"

The guessing-game words do not prelude a disclosure. They constitute the disclosure: erotic heat, passion. ("Hot" here is a translation of the Russian *goriachii*, a word that may also be translated as "burning" or "passionate.")

Anna's "Well, so what?" or "What of it?" both concedes the reality of her erotic interest and defiantly embraces it. And yet with a degree of uncertainty Anna still asks herself at this point, "What does this mean? Am I really afraid to look straight at it?" And again, as though taking a good look at the matter, she responds again, "Well, what of it?" She then discloses what is on her mind: "Is it possible that there exists, or could exist, between me and this officer-boy any relations differing from those with other acquaintances?" She smiles "disdainfully and again took up her novel; but now she absolutely could not understand what she was reading." The narrative of her own life has blotted out the fictional world of reading. A relationship between a married woman and an officer boy strikes her as incongruous. Yet incongruities lie at the root of life. Anna herself wishes to relive her youth.

She asks whether sexual relations exist or could exist between her and Vronsky. The use of the present tense in the first part of the phrase suggests that an erotic relationship already exists between her and Vronsky, that is, she clearly has experienced an erotic attraction to him.

She smiles disdainfully at the idea, yet thoughts, emotions, questions, and answers follow rapidly on each other in her mind. Her smile dissolves almost instantly into another kind of feeling, an awareness that marks a resolution of her internal dialogue. This

new feeling is accompanied by a gesture with the paper knife: "She passed her paper knife over the window-pane, then pressed its cold smooth surface against her cheek and almost laughed aloud, suddenly overcome with unreasoning joy."

The paper knife, which at first served a concrete function as a paper cutter, then served figuratively as an embodiment of her restless desire to open a way to a romance of her own, then made manifest the destructive implications of her passion and will to self-empowerment, now in an organic way conveys to Anna the heat of her passion. Whether the warmth of her cheeks is the flush of shameful erotic awareness, the warmth of her body or both—Tolstoy indeed is pointing again to the responsiveness of two temperatures to each other—the message is clear.

The testing of the cold blade against the warmth of her cheeks signals the moment when the heat of passion, the object of passion, and the acceptance of passion merge in Anna's consciousness. Anna embraces her shame, and shame becomes shameless. Her loud but suppressed cry of almost primitive, orgiastic joy preludes her breaking through the barrier of her inner sense of what is good or right (all that motivates her sense of shame) to her egoistic sense of what she feels is good for her. Ethical reality is momentarily lost in an esthetic or sensual reality. The ideal unity between the good and the beautiful is sundered when the pull of passion triumphs.

The focus here is not primarily on the paper knife as a phallic object or image. Tolstoy recognizes the universal sign and its significance in the realm of the subconscious. He is not concerned with sexual imaging, however, but with relationships. He is interested, in this final appearance of the pen knife, in the way it mediates the relation between mind and body, between the sensuous and sensual, between the storm outside and the storm within; he is concerned with depicting that moment when sexuality, suffusing Anna's whole being and consciousness, makes its age-old claims. It is the sublimation of the sexual object, of phallic imaging, not its actualization or realization in explicit imaginative terms that gives this episode its power.

Anna's deliriums, her hallucinations, or what we might, for convenience's sake, call her nightmare, follow on her recognition and her joyful acceptance of her sexuality, her shame, her passion for Vronsky. Her passion is the focal point of her nightmare, but the nightmare itself centers on the conflict this passion arouses in her, with her inner

awareness of the consequences of her passion for Vronsky. What we are witness to are the convulsions of conscience. The emotional climax of those convulsions is both a vicarious experience of sexuality and a premonition of death—a premonition linked with her encounter with Vronsky at the railroad station and her troubled reaction to the death of the guard.

There is, finally, the biological link that Tolstoy establishes between the procreative sexual instinct and death: he alludes to it, for example, in "Father Sergius" (1891). In the temptation scene of that story, the beautiful widow Makovkina calls out to Father Sergius in his cell, "For God's sake! Oh, come to me! I am dying, oh!" A moment earlier Sergius formulated the temptation he is prey to with an image that shares with Makovkina's words a common subtext: "a solitary couch is a coffin."<sup>8</sup> In the deepest biological sense, then, Tolstoy perceives the sexual drive as beyond good and evil; it serves the laws of nature, the ineluctable rhythms of life and death. Procreation, not pleasure, governs sexuality, Tolstoy insists in *Anna Karenina*. Yet in the same breath, he recognizes that his beloved Anna, like every human being, moves freely about within the iron triangle of desire, conscience, and the law of life.

Anna's struggle for and against her passion (her nightmare is about this struggle) is complex. It is presided over by a living conscience; it is marked by what Anna's sister-in-law Dolly Oblonsky calls Anna's "too gloomy" (*slishkom mrachno*) way of looking at things and by what Princess Betsy (a person wholly disinclined to meditate on moral issues) with irony calls Anna's inclination "to take things too tragically." This complexity, Anna's whole nature, one that includes a fully awakened sexuality, manifests itself in her delirious inner turmoil. In respect of this deep and essentially tragic nature, Anna is much the opposite of her brother Stephen Oblonsky (his dalliance with a former French governess is a focus of attention at the beginning of the novel), a person of good heart but shallow nature, a man in whom the erotic drive is also powerful, but unlike in Anna, transparent and trivial.

Anna's experience of joy quickly passes into an experience of disorientation, delirium, and terror. Tolstoy conveys the implications

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<sup>8</sup> For full discussion of this episode, see my essay, "Father Sergius and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall," in *Russian Literature* 40 (1996): 469-472.

of her distress in lines of extraordinary artistic and psychological power and depth:

She felt that her nerves were being stretched like strings drawn tighter and tighter round pegs. She felt her eyes opening wider, her fingers and toes nervously moving, and something inside her stopping her breath, and all the forms and sounds in the swaying semidarkness around struck her with unusual vividness. Momentary doubts kept occurring in her mind as to whether the train was moving forwards or backwards, or standing still. Was it Annushka who was sitting beside her, or a stranger? "And am I here, myself? Am I myself or another?" She was afraid of giving way to this oblivion (*zabyt'e*). Something seemed to draw her to it, but she could at will yield to it or resist. To get over it she rose, threw off her wrap, and took off the cape of her coat. She came to her senses for a moment, and knew that the lean peasant in the nankin coat with a button missing who had come into the compartment was the carriage stoker and was looking at the thermometer, and that the wind and snow rushed in when he opened the door; but afterwards everything again became confused . . .<sup>9</sup>

The transition in Anna to a new perception of herself and life, the overcoming of moral resistance in herself to her involvement with Vronsky, takes on the form of violent and chaotic sensations that seize her entire being. The implications of her passion are traumatic. She experiences her choice in the form of an almost delirious disorientation. The storm of sensory experience around her, like the furious wind and snow that bursts into the train in the wake of the peasant-stoker who has come to check the thermometer, not only symbolizes her disorientation but also contributes to her inner turmoil.

In all this chaos of dying and birth, it would seem that Anna is at the mercy of an implacable determinism, at the mercy of elements, internal and external, driving her into a new world of judgment and experience. Yet the elements that participate in this upheaval (and chance plays a role here) express both her elemental breakthrough to a new state of consciousness and her conflict and resistance. Anna is

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<sup>9</sup> *Zabyt'e* (oblivion) is linked etymologically with *zabyt'* (to forget); it may refer to a half-conscious state, oblivion, a drowsy state, or a moment of distraction or separation from surroundings, as when in excitement people lose track of their whereabouts or of what is going on around them.



not a victim. She is conscious of her freedom throughout.<sup>10</sup> "She was afraid of giving way to this oblivion. Something seemed to draw her to it, but she could at will yield to it or resist (*i ona po proizvolu mogla otdavat'sia emu i vozderzhivat'sia*).

I have translated Tolstoy's "po proizvolu" as "at will." *Proizvol* has roughly three distinct though related meanings in Russian: one's own choice, desire; self-will (*svoevolie*); arbitrariness. Tolstoy's use of this phrase is marked by calculated ambiguity. In the context, Anna can freely choose to yield to oblivion (*zabyt'e*) or to resist it. Yet the phrase also suggests that yielding to oblivion involves a certain anarchic self-will. If, as we read the passage silently or out loud, we take in as a unity the first semantic unit—"ona po proizvolu mogla otdavat'sia emu"—we become aware of the meaning of *proizvol* as "self-will" or "arbitrariness" (thus, we might translate, "out of self-will she could yield to [oblivion]"). As we read on, however, and take in the phrase "i vozderzhivat'sia" (or resist), thereby forming a new and larger semantic unit, our understanding of the word *proizvol* reverts to the idea of "at will," that is, to the idea of freedom to choose.

Using the Russian phrase *po proizvolu* with its variant meanings to convey Anna's thought processes, Tolstoy encapsulates the conflicting pulls in her, strains that find expression as we have noted, in such strange sensations as "whether the train was moving forwards or backwards," or in her wondering who was sitting beside her or whether she was herself or somebody else. Anna fears giving way to this oblivion, that is, to the condition of a person who has lost a sense of her whereabouts or relation to what is going on around or in her. The Russian word for oblivion also evokes the terror of forgetting that she is married.

Anna, then, still possesses moral freedom, though this freedom (as with all freedom) is not unconditional, not absolute.<sup>11</sup> It is manifested in her awareness that she can yield to or resist the forces drawing her into the abyss, but it is also—her moral consciousness, her agonizing choice—the storm she experiences, her disorientation, her terror.

<sup>10</sup> Gary L. Browning also makes this point in "The Death of Anna Karenina: Anna's Share of the Blame," *Slavic and East European Journal* 30 (1986): 329.

<sup>11</sup> Tolstoy broadly develops this idea in his historical-philosophical discourse in the second epilogue of *War and Peace*.



"But afterwards everything again became confused . . ." (*no potom opiat' vse smeshalos' . . .*): these words form the gateway to the dramatic and ominous climax of Anna's nightmare. The first time the narrator uses the phrase *vse smeshalos'* (everything was confused) is in the second paragraph of *Anna Karenina*: "Everything was [in confusion] in the Oblonsky's household" (*Vse smeshalos' v dome Oblonskikh*). The painful dismemberment of the family (the body, the body of the family household; on the symbolic plane, the church and its congregation) constitutes the subtext of the opening two paragraphs of the novel, which introduce, as we have noted, the infidelity of Stephen Oblonsky and its familial consequences.<sup>12</sup> Not without reason do the words "everything was in confusion" prelude the ominous ending of Anna's hallucinations, one marked by a sense of almost apocalyptic chaos, dismemberment, and destruction.

Everything was in confusion . . . The peasant in the long coat started gnawing at something on the wall; the old woman began stretching her legs the whole length of the carriage and filled it with a black cloud; then something squeaked and clattered in a dreadful manner, as if someone were being torn to pieces; then a blinding red light appeared, and at last everything was hidden by a wall. Anna felt as if she had fallen through the floor. But all this did not seem dreadful, but gay. The voice of a man wrapped up and covered with snow shouted something just above her ear. She rose and came to herself.

These lines—the images of the black cloud and the red fire, the dreadful screech and clatter, the sense of somebody "being torn to pieces," and the wall (death) blanking out everything—clearly point back to the terrible accident at the railroad station an accident that so morbidly affected Anna ("It is a bad omen") precisely in the context of her nascent interest in Vronsky. In this accident, a muffled guard on the tracks is caught unaware and crushed by a train. The same lines depicting Anna's hallucination also point forward to the "darkness" (*mrak*) of her state of mind before her suicide and to her dismemberment

<sup>12</sup> See my discussion of the first and second paragraph of *Anna Karenina*, "On the Ambivalent Beginning of *Anna Karenina*," in *Semantic Analysis of Literary Texts: To Honour Jan van der Eng on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. Eric de Haard, et al. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1990), 345-352.

at a railroad station. Her death is closely linked with the unraveling of her relationship with Vronsky and with the destruction of the family.

Death images dominate the climax of Anna's hallucinations. Every detail in Tolstoy's art carries meaning. The mysterious old lady (*starushka*) of Anna's hallucination "began stretching her legs the whole length of the carriage." The Russian phrase "protiagivat' nogi" —to stretch out, to extend one's legs (forward)—also may mean, colloquially, "to turn up one's toes," that is, to die. Stretched out the full length of the railroad carriage, the old lady lies as in a coffin. The symbolic message of the old woman of Anna's hallucination and of the black cloud is death.

Tolstoy's image of the old woman is probably an allusion to Baba the Bony-Legged One, the notorious sorceress of Slavic mythology. Baba Yaga, as she is known, lives in a forest in a hut that stands on chicken legs; it is surrounded by a fence of human bones and skull heads. She likes to eat people, and is consequently, continually trying to stuff them into her oven. The folklorist Vladimir Propp suggested that the reason Baba Yaga's head, body, and legs fill the hut is not because she is large, but because, appropriate to her role as guardian of the realm of death, she lives in a coffin. The old woman of Anna's hallucination echoes the fat woman who at the beginning of part 1, chapter 29, talks about the heat as she wraps up her legs. The railroad carriage is of course coffin-shaped; as we have noted, the railroad in *Anna Karenina* (as in Tolstoy's later work *The Kreutzer Sonata*) is both as symbol and social phenomenon, an embodiment of death and destruction.

Anna instinctively comprehends the images of death in her dream, but their full message does not reach her in her conscious state. After a massive inner conflict over her passion, she falls. Figuratively speaking, she dies; her death, however, is also rebirth, but in a fallen state.

Her recognition of her desire for transgression begins with "unreasoning joy" and is quickly replaced by feelings of terror; in turn, her terror, at the end, abruptly is replaced by an unnatural sense of gaiety. This strange levity would seem simultaneously to symbolize both her denial of and delight in her fall. "But all this [experience of falling] did not seem dreadful, but gay." The account of her night journey ends on not a falling but a rising note. Her state of mind seems artificially illuminated, like the station platform.

The train arrives at a station. Anna steps out onto the platform where the whistling wind disputes with her over whether she should go out of the door of the carriage or whether it, the wind, should go in. "And this too struck her as gay." She steps out into the fresh air: the wind whistles gaily "and tried to seize and carry her off." We have here a final reminder of what Anna's internal storm has accomplished and of the euphoric feelings it has paradoxically engendered in her. She has arrived at a new station in her life. "With enjoyment she drew in full breaths of the snowy, frosty air as she stood beside her carriage looking round at the platform and the lighted station." Does she, like Raskolnikov after his nightmare, feel inwardly free of her temptation and obsession? Whatever the answer, her meeting with Vronsky on the same station platform only moments later makes it clear that she is not at all free. "Her face beamed with a joy and admiration she could not repress."

What connection, we may ask in conclusion, is there between the beginning of chapter 29—"Well, that's all over, thank God!"—and its end? We can, indeed, say at the end of the chapter that everything is over: not her relations with Vronsky, however, but her "good and accustomed life," a life that until now has taken a routine and familiar course. That particular chapter in the novel of her life has come to an end. A new chapter will open, just as a new one has begun for Vronsky, a man who, unlike Anna, is not inclined to view things tragically. This new drama, involving Anna, Vronsky, Karenin, and her son Serezha, among many others, will be not routine or simple in character but fatefully complicated; it will bring Anna into conflict with society and herself; it will finally lead her to the realization that one cannot get away from oneself.

For the moment, however, "all this did not seem dreadful, but gay," remarks the narrator immediately after her fall. We have a hint of the future in the line that follows this remark, "The voice of a man wrapped up and covered with snow shouted something just above her ear." What this man, a conductor or trainman, literally shouts into her ear is not of significance to us; what this same cloaked man, clearly a fate-figure in the novel, shouts into her unhearing ear she will learn in the final moments of her life, when "the candle, by the light of which she had been reading that book filled with anxieties, deceptions, grief, and evil, flared up with a brighter light than before, lit up for her all that had before been dark, flickered, began to grow dim, and went out for ever."

UZHAS IN THE SUBTEXT:  
TOLSTOY'S *THE DEATH OF IVAN ILYCH*<sup>1</sup>

He is a god of art.

—F. M. Dostoevsky

I

“Andreyev says, ‘Boo!’ but I am not afraid,” Leo Tolstoy once remarked apropos of some of Leonid Andreyev’s tales of horror and death. Tolstoy had a very keen sense of the distinction between melodrama and drama. His *Death of Ivan Ilych* (*Smert’ Ivana Il’icha*, 1886) is a case in point. There are disturbing moments in this tale’s treatment of illness and death, but the elements of horror or terror (*uzhas*)<sup>2</sup> in the story do not belong to melodrama. Tolstoy’s purpose is not to say “Boo!” to the reader, that is, to frighten him to death, but rather to wake him up to life. Yet a part of the story’s intense power does rest in Tolstoy’s presentation of the general sense of horror, fear, and fright that contact with death typically arouses in people, if not on the plane of consciousness, where all sorts of defensive mechanisms are at work, then in the subconscious where the horror is stored.

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<sup>1</sup> First published under the title of “Text and Subtext in the Opening and Closing Lines of *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, or, Phonetic Orchestration in the Semantic Development of the Story,” in *Tolstoy Studies Journal*, 4 (1997): 11-24.

<sup>2</sup> “Uzhas” —the feeling or state of a very strong sense of fright or terror. As a noun it may be translated as “horror” or “terror.” As a verb the word appears in some Slavic languages, including Russian, in the sense of “to frighten” (*uzhasat’ / uzhasnut’*). “A difficult word,” the linguist Max Vasmer remarks apropos of the etymology of “uzhas.” He suggests that “uzhas” may be connected with “*gasit’*” (to extinguish), a word rooted in the Indo-European. See Max Vasmer, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der Russischen Sprache* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1950-1958), 175. “Uzhas” and its cognate “uzhasno” are key words on the semantic plane of *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. The subtext In Tolstoy’s use of “uzhas” in the story invariably alludes to death.

The first sentence of *The Death of Ivan Ilych* opens with the words “In a large building of the law courts”—followed by a reference to Ivan Ilyich’s law colleagues who are in a room discussing whether a particular case is or is not subject to their jurisdiction. One person argues that it is not subject, another argues that it is. A third judge who takes no part in the discussion, but who has been leafing through the most recent issue of the newspaper, “Vedomosti” (*News*), breaks in:

“Gentlemen!” (*gospoda*)<sup>3</sup> he said, “Ivan Ilych has died.”

“Really!” (*Neuzheli*)

“Here, read it yourself,” he said to Fyodor Vasilevich, handing him a paper damp off the press (*svezhii, pakhuchii eshche nomer*—literally, “a fresh, still-smelling issue or number”). [1]<sup>4</sup>

The lordly members of the court are deciding questions of jurisdiction. At this very moment, information about the Supreme Judgment, as it were, is handed down to one of its members: death. Ivan Ilych has been struck down. How do the little earth gods respond? The news is received with incredulity: “Neuzheli?”—“Really?” We shall return to this response and to the word in particular.

Noteworthy at this point is the manner in which Tolstoy structures the opening lines of the story and the way in which words and images echo each other so as to deepen our perception of the world of Judge Ivan Ilych. Two paragraphs of descriptive material are separated by three lines of dialogue at the center of which is the pivotal word “Neuzheli?” The first sentence, opening with the words “In a large building” is followed, as we have noted, by a brief account of the deliberations of Ivan Ilych’s colleagues. The second paragraph opens with the words “Surrounded by the black border was printed . . .”; these words are followed by a conventionally worded obituary: “Praskovya Fyodorovna Golovina, with profound sorrow, informs

<sup>3</sup> “Gospoda,” the plural of “gospodin”—gentleman, master. In Russian, the word is etymologically connected with the word “Gospod”—the Lord.

<sup>4</sup> Roman numerals after quotations refer the reader to the chapter of *The Death of Ivan Ilych* in which the quotation appears. In this essay I use Louise and Aylmer Maude’s translation of *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (London: Oxford University Press [The World’s Classics], 1935). For purposes of analysis I have in a number of cases amended the translation.

relatives and friends of the demise of her beloved husband, a member of the Appellate Court," etc.

The two paragraphs or worlds stand in direct relation to one another. The world of the law court and the world of the obituary notice are "dead" institutions in which everything works to exclude feeling and humanity. The rituals of law, like the rituals and rites involving death, not only encase people in a formulaic way, but serve to obscure or mask meaning and essence. The "large building" housing the Appellate Court, like the black-bordered obituary and the world it signifies, Tolstoy suggests, is a dead house.

The two paragraphs are linked on the semantic plane in various ways. At the end of the first paragraph, Pyotr Ivanovich, one of Ivan Ilych's colleagues, is leafing through the latest number of *Vedomosti*. The last words of the second paragraph refer to the *vynos tela*, literally, the "carrying out of the body" or funeral of Ivan Ilych. Such is the latest and oldest "news" (*Vedomosti*) or knowledge (*vedoma*). Death. "Gospod' vedaet" — "the Lord knows." *Vedomost'* may also mean "register" or "list." The juxtaposition of the first and third lines of the dialogue "Ivan Il'ich-to umer" and "svezhii pakhuchii eshche nomer" (my italics—RLJ) serves to accent on the symbolic semantic plane of the narrative the fact that Ivan Ilych is not only on the Lord's list, but that he is a "freshly smelling" "number" or issue.<sup>5</sup> This is a colossal put-down for the little earth god.

Pyotr Ivanovich and his colleagues are all on the Lord's list. The general response of Ivan Ilych's friends to his death, however, is one of evasion, suppression and denial: "Neuzheli?" — a word that may be translated as "Really?" "Is it possible?" "You don't say?" and literally as "already?" "not already?" (*ne uzhe li*). The interrogative particle "neuzheli" here expresses a psychological evasiveness, an unwillingness to recognize or face death. The "uzh" in the word "neuzheli," phonologically points to the "uzh" in "uzhas"<sup>6</sup>—

<sup>5</sup> The allusion to a "freshly-smelling" body turns up in the scene of the wake. We are told that Gerasim "scattered something over the floor," while Pyotr Ivanovich "sensed a slight odor of a decaying corpse" (I). Ultimately, the noxious smell of the corpse and of the sick room will be contrasted with the "clean, fresh" Gerasim, pleasantly smelling of tar and the "fresh winter air," who gladly undertakes the task of caring for his master's bodily functions.

<sup>6</sup> "Neuzheli" is accented on the third syllable. In his classic dictionary,

a frequently used word in the text; on the semantic plane of Tolstoy's narrative it points to a lurking, barely acknowledged sense of "horror" (*uzhas*) in the response to death.<sup>7</sup>

Tolstoy's linkage of "neuzheli," the death-bearing word "uzhas" and "uzhasno," is first signaled overtly in the conversation between Pyotr Ivanovich and Ivan Ilych's widow during the wake. Ivan Ilych's widow remarks:

- He suffered terribly (*on uzhasno stradal*) the last few days.
- Did he suffer very much? asked Pyotr Ivanovich.
- Oh, terribly (*uzhasno*)! He screamed unceasingly, not for minutes but for hours. Three days in a row, with no alteration in

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Vladimir Dal' places the accent on the second syllable, thus, "neUzheli." See his *Tolkovyi slovar' zhivago velikorusskago iazyka*, 4 v. (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1955 [reprint 1881 edition]), 2: 540. If the word is pronounced with the stress on the second syllable the phonetic link between "neuzheli" and "uzhas" becomes even more perceptible on the phonological-semantic plane of Tolstoy's artistic endeavor. Thus, "uzhe" and "uzha" would be indistinguishable in pronunciation.

<sup>7</sup> Tolstoy's sensitivity to aural and visual imagery, as well as his use of sound-formations in words in the development of meaning, have been well illustrated in another context by Richard F. Gustafson. See his analysis of the manner in which sound, the phonetic components of words, external and internal reality (memory), interact in the drowsy subconscious of Nikolai Rostov (*War and Peace*, Part I, iii, xiii) to provide a complex tapestry of meaning with respect to Nikolai's "quandary of identity and vocation" (Richard F. Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy, Resident and Stranger: A Study in Fiction and Theology* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986], 298–302). I direct special attention in my discussion to Tolstoy's use and integration of three etymologically unrelated words—"neuzheli," "uzhas," and "zhalko"—in the development of semantic dominants in the story. Tolstoy utilizes the purely accidental phonetic relationship of syllables within these words to underscore the complex and shifting attitudes of Ivan Ilych and others toward death. The everyday use of language, Tolstoy suggests, is a continuously creative one: we not only draw upon already established meaning in words, upon recognized etymological relationships, but actively invest the raw material of sound with meaning. Chekhov once spoke of the "affinity between full-bodied Russian verse and artistic prose" in Russian literature. (See A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh*, 30 vols. [Moscow: Nauka, 1974–1983], *Pis'ma* 12: 177. Two discussions of *The Death of Ivan Ilych* that focus on language and style may be mentioned here: C. J. G. Turner, "The Language of Fiction: Word-Clusters in Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych*," *The Modern Language Review* 65 (1970): 116–121, and M. M. Girshman, *Izbrannye stat'i* (Donetsk: Lebed, 1996), 82–84.



his voice, he screamed. It was unendurable. I cannot understand how I endured it; you could hear it three rooms off. Oh, what I endured!

—Is it possible that he was conscious?" (*I neuzheli on byl v pamiati?*) asked Pyotr Ivanovich.

—Yes—she whispered—“till the last minute.”

Ivan Ilych's colleagues do not openly give expression to their sense of distress and dread of death, but “uzhas” literally and figuratively lurks in their conventional response, “Neuzheli?” Pyotr Ivanovich, significantly, utters the word “neuzheli” a second time in connection with the account Ivan Ilych's widow gives of the sufferings of Ivan Ilych. Hearing about Ivan Ilych's “terrible sufferings” (*on uzhasno stradal*), Pyotr Ivanovich focuses not on the inescapable reality of death, but on Ivan Ilych's *awareness* of his impending death. “And is it possible that he was conscious?” (*I neuzheli on byl v pamiati?*) Pavel Ivanovich asks. The idea of being conscious of one's impending death, that is, of facing it directly, is something alien and frightening to him. The “uzhas” or horror people experience in the presence of death, Tolstoy emphasizes, leads precisely to their attempt to suppress, evade, turn away from its reality. “Neuzheli,” a word that hides and harbors “uzhas,” gives expression to this inclination to evade the truth of death.

The evasiveness of “neuzheli” and its hidden horror (*uzhas*) of death is fully disclosed when Ivan Ilych, recognizing for the first time that the issue of his illness is a matter of “life and death,” remarks to himself, “I won't be, so what will be? Nothing will be. So where will I be when I will no longer be? Can this really be death? No, I don't want [it]” (*Menia ne budet, tak chto zhe budet? Nichego ne budet. Tak gde zhe ia budu, kogda menia ne budet? Neuzheli smert'? Net, ne khochu*). “Can this really be death?” (*Neuzheli smert'?*) he repeats a moment later. “Again terror (*uzhas*) seized him” (V). Again and again, Ivan Ilych accents the word “to be” (*byt'*) in its forms “budu” and “budet,” struggling with the existential concepts of being and nonbeing, much as Goethe's Werther a century earlier in *The Sufferings of the Young Werther* (*Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers*, 1774), anguishes over death and the meaning of the words “sterben” and “vergehen” (to die, to perish, to pass away). “No, Lotte, no! How can I perish? How can you perish? We *are!* [Wir sind ja!—that is, *we exist*]—to perish!—what does that mean? Once again that's a word.” Ivan Ilych, like Werther



before him, finds it difficult to break through limitations of the egoism of life<sup>8</sup> (my italics—RLJ).

The “truth” begins to press on Ivan Ilych. He seeks to “screen off the thought of death,” but without success. “Is it really possible (*neuzheli*) that *it* alone is true?” And pondering his condition a few moments later he asks: “What is it all for?” And answers: “It is true that I lost my life over this curtain, as though storming a fort. Really (*Neuzheli*)? How terrible (*uzhasno*) and how stupid! This cannot be! It cannot be, but it is.” (VI). “Neuzheli” squarely expresses Ivan Ilych’s continued resistance not only to the idea that the curtain and his fall

<sup>8</sup> The entire passage reads: “Die! What does that mean? You know, we are dreaming when we talk about death. I have seen many people die; yet so constricted is human nature that it has no sense of the beginning and end of its own being. At this moment I am my own. Thine! Thine, o, beloved! And in a moment—parted, severed—perhaps for ever?—no, Lotte, no—how can I perish? How can you perish? We *are!*—perish!—what does that mean? Once again that is a word, an empty sound, without meaning for my heart.” (*Sterben! Was heißt das? Siehe, wir träumen, wenn wir vom Tode reden. Ich habe manchen sterben sehen; aber so eingeschränkt ist die Menschheit, daß sie für ihres Daseins Anfang und Ende keinen Sinn hat. Jetzt noch mein, dein! Dein, o Geliebte! Und einen Augenblick—getrennt, geschieden—vielleicht auf ewig?—nein, Lotte, nein—wie kann ich vergehen? Wie kannst du vergehen? Wir sind ja!—vergehen!—was heißt das? Das ist wieder ein Wort, ein leerer Schall, ohne Gefühl für mein Herz*). In the spirit of Werther, Ivan Ilych says to himself: “If I had to die like Caius, I should have known it was so, an inner voice would have told me so, but there was nothing of the sort in me; and I and all my friends—we understood that our case was quite different from that of [mortal] Caius. Yet now here it is! (*A teper’ vot chto!*) It cannot be. It cannot be, but it is (*ne mozhet byt’—a est!*)! . . . How is this? How is one to understand it?” [VI] Both Goethe and Tolstoy underscore the intangible, abstract, elusive, character of the concept of “death” and the linguistic paradoxes attending any attempt to conceptualize it. Werther defines death, nonbeing, negation only through opposing it to life, existence, affirmation: “Nein, Lotte, Nein” . . . “Wir sind *ja!*” —“We are! [i.e. we exist]. In contrast to unacceptable “death” (vergehen), the negation of life, “ja” is *not* “just a word” to Werther: it denotes presence (as in the everyday German expression “Da ist er ja!” —“here he is now”). Ivan Ilych’s “*Ne mozhet byt’—a est!*” (“It cannot be, but it is!”) offers an interesting parallel to Werther’s “nein”—“ja” formulation, with this difference: the word “est!,” in contrast to Werther’s affirmative “ja,” announces not life and being, not something that *is*, but the arrival of something that “is not,” that is, the void of death. “A teper’ vot chto!” —“yet now here it is!”

from the ladder is the cause of his death, but to the inexorable truth and reality of death itself. "Is it possible that *it* alone is true?" "Is it really true that this is death?" (*Neuzheli pravda, chto smert'*) Ivan Ilych asks himself after a night of frank and brutal self-interrogation. "And an inner voice answers: 'Yes, it is true'" (X). With the recognition that the "truth" is "death," that death is the inexorable "reality" (VIII), the evasive word "neuzheli"—but not "uzhas," not "uzhasno"—understandably disappears from the Ivan Ilych's vocabulary and from text of the story. "Uzhas" (horror, terror) moves to the foreground.

In his final days and hours, Ivan Ilych is fully conscious of the "horror," of the truth and reality of death for himself. In those days, he endured not only its physical horror, but the agony of contemplating the possibility of a life that was badly lived. "Yes, everything was wrong" (*Da, vse bylo ne to*—not right, not the right way, wrong [XII]). "Oh! Oh! Oh!" (U! Uu! U!), he cried in various intonations, three days before his death. "He had begun by screaming, *Ne khochu* (I don't want [it], I won't), and continued to scream on the letter and sound "U" (XII). The final prolonged "U! Uu! U!" is humanly, conceptually, and phonologically fitting at this moment; for the evasive "neuzheli?" has been reduced to "uzhas," and "uzhas" itself to the primordial scream of mortality: "U! Uu! U!"—the interjection for pain in the Russian language. This is not yet the moment of acceptance of death on the part of Ivan Ilych; here, there is not only terrible pain, however. On the conceptual plane, one hears a reflex of the childlike "Ne khochu!"—"I don't want [it]."

## 2

Tolstoy is engaged in unsmiling satire or parody in his story, particularly in the opening pages and chapters of the work. Foreshadowing certain emphases of Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*, 1927), he explores the deepest realms of human consciousness and its stratagems of defense and denial in the face of death.

Ivan Ilych's colleagues, we are told in the third paragraph of the story, "were fond of him," but on learning of his incurable illness, they immediately were taken up with the question of the impact Ivan Ilych's death might have on the disposition of openings or positions (*mesta*) in the ranks, matters that used to occupy Ivan Ilych himself in his life. "Ivan Ilych's post had been reserved for him," but on learning of his death,

the thoughts of his colleagues turned to “the significance this death might have on transfers (*peremeshcheniia*) or promotions (*povysheniia*) of the members of the court themselves or their acquaintances.”

The discussion of positions, transfers, and promotions, that is, consideration of the “significance” of Ivan Ilych’s death, resonates ironically in the narrative’s subtext. Ivan Ilych’s colleagues consciously ignore precisely the deeper question of the “significance of this death,” just as they fail to connect their preoccupation with future positions or slots (*mesta*) with the fact that Ivan Ilych has been shifted (*peremestit’sia*) to the ultimate slot or “place (*mesto*) in the cemetery” that has been reserved for him; just as they fail to weigh the significance of their earthly activities against the background of Ivan Ilych’s final “promotion,” that is, fail to give consideration to the deeper questions of the moral and spiritual meaning of life that are posed by mortality. Yet at the same time, the language Ivan Ilych’s colleagues use to discuss their mundane concerns, to express their banal thoughts and preoccupations, unconsciously mimics their lost spiritual estate.

“I shall be sure to get Shtabel’s place [*mesto*]<sup>9</sup> or Vinnikov’s,” thought Fyodor Vasilevich. “I was promised that long ago, and the promotion [*povyshenie*] means an extra eight hundred rubles a year for me besides the allowance.” “Now I must apply for my brother-in-law’s transfer [*perevod*] from Kaluga,” thought Pyotr Ivanovich. “My wife will be very glad, then she won’t be able to say that I never do anything for her relations.” “I thought he would never rise from his bed again [*Ja tak i dumal, chto emu ne podniat’sia*],” said Pyotr Ivanovich out loud. “A pity” (I).

The play on the words *perevod* (transfer, but also translation) and *podniat’sia* (get up, but also to rise, to ascend), as well as the concern for “distances” in the final phase of the conversation between Ivan Ilych’s colleagues, points to a residual, but nonetheless restless concern with the reality of death and its physical and metaphysical mysteries.

The linkage between death and property has a history almost as long as history itself. The genuine, if repressed, anxiety of Ivan

<sup>9</sup> “Shtabel” in Russian means stack or pile; things evenly laid out.; thus, one may speak of a pile of railway sleepers or ties (*stabel’ shpal*), a pile of bricks, etc. Certainly, Tolstoy’s choice of this particular surname is not accidental: Shtabel’ and his colleagues, busily preoccupied with promotions, will all ultimately be *lined up*, as it were, in their coffins and in the grave.

Ilych's colleagues over illness and death finds expression not only in their concerns for their own material well-being, but in property and possessions per se. The illusion, in general, that property gives of solidity, substantiality, and continuity serves psychologically as a surrogate for the sense of the fullness of existence and of the values and beliefs, moral and spiritual, that traditionally contribute to that sense of wholeness. Death, thus, puts a premium on property in the bourgeois world of the Ivan Ilychs. Ivan Ilych's colleagues have a strong interest in whether he left anything behind. Indeed, the idea of paying a visit to his widow seems spurred not so much by pity for a woman who has lost her mate as by the realization that her husband had apparently left little behind in the way of possessions or property. "I think his wife had a little. But something quite trifling. Yes, we shall have to see her, but they live so terribly (*uzhasno*) far away" (I).

Tolstoy strikingly illustrates the complex intertwining in the subconscious of the triple concern for illness, death, and property through his juxtaposition of two questions: the first, put by one of Ivan Ilych's colleagues, and the second, asked a few lines later by another colleague:

Da chto u nego, sobstvenno, bylo?

[Just what, exactly, was the matter with him]

Chto, u nego bylo sostoianie?

[Tell me, had he any property?]

*Da chto u nego, sobstvenno, bylo?* The speaker's dominant interest here is the exact nature of Ivan Ilych's illness (Pyotr Ivanovich has just observed that he did not expect Ivan Ilych to recover), but property (in Russian, *sobstvennost'*) is clearly on the mind of the speaker (though the word *sobstvenno* can only mean "exactly" or "precisely"). The same sentence removed from context, could also lean in the direction of an inquiry about possessions, that is, "What exactly did he have or own?"

The second question, in any case, picks up on the undercurrent of the first one. What is on everybody's mind, property, now surfaces in *sostoianie* (possessions, property). "*Chto, u nego bylo sostoianie?*" (Tell me, had he any property?) At the same time, the double meaning of the word *sostoianie* ("possessions," "property," but also "state," "condition"), points to the speaker's deep underlying interest in Ivan's illness, his "condition" or "state" at the time of his death.

In his conversation with Ivan Ilych's widow, as we have noted, Pyotr Ivanovich is very much concerned with Ivan Ilych's condition, his general state of mind at the time of his death. "And was he really conscious?" (*I neuzheli on byl v pamiati?* – literally, "in memory"). Indeed, Ivan Ilych was not merely conscious, but precisely "in memory," that is, reviewing his entire life, seeking to cope with the issues raised by it, trying to give meaning to or find meaning in his death.

In a subtle play with words, Tolstoy demonstrates how two intimately related currents of thought—the one involving property and the other, illness and death—become entangled on the level of the subconscious and invade and subvert the language and thought of even the most propriety-minded people.

The amount of property Ivan Ilych left behind, we learn, was trifling. But what is left of Ivan Ilych? *Where is Ivan Ilych? Where has he gone?* Even for nominally religious persons (and that is the most that can be said of Ivan Ilych and his colleagues); even for atheists or agnostics, as Dostoevsky demonstrated in his satiric tale, "Bobok"; even for the Ivan Ilych, anxiety over death lies just beneath the surface of consciousness. The seemingly idle, good-humored banter about "distances" in a final exchange between Ivan Ilych's colleagues gives evidence of profound anxiety and restlessness.

"Yes, we shall have to see her, but they live so terribly (*uzhasno*) far away."

"Far away from you, you mean. Everything's far from you."

"You see he can never forgive my living on the other side of the river," said Pyotr Ivanovich smiling at Shebek. And they began to talk about the distances between different parts of the city as they returned to the Court. (I)

People have held various views on where the dead go, but mythic consciousness almost invariably has insisted on correlating death with distance. The deceased may not be "here" or "there," but he has gone *somewhere*, "terribly far away," "beyond the river."<sup>10</sup> Here,

<sup>10</sup> Forced to come to grips with the actuality of his own death, however, Ivan Ilych struggles more directly to grasp the problem of being vs. nonbeing; he, too, in part, tries to understand the problem of life and death in spatial terms. Ivan Ilych poses the question in the form of a dialogue with himself, one in which the future of the verb "to be" (*byt'*) significantly is employed

the unconscious pondering of Ivan Ilych's colleagues comes to a halt, but not the troubled awareness that Ivan Ilych's journey is one that they, too, will be obliged to make. What is "terribly far away" (*uzhasno daleko*)—the use of the word *uzhasno* is noteworthy—is in reality, for all of us, just around the corner. The reluctant words, "Yes, we'll have to go," the whole casual dialogue about distances, have as their subtext the reluctant awareness that all of us, ultimately, will have to undertake Ivan Ilych's journey "beyond the river."

The linkage between the "journey" and "death" is echoed later on in the story in a more pointed way at the moment Ivan Ilych's wife, his daughter Liza, and her fiancé are standing silently, guiltily, and uncomfortably by his sick bed. Their silence, of course, bespeaks their knowledge of the truth, but also their unwillingness to utter it.

The silence somehow had to be broken, but for a time no one dared to break it and they all became afraid that the conventional deception would suddenly become obvious and the truth become plain to all. Liza was the first to pluck up courage and break that silence, but by trying to hide what everybody was feeling, she betrayed it. "Well, *if we're going*, then it's time (*Odnako, esli ekhat', to pora*)," she said (Tolstoy's italics; VIII).

In the context, the phrase "*esli ekhat', to pora*," means "if we're going, then it's time to go"; yet in the context of Ivan Ilych's dying, the words may be read "if you are going to go, then go, [i.e., die], it's time!" With his italics, Tolstoy alerts the reader to the ambiguity of Liza's remark. The real thoughts of Liza and the rest of the family are not lost on Ivan Ilych.

So too, the carefree but anxious banter of Ivan Ilych's colleagues about distances gives evidence of their concern with death. Their

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five times: "I won't be, so what will be? Nothing will be. So where will I be when I will no longer be?" (*Menia ne budet, tak chto zhe budet? Nichego ne budet. Tak gde zhe ia budu, kogda menia ne budet?*) (V). Ivan Ilych's rapid-fire declaration and negation of his "being" and "nonbeing" itself is a kind of psychological device to "capture, as it were" "being," that is, his existence, the nature of his existence, existence itself. One recalls his early work, *Boyhood* (*Otrochestvo*, 1854) where Tolstoy's alter ego in his preoccupation with metaphysical questions of existence reached "such a state of insanity" that he sometimes "looked rapidly in the opposite direction, hoping to catch unawares emptiness (*le néant*) where [he] was not" (*Boyhood*, xix).

dominant and overt interests, however, remain the worldly interests of rank, promotion, upward mobility (*mesto* [position], *perevod* [transfer], *peremeshchenie* [relocation], *povyshenie* [promotion], *podniat'sia* [rising, advancing])—all concerns, as Tolstoy's language suggests, that mimic the long journey “beyond the river” and heavenward.

Beside considerations as to the possible transfers and promotions likely to result from Ivan Ilych's death, the mere fact of the death of a near acquaintance aroused, as usual, in all who heard of it a feeling of gladness (*radost'*)<sup>11</sup> that “it was he who is dead and not I” (I).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> In their translation, Louise and Aylmer Maude write here that the news of Ivan Ilych's death “aroused . . . the *complacent feeling* that ‘it is he who is dead and not I,’” (my italics). Tolstoy wishes to emphasize here that Ivan Ilych's colleagues experience an organic thrill of being alive, that is, something akin to joy or gladness (*radost'*).

<sup>12</sup> This sentiment is echoed later on by Pyotr Ivanovich at the wake: “‘Three days of terrible [*uzhasnykh*] suffering and then death. Why that might suddenly, at any time, happen to me,’ he thought, and for a moment felt terrified. But—he did not himself know how—the customary reflection at once occurred to him that this had happened to Ivan Ilych and not to him” (I). “Everydayness,” observed Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*, 1927) “has already stowed away an interpretation for this event [death]. It talks of it in a ‘fugitive’ manner, either expressly or else in a way which is mostly inhibited, as if to say, ‘One of these days one will die too, in the end; but right now it has nothing to do with us.’” The death of another (the “Other”) “gives the assurance still more plainly that ‘oneself’ is still ‘living.’” See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated from the German by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper, 1962), 297, 298. Heidegger, as has been often noted, found close points of coincidence between his existential analysis of death and Tolstoy's artistic thought in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. In a footnote to *Being and Time*, he writes: “In his story *The Death of Ivan Ilych* Leo Tolstoy has presented the phenomenon of the disruption and breakdown of having ‘someone die.’” For a discussion of Heidegger and Tolstoy, see Jens Kulenkampff, “Der Tod des Ivan Iljitsch: Sterblichkeit und Ethik bei Heidegger und Tolstoi,” in *Sterblichkeitserfahrung und Ethikbegründung. Ein Kolloquium für Werner Marx*. Hrsg. Walter Brüstle/Ludwig Siep. *SOPHIA. Schriften zur Philosophie*. Band 2 (Essen: Der Blaue Eule, 1988): 164–179. The Heidegger-Tolstoy connection is also briefly mentioned by Zoltan Haynady, “Ivan Ilyich and Existence Compared to Death: Lev Tolstoy and Martin Heidegger,” in *Acta Litteraria Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, ed. G. Tolnai: 27 (Budapest: 1985) nos. 1–2: 3–15.



In referring to the gladness that Ivan Ilych's colleagues felt, Tolstoy is only underscoring the psychological truth he had variously explored in earlier works, for example, in his story "Three Deaths" (*Tri smerti*, 1858–1859), or more extensively, in *War and Peace*, namely the idea that the organic egoism of the life instinct stands in the way of a direct and full recognition or acknowledgement of death; unless, as in the case of Tolstoy's ideal peasants (including Gerasim in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*), the individual in his total being directly and squarely accepts death (his own, in the first place) and yields himself up freely to the total life process. In this respect, Gerasim is emblematic for Tolstoy of the right attitude toward death; an attitude rooted in a total engagement with life; an attitude that views death as neither welcome nor unwelcome, but as a simple fact of life and nature.

Quite different is the attitude of Pyotr Ivanovich who leaves Ivan Ilych's wake to go off to his card game. "Well, friend Gerasim?" said Pyotr Ivanovich so as to say something, "A pity, isn't it? (*Zhalko*)" (I). This off-hand "zhalko" is devoid of any real emotional feeling or genuine pity; it serves to distance the speaker from Ivan Ilych and death. This is a matter for poor Ivan Ilych, Pyotr Ivanovich's remark seems to suggest, but not us. A moment later, however, as he sets off to his card game (Ivan Ilych's wake had kept him from his game), he observes, "It's not late" (*ne pozdno*)—a remark that has an anxious subtext.<sup>13</sup> Tolstoy's implicit reply is, *it's later than you think*. The game of cards, the play with chance, symbolizing the fundamental escapism and moral-philosophical irresponsibility of Pyotr Ivanovich and his colleagues, will offer no refuge from death. Gerasim's response to Pyotr Ivanovich's evasive "Zhalko?" on the other hand is straightforward, "It's God's will. We shall all come to it some day," said Gerasim, displaying his teeth—the even white teeth of a healthy peasant—and like a man in the thick of urgent work, he briskly opened the front door, called the coachman, helped Peter Ivanovich into the sledge, and sprang back to the porch, as if in readiness for what he had to do next."

<sup>13</sup> The subtext, of course, is Pyotr Ivanovich's worried thought that what happened to Ivan Ilych could happen to him. See the beginning of note 11 where his concerns are cited.



Gerasim's acceptance of the fact that we will all die is devoid of any false commiseration or evasive banter. It frees him for direct and unaffected action, unimpeded by feelings of guilt or fear. During Ivan Ilych's illness, Gerasim holds the ailing, helpless Ivan Ilych as a mother might hold a sick child or as a grown son might hold his ailing father or mother. His responsive actions, marked by a vigor and "joy of life" (*radost' zhizni*) flow from a direct organic participation in the life process, and from a full-hearted response to the needs and requirements of the moment.

Such is not at all the case with Ivan Ilych's colleagues. Their inner feeling of gladness, of the joy of life on hearing of Ivan Ilych's death takes on the character of a half-conscious celebration not of a freedom *to* life and living, but of a freedom *from* death; an intrinsically anxious and superstitious celebration marked by evasiveness and dread. Such is the case with Pyotr Ivanovich who enters Ivan Ilych's house during the wake, "feeling uncertain, as is always the case, of what he would have to do. All he knew was that at such times it is always safe to cross oneself." (I). Pyotr Ivanovich's gesture, his sign of the cross, gives expression not to religious faith, but to a primordial feeling of dread.<sup>14</sup> Another example of anxiety and evasiveness, one marked by grotesque levity, is presented by Ivan Ilych's colleague, Schwartz: "[He] was just coming downstairs, but on seeing Pyotr Ivanovich enter he stopped and winked at him, as if to say: 'Ivan Ilych has made a mess of things—not like you and me!'"

### 3

Tolstoy signals Ivan Ilych's recognition, though not acceptance, of death in a linguistically remarkable way. We have noted that "neuzheli" in Tolstoy's story—a signal for evasiveness and denial—marks Ivan Ilych's attitude toward death almost until the last hours of his life. Yet *uzhas*, like some dread incubus, inhabits *neuzheli*; it is *uzhas* that permeates and poisons Ivan Ilych's whole being as death approaches; it penetrates the spirit of all who surround him in the last days of his illness:

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<sup>14</sup> So too, as he approaches the hermitage where Father Zosima is living, the blasphemer and buffoon, Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov, "vigorously crosses himself before the saints painted on the sides of the gate."

"You feel better, don't you?"<sup>15</sup> Without looking at [his wife] he said "Yes." Her dress, her figure, the expression of her face, the tone of her voice, all revealed the same thing. "Not right. All you have lived for and still live for is falsehood and deception, hiding life and death from you." And as soon as he admitted that thought, his hatred and his agonizing physical suffering again sprang up, and with that suffering a consciousness of the unavoidable, approaching end. And to this was added a new sensation of grinding shooting pain and a feeling of suffocation. The expression of his face when he uttered that "yes" was dreadful [*uzhasno*]. Having uttered it he looked her straight in the eyes, turned on his face with a rapidity extraordinary in his weak state and shouted: "Go away! Go away, leave me!" From that moment the screaming began that continued for three days, and was so terrible that that one could not hear it through two closed doors without horror [*uzhas*]. At the moment he answered his wife he realized that he was lost, that there was no return, that the end had come, the very end, and his doubts were still unresolved and remained doubt. "U! Uu! U!" he cried out in various intonations. He had begun by screaming: "I don't want to!" [*Ne khochu*] and continued screaming on the letter "U." (XI–XII)

It would seem, indeed, that the "uzhas" of death, formerly concealed and buried, conceptually and phonologically, in "neuzheli," has finally broken loose, triumphed, and instituted a reign of terror that is not to be mastered. Yet a radical shift occurs at the end of the third day of Ivan Ilych's agony, an hour before his death, when, struggling in a "black bag," he himself acknowledges, finally, that his life has not been a good one. The shift in point of view is simultaneous with an internal physical "blow" (*sila*) experienced in his chest and side. At

<sup>15</sup> "[The] evasive concealment in the face of death," writes Heidegger in what could be a gloss on this scene and several others in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, "dominates everydayness so stubbornly that, in Being with one another, the 'neighbors' often still keep talking the 'dying person' into the belief that he will escape death and soon return to the tranquilized everydayness of the world of his concern. Such 'solicitude' is meant to 'console' him. It insists upon bringing him back into Dasein, while in addition it helps him to keep his own most non-relational possibility of Being completely concealed. In this manner, the 'they' provides a constant tranquilization about death. At bottom, however, this is a tranquilization not only for him who is 'dying' but just as much for those who 'console' him" (Heidegger, op. cit., 297–298).

the time, Ivan Ilych's son had crept quietly into the room and gone up to the bed of the screaming Ivan Ilych. His flailing hand fell on the head of his son; the latter seized it, pressed it to his lips, and burst into tears. That was when Ivan Ilych fell through the "black hole" and "saw light, and it was revealed to him that though his life had not been what it should have been, this could still be rectified." He asked himself, "What is the right thing?" and grew, still listening.

Ivan Ilych's moment of discovery begins with a blow to the chest; it is something physical, but it is also a moral jolt. It is accompanied by the experience of light (*svet*); but it is also an experience with the world (*svet*) outside of himself—his son, in the first instance. For we do not *see* light, we only experience it in its interaction with the world. That is the essence of Ivan Ilych's getting out of himself at this moment, of his experience of giving, of his interrelation with others. To give is to be at one with the world (*svet*) and light (*svet*). Ivan Ilych experiences the world around him, first of all, through *touching, listening, feeling, exchanging glances, seeing* in the deepest sense of the word. To see truly, for Tolstoy, is to know deeply; the act of two people deeply looking at or into each other is, for Tolstoy, an ethical act.<sup>16</sup> In the lines that follow seeing of light, Ivan Ilych sees looks of pity and distress on the faces of his family and, in turn, feels pity for those about him. The word "zhalko" (sorry, pity) is used five times:

Here he felt that somebody was kissing his hand. He *opened his eyes* and *glanced at* (*vzglialnul*) his son and felt *sorry* for him (emu stalo zhalko ego). His wife approached him. He *glanced at* (*vzglialnul*) her. She was *looking* (*smotrela*) at him open-mouthed with undried tears on her nose and cheek and a despairing expression on her face. He felt *sorry* for her (emu zhalko stalo ee). "Yes, I am making them wretched," he thought. "They are *sorry* (im zhalko), but it will be better for them when I die." He wished to say this but had not the strength to utter it. "Besides, why speak? I must act," he thought. With a *look* (*vzgliadom*) at his wife he indicated his son and said: "Take him away... *sorry* [for him]...[*sorry*] for you too... (uvedi... zhalko... i tebia...)." He tried

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<sup>16</sup> On the problem of "looking" in its ethical context in Tolstoy, see "The Ethics of Vision III: The Tolstoyan Synthesis," in Robert Louis Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky: The Overwhelming Questions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 55–74. In particular, see my discussion of Pierre Bezukhov's encounter with General Davoust (59–61).

to add "forgive me" (*prosti*), but said "let me through" (*propusti*), and no longer having the strength to correct himself, waved his hand, knowing that he who needed to understand would understand. And suddenly it grew clear to him that what had been oppressing him and would not leave him was all dropping at once from two sides, from ten sides, and from all sides. He was *sorry* for them (*zhalko ikh*), he must act so as not to hurt them (*my italics—RLJ; XII*)

The weakened Ivan Ilych, of course, has slurred the word *prosti* ("forgive," but a word that also means "farewell"), so that it emerges as *propusti* (let me through). By adding, in his physical weakness, the syllable "pu" he forms the word *propusti*—a word very much on his mind—for he has been struggling in the "black bag" to get *through* to the light.<sup>17</sup> This slip of the tongue marvelously underscores the solemnity, significance, and simultaneity of his physical and spiritual passage from life to death, darkness to light.

Equally marvelous, too, is the manner in which Tolstoy signals the transition in Ivan Ilych from the sense of horror (*uzhas*) to the experience of pity (*uvedi . . . zhalko . . .*). Noteworthy is the sudden disappearance of the terrible sounds and words "U," "uzhas," and "uzhasno" that dominate the end of chapter 11 and the beginning of chapter 12.

Where have these words gone? These words and sounds do not so much disappear as become absorbed in another word and sound. Just as the evasive "neuzheli" ultimately falls away and discloses "uzhas," thus marking Ivan Ilych's recognition of temporal truth, of the ineluctable, and of horror-filled truth of death, so the decisive movement from temporal to moral-spiritual truth in the last chapter is marked by the transition from *uzhas* to *zhalko*, a movement involving the near phonetic absorption of *uzhas* into *zhalko*: *Emu . . . zhalko . . . zhalko ikh*, etc. "Zhalko," the sense of pity or compassion, unlike "neuzheli?" does not evade or deny death; acknowledging death, "zhalko" reaches out: it is, for Tolstoy, an expression of love. "In the language of the people," Tolstoy wrote, "'to take pity on' means 'to love' (*zhalet' znachit*

<sup>17</sup> For a general discussion of the ending of *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, see Gary R. Jahn, "The Role of the Ending in Lev Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych*," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 24 (1982): 229–238.

*liubit'*). This is a correct definition of that kind of love which more than anything else unites people and evokes their loving activity." Tolstoy speaks of the "love of a lower being for a higher one," and continues, "There is also a love, and it is most necessary, which is the transferal of self into another, suffering person, compassion, the desire to help him. This is the love that takes pity on."<sup>18</sup> This is the kind of love, or more accurately, the kind of "transferal of self" that Ivan experiences on his death bed. Pity, not for himself, but for another, overcomes fear, overcomes horror (*uzhas*), overcomes death. *Neuzheli? – Uzhas!! – Zhalko*. On interacting semantic and phonological planes, Tolstoy tracks the fear of death from denial of, and rebellion against, death, through anger and acceptance, to the sublimation of horror in pity-love.

The journey from *uzhas* to *zhalko*, however, is a long one. People in Ivan Ilych's immediate surroundings do not feel authentic pity or compassion for one another. Exceptions are the peasant Gerasim who "understood Ivan Ilych's situation and pitied him" (*zhalel ego*; VII) and Ivan Ilych's son, Vasya, who "understood and felt pity (*ponimal i zhalel*); Gerasim's pity, it may be noted, is not expressed in words of commiseration: simply and directly, he *feels* and *acts* – he "lifts," "holds," "embraces" Ivan Ilych. Vasya's pity, too, is not expressed verbally, but in "a compassionate look" (*soboleznuiushchii vzgliad*). "Zhalko" in the vocabulary of Pyotr Ivanovich, however, is a worn phrase that masks, albeit poorly, his own anxious relation to the death of Ivan Ilych ("I never thought he would rise from the bed again. It's a pity [*Zhalko*]"). As an official or family man, Ivan Ilych shows no pity or compassion for others (for his wife, for example, when she is pregnant). When he himself is sick, on the other hand, he pities himself or wishes that others would pity him as one might pity a "sick child" (*[emu] khotelos' togo, chtob ego, kak ditia bol'noe, pozhalel by kto-nibud'*) (VII).

Self-pity lies concealed behind Praskovya Fyodorovna's and Liza's conventional expressions of pity and solicitude: they plainly wish that Ivan Ilych would take pity on them. "I'm sorry for papa, but why

<sup>18</sup> See L. N. Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii (Iubileinoe izdanie)*, 91 vols., ed. V. G. Chertkov, et al. (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1928–1958), 55: 278–279. See Richard Gustafson's discussion of this passage (I use his translation) in the context of Tolstoy's understanding of "love of" and "love for" (Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*, op. cit., 186–187).

does he have to torment us?" (*Mne zhalko papa, no za chto zh nas muchit?*) asks Ivan Ilych's daughter (XI). Concealed beneath this self-pity, Tolstoy observes, there slumbers the demon of irritation, resentment, hatred, and poisonous wishes. At the very outset of Ivan Ilych's illness, as he grows more and more irascible, we learn the following about the state of mind of his wife, Praskovya Fyodorovna:

Having come to the conclusion that that her husband (*muzh*) had a terrible nature (*uzhasnyi kharakter*) and had made her life miserable, she began to pity herself (*zhalet' sebia*). And the more she pitied herself (*zhalela sebia*), the more she hated her husband (*muzh*). She began to wish (*zhelat'*) he would die, yet she was unable to wish (*zhelat'*) that because then his salary (*zhalovan'e*) would cease. And this irritated (*razdrazhalo*) her against him even more. She considered herself fearfully unhappy just because not even (*dazhe*) his death could save her, and she became irritated (*razdrazhalas'*), concealed it, and this concealed irritation (*razdrazhenie*) intensified his irritation (*razdrazhenie*). (IV)

This astounding bit of prose is remarkable for its subtle linguistic play with a restricted range of sounds and syllables ("zh," "zha," "zhal," "zhe," and "uzh"); the four lines offer a veritable labyrinth of phonetic-semantic linkages and psychological allusions. The awful (*uzhasnyi*) behavior of her husband leads Praskovya Fyodorovna to self-pity (*zhalet' sebia*), hatred, and the wish (*zhelat'*) that her husband would die. She does not really want this to happen, however, because she would no longer have his salary (*zhalovan'e*). "And this irritated (*razdrazhalo*) her more." Tolstoy implies that this thought "stings" or bites her. The idea of "sting" (*zhalo*) is buried, though not etymologically, in "*zhalovanie*" (salary, something that is freely received or granted, but the absence of which is painful).<sup>19</sup> "Zhalo" is immediately picked up in "*razdrazhalo*," and then again in the next line (*ona razdrazhalas'*).

<sup>19</sup> Money, of course, is high on the priority list of both Ivan Ilych and his wife. Ivan Ilych is loath to invite Dr. Leshchetitsky, a specialist, to examine him at home because they would have to be "unsparing" in expenditure. (*Eto znachit znamenitogo doktora priglasit' i ne pozhalet' deneg*; V). The use of the verb "pozhalet'" — usually "to take pity" — is idiomatic here. Tolstoy's use of this idiom is deliberate: Ivan Ilych, who has little pity for others, takes "pity," as it were, on his own money where expenditures are concerned.

A wife (*zhena*) cannot pity such a husband (*muzh*). She cannot kill him, true, but she can at least desire (*zhelat'*) his death, that is, wish to sting or bite him dead. "Zhena da muzh—zmeia da uzh" (husband and wife—viper and snake), goes a Russian folk saying.<sup>20</sup> Pity (*zhalko*), Tolstoy demonstrates, transformed into self-pity, degenerates into resentment, hatred, and a poisonous sting (*zhalo*). The primordial serpent's poisonous sting lurks barely concealed in dissembling solicitude and pity (*zhalo* in *zhalko*). Too, a shift in stress from the second to the first syllable of the verb *zhalet'* results in the word "zhalit," "to sting"—which is exactly what the *zmeia* (viper) does to deadly effect and what the "zmeia-zhena" (viper-wife), in this case Praskovya Fyodorovna, wishes (*zhelat'*) to do to her "uzh-muzh" (snake-husband). *Zhalit'* (to sting), finally, echoes *zhalit'sia* (to take pity on)—a sentiment that in Ivan Ilych's family conceals deadly resentment.

In death, as in life, then, Ivan Ilych promises to be a torment to his wife. "Even (*dazhe*) Ivan Ilych's death could not save her." Meanwhile, wife and husband can only experience unhappiness in this viper's nest, that is, experience a constant irritation (*razdrazhenie*—the word is repeated four times), perpetual self-laceration, mutual stinging, torment ("drazhit," the core of "razdrazhenie," suggests "teasing," "tormenting"). In short, wife and husband are condemned to a kind of connubial living-death, a situation that will end only when Ivan Ilych dies. At that moment, for Ivan Ilych, at least, "pity" is experienced *not* as self-love, but as genuine solicitude for another person, as a "transferral of self into another, suffering person," as something equivalent to "zhalovanie" (salary), something that is freely given and freely received.

In his dying moments, however, Ivan Ilych does not in the conventional sense suddenly "love" those around him any more than Gerasim loves Ivan Ilych when he helps him in his needs. Like Gerasim, Ivan Ilych simply and directly, and with a sense of immediacy, *feels*—

<sup>20</sup> "Zmeia"—a snake, usually poisonous; it is also used in referring to a cunning, evil person. "Uzh" is usually a name for certain nonpoisonous snakes; it is also used metaphorically in the phrase "polzti uzhom," to flatter, to toady—literally, to crawl like a snake. Vladimir I. Dal' in his dictionary of the Russian language cites a Russian proverb—"zhena da muzh—zmeia da uzh"—a saying in which the wife is identified with the often poisonous snake (*zmeia*), while the husband is identified with the nonpoisonous one (*uzh*). See Dal', *Tolkovnyi slovar'*, op. cit., 4: 476.



he "feels sorry," wants to "do something," and acts; and having acted he feels good. "How good and how simple" (*kak khorosho i kak prosto*), he thinks. "Kak khorosho" expresses a pleasurable sense of something that is remedial, salutary, tonic, contributing to the well-being of body and spirit. This good feeling, however, certainly embodies an unarticulated awareness that what has been done is good in the ethical sense; for the phrase, "how simple" (*kak prosto*), clearly refers to Ivan Ilych's awareness that the source of his good feelings was his direct, unpremeditated, "simple" giving of himself, pitying others and not merely himself; doing something to "deliver them and free himself from these sufferings."

Yet whatever the implicit, purely ethical significance of these gestures in this Tolstoyan parable of everyman, Ivan Ilych's condition in these final moments of his life is certainly not that of a person who has been converted to a set of ethical or religious beliefs, not that of somebody who has been, as it were, "spiritually reborn"; Tolstoy avoids denoting the change that Ivan Ilych experiences in such terms, rather it is the condition of a dying man who, reading suffering on the faces of those around him, *without reflecting* does what his heart tells him should be done, and having done it, has an organic, pervasive, and reconciling sense of having done the right thing. Ivan Ilych does not end his life reflecting on lofty moral or spiritual transfiguration; rather at the moment of dying, he returns to what is simple and natural: he comes down, literally and figuratively, to earth. In this sense, and *only* in this nonreligious sense, can we say that the dying Ivan Ilych is born again to light (*svet*) and to the world (*svet*).

The turning of attention away from his own suffering to the suffering of others seems to bring, if only for a moment, the final moment of dying, a lessening of Ivan Ilych's own suffering; even more, fear and death disappear, and "in the place of death there is light. 'So that's what it is!' [*tak vot chto*—here, an exclamation of stupefaction, surprise, discovery], he suddenly said aloud. 'What joy! (*kakaia radost'*)'" (XII). The joy that Ivan Ilych experiences here, in contrast to the joy that his colleagues experience on hearing of his death, is not that of a freedom *from* death, but of a freedom *to* death or dying. In contrast to the self-oriented "joys" he experienced in his death-in-life existence.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See, at the end of chapter III, the listing of "joys" (*radosti*) that Ivan Ilych experiences in his bourgeois life: the "joys of ambition," the "joys of vanity,"



Ivan Ilych experiences a momentary consciousness of selfless life in death.

“To him all happened in a single instant, and the meaning of that instant did not change. For those present his agony continued for another two hours.” (XII) A verbal, as opposed to a graphic, description of what Ivan Ilych experiences can only present the happening as a sequence of separate moments.<sup>22</sup> Yet in fact, there is no development of thought or experience, no cogitation, no drawing of conclusions. The transferal of self into the suffering of others and the literal dying of the self; the sensation of light and sense of enlightenment, are essentially *one* experience and the experience of one moment, a moment whose “significance” does not change. “There was no fear because there was no death.” In biblical terms, “there was no more time.” For the observer, Ivan Ilych’s agony continued another two hours. This distinction between empirical time (as experienced by Ivan Ilych’s body and by those observing it) and phenomenological time (as experienced by Ivan Ilych and recognized by the reader) mark the earthly and unearthly end of Ivan Ilych.

“‘It’s finished (*koncheno*),’ said someone above him. He heard these words and repeated them in his soul. ‘Death is finished (*konchena smert*),’ he said to himself. ‘It is no more.’ He drew in a breath, stopped in the midst of a sigh, stretched out, and died.”

The last moment of Ivan Ilych’s life is one in which resolve, action, and accomplishment constitute a unity; it is the condition of a man who, in the personal acceptance of his mortality, is no longer in conflict with himself or his surroundings; the state of a man who, like his servant Gerasim, is neither looking backward nor forward, but

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the “joys of cards,” etc. “So they lived” — comments the narrator.

<sup>22</sup> Tolstoy overcomes this problem of depicting simultaneous sensations or actions in the dying Ivan Ilych—to the extent that it can be overcome in words—by the device of repeating descriptions of Ivan Ilych’s actions or feelings, each time adding new detail or expanding the context, thus providing a sense of overlapping experience. The reader, used to logical “horizontal” progression in the text, undergoes a sense of time-disorientation at this “vertical” piling up of sensation-experiences—a calculated inconvenience that effectively introduces him into the hyperactive, non-Euclidian world of the dying psyche.

is at one with the moment and its requirements. Here, action fills the space of a single moment. Again, what in words appears as a sequence of actions in reality constitutes one resolute taking-possession of one's death: Ivan Ilych listens, repeats, draws in a breath, lets out a sigh, stretches out, and dies. The verb *potianut'sia*, with the idea of "stretching oneself," "stretching out," but also "reaching out," would seem to sum up Ivan Ilych's unimpeded resolve, his resolution of his life. The final word *umer* (died), that is, death itself, follows as something oddly superfluous, a shell, discarded, harmless. "Death is over. It is no more."

Death in Tolstoy's story is not an ending, it is a beginning. The finishing of death is also the finishing of the end of the story, of the idea of an end. *The Death of Ivan Ilych* is open-ended in form and content. The end is the beginning and the beginning is the end. Thus, the end of the story, the death of the Ivan Ilych, carries the reader back to the beginning of the story where he first learns about the death of the protagonist; it brings him back to the beginning which is the end of Ivan Ilych; it returns him to the lines: "Ivan Ilych has died! Really? Here, read it." And with this invitation to the reader, with the return of "neuzheli" — but now with a new dimension of the surprise just experienced — we are off again, attending to the chronicle of Ivan Ilych's life and death, beginning and end, end and beginning, and so on, ad infinitum.

“WHAT TIME IS IT? WHERE ARE WE GOING?”  
CHEKHOV’S *CHERRY ORCHARD*: THE STORY OF A VERB<sup>1</sup>

As before, so now during rehearsals of *The Cherry Orchard*, one almost had to use pliers to drag out of Anton Pavlovich any comments and advice on his play. His answers resembled riddles, and one had figure them out . . . “But I’ve written it all out,” he would say on such occasions. “I’m really not a director, I’m a physician.”

—Konstantin S. Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*<sup>2</sup>

They require that every hero, heroine be scenically effective. But really, people in life are not every moment shooting or hanging themselves, or declaring their love. Nor are they are saying clever things every moment. For the most part they are eating, drinking, running after each other, talking nonsense. Now that has to take place on the stage. We have to create a play where people come, go, eat, talk about the weather, play cards, not because the author wants it that way, but because that’s the way it is in real life . . .

Let everything on the stage be just as complex and at the same time just as simple as in life. People dine, just dine, and at that moment their happiness is being shaped and their lives are being smashed.

—Anton Pavlovich Chekhov<sup>3</sup>

“The train has arrived,” “They’re coming!” “They’re coming!” “They’re coming!” “Let’s go and meet them,” “Come through here . . . the nursery!” “Time is marching on!” “Sleep well. There’s a way out. The railroad passed nearby.” “Go to sleep,” “I’m going, I’m going,” “Let’s go to bed . . . Let’s go.” (Act 1)

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<sup>1</sup> A version this essay was published in Russian under the title “Kotoryi chas? Kuda my idem? *Vyshnevyyi sad* kak istoriia glagola,” in the Moscow theater journal, *Teatr. Literaturno-khudozhestvennyi zhurnal* 2 (2006): 145–150.

<sup>2</sup> See Konstantin S. Stanislavskii, *Moia zhizn’ v iskusstve* in *Sobranie sochinenii v devyati tomakh*, 9 vols. (Moskva, 1988), 1: 344–345.

<sup>3</sup> The two comments by Chekhov are cited by Alexander P. Skaftymov in his study, *Stat’i o russkoi literature* (Saratov: Saratovskoe izdatel’stvo, 1958), 317. The first comment is taken from the memoirs of D. Gorodetsky published in *Birzhevye vedomosti*, No. 364 in 1904; the second comment is recorded in the memoirs of Ars. G. (I. Ia.Gurliand) in *Teatr i isskusstvo*, No. 28 in 1904.

"Our's [our children] are coming," "Epikhodov is coming," "Somebody is coming," "Can I go through here directly to the station?" "Let's go, everybody, it's time for supper," "To avoid [literally, "go around," or "bypass"] everything petty and illusory that interferes with being free and happy, that's the goal, the meaning of our life," "Mankind is coming," "Here it is, happiness. Here it comes," "Let's go down to the river, it's lovely there." (Act 2)

"Oh, that all this would go by quickly, that somehow our awkward, unhappy life would change quickly," "A new landowner is coming, the owner of the cherry orchard!" "Go with me, let's go away from here, my dearest, let's go!" (Act 3)

"I'll come, my golden one," "Forty six minutes is all that remain before the train [leaves]," "It's time to go," "Life . . . is going by," "Let's get going," "Winter will pass, spring will arrive," "We must be going," "Time to go!" "Let's leave," "Come along now!" "The train is coming," "See you in the spring. On your way, everybody," "Coming!" "They've gone," "Life's gone by." (Act 4)

"Prishel poezd," "Edut!" "Edut!" "Edut!" "Poidem vstrechat'," "Proidemte zdes' . . . detskaia!" "Vremia idet!" "Spite sebe spokojino. Vykhod est'. . . Vozle proshla zheleznaia doroga," "Idite spat'," "Idu, idu," "Poidem v postel'ku . . . Poidem!" (Act 1)

"Nashi idut," "Epikhodov idet," "Kto-to idet," "Mogu li ya proiti zdes' priamo na stantsiiu?" "Idemte, gospoda. Skoro uzhinat'," "Oboiti to melkoe i prizrachnoe, chto meshaet byt' svobodnymi i schastlivymi," "Chelovechestvo idet," "My idem . . . k iarkoi zvezde," "Vot ono schast'e, vot ono idet," "Poidemte k reke, tam khorosho." (Act 2)

"O, skoree by vse eto proshlo, skoree by izmenilas' kak-nibud' nasha neskladnaia, neschastlivaia zhizn'," "Idet novyi pomeschik, vladelets vishnevogo sada!" "Poidem so mnoi, poidem, milaia, otsiuda, poidem!" (Act 3)

"Priedu, moe zoloto," "Do poezda ostalos' vsego sorok shest' minut," "Pora ekhat'" "Zhizn' . . . prokhodit," "Ekhat' by nam," "Proidet zima, nastanet vesna," "Nado ekhat," "Pora ekhat'!" "Uedem," "Idemte!" "Poezd pridet," "Do vesny. Vykhodite, gospoda . . ." "My idem!" "Uekhali," "Zhizn'-to proshla." (Act 4)

The phrases joined together here, making use of the going and coming verbs “*idti*” and “*khodit*” (to go, to come, or to travel, primarily on foot) and its derivatives, but occasionally also making use of the verb “*ekhat*” (go, come, travel—used for persons traveling in some conveyance, all point in the direction of a coherent line of thought and action in *The Cherry Orchard* (*Vishnevyyi sad*, 1904). These verbs describe not only ordinary physical movement or action in the everyday life of the characters, but also give expression to the play’s central theme of time: actual, historical, metaphysical, and religious.

In our discussion, we are concerned with how Chekhov draws these verbs into the orbit of his artistic-symbolic thought; how they become, as it were, the means of transportation for the various motifs of coming and going, arrival and departure, farewell and reunion, sleep and awakening, death and resurrection; how they give expression to them in all the banal and profound, comic and tragic ways in which these realities are perceived and experienced in human experience.

The theme of time and of the going and coming verbs (here “*priidti*” —to arrive, or come, and “*poezd*” [train], cognate of “*poezdit*” —to travel about) make a joint appearance in the opening line of the play, when Lopakhin, a former serf, but now merchant, remarks: “The train has arrived, thank God. What time is it?” (*Prishel poezd, slava Bogu. Kotoryi chas?*) With these words, the clock starts ticking in *The Cherry Orchard*. Time is running out for the estate and its cherry orchard, and in particular, for Lyubov Andreyevna Ranevskaya and her family. Everybody seeks refuge from the present in the past or future, in plans for happiness or dreams of luck (the word “*schast’e*,” happiness, also means luck). Nobody in Lyubov Andreyevna’s family or entourage is able to focus sensibly on the present, on its needs and deadlines, on the impending auction at which the cherry orchard will be sold—nobody, that is, except Yermolai Lopakhin, and even he has lapses with respect to time, and experiences tensions between the past and present, and the present and future.

Lopakhin lives by the clock. He is the timekeeper in the play, a friendly, but indefatigable man of action, constantly on the move with his own affairs, but with a plan of salvation for the estate. It is given to him not only to buy the estate and chop down the cherry orchard, but succinctly to express the profound wrench and disjointedness of the present moment; to express in one sentence not only the dislocation, the pain, the suffering that the present represents to everybody,

including himself, but to define what it is that gives that experience its tragi-comic character.

Oh, that all this would pass quickly, that somehow our awkward (*neskladnaia*), unhappy (*neschastlivaia*) life would change quickly.

That which is “*neskladnyi*”—awkward, without logical sequence or connection, disjointed, disconnected, inharmonious, awkward, disproportional, or irregular, can give rise to “*neschast’e*”—unhappiness or misfortune; but that which is “*neskladnyi*” is also the essence of the humorous, the ridiculous, or the absurd. Life for Lyubov Andreyevna’s gentry family has long run out of regularities, almost nothing is left, as it were, but “twenty two misfortunes” (*dvadtsat’ dva neschastiia*).<sup>4</sup> Whatever their number, the family’s misfortunes, large or small, comic or tragic, or both add up to an unhappy life. These misfortunes, like Charlotta Ivanovna’s magic tricks, are paradigmatic of a life in which chance is king, all is in limbo, and up for auction. In the larger existence which makes up reality, or realities, however, there are regularities, or necessities that make themselves felt, and play a determining role in life. The so-called passage of time uncovers them and, in turn, moves people to act or not to act.

The opening line of *The Cherry Orchard*, “The train has arrived, thank God. What time is it?” brings into focus one such regularity. The first line announces the arrival of the train carrying Lyubov Andreyevna Ranevskaya, her brother Leonid Andreevich Gaev, her daughter, Anya, and the lackey Yasha. The same train, however, is also bringing to the country merchants, businessmen, and *dachniki*, or summer people, who are all changing the social and economic landscape of the old agricultural and gentry world of Russia. The train is late. Indeed, the arrival of the railroad itself, like many other historical developments in Russian history, is late.<sup>5</sup> It has arrived, however, and its arrival is

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<sup>4</sup> “Twenty two misfortunes”—the nickname of the clerk, Epikhodov.

<sup>5</sup> Russian railways made a slow start in comparison with the networks of the industrialized nations of Europe. By 1880, however, the Russian railway network was nearly on a par with the networks of European nations. By 1900, it had surpassed every European country with the exception of Germany.

apocalyptic for rural Russia.<sup>6</sup> On the everyday plane of the play's action, Lopakhin's "thank God" (*slava Bogu*) signifies familial feeling at the arrival his former owner, Lyubov Andreyevna; on the deeper symbolic plane of the play's action, it also may be said to mark the satisfaction of the merchant at the arrival of the train of history.

The play's opening line, then, in an unobtrusive way, introduces the theme of time, everyday and apocalyptic, into *The Cherry Orchard*, while simultaneously, and again unobtrusively, announcing Chekhov's poetics of everyday language and talk. The specificity of Chekhov's poetics emerges clearly when one compares the opening line of *The Cherry Orchard*, "The train arrived . . . What time is it?" with a passage in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* with which Chekhov was undoubtedly familiar. In Dostoevsky's novel, the seventeen-year-old Ippolit Terentiev, planning to commit suicide, in conversation juggles with everyday time and apocalyptic time. "What time is it? (*Kotoryi chas?*)," he asks, and replies, "But never mind, I know what time it is." He has in mind, of course, apocalyptic time, as his next words make plain: "The hour is at hand [*prishel chas*, literally the hour has arrived]. Now is the time (*Teper' samoe vremia*) . . . Tomorrow [with this word, Ippolit reverts to everyday time, only to follow it with a stock biblical reference to apocalyptic time], 'there shall be no more time.'" A moment later, he reverts to everyday time. "But don't worry. It won't take me more than forty minutes to read—oh, an hour (*chas*) at most [that is, an everyday hour], and then eternity [absolute time]." The reader immediately recognizes the interplay play of two kinds of time in Ippolit's remarks. Everything is in full view. Chekhov, unlike Dostoevsky, conceals the play with time in commonplace talk.

Some perfectly ordinary talk of Lopakhin in act 1 provides an example of Chekhov poetics of everyday talk, in this case what we may call his *silent* interplay of everyday and apocalyptic time. Lopakhin remarks that he wants to tell the Ranevsky family "something nice, cheerful. (*Glancing at his watch*). No, I'm going off now ["uedu seichas,"—literally, I am going off *this hour*]. *There's no time* to talk

<sup>6</sup> The perception of the development of the railroad as an apocalyptic event was ubiquitous in European literature and culture in the nineteenth century. See, in particular, Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Chekhov's use of the railroad in *The Cherry Orchard* follows in the tradition of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

(*Nekogda razgovarivat'*) . . . Well, alright, in two or three words. As you know, the cherry orchard is being sold for debts. The auction is set for the *twenty-second of August*. But don't you worry, my dear, *have a tranquil sleep (spite spokoino)*. There's a *way out (vykhod est')*." Lopakhin's "cheerful" advice, his "way out," involves sudden death for the orchard in quite ordinary time. *Spite spokoino* (have a tranquil sleep), in the context of his plans for the orchard, awakens sleep as a metaphor for death, thus introducing the timelessness of the long sleep.<sup>7</sup>

Lopakhin has overslept. One might think that this merchant-peasant, whose skill as a business man depends upon being on time and in time, is out of step with time. The opposite is the case. He is out of step only with the old masters' time: a spirit of time which (according to the maid Dashenka) the dogs gave expression to by staying awake all night in expectation of the arrival of their masters. Though Lopakhin has affectionate feelings for the Ranevskaya family, though he is "vexed" that he overslept, though his yawn is perfectly natural, that same yawn signals the seismic shift that has displaced master's time (most recently master-serf time) in favor of merchant's time.

"What time is it?" is certainly the wake-up call in act 1 of *The Cherry Orchard*, one in which sleep and sleepiness is on everybody's minds. "What time is it?" is a prelude to Lopakhin's constant and insistent reminders to Lyubov Andreyevna and her family that they must take action if they are not to lose the estate and its orchard. Yet in a larger sense, the question also points to the dislocation of time, the absence of any real sense for the present, the absence of structuring temporal regularities.

Time in *The Cherry Orchard* is multidimensional, and its various levels intersect with one another to form a very unstable present: master's and serf's time; romantic pastoral time redolent of the Golden age; congealed gentry-intelligentsia time with its complete loss of any creative promotive power; energetic capitalist time and the theme of bourgeois salvation secured through the market process; student-

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<sup>7</sup> For discussions of time in Ippolit's "My Explanations," see Robin Feuer Miller, *Dostoevsky and The Idiot: Author, Narrator, and Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 206–210; and David M. Bethea, *The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 96–98.



socialist utopian time with its “bright star” in the distant future; and buried in people’s consciousness, the apocalyptic time of *Revelations*, where death and destruction is a prelude to the vision of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1). On the deepest level of the play’s meanings, Lopakhin’s “What time is it?” signals both taps and reveille.

“Vot proidemte zdes’” (pass through here), we hear a voice say in the background of an empty stage at the beginning of act 1. And “passing through,” with all the suffering that such passage entails, is what *The Cherry Orchard* is about. “Pass through here” (*Proidemte zdes’*) Lyubov Andreyevna’s daughter Anya repeats, as Lyubov Andreyevna and her entourage pass through halls or rooms and enter the nursery or children’s room (*detskaia*) where Lyubov Andreyevna ecstatically greets her childhood world.

It is as though Lyubov Andreyevna were passing through a birth canal to the nursery; or viewing this passage from a different perspective, passing back through the birth canal to wombland, the primal nursery. “My darling nursery, my beautiful room . . . I slept here when I was a child . . . And now I am like a child . . .”

Lopakhin’s question “What time is it?” is asked again early into act 1 by sleepy and dreamy Anya, Lyubov Andreyevna’s seventeen-year-old daughter. “The birds are singing in the garden. What time is it now?” This is an everyday question in an everyday time context, and it is natural between two or three in the morning, after a long trip, to ask the time. Yet the birds twittering in the cherry orchard also hint at sacred time, an innocent pre-fall world or Garden of Eden. Indeed, what time is it for Anya?

Lopakhin’s constant reminders, his prodding words about the impending sale of the estate, “decide,” “think it over,” contribute to an urgent sense of passing time and impending misfortune. It is people, of course, and not time that move or stand still, act or remain inert. “The future stands firm . . . it is we who move in endless space,” as the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke put it.<sup>8</sup> Yet the contrary notion of time as something that *moves* or *passes* is a stubborn one. Through a play on the plain phrase, “vremia idet” (time is passing), Chekhov both parodies and dramatizes this idea of passing time. Thus, in

<sup>8</sup> “Die Zukunft steht fest . . . wir aber bewegen uns im unendlichen Räume.” Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter* (Frankfurt am Main und Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1992 [first published in 1929]), 43.

response to Gaev’s remark, “And now I’m already fifty-one year’s old, strange as it may seem,” Lopakhin replies in a matter-of-fact way, “Da, vremia idet” (Yes, time passes). Gaev retorts, “Kogo?” (what, but also who) And Lopakhin repeats, “Vremia, govoriu, idet” (Time, I say, is passing).

English translations of *The Cherry Orchard* usually translate “vremia idet” as “time is passing” or “time flies.” Gaev’s “kogo?” however, awakens the sleeping metaphor, “vremia idet”; it anthropomorphizes “vremia,” turning “time” into a kind creature on the march, or an incarnation of “horror” (*uzhas*), to borrow a word the Russian theater, opera, and film director Vsevolod E. Meyerhold (1874–1940) used to define what he perceived as the unseen presence of death in act 3 of *Cherry Orchard*.<sup>9</sup>

Ronald Hingley’s translation, “time marches on,” effectively awakens the sleeping metaphor in “vremia idet.”<sup>10</sup> To Lopakhin’s “Time, I say, is marching on” (*Vremia, govoriu, idet*), Gaev responds with a complete non sequitur, “And here it smells of pachouli.” His remark is followed by Anya’s “I’m going to sleep” (*Ia poidu spat*). Gaev completely shuts out time with his nonsense. Anya, on the other hand, deals with the issue by going off to sleep. Chekhov’s point, of course, is that time is *not* sleeping. “Time won’t wait” (*vremia ne zhdet*), Lopakhin says later on, “Time is marching on!” (*Vremia idet!*)

No detail is without meaning in Chekhov’s poetic drama. Early in act 1, Chekhov, through an exchange between Dunyasha and Lopakhin, hints at the arrival of the creature time or “misfortune” and what it has in store for Lyubov Andreyevna and her family.

*Dunyasha:* He [Epikhodov] is an unfortunate man, every day there’s *something*. They tease him around here: *twenty two misfortunes*.

*Lopakhin* (listening): I think *they’re coming* (*edut*) now.

*Dunyasha:* “*They’re coming!* (*edut!*) What’s the matter with me . . . I’m cold all over.

*Lopakhin:* *They’re really coming* (*edut*). Let’s go and meet them.

<sup>9</sup> Letter of Meyerhold to Chekhov, May 6, 1904. See V. E. Meierkhol’d, *Stat’i. Pis’ma. Rechi. Besedy* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1968), 85.

<sup>10</sup> See *The Oxford Chekhov: Uncle Vanya, Three Sisters, The Cherry Orchard, The Wood-Demon*, ed. and trans. by Ronald Hingley (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 3: 151.

*Dunyasha.* I'm going to faint now . . . Oh, I'm going to faint! (my italics—RLJ)

Lopakhin's words, "I think they're coming now" announce the arrival of the family. Yet this exchange has an important subtext: The thrice-repeated word, "edut," directly picks up on "something" (*chtonibud'*), "unhappy person" (*neschastlivyi chelovek*), and finally, "twenty two misfortunes" (*dvadtsat' dva neschast'ia*). In a word, misfortunes are on the way, they're coming, coming, coming (*Edut, Edut, Edut*).

There is a good deal of talk about sleep, "going to sleep." in act 1. This is understandable: people are tired. They are also asleep on the question of the fate of the cherry orchard. Not surprisingly, Chekhov is interested in the metaphorical associations of the word "sleep." Anya early on hints at the age-old connection of sleep (in Russian—"son") with death, and with dream (in Russian, also "son"). "Home again!" she exclaims shortly after her arrival back at the estate. Tomorrow I'll get up, I'll run into the orchard . . . Oh, if only I could fall asleep! I couldn't sleep on the way" (*Zavtra utrom vstanu, pobegu v sad . . . O, esli by ia mogla usnut'!*). Anya wishes to go to sleep the sooner to wake up in the morning in her paradise, the fabulous cherry orchard. Not accidentally does Chekhov place trailing ellipses after the word "orchard" (*sad*).<sup>11</sup> Anya's words echo the "mystery" of Corinthians, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed (*ce, tainu vam glogolii: vsi bo ne uspnem, vsi zhe izmenimsia*) . . . the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (I: Cor. 15:51–52). The veiled allusion here to Corinthians lays the groundwork for Anya's passionate effort, following the auctioning of the estate, to persuade her mother to "go away" with her to plant a new cherry orchard.

The linkage of sleep with death is also evoked by variant meaning of the word "pokoinaia" (calm, restful, but also deceased). "If only we could marry you to a rich man, and I could then be at peace (*ia by togda byla pokoinoi*), I'd go myself to a hermitage," says Lyubov Andreyevna's foster daughter to Anya. "Pokoinaia" here must be translated as "at

<sup>11</sup> The use of trailing ellipses, three periods closely following each other after the end of a phrase or sentence, is common in Russian writing. The ellipses may be used to direct the reader's attention to something obvious that deserves note but has not been emphasized in the preceding sentence, or to stress some underlying authorial attitude—irony, a sense of tragedy, awe, etc. with respect to what has been said.

peace,” “content,” “at ease,” but in its alternate meaning, “deceased,” it alludes to Varya’s stiffness and coldness; she will later in the text be identified with Shakespeare’s ill-fated Ophelia. Toward the end of act 1, Anya several times uses the word “pokoinyi” (content) in ways that awaken its alternate meaning, “I am now content! I am now content, I am happy” (*Ja teper’ pokoina! ia pokoina, ia schastliva*), Anya exclaims after hearing Gaev’s plan, in reality a totally empty one, for rescuing the cherry orchard and the estate. Yet Anya’s spirituality has a congeniality for life and happiness beyond death.

Gaev’s is irritated by Firs’s vexed effort to get him to go to sleep, “I’m going, I’m going, you go to bed [i.e. lie down].” “Right away, right away (*seichas, seichas*, literally this hour, this hour), Gaev responds to Firs, but immediately begins to utter clichés about his generation of the 1880s, thus confirming Gaev’s readiness for the long sleep. “I’m going, I’m going,” Gaev says again to Firs, “you go to bed [i.e. lie down—*lozhites’*]” —the first hint in the play of what will be Firs’s last action at the play’s end: lying down. Is he falling asleep, dying, or dead?

In the last several lines at the end of act 1, “*poidem*” (let’s go, come along) is frequently used. “Let’s go to bed . . . Come along! Come along . . . My angel has fallen asleep! Let’s go . . .,” says Varya. The stage direction “*Idut*” (they go off) that accompanies Varya and sleepy-dreamy Anya as they go to bed also leads the spectator or reader into a dreamy pastoral scene. “In the distance beyond the orchard a shepherd is playing on a pipe. Petys walk across the stage, and seeing Anya, stops.” Typically, the pastoral is an imitation of rural life, usually the life of an imaginary Golden Age. This is the world that draws Anya.

The seamless transition from the sleepy end of the act 1 to the bleak and funereal mood of the setting of act 2 underscores the connection between two “sleeps” that are ever-present in *The Cherry Orchard*: the everyday sleep with its dreams and dodges of reality, and the dreamless sleep of death.

Chekhov’s stage directions in act 2 accent images of emptiness, breakdown, death, and decay; a field, an abandoned little chapel (*chasovenka*), and next to it, a well, and remnants of what was once a cemetery; “large stones that evidently were once grave stones,” and an old bench. Chekhov concludes with words that constitute a caption to the setting: “The sun is about to set” (*Skoro siadet solntse*).

The type of little chapel or “*chasovenka*” (the root of the word is “*chas*” or “hour”) that is mentioned was typically a small wooden structure with icons where pilgrims could pray, read psalms or verses

at prescribed hours, that is, observe the canonical hours (*sluzhit' chasy*). The abandoned chapel is a reminder of the dislocation of time in the world of *The Cherry Orchard*, not only of temporal time, but also of absolute time. The mention of a large stones that "evidently" once were grave stones contributes to the sense of both material and spiritual desolation. It is significant that Chekhov twice insisted in letters to the directors of the play that the scene is not set in a cemetery, but that there *had been* one a long time ago.

The meditative and somber pastoral garden scene in the light of the setting sun approaches its denouement at the end of act 2 with the "mournful" sound of a breaking string, a sound identified with "misfortune" (*neschast'e*). In the "There goes Epikhodov, there goes Epikhodov" (*Epikhodov idet . . .*), "The sun has set." "Suddenly a distant sound is heard, as if out of the sky, the sound a breaking string, dying away, mournful." The sound is followed by Firs's mention of the "misfortune" (*neschast'e*). "The same thing happened before the misfortune." "Before what misfortune?" Gaev asks, and Firs responds, "Before the freedom (*volia*)," that is, the emancipation of the serfs.

Lyubov Andreyevna's response to this happening is immediate, "You know, my friends, let's go. Night is falling" (*Znaete, druž'ia, poidemte, uzhe vechereet*). Turning to Anya, she says, "You have tears in your eyes . . . What is it, child?" Anya replies, "Nothing, Mama, it's okay" (*Eto tak, mama. Nichego*). The student Petya Trofimov remarks at this point, "Somebody is coming" (*Kto-to idet*). His words call attention to the approach of the frightening and ill-omened "prokhozhi" (passerby). In him, as in Epikhodov, we find a member of the "khod" family, a "prokhozhi" (the word has as its etymological root, "khod" — motion, movement, going, etc.). Both the designation of the stranger as a "prokhozhi," one who is passing through, and his question, "Can I go straight through here to the station?" (*Mogu li ia proiti zdes' priamo na stantsiu?*), aptly awakens the underlying and disturbing theme of change or *passage* (*prokhod*).

(The words immediately follow Anya's "nichego," thus suggesting a subtext of "[Nichto] idet" — "Naught is coming" — quite in the spirit of the mysterious and frightening sound which Firs links with "misfortune." The device Chekhov uses here is similar to his linking of "chto-nibud'" [something] and "neschast'e" [misfortune] with the thrice-repeated verb "edut!" [they are coming] at the beginning of act 1.)

Petya’s “somebody is coming” (*kto-to idet*) focuses on the approach of the frightening and ill-omened “prokhozhi” (passerby). In him, as in Epikhodov, we find a member of the “khod” family, a “prokhozhi” (the word has as its etymological root, “khod” — motion, movement, going, etc.). Both the designation of the stranger as a “prokhozhi,” one who is passing through, and his question, “Can I go straight through here to the station?” (*Mogu li ia proiti zdes’ priamo na stantsiu?*), aptly awakens the underlying and disturbing theme of change, or *passage* (prokhod).

It is not by chance that Lopakhin associates the appearance of the passerby with the word and concept of “bezobrazie” (ugliness, but also deformation, desecration of beauty and form shapelessness). “Bezobrazie” — such is the essence of the arrival of a new social and economic order, or disorder’ such is the nature of the historical “passage” of the railroad across the gentry land of *Vishnevyi sad*.

The theme of “coming” or “going” of “passage,” of closure, and of death, as it relates to the famed cherry orchard, becomes insistent and marked in the play. The “idet” theme emerges as the theme of approaching disaster: *time, unhappiness, “twenty-two misfortunes,” merchants, speculators, somebody, something is coming.*

Petya Trofimov’s triumphant theme, “chelovechestvo idet” (mankind is coming, or mankind is on the march), might appear, at first glance, as the cheerful counterpoint to the ominous “idet” theme of time and change. Petya’s “mankind is coming,” however, belongs typologically *not* to what has been brewing for a long time and is about to overwhelm the present, such as the merchant Lopakhin and all the social and economic changes his coming portends, but rather to what is coming down the chute of the utopian socialist future.

Chekhov, however, finds no special promise in the collective arrival of “humanity” or in Petya Trofimov’s qualifications as a leader of this new army. “There aren’t any generals. He’s raving,” Lyubov Andreyevna remarks in act 1 apropos of Gaev’s hope that there’s a general in town who might offer the family a loan. At this very moment, Gaev, observing the approach of the young people, Petya, Varya, and Anya, remarks, “Our young people are coming” (*Nashi idut*) — a remark that in the play’s ironic subtext at this point conflates the Petyas, Anyas, and Varyas with generals. Yet there are no generals or leaders in Chekhov’s dreamy young generation.

Petya nonetheless childishly speaks in the militant voice of a general whose troops are on the march: “Mankind is marching



forward" (*Chelovechestvo idet vpered*), he declares. One might say that this new mankind, in contrast to Lopakhin's time on the march, is still a monster in the making. Right now, as Petya explains, mankind is only "perfecting its forces." But he is confident; "I have a premonition of happiness (*schast'e*), I see it already . . ." The future indeed is approaching, and like Lopakhin's "vremia" (time), it is approaching on foot; "Happiness, here it comes, it's approaching nearer and nearer, I already hear its footsteps" (*Vot ono schast'e, vot ono idet, podkhodit vse blizhe i blizhe, ia uzhe slyshu ego shagi*), Petya says at the end of act 2.

Chekhov, too, hears these steps, but recognizes in "schast'e" (happiness) the same old approaching "neschast'e" (misfortune), but now in a new disguise. "Ia uzhe slyshu ego shagi" (I already hear its steps). The word "uzhas" (horror) is hidden in Petya's words: "UZH[e] S[lyshu]" — "I hear horror." Not happiness, but horror is coming, not only from the past, but from the future, "Ours are coming" (*nashi idut*). At the very least, Chekhov in his parodic rendering of Petya would seem to suggest that the new generation is afoot with old illusions.

The alarming "distant sound," Firs's mention of the "misfortune" (*neschast'e*) on hearing it, and finally, the appearance of the passerby — all generate a sense of fear, premonition of disaster. Chekhov marks it with a flurry of frightened "goings." "My friends, let's be going, evening is setting in" (*Druz'ia, idemte, uzhe vecheret*), Lyubov Andreyevna remarks immediately after Firs's mention of the "misfortune." "I'm going, I'm going" (*Ia idu . . . ia idu . . .*), exclaims the frightened Varya. "Let's go, everybody, it's time" (*Poidemte, gospoda, pora*), Lopakhin jests with respect to Varya. "Okhmelia [Ophelia], be off to the nunnery," (*Okhmelia, idi v monastyr'*), jests the unfrightened Lopakhin about Varya. "Let's go, everybody" (*Idemte, gospoda*), says Lyubov Andreyevna again. And if the approaching "twenty-two misfortunes" of Epikhodov have been forgotten, Lopakhin indirectly reminds us of their presence and of a really threatening event in the life of the Ranevsky family when he declares that on the "twenty-second of August" the estate will be up for auction. What time is it? Time is on the march!

In the midst of these "goings," and as if responding to the sense of alarm in the air, Petya's grandiose utopian theme of the future becomes more militant, his voice more shrill and commanding: "Forward! We are marching (*my idem*) irresistibly to a bright star that is glowing in the distance! Forward! Do not lag behind, friends." Anya's response to Petya's rhetoric, clapping her hands — "How well you put it!" — only deepens our sense of the human comedy.

Lyubov Andreyevna's characterization of Petya's behavior at one point as “ridiculous”—“You are ridiculous,” “a ridiculous oddity,” “a ridiculous man” (“smeshnoi vy,” “smeshnoi chudak,” “smeshnoi chelovek”)—parodies a character in Dostoevsky's writings. Petya's lofty rhetoric, his flaming idealism, his “premonition” of “happiness,” his “bright star,” his insistence that we do everything to help everyone “who is searching for the truth”—all this indeed recalls the hero of Dostoevsky's fantastic tale, “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man” (“Son smeshnogo cheloveka,” 1877).

The Ridiculous Man recounts his dream-visit to a bright “star,” one that turns out to be the earth's mythic pre-fall paradise. Here, on one of the islands of a pastoral “Greek Archipelago,” he celebrates the “beautiful” “children of the sun,” and then sexually corrupts them. Awakening from his dream, he foregrounds *not* his corruption of paradise, but his earlier idyllic experience and vision of an “an earth not corrupted by the sin of the fall,” a vision of truth (*istina*). It is this vision that he sets out to preach to the world.

Through his allusion to the “Dream of a Ridiculous Man,” Chekhov foregrounds the central metaphysical theme embodied in the cherry orchard and its fabulous beauty—a yearning for the Garden of Eden, a yearning for paradise lost; in one form or another, and on the deepest level of their being, Petya, Anya, Lyubov Andreyevna, Lopakhin, and even Firs, experience that painful yearning for the lost Garden of Eden, that is, they experience the *suffering of change*.<sup>12</sup>

Chekhov, however, seeks not to idealize Petya. In spite of Petya's awareness of social evil in Russia's tragic history of serfdom, he has not learned the lesson of the past: the permanent presence of evil in human existence; he remains a naïve idealist in his effort to realize social utopia on earth.

It is rather Lyubov Andreyevna who emerges, paradoxically, as a positive “ridiculous” heroine in the play. She does not preach

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<sup>12</sup> Francis Fergusson speaks of *The Cherry Orchard* as a “poem of the suffering of change”; he notes that each person suffers the loss of his or her cherry orchard. I emphasize here, however, the suffering of change that unites all these people: Chekhov's underlying metaphysical theme of man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. For his formulation of the matter, see Fergusson's essay, “The Cherry Orchard: A Theater Poem of the Suffering of Change,” reprinted in *Chekhov: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Louis Jackson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 147–160.



or philosophize, but she embodies in her life, albeit in impractical, irrational, indeed, *ridiculous* ways, the fundamental virtues of *magnanimity* (*velikodushie*), of unselfishness (a quality that she finds markedly absent in Petya), self-sacrifice, liberality, and above all, kindness and compassion.<sup>13</sup> She is neither “above love,” or below it, but embodies both Eros and agape.

The last two lines of act 2, spoken against the background of the sad strains of Epikhodov’s guitar, have an air of innocence:

*Anya*: Let’s go down to the river (*poidemte k reke*). It’s lovely there.

*Trofimov*: “Let’s go” (*Poidemte*).

Chekhov follows this exchange with the stage direction: *idut* (they go off, exit). Anya and Petya are going down to the river, the same river where Lyubov Andreyevna’s son, Grisha, had drowned. The river is mythically associated with death; it is also associated with a crossing over into knowledge and experience. Petya and Anya have yet to cross that river. In this broad context, Anya’s comment, “It’s lovely there” is as innocent as is her rapturous response to Petya’s rhetoric a moment earlier: “How well you put it!” Innocence and *naïveté*, rather than knowledge, marks these two young people.

Act 3 opens with the landowner, Boris Borisovich Semionov-Pishchik’s mention of his “two strokes” (*dva udara*) and concludes with a final blow: Lopakhin’s announcement of auctioning of the estate. The stamping feet of triumphant Lopakhin replace Petya’s “footsteps” of approaching “happiness.” It is no longer “Time is on the march!” (*vremia idet!*) for Lyubov Andreyevna and her family, but “here comes the new landowner (*Idet novyi pomeshchik*), proprietor of the cherry orchard!” *Time is at hand*, the apocalyptic time of *Revelations* has arrived, and is incarnate in the person of Lopakhin, the new owner who has just “bought an estate more beautiful than anything in the world.” He “accidentally” bumps into a small table and nearly knocks over the candlesticks as he announces the “new life” that will follow the destruction of the cherry orchard. In the new order, however, more

<sup>13</sup> In a “Little and Bold Friends of Humanity” in the January 1876 issue of his *Diary of a Writer*, Dostoevsky pointedly asserts that he is “terribly fond” of those so-called “comic” or “ridiculous” heroes and idealists who act for good in concrete and unselfish ways. (See Dostoevskii, PSS, 22:25).

than artifacts of gentry life will be in danger. The new owner “will take an ax” to his beautiful orchard and hack out the new order.

In the stupendous finale of act 3, in the accelerating and feverish rhythms of Lopakhin’s narrative of the auction, real and historical time becomes apocalyptic time, a time of destruction, but a time also for sorrowful and plangent lament—one first articulated by Lopakhin himself, “Oh, that all this would go quickly, that somehow our awkward, unhappy life would quickly change.”

Lopakhin’s poignant words fail to make any impact on Pishchik, except to arouse his desire to get away from the scene. “Lyubov Andreyevna is weeping . . . Let’s go into the hall (*Poidem v zalu*) let her be alone . . . Let’s go . . . (*Poidem*).” Quite different in ethical mood from Pishchik’s desire get away from Lyubov Andreyevna’s tragedy is Anya’s repeated “let’s go” (*poidem*) to her mother in her final lines at the end of act 3. She not only showers her mother with sympathy and love, but seeks passionately to lead her into a new life.

Mama! Mama, you’re crying? My dear, kind, good mama, my beautiful one, I love you . . . I bless you. The cherry orchard has been sold, it exists no longer, that’s the truth, the truth, but don’t cry, mama, life remains for you ahead, your good, pure soul remains . . . Come with me, let’s go away from here, my dearest, let’s go! We will plant a new orchard, more splendid than this one, you will see it, you will understand, and joy, a quiet, deep joy will descend on your soul, like the sun at the evening hour, and you will smile, mama! Let’s go, my dearest! Let’s go!

[Milaia, dobraia, khoroshaia moia mama, moia prekrasnaia, ia liubliu tebia . . . ia blagoslovliaiu tebia. Vishenevyi sad prodan, ego uzhe net, eto pravda, pravda, no ne plach’, mama, u tebia ostalas’ zhizn’ vperedi, ostalas’ tvoia khoroshaia, chistaia dusha . . . Poidem so mnoi, poidem, milaia, otsiuda, poidem! My nasadim novyi sad, roskoshnee etogo, ty uvidish’ ego, poimesh’, i radost’, tikhaia, glubokaia radost’ opustitsia na tvoiu dushu, kak solntse v vechernii chas, i ty ulybnesh’sia, mama! Poidem, milaia! Poidem!]

On the surface, Anya’s tender and lyrical words to her mother urge a simple and sensible adaptation to the catastrophe: the estate with its garden, its orchard, has been sold; you have the rest of your life to live; let’s go away; we’ll plant a new orchard, and you will rest content in the evening of your years.

Yet Anya's appeal to her mother is markedly elegaic. On her knees, she pleads with her mother to leave the estate with her, but addresses her almost as though she were dying. She loves and blesses her mother. "Life remains for you ahead, your good, pure soul remains . . ." What is "left" for Lyubov Andreyevna up ahead? The disembodied life of a "pure soul" in a new orchard that will be more "splendorous" than the cherry orchard that has just been sold. The new orchard recalls Petya's vision of "all Russia as our orchard"; yet that orchard, for Anya, seems a stand-in for the Garden of Eden. Anya's language in her peroration has a dreamy, eschatological dimension. She promises her mother that she "will see" and "will understand," and that a "quiet, profound joy will descend on [her] soul, like the sun at evening dusk, and [she] will smile."

Anya is a person of markedly religious temperament. It is no accident that Gaev and Varya speak of her as an "angel." Her words in act 1 echoes the "mystery" of Corinthians (I: Cor. 15:51-52). The day has been is a momentous one. August 22 is the date of the sale of the estate to Lopakhin and his declaration of a "new life"; it is also the eve of closing day of the Eastern Orthodox *Feast of the Dormition*,<sup>14</sup> a fixed holiday commemorating the "falling asleep" (as indicated by the Russian word for "dormition" — *uspenie*), that is, the death of the Virgin Mary and her passing from earthly to eternal life.

Chekhov, then, has juxtaposed at the end of act 3—the traditional turning point or peripeteia in classical drama—two strangely connected events: the passing of the cherry orchard from life into death, and back into memory, on one hand, and the passing of the Virgin Mary from death into eternal life, into the promised paradise, on the other. Both of these events occur off stage, yet both are marked by feasts or rituals on stage: the first feast, as it were, profane, and the other, sacred in spirit:<sup>15</sup> Lopakhin's triumphal utterances and celebrations, with its subtext of anguish over

<sup>14</sup> *The Feast of Dormition (Prazdnik Uspeniia)*, one of the fixed Great Feasts of the Eastern Orthodox church, is celebrated between August 15 and August 23 (Old Style), and corresponds to Assumption in the Western church.

<sup>15</sup> These two feasts are accompanied by music played by a Jewish orchestra: on the one hand, the cheerful music marking Lopakhin's celebration (Lopakhin: "Orchestra, strike it up!"); on the other, "quiet" music (Chekhov's stage direction reads: "the orchestra plays quietly") marking Anya's ecstatic but elegaic pleading-speech to her mother.

the wrenching “awkward and unhappy” event of the transition, and Anya’s invitation to her mother to accompany her on a journey into a more “splendorous” orchard (Russia), figuratively speaking, into the eternal life promised by the gospels and Revelations.

A sense of irony pervades Chekhov’s representation of Lopakhin’s and Anya’s “feasts.” The real estate wonder and the “new life” that Lopakhin hails is a parody of the Promised Land. Yet his compassion for Lyubov Andreyevna, his empathetic lament over the unhappiness and awkwardness of the suffering of the transition or change strikes a profound note. Anya’s consoling thought about her mother *smiling in misfortune* echoes an earlier line, vaudevillian in character, by Epikhodov in act 1, “Every day some kind of misfortune happens to me. And I don’t complain and even smile.” Epikhodov utters the same line in a somewhat altered form toward the end of act 3, “I have a misfortune every day, and I, allow me to so express it, only smile, even laugh.”

The repetition by Anya of the motif of a smile in misfortune undercuts the lofty spiritual drama that Anya creates around Lyubov Andreyevna. Yet Anya’s empathy with her mother’s grief is moving, even as Lyubov Andreyevna seems ill-chosen for a role in the great Feast of the Dormition—the unconscious subtext of Anya’s address to her mother.

Lyubov Andreyevna’s life, to begin with, is far from over. There is little about her Parisian gambols, past and anticipated, that puts her in the category of the Virgin Mary or even a repenting Mary Magdalene. She has a visceral will to live in spite of the humiliating and degrading forms her return to Paris will involve. She will in any case leave her Garden of Eden, not return to it. The notion of Lyubov Andreyevna as Virgin Mary is thus as delusionary as Liubov’s own vision of her mother dressed in white moving about in the cherry orchard. Yet Chekhov’s parody has its limits. The name “Liubov” (love) is not an accident: in all her dilapidated life style and idiosyncratic behavior Liubov’s abundance of elemental goodness and kindness and human sympathy places her at least in the circle of the Virgin Mary’s spiritual charisma.

Act 4 is replete with the coming and going verbs “*idti*” (to go on foot) and “*ekhat’*” (to ride in a vehicle). The die is cast. The estate and its orchard have been sold. People are going off, not to die, but to live out their lives, for better for worse. The exuberant mood of the departing family, however, belies a sense of a world irrevocably lost.

Even Petya seems to be grasping at straws when he declares again, almost desperately, that “mankind is marching toward the highest truth, the highest happiness, such as is only possible on earth, and I am in the first ranks!”

To Lopakhin’s skeptical retort, “Will you get there?” (*doidesh’?*), Petya answers, after a pause, “I’ll get there . . . or I’ll show others the way to get there.” Chekhov’s stage note at this point reads, “The sound of an ax striking a tree is heard in the distance.” Lopakhin’s ax is destroying the old world. The positioning of Chekhov’s stage note suggests, too, that Petya’s brave, new world may also rely on the ax.

“Well, good-bye, my dear. It’s time to go” (*Nu, proshchai, golubchik. Pora ekhat’*), Lopakhin responds to Petya.<sup>16</sup> “We turn up our noses at each other, but life goes on its own way” (*My drug pered drugom nos derem, a zhizn’ znai sebe prokhodit*). Gaev’s words, a moment later, echo that sentiment, but with a hint at apocalyptic time, “Let’s get going (*Ekhat’ by nam*). Only a little time is left.” Lyubov Andreyevna’s words—“Winter will pass (*proidet zima*), spring will come but you [dear house] will no longer be, they will smash you up” —reflects an underlying sense of an ending of the old world. “My treasure, you are beaming, your eyes are dancing like two diamonds,” she remarks to Anya. “Are you happy?” “Very!” answers Anya. “Our new life is beginning, Mama!” Anya, as always, has her head high in the clouds. That is evident in the way she expresses her concern for her mother’s well-being. She urges her mother, who is setting out again for Paris, to return soon:

Mama, you’ll return quickly, quickly . . . isn’t that true? . . . Mama, we’ll read all sorts of books . . . Isn’t that true? (Kisses her mother’s hands). On autumn evenings we’ll read, we’ll read all sorts of books, and a new, marvelous world will open up before us . . . (Dreamily). Mama, come back . . . (*Mama, priezhai . . .*)

The marvelous world that she holds out before her mother, the world to which she wishes her mother to return “quickly, quickly,” is essentially the same world of the Golden Age where there is no time. Lyubov Andreyevna’s answer is tender, but her choice of words makes it clear that she is immune to the fantasies of her daughter. “I’ll come, my golden one” (*Priedu, moe zoloto*), she remarks—this time, unconsciously

<sup>16</sup> “Good-bye, my dear.” Lopakhin’s use of the word “golubchik” (diminutive of “golub” or dove), here translated as “my dear,” comes across ironically.

substituting the word “zoloto” (gold, but here, “golden one”) for the word “treasure” (*sokrovishche*) that she had used a moment earlier in addressing Anya.

The play draws to a close with a chorus of “goings” and good-byes. “We must be going” (*Nado ekhat’*), says Lyubov Andreyevna; “We’re off!” (*V dorogu!*) exclaims Anya joyously; “Time to go!” (*Pora ekhat’*) calls out Petya; “We are going and not a soul will remain here . . .” (*Uedem—i zdes’ ne ostanetsia ni dushi . . .*), says Lyubov Andreyevna. “Till spring,” replies Lopakhin, a man whose “spring” will bring the activity of many living souls. “Come now, into the carriages . . . The train will be arriving momentarily [literally, this hour the train will arrive!]” (*Idemte sadit’sia v ekipazhi . . . Seichas poezd pridet!*), calls out Petya, and again, “Let’s go, everybody! (*Idem, gospoda!*) Let’s go! (*Idem!*),” says Lyubov Andreyevna. “Let’s go!” (*Idem!*) exclaims Lopakhin again. “Until spring. On your way, people . . . Till the station (*Znachit, do vesny. Vychodite, gospoda . . . Do svidantsiia*),” says Lopakhin. He wanted to say “do svidania” (good-bye) but unconsciously conflates the word “stantsiia” (station) with “svidanie (meeting), thus suggesting “until the station,” rather than “until we meet again.” For Lopakhin, spring cleaning has begun, and his de facto connection with the past ends where the play began: at the railroad station.

“There’s a way out” (*Vychod est’*), Lopakhin had pleaded earlier with respect to his plan to save the estate financially. The “way out,” for the family, in the end turns out to be, “On your way . . .” or simply, “Out with you!”

### *Farewell to Eden*

In the penultimate scene of the play, we are witness to an expulsion from Eden.<sup>17</sup> Lyubov Andreyevna’s last words addressed to her “garden,” her “life,” her “happiness,” are interrupted at intervals by impatient

<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to note that in one of his first and saddest stories, “Za iablochki” (About Little Apples, 1880), Chekhov uses the biblical scene of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden scene as a frame of reference for sharp social satire. That motif appears in other stories of Chekhov, such as “A Trifle from Life” (*Zhiteiskaia meloch’*, 1886). For a discussion of “About Little Apples,” see my chapter, “Dostoevsky in Chekhov’s Garden of Eden” in Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky: The Overwhelming Questions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 83–103.

calls from Anya and Petya (“Mama!” “You-hoo”) who have already left the house. Her final words “We’re coming!” (*My idem!*), though they belong to a category of responses standard for the occasion, nonetheless, rise above pedestrian meaning.

Anya’s and Petya’s calls echo, as it were, their earlier sophomoric “aoo’s” and appeals to “Mamma” to follow them in their march toward the “bright star” of future. However, Lyubov Andreyevna’s “my idem!” has nothing in common with the heady social utopia of Petya’s or with Anya’s paradise anymore than it connects with Lopakhin’s real-estate man’s plan for the “salvation” of the estate. “There’s a way out” (*Vykhod est’*), he had assured Lyubov Andreyevna. “I congratulate you, you are saved. A marvelous site (*mestopolozhenie chudesnoe*), a deep river.” Is this a place for vacationers from the city? Or is it the Promised Land by the river Jordan, or the Garden of Eden with its river? Lopakhin has his dream, but he must first chop down the cherry orchard and clear the land before he can develop this marvelous site. Yet destruction is essential part of the prophecy of *Revelations*, as is the “new heaven and the new earth” that follows it (Rev. 21:1).

Lyubov Andreyevna has formed her own Edenic ideal: she has recognized in the cherry orchard her childhood paradise, one watched over by “heavenly angels.” Yet her Eden is not a world she dreams of returning to. Innocence for her is no longer an option. Her spirited “We are coming!” (*My idem!*) includes her ill-omened decision to return to Paris and to her shattered love-life. This course of action will be fatal, yet it is driven by love, however irrational, and compassion; it is, finally, a choice of life.

One cannot but ask, in this connection, whether Chekhov has not invested Liubov’s last words, “My idem!” with something of the exhilarating existential challenge that we find in the dream-chant “My idem!” (We keep going!) of Lesnitsky and Loshadin in Chekhov’s story, “On Official Business” (“Po delam sluzhby,” 1889). Lesnitsky dreams he is singing and marching side by side with the simple and plain Loshadin, the central figure in the story. Earlier in the narrative, it is the blizzard that seems to sing a song of suffering and pain. Now, the two men pick up the chant of the blizzard that circles around them: “We keep going, we keep going, we keep going . . . We bear the whole burden of this life, ours and yours.” (*My idem, my idem, my idem . . . My nesem na sebe vsiu tiazhest’ etoi zhizni, i svoei, i vashei*).

Lesnitsky’s and Loshadin’s endless march with its chant, “my idem!” is not sustained by a vision of an earthly or religious paradise or



ideal, or spiritual goal, any “bright star”; yet it is full of value-oriented spirit of endurance. Something of this existential challenge to fate, like the myth of Sisyphus, would seem to inhere in the final “My idem!” of Lyubov Andreyevna and in her orientation to life.

At the end of a note to his friend and correspondent Lydia A. Avilova, a few months before he died, Chekhov pens some lines that seem applicable, as one Russian critic has suggested, to the philosophical core of his, Chekhov’s, characterization of Lyubov Andreyevna:

All the best to you, chiefly—be cheerful, don’t look on life too subtly; probably things are really far more simple. Indeed, does this life which we do not know deserve all the tormenting reflections with which our Russian minds wear themselves out—that’s still a question.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Letter to Lydia A. Avilova, February 14, 1904. See A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v tridtsati tomakh*, 30 vols. (Moscow: Nauka, 1974–1983), *Pis’ma*, 12:34–35. See Boris I. Zingerman’s characterization of Lyubov Andreyevna in his study *Teatr Chekhova i ego mirovoe znachenie* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), 330, 337.

The essential issue concealed in Chekhov’s casual remark to Avilova—the tension between living and philosophizing, between the life process and preoccupation (here: a Russian one) with the meaning of life—is not a new one for Chekhov. It is present in the peasant girl Lipa’s anguish, in the story “In the Ravine” (1900), over the death of her baby boy. To her question—“And tell me, grandfather why should a little one be tormented before his death, why a little one, when he has no sins? Why?”—her interlocutor, an old peasant, answers: “Who knows about such things? . . . As much as [man] needs to know in order to live, so much he knows.” “Life is long, there will be good and bad, there will be everything.” The peasant speaks of his losses, his trials and tribulations; echoing the Karamazov thirst for life, however, he wants to live “another twenty years . . . which means,” he adds, that “there’s more of the good [than the bad] in the world.” Lipa is responsive to the old peasant’s kindness and compassion, to his vision of life. In the end, unlike Ivan Karamazov, she does not take the path of rebellion and indignation. She embraces life over the meaning of life.

These issues turn up in *The Three Sisters* (1903), a play in which there is a great deal of philosophizing about life and the meaning of existence. “Look it’s snowing. What’s the meaning of that?” asks Tusenbach. Masha retorts: “It seems to me a person must have faith or must search for it. Otherwise life is empty, empty . . . To live and not know why the cranes are flying, why children are born, why there are stars in the sky . . . Either one knows why one lives or everything is nonsense, rubbish.” It is Olga at the play’s end who reduces Masha’s all-or-nothing demand to the poignant and pleading,

The double ending of the play, Lyubov Andreyevna's farewell to Eden, her spirited "My idem!" and Firs's dispirited "They've gone . . . life has gone by" (*Uekhali . . . Zhizn'-to proshla*), provide complementary views on the questions the play has posed, as well as complementary aspects of Chekhov's own worldview.

On the one hand, there is the elementary truth of life, of being, of being in the world, of love, of instinctual movement forward into life regardless of what this life has in store for us; time marches on (*vremia idet!*), time is bearing down on us, but in spite of everything, we live, love, keep going: "my idem!"

On the other hand, there is the all-regulating truth of death, the truth of passage, one that Chekhov makes audible and amplifies in the distant, mysterious, and melancholy sound of the breaking string that resounds in the middle of the play and again, "as if from the sky," at the play's end; a sound that brings the audience and reader back to the opening line of the play and to a question that lies hidden in full view; a question, moral and spiritual at its foundations, that shakes up all priorities, arouses anew all sorts of "tormenting reflections," and moves to the foreground the ultimate question of the meaning of this life we live, its purposes, its direction, and its dreams: "What Time is it?" – "Kotoryi chas?"

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"If only we knew, if only we knew" – this in contrast to Chebutykin's "nothing makes any difference." It is Masha, however, in spite of all losses, who counters with a new imperative: "We must go on living... we must go on living." This imperative of life over philosophizing appears to have been on the mind of the dying Chekhov when he wrote to Lydia Avilova: "All the best to you, chiefly – be cheerful, don't look on life too subtly."

*TWO KINDS OF BEAUTY*

## TWO KINDS OF BEAUTY<sup>1</sup>

“Beauty will save the world. Two kinds of beauty,” Dostoevsky observes without further explanation in one of his notebooks to *The Idiot*.<sup>2</sup> This condensed set of idea-signals points not only to the problem content of *The Idiot*, but to the complex dialectic of Dostoevsky’s esthetic thought. The first phrase, “Beauty will save the world,” is a model of syntactic precision and order; it promises direct, unimpeded action. But the second phrase is disruptive; it shatters the integrity of the beauty-savior and bogs down the action in ambiguity and enigma. “Is it true, Prince, that you once said that ‘beauty will save the world?’” Ippolit Terentiev asks Myshkin in *The Idiot*, and then mockingly asks, “What kind of beauty will save the world?” “The world will become the beauty of Christ,” Dostoevsky answers in one of his notes to *The Devils*.<sup>3</sup> Myshkin, however, does not answer Ippolit; elsewhere in the novel he remarks, “It is difficult to judge beauty; I am still not ready. Beauty is an enigma.” Dmitry Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov* also posits the enigma of beauty, its ambiguity, and finds it “indefinable.”

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<sup>1</sup> From Robert Louis Jackson, *Dostoevsky’s Quest for Form: A Study of his Philosophy of Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), 40-70. I have supplemented this shortened version of my essay with some material from other essays in *Dostoevsky’s Quest for Form*.

<sup>2</sup> Dostoevsky’s notebook to *The Idiot*, PSS, 9:222. “Dva obrazchika krasoty” (*Two kinds of beauty*). “Obrazchik” (from “obraz” — form, model, kind, but also “icon”). The use of the suffix “chik” adds a touch of irony to the phrase. Thus, the phrase could be translated: as “two nice little kinds of beauty” or “two nice little types of beauty.”

<sup>3</sup> PSS, 11:188.

Where is Dostoevsky in this esthetic confusion? Is he the one who believes in a single omnipotent beauty? Or does he acknowledge more than one kind of beauty? It is to be noted at the outset that when Dostoevsky, as critic or journalist, and speaking for himself, uses the word "beauty," it is invariably in the antique or neo-Platonist and Christian sense of ideal Beauty. It is this kind of beauty which will save the world; it is, to Dostoevsky, a beauty which finds embodiment in concrete form, one governed by definite formal esthetic principles. Philosophically, Dostoevsky gives de jure recognition only to this classical beauty. At the same time, in his *belles lettres*, he explores, or one might say poses the problem of, two kinds of beauty. Here, he recognizes de facto a category of the beautiful or of the experience of the beautiful, which is the very antithesis in both formal attributes and moral content to classical beauty; he recognizes, in short, a judgment of beauty of which the determining principle is wholly subjective. What is the relationship between these two categories of esthetic thought in Dostoevsky's outlook?

We cannot arrive at an understanding of Dostoevsky's esthetic position without recognizing one paradoxical notion: it is not beauty which is ambivalent, but man who experiences two kinds of beauty. "But really to them (and indeed to many) this madness seems not a monstrosity," Dostoevsky wrote to the critic N. N. Strakhov, May 18, 1871, "apropos of the destructiveness of the Paris Commune, but on the contrary, *beauty*." He went on, "And thus the esthetic idea in the new humanity is beclouded. A moral foundation of society [taken from positivism] not only gives no results, but cannot even define itself, is confused in its desires and ideals."<sup>4</sup> Dostoevsky's position is clear: man in his moral obloquy finds pleasure in ugliness, violence, bloodshed, and falsely calls it *beauty*. The "esthetic idea" alone, however—the idea of beauty which for Dostoevsky in the post-exile period, if not earlier as well, is always a religious idea—though beclouded in man's consciousness remains universal and absolute.

We must distinguish, then, between Dostoevsky's point of view and the point of view of some of his characters. This is not to deny that Dostoevsky enjoys a certain complicity with his heroes, even the most morally or ideologically questionable ones; and these may often in one way or another reflect his point of view; but it is always within,

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<sup>4</sup> PSS, 29 (1):214.

and in relation to, a clearly defined structure of ideas and beliefs. It is especially important to distinguish this basic structure where Dostoevsky's esthetic thought is concerned.

Dostoevsky first set forth publicly his view on the role of beauty in the life of man in his critique of utilitarian esthetics in his article, "Mr. [Dobrolyu]-bov and the Question of Art" (1861). His essay on the critical views of the radical critic Nikolai A. Dobrolyubov (1836–1861) may be said to constitute a major formulation of his higher esthetic (among other issues), but with the important qualification that he conceals from his audience the deeply Christian foundation of the esthetic outlook had formulated in Siberia. At the end of his *Diary of a Writer* in 1873, Dostoevsky wrote of his early childhood immersion in the gospels and his efforts in general to return to the "light and truth," adding that "it would be very difficult to write about my rebirth of convictions," that is, in the spiritual realm, about the resurgence of Christian religious faith.<sup>5</sup> These convictions harmonized completely with his ideas on the role of art and literature in history and contemporary society. He wrote his friend, A. E. Wrangel, April 13, 1856, little more than two years after his release from prison in Omsk, that he was preparing an article, "Letters About Art," which was the "fruit of decades of careful thought. I conceived it all to the last word as far back as in Omsk." His article, he wrote, was "essentially on the significance of Christianity in art."<sup>6</sup> Dostoevsky did not publish this essay, nor has it been preserved, but its ideas resonate in the subtext of his critique of Dobrolyubov's utilitarian esthetic, and more explicitly, in his letters and notebooks and other writings in later years.

<sup>5</sup> "We in our family knew the Gospels practically from our earliest childhood years . . . It would be very difficult to speak of my rebirth of convictions [*pererozhdenie moikh ubezhdenii*]," he wrote at the end of "One of Today's Falsehoods" in his 1873 *Diary of a Writer*. More precisely Dostoevsky, using the plural, spoke of a change in "our view, our convictions and hearts." PSS, 21:133-134.

<sup>6</sup> PSS, 28(1):229. Dostoevsky's interest in the significance of Christianity in art was certainly an early one. "Yes," he replies to his brother Mikhail in a letter to his brother October 31, 1838. "Write me about the main idea of Chateaubriand's *Génie du Christianisme*"—a highly influential work published in 1802 in which the French writer defends Christianity against the attacks of the Enlightenment and strongly accents its esthetic-spiritual beauty and insight. See my essay, "Chateaubriand and Dostoevsky: A Posing of the Problem," *Scando-Slavica* 12 (1966): 28–37.

Dostoevsky's unique synthesis of classical and Christian esthetic posits a striving for beauty in man's life, art, and history. The highest and most unattainable beauty man seeks, in Dostoevsky's view, is the beauty and moral perfection of Christ.

In 1861, however, Dostoevsky was addressing in his article not only Dobrolyubov, but a highly radicalized and materialistic-minded generation of young people, a group that in 1861 hailed him as a hero returning from exile. In his defense of art against utilitarian criticism, Dostoevsky thus chose to veil his Christian views, though not the underlying moral-spiritual essence of his positions or his central thesis that beauty and art are organic to man's moral-spiritual strivings.<sup>7</sup> Art, Dostoevsky writes in his critique of Dobrolyubov, is as organic a need for man as eating and drinking:

The need for beauty and the creation which embodies it is inseparable from man, and without it man, perhaps, would not want to live in the world. Man thirsts for it, finds and accepts beauty *unconditionally*, and just because it is beauty; and he bows down before it with reverence, without asking what it is useful for and what one can buy for it. And, perhaps, precisely in this consists the greatest secret of art, that the image of beauty created by it immediately becomes an idol *unconditionally*. And why does it become an idol? Because the need for beauty develops most at the moment man is in discord with reality, in disharmony, in struggle, that is, when he is *alive* most of all; because man lives most of all when he is seeking something and striving; at such moments he feels within himself a most natural desire for everything harmonious, for tranquility, and in beauty there is both harmony and tranquility . . . But when man finds what he has been striving for, then for a time life, as it were, slows up for him, and we have seen examples in which man, having achieved the ideal of his desires, satiated and not knowing what further to strive for, falls into a kind of anguish, even foments in himself this anguish, seeks out another ideal in his life and, in an extreme surfeit of pleasure, not only ceases to value what he had enjoyed, but quite consciously turns from the direct path,

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<sup>7</sup> Dostoevsky stresses the huge importance of art and literature in the moral and spiritual development of the individual and peoples. The "usefulness" of art and beauty is intrinsic to art; it cannot arise, Dostoevsky adamantly insists in his critique of Dobrolyubov, from a deliberate, intentional desire on the part the artist to be "useful."



exciting in himself alien tastes, unhealthy, sharp, inharmonic, sometimes monstrous ones, losing measure and esthetic feeling for healthy beauty, and demanding exceptions in its place. And therefore beauty is immanent in everything healthy, that is, in that which is most alive, and is a necessary need of the human organism. It is harmony; in it lies the guarantee of tranquility; it embodies the ideals of man and of mankind.<sup>8</sup>

This is an esthetic-philosophical credo, at once a view of beauty with a capital "B," and a dynamic spiritual definition of the human condition. The striking aspect of this whole exposition is the central place given to the esthetic element in the life of man; with it, in its "healthy" form, are associated all man's noblest ideals and aspirations; in its so-called unhealthy form, however, the esthetic element enters man's being as a disfigured, destructive force.

Dostoevsky's point of departure is the same as Plato's in *The Symposium*: the concept of love of beauty as necessarily love of something that is wanting to man; the concept of beauty as absolute. The conception of an absolute ideal beauty emerges from the postulation of man as incomplete, at variance with himself, and therefore ever seeking completion, unity, wholeness, and harmony. "Man strives on earth for an ideal which is *contrary* to his nature," Dostoevsky observes in his important notebook commentary of April 16, 1864<sup>9</sup>—a line that encapsulates his view of man's tragic human condition. At the core of his esthetic and spiritual outlook is a tragic idealism, a view of man's relation to himself and human existence as one marked by permanent inner contradiction or discord—one never resolved, yet sublimated, as it were, in a permanent tension toward the ideal.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> PSS, 18:94.

<sup>9</sup> PSS, 20:175.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Schelling repeatedly emphasizes in the last chapter of his *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* that art is born in contradiction. "The artistic drive must emerge from a similar feeling of inner contradiction" (*So muss auch der künstlerische Trieb aus einem solchen Gefühl des inneren Widerspruchs hervorgehen*). This feeling is resolved in a "feeling of endless harmony" (*im Gefühl einer unendlichen Harmonie*). Cf. F. W. J. Schelling, *Werke*, ed. Otto Weiss, 2 (Leipzig, 1907), 293–298. I. I. Lapshin notes this parallel in *Estetika Dostoevskogo* (Berlin: Obelisk-Verlag, 1923), 47–48. Important for Dostoevsky's general philosophical outlook is that man's permanent

When, however, that tension toward ideal beauty lessens or vanishes from man's life, as we have seen, man loses his moral-spiritual equilibrium and the reverence for "healthy beauty" is replaced by demands for "exceptions." In "Response to *Russkii Vesnik*" in 1861, apropos of the poetic improvisation, "Cleopatra e i suoi amanti" in Pushkin's story "Egyptian Nights," Dostoevsky dramatizes man's moral crisis. All hope and faith have disappeared from Cleopatra's decadent society; it is at the edge of an abyss.

Life is choked because of the absence of a goal. There is nothing in the future; one must demand everything from the present; one must fill life with the immediate alone. Everything passes into the body, everything plunges into physical debauchery, and, in order to fill in for the higher spiritual impressions which are lacking, people excite their nerves, their body with everything that can possibly arouse sensations. The most monstrous aberrations, the most abnormal phenomena little by little become customary. Even the feeling of self-preservation disappears. Cleopatra is the representative of this society.<sup>11</sup>

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discord and striving for the ideal of beauty is a simultaneously an esthetic and spiritual one.

<sup>11</sup> PSS, 19:135–136. The phenomenon of a sensualism or sensuality that invades and corrupts the realm of beauty is an issue in two early works of Dostoevsky—"The Landlady" (1848) and "Netochka Nezvanova" (1849). In the latter work, Netochka comments on the dazzling beauty of her childhood friend, Katya: "Perhaps for the first time the esthetic sense was aroused in me, the sense of the artistic awakened by the beautiful was revealed for the first time and—that was the source from which my love [for Katya] arose." Yet both the "element of the beautiful" in Katya and the feeling it evokes in Netochka are torn with conflict. The beautiful in Katya was enveloped in a "false form" of pride which distorts and perverts it; and the sensual feelings that it gave rise to in Netochka are characterized as "abnormal." In this strange and feverish episode, Dostoevsky explores the phenomenon of "beauty in Sodom," as Dmitry Karamazov puts it in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The beauty of Katya is perceived as corrupt; evil is a part of her nature "Everything about her," says Netochka, "was beautiful; not a single of her vices was born in her—all were engrafted and all were in a state of conflict. Everywhere was visible a beautiful element which had taken for a time a false form." It is no accident that Dostoevsky in "Netochka Nezvanova" parodies the name of Jean Jacques Rousseau and the theme of education in the figure of Madame Leotard. Dostoevsky does not share Netochka's Rousseausque framework for her remark about Katya, but her

Dostoevsky avoids the use of the word “beauty” in his discussion of man’s taste for “another ideal”; he does not explicitly state here that man conceives and experiences this other ideal as beauty. Yet the idea of unhealthy beauty is suggested by the very notion of a “healthy beauty.” What is involved here is the notion of a counter-ideal in the life of man, one that contrasts with the ideal of absolute beauty in that it is both temporal and accessible, and full of the force of violence, disharmony, and unrest. There is no question of any ethical “good” embodied in this other ideal. The phenomenon evoked here, in Dostoevsky’s view, is esthetically attractive evil, in its most radical form — sensuality.<sup>12</sup> This is the “ideal of Sodom,” as opposed to the “ideal of the Madonna,” about which Dmitry speaks in his peroration on “beauty” in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880); it is the phenomenon of beauty in Sodom. These two ideals, taken in their organic relationship to one another in man, constitute the enigma that is beauty to Dmitry. On the esthetic plane, love of beauty in Sodom is posed in *The Brothers Karamazov* as the discordant element in man’s inner being. Even in this condition, however, man does not renounce the ideal of absolute beauty, the ideal of the Madonna. It is precisely in the context of his inner discord, in struggle, in disharmony, and in disfiguration that the need and quest for harmony, order, and form is felt.

The problem of beauty in Sodom, esthetically, the problem of ugliness, disfiguration, deformation of the norm, is Dmitry’s point of departure in his dramatic peroration on the enigma of beauty in *The Brothers Karamazov*: here is man’s condition, his dilemma, his struggle viewed in its earthly aspect. Dostoevsky’s point of departure in his article on beauty in “Mr.—bov and the Question of Art” is absolute beauty toward which man strives: here is man’s struggle seen in the aspect of his highest destiny, in the aspect of eternity. The concept of absolute beauty as the highest good and the eternal truth and the corresponding notion of an ideal form which symbolizes harmony, and therefore, beauty, constitute the unalterable foundation of Dostoevsky’s higher esthetic.

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concept of beauty taking a false form anticipates his later poetics of higher beauty.

<sup>12</sup> “Cruel sensuality,” declares Dostoevsky’s Ridiculous Man in “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man” (1877), “which befalls almost everybody on our earth, all and everyone, serves as the sole source of almost all the sins of our human race.” (PSS, 25:113)

The unity of moral and esthetic categories of the good and beauty is characteristic of Dostoevsky's higher esthetic in all periods of his creative life. The dreamer in his confusion loses that "moral sense with which man is capable of evaluating all real beauty," Dostoevsky writes at the beginning of his career in a feuilleton in the "Petersburg Chronicle" in 1847<sup>13</sup>; and at the end of his career, shortly before his death, in his notebook for 1881: "*Moral* is only that which coincides with your feeling of beauty and with the ideal in which you embody it."<sup>14</sup>

Beauty is immanent in everything healthy. Art, embodying beauty, is an embodiment of moral health. Artistic creation forms an "image of beauty" before which man bows; he bows before this image precisely in its incarnation of his ideal—the purity and good for which he strives. Dostoevsky, in his reply in 1861 to the journal *Russkii Vestnik*, stresses the moral purity (*tselomudrennost'*) of the sculpture images of the Venus of Medici and Venus of Milo. "These images produce a lofty, divine impression of art precisely because they are works of art. Here reality is transfigured, *passing through art*, passing through the fire of a pure, chaste inspiration and through the artistic thought of the poet. This is the secret of art and every artist knows about it."<sup>15</sup> Art is transfiguration. The very act of creation, the creation of form, is a creation of moral value. The need for beauty, therefore, is a need for moral transfiguration. Even art, Dostoevsky nonetheless cautions, will not have its "whole influence" on an "unprepared or undeveloped nature, or on a coarse and debauched soul. The more cultivated, the better the soul of man, the more complete and authentic will be the impression of art upon it."<sup>16</sup>

Beauty in its incarnation of the moral ideal is also truth. George Sand, Dostoevsky noted in "A Few Words about George Sand" in the June 1876 issue of *Diary of a Writer*, was entranced in her works by the beauty of the truths she preached.<sup>17</sup> The visionary hero of "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man," recalling his vision of earthly paradise (one imbued with the harmony and tranquility of pure beauty), repeatedly

<sup>13</sup> PSS, 18:34.

<sup>14</sup> PSS, 27:57.

<sup>15</sup> "Otvét russkomu vestniku" (1861), PSS, 19:134.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> PSS, 23:37.

speaks of his discovery of the truth. "I saw the truth, I saw and know that people can be beautiful and happy without losing the capacity to live on earth." The truth here is ideal moral reality; it is moral truth embodied in real forms. "The real images and forms of my dream, that is, those which I in fact saw at the very moment of my dream, were filled with such harmony, were so entrancing and beautiful, and were so truthful, that on awakening I wasn't able to embody them in our weak words."

The dream of the Ridiculous Man is a vision of formal beauty itself; he has seen a "living image," he stresses, and he wishes to go forth and preach the truth of his revelation. It is the actuality of an esthetic experience, the experience of ideal form, of pure beauty, that he wishes to preach. Yet art acts on man "plastically and through the image," Dostoevsky wrote in "The Stories of N. V. Uspensky" in 1861.<sup>18</sup> The Ridiculous Man's dream acted upon him as a work of art, and it is as a work of art that he would act upon people; hence, his frustration with "our weak words." The Ridiculous Man, however, is not a writer; he lacks the ability to embody his vision in verbal imagery. In "Old Reminiscences" in the January 1877 issue of *Diary of a Writer*, Dostoevsky recalls Belinsky's excited praise of his first work, *Poor Folk* (1846): it had conveyed in one stroke, "in an image," Belinsky exclaimed, the very essence of what the publicists and critics try to explain "in words." This is the secret of artistry, "here is truth in art!"<sup>19</sup>

Truth exists in the language of the critic or philosopher, but in art, whether plastic or verbal, truth exists only in the image, in the form that embodies it. The problem of conveying truth in art, therefore, is a problem in the creation of form, one that only genuine artistry can solve. There can be no truth in a work that scorns artistry, Dostoevsky insists in "Mr. —bov and the Question of Art." The truth of a work, its living truth and therefore its "usefulness," is destroyed through

<sup>18</sup> PSS, 19:182.

<sup>19</sup> PSS, 25:30–31. In an article on the play *Wit Works Woe* (*Gore ot uma*, 1823–1824), by Alexander S. Griboyedov (1795–1829), Belinsky wrote, "The poet thinks in images; he does not prove (*dokazyvaet*) truth, but shows it (*pokazyvaet*)." See V. G. Belinskii, "Gore ot uma," in *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, 3 vols., ed. F. M. Golovchenko (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1948), 1:464. It is noteworthy that Dostoevsky recalls Belinsky as saying that one might almost "feel the image [*obraz*] with one's hand."

poor craftsmanship. And “there is no idea, no fact, which could not be vulgarized and presented in a ridiculous way.”<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, in his article on N. V. Uspensky, “The artistic finish of a work gives to thought clarity, relief, palpability, and truth; and artistic power consists just *in truth and in its vivid representation*.”<sup>21</sup> Truth, then, is not just a reflection of nature or social reality in a work of art; truth is an attribute of the work of art itself, the end result of an artistic transfiguration of reality.

The centrality of “obraz” (“image,” “form,” “shape,” but also the iconographic image or icon; in Russian Orthodoxy, the visible symbol of the beauty of God) as an esthetic and religious idea and *symbol* is dominant in Dostoevsky’s thinking on art throughout his life. “Obraz” (form, shape, image, but also icon) is the “axis of Beauty in the Russian language.”<sup>22</sup> In a letter to the poet Apollon Maikov, December 11, 1868, Dostoevsky admires the poet’s poem “At the Chapel” (“U chasovni”), at the center of which is an icon. He is troubled only by Maikov’s tone: “You seem to *apologize* for the icon, *justify*.” Dostoevsky goes on to indicate his deep and feelingful religious reverence for the icon, and asks, “Do you believe in the icon or not!”<sup>23</sup> The icon, particularly the iconographic representation of the Madonna, appears in Dostoevsky’s artistic universe as a religious esthetic symbol of great importance, a concrete image of beauty toward which man turns in reverence and longing. “Her eyes were dimmed by a mute, tormenting anguish,” Dostoevsky writes of the heroine Katerina in “The Landlady” (1847). “She slowly rose, took two steps forward, and with a piercing wail fell down before the image of the Madonna.” Dostoevsky’s whole

<sup>20</sup> “G.—bov.” PSS, 18:90.

<sup>21</sup> “Rasskazy N. V. Uspenskogo.” PSS, 19:183–184.

<sup>22</sup> “L’image, dans la langue russe, est l’axe de la Beauté.” See Lydie Krestovsky, *La laideur dans L’art a travers les ages* (Paris: Seuil, 1947), 36.

<sup>23</sup> PSS, 28 (2):333. In a conversation with E. Opochinin, Dostoevsky speaks with great warmth and sympathy of the cult of the icon among the Russian people. “One must believe, strive toward the invisible God, but also worship Him on earth through a simple native custom. They can tell me that such faith is blind and naïve, but I answer that such faith must be. After all, not everybody can become a theologian.” See *F. M. Dostoevskii v vospominaniakh sovremennikov v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), 2:387.

conception of the role of beauty in the life of man is conveyed in his conception of Katerina: a woman torn between her voluntary enslavement to a corrupt passion and an anguished yearning for purity and unity. Man is created in the image and likeness of God, Dostoevsky repeats in his writings; his highest striving is to “imitate the perfection of that image.”

In his moving letter to N. D. Fonvizina in late January or early February 1854 following his release from prison, Dostoevsky presents Christ as his supreme esthetic-spiritual ideal. He speaks of moments in prison when he thirsted for faith as the “withered grass” thirsts for it, and found it just because truth dawns in misfortune. He speaks of being “a child of the century, a child of disbelief and doubt,” and of his agonizing thirst to believe

which is all the stronger in my soul in the face of opposite proofs. And yet God sometimes sends me moments in which I am completely tranquil; in those moments I love and find that I am loved by others, and in just such moments I have formed in myself a symbol of faith in which everything is clear and sacred to me. This symbol is very simple, here it is: to believe that there is nothing more beautiful, deeper, more sympathetic, more meaningful, more courageous and perfect than Christ, and not only is not, but I say with jealous love, can never be. Even more, if somebody proved to me that Christ was outside of the truth, and it really was so that the truth was outside of Christ, then I would rather remain with Christ than the truth.<sup>24</sup>

Dostoevsky speaks of his “thirst for faith” in the context of a permanent legacy of “doubts and disbelief.” The choice to remain with Christ is the face of “opposite proofs” is the leap of faith that brings him back into the circle of Christian truth—a leap that denotes the permanent essence of his being and striving. This concept of yearning for the beauty of Christ constitutes a kind of subtext to Dostoevsky’s essay on Dobrolyubov in 1861, one in which Dostoevsky posits man’s yearning for absolute beauty. Some years later, in his notebook entry of April 16, 1864, Dostoevsky writes of Christ as “final ideal on earth,” the eternal ideal toward which man strives and must strive according to the laws of nature. “Christ’s paradise— all history, all mankind, and

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<sup>24</sup> PSS, 28 (1):175.



in part every individual, is only development, struggle, striving and achievement of this goal.”<sup>25</sup> For Dostoevsky, the law of eternal striving toward the ideal, the *tension* toward the ideal, one that is moral, esthetic, and spiritual, lies at the basis of human existence.

Dostoevsky’s moral-esthetic spectrum begins with “obraz” and ends with “bezobrazie,” literally and figuratively with that which is “without image,” shapeless, disfigured, ugly. Man finds pleasure (he also calls it beauty) in “bezobrazie,” in the disfiguration of himself and others, in cruelty, violence, and above all, sensuality—and “sensuality is always violence.” Esthetically, “bezobrazie” is the deformation of ideal form (“obraz”).<sup>26</sup> The humanization of man is the *creating of an image*, the creating of form. The verb “obrazit’,” Dostoevsky writes in the “Russian Association for the Protection of Animals” in the January 1876 issue of *Diary of a Writer*, “is a folk word that means to re-form oneself, to restore one’s human image.” “One has always said to the drunkard, reproachfully, ‘You ought to reform yourself.’ I heard this from the convicts.”<sup>27</sup>

God created man in His own image. Man’s violence against man, in the final analysis, is a deformation of the divine image. Zosima

<sup>25</sup> PSS, 20:174–175.

<sup>26</sup> In its broadest sense, the word “bezobrazie” is used by Dostoevsky to define any kind of ugliness (moral, spiritual, esthetic); very frequently, however, it appears in the context of sexual passion or outrage. Rogozhin in *The Idiot* is referred to as a “bezobraznik”—one who enjoys “bezobrazie;” his sensuality is described as a “bezobraznaia strast’”—a monstrous or disfiguring passion. “It was impossible to imagine anything more monstrous (*bezobraznee*),” Stavrogin marks apropos of his rape of a young girl. We learn that in Fyodor Karamazov’s “bezobraznyi dom”—house of iniquity, literally, his disfigured or monstrous house—his first wife was surrounded by “bezobrazie”—all kinds of shamelessness; Fyodor himself “liubil bezobraznichat’ s zhenskimi polom”—liked to debauch with the feminine sex, that is, literally, to act without any sense for form, purity, or for the sacred, to defile in word or deed. The pleasure a human being experiences in moral “bezobrazie” is characterized in Dostoevsky’s novelistic world, as we have noted, by delight in the exceptional, inharmonic, disfigured, abnormal. Only the monstrous, abnormal, malignant can stimulate the bored soul of Cleopatra, writes Dostoevsky in his “Reply to *Russkii Vestnik*.” “She has already learned all the secrets of love and pleasures, and before her the Marquis de Sade might seem like a child.” PSS, 19:136.

<sup>27</sup> PSS, 22:26.

recalls how, as a young man, in a moment “disfiguring and monstrous” (*svirepyi i bezobraznyi*) he struck his servant in the face; he remembers how he then reproached himself for his act of violence against another being created, like himself, “in the image and likeness of God.” The extremes in brutalization, disfiguration of men are reported in *Notes from the House of the Dead* (1861–1862). The narrator of this work writes of sensualists akin to the Marquis de Sade and Marquise de Binvilliers who obtain an esthetic delight in flogging others, in inflicting the last degree of humiliation “upon another being bearing in himself the image of God.” Such a sensualist is the guard Lieutenant Zherybatnikov who “passionately loved the art of execution and loved it solely for the art. He enjoyed it, and like some jaded Roman patrician of the Roman empire running out of pleasures, invented for himself various refinements, various unnatural variations, so as in some way to stimulate and pleurably titillate his soul lapped in its fat.”

In his profound despair over the brutalization of men, Ivan, symbolically, is prepared to discard Dostoevsky’s vital distinction between “obraz” and “bezobrazie” in the definition of man. Commenting upon man’s bestial and supremely “artistic” cruelty to his fellow man, he declares, “I think if the devil does not exist, and therefore, man created him, he created him in his own image.” Here, the dialectical character of man’s nature vanishes, and the inner spiritual countenance of man is replaced by “bezobrazie.” Ivan, in his near atheism, essentially advances the notion that man is created in the image of the devil.

The desecration of the iconographic image, the icon, or the religious is symbolic in Dostoevsky’s Christian universe of the deepest crime. Peter Verkhovensky’s desecration of the icon in *The Devils* parallels on the symbolic plane the murder of Stavrogin’s saintly wife. Stepan Verkhovensky, outraged at those who would place a pair of boots above Shakespeare or Raphael, wishes to speak out at the literary quadrille against the “stinking and debauched lackey who first will mount the ladder with a pair of scissors in his hands and slash the divine countenance of the great ideal” (a reference to the Sistine Madonna, one of Dostoevsky’s favorite paintings). Rogozhin’s sensual “bezobrazie” in *The Idiot* ends up by his slashing Myshkin’s “image of pure beauty,” the Madonna-like Nastasya Filippovna, with a knife. Fyodor Karamazov lasciviously blabbers in the chapter “Over the Brandy” about his favorite topic—women, and concludes with a description of how he once spat on his wife’s icon of the Madonna.

Sensual “bezobrazie,” as we have noted, is for Dostoevsky, the central area in which man disfigures both himself and his ideal. The Ridiculous Man’s corruption of paradise with its beautiful forms and images and harmonious existence is on the same plane as Stavrogin’s rape of a young girl. In both cases, “cruel sensuality” consists in a disfiguration of innocent beauty, the ideality of “obraz”. Ugliness disfigures, ugliness kills. After reading Stavrogin’s “confession,” Tikhon remarks that he finds something ridiculous in the “essence” as well as the “form” of the confession. “Ugliness will kill it,” he whispers to Stavrogin. “Ugliness! What kind of ugliness?” asks Stavrogin. “Of the crime,” answers Tikhon.<sup>28</sup>

The disfiguration of another is simultaneously a self-disfiguration—a loss of image, form, humanity. The body of Dmitry hunches up into a deformed position when he utters the terrible words: “Why is such a man alive?” (Dostoevsky significantly titles the tumultuous episode in which these words are spoken: “A monstrous Scene”—“Bezobraznaia stsena.”)<sup>29</sup> “Insane cruelty had long ago distorted this divine soul to the likeness of a beast,” Dostoevsky writes of Pushkin’s Cleopatra in reply to *Russkii Vestnik*, “and already had often degraded her to the likeness of a wild animal.”<sup>30</sup>

The Underground Man’s moral and physical violation of the compassionate Liza is in the deepest sense a despairing act of self-mutilation, a deliberate defacing of his own cherished ideal out of a feeling of its unattainability, a conscious laceration of his own nature, his own image. Man’s being, then, is crucified by the opposite strivings of his divided nature: his corporeal self, with its destructive, carnal

<sup>28</sup> PSS, 11:145.

<sup>29</sup> It is indicative, again, of the tremendous importance of the esthetic element for Dostoevsky that he has Dmitry Karamazov express a deep loathing for the ugly physical features of his father’s face (the objective embodiment, one might say, of his moral “bezobrazie”). Indeed, Dmitry says at one point that he fears it will be precisely these repulsive features that will “at the last moment” induce him to kill his father.

<sup>30</sup> “And not only to that level: an insane cruelty had long ago disfigured this divine soul. Concealed in this beautiful body of hers is the soul of a dark-fantastic, fearful serpent: here is the soul of a spider, the female of the kind that devours its mate at the moment of mating.” Note that Dostoevsky refers to Cleopatra’s soul as disfigured, not, as Ivan Karamazov might suggest, created in the likeness of the devil. PSS, 19:136.

drives, and his spiritual self, with its higher strivings. The pleasure man finds in "bezobrazie," in the ideal of Sodom, coexists in lacerating contact with his higher ideal; at the same time, the striving for that higher ideal is itself an effort to sublimate the forces of sensuality. (Fyodor Karamazov indirectly gives expression to this idea when he calls Father Zosima a "sensualist.") The drama of Dmitry Karamazov, of course, provides the most vivid example of this ceaseless interplay of opposites in man's nature as Dostoevsky conceives it.

The feeling of the beautiful that man experiences in the contemplation of higher beauty is for Dostoevsky esthetically and morally of an entirely different order from the feeling of pleasure man experiences in his moral "bezobrazie." There can be no fusion of these two orders of esthetic sensation. Yet man in his degeneration may lose the perception of the *difference* between these two antithetical moral-esthetic experiences. "Is it true," Shatov asks Stavrogin in *The Devils*, "that you maintained that you know no difference in beauty between some sensual, bestial act and some worthy deed, for example, even the sacrifice of one's life for humanity? Is it true that in both extremes you found a coincidence of beauty?" Stavrogin finds this question "impossible to answer" and remains silent. Shatov continues, "I also don't know why evil is vile while good is beautiful, but I know why the perception of this difference is erased and lost in such gentlemen as the Stavrogins." "You have lost the distinction between evil and good because you have ceased to know your people."

It is essential to note that Stavrogin does not experience two kinds of beauty. The "coincidence of beauty" is the obliteration of distinction between esthetic categories; it signifies the loss of esthetic criteria, of measure and feeling for healthy beauty. The faculty of taste in Stavrogin has atrophied; the feelings he obtains from both a good deed and an evil act, he confesses, are "too petty." He has fallen into indifferent debauchery, and it is on this level of moribund moral-esthetic consciousness that he weakly registers esthetic experience. His inability to answer Shatov's question is indicative of his central dilemma or void: he does not know what he feels (like a man who has lost the sense of taste). The distinction between the good deed and evil act is for him an academic one; he doubtlessly knows, intellectually, that the feelings of beauty in these two different acts relate to two entirely different esthetic categories. There is a certain fatal logic in Stavrogin: the same contradictions (of which he is fully conscious) that drive him to suicide compel him to silence in his critical exchange with Shatov.

Dostoevsky's conception of the normal and the abnormal, of moral health and moral sickness, turns not on a distinction between good and evil (evil is everywhere and in all men), but on a distinction between a spiritual condition marked by struggle and one marked by inertia. The cardinal sin in Dostoevsky's novelistic universe is inertia. "The teachings of true philosophy," he writes in his notebook, "[call for] the annihilation of inertness."<sup>31</sup> He censures man not for the presence of vileness, evil, but for the absence of ideals and of the striving for them. What is important to him is that the Russian peasant has "preserved . . . the beauty of his image" in the midst of barbarism. "I repeat," he writes in "About Love for the People" in the February 1876 issue of his *Diary of a Writer*, "judge the Russian people not by those vilenesses which it so often commits, but by those great and sacred things for which, even in its very vileness, it constantly longs. . . . Judge it not by what it is, but by what it wants to become. And its ideals are strong and sacred."<sup>32</sup> Dostoevsky does not justify abominations, he insists rather that man can be judged finally only in reference to his total evolving being.

"Beauty is normality, health," Dostoevsky writes at the end of his critique of Dobroliubov's utilitarian esthetic. "Beauty is useful because it is beauty, because in mankind there is a permanent need for beauty and its highest ideal. If a people preserve the ideal of beauty and its need, that means there is also a need for health, for the norm, and thus in this way the highest development of a people is guaranteed."<sup>33</sup> Stavrogin is doomed because he has no ideals, because there is no creative tension or struggle in his existence. He is far from the "Prince"—that earlier version of Stavrogin whom we encounter in the notebooks to *The Devils*—who declares: "If I am imperfect, foul, and wicked, yet I know that there is something other, my ideal, which is beautiful, sacred, and blessed . . . From the image of the one to whom I bow, I draw forth also his spirit and hence all my moral being. And therefore it is

<sup>31</sup> The passage from which this line is taken reads as follows: "The teachings of the materialists—universal inertness (*kostnost'*) and the mechanism of matter—mean death. The teachings of true philosophy—the annihilation of inertness, i.e., the center and synthesis of the universe and of its external form—of matter, i.e., God, i.e. eternal life." PSS, 20:175.

<sup>32</sup> PSS, 22:43.

<sup>33</sup> PSS, 18:102.

absolutely necessary to bow down."<sup>34</sup> Stavrogin has lost both the sense of higher beauty and his God. He bows to no one. In essence, nothing is important to him. His face is the symbol of his stagnant inner being, a congealed mask of a triumphant sensualism—moral "bezobrazie". Stavrogin in all essential respects has been "killed" by ugliness.

In contrast, the possibility of Dmitry's moral-spiritual salvation, concretely, a perceptive shift in the direction of control, order, form, is rooted in his active moral consciousness, and a recognition of, and striving for, the ideal even in the midst of his ignominy. In his keenly felt sense of ignominy (nonexistent in Stavrogin), in his moral despair at what he discovers in himself and in man, just here lies the measure of possibility for change. Consciousness of evil in self is the first step in the direction of purgation of evil. "That which seems to you to be foul within," Zosima observes, "is, by the fact alone that you observed it, cleansed." Dmitry, also, has his higher ideal. "I am a lover of Schiller, I am an idealist," he declares in the notebook to *The Brothers Karamazov*.<sup>35</sup> It is Schiller and his poetry that Dmitry recalls in the depths of his degradation. "I have always read that poem about Ceres and about man. Has it reformed me? Never! Because I am a Karamazov."

Dmitry nonetheless bows down. "Granted that I be cursed, granted that I be low and vile, but let me also kiss the edge of that veil in which my God is shrouded." In the very depths of his ignominy—"and I consider this beauty for myself"—he begins his hymn to that luminous divine ideal "without which the world cannot stand or exist." "I am not Silenus, but I am strong" (*Ne Silen, a silen*), Dmitry remarks, setting himself by way of a pun apart from the esthetically disfigured image of the father of the satyrs.

The quest of Dmitry, the quest of man, is an esthetic one; it is for form, and therefore, for moral-spiritual structure. It is not without significance that Dmitry's consciousness of a "new man" within himself is accompanied by an esthetic awareness of himself as an "image and likeness of God." Dmitry will never be "re-formed," but in his denial of his disfiguration (even as he "follows after the devil") and in his recognition of his symbolic likeness to God (even as he senses his disfiguration) he maintains a creative tension toward the ideal.

<sup>34</sup> PSS, 11:189.

<sup>35</sup> PSS, 15:366.

There can be no mistaking the central Christian structure, with its classical foundation, of Dostoevsky's higher esthetic, his unwavering commitment to the notion of ideal beauty. At the same time, we cannot fail to note in his writing and thinking a *de facto* recognition of another kind of beauty, one indifferent to moral context and experienced by man as pleasurable disharmony. Dostoevsky succeeded in harmonizing his commitment to ideal beauty with his recognition of "another ideal" in the framework of his dualistic view of man, his division between the material and spiritual nature of man. Man finds pleasure in the destructive drives of his corporeal nature yet simultaneously, strives for a spiritual ideal, a tranquility, harmony, and esthetic integrity which is contrary to his nature. Dostoevsky recognizes only the beauty which is the object of man's higher strivings. In the contradiction between his classical and Christian higher esthetic, and his practical poetics, we find the creative dynamic of his novel, his psychological and fantastic realism.



## THE SENTENCING OF FYODOR KARAMAZOV<sup>1</sup>

In *Anna Karenina* is expressed a view of human guilt and criminality. People are portrayed in abnormal circumstances. Evil existed before them. Caught in a whirl of deceit, people commit crimes and inexorably perish: clearly the idea pertains to one of the most beloved and ancient of European themes.

—*Dostoevsky, Diary of a Writer*

He got what was due him.

—*The prosecutor in The Brothers Karamazov*

Two short scenes, “Over the Brandy” and “The Sensualists,” one following the other, occupy a pivotal place in the destiny of Fyodor Karamazov. In the first scene, the theme of desecration (crime), as it relates to Fyodor, attains its sharpest and most comprehensive expression. In the second scene, the theme of retribution (punishment) surfaces as the inexorable response to his desecration. Both the crime and punishment of Fyodor, in the poetics of Dostoevsky, belong to the realm of “bezobrazie (the morally and esthetically “monstrous” or “shapeless”) and involve the disfiguration of man made in the image and likeness of God.

The centrality of the concepts of “obraz” (image, form, icon) and “bezobrazie” as antithetical moral and esthetic categories in Dostoevsky’s thought cannot be overstressed. “Obraz”, for Dostoevsky, is the axis of beauty in the Russian language. It is esthetic form, and it is also the iconographic image, or icon, the visible symbol of the beauty of God.<sup>2</sup> Esthetically, “bezobrazie” is the deformation of ideal form. The

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<sup>1</sup> From Robert Louis Jackson, *The Art of Dostoevsky: Deliriums and Nocturnes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 304-318.

<sup>2</sup> Dostoevsky speaks of his great respect for the popular cult of the icon in a letter to Apollon Maikov in 1868 (*PSS*, 28[2]:333). See also his remarks on this subject to E. P. Opochinin, “Iz Besed s Dostoveskim” (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), 2:387.

humanization of man is the creation of form, the restoration of the image. All violence against man is a dehumanization, which is a deformation, in Dostoevsky's view, of the divine image. Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov* recalls how once, as a young man in a "savage and monstrous" (*bezobraznyi*) state of mind, he struck his servant in the face; and he remembers how he then reproached himself for his act of violence against another being created, like himself, in the image and likeness of God. On the symbolic plane, the desecration of the icon (*obraz, ikona*) involves a crime of the most grave nature, an assault upon the very ideal and principle of divine, and therefore human, beauty. Fyodor is guilty of precisely this crime of desecration.

Both the crime and punishment of Fyodor, in Dostoevsky's Christian view, are deeply reprehensible and should have yielded to an ethos of love and self-sacrifice. Yet as dramatist, Dostoevsky grasps the character's fate in the somber logic of classical Greek tragedy. "The theme is not the tragic workings of a mind," H. D. F. Kitto wrote in connection with Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, "it is that men of violence do things which outrage Justice, bring retribution, and provoke further deeds of violence."<sup>3</sup> Fyodor is not a victim; he brings his fate down upon himself by his own words and deeds—his criminal neglect of his sons, his persecution of his wife, his debauchery, and his desecration of all things sacred. Fyodor, although the embodiment of a "universal senselessness," is by no means presented to the reader as an unconscionable villain, however. "You are not an evil man, but corrupted," Alyosha once remarks to him. This observation, perhaps more than any other, echoes Dostoevsky's view that the evil that men do rarely serves to define their whole inner nature.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky discloses Fyodor's complex and many-sided character. As dramatist, however, he is deeply concerned with the ineluctable movement in the novel from crime to punishment and with the tragic rhythm that carries Fyodor to disaster. He captures the elusive moment in the destiny of a man when quantity turns into quality, when he exceeds all limits, when, like Agamemnon, he steps upon the "purple carpet"—and falls. Such a moment occurs in "Over the Brandy, a scene of Shakespearean power and conception, when Fyodor loses all moral controls. The full implications of this moment are spelled out in the following scene, "The Sensualists," in

<sup>3</sup> H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study* (New York, 1954), 75.

which Dostoevsky discloses the real and false denouement of the tragic action in the novel.

The theme of Fyodor is the theme of desecration, or profanation; it is the theme of moral and esthetic shapelessness and of the loss of all sense of measure and form. The theme is expressed by the very physical appearance of Fyodor as he is sketched in the opening chapter of the novel, and this is noted by Fyodor's son Dmitry: "I did not like his appearance, there was something about it that was dishonorable, boastful, and trampling on everything sacred, mockery, unbelief—vile, vile!" Dmitry's response to his father is direct: "Why is such a man alive! . . . No, tell me, can one go on permitting him to dishonor the earth?" Fyodor is nicknamed "Aesop," an allusion, no doubt, to the legendary ugliness of the ancient Aesop.

The theme of desecration is also embodied in the chronic and "boundless drunkenness" of Fyodor. "The word '*obrazit*' (reform)," Dostoevsky wrote in the January 1876 issue of *Diary of a Writer*, "is a folk word meaning to give an image to, to restore in man a human image. One has always said to the drunkard, with reproach: 'Now you ought to go and re-*form* yourself.' I heard the convicts say this."<sup>4</sup> Zosima, in essence, calls upon Fyodor to "re-*form*" himself, that is, to restore his "image" (*obraz*). The moral disfiguration of Fyodor, however, has passed beyond all limits.

The theme of desecration in its moral-psychological and spiritual content is developed in the monastery scenes where Fyodor confronts Dmitry, Zosima, and the monks, and in rising crescendo in the scene entitled "The Scandal," where, in his drunken buffoonery, Fyodor loses all restraint: "he could no longer control himself and plunged as though down from a mountain." Fyodor flies out of control. Objectively, physically, he is dissolving, sagging, losing his features, image; subjectively, he is carried away by evil promptings. "Alyosha, don't be angry that I offended your Superior a little while ago," he remarks in "Over the Brandy." "I can't help feeling vexed. Now if there's a God, if He exists, then, of course, I'm to blame and I shall have to answer for it." In juxtaposing the phrases *menia, brat, zlo beret* ("I can't help feeling vexed," or literally, "I am taken up by evil") and "now if God exists," Dostoevsky awakens a sleeping metaphor and gives the whole sentence symbolic meaning: at this moment, Fyodor is

<sup>4</sup> PSS, 11:167.

in the power of evil (the devil) and not good (God). What Dostoevsky suggests obliquely through Fyodor here, he characterizes directly in another context. "But the foolish devil," writes the narrator apropos of Fyodor's behavior in the monastery, "had caught up Karamazov and was carrying him along on his nerves into lower and lower depths of ignominy." "I dare say that there may be an evil spirit in me, too," Fyodor himself remarks at another point in the novel, adding that it must, however, be a "small one." Whatever, Fyodor's little devil triumphs in "Over the Brandy."

The peculiarly repulsive impression created by Fyodor is significant in view of Ivan's theory of love of one's neighbor: "One may love one's neighbor in the abstract and even sometimes from a distance, but close-up almost never." Fyodor provides Ivan and Alyosha with a close-up view of himself in the opening scenes of the novel and again in the scene appropriately entitled "Over the Brandy." Fyodor is alone with his two sons here, and he is drunk. This scene is a fatal one as far as Fyodor is concerned; it is the "last act of the performance." He begins to talk, and he cannot stop. He babbles and almost literally bespatters everything. Both on the dramatic and ideological planes, the scene escalates in tension toward a stupendous finale, a confrontation between the sacred and the profane.

Fyodor begins by expressing his contempt for the Russian peasant: "The Russian peasant, generally speaking, needs thrashing." He moves swiftly on to defile Russia: "Russia's all swinishness. My dear, if you only knew how I hate Russia." He hates Russian vice, but Russia itself, he implies, is vice. The motif of beating leads him to his favorite subject: the thrashing of women. The shift from Russia to women, from "mother Russia" to the mother of men represents ideologically a new and dangerous escalation of profanation.

This theme of profanation is closely and fatally interwoven with the novel's moral-philosophical dialectic. The ominous significance of Fyodor's desecration is signaled by a casual remark: "Now if there's a God, if He exists, then, of course, I'm to blame and I shall have to answer for it." As though gambling with his fate, Fyodor puts this question to Ivan: "Is there a God or not?" His fate is linked with Ivan's resolution of this crucial question, a question that in its basic moral content can be rephrased as follows: Is there any moral order or meaning in the universe, or is everything permissible? It is Ivan's tendency to resolve this question negatively that ultimately proves fatal to Fyodor.

The significance of the entire moral-philosophical dialectic in "Over the Brandy" is that Fyodor himself definitively emerges to Ivan, in his personality and outlook, as a hateful embodiment of the human condition, as disgusting proof of the moral disorder of man and the universe. Ivan answers his father's question bluntly, "No, there is no God . . . there is no immortality, either." Whether or not this answer truthfully reflects Ivan's views on this question (later he insists to Alyosha that he had been "teasing on purpose"), it is clear that it expresses his deep skepticism, and on the psychological plane of action, at least, paves the way to a negative resolution of the moral question that he has linked with immortality.

Fyodor now returns to his favorite topic: women and sensuality. His unbridled sensualism, as it is disclosed here, is the very essence of "bezobrazie". In behavior and discourse, he pollutes the very idea of woman. As Fyodor shifts his attention to a particular woman, the mother of Ivan and Alyosha, and to his dishonorable behavior with her, the confrontation between the sacred and profane intensifies. In Alyosha's memory, his mother emerges as a pure, innocent, almost sacrosanct figure. She is linked in his mind with the iconographic Madonna (he remembers her "praying for him to the Mother of God, holding him out in both arms to the icon as though to put him under the Mother's protection"). It is the subject of Alyosha's and Ivan's mother that provides Fyodor with a bridge to a final assault on the sacred. The attack takes the form of a recollection of an act of vileness: the desecration of his late wife's "wonder-working" icon, an object embodying the loftiest spiritual beauty. Fyodor recalls that he had insulted his wife only once, and that was in the first year of their marriage:

She used to pray a great deal at that time, kept the feasts of Our Lady particularly and would turn me out of her room at those times. Well now, I thought, I'll up and knock all that mysticism out of her! "You see," I say, "you see, here is your icon, here it is, and here I take it down. Now just look, you regard it as a wonder-working icon, but here now, I'll spit on it in front of you and nothing will happen to me for it!"

As the narrator observes at this point, the old man "was slobbering all over."

The act of desecration and insult that Fyodor recalls took place in the past. But on the dramatic and ideological plane of his drunken

discourse, this recollection constitutes the high point of a sweeping assault on fundamental national, social, and spiritual values: on Russia, the Russian peasant, Russian women, women in general, the mother of Alyosha and Ivan, and finally, the image of the Madonna, the incarnation of the highest spiritual beauty. The fatal hubris of Fyodor is embodied in his astounding, audacious, and cruel words, "Now just look, you regard it as a wonder-working image, but here now, I'll spit on it in front of you and nothing will happen to me for it!"

This is one of the most dramatic and psychologically profound moments in the novel. It is a moment when past and present merge to determine the future, a moment verifying the indissoluble fatal unity of a man's character and fate. Both Fyodor's vile act and the utterance that accompanies it, of course, attest to his deeply superstitious nature. Years later, rising again in his consciousness, the memory of this moment, guilt, secret dread, tracks him down. The shameless boast that he would not be punished for his act, now recalled in the presence of his sons, becomes the instrument of his future punishment. Fyodor is undone by his own hubris. In the words of Oedipus, the "blinding hand" is his own. This moment in "Over the Brandy" rivals in depth and depiction the art of Greek tragedy where, in the words of Kitto, "the Past is always a menace to the Present, 'the art of Calchas is unerring'; even the Future throws its shadow behind it."<sup>5</sup>

As Dostoevsky indicates in the novel, and as Fyodor's behavior suggests, the wonder-working icon of Alyosha's and Ivan's mother has a certain mystique attached to it. Dostoevsky's use of the icon at this point adds a touch of the mysterious or fantastic to the fate of Fyodor. Yet on the deepest level of Fyodor's characterization, Dostoevsky, like the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, affirms that "a man's character is his fate." Dostoevsky is not attempting to introduce supernatural motivation into Fyodor's drama (in the last analysis, "God," the "Mother of God," or the "devil" are metaphorical embodiments of objective moral and psychological realities). Rather, he is concerned with the manner in which the arrogant act and boast of his hero is fatefully woven into his drama. This boast is uttered in the presence of Ivan, the ideological murderer in the novel. It is Ivan, or his alter ego, the devil, who more than anyone, perhaps, is Fyodor's nemesis.

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<sup>5</sup> Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*, 76.

It is man's worship of esthetic and spiritual beauty (revealed negatively in the peculiar character of Fyodor's free act), not God, that plays the decisive role here, though an element of mystery undoubtedly inheres in this scene. Fyodor's assault on everything sacred in Russian life, passing all limits in his spitting on the image of spiritual beauty itself, the Madonna, enters into Ivan's pro and contra and gives a fatal turn to his moral-philosophical drama. His profane and drunken blabberings not only raise but also provide a tragic answer to the fundamental questions tormenting Ivan, and indeed, Dostoevsky as well: Is man any good? Is there a moral pivot in him?

In the microcosmic universe inhabited by Fyodor in "Over the Brandy," evil is rampant, evil is unpunished, evil prevails. There wells up in Ivan a nihilism of outrage, a subconscious readiness to stand aside in the conflict between Dmitry and his father. "One reptile will devour another reptile," Ivan will remark in the next scene, "The Sensualists," "to hell with both of them!"

Alyosha collapses in hysterics as he listens to Fyodor's story about the icon and his mother. "Ivan, Ivan! Give him some water, quickly!" Fyodor exclaims. "It's like her, exactly like her, the way his mother was at that time! . . . He's upset about his mother, his mother," exclaims Fyodor. "But she was also my mother, too, I think, his mother, isn't that so?" Ivan observes acidly. Fyodor's profoundly offensive and degrading attitude toward women now takes the form of a mortal personal insult: He is seemingly oblivious not only of Ivan's existence as a son, but of his very presence at the moment (one recalls his first ambiguous words in the novel about Dmitry, "Yes, Dmitry is nonexistent as yet"). His forgetfulness could even be taken as a hint of Ivan's illegitimacy:

"What do you mean, your mother," he muttered, not understanding. "What's this all about? Just what mother are you talking about? . . . Now can it be that she . . . Oh, the devil! Why, of course, she was yours, too! Oh, the devil! Well, now, my mind has never been so darkened before, excuse me, and I thought, Ivan . . . He, he, he!" He stopped. A broad, drunken, half-senseless grin spread out across his face.

Fyodor's words about a darkening of his mind, more exactly translated, "an unprecedented eclipse" (*zatmenie kak nikogda*), do more than characterize the drunken muddle of his mind; they portend the disaster that will befall him and the Karamazov family as a whole. In three words, he pronounces his own death sentence, and he does so in



the presence of his ideological executioner, Ivan. Not without reason does the word "devil" twice come to his lips as he stumbles over his shameless thoughts and tries to come to his senses.

At the beginning of his drunken ramblings, Fyodor remarks to Alyosha, "I'd put an end to your monastery. I'd like to take all that mysticism and suppress it once and for all, all over the Russian land, so as finally to bring all those fools to reason. And what a lot of gold and silver would flow into the mint!" "But why suppress it?" Ivan goads him on. "So that the truth would shine forth as soon as possible, that's why," he answers, to which Ivan replies, "But you know, if this truth were to shine forth you would be the first to be robbed and then . . . suppressed." In the context of Ivan's profound skepticism (to say nothing of the worldview of Smerdyakov, the man who will physically rob and "suppress" Fyodor), the truth that will shine forth is the truth of *eclipse*, the truth of a world without the sun, without the shining image of Jesus, and therefore, without morality. In "Over the Brandy," the drunken Fyodor momentarily emerges as the very incarnation of man without God or morality. It is in this scene and the one that directly follows that Dostoevsky advances Ivan as one of those people who might be capable in a darkened world of suppressing Fyodor.

"Now if there's a God, if He exists, then, of course, I'm to blame and I shall have to answer for it," Fyodor allows. His subsequent punishment, his murder, hardly resolves in the novel the question of the existence of God, however. Dostoevsky's own vision of God was not the punitive God of retribution of the Old Testament. Nonetheless, these words of Fyodor's are noteworthy. Fyodor's murder follows from his violation of fundamental moral and spiritual norms. He perishes in part because he represents to Ivan, the ideological murderer, a negation of all that he, Ivan, holds, or at least would like to hold, sacred. On the plane of the novel's moral action, Ivan and his brother Dmitry are bearers of a tragic pre-Christian truth of which Fyodor is quite aware, though he remembers it in a Christian reformulation: "And with what measure you mete, it shall be measured—or however it goes . . .," Fyodor remarks in "Over the Brandy."

Certainly, Dostoevsky did not interpret Jesus's words in the spirit of the Old Testament. Indeed, in the Sermon on the Mount from which these lines come, Jesus specifically says, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil" (Mt. 5:38–39). The words that Fyodor recalls are prefaced by the important lines "Judge not, that ye be not

judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged" (Mt. 7:1). Dostoevsky, like Tolstoy in *Anna Karenina*, essentially affirms that it is for God and not man to judge. He in no way condones the punishment of Fyodor. Like Aeschylus in *The Oresteia*, he rejects the notion of crime as a solution to crime. Yet as novelist-tragedian, he acknowledges in the murder of Fyodor a tragic reenactment of the primitive law of retribution. All is not permissible in the affairs of men. In the words of *The Oresteia*, the "gods do not fail to punish those who trample upon holy things." The meaning of these words is not that good inevitably triumphs over evil but that evil gives birth to evil, and great evil often leads to catastrophe, or in the words of Fyodor, to an unprecedented eclipse. Fyodor *forgets* that Alyosha's mother is also Ivan's mother, and then, half coming to his senses, speaks of a darkening of his mind. At this very moment, the narrator observes:

A fearful thunderous clamor echoed from the hall, frenzied shouts could be heard; the door burst open and Dmitry tore into the room. The old man rushed to Ivan in terror: "He'll kill me, he'll kill me! Don't let him get at me, don't let him!" he screamed, clinging to the skirt of Ivan's coat.

These concluding lines of "Over the Brandy" dramatize the dangerous situation Fyodor finds himself in. He is threatened by Dmitry, and he seeks protection from Ivan, whom he has outraged by his behavior: "Don't let him get at me!" Will Ivan let Fyodor be killed? In the immediate moment, he will protect his father. But in the subsequent action, the internal pro and contra of Ivan will turn on this question. Fyodor's words, then, point to the main area of Ivan's evil: his inaction, his unwillingness to mediate the struggle between Dmitry and Fyodor, his insistence on playing the observer.

In the early scenes of the novel, Ivan is characterized almost exclusively through inaction and silence, and silence for Dostoevsky epitomizes the moral atrophy of the spirit. Ivan, almost unnoticed by the reader, silently watches the buffoonery of his father in the early monastery scenes but does nothing to stop him. His angry blow directed at Maksimov at the moment he departs from the monastery reflects his suppressed hostility toward his father. The scene "Over the Brandy" brings to the surface the hidden tensions between Ivan and Fyodor. Fyodor rightly suspects that Ivan out of spite will not stop him from telling lies: "You have contempt for me." Ivan deliberately

leads him on, baits him. Fyodor, intoxicated, is carried away by his internal devil and seems to embody in this scene the notion that "all is permissible."

In the following scene, "The Sensualists," Ivan emerges as the most dangerous threat to Fyodor. What takes place in this scene is in essence a rehearsal for the murder: Dmitry rushes in followed by Grigory and Smerdyakov; as in the real murder scene, he strikes Grigory; then he boots his father in the face, announcing that he deserves to be killed. But in this action, Ivan, along with Alyosha, defends his father, whereas in the murder scene that occurs a short while later, after reaching a devious understanding with Smerdyakov, he lets his father be killed. Even while he defends his father in "The Sensualists," however, the idea of not defending him enters his mind and becomes part of his internal moral and psychological drama. Ivan remarks to Alyosha:

"The devil take it, if I hadn't pulled Dmitry away, I dare say he would have gone ahead and killed him. It wouldn't take much to do in Aesop, would it?" Ivan whispered to Alyosha. "God forbid!" cried Alyosha. "And why forbid?" Ivan continued in the same whisper malignantly contorting his face. "One reptile will devour another reptile; to hell with both of them!" Alyosha shuddered. "Of course, I won't let him be murdered as I did not let him now. Stay here, Alyosha, I'll go for a walk in the yard, my head has begun to ache."

Noteworthy in this exchange is the way the psychological and mythopoetic planes of action come together. God and the devil emerge in the subtext as central antagonists. Ivan's remark, "and why forbid?" (*a zachem sokhranit'*, or literally, "why preserve or take care of") echoes Dmitry's question earlier in the novel: "Why is such a man alive! . . . No, tell me, can one go on permitting him to dishonor the earth?" The body of Dmitry hunches up into a deformed shape when he utters these words. Similarly, Ivan's face is contorted by a grimace when he echoes Dmitry's words. He assures Alyosha that he will not let his father be murdered. But the degree to which the idea of *letting* his father be murdered has taken hold in his subconscious, and at the same time, the degree to which this subconscious temptation disturbs him is suggested by his complaint about a headache. His headache is the first physical symptom of imminent psychological disorder, a disorder that will involve a deep inner split, and an encounter with his alter ego,

the devil. Ivan's conscious assurances that he will defend his father, then, contradict his deep subconscious disposition to let his father perish.

In the conversation between Alyosha and Fyodor that follows Alyosha's exchange with Ivan, Dostoevsky accents the emergence of Ivan as the main threat to his father. Fyodor's first question on recovering consciousness relates not to the beating he received from Dmitry, as might be expected, but to the conversation with Ivan just before Dmitry burst into the room. "Alyosha, where's Ivan?" Fyodor whispers fearfully. "Outside, he has a headache. He will protect us," Alyosha replies. "What does Ivan say? Alyosha, my dear and only son, I am afraid of Ivan; I am afraid of Ivan more than the other. You're the only one I do not fear . . ." Fyodor's terrible fear of Ivan, especially at this moment, is an expression in part of his inner awareness of the full implications of his behavior in the scene preceding the brawl and of the implications of Ivan's dangerous moral-philosophical dialectic. Yet ominously and naïvely, even after his "eclipse," he continues to disown Ivan and refers to Alyosha as "my dear and only son"; he speaks of his first son, Dmitry, not by his name, but simply as "the other." Alyosha assures his father that Ivan will protect them, but the reference to a headache suggests another course of action or inaction on Ivan's part.

Ivan in "The Sensualists" is moving toward moral conflict and mental confusion, whereas Fyodor is slowly recovering his senses. As though stepping back from a terrible abyss, Fyodor now adopts a wholly different attitude toward the icon he had abused and the monastery he had reviled: "That little icon of the Mother of God, the one I was talking about a moment ago—you take it with you and keep it for yourself. And I give you permission to go back to the monastery. . . . I was joking a moment ago, don't be angry. My head aches, Alyosha." Fyodor's head aches from the beating it has received; but psychologically his headache, like Ivan's, reflects inner conflict and guilt over his words and behavior in "Over the Brandy."

Ivan, as we have noted earlier, insists that he had been "deliberately teasing" in the episode with his father. Fyodor likewise asserts that he was only "joking." Yet the tragedy of words to which "Over the Brandy" bears witness is that the words have a power and dynamic of their own. The "teasing" and "joking" of both Ivan and Fyodor mask a deep and corrosive skepticism. In both father and son, this behavior constitutes a cover for their real feelings and for their evasion of responsibility.

Both Ivan and his father are constantly playing with ideas. Ivan's play with ideas—he first expounds them before a group of provincial ladies, then allows Miusov to develop them in his own presence, and finally sits by almost silently as his disciple Smerdyakov (in "The Controversy") parodies his thought—is the corollary of his self-deception. In the cases of both Ivan and his father, seemingly innocent or uncontrolled play ends in tragedy. Fyodor's effort to step back from the abyss comes too late, while Ivan lacks the inner moral strength and candor to confront himself directly.

The final episode in "The Sensualists" brings to the foreground the complex moral-psychological game that Ivan is playing with himself and others. When Alyosha returns to Ivan in the courtyard, he finds Ivan "writing something with a pencil in his notebook." His mood is disturbingly lighthearted in contrast to his ugly state of mind of a few moments before. Alyosha, upset over the "horror" of relations between Dmitry and his father, puts a crucial question to Ivan:

"Brother, let me ask one thing more: has any man really the right to look at other people and decide which of them is worthy of living and which of them is less worthy?" "Why introduce here a decision about worth? This question most often is decided in the hearts of people not at all on the grounds of worth, but for other reasons much more natural. And as for right, who does not have the right to wish?" "Not for the death of another?" "What even if for another person's death? Why lie to oneself, since all people live so and probably cannot live otherwise? Are you referring to what I said just now—that the two reptiles will devour each other? In that case, let me ask you, do you think me like Dmitry capable of shedding Aesop's blood, say, of murdering him, eh?" "What are you saying, Ivan? Such an idea never entered my head! And I don't believe that Dmitry. . . ." "Thanks if only for that," laughed Ivan. "Be sure I shall always defend him. But in my wishes I reserve full latitude for myself in this case. Goodbye, till tomorrow. Don't condemn me, and don't look upon me as a villain," he added with a smile.

This Russian Hamlet's last words, "don't condemn me," point to his inner resolution of the question Alyosha poses, a question that he himself puts more bluntly when he asks Alyosha: "Do you think me like Dmitry capable of shedding Aesop's blood?" What is symptomatic of Ivan's evasiveness here is not only his unwillingness to name his father, but his initial willingness to let somebody else resolve a question that ought to evoke an immediate and decisive answer from him.

Alyosha poses the problem of the brothers' relation to their father in an ethical context: does a person have the right to decide whether another person is worthy or unworthy of living? (Quite clearly, the idea of murder crossed Alyosha's mind as well.) He places the question squarely in the realm of conscious decision. Ivan, significantly, removes the question from the realm of ethical judgment and responsibility and relegates it to the "natural" realm of feeling and instinct. Man's natural feelings, in Ivan's view, do not bind him to love his neighbor or to do good. "There is absolutely nothing on earth that could compel people to love each other," Miusov reports Ivan as believing. "A law of nature saying that man must love mankind simply does not exist." Man's wishes, then, come from the amoral, instinctual, natural side of his being. And "who does not have the right to wish?" Ivan will defend his father; such is his rational decision. But as for his wishes, he reserves for himself full latitude.

Though he has excluded wishes from the realm of ethical judgment, Ivan involuntarily condemns himself ("don't look upon me as a villain"). He believes nonetheless that he can keep his wishes separate from his actions. The denouement of the Karamazov drama demonstrates the naïveté of this belief and the tragedy of his unconscious duplicity. Just as his wishes involuntarily signal to him his guilt, so those same wishes involuntarily will later signal to Smerdyakov, the actual physical murderer, his desires. In the end, Ivan adopts his favorite stance of the "observer." This stance and its moral implications are well illustrated in the last chapter of the section of the novel entitled "Pro and Contra." After his fatal encounter with Smerdyakov at the garden gate, Ivan goes upstairs and sits up late:

Remembering that night long afterwards Ivan recalled with especial revulsion how at one point he suddenly got up from the sofa and very quietly, as though he were terribly afraid that he might be watched, opened the door, went out onto the staircase and listened to Fyodor moving and walking about below; he listened, holding his breath and with beating heart; for a long time, for perhaps five minutes, with a sort of strange curiosity; but just why he did all this, or what was the purpose of listening he of course did not know. This "action" all his life afterwards he called "abominable"; for his whole life long, deeply within himself and in the recesses of his soul, he considered it the most vile act of his life.

THE DEFILED AND DEFILING “PHYSIOGNOMY”  
OF FYODOR PAVLOVICH KARAMAZOV<sup>1</sup>

In a discussion some years ago entitled “The Sentencing of Fyodor Karamazov,” I focused on the way in which the theme of *defilement* reached its culmination in “Over the Brandy” (*Za kon’iachkom*). Fyodor Pavlovich, in the presence of Alyosha and Ivan, recalls spitting on Sofia Ivanovna’s icon of the Mother of God and saying to her, “Just take a look, you think this is [a miracle-making] icon, well right now before you I’m spitting on it, and nothing will happen to me!” In “Over the Brandy,” as early in the novel, the theme of esthetic-religious defilement is linked with the theme of sexual defilement, but now with catastrophic consequences for Fyodor Pavlovich.<sup>2</sup>

Defilement, or crime, inexorably calls forth *vengeance*, or punishment. In “The Sensualists” (*Sladostrastniki*), the chapter immediately following “Over the Brandy,” we have a dress rehearsal for the crime. The roles of the various characters, to be sure, will be shuffled in the final crime scene. Accident, chance, choice—conscious and unconscious—enter into the denouement; nothing is fated, nothing preordained; but the sentence is carried out. The murder did not have

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<sup>1</sup> From *Word, Music, History: A Festschrift for Caryl Emerson*, eds. Lazar Fleishman, Gabriella Safran, and Michael Wachtel, *Stanford Slavic Studies* 29, 30 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005): 450-463.

<sup>2</sup> “To defile”: to “trample,” “make impure,” “befoul,” “soil,” “contaminate,” “debase,” “dishonor,” “sully” and, in the sexual realm, “to deflower,” “ravish,” “deprive of virginity.” The notion of defilement is conveyed in Russian by “zagriaznit’,” “oskvernit’,” in French by “souiller,” and in German by “besudeln” —among other words.



to happen, but it happened, and the happening carries with it a sense of tragic inevitability. As we are told in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, the "gods do not fail to punish those who trample upon holy things." In the words of the prosecutor who responds to a primordial, pre-Christian, ordering of things, "[Fyodor Pavlovich] received his due" (*on poluchil svoiu mzdu*).

Tragedy in the Christian universe of the *The Brothers Karamazov*, however, opens up a very different kind of knowledge and perspective than that suggested by the prosecutor's remark. Yet in spite of Fyodor Pavlovich's basic inner humanity, his personal drama is caught up in the evil of defilement and the ineluctable vengeance it provokes. Dmitry, Ivan, and Alyosha, and probably Smerdyakov, on the other hand, whatever the nature and degree of their complicity in the death of their father, in one measure or another, recoil from defilement.

The theme of sexual defilement emerges in the very first pages of the novel, particularly in the two chapters dedicated respectively to Fyodor Pavlovich's second marriage and to his third son, Alyosha. This theme marks Fyodor Pavlovich's relationship with Sofia Ivanovna, the mother of Ivan and Alyosha; it hovers on the margins of the monastery scenes and bursts forth in the encounter between Fyodor Pavlovich and Dmitry in "Why Is Such a Man Alive" (*Zachem zhivet takoi chelovek*). The theme of defilement culminates, literally, in Fyodor Pavlovich's rape of Lizaveta Smerdyashchaia, and figuratively, in his profanation of women and the icon of Mother of God in "Over the Brandy."

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur writes of the age-old "indissoluble complicity between defilement and sexuality."<sup>3</sup> What is striking is the way Fyodor Pavlovich's consciousness of defilement gives evidence of what Ricoeur calls "primitive dread" or "ethical terror." Characterizing defilement (*la souillure*) in its archaic system of beliefs as "an act that involves an evil, an impurity, a fluid . . . a quasi-material something that infects as a sort of filth, that harms by invisible properties, and that nevertheless works in the manner of a force, in the field of our undividedly psychic and corporeal existence,"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*. Translated from the French by Emerson Buchanan (New York: Beacon Press, 1967), 28. This work was originally published as part of the larger work: *Philosophie de la volonté. Finitude et culpabilité*. 2. *La Symbolique du mal* (Paris: Aubier, 1960).

<sup>4</sup> Ricoeur, *op. cit.* 25–26.

Objectively, Ricoeur notes, it “infects by contact. But this infectious contact is experienced subjectively in a specific feeling which is of the order of Dread.”<sup>5</sup> “The origin of that dread is the primordial connection of vengeance with defilement.”<sup>6</sup>

Dostoevsky discloses precisely this “dread” in Fyodor Pavlovich. We recall that in areas of “certain things of life” pertaining to his weak character, “he knew and feared much.” Indeed, at times, and in the depths of depravity, the narrator writes, he “sometimes suddenly felt in himself a spiritual fear and moral shock (*dukhovnyi strakh i nraovstvennoe sotriasenie*) that almost, so to speak, resounded physically in his soul. ‘My soul just trembles in my throat at those times,’ he would sometimes say.” He needed somebody who “did not reproach him or threaten him with anything,” and who in case of need “would defend him if need be—from whom? From someone unknown, but terrible and dangerous.” In Dostoevsky’s perception, Fyodor Pavlovich’s “dangerous” enemies arise out of the very depths of his sexual depravity; they are there *before* the arrival of his sons and find objective embodiment in the later threat of Ivan, Dmitry, and Smerdyakov.

“Dread,” writes Ricoeur in lines relevant to our discussion of Fyodor Pavlovich, is “already ethical dread, and not merely physical fear, dread of a danger which is itself ethical and which, at a higher level of the consciousness of evil, will be the danger of not being able to love any more, the danger of being a dead man in the realm of ends.”<sup>7</sup> It is this danger that is addressed in Fyodor Pavlovich’s unexpectedly congenial relationship with Alyosha.

The early appearance of the “chaste and pure” Alyosha in Fyodor Pavlovich’s “den of filthy debauchery” might have been expected to further intensify the tension between purity and defilement, form and disfiguration, “obraz” and “bezobrazie” in the opening pages of the novel, and completely undermine the relationship between Alyosha and his father. The reverse is the case: any potential for tension quickly dissolves into a friendly relationship: one that foregrounds both the purity of Alyosha’s ethical character and unexpected sensitivities in what at first glance seems to be Fyodor Pavlovich’s hopelessly corrupt nature.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 29–30.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Dostoevsky, however, brings this new view of Fyodor Pavlovich into focus only moments after his narrator has presented us with a portrait that would appear to utterly demolish the most charitable view of Fyodor Pavlovich, let alone any hope that he might be redeemed. In "The Third Son Alyosha," the narrator provides a verbal sketch of the so-called physiognomy (*fizionomiia*) of Fyodor Pavlovich:

I have already said that he was very bloated. His physiognomy by that time offered something that sharply testified to the character and essence of the whole life he had been living. Besides the long and fleshy bags under his small eyes; besides the multitude of deep wrinkles on his small, but fattish little face, there hung, in addition, beneath his pointed chin, a large Adam's apple, fleshy and oblong like a purse, which gave him a kind of repulsively sensual look. Add to this a long, lewd mouth, with puffed-up lips, under which could be seen small stumps of black, nearly rotten teeth. He sprayed saliva whenever he spoke.

[Ia uzhe govoril, chto on ochen' obriuzg. Fizionomiia ego predstavliala k tomu vremeni chto-to rezko svidetel'stvovavshee o kharakteristike i sushchnosti vsei prozhitoi im zhizni. Krome dlinnykh i miasistykh meshochkov pod malen'kimi ego glazami, vечно naglymi, podozritel'nymi i nasmeshlivymi, krome mnozhestva glubokikh morshchinok na ego malen'kom, no zhirnen'kom lichike, k ostromu podborodku ego podveshivalsia eshche bol'shoi kadyk, miasisty i prodolgovaty, kak koshelek, chto pridavalo emu kakoi-to otvratitel'no sladostrastnyi vid. Pribav'te k tomu plotoiadnyi, dlinnyi rot, s pukhlymi gubami, iz-pod kotorykh vidnelis' malen'kie oblomki chernykh, pochti istlevshikh zubov. On bryzgalsia sliunoi kazhdyi raz, kogda nachinal govorit'.]

What Paul Ricoeur refers to as the age-old "complicity of defilement and sexuality" is plainly visible in Fyodor Pavlovich's "physiognomy" as it is in his life at large. The narrator speaks of Fyodor Pavlovich's "repulsively sensual appearance." Indeed, there is no mistaking in the narrator's verbal sketch the sexualized character of Fyodor Pavlovich's defilement. His features seem like sexual organs metamorphosed into facial forms. His face insolently and shamelessly leers and sneers at the reader. His lewd mouth, black and rotten with decay, spits out at his interlocutors. "He sprayed saliva whenever he spoke." It is as if the very seed of man had become corrupt.

Like the famous painting of the pawnbroker in Gogol's "The Portrait" (1835), Fyodor Pavlovich's face enters, as it were, the world of the Karamazovs as a force for evil.<sup>8</sup> Appearing at the very beginning of the novel, the narrator's sketch in itself sharply poses for the reader central moral-esthetic questions of the novel, most specifically the ethical and philosophical questions that Ivan will formulate in "Rebellion" (Bunt): is it possible to love one's neighbor, particularly if he is close-by? And most important, is the impossibility of loving one's neighbor (that is Ivan's view of the matter) due to "people's bad qualities" or is it due to their "nature" (*Vopros ved' v tom, ot durnykh li kachestv liudei eto proiskhodit, ili uzh ottogo, chto takova ikh natura*). Ivan, as we know, inclines toward the view that the *nature* of man stands in the way of love.

Among the brothers, it is Dmitry who responds most directly and vociferously to the uncleanness, the impurity, the filth of Fyodor Pavlovich's *physiognomy*. We may leave aside any unconscious responses of Smerdyakov to his father. His fastidious, obsessive cleanliness might be interpreted as an involuntary reaction to the filthy presence of Fyodor Pavlovich. Such a response, accompanied by an unconscious self-loathing, would not be surprising. Smerdyakov, after all, is the product of what would appear to be Fyodor Pavlovich's most vile act of sexual defilement—his rape of Lizaveta Smerdyashchaia.

It is Dmitry, however, who openly rebels at the face of his father: "I hate his Adam's apple, his nose, his eyes, his shameless snigger. I feel a personal sense of loathing! It's just this that I fear, I just won't be able to restrain myself" ("In the Darkness"). Or again, "I did not like his outward appearance," he says at the first preliminary hearing, "there was something dishonorable, boastful, a trampling on everything

<sup>8</sup> In Gogol's story, a religious painter, desiring to introduce the "Prince of Darkness" into one of his religious epics, strives to paint the portrait of a moneylender with "scrupulous exactitude." He succeeds, but in a terrible way: "The dark eyes of the old man looked out in an extraordinarily lifelike, and yet dead way." The demonic power of the moneylender, that is, the Antichrist, continues to live in the portrait and to bring misfortune to all those who come into contact with it. The attempt to reproduce reality with "scrupulous" fidelity, in Gogol's outlook, has resulted in a morally and spiritually destructive "super" natural realism, one that has a disturbing and corrupting impact on the viewer in both moral and social aspects.

sacred, mockery, unbelief—vile, vile!" (*Mne ne nraivilas' ego naruzhnost', chto-to beschestnoe, pokhval'ba i popiranie vsiakoi soiatyni, nasmeshka i bezverie, gadko, gadko!*)

Dmitry fully grasps the sexual foundation of his father's defilement. "Don't dare defile a most noble girl," he shouts to his father in the chapter "Why Is Such a Man Alive." "No, tell me, can one go on allowing him to dishonor the earth with himself?" Dmitry seconds Miusov, who earlier ("The Old Buffoon") remarks to Fyodor Pavlovich, "You literally defile everything you touch." Trample, defile, dishonor (*popiranie, marat', beschestit'*). The notion of Fyodor Pavlovich dishonoring the earth gives mythic dimensions to the archaic theme of sexual defilement, while at the same time it offers a corollary to the novel's epigraph: the corn of wheat dying in the ground yet bringing forth new life.

Ivan's response to Fyodor Pavlovich's, like everything else that pertains to his relations with his father, is marked by indirection and evasion. He does not respond directly to element of ugliness and disfiguration (*bezobrazie*). Yet his graphic picture in the chapter "Rebellion" of John the Merciful embracing and breathing into the foul and festering mouth of a person suffering from some terrible disease—a tableau that is the centerpiece to his moral-philosophical discourse on love of one's neighbor—constitutes an analogue to his father's physiogomy and the moral-esthetic issues it raises. The putrid and diseased mouth of Ivan's passerby and the vile and repellent mouth of Fyodor Pavlovich belong to the same order of images. The reader has already encountered the face of Fyodor Pavlovich and has looked at it with revulsion. The mouth is central to Ivan's thought: it is the locus of the kiss of love. Ivan, full of hatred, compels Alyosha (and the reader), as it were, to kiss the mouth of Fyodor Pavlovich and reflect upon the theme of love of one's neighbor!

"In order to love a person," Ivan famously declares in "Rebellion," "it is necessary that he be hidden, because the moment he shows his face—love is gone." The focus here on "litso," or face, or countenance, is central. Zosima and Alyosha, as we know, are fully conscious of how often the esthetic element constitutes an obstacle to higher love. "Active love . . . is a cruel and terrifying business" ("A Lady of Little Faith"), Zosima declares not many pages after the introduction of Fyodor Pavlovich's infamous physiognomy. "The face of man often prevents many people inexperienced in love from loving others," Alyosha replies to Ivan, citing Zosima ("Rebellion"). Though the face of

a person, of man, made in the image of God, may be repellent; though it may give evidence of a corrupted life, Zosima and Alyosha insist, it is never representative of the whole person.

Dostoevsky makes this very point at the beginning of the novel when his narrator refers to Fyodor Pavlovich's "physiognomy": "Physiognomy" is precisely "litso," "face." Dostoevsky's choice of the word "physiognomy" (*fizionomiia*) is significant. The Greek root of the word *fizionomiia* or physiognomy is "physiognomon"—"to judge a character by the features." The word derives from "physis"—"nature," "physique," "appearance" + "gnomon"—"interpreter." The art of physiognomy, then, is typically the art of knowing, discovering, judging temperament and character on the basis of a person's outward appearance, face, or features.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The art or so-called science of physiognomic interpretation, as developed and popularized in the studies the Swiss writer and Protestant pastor, Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801), consisted in judging or interpreting character on the basis of a person's face or outward appearance (bodily movements, gestures, speech, etc.). The relationship between man's inner character and his features and movements is more or less fixed, according to Lavater. The beauty or hatefulness of a face stands in direct relation to the beauty and moral state of a human being: the better morally, the more beautiful, while the more morally bad—the more hateful. Man cannot escape his basic character, Lavater believed. He is as "free as a bird in a cage" (*frei wie der Vogel im Käfig*). For a recent discussion of physiognomy and character in nineteenth and early twentieth century literature, see Kirstin Breitenfellner, *Lavaters Schatten. Physiognomie und Charakter bei Ganghofer, Fontane und Döblin* (Dresden and Munich: Dresden University Press, 1999). Some of Breitenfellner's discussions on physiognomy bear on Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, in particular 158–162; 187–189, and 195–198. These discussions draw upon Horst-Jürgen-Gerigk's critical writings, in particular, "Der Mörder Smerdjakow. Bemerkungen zu Dostojewskijs Typologie der kriminellen Persönlichkeit," in *Dostoevsky Studies* (1986) 7:107–122, and "Dostojewskij: Der Kriminologe als Dichter," in Willi Hirdt, Ed. *Europas Weg in die Moderne* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1991), 19–39. There is no hard evidence that Dostoevsky read any of Lavater's work, but his complete familiarity with, and critical stance on, many of the Swiss writer's ideas on physiognomic interpretation cannot be doubted. Thus, in his remarks on academic genre painting in "Apropos of the Exhibition" (Po povodu vystavki) in his *Diary of a Writer* in 1873, Dostoevsky writes: "One must portray reality as it is," they say, whereas reality such as this does not exist and never has on earth because the essence of things is inaccessible to man; he perceives nature as it is reflected in his ideas, after it has passed

We cannot, however, fully know, interpret, or judge a human being, Dostoevsky insists, through a superficial glance at, or a surface, naturalistic depiction of, a person's face or features. To know esthetically is to know spiritually; to know spiritually is to see into a character. The narrator's physiognomic characterization of Fyodor Pavlovich, from the standpoint of Dostoevsky's poetics, is limited and lacking in insight—if taken out of the broader context in which it appears. While this "physiognomic" reading of Fyodor Pavlovich countenance contains much truth, it fails to encompass the whole truth of Fyodor Pavlovich's character. It does represent the physiogomy of Fyodor Pavlovich, however, as Ivan and Dmitry, and others, see it and respond to it.

The narrator's later "physiognomic" interpretation of Smerdyakov, in the chapter "Smerdyakov," however, suggests that he *can* successfully read a person's face or physical being. Remarking on Smerdyakov's habit sometimes of coming to a halt in the house, or in the yard, or on the street, and then lapsing into thought for as long as even ten minutes, the narrator observes: "A physiognomist, looking deeply into him (*vgliadevshis' v nego*) would have said that here there was neither thought nor reflection, but only some kind of contemplation. The key word and verb here is "vgliadet'sia" — to look intently, deeply, into something. In his *Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language* (*Tolkovyi slovar' riusskogo iazyka*, 1935), D. N. Ushakov provided an instructive example of the use of this verb: "My vgliadelis' v ego litso i uzhe ne zamechali ego bezobraziia" (We looked into his face and did not notice its disfigured character).

In the case of Smerdyakov, the narrator's physiognomic reading is, without doubt, on firm ground. His wisdom at this point, however, is borrowed: he does not provide us with his own analysis

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through his senses. Accordingly, more scope must be given to the idea, and the ideal should not be feared. A portraitist, for example seats his subject to paint his portrait; he prepares, he studies the subject carefully. Why does he do that? Because he knows from experience that a person does not always look like himself and therefore he seeks out 'the principal idea of his physiognomy,' that moment when the subject most resembles his self. The portraitist's gift consists in the ability to seek out and capture that moment. And so what is the artist doing here if not trusting first his own idea (the ideal) more than the reality before him? The ideal is also reality, after all, and just as legitimate as immediate reality. (Dostoevskii, PSS, 21:75)



of Smerdyakov’s peculiar habit of contemplation, but presents it to the reader by analogy with the “contemplator” in Ivan N. Kramskoy’s well-known painting, “The Contemplator” (*Sozertsatel’*, 1878).<sup>10</sup> The physiognomist (“A physiognomist . . . would have said”) in essence turns out to be a well-known Russian painter. The narrator conveys to the reader thoughts evoked by Kramskoi’s portrayal of a contemplative type.<sup>11</sup> At the conclusion of his discussion he states that Smerdyakov “probably was just one of those contemplators” depicted by Kramskoy. It is the artist, painter, or writer, finally, who looks into the character of such contemplative types as Smerdyakov and finds them complex and multidimensional.<sup>12</sup>

The narrator’s verbal portrait of Fyodor Pavlovich at the opening of *The Brothers Karamazov* might be called the mask of evil. It does not, however, turn out to be the true portrait of old Karamazov, that is, the in-depth verbal portrait that the novel will provide. Dostoevsky, it might be said, has heeded a prescription for the painter and poet provided by the literary icon of his youth, Friedrich Schiller. In his *Reflections on the Use of the Vulgar and Low Elements in Works of Art* (*Gedanken über den Gebrauch des Gemeinen und Niedrigen in der Kunst*, 1802), the German poet, dramatist, and philosopher argued that artists need not fear to

<sup>10</sup> By having his narrator essentially borrow his physiognomic interpretation from Kramskoy, Dostoevsky guards his narrator from the charge of being inconsistent in these two physiognomic readings.

<sup>11</sup> Dostoevsky himself, as James L. Rice points out, may have heard and incorporated in his text analyses of Kramskoy’s painting. For a discussion of Dostoevsky’s relation to Kramskoy’s painting, “Sozertsatel’,” and to interpretations of it that relate to the passages we have discussed, see Rice, *Dostoevsky and the Healing Art: An Essay in Literary and Medical History* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis Publishers, 1985), 252–259.

<sup>12</sup> For views that challenges the generally negative perception of Smerdyakov, see Lee D. Johnson’s “Struggle for Theosis: Smerdyakov as Would-Be Saint” and Vladimir Golstein’s “Accidental Families and Surrogate Fathers: Richard, Grigory, and Smerdyakov” in *A New Word on The Brothers Karamazov*, ed. Robert Louis Jackson, with an introductory essay by Robin Feuer Miller and a concluding essay by William Mills Todd III (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 74-89 and 99-106. For other views on Smerdyakov, see also Horst-Jürgen Gerigk’s essay on Smerdyakov (noted in footnote 8 of this chapter), as well as Gary Saul Morson’s “Verbal Pollution in *The Brothers Karamazov*” (1978) reprinted in *Critical Essays on The Brothers Karamazov*, ed. Robin Feuer Miller (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986), 234-242.

show us their heroes under a contemptible exterior, provided that they have already given expression to their inner world:

But what is allowed the poet is not always permitted to the painter. The former merely brings objects before the imagination; the latter, on the contrary, brings objects before the senses. So it is not only that the impression of the painting is more alive than that of the poem, but also that the painters with their natural symbols cannot make the interior spirit [das Innere] so visible as the poets do with their arbitrary ones, and yet—only the interior spirit can reconcile us with the exterior.<sup>13</sup>

Dostoevsky illustrates Schiller's point when he allows his narrator to present the reader with what amounts to a naturalistic portrait of Fyodor Pavlovich. Dostoevsky does not fear, as it were, to show us his hero under a "contemptible exterior" because he is fully capable of showing the reader the full inner being of Fyodor Pavlovich. In the final analysis, we can say that it is only Dostoevsky's in-depth revelation of Fyodor Pavlovich's "interior spirit" that ultimately, and in the light of the novel's whole moral-spiritual direction and denouement, reconciles the reader with Fyodor Pavlovich's contemptible exterior, that is, with his mask.

Dostoevsky's poetics of insight rests comfortably, of course, in the matrix of his religious worldview. "Man is created in the image and likeness of God" (*I sotvoril Bog cheloveka, po obrazu Svoemu, po obrazu Bozhiiu sotvoril ego*) (Gen. 1:27), Zosima remarks. "Obraz" (image, form, but also icon) is the "axis of beauty in the Russian language."<sup>14</sup> Strictly speaking, a *bezobraznyi obraz* (ugly form, ugly icon) is a contradiction in terms both in the Russian language and in Dostoevsky's higher esthetic-religious outlook. Man's "obraz," man's image, his likeness to divinity may be marred, as with an old icon, but the sacred image retains its essential link with divinity. Alyosha echoes this view in plain language when he says to Fyodor Pavlovich in the chapter "At his

<sup>13</sup> See Friedrich Schiller, *Kleiner prosaische Schriften von Schiller. Aus mehreren Zeitschriften vom Verfasser selbst versammelt und verbessert.* v. 4 (Leipzig: Siegfried Lebrecht Crusius, 1802), 324-325.

<sup>14</sup> "L'image, dans la langue russe, est l'axe de la Beauté." See Lydie Krestovsky, *La laideur dans L'art a travers les ages* (Paris: Seuil, 1947), 36.

Father’s,” “You’re not a bad person, but distorted” (*Ne zloi vy chelovek, a iskovertkannyi*).

In Romans, St. Paul challenges the notion of absolute uncleanliness: “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself.” Paul goes on to acknowledge the relativity of human judgment, however, declaring that “to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean” (Rom. 14:14).

Ivan, Dmitry, and Alyosha, like most of the readers of *The Brothers Karamazov*, find themselves in the ranks of the majority for whom uncleanliness is unclean, impurity—impure, a bad smell—a bad smell. People can’t see other people’s suffering, Ivan argues in “Rebellion,” because the other person has “a bad smell” or “a foolish face.” Ivan inclines to the view, however, that man’s looks and smells may betray his nature. For a moment, as we know, even Alyosha’s faith is shaken by a bad smell.

Dmitry shares Ivan’s sensitivity to looks and faces. Yet for all of his violent reaction to his father’s face, there is nothing about his view of his father or of people in general to suggest that the superficial impression of a face gives evidence of a person’s whole nature. He fears the impact of Fyodor Pavlovich’s “exterior” or “outward appearance” (*naruzhnost’*). “I’m afraid that [Fyodor Pavlovich’s] face at that very moment will suddenly become hateful to me” (*Boius’, chto nenavisten on vdrug mne stanet svoim litsom v tu samuiu minutu*), he declares in the chapter “In the Darkness.” Dostoevsky italicizes the words “*svoim litsom v tu samuiu minutu*.” His emphasis on these words—Dmitry’s emphasis, let us remember—is crucial to an understanding of why he, Dmitry, might kill his father. Yet those same italicized words are equally crucial to an understanding of why he might *not* kill his father. As his stress on the word “litso” and “naruzhnost’” and the momentary effect of the appearance of his face suggests, Dmitry does not at root take mere surface features to be the whole person.

Dmitry’s situation at the window may be compared with Father Zosima’s after he had struck his servant. After his “crime”—that is Zosima’s word—he recalls thinking that his servant is “a man, just like I, made in the image and likeness of God”. Dmitry, to be sure, does not utter these words as he stands at the window and observes his father; nor is he remotely thinking about Genesis 1:27 or theology in general. He is a man, however, who in the days leading up to the murder of Fyodor Pavlovich obsessively preoccupies himself with moral and esthetic questions; he is a person who, one

might say, suffers them through; and these tormented questions, openly confronted and contemplated, lay the groundwork for the *answer* he will give as he stands by the window and observes his father.

Fyodor Pavlovich's outer appearance revolts Dmitry. That exterior, he says at the first preliminary hearing, "trampled on everything sacred," it embodied "mockery" and "unbelief." "But now that he's dead," he continues, "I think differently . . . I regret that I hated him . . . It's not so much repentance . . . [but] I myself am not good . . . I myself am not so very beautiful (*sam-to ia ne ochen' krasiv*), and therefore did not have the right to consider him repulsive, that's the thing!" (*vot chto!*) ("The Torments of a Soul")

At the highest level of ethico-religious perception, Zosima sees in his servant a person made in the image and likeness of God. Dmitry sees himself mirrored in Fyodor Pavlovich's moral turpitude and ugliness: a first step on the part of Dmitry in the direction of a deeper awareness of himself and the other. His use of the word "krasiv" (beautiful) is important: it marks, once again, his heightened awareness (in the spirit of the poet Schiller whose poetry he fondly recites) of moral and esthetic questions. This awareness enters into Dmitry's unconscious decision not to kill his father.

Dmitry's deep spiritual-religious consciousness surfaces in the third preliminary investigation: "In my opinion, gentlemen, in my opinion, this is how it was," he quietly said. "Whether it was someone's tears, whether my mother prayed to God, whether a bright spirit kissed me at that moment—I don't know, but the devil was conquered [The Third Torment]." Dmitry, then, views his action or inaction at the window as the culmination of what he earlier described as an inner struggle in himself between God and the devil.

"God . . . watched over [or "guarded"] me at the time (*Bog . . . storozhil menia togda* ["In the Darkness"]), Dmitry later says in explanation of why he did not kill his father. "Storozhit'" is to "guard, or watch over the safety of someone," but also to "be on the watch for somebody." Dmitry was on the watch for Grushenka, while God, as he sees it, was watching over his safety. In Dostoevsky's Christian universe, however, it is not God who watches over us and determines our actions, but God who gives us the freedom to watch over ourselves and to save ourselves. That is exactly what Dmitry is doing in the time-span of the novel. He had spent the two days before the murder of his father—so the narrator tells us—"literally casting himself in all

directions, ‘struggling with his fate and saving himself,’ as he put it later.” (*On zhe v eti dva dnia bukval’no metalsia vo vse storony, ‘borias’ so svoeiu sud’boi i spasaia sebia’, kak on sam potom vyrazilsia* [“Kuzma Samsonov”]). In his encounter with his father at the window, he saves himself. Not God, one might say, but a residual striving in Dmitry for a moral-spiritual ideal saves him.

Very much to the point here are the programmatic verses he utters (the first to be recited by Dmitry in the three “confessional” chapters, and ones that he himself has composed) in “Confession of a Passionate Heart,” in verse, and then again in the chapter “A Sudden Decision” that immediately follows his encounter with his father at the window, “Glory to the Highest in Heaven, Glory to the Highest *in me!*..” (*Slava Vysshemu na svete, Slava Vysshemu vo mne!*.. [my italics—RL]).<sup>15</sup> Dostoevsky’s trailing ellipses point to the special importance of the words “in me.” Dmitry, finally, is deeply conscious of the *whole picture*.<sup>16</sup> The Dmitry who declares that “God sees [the] whole picture in me” (“The Confession of a Passionate Heart. In Anecdote”)—that is, God sees the *whole* human being in him, is capable of intuiting the whole human being in others.

What happens to Dmitry at the window was, indeed, a *happening*, or to borrow a notion and phrase of the German writer Adelbert von Chamisso (1781–1838) in his novella, *The Strange Story of Peter Schlemihl* (*Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte*, [1814])—“an event in place of a deed” (*ein Ereignis an die Stelle einer Tat*).<sup>17</sup> Chamisso’s Peter Schlemihl differs from Dostoevsky’s Dmitry in almost every aspect. Yet a comparison of the way each man relates to his respective “event”

<sup>15</sup> Dmitry’s lines, as the editors of the thirty volume Russian edition of Dostoevsky’s work note, echo words from Luke 2:13–14: “I vnezapno iavilos’ s Angelom mnogochislennoe voinstvo nebesnoe, slaviashchee Boga i vzyvaiushchee: slava v vyshnikh Bogu, i na zemle mir v chelovekakh blagovolenie!” (And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: / “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men!”) See PSS, 15:541.

<sup>16</sup> See my discussion of the significance of the concept of “whole picture” in my essay, “Alyosha’s Speech at the Stone: ‘The Whole Picture’,” in *A New Word on The Brothers Karamazov*, op. cit., 234–253.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Adelbert von Chamisso, *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte*, Vorwort von Horst-Jürgen Gerigk (Heidelberg: 1998), 55.

serves to bring out the specific character of Dmitry's happening, what happened, and the way he related to it.

In Chamisso's story, Peter Schlemihl has given up his "shadow" to a "gray stranger," the devil in disguise, in exchange for an unlimited source of gold. The stranger nonetheless seeks the ultimate prize: the soul of Schlemihl. At a critical moment in Schlemihl's life, when he is about to lose his beloved to a scoundrel who would ruin her; when he himself is about to be exposed as an adventurer and imposter without a shadow—at this moment the "gray stranger" offers to get him out of all his difficulties in exchange for a *signature in blood*. Torn between his affection for, and moral commitment to, the girl, and his loathing for the demonic "gray stranger," he reaches for the parchment to sign, but at that moment falls into a deep faint (*eine tiefe Ohnmacht*). "I lay there for a long time as though in the arms of the dead." An "event"—a positive one in the view of Schlemihl—has taken the place of a decision.<sup>18</sup> Yet the event also discloses his fundamental passivity.

For all his romantic characteristics, Schlemihl's own views of the happening reveal him as a child of the Enlightenment. The event, he explains, had taught him to "respect necessity, and what is greater than a deed that has been done, an event that has occurred, its [necessity's] property!" (*Ich habe erstlich die Notwendigkeit verehren lernen, und was ist mehr als die getane Tat, das geschehne Ereignis, ihr Eigentum!*) Even more, he has learned to "revere that necessity as a wise providence that pervades the whole great mechanism in which we are enmeshed as mere driving and driven wheels; what must be, must happen; what was to happen, happened; and not without that providence which I finally learned to revere in my own destiny and in the destinies of those that interlocked with mine."<sup>19</sup>

Schlemihl's "providence" (*Fügung*) is a kind of divine fate; his is a fate-ruled universe. His ethics are markedly deterministic. The ideological dynamics of Dmitry's own "event" and of his view of it are basically the reverse of Schlemihl's, though Dmitry only gropes toward an understanding of what took place at the window. What is clear is that Dmitry's universe is not a machine and his Providence is one that leaves man free to make his own decisions. Dmitry has inclinations toward fatalism. He remarks after the murder of his father, "I understand that

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 55–56.

for such people like me, a blow is need, a blow of fate, to catch them as with a noose, and bind them by an external force” (*Ponimaiu teper’, chto na takikh, kak ia, nuzhen udar, udar sud’by, chtob zakhvatit’ ego kak v arkan i skrutit’ vneshneiu siloi* [“They Carry Mitya Away”]). What is important, however, is that at a crucial moment in his struggle with his “fate” — with his own sense of fatality, with “unknown ideas,” and with crude materialistic-philosophical conceptions of man — the balance tips in the direction of his *not* killing his father. In the final analysis, Dmtri knows something that Schlemihl does not know.

There is no miracle in the fact that Dmitry does not kill his father, though Dostoevsky’s asterisks throw a temporary veil of mystery over the event. How we act at any given moment depends not only on the circumstances of the moment, but on what we bring to that moment. Dmitry’s unconscious decision *not* to kill his father finds support in the dialectic of his moral, spiritual, and nascent religious consciousness; it finds sustenance in a consciousness or conscience that is continually alive to the complexities and interaction in human behavior and consciousness of the sacred and the profane, *obraz* and “bezobrazie”, the man and the mask. This unconscious choice not to kill his father is a *blow to fate*. As Ralph Waldo Emerson put it in an essay, “Fate,” “If Fate is so prevailing, man also is part of it, and can confront fate with fate [. . .] If there be omnipotence in the stroke, there is omnipotence of recoil.”<sup>20</sup>

“Man is a mystery,” wrote the seventeen-year-old Dostoevsky. “It is necessary to divine it” (*Chelovek est’ taina. Ee nado razgadat’* [28:1:63]). “Razgadat’” — “to divine,” “to guess at the meaning of something,” “to get to the bottom of something”; that is what the novelist has done in *The Brothers Karamazov*; that is what Dmitry does intuitively at the window; that is what the reader does when revisits and reviews the fateful “physiognomy” of Fyodor Pavlovich at the opening of the novel and recognizes both its power and its limitations as a true portrait. “There’s no art to find the mind’s construction in the face,” complains Duncan, King of Scotland, in *Macbeth* (I: 4). There’s no art, except the artist’s art of seeing, which points to the second meaning embedded in Shakespeare’s line and to Dostoevsky’s own “physiognomic” vision.

<sup>20</sup> See *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 340–341.



DOSTOEVSKY'S "ANECDOTE FROM A CHILD'S LIFE":  
A CASE OF BIFURCATION<sup>1</sup>

Call it a moment's work (and such it seems)  
This tale's a fragment from the life of dreams;  
But say, that years matured the silent strife,  
And 'tis a record from the dream of life.

— Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Phantom or Fact"

The sketch entitled "An Anecdote from a Child's Life" ("Anekdot iz detskoi zhizni") constitutes the first section of chapter 2 of the December 1876 issue of *Diary of a Writer* (*Dnevnik pisatel'ia*).<sup>2</sup> In length it is about 2,000 words. The story centers on a twelve-year-old girl who decides not to come home after school and to spend the night in St. Petersburg. Its focus is the psychology of a preadolescent girl at the moment of passage from innocence to a "knowledge of good and evil" and the predatory world this girl faces in the dark Petersburg night. The theme of child seduction lies close to the surface of this story. Typical of threshold art, or of the boundary genre that characterizes a multitude of entries in Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer*, "An Anecdote from a Child's Life" combines fact and fiction, actual material from everyday life with the author's imaginative development of those same materials.<sup>3</sup> Throughout, Dostoevsky, as narrator, comments on the elements of the story, their psychological, pedagogical, and social interest and significance.<sup>4</sup> The reader is drawn directly into a story

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<sup>1</sup> From *Russian Literature* 25 (1989): 127-140.

<sup>2</sup> Dostoevskii, PSS, 24:55-59.

<sup>3</sup> For two discussions of Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer*, see Gary Saul Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's Diary of a Writer and the Traditions of Literary Utopia* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), in particular 3-68. See also his "Introductory Study: Dostoevsky's Great Experiment," to *A Writer's Diary* [by] Fyodor Dostoevsky. 2 v. Translated and Annotated by Kenneth Lantz. With an Introductory Study by Gary Saul Morson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 1:1-117.

<sup>4</sup> Dostoevsky's "Anecdote" highlights such questions as the different

*in process*, one that theoretically could be turned into a story told by a wholly fictitious narrator.

The sketch can be divided into two parts: the first part is devoted to a story told by a mother whose twelve-year-old daughter, Sasha, had failed to come home from school until late in the evening. On her return, the girl recites her adventures to her mother, who in turn tells them to the narrator of the *Diary*, who then recounts them to the reader.<sup>5</sup> The girl's tale, the first part of the story, has a happy ending. The second—and shorter—part of the story consists of Dostoevsky's sketch of what might have happened to the girl; it involves the seduction or "fall" of a girl and has an unhappy ending. Both narratives are discussed in the context of an earnest pedagogical discussion on the psychology of preadolescents, that is, "young souls who have already left early childhood, but have in no sense arrived even at the threshold of maturity."

"An Anecdote from the Life of a Child" affords Dostoevsky an opportunity to comment briefly on his poetics of fantastic realism. "This anecdote is a true one" (*anekdot etot pravda*), Dostoevsky remarks after relating the mother's account of Sasha's experiences. To the objection that the girl's experience is "an isolated incident," Dostoevsky calls attention to the complex boundary-mentality of twelve- or thirteen-year-olds and to "the amazingly fantastic notions, dreams and decisions that are generated at times in these young souls." What may appear exceptional or fantastic to us is really the normal fantasy world of preadolescents. He recommends that educators and parents study "this extraordinarily interesting age group."

Sasha lives on the outskirts of St. Petersburg with her mother. She travels back and forth every day from school by streetcar.

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character of youthful dreams and fantasies in different generations; the weakened sense of family ties and obligations in the current generation: prostitution, adolescent vagrancy in general, and the vagrancy of girls in particular. Dostoevsky regards national vagrancy as a Russian trait. "Vagrancy is an unhealthy habit, in part our national habit, one that later turns into an unhealthy passion." For Dostoevsky's comments on "vagrancy" (*brodiazhnichestvo*), see PSS, 4:250.

<sup>5</sup> Anna Grigorievna Dostoevsky, the author's wife, comments with regard to this story: "This was a real incident which involved the daughter of Mrs. Khokhriakova. The mother of the girl related it to [Dostoevsky]." See Leonid Grossman, *Seminarii Dostoevskogo* (Petersburg: Gosizdat, 1922), 66.

One day, she fails to return home on the usual 6:00 p.m. streetcar. Instead, the conductor hands a note to the mother in which Sasha has written:

Dearest Mama, all during this past week I have been a very bad girl. I received three zeroes and was deceiving you all along. I am ashamed to return to you and I will no longer return to you. Farewell, dearest Mama, forgive me, your Sasha.

When Sasha returns to her distraught mother four hours later, she explains that she had wanted to run away because she had been lying to her mother about working on her lessons. Moreover, she adds, she had been influenced by another girl who had been playing truant already for two weeks. The story Sasha tells her mother is as follows: in deciding to run away, she had not thought much on how she was going to live; but she took along with her a few rolls. As evening drew near, she sought a place to sleep. She went first to the railway station, noticed some unusual looking railway carriages off to the side, and started to get into one of them. But at this point a watchman shouts to her, "Where do you think you're slinking? These cars are carrying the dead!" (*Kudu lezesh'? V etikh vagonakh mertvykh voziat!*) And again, approaching her, "What is it you want here?" Whereupon Sasha runs away to the sound of the watchman's voice calling out to her. There is a Gogolian touch to this scene: corpses, too, travel in Russia, even they partake in the unhealthy passion for vagrancy.

Sasha's second effort to find a place to sleep is no less frightening and funereal in character. She tries to make her way into another symbolic coffin or mortuary: a large house in construction, but boarded up; no sooner, however, does she crawl into the house "as into a pit" to seek out a plank to sleep on than she hears talk, and senses eyes gazing at her. Frightened, she again runs away to the sound of voices calling her back.

Sasha's third effort to find a place to sleep does not get beyond the idea stage, but her innocence and naïveté promise a sinister conclusion. She "suddenly became tired," she recalls, and decides at this point to find "a good man" (*dobryi chelovek*) on Nevsky Prospect who would say to her, "Come and spend the night with us" (*Poidemte k nam nochevat'*). Later, the narrator remarks with irony that St. Petersburg's streets and most "affluent homes" teem with "nice little people" (*dobrye chelovechki*) of bad intent. Sasha, however, has no such encounter with a nice man.

"Suddenly she looks up, sees a coach, the last one for the night, and decides to return home to her mother."

Meanwhile, her worried mother, preferring to wait at home should her daughter turn up, accepts the assistance of another "good man" (*dobryi chelovek*), this one a "close acquaintance" who manifests a "fervent concern" (*goriachee uchastie*) over Sasha's plight. He sets forth into the Petersburg night, prepared "if necessary to spend all all-night long seeking out the girl at acquaintances," in order to bring her home. But Sasha, however, returns home on her own. "Sasha," her mother asks, "is it possible that you dreamed all this up yourself so as not to go to school and to live on the street?"

At this point in the girl's narrative, the reader has a clear idea of what might have happened to Sasha that night had the bad "good man" turned up instead of the good "good man" sent out by Sasha's mother. The presence in the story, however, of two "good men," but of differing intentions, wandering about in the Petersburg night and looking for young girls, is a calculated ambiguity on the part of Dostoevsky. It signals the story's complex moral-psychological subtext.

After comparing the adolescent imagination of an earlier romantic generation with that of the current young generation (a more down-to-earth youth that dreams but also carries out its dreams), the narrator insists that the case of Sasha relates to a definite stage in preadolescent development. Then, developing his line of thought, he continues: "And how easily all this could have happened, that is, the most awful thing of all, and what is more, to whom? To our own children!" The accumulation of ominous images and innuendoes in Sasha's narrative leads logically to "the most awful thing of all."—that is, a tragic, ending to Sasha's story—an alternate ending upon which the narrator-writer now calls upon the reader to meditate:

Only think about that place in the mother's story where the girl "*suddenly tires*," walks about, weeps and dreams about meeting a good man who would take pity on the poor girl who has nowhere to sleep, and will invite her to his house. Just think now, this wish (*zhelanie*) of hers, testifying to her extremely youthful innocence and immaturity, might easily have been realized; everywhere among us, on the streets and in the wealthiest houses, there are countless just such "good little people." Well, and after that, the next morning? It's either a hole in the ice or the *shame of confessing*, and beyond the shame of confessing, a growing ability to *accommodate this recollection*; then later on to reflect upon the

matter, but now from a different point of view, and to go on just thinking and thinking, but now with an extraordinary variety of notions, and all this slowly and by herself; well and at last, I dare say, a desire will arise to repeat the incident, and then all the rest. And all this taking place in a twelve-year-old! And all this undercover. Really undercover in the full sense of the word! (*I vse shito-kryto. Ved' shito-kryto v polnom smysle slova*).

It is useful to juxtapose Sasha's account of her adventure, as told by her mother with the narrator's variant of the story: what might have happened. In Sasha's story, the motif of innocence and naïveté predominates, though she is conscious of danger around her. She is perfectly open and frank in her disclosure of her motivations and actions. She freely unburdens herself to her mother and feels ashamed. Though in the note, she calls herself a "bad girl" (*durnaia devochka*), her sense of badness is mitigated by her innocence.

In the narrator's continuation of the tale, however, the girl *falls*, and in falling she loses both her innocence and openness. In this alternate ending, she experiences a deep sense of shame that inhibits confession; she accommodates herself to her fall. Sex is no longer an external threatening force; it is an increasingly active internal one. The awakened sexual instinct of the girl not only brings with it an immobilizing sense of shame, but a feeling of pleasure, a desire to repeat the experience. Seduced by some roving "good man," the fallen girl in Dostoevsky's new tale succumbs to the power of the erotic instinct in herself.

What is of particular interest, however, in the narrator's whole conception of the drama of preadolescent consciousness is its divided character. After noting that "vagrant girls" really do exist, he concludes:

Granted that for the time being there is complete innocence here; but even if she be as innocent as the first primeval creature in paradise, all the same she will not escape a "knowledge of good and evil," well, at least a touch of it, be it only in the imagination, in dreams. After all, the street is a very lively school. But mainly, I want to repeat over and over again: here we have a most interesting age, an age still maintaining, on the one hand, in its entirety, the most childlike, touching innocence and immaturity, and, on the other, a rapidly acquired almost greedy taking things in, and a knack for quickly familiarizing oneself with ideas and notions which, in the opinion of a great many

parents and teachers, this age group is seemingly incapable even of imagining. Now just this duality (*razdvoenie*), just these two so dissimilar halves of a young creature constitute in their unity an extraordinarily dangerous and critical element in the lives of these young creatures.

The sketch that begins with Sasha's innocent foray into the Petersburg jungle ends with the narrator's warning about the dangerous phenomenon of duality (*razdvoenie*). With this word or concept we are at the heart of Dostoevsky's sketch. The phenomenon of duality or interplay of opposites characterizes not only the consciousness of preadolescent girls, but the consciousness, so to speak, of the entire sketch; it constitutes the principle governing its message, structure, psychology, and most of its linguistic play.

"Anecdote," to begin with, consists of two narratives, Sasha's and Dostoevsky's. In their unity, they dramatize "two dissimilar halves of a young creature," an innocent half and a half that has begun to acquire a "knowledge of good and evil"; a pre-fall and a post-fall Sasha. There is the good girl Sasha and the "bad girl" she innocently takes herself to be, but then there is her bad girl friend ("just like me"). There is the androgynous name "Sasha" which may denote a man or a woman. And finally, there is the good "good man" who at the behest of the mother goes out looking for Sasha in order to aid her, and the bad "good man" whom she encounters at every turn from whom she innocently seeks aid on the street.

The two anecdotes are bridged by a section in which the narrator discusses the way two different generations of youth dream and fantasize. The earlier generation, clearly that of the people of the 1840s, emerges as frankly romantic, that is, divorced from life; the later generation, to which Sasha belongs, acts out its fantasies: three young boys, we are told, recently tried to make off for America with pistols. This generation is representative of an environment marked by weakening values, a faltering sense of duty, and a loosening of family ties. In this connection, it is noteworthy that there is no mention in the sketch of Sasha's father; she belongs, perhaps, to a broken family. Perhaps, too, the father's place has been taken by the "close acquaintance" who turns up in Sasha's house the night she fails to come home, that is, the good "good man" who sets out in the night to find Sasha at the very moment Sasha herself is looking for a fatherly "good man" who will invite her to spend the night at his home.

Duality dominates the geography of the story. Sasha and her mother live on the outskirts, “na kraiu,” literally “on the edge,” “at the borderline” of St. Petersburg. Sasha crosses that line when she goes to school in Petersburg; there on the streets (a “lively school”) an innocent vagrant girl “will not escape ‘a knowledge of good and evil,’ well, at least a touch of it (*nu khot’ s kraiuishku*).” Sasha lives between a pastoral and an urban world, between innocence and knowledge.

“It is just this self-division (*razdvoenie*),” Dostoevsky writes in the concluding line of his sketch, “the union of just these two quite dissimilar halves of a young being, that constitutes a most extraordinarily dangerous and critical element in the lives of these young creatures.”

A binary pattern emerges in Dostoevsky’s deployment of individual words and phrases. This is strikingly evident in Sasha’s emotionally excited, but naïve account of her visit to the railroad station. Sasha has just told her mother that she had expected her fifteen kopecks would last her for five days. “And what then?” (*A tam?*) asks her mother:

And what then?

I don’t know what then, I hadn’t thought that far.

And what about the night, where were you planning to spend the night?

About the night, I’d thought about that. When it got dark and when it got late, my thought was to the railway, only further away beyond the station, where there isn’t anybody and where a frightful lot of railway cars are standing. I’d crawl into one of those cars which didn’t look as if they were going anywhere, and spend the night. And I went there. And I went far beyond the station, and nobody was there, and I see cars standing just nearby and not at all like the ones one rides in. Well, I think, I’ll crawl into one of these cars, and nobody will see. But I had just started to climb in when suddenly a watchman cried out: “Where do you think you are slinking?” These cars are for hauling the dead.

*A tam ne znaiu, dal’she ia ne podumala.*

*A nochevat’-to, nochevat’—gde?*

*A nochevat’, ja eto obdumala. Kak uzh temno i kak uzh pozdno, ia dumala vsiakii den’ khodit’ na zheleznuiu dorogu, tuda dal’she, za vokzal, gde nikogo uzh net i gde uzhasno mnogo vagonov stoit. Vlezt’ v kakoi-nibud’ etot vagon, kotoryi uzh vidno, eto ne poidet, i nochevat’ do utra. Ia i poshla. I daleko zashla, tuda*



za vokzal, i nikogo tam net, i vizhu sovsem v storone vagony stoiat i sovsem ne takie v kotorych vse ezdiat. Vot, dumaiu, vlezu v kakoi-nibud' etot vagon, i nikto ne uvidit. Tol'ko ia nachala vlezat', a vdrug storozh mne i zakrichal: "Kuda lezesh'? V etikh vagonakh mertvykh voziat."

The multitude here of paired words and phrases, or syntactic parallelisms, is overwhelming: *tam/tam*; *dal'she/dal'she*; *podumala/obdumala*; *nochevat'-to/nochevat'-to*; *kak uzh/kak uzh*; *tuda za vokzal/tuda za vokzal*; *gde nikogo uzh net/i nikogo tam net*; *vlezit'`v kakoi-nibud'`etot vagon/vlezu v kakoi-nibud'`etot vagon*; *khodit'`lezdit'*, etc. The almost formulaic pairing of words and phrases serves to convey Sasha's innocent and highly agitated stream of consciousness, the dangerous rhythm of anxious impulse and action.

The words *tam/tam*, two staccato beats, inaugurate a feverish, nightmarish movement towards darkness and death. A sinister subnarrative runs parallel to Sasha's account: "there" (*tam*), "beyond" (*dal'she*), lies "night" (*nochevat'*), "darkness" (*temno*), "horror" (*uzhasno, uzhas*), where "there is nobody" (*gde nikogo net*), that is, where there are only the dead (*mertvykh*).

Other uses of paired words and phrases carry us directly into the dark world of moral and psychological duality. The mother's close acquaintance, we are told, expressed "a fervent concern" (*goriachee uchastie*) over the girl's plight. This "good man" is willing to spend the night looking for Sasha. In the next sentence, the narrator reminds us again that the mother put her "trust in the fervent concern of the good man" (*dovertit'sia goriachemu uchastiiu dobrogo cheloveka*). The word "goriachee," which we have translated as "fervent," also has the alternate meanings "passionate," "feverish." And these words, of course, define those "dobrye chelovechki"—those nice little men who inhabit the empty boarded-up houses and warehouses and the dwellings of the well-to-do men.

Dostoevsky's thought in his sketch is clear: we are *not* dealing here with two different moral types of human beings, a good "good man" and a bad "good man," that is, a bad man masking himself in goodness; we are dealing with a basic duality of human consciousness. The girl whose bad example of truancy Sasha follows is "just like me" The same fervently good man who goes out in the night to safely bring home a twelve-year-old girl to her mother may also lust for an adolescent girl in order to bring her home to seduce her. "Anecdote

from a Child's Life" suggests, in short, that two kinds of men live in the same person, a not novel notion that Goethe's Faust famously formulates: "Two souls, alas! are living in my breast."<sup>6</sup>

One may cite other examples of significant uses of words and phrases in pairs and sometimes even in triads. The "unhealthy passion" (*boleznennaia strast'*) for vagrancy recurs as a "national passion" (*natsional'naia strast'*). There are not only "vagrant girls," but vagrant "dreams and fantasies" that "wander about" in the heads of very young people. The same word, as we have seen in the example of "goriachee," takes on a different meaning in a different context. Sasha's innocent "wish" (*zhelanie*) to turn to a fatherly good man for a night's lodging in the worst instance in a seduced girl may turn into desire (*zhelanie*) to continue a bad pattern of life.

Dostoevsky's play with the verb "dumat'," "to think," provides an illustration of the way words may be used to draw the reader into the vortex of Sasha's drama. The narrator calls upon the reader to give some thought (*podumat'*) to the possible consequences of the innocent girl's appeal to a so-called good man. In the very next line, he again appeals to us to think (*podumat'*) of how her wish (*zhelanie*) might be fulfilled. A few lines later, this pair of words (*podumat'/podumat'*), associated with the reader's thoughts, is replaced by a related pair of words linked with the consciousness of the fallen girl: following her seduction, she is "continuously thinking" (*vse dumat' i dumat'*) about her experience with the bad good man, but now from the standpoint of the pleasure obtained in her first sexual encounter with him.

Dostoevsky establishes a sense of complicity between the reader's thoughts about the consequences of the girl's appeal to a good man and the girl's thoughts on the pleasures of sex. Dostoevsky scrambles low-minded thoughts with high-minded thoughts. We are witness to a kind of linguistic seduction. The reader himself is subtly implicated

<sup>6</sup> "Zwei Seelen wohnen! ach, in meiner Brust" (Goethe's *Faust* [I: 1112]). Faust goes on to say, however, that "one soul wants to separate from the other. The one holds on to "gross amorous desire," the other "lifts itself powerfully from the dust to ancestral fields of higher presentiment." (Die eine will sich von der andern trennen; / Die eine hält in derber Liebeslust, / Sich an die Welt mit klammernden Organen; / Die andre hebt gewaltsam sich vom Dust / Zu den Gefilden hoher Ahnen.) (I: 1113–1117). Like Goethe, Dostoevsky views man's ambivalent nature as one ultimately galvanized by a striving for higher things, for an ideal that is contrary to his nature.

in what the Dostoevsky calls the "dangerous" drama of duality: it is dangerous, in the final analysis, not only because it might get us into serious trouble, but because it is a phenomenon the complexity of which exhausts moral judgment.

Finally, one feels at moments that the high-minded narrator, Dostoevsky, himself stands in some sort of double relationship to his subject. He repeatedly emphasizes his "interest" in girls of the twelve- to thirteen-year-old age bracket. "This age (twelve or thirteen) is extremely interesting (*neobychaino interesen*) in girls even more than in boys," he writes. "I repeat," he writes later on, "this extraordinarily interesting age (*chrezvychaino interesnyi vozrast*) absolutely requires the special attention of . . . our pedagogues." Then again, at the end of the sketch, he returns to this theme: "I repeat again and again: here we have a most interesting age (*interesneishii vozrast*)." The repetition of these phrases and the emphasis upon their repetition, "I repeat again and again" (*povtoriai u eshche i eshche*), suggest to the reader that the narrator *himself* may not be free of double thoughts, that is, that he, too, is ruled by the same law of bifurcation that governs his text, and that he connects with his story on some deeper level, enjoys, perhaps, a covert interest in his theme. Indeed, the very word "interesnyi" (interesting) is marked by a certain duality in "Anekdot"; a theme may be "interesting," but the word can be used to suggest an erotic interest in a person; "u nego k nei interesnoe otnoshenie," literally, he has an interesting relation to her, that is, he is erotically attracted to her. The frequency of the theme of seduction of children, adolescents, and young women in Dostoevsky's works suggest that he has indeed a special "interest" in this theme.<sup>7</sup> Or is "Anecdote from a Child's Life" just another example of threshold art in Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer*—an art in which the author Dostoevsky seems to be dissolving into a fictional narrator or character? The theme of seduction is broadly linked in his writing with

<sup>7</sup> Dostoevsky's "A Christmas Party and a Wedding" ("Elka i svad'ba," 1848) is an early example of Dostoevsky's subtle psychological development of the theme of seduction of children. At the center of this story is Julian Mastakovich, a predecessor of the *dobrye chelovechki* who appear in "Anecdote from a Child's Life." The narrator in this story calls Julian Mastakovich a "dobrozhelatel'," that is, a "Well-wisher" or a "Wisher of Good." See my discussion of this story in *Dialogues with Dostoevsky: The Overwhelming Questions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 94–103.

the problem of memory, guilt, and confession. In this sense, the casual opening phrase or sentence of his sketch is noteworthy: "I've a story to tell that I don't want to forget" (*Rasskazhu, chtob ne zabyt'*). Should the reader simply take this opening line as typical of Dostoevsky's sometimes informal mode of addressing the reader in his *Diary of a Writer*? Or, again, should we associate that motif of forgetting yet wanting not to forget with a semi-fictive narrator in the making, a bifurcated "good man" who, obsessed with a recollection, has a need to tell a story? And what better way is there to cope with a troubling recollection than to talk about it in the form of somebody else's story. "When I was told this anecdote," Dostoevsky remarks, "I realized that it was very important to publish it in the *Diary*. I was given permission to do so, of course, without revealing anybody's identity (*s polnym inkognito*)." This motif of concealment crops up again when Dostoevsky speaks of the psychological processes of adolescents: "All this is undercover, indeed, undercover in the full sense of the word!" (*Vse eto shito-kryto. Ved' shito-kryto v polnom smysle slova!*). The same may be said of "Anecdote from a Child's Life" as a whole.

THE TRIPLE VISION:  
DOSTOEVSKY'S "THE PEASANT MAREY"<sup>1</sup>

Life is a whole art and to live is to make an artistic  
work out of oneself.

—Dostoevsky

Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit.

—Goethe

In "The Peasant Marey" (*Diary of a Writer*, February 1876, chapter 1, section 3), Dostoevsky recalls how as a convict in a Siberian prison, early in Easter week, 1850, he recoiled in horror before the depravity and violence of his fellow convicts. The words of a Polish political prisoner addressed to him on this occasion, "Je hais ces brigands," seem to express his own sense of disgust, hatred, and despair. Dostoevsky writes that he lay down on his bunk in the barracks a few moments later and recalled, in a daydream, a childhood encounter with the kindly peasant Marey.<sup>2</sup> As a result of that recollection, he recalls, something unusual happened to Dostoevsky, the convict. Just what happened, he describes at the end of "The Peasant Marey":

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<sup>1</sup> From Robert Louis Jackson, *The Art of Dostoevsky: Deliriums and Nocturnes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 20-32.

<sup>2</sup> Dostoevsky's brother Andrey observes in his memoirs that the peasant Marey, "probably called Mark," was "not an invented character but one who really existed." He describes him as a handsome, black-bearded peasant around middle age who was known for his expertise with cattle. See Andrei Dostoevskii, *Vospominaniia A. M. Dostoevskogo* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo pisatelei, 1930), 58-59. There are a number of references to "Marey" in Dostoevsky's notebook at the time he was conceiving his sketch in 1876. In one of them he sums up his artistic idea: "Marey. A little scene from childhood, I had not been thinking about it, that is, had not forgotten, but once, later, long afterwards—oh, how I dreamed, and often—and suddenly I recalled Marey; really some childhood scenes make it possible to look at things quite differently." (PSS, 24:121)

And so when I got off the bunk and looked round, I remember, I suddenly felt that I could look at these unhappy creatures with quite a different glance, and that suddenly, as though by some miracle, all hatred and anger vanished from my heart. I went about looking into the faces of people I encountered. This rascal of a peasant with shaven head and branded face, intoxicated, bawling out his drunken hoarse song,—why, he too may be the very same Marey: after all, I really can't look into his heart.<sup>3</sup>

The daydream-recollection of Dostoevsky the convict certainly brought about an important transfiguration in his heart. This change is intimately connected with his daydream image of Marey, a peasant that Dostoevsky had known as a child. At that moment, he felt that he could look at the convicts with new eyes, that is, look beyond their raw, frightening exterior. Yet when Dostoevsky, looking into the faces of the convicts, speculates that this or that peasant “may be the very same Marey,” he adds, oddly, “after all, I really can't look into his heart.”

We can count five words in the passage quoted above that have to do with vision. Dostoevsky must have been fully aware of the curious non sequitur presented by that last phrase. So we come to the question: How is it possible to have a new view of the convicts, that is, a view of their basic humanity, without the capacity to look into their hearts? How can there be belief without insight? We will leave aside the testimony of Jesus, his gentle admonition to the once doubting Thomas, “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (Jn. 20:29). The answer to this question involves not only an understanding of the precise nature and limits of the action of the daydream-recollection in a psychological and esthetic sense, but a recognition that the vision of Dostoevsky the convict is only an intermediate level in a three-stage vision and transfiguration of reality. This triple vision involves the encounter of the nine-year-old Dostoevsky with the peasant Marey, the convict Dostoevsky's daydream-recollection of the encounter, and the recollection of the recollection in “The Peasant Marey”—all that constitutes section 3, chapter 1 of the February 1876 issue of *Diary of a Writer*.

In analyzing this sketch or testimony, we must continually bear in mind some important remarks Dostoevsky makes toward the middle

<sup>3</sup> PSS, 22:49.

of the story. The daydream, he indicates, was for him both an escape and a creative occupation in prison. All through those four years, he would "incessantly" recall his past, "relive [his] whole past life." These recollections, he notes, would arise spontaneously:

I rarely evoked them of my own will. It used to begin with some spark, traits, sometimes almost imperceptible, and then little by little grew into a whole picture, some kind of strong and integral impression. I would analyze these impressions, add new features to things that had happened long ago, and, mainly, I would correct, endlessly correct the picture, and herein lay my whole pleasure.<sup>4</sup>

There is no doubt at all that Dostoevsky the convict did indeed dream and think, in this manner, that he would correct, that is, shape or give form and moral meaning to the impressions and experiences of his past. These remarks, however, also provide us with a clue to "The Peasant Marey" as a whole, and to the serious play of Dostoevsky, the artist, here, a sacred play involving his fundamental esthetic, spiritual, and populist outlook.

Perhaps more than any other work of Dostoevsky, "The Peasant Marey" constitutes a *profession de foi*, a declaration of faith and convictions. Everything else, including the recollection of the peasant Marey, is subordinated to this idea. The opening lines of "The Peasant Marey," commenting on the short discussion of the Russian people in the section of *Diary of a Writer* just preceding the sketch, read as follows:

But these *professions de foi*, I think, are very boring to read, and therefore I will relate an anecdote, or rather not even an anecdote; just one distant recollection which for some reason I very much want to relate precisely here and now, at the conclusion of our little treatise on the people. I was then only nine years old . . . but no, better that I start when I was twenty-nine years old.<sup>5</sup>

Dostoevsky's *profession de foi*, of course, points forward to his anecdote as well as backward to his treatise on the people. They are most relevant to "The Peasant Marey."

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<sup>4</sup> PSS, 22:47.

<sup>5</sup> PSS, 22:46.



The short piece that precedes "The Peasant Marey" is entitled "About Love for the People. A Necessary Contract with the People."<sup>6</sup> In the so-called anecdote or distant recollection that follows, Dostoevsky presents the reader with precisely the moment when he made his "contract" with the people, that is, when he attained to the most important vision of his life. In this vision, esthetics, religion, and populism form a grand trinity. We say "moment," yet an analysis of "The Peasant Marey" suggests that the moment existed at a number of points in historical time, and therefore, exists out of time, or only in the ideality of time created by the artist himself.

One cannot overestimate the critical, indeed agonizing, importance that the people, the problem of understanding them, and being reconciled with them, played in Dostoevsky's life, outlook, and art. It is agonizing because Dostoevsky came to understand through direct experience that any authentic understanding or reconciliation would have to endure a terrifying journey before it reached the interior, the spiritual yearnings, of this wounded people. In the so-called treatise on the people that precedes "The Peasant Marey," Dostoevsky formulates the problem of love for the people in characteristically esthetic terms:

In Russian man from the common people, one must be able to abstract his beauty from alluvial barbarism. Owing to circumstances of almost all Russian history our people have been subjected to such depravity and debauched, tempted, and constantly tortured to such an extent that it is still amazing how it survived, preserving its human image, to say nothing of preserving its beauty. But it also preserved the beauty of its image. A true friend of humanity . . . will understand and excuse all the impassable alluvial filth in which our people are sunk and be able to seek out diamonds in this filth.<sup>7</sup>

Dostoevsky distinguishes between repulsive, yet alluvial, filth in Russian life, that is, a surface disfiguration and an inner organic form, *obraz*, or image. Diamonds in filth. In this extended metaphor, the diamond or image represents the luminous, refulgent ideals preserved

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<sup>6</sup> "About Love for the People. A Necessary Contract with the People," in the February 1876 issue of the *Diary of a Writer*. PSS, 22:42–45.

<sup>7</sup> PSS, 22:43.

in the heart of the people—"all those great and sacred things it longs for," everything that we find in its "saints," saints who "themselves glow and illuminate the path for us all." The ideals of the people, Dostoevsky insists, are "strong and sacred"; they "saved it in centuries of suffering"; "they became one with its spirit . . . And if moreover there is so much filth, then Russian man more than anybody else anguishes over it and believes that all this is only alluvial and temporal, a diabolical delusion, and that the darkness will disappear and eternal light without fail will shine forth some day."<sup>8</sup>

What conceals or disfigures the image, or icon, of the Russian people, then, is not merely ugly, but evil, a diabolical delusion something alien, accidental, slanderous, as the Russian word *nanosnyi* (alluvial) implies. In turn, the revelation of the beauty of the image, the removal, as it were, of layers of filth from the icon, will also be a triumph over evil. It will be a revelation of light in the broad esthetic and religious sense. The esthetic act, the revelation of light and beauty, is in this sense apocalyptic: it presages rebirth and transfiguration. In the deepest sense, though, Dostoevsky would say of the artist and his action what the Gospel says of John the Baptist, "He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light" (Jn. 1:8).

Who, according to Dostoevsky, bears witness to the luminous image of the Russian people? Who gives birth to images? Or, as he puts it, who "seeks out diamonds in filth"? Russian literature, the Russian artist, the poet, of course. The poem, Dostoevsky wrote to Apollon Maikov May 15, 1869, "is like a natural precious stone, a diamond in the soul of the poet"; of course, "life," the "mighty essence of life," "God, living and real" are the real creators manifesting power "most often in a great soul and powerful poet, so that if it is not [the poet] himself who is the creator then at least his soul is the very mine that gives produces the diamonds."<sup>9</sup> It is "only in accord with common interests, in sympathy with the mass of society," Dostoevsky had written in a feuilleton in a newspaper column entitled "Petersburg Chronicle" (*Peterburgskaia letopis'*, 1847), "with its direct, immediate requirements, and not in drowsiness, not in indifference, which leads to the disintegration of the mass, not in solitude, that man's treasure,

<sup>8</sup> PSS, 22:43.

<sup>9</sup> PSS, 29(1):39.

his capital, his good heart can be refined into a precious, inimitable, brilliant diamond."<sup>10</sup>

It is no surprise, then, that Dostoevsky once again insists, in his treatise on the people in *Diary of a Writer* in February 1876, that it is precisely the Russian artist who has been drawing forth "diamonds" from the tragic history of the Russian people, discovering and displaying the "beauty of image" that the Russian people have preserved in spite of the alluvial barbarism of its life and history. "All that is truly beautiful in Russian literature has been taken from the people," he writes. The great writers "borrowed from the people its simple-heartedness, purity, gentleness, breadth of mind, and kindness, in contrast to all that is twisted, false, alluvial, and slavishly borrowed." Russian literature, Turgenev, Goncharov, and others, has the merit of having "recognized the people's ideals as genuinely beautiful." "In all this," Dostoevsky remarks, "it has been guided by artistic sense rather than good will."<sup>11</sup> Where good will is easily frustrated, artistic sense, acting independently, discerns the beauty and the deepest layers of moral reality in man. Esthetic vision, revelation, the simultaneous discovery of light and truth in the midst of darkness, penetrating the alluvial filth, in a word, artistic sense, is what "The Peasant Marey" is about.

When, however, did the miracle take place? In the summer of 1830, when the nine-year-old Dostoevsky met Marey in the woods? In prison, during Easter week 1850, when at the age of twenty-nine Dostoevsky, the convict, recollected Marey? Or in February 1876 in St. Petersburg, when Dostoevsky, a fifty-five-year-old writer, recollected his recollection of Marey and embodied it in "The Peasant Marey"?

Easter Monday, though a traditional moment of joyous expectation for the believer, was a terrifying time for the convict Dostoevsky in Omsk, Siberia, in 1850. Dostoevsky accents the degradation, violence, and brutality of the convicts around him:

Monstrous, vile songs, groups of convicts playing cards under the bunks; several of convicts already half-beaten to death by verdict of their own comrades and covered with sheepskins in their bunks till they recovered and came to their senses; knives had already been drawn several times—all this, for the two days

<sup>10</sup> PSS, 18:13–14.

<sup>11</sup> PSS, 22:44.

of the holiday, had been tormenting me to the point of illness. And indeed I could never endure without repulsion the drunken revelry, and here, in this place, especially.<sup>12</sup>

Dostoevsky had just rushed out of the barracks "half mad" when six convicts beat the drunken, monstrous Tatar Gazin nearly to death (Dostoevsky describes Gazin in *Notes from the House of the Dead* as "having the appearance of a huge spider the size of a man"). He returned to the barracks fifteen minutes later with the words of the Polish political prisoner ringing in his ears: "Je hais ces brigands."

In the midst of this nightmare of violence and debauch, Dostoevsky relates, he lay down on his bunk on his back and closed his eyes. "I liked to lie that way: people don't bother a person who is sleeping, and meanwhile one can dream and think." Little by little, he forgot his surroundings and "imperceptibly sank into memories." What follows is the recollection of Dostoevsky, the convict, in the rendition of Dostoevsky, the writer, of his experience as a child on a walk through a wooded area called Losk (that is, "shine" or "luster") one late summer's day. We shall not dwell on the extraordinary description Dostoevsky gives of himself in the woods hunting beetles, lizards, and mushrooms—fearing only snakes. "These impressions remain with you for your whole life," he remarks. Suffice it to say that there is something distinctly idyllic, indeed mythic about this scene; it is a kind of Garden of Eden, such as is rarely found in Dostoevsky's works.

Suddenly, in this garden, the child hears a cry, "A wolf is coming!" "I shrieked, and beside myself with fright, and screaming at the top of my lungs, I rushed out to the clearing and straight to the ploughing peasant," to the kindly and benevolent Marey. It turns out that the boy had been the victim of a hallucination. The peasant Marey gently calmed him, Dostoevsky, the convict, recalls; he "extended his hand and suddenly stroked" his cheek and made the sign of the cross. With a "broad motherly smile," "he quietly stretched out his thick earth-bespattered finger with its blackened nail and gently touched my trembling lips."<sup>13</sup> The episode is almost iconographic in its detail. As

<sup>12</sup> PSS 22:46.

<sup>13</sup> PSS, 22:47–48. In his notebook, Dostoevsky does not mention being touched on the lips: "And how this peasant Marey patted me on the cheek and head.

though to emphasize its importance, Dostoevsky in his *Diary of a Writer* repeats his description of it a few moments later.

Suddenly now, twenty years later, in Siberia I remembered this entire meeting with great clarity, to the last detail. That is, it had lain in my soul unnoticed, on its own, and without my will and then suddenly was remembered when it was needed; remembered was this tender, motherly smile of that poor serf, his sign of the cross, the nodding of his head . . . and especially that thick finger bespattered with earth with which quietly and with such shy tenderness he touched my trembling lips. Of course, anybody would have comforted a child, but here in this lonely encounter it seems that something quite different happened, and if I had been his own son, he could not have looked at me and beamed a more luminous glance of love; yet who compelled him? . . . The meeting was a solitary one, in an empty field, and only God, perhaps, saw from above with what profound and enlightened human feeling, and with what delicate, almost feminine tenderness, the heart of a coarse, savagely ignorant Russian serf was filled, a serf who at the time neither expected nor dreamed, of his emancipation.<sup>14</sup>

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I had forgotten this, that is, not forgotten, but had only recalled it in prison. These recollections made it possible for me to survive in prison." PSS, 24:107.

<sup>14</sup> PSS, 22:49. The incident Dostoevsky recalls is archtypal in its essence. In his *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821), Thomas de Quincey recalls the following incident in his life: A gentleman's butler or person of some lower rank sitting next to him on a mail coach produces an initial impression of a "brutal fellow." But on learning that the wandering child, De Quincey, was ill, this man, while the child was sleeping, put his arm around him to protect him from falling off. De Quincey goes on to write: "And for the rest of my journey he behaved to me with the gentleness of a woman, so that at length, I almost lay in his arms." This incident, along with many others in his life, convinced De Quincey "how easily a man who has never been in any great distress may pass through life without knowing, in his own person at least, anything of the possible goodness of the human heart, or as I must add, with a sigh, of its possible vileness. So thick a curtain of manners is drawn over the features and expression of men's natures that, to the ordinary observer, the two extremities and the infinite field of varieties which lie between them are all confounded, the vast and multitudinous compass of their several harmonies reduced to the meager outline of differences expressed in the gamut or alphabet of elementary sounds." See Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (New York and Toronto, 1966), 50–51.

The change of heart of Dostoevsky, the convict, is, of course, the miracle of the memory-purified image of Marey, an image expressed in his "gentle motherly smile" (mentioned three times), his "shy, feminine tenderness," his "luminous glance of love." At the moment of contact with the boy Dostoevsky, Marey is the very embodiment of love and motherly compassion.

Dostoevsky has selected this name "Marey" for the peasant of his childhood memory,<sup>15</sup> for he remarks, significantly, on his first mention of the peasant, "I do not know if there is such a name." The name, if indeed it exists, is certainly a rare one. It is, in any case, not accidental that the name or word "Marey" could very easily have been associated in the popular mind with the dialect pronunciation of "Mariia" (Mary), which is "Mareia." The peasant Marey, in all his essential characteristics, his tenderness, and motherly compassion, is an imitation of the Holy Mary. In this sense, the nine-year-old Dostoevsky, like the child Alyosha Karamazov whose mother held him up before the icon-image of Mary, may be said to have come under the protection of the Madonna.

The symbolic meaning of Dostoevsky's encounter with Marey dawned upon him only as a convict in prison. This encounter, as Dostoevsky, the writer, conceives it, suggests the depth of feeling and concept that underlay his assertion in the last section of *Diary of a Writer* in 1873 that at the basis of his change of "convictions and heart" lay "direct contact with the people, brotherly unity with it in the common

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The Russian sculptor Naum Gabo (1890-1977), in the tradition of De Quincy and Dostoevsky, relates an incident from his childhood almost identical in detail and moral import with Dostoevsky's story in "The Peasant Marey." Wandering off into an "enchanted" woods near his home, the child Gabo encounters a "huge, overwhelming image of a peasant with an ax." He faints, but is carried in the arms of the same peasant home to safety. Later in life, Gabo writes, he learned that the fear he had had in general of "Man—of the Stranger" was rather a fear of his unknown image. "And when I found him as my neighbor among the multitude of my contemporaries, I saw that he might be much more afraid of me than I of him, and that it was perhaps up to me to take him into my arms and bring him safely to his home whence he had wandered so frightfully far away." See *Of Divers Arts*, Bollingen Series XXXV 8 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), 12–13, 15.

<sup>15</sup> See Andrei Dostoevskii, *Vospominaniia*, op. cit., 58–59.

misfortune.”<sup>16</sup> Contact with the people for Dostoevsky, as for Alyosha Karamazov in the chapter “Cana of Galilee,” was not only a contact with the rejuvenating powers of the earth, but a hidden revelation. Thus, the special words of Dostoevsky—“something different” happened—point to a mystical experience, a religious moment of consecration—a solitary one, as Dostoevsky puts it, in an empty field with only God looking on.

Let us briefly review the experience remembered in “The Peasant Marey.” In prison, surrounded by coarse and frightening peasant convicts, Dostoevsky closes his eyes and recalls a moment in his childhood when, alone in the woods, he had a terrible fright about a wolf (in Russian, the word for “wolf” is “volk”). We have an obvious parallel in experience here. On the one hand, we have the moment of panic in the woods in which the boy fears a terrible wolf; this all turns out to have been a hallucination. On the other hand, we have a moment of panic in the barracks in which Dostoevsky, the convict, is terrorized by monster convicts; this also turns out to have been something of a hallucination, a nightmare, a demonic suggestion, for it involved a deep misunderstanding of the true nature of the convicts, or Russian people. (The German word for “the people,” “das Volk,” comes to mind here.) Dostoevsky had been deceived in his judgment by alluvial filth, the diabolical mask of ugliness. In the first instance, the terrified child is touched on the lips and cured of his hallucination by the compassionate Marey with his “gentle motherly smile.” In the second instance, Dostoevsky the convict is cured of his hatred and anger, his moral blindness, by what he calls the “gentle smile of memory”:

All this I recalled at once, I do not know why, but with amazing accuracy of detail. I suddenly came to and sat up in my bunk and, I remember, I could still feel the gentle smile of memory on my face. For another minute I went on recalling that incident of my childhood.<sup>17</sup>

The gentle smile of memory, of course, spreads across the hardened, embittered face of Dostoevsky, the convict, comforts him in his suffering, and above all—momentarily, to be sure—banishes from

<sup>16</sup> PSS, 21:133–134.

<sup>17</sup> PSS, 22:49.



his heart all hatred and anger. The esthetic impact of the daydream-recollection with its glowing image of Marey is such as to make him feel, precisely feel, that he could look at the convicts with quite different eyes.

And yet for Dostoevsky the convict, in the very first months of his imprisonment, there was as yet no real seeing into the inner human core of the convicts. Under the impact of his daydream-recollection, he only sensed or supposed the existence of other peasant Mareys under the harsh exterior of the convicts. "But after all I cannot really look into his heart," he says. If we read correctly the concluding passage from "The Peasant Marey," we realize that the daydream-recollection constituted a form of intuition by analogy; the purified dream-image of Marey momentarily came between Dostoevsky and the convicts. What the daydream-recollection did for Dostoevsky, the convict, was to open up for Dostoevsky, the artist, the possibility of a new "quite different glance"; it opened the way for those months and years of purifying his recollection of his years in prison, years of slow spiritual recovery, years of preparation of *Notes from the House of the Dead*, the pivotal work in Dostoevsky's post-exile artistic development. In the latter work, in which philosophical idealism blends with a Christian faith and mythology, Dostoevsky simultaneously formulates his Christian poetics<sup>18</sup> and signals his own personal and artistic triumph over the raw, naturalistic, lethal reality of Russian life. The daydream-recollection, then, is analogous to the artistic process. As Dostoevsky himself notes in "The Peasant Marey," it is an active creative process working toward a final, integral, complete "picture." Further, the daydream-recollection, as a completed memory image, in all its artistic detail, acts upon the dreamer like a work of art: it momentarily transforms him, inwardly and outwardly. Yet the convict Dostoevsky's daydream-recollection was not art in itself. It became art in the final recollection of the recollection, that is, when the anecdote or distant recollection, after much analysis and correction, after prolonged search for form and meaning, was finally embodied in artistic imagery.

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<sup>18</sup> In a letter to A. E. Wrangel, April 13, 1856, Dostoevsky refers to a then unpublished essay he had written, "Letters about Art"—one that has not been preserved. The essay, he wrote, is the "fruit of decades of thought. I worked it out to the last word in Omsk . . . It is directly about role of Christianity in art." PSS, 28(1):229.

In sum, we can distinguish three intersecting levels of vision or esthetic-spiritual experience. The first vision pertains to the appearance of Marey before the nine-year-old Dostoevsky. Something happened to the child in the field: he was not merely comforted; his lips were touched, consecrated by earth; he was blessed by the archetypal man of the people, the peasant Marey. The poet discovers in this the inner mystical moment of his spiritual formation and calling. This whole "adventure," as Dostoevsky calls it, along with the memory of Marey, was, of course, quickly forgotten by the child. But nothing is ever lost. It only waits to be recovered.

The second vision was experienced by the convict Dostoevsky in prison on the second day of Easter week. Just as the Russian peasant was saved in centuries of suffering by the luminous, embodied ideals of the people, so the image of Marey, as Dostoevsky puts it, "came back when it was needed," came back in the purifying form of a daydream-revelation.

The third and final vision involved the crucial artistic embodiment of all that the child experienced, the convict unearthed, and artistic memory refined. The miracle of the encounter that became the miracle of the daydream now becomes the miracle of the resurrection. Here, memory and imagination, always prompting one another, merge into the image. The poet is no longer witness, but creator. "The time is fulfilled" (Mk. 1:15). Here, the lips of the poet open, the dream becomes prophecy, and prophecy, the word.

At the beginning of "The Peasant Marey," Dostoevsky recalls the words of the Polish convict, "Je hais ces brigands." He concludes his story with a final reference to these words. On the very evening of his daydream, Dostoevsky writes he met the Polish convict again. "Unfortunate one!" he exclaims, "Now he could not have had any recollections about any Mareys or any other view of these people except, 'Je hais ces brigands!' No, these Poles endured more than we did at that time!" In this final line, Dostoevsky brings the reader back to the reality of the prison, the reality of suffering, the reality of reality as he himself had experienced it during his four years in Omsk.

The words of hatred he attributes to the suffering Polish convict he must have uttered countless times himself. The recollection of the recollection of Marey, after all, was not Dostoevsky's only recollection of his prison years. "Even now at nights," he writes in "The Peasant Marey," "I sometimes dream of that time, and I have no dreams more

agonizing than these."<sup>19</sup> "Those four years," Dostoevsky had written his brother, Andrey, on November 6, 1854, a few months after his release from prison, "I consider a time in which I was buried alive and closed up in a coffin. I haven't the strength to tell you, my friend, what a frightful time this was. It was inexpressible, endless suffering, because every hour, every minute weighed on my soul like a stone."<sup>20</sup> "Man does not live his whole life, but composes himself, *self-composes himself*," Dostoevsky wrote apropos of Katerina Ivanovna in *The Brothers Karamazov* in his last notebook in 1881.<sup>21</sup> Anecdote and distant recollection merge in "The Peasant Marey." Without doubt, there is material of biographical interest here, though it is clear that this material has been reshaped and that the image of Marey is an idealized one.<sup>22</sup> Yet the real importance of the sketch as a work of art lies not in its measure of literal truthfulness to incidents in Dostoevsky's life, but in the way it signals the manner in which he approached his prison experiences in the critical period of his Siberian exile. His emphasis upon the role of "artistic sense" as opposed to "good will" in the Russian writer's perception of the Russian people may also be taken as something of an artist's confession. Dostoevsky, the man and convict, struggling to survive, certainly felt little "good will" toward the convicts with whom

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<sup>19</sup> PSS, 22:47.

<sup>20</sup> PSS, 28(1)181.

<sup>21</sup> "Chelovek vsiu zhizn' ne zhivet, a sochiniaet sebia, samosochiniaetsia." PSS, 27:59.

<sup>22</sup> It is difficult to say to what extent Dostoevsky "corrected," or idealized, the original peasant Marey. In his notebook in January 1876, at the time of the publication of "The Peasant Marey," in his *Diary of a Writer* he recalls Marey in a distinctly unidyllic context. "Marey. He loves his mare and calls her his wet-nurse And if he has moments of impatience and the Tatar breaks out in him and he begins to lash the one who feeds him with a whip across the eyes when she gets stuck in the mud with the wagon, then remember the courier here, upbringing, habits, recollections, vodka, Vorobiev." ("Vorobiev" stands in for Dostoevsky as a "mythic" despotic figure) (PSS, 24:128). Dostoevsky associates the "Marey" of his notebook entry (he has in mind here Marey as a peasant type) with the peasant Mikolka from Raskolnikov's dream who lashes his mare across her "gentle eyes." In "The Peasant Marey," Marey is in the field "with his mare," but there is no indication of any brutal behavior on his part toward the mare or of any hostile feelings on the part of the child toward the peasant, as in Raskolnikov's dream.

he lived those four terrible years. But with his “artistic sense,” he discerned an inner moral truth, the truth of their essential humanity.<sup>23</sup> This is the real message of “The Peasant Marey.”

It does not seem likely that Dostoevsky experienced any sudden revelation about the Russian peasant, though we cannot exclude the possibility of a mystical experience in prison. The author of *Poor Folk* had many revelations of the humanity that lay beneath the coarse exterior of the Russian peasant-convict. What Dostoevsky does in “The Peasant Marey,” however, is to dramatize the miracle of artistic revelation, the *miracle of the artistic process itself*, involving esthetic distancing, the interplay of memory and imagination, and the perception of the inner “idea” of reality.

“The Peasant Marey,” then, points directly to Dostoevsky’s artistic and spiritual resolution of his crisis in prison and his Siberian exile, a crisis involving not only his personal sufferings and feelings of hatred and resentment, but his recognition of the profound tragedy of the Russian people and its history. Dostoevsky did not merely discover a people buried, like himself, in prison, but a people buried in the alluvial barbarism of Russian life and history. The esthetic and spiritual processes whereby Dostoevsky overcame his disillusionments, as well as his own misery with its accumulation of bitterness and hatred, the processes whereby he reassembled broken dreams and ideals on the basis of a renewed Christian faith—this is the real subject of “The Peasant Marey.” Though written almost a decade and a half after *House*

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<sup>23</sup> Dostoevsky’s long letter of February 22, 1854, shortly after his release from prison to his brother, Mikhail, provides evidence of the tension between ill-will born of hardship and artistic and humane insight and intuition. Dostoevsky begins by detailing his terrible situation in prison—over four long years “150 enemies never tired in their persecution of us” and our only defense was to meet it “with indifference, moral superiority”—but ends it with the exhilaration and affirmation of the artist: “A propos: how many types of common people, of characters, did I bring away with me from the prison camp! I lived together with them, and so I think I know them quite well. How many stories [did I hear] of vagabonds and robbers and in general of that whole dark and miserable world! Enough for whole volumes. What a marvelous people! On the whole the time was not lost for me. I may not have gotten to know Russia, but I got to know the Russian people, as well, perhaps, as only a few people know them.” (PSS, 28(1):169–170, 172).

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of *the Dead*, "The Peasant Marey," in fact, forms a fitting prologue to that work, to its poetics and the problems involved in its creation.

"Perhaps it will be noted that until this day I have hardly ever spoken in print about my life in prison," remarks Dostoevsky in "The Peasant Marey." "Now I wrote *Notes from the House of the Dead* fifteen years ago in the person of a fictitious character, a criminal who was supposed to have killed his wife. I may add, incidentally, as a minor detail that from that time many people have believed and even now maintain that I was exiled for the murder of my wife." An analysis of the problem of the fictitious narrator of *House of the Dead* leads to the heart of some of the central esthetic and ideological problems of that work.

THE MAKING OF A RUSSIAN ICON:  
SOLZHENITSYN'S "MATRYONA'S HOME"<sup>1</sup>

"O, Rus! My wife! Our long road lies painfully clear ahead!"

—Blok, "On the Field of Kulikovo"

"It chewed 'em all up. Can't even pick up the pieces." "That's a detail. The nine o'clock express nearly jumped the track, that would've been something."

—Solzhenitsyn, "Matryona's Home"

The years pass, and what is not recalled grows ever dimmer in our memory.

—Solzhenitsyn, Gulag Archipelago

Alexander Solzhenitsyn's tale "Matryona's Home" ("Matrenin dvor," 1963),<sup>2</sup> consisting of three little chapters, begins with a prologue that is brief, factual, yet tense with significant drama.

One hundred and eighty-four kilometers from Moscow, and a good half year after it happened, all trains slowed down their course almost to a crawl. The passengers pressed to the windows, went out into the vestibule: were they repairing the tracks, or what? Was there a change in schedule?

No. Past the crossing, the train again picked up speed and the passengers settled back.

Only the engineers knew and remembered what it was all about. And I.

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<sup>1</sup> From *Solzhenitsyn. A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Kathryn Feuer (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 60-70.

<sup>2</sup> The word "dvor," translated here as "home," has the more inclusive meaning of "homestead," or "farmstead," that is, it suggests the house, yard, and the whole domain.

These lines have a dramatic impact upon the reader: his curiosity instantly aroused, he peers ahead in order to learn what has happened, what will happen, what in fact will turn out to be the dramatic and ideological core of the story. The mystery is deepened by the narrator's cryptic and somewhat unconventional way of alluding to the cause of the slow-down: "eshche s dobrykh polgoda *posle togo vse poezda zamediali svoi khod,*" literally, "a good half *after that* all trains slowed down their course" (my italics—RLJ).

What is "that"? As the reader learns in chapter 2 of the tale, "that" is the accident which occurs when "two locomotives coupled together, without lights and moving backwards—why without lights nobody knows," crash into a tractor, two sledges loaded with lumber and sundry people at a railroad crossing, creating a havoc of organic and inorganic matter. Matryona, too, the central figure in the tale, is crushed.

A terrible accident. On the story's deeper symbolic plane of meaning, however, the accident is no accident; it is more than a chance error in the moving of railroad stock, more than a "mistake." The accident is the fated expression—in the story, the central metaphor—of vast social and national catastrophe. The accident emerges out of Russian life and history, most immediately out of the years of revolutionary upheaval and change; for Solzhenitsyn, profoundly tragic years involving the disfiguration and dislocation of Russian life. The narrator himself, though a marginal actor in this tale, in his own destiny, is a bearer of this theme of disfiguration and dislocation; one of the "distant ones" who has spent a good ten years in prison, he "came back at random from the dusty, hot desert lands—simply to Russia."<sup>3</sup>

This random movement of the narrator is philosophically of the same order as the strange movement of the "two locomotives coupled together without lights, and moving backwards"; both movements, seemingly unmotivated and senseless, are in fact symbolic expressions of one violent historical explosion. But the random movement of the locomotives embodies the terrifying amoral force of history; the haphazard movement of the narrator—the reaction of one of those

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<sup>3</sup> The time of the narrator's return to Russia is given as 1953, the year of the dictator Stalin's death. After his death, masses of amnestied convicts were released from Soviet concentration camps.



unfortunates to whom such history *happens*. The accident is history. Matryona is the focal point of the historical action.

"I wanted to work my way into, and lose myself in, the very core of Russia, if ever there was such a place," remarks the narrator in the opening lines of chapter 1. These words signal the pilot effort of Solzhenitsyn's "Matryona's Home": an effort to make a fundamental statement about Russian man and his reality. Solzhenitsyn's story is socialist realism turned on its head: it seeks to depict man not in the perspective of the future, but of the past, its myth and reality; it is a look at the old Adam, and at the same time, an attempt to restore in men's minds the lost outlines of the iconographic image, the concept of a viable ideal, one that is accessible and humane. Matryona's "home" is at the mythic core of Solzhenitsyn's Russia.

Matryona herself, the heroine of this fabled but ailing land, is ill; doomed to perish, she is nonetheless its restorative force, the bearer of the theme of its moral reformation. But the "core" of Russia is above all problematic, ominously complex in the contemporary and historical perspective of Solzhenitsyn; its ideal incarnation, its mythopoetic *figura*, Matryona is not only challenged symbolically by a "second" and "substitute" Matryona (the wife of Faddei), but by the old peasant Faddei himself, an incarnation of darker forces in the core of Russian life; it is challenged, finally, by the metallic era of socialist primary accumulation. The theme of disfiguration in "Matryona's Home" runs from past to present, from the ancient Russian peasant with an axe to the modern "excavators snarling about in the bogs."

The narrator's predilection for the pastoral ideal is prefigured in a scene curiously reminiscent of Ivan Turgenev in *A Hunter's Notebook* (*Zapiski okhotnika*, 1852; 1874): the narrator is sitting on a stump in the gentle rolling hills and woods of Vysokoe Pole (High Meadow), surrounded by "an unbroken ring of forest"; he wishes that he could live and die in such a place, do nothing but commune with nature "with the whole world silent." Solzhenitsyn's Russia, however, provides no such total immunity for man from man. "Torfoprodukt (peat product)?" ponders the narrator a little later as he scans his official orders directing him to a community of that name where he could find work. "Ah, Turgenev never knew that one could put together such a thing in Russian."<sup>4</sup> The modern place name "Torfoprodukt" and all it connotes

<sup>4</sup> "Torfoprodukt"—a compound of two words brought into the Russian

signals the end of the Russian idyll. It abruptly announces the theme of disfiguration (in Russian, "bezobrazie") in the heart of Russian culture: its language. "Torfoprodukt." A terrible accident. Language here anticipates the author's picture of social catastrophe. This "thematic" use of language is characteristic of "Matryona's Home," as it is in other works of Solzhenitsyn, where the typically rich, colloquial speech of Russian life enters into a veritable war with the mutilating jargon of bureaucracy and propaganda.

A growing rumble of imagery announces a curse of disfiguration on this land: the very "stump" upon which the narrator first sits in Vysokoe Pole; the jarring name "Torfoprodukt"; the strange signs at its railroad station, "scratched with a nail," and "carved with a knife"; the once dense and impenetrable pre-Revolutionary forests "cut down by the peat exploiters and the neighboring collective farm"; the acres of timber razed and sold at a profit in Odessa. And in the midst of these peaty lowlands, a scene of urban-industrial blight: "a settlement sprawled out in disorder" (barracks of the 1930s and the little houses with glass verandas of the 1950s), yet oddly skewed by a narrow gauge railroad which "here and there" ranged through it. Factory chimneys. Thick smoke. Piercing whistles. In this typical industrial settlement, the narrator could assume "without fear of error" that in the evening the "loud speaker" over the doors of the club would "screech forth in lacerating tones," that on the streets the drunkards would brawl, "not without thrusting at each other with knives." This imagery of social disfiguration, deformation, and disorder foreshadows the impending tragedy.

Torfoprodukt: this was where the narrator's dream of a "quiet little corner in Russia" had brought him. Torfoprodukt with its mutilated landscape is a last stop. "It was easy to arrive at Torfoprodukt, but not to leave." But Torfoprodukt is not all of Russia, at least not yet.

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language, "Torf" (German-Austrian dialect for "peat") and "produkt" (product). Turgenev, perhaps, is one the greatest prose stylists in Russian literature. However, the reference to Turgenev (the only Russian writer mentioned in "Matryona's Home") has deeper significance. "Matryona's Home," in certain features—its open form, its use of a narrator-observer, and (out of regard for censorship) its oblique critique of the social order—recalls Turgenev's sketches in *A Hunter's Notebook*. The power of "Matryona's Home," from a purely artistic point of view, rests on Solzhenitsyn's ability to *speak in images*.

The landscape of disfiguration is immediately offset by an atmosphere or setting such as that encountered in Washington Irving's "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" or "Rip Van Winkle." At daybreak, after his night at the railroad station, the narrator wanders to the market place and encounters a peasant woman selling milk. He takes a bottle and starts drinking it right away . . . A new world unfolds. "I was struck by her speech. She did not speak, but sang in a sing-song way and her words were the very ones I was longing to hear when I left Asia."

From this peasant woman the narrator learned that not everything was peat production, that beyond the railroad "was a hill, and behind the hill, a village, and this village was Talnovo, which had been here from time immemorial, even when the 'gypsy woman' lived there and the enchanted forest stood all round." And beyond Talnovo, "deeper into the hinterland, and farther from the railroad toward the lakes," follow a whole region of villages with "soothing" names that "promised me age-old Russia."

Thus, do the magically mellifluous words and drink of a Russian peasant woman in a "tiny market place" open the broad way, as in a fairy tale, to Matryona's little homestead with its "two or three willows, a lopsided house" and a pond with ducks and geese—a place that is close to the narrator's heart. And out of age-old Russia, out of the enchanted forest, out of Talnovo, out of her house emerges Matryona, a figure whom the narrator himself compares with one of the "grandmothers in fairy tales"; she emerges to survive and die in a world "turned upside down."

Matryona's strange little lopsided world with its quaint, almost grotesque interior might seem disfigured in the way of Torfoprodukt; yet it is in every respect its antithesis. Outwardly battered by use and nature, it has the warmth and humanity of its mistress, the simple rhythms and shapes of a workaday life. The dirty white goat with the twisted horn, the lame cat, the mice that run rampant behind the five loose layers of wallpaper, the tubs full of odd rubber plants, the food with its occasional litter of peat and cockroach legs—everything is touched by the benign and tangible presence of Matryona. Everything is manifestly what it is. Of the noisome cockroaches and mice, the narrator observes, significantly, that "there is nothing evil in them, no lie in them." It is here that the narrator "hermit" finds his cot, his refuge; it is here that he begins to discover his ideal.

The "lusterless mirror," like a Gogolian artifact, reflects the "bleary" eye of Matryona; it was plain, notes the narrator, that illness

had exhausted her (her illness is almost a motif in the tale). Yet her much-emphasized "roundish face" with its quixotic expression points to an almost legendary spiritual health and goodness.

There is more than a touch of the writings of Nikolay Gogol (1809–1852) in Matryona's immediate surroundings, in her life and in her person.<sup>5</sup> Yet this is no "vegetable life," no tedious world of physical satiety and slumber, no world in which the vitality of things parodies the slumber of man. Food is conspicuous by its absence or meagerness. And the narrator reconciles himself with his diet because "life had taught me not to find the meaning of everyday life in food" (an outlook, of course, quite distinct from that of Solzhenitsyn's convict hero in his gulag in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, 1962). In this, of course, the narrator mirrors the life view of Matryona. In an existence that is marginal to the engulfing life of the new social and economic forms of the collective farm and state enterprise (she had worked for the collective farm for twenty-five years, but was dismissed when she fell ill), Matryona scours about for food and fuel, potatoes, peat, and stumps; yet her essence is not in the Gogolian accumulation of things, in drawing everything toward herself, but in what might be called a proliferation of selfless activity. With wondrous energy, she aids others—individuals and enterprises—who invariably call on her in their moments of need. This goodness that is neither humble nor dumb, this simple nature that also feels pain and injustice, seems powered by an organic earthly force. In Matryona (her name is etymologically connected with the Russian word "mat'," or "mother"), in this peasant possessed of incredible physical strength, one recognizes those indefatigable laborers of Russian life: Russian women. Plain and simple in her half-pagan, half-Christian religiosity and ethic, Matryona is also a type that finds persistent embodiment in Russian literature, one of that class of simple and unpretentious people who do not preach but live their values. Such are the Mironovs in Alexander Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter* (1836) or Samson Vyrin in "The Station Master" (1831); such, too, are Maksim Maksimych in Mikhail Lermontov's *Hero of Our Time* (1841), Devushkin in Dostoevsky's *Poor*

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<sup>5</sup> We may note, as another example, the fleeting but touching mention of how Matryona, on receiving her pension money at last, orders from the "hunchbacked tailor" a "wonderful coat." The allusion here is to Gogol's classic story, "The Overcoat" ("Shinel'," 1842).

*Folk* (1846), Captain Tushin in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1863–1869), or even Chekhov's Samoylenko in "The Duel" (1891)—all people whom everybody takes for granted, but upon whom everybody depends; people whose reliability rests on their complete freedom from any kind of self-interest or opportunism.

The theme of disfiguration which rings out so emphatically at the opening of chapter 1 reaches its apogee in chapter 2 with the dismemberment, first, of Matryona's house, and then of Matryona herself in the accident. These two events, forming the structural and ideological center of the story, are part of the tangled skein of past and present. From Matryona herself, the narrator learns her tragic personal history: the disappearance of her betrothed, Faddei, in the World War I; her subsequent marriage to Faddei's brother, Yefim; and then the sudden reappearance of Faddei, axe in hand: "If it weren't my very own brother I'd cut you both down with this axe." And then the sequel: her luckless family life with Yefim (six children born and buried, the unfaithfulness, and finally, the disappearance of Yefim in the World War II).

Under pressure from Faddei and his daughter and son-in-law (the young couple needs a building in order to buy and keep a plot of land), Matryona agrees to yield in her lifetime what she had willed to her niece: the top room of her house. The house must be torn apart. "It was an agony for her to start about smashing that roof under which she had spent forty years," the narrator observes. "Even I as a tenant felt sick at the thought that they would tear out the boards and yank out the beams of the house. But this was the end of her whole life. Yet those who were insisting on it knew that her house could be broken up even while she was alive."

The mutilation of Matryona's house and the events leading up to the accident are described in detail. The mood is apocalyptic. Faddei with his sons and son-in-law turned up one February morning and began hacking away with their "five axes," setting up a screeching and creaking as they ripped off the boards. They worked feverishly, left chinks in the walls, and "everything indicated they were wreckers—not builders." Old Faddei comes to life in this work of destruction, his eyes "gleamed." Two weeks later, the dismembered room is piled onto two sledges. "All were working like madmen." But before leaving the mutilated house, they celebrate with drink and leave behind them a scene of "desolate carnage."

The railroad accident itself, the final episode in this terrible drama of destruction, is a mauling of men and material. "It chewed

'em all up. Can't even pick up the pieces," remarks one observer. The locomotives "came flying up and crushed to a pulp the three people who were between the tractor and sledges." Tractor, sledge, tracks, and locomotives are churned into a chaos. The remains of Matryona, covered with a dirty sack on a sled, are "jumbled together. The feet, half of the trunk and the left hand were missing." "The Lord has left her right hand," observes one peasant woman. "She will say her prayers there." This motif of the reformation of the spiritual image of Matryona at the opening of chapter 3 follows directly upon the last lines of the preceding chapter which speak of the fatality of the tragedy: "For forty years [Faddei's] threat had idled in a corner like an idle broadsword—and then struck at last. . . ."

Solzhenitsyn's use of the railroad and of the railroad accident in the ideological design of "Matryona's Home" follows in the rich tradition of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. For these two great novelists, the railroad symbolizes the commercial and capitalist disfiguration of Russian life and family. The railroad is part of the apocalyptic imagery in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (1868). The apocalyptic note is struck in the very first lines of the novel—in the ominous image of the train rushing through the fog, bearing Myshkin and Rogozhin into the chaos of Russian life. The theme of the railroad is used with consummate artistry in *Anna Karenina*. The railroad accident at the opening of the novel—a guard is crushed by one of the trains—is not an "accident" on the deepest level of the novel's meaning: both the death of the guard and the subsequent suicide of Anna on the tracks emerge as ultimate expressions of profound dislocations in Russian life in which "everything is topsy turvy" (Levin's words), in which new and destructive social and economic forces, spearheaded by the railroad, are overtaking traditional Russian life, tearing up what for Tolstoy is its rich communal and patriarchal fabric. Anna's suicide, in the last analysis, is inseparable from the general social tragedy in Russian life. The same may be said of Solzhenitsyn's conception of the death of Matryona. Her fear of railroads points not simply to her superstitious nature, but to an elemental sense of alienation from all that this railroad and its creation, Torfoprodukt, represent.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The narrator is very close to Matryona in his basic outlook on contemporary industrial society. His purely social perspectives seem to turn backward, rather than forward, into Russian history. Noteworthy in this respect, is his interest in photographing "somebody at an old-fashioned handloom."

The railroad crossing in "Matryona's Home," then, is the tragic junction between all forces in Russian life: those fated to destroy, those fated to perish, and those fated to bear witness to the disaster and record it. The accident is the focal point of a tragic action which involves the *entire* society. The remorseless realism of Solzhenitsyn in developing the theme of disfiguration and destruction in "Matryona's Home" prefigures his *Gulag Archipelago* (1973). What dominates the consciousness in a reading of "Matryona's Home," however, is not only the mutilated house and body of Matryona, obvious symbols of a much larger edifice, but the brutal and elementary character of the mutilating forces, senselessness and moral anarchy reaching deeply into man and history. The tragic destiny of Matryona is not alone the product of a "new" upheaval in Russian life. Woven into that destiny is the record of men driven by crude impulses of need and greed, men who have accepted the rituals of Christianity but who have remained alien to its essence, its ethic of love and self-sacrifice.

The tragedy of botched life in "Matryona's Home" is more overwhelming because of the disparity between the real and the ideal that it exposes not only in society at large, but in man himself. In this connection, the figure of Faddei occupies a central place in Solzhenitsyn's tableau. The dark counterpart of Matryona on the mythic as well as the real plane of the story, Faddei is the legendary Russian peasant with an axe. How does he use that axe, as a "builder or destroyer"? Faddei, too, emerges out of the core of Russia; he threatens Matryona with his axe, seeks out another woman with the name of Matryona to marry, as though, in malice, to scratch out the very existence of the "first" Matryona; finally, eyes gleaming, he lays an axe to Matryona's house, and in effect, to Matryona herself. This strange person carries the motif of *demonism* in the story: not without reason is the epithet "dark" (*chernyi*) applied seven times in the opening two lines of the description of Faddei.

The narrator outlines the sad state of affairs in Faddei's life after the accident: his daughter's sanity has been shaken, his son-in-law faces a criminal charge in connection with the accident, and his son, as well as his first betrothed, Matryona, are dead. Faddei stands by the coffins only briefly, then leaves. "His lofty brow was clouded by painful thoughts, but what he was thinking about was how to save the timbers of the top room from the flames and from Matryona's scheming sisters." Faddei's "lofty brow," struggling with thought, seems to promise something more worthy of the destiny of man than



acquisitiveness. But the promise is a lie. "Going over the people of Talnovo in my mind," the narrator continues, "I realized that Faddei was not the only one like that."

Faddei's choice of evil arouses in the narrator the following speculation: "The [Russian] language strangely calls property our *good*, whether it be the people's property or personal. And yet losing any of it is considered disgraceful and stupid by the people." (The Russian word "dobro" may signify either ethical "good" or "property," that is, "goods.") The line of thought here is a tragic one: the only "good" that man understands is property, material goods, in short, whatever is *good for him*, whatever serves his self-interest; his feeling of "shame" in giving up property, therefore, parodies that feeling of shame man is supposed to feel when he deviates from ethical good, from his supposed inner sense of what is right or just. In like manner, Faddei's "painful thoughts," in their inner essence and genealogy, sharply parody and contradict the lofty spiritual attribute arbitrarily assigned to the "lofty brow" by the indulgent observer.<sup>7</sup>

The demonism of Faddei, then, consists in the fact that he, like so many others around him, stands at the fringe of moral evolution, a troubled and uncertain realm where, as Dostoevsky repeatedly demonstrates, acquisitiveness, violence, and sensuality constitute an entangling syndrome.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In his portrait of Faddei, Solzhenitsyn may be polemicizing with Turgenev's portrait of the "peasant Khor" in the latter's story, "Khor and Kalinych" in his *Hunter's Notebook*. Khor's face reminds Turgenev's narrator of the face of Socrates: "the same high bumpy brow," etc. More important, Turgenev admires Khor for his "positive, practical, efficient head, a rationalist." Khor's general disposition convinces Turgenev's narrator that "Peter the Great was preeminently a Russian man, precisely in his transformations." For Solzhenitsyn and many others, however, Peter the Great's reforms were regarded as manifestly *destructive* of Russian peasant and national life. In this context, Solzhenitsyn's axe-bearing peasant Faddei turns Turgenev's "Khor" upside down: the "westernized" peasant has degenerated in Solzhenitsyn's story. Peter the Great's so-called "transformations" of Russia, for Solzhenitsyn, are deformations.

<sup>8</sup> The ambiguity of the word "dobro" is brought out by Dostoevsky in Raskolnikov's dream about the beating of the mare. "My property!" (*Moe dobro!*) screams the peasant Mikolka repeatedly as he beats his horse. Mikolka's crude "ethic" may be put into words: what I covet and own releases me from all obligations because it is *my* good (property).

Even the religious conventions and rituals would seem only to mask man's moral and spiritual immaturity. "I observed in the weeping a coldly thought-out time-worn pattern," the narrator observes of the lamentations over the body of Matryona. The striving for goods set the tone of these "political" lamentations. "At her burial all sang, 'Worthy Is She.' Then again thrice over: eternal memory! eternal memory! eternal memory! But the voices were hoarse, discordant, their faces drunk and nobody put any feelings into the eternal memory." After the special guests left, the remaining relatives "took out their cigarettes, smoked, exchanged jokes and laughter." In such a world, Matryona, who "never tried to acquire things for herself," who "never struggled to buy things and then treasure them more than life," who "never tried to dress smartly," was inevitably considered a "ridiculous creature"; in such a world, Matryona, who would work for others without pay, who even accompanied her dismembered house to the railroad crossing (as though to her crucifixion), was inevitably pitied and scorned; in such a world, as the narrator concludes, Matryona was the only true "righteous" one. "All of us lived alongside her and did not understand that she was that very righteous one without whom, according to the proverb, no village can stand. Nor city. Nor our whole earth."

Matryona, clearly, is the only true Christian, in the language of her time—the only true communist.

The Russian word for image or form is "obraz," and it carries the implication of the highest beauty; it also stands for "icon"; its antithesis in the Russian language is "bezobrazie" —disfiguration, the monstrous, literally, that which is "without form or image." These two moral-esthetic opposites structure Solzhenitsyn's story (as they do Dostoevsky's worldview) and invest much of its imagery with their deeper symbolic meaning. Matryona is Mother Russia. Her death, in the symbolism of Solzhenitsyn, signifies Russia's martyrdom.

Matryona is no more. Somebody precious had been killed (*ubit rodnoi chelovek*). And I had reproached her the day before for wearing my jerkin. The ornately drawn red and yellow peasant woman in the bookstore advertising poster smiled joyfully.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The word "rodnoi" has several related meanings: one's own (a close, blood relationship); somebody or something close in spirit or way of life; native; dear; precious. The phrase, then "ubit rodnoi chelovek" (literally, "a dear, or precious, or closely related person has been killed") suggests an intimate

Matryona, real and tangible, nonetheless has a mythic aura (she invisibly flutters about the hut bidding all farewell at the end of the story); but she is infinitely more real in all her moral and spiritual health, than the "joyfully smiling" woman who looks down at the narrator from the poster on the wall of the hut, that fabricated Soviet madonna who knows no home in the real world as she knows no suffering. Matryona, horribly disfigured in the accident, still emerges a symbol of transcendent spiritual beauty. Solzhenitsyn's final description of Matryona in death suggests precisely the triumph of image (*obraz*) over disfiguration (*bezobrazie*). "Matryona lay in her coffin. Her lifeless, mangled body was neatly and simply covered with a clean sheet. Her head was enveloped in a white kerchief, but her face, undamaged and peaceful, seemed more alive than dead." Matryona's death completes the making of a Russian icon.

A premonition of catastrophe pervades the prologue to this story. "Only the engineers knew and remembered what it was all about. And I." The author Solzhenitsyn merges with the narrator, memory with conscience, history with art. Of course, precisely on this level of art, in the creation of moral-esthetic form, the aching disparity of the real and ideal is bridged, the catastrophe of history is overcome, suffering is redeemed, and the possibility of moral progress in society restored. Such is the action of all significant art.

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family relationship between the narrator and Matryona, as between a mother and son.

*CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES*

## DOSTOEVSKY'S CONCEPT OF REALITY AND ITS REPRESENTATION IN ART<sup>1</sup>

"By the word reality we understand everything that is," observed Belinsky in 1840, "the visible world and the spiritual world, the world of facts and the world of ideas."<sup>2</sup> Belinsky's definition—which belongs to his middle or so-called Hegelian period of rationalization of reality—comes close to characterizing Dostoevsky's omnibus view of reality. We shall not encounter a single binding concept of reality in Dostoevsky's thought; rather, his notion of reality is a syncretism.<sup>3</sup> Reality for him

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<sup>1</sup> From Robert Louis Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form: A Study of his Philosophy of Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), 71-91.

<sup>2</sup> V. G. Belinskii, "Gore ot uma," in *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, 3 vols., ed. F.M. Golovchenko (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1948), 1: 469.

<sup>3</sup> The syncretic character of Dostoevsky's realism has been noted by L. P. Grossman and others. Grossman writes, "Close in many respects to the current of critical representation of reality, and frequently offering fine examples of it, the style of the novelist is unique and qualitatively different. A profound truthfulness of experience gives to his painting the sharp features of a realistic reflection of life. But this is . . . realism of a special type—psychological or grotesque, or in the words of Dostoevsky himself, 'prophetic,' i.e. striving to determine on the basis of the deep currents of contemporary history, the lines of its future development." L. P. Grossman, "Dostoevskii-khudozhnik," in *Tvorchestvo F.M. Dostoevskogo*, ed. L. D. Opuľ'skaia (Moscow: Akademiia nauk, 1959), 368. J. van der Eng in *Dostoevskij Romancier* (Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1957), 44-45, notes the range of definitions of Dostoevsky's realism in critical literature: "mystical realism," "symbolic realism," "symbolic or transcendental realism," the "realism of an epileptic," "demoniac realism," "fantastic realism," "*réalisme du dernier degré*," "allegorical realism," "psychological realism."

embraces concrete, historical reality with its classes, its immediate problems and conflicts, and its social and national types which give expression to the life and development of society. But Dostoevsky's reality also encompasses the ideals and dreams that are part of social reality, and their embodiment in ideal types. These ideals and dreams, though they arise in a specific historical moment or context, relate ultimately to a universal spiritual reality; it is in this deeper, archetypal reality that Dostoevsky seeks the ultimate meaning of man's existence. Reality, he writes in "Two Suicides," in the October 1876 issue of *Diary of a Writer*, is "all available human meaning," but "we can never exhaust the whole of a phenomenon, never reach its ends and beginnings. We are familiar only with the immediate, visible, current, and this only in its appearance, while the ends and beginnings—all this is still a realm of the fantastic for man."<sup>4</sup> But it is precisely this realm of reality without end—at its point of intersection with man's "immediate" present—that is the exploratory realm of art for Dostoevsky. Reality for him, finally, is *man*: the journey of his life. This journey, like that of Dante in the *Commedia*, is eminently real, concrete, and historical; yet at the same time, like Dante's, it is symbolic and imbued with a meaning and perspective that is transcendental and timeless.

In "Mr. [Dobrolyu]bov and the Question of Art" (1861) Dostoevsky writes that "one may know a fact, see it oneself a hundred times, and still not get the impression one would if somebody else, a particular person, stands beside you and points out to you that very fact, but of course, in his own way, explains it to you in his own words, compels you to look at that fact with his own glance. A real talent is recognized by just this influence."<sup>5</sup> This is a very simple way of describing the role of the artist in the artistic representation of reality. The "particular person," the artist, distinguishes an ordinary fact; he gives it special shape or form (his own glance, his own words, his own way). The artist does not mirror reality (the ordinary observer performs this essentially unperceptive act a hundred times); rather, he acts upon reality, "explains" it through the shaping he gives to it, through form; he gives us a unique "impression" of it. The artistic power with which the artist compels us to view reality resides in the form that he gives to reality. We may note, finally, the basis here for a distinction between

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<sup>4</sup> PSS, 23:145.

<sup>5</sup> PSS, 18:89–90.

two kinds of reality: an apparent, everyday reality; and a real or underlying reality that is visible to the artist but hidden to the formless and unforming glance. The artist is the one who *sees into* life, perceives all its richness and complexity in depth. The image of the eyes—of sight and vision—is recurrent throughout all of Dostoevsky's discussion of the artistic representation of reality. "Really, examine some fact of real life, even one which at first glance is not very striking," Dostoevsky writes later in his *Diary of a Writer*, "and if only you are able and have the eyes you will discover in it a depth such as is not to be found in Shakespeare. But really here is just the whole point: *whose eyes and who is able?* Indeed, not only to create and write artistic works, but even just to note a fact, something in the way of an artist is also needed."<sup>6</sup>

The problem of the representation of reality in art and literature is at the center of "The Exhibition in the Academy of Arts: 1860–1861." Dostoevsky singles out for particular criticism a work of the painter Valery I. Jakoby (1834–1902), entitled "Convicts at a Halting Point."<sup>7</sup> The picture is striking for its remarkable exactitude, he writes. "Everything is like that even in nature . . . if one looks at nature, so to speak, only from without." The spectator looks at the picture as though he saw it in a mirror or in an expertly touched-up photograph. But the photographic snapshot or mirror reflection is by no means an artistic work, Dostoevsky insists again in "The Exhibition at the Academy of Arts." "Not photographic faithfulness, not mechanical accuracy, but something else, larger, broader, deeper is demanded from art." Accuracy and faithfulness are needed only in a basic sense, as material "out of which the artistic work is then created; it is a tool of creation. In a mirror reflection one does not see how the mirror looks at the subject, or put another way, it is evident that it does not look at all, but reflects passively, mechanically." Dostoevsky insists that this is not the case with the true artist; whether in a picture, story, or musical work "he himself will be visible invariably; he will be reflected involuntarily; even against his will, he will speak out with all his views, with his character, in accordance with his development." When we overhear two people discussing an ordinary street incident, Dostoevsky observes by way of

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<sup>6</sup> PSS, 23:145.

<sup>7</sup> Jacoby received a gold medal for his painting, "Convicts at a Halting Point" (Prival arestantov) at the Academy of Arts Exhibition in St. Petersburg, 1861.



example, we often guess their age, the nature and field of their work, their level of development, and even their rank in the civil service.<sup>8</sup> The artist, then, cannot evade identification.

Dostoevsky does not elaborate upon the notion that a writer will be reflected in his art even against his will. Belinsky much earlier had advanced the view that the thought of an artist in his poetic creation may contradict his personal convictions.<sup>9</sup> The radical critic Dobrolyubov later elaborated on this view with his theory that social type in an artistic work may reveal an author's view independently of, and even contrary to, his conscious intentions.<sup>10</sup> Dostoevsky appears to be echoing Dobrolyubov's theory in the distinction he makes in "Stories of N. V. Uspensky" between the "preconceived view" of the artist and his "real view" expressed in social type.<sup>11</sup>

"There is not, and cannot be, any epic, indifferent tranquility in our time," Dostoevsky writes in "The Exhibition in the Academy of Arts: 1860-1861." Only completely undeveloped, capricious, or mad people could manifest such tranquility. And since these "sad possibilities" are unlikely in the artist, Dostoevsky concludes that the artist's audience is right in demanding that he "view nature not as a photographic

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<sup>8</sup> PSS, 19:153.

<sup>9</sup> Belinsky argues in his article "Menzel as a Critic of Goethe" in 1840 that one must distinguish between the *man* and the *artist*. Art has its own laws, he insists, on the basis of which one must examine its works. "The thought, expressed by a poet in a creation, may contradict the personal conviction of the critic, without ceasing to be true and universal, provided the creation is really an artistic one, because man, as a limited individual, may err and nourish false convictions, but the poet, as the organ of the general and universal, as the direct manifestation of the spirit, cannot err and speak a lie . . . Therefore, to find out whether a thought expressed by a poet in his work is correct, one must first find out whether his creation is really artistic." Belinskii, "Mentsel', kak kritik Gete," *op. cit.*, 1, 429-430.

<sup>10</sup> See, in particular, the opening section of N. A. Dobrolyubov's essay, "Realm of Darkness." Dobrolyubov distinguishes between the artist as artist and the artist as thinker. "Frequently even in abstract discussions [the artist] expresses concepts strikingly in contradiction with what is expressed in his artistic work." Truth, according to Dobrolyubov, lies in the images created by the artist, in the *types* created by him. See N. A. Dobrolyubov "Temnoe tsarstvo," *Izbrannnye sochineniia* (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1948), 104.

<sup>11</sup> PSS, 19:179.

apparatus sees it, but as a man." The representation of reality in art is a humanistic process.

Dostoevsky's concept of the artistic representation of reality is brought out in his criticism of Jacoby's painting. The subject of the painting, the representation of convicts, was one which could not but intensely interest the author of *Notes from the House of the Dead*. Jacoby's painting (we summarize Dostoevsky's description of it) represents a group of convicts surrounding a wagon; upon it lies a dead man and on his outstretched hand is a precious ring. The figure of the dead convict suggests a person of gentry origin. Another convict, "with a repulsive face," reaches out from beneath the wagon and is in the act of removing the ring from the dead man's hand. He produces upon the observer the impression of a "reptile that is foul and at the same time dangerous, like a scorpion." An officer stands by the corpse, very indifferently smoking a pipe; he is holding open one of the eyes of the dead convict and calmly looking at it. His face expresses neither sympathy, nor compassion, nor surprise—absolutely nothing. Another convict dully examines a wound made by his chains.

In ancient times, Dostoevsky remarks, people would have said that the artist "must see with physical eyes, and, above all, with the eyes of the soul, or with a spiritual glance." Jacoby, in his opinion, lacks this second pair of eyes. There is not a trace of artistry in the painting. The figures of the convicts, he complains, all appear as scoundrels, monstrous. The dead man alone is an exception to this impression of monstrousness. A splendid youth in life, academic demands made it impossible to give him "more ordinary or less classical features: thus one sees a man of birth among a vile people, vile in the sense that he has understood it all his life." Dostoevsky acknowledges the hopeless condition of the convicts, but "at the same time it is impossible not to allow that they are people. At least present them to us as people, if you are an artist, and leave the photographing of them to the phrenologists and the judicial investigators."<sup>12</sup> But it is precisely man that Jacoby does not reveal.

Dostoevsky resents this caricature depiction of the convicts with its underlying class snobbism. But the basis of his criticism is esthetic: the artist must go beyond surface reality. "We think it insufficient to set forth faithfully all the given qualities of a person; one must resolutely

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<sup>12</sup> PSS, 19:152–154.

illumine him with one's own artistic vision," Dostoevsky writes in "Apropos of a New Drama" his *Diary of a Writer* in 1873. "A genuine artist should under no circumstances remain on one level with the person portrayed by him, contenting himself with the mere realistic truth of that person: the impression will carry no truth."<sup>13</sup> "Above all," Dostoevsky writes earlier in his critique of Jacoby's painting at the "Exhibition of the Academy of Arts in 1860–1861," "one must master the difficulties of transmitting actual truth in order to rise to the heights of artistic truth."<sup>14</sup> Jacoby in his striving for photographic truth, in his play for effect, has depicted a lie. "This is melodrama and not reality," Dostoevsky insists.<sup>15</sup> The painting, in other words, appeals for its effect to the upper class view of the convict and of the people; it confronts the observer with his own luridly exaggerated and cliché notion of a "vile" people. Here there can be no true reality, no representation of deeper human reality, but only a crude caricature in which the surface, the face of reality as it were, is divorced from its meanings, from the deeper moral substratum of reality.

The faces of the convicts are disfigured; this is "actual" or surface truth. But surface reality, Dostoevsky points out in "Apropos of the Exhibition" in his *Diary of a Writer* for 1873, is deceptive. Why—he asks—does a portrait painter long scrutinize the subject of his painting before setting to work? "Because he knows in practice that man does not always resemble himself, and therefore he seeks out 'the main idea of his physiognomy,' that moment when the subject most resembles himself."<sup>16</sup> Versilov in Dostoevsky's novel *The Raw Youth* (1875), echoing Dostoevsky's views, observes that only on rare occasions does a man's face express his "main idea, his most defining idea." The painter "studies and divines this idea," whereas on the other hand "photography catches man as [he] is, and it is quite possible that Napoleon at one moment would have turned out looking stupid, and Bismarck—tender."

The "main idea" is the organizing principle in a work of art. On the other hand, when the detail or aggregation of details substitutes

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<sup>13</sup> PSS, 21:97.

<sup>14</sup> PSS, 19:154.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> PSS, 21:75.

for the idea, the result is not realism but caricature. Thus, the quixotic hero of Dostoevsky's fantastic story, "Bobok" (*Diary of a Writer*, 1873) discussing a portrait of which he is the subject, remarks that he believes the artist did his portrait "not for the sake of literature, but for the sake of my two symmetrical warts on my forehead: it's a phenomenon, so to speak. They have no idea, so now they go to town on phenomena. Well, but how well he succeeded with my two warts in the portrait—they're alive! They call this realism."<sup>17</sup>

The unselected and unilluminated truth of detail, "mere realistic truth"—is caricature or, simply, ugliness. This idea is suggested indirectly in Dostoevsky's formulation of a remark by the young Arkady Dolgoruky in *The Raw Youth*; recalling a past incident: "I remember (for I remember that whole morning to the detail) that there followed between us a scene most disgusting in its realistic truth." The realistic truth here, like the realism of the portrait in "Bobok," has nothing to do with artistic realism; it is chaotic, detail-crammed reality of everyday life; it is untransfigured actuality. The writer Uspensky, Dostoevsky writes in "Stories of N. V. Uspensky," sets up his photographic machine on a plaza, without even selecting a point of view, and takes in everything "faithfully, *as is*. Naturally, everything that is absolutely unnecessary to this picture, or rather, unnecessary to the idea of this picture, will enter into the picture." Some laud this kind of approach for its accuracy. But is this accuracy, Dostoevsky asks, and does accuracy consist in this? "This is confusion, not accuracy."<sup>18</sup> "You needed chaos, disorder at all costs," Dostoevsky remarks apropos of Jacoby's arbitrary use of detail.<sup>19</sup> "Reality strives toward fragmentation," the narrator remarks in *Notes from the House of the Dead*. On the other hand, art imposes order upon reality—not mechanical order, but the order of organic form; and artistic form for Dostoevsky is inseparable from idea. There is little, he insists, that can be transmitted through the mere description of material. The playwright A. N. Ostrovsky, he observes in "Stories of N. B. Uspensky," would have had to be stretched out to two hundred volumes, and then these volumes would not convey what Ostrovsky

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<sup>17</sup> PSS, 21:42.

<sup>18</sup> PSS, 19:180.

<sup>19</sup> PSS, 19:155.

gave us in two volumes. "Moreover, one cannot faithfully transmit even the material with only a daguerreotype."<sup>20</sup>

Dostoevsky's sharp criticism of Emile Zola's naturalism in the 1870s, in light of the above discussion, is not unexpected. In "Children's Secrets," in the July–August 1876 issue of *Diary of a Writer*, Dostoevsky refers scornfully to our "so-called realist" Zola.<sup>21</sup> "In realism alone there is no truth," Dostoevsky writes in his notebook in 1875 in connection with a reading of Zola's *Le Ventre de Paris*. And again these notes: "Photography and the artist. Zola overlooked in G[eorge]. Sand (in the first tales) poetry and *beauty*, something far more real than leaving mankind with only filth."<sup>22</sup> In connection with Zola's naturalistic method, Dostoevsky writes, "He will describe every nail in the heel of a boot, and in a quarter of an hour, when the sun rises, he will again describe this nail in another illumination. This is not art. Speak to me one word [Pushkin], but let it be the most essential word."<sup>23</sup> "I can scarcely read him—what muck!" he writes to his wife, July 15, 1876. "And we scream about Zola as a celebrity, a luminary of realism!"<sup>24</sup>

"I am terribly fond of realism in art," Dostoevsky wrote in "An Isolated Case" in his March issue of *Diary of a Writer* in 1877, "but there is *no moral center* in the pictures of some of our contemporary, realists."<sup>25</sup> Jacoby's painting of Russian convicts lacked precisely a moral center. The criticism of his painting appears in sharp relief against the background of Dostoevsky's own canvas on convict life, *Notes from the House of the Dead*. The moral center in this work, the restoration of the image of the "lost people," was reached through the esthetic accomplishment: the penetration of surface, or naturalistic, truth. A "repulsive crust," the narrator observes, covered even the most decent convicts. Yet "one need only remove the outer superficial crust and examine more attentively the kernel itself, more closely, and without prejudice, and some of us will see things in the people that we never expected." Here,

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<sup>20</sup> PSS, 19:181.

<sup>21</sup> PSS, 23:94–95.

<sup>22</sup> PSS, 24:248.

<sup>23</sup> PSS, 24:239.

<sup>24</sup> PSS, 29:2:100.

<sup>25</sup> PSS, 25:90.

of course, is a very simple and clear statement of Dostoevsky's notion of realism. To be sure, he in no way ignores the repulsive crust—the frightful details, the ugly actuality of convict life. The multitude of raw details, however, is never presented for themselves alone. Reality, however chaotic and disfigured at first glance, yields to an inner, organizing idea, a moral idea. The ugly, the repulsive, the disfigured presents itself to the reader invariably as a deformation of a norm: that norm is the moral-esthetic shape of man-created in the image of God, a preeminently humanistic norm for Dostoevsky. He sought the truth about the convicts not only in the cross section of the moment; *Notes from the House of the Dead* is not a series of snapshots. "After all, the whole truth must be told: these were an exceptional people," the narrator remarks at the conclusion of his memoirs. "Indeed, they are, perhaps, the most gifted, the strongest of all our people. But mighty forces perished in vain, perished abnormally, wrongfully, irrevocably. And who is to blame? And this is just the point: who is to blame?"

The young Arkady Dolgoruky remembers an episode to the detail, remembers it, he says, in all its disgusting realistic truth. The narrator in *Notes from the House of the Dead* also recalls his past, but differently. "This was really long ago," he observes at the beginning of his memoirs, "it all seems like a dream to me." The narrator's passing reference to the dreamlike character of his recollections is not without significance. The so-called dream here is artistic transfiguration; it marks esthetic distance between the writer and his material. Much later, in his semiautobiographical sketch, "The Peasant of Marey," published in the February 1876 number of *Diary of a Writer*, Dostoevsky offered a clue to his artistic approach in *Notes from the House of the Dead*. He relates how, as a convict, he once had dreamed of a kindly peasant who had befriended him as a child. The dream came to an end. He got off his bunk and looked around. "I suddenly felt that I could look at these unhappy creatures with quite different eyes and that suddenly, by some miracle, all hatred and malice had disappeared completely from my heart."<sup>26</sup> The dream here has both a psychological and esthetic character; it is both catharsis and revelation; it opens what Dostoevsky calls the eyes of the soul. The miracle affected by the dream is the miracle of artistic transfiguration.

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<sup>26</sup> PSS, 22:49.

In his entry "Apropos of the Exhibition" in his *Diary of a Writer* in 1873, Dostoevsky leaves no doubt as to the philosophically idealist character of his conception of reality. "'One must depict reality as it is,' they say, whereas there is simply no such reality, and indeed such a reality never existed on earth, because the essence of things is inaccessible to man, and he apprehends nature as it is reflected in his idea, passing through his feelings; therefore one must give far more expression to the idea and not fear the ideal."<sup>27</sup> In a letter to Apollon Maikov, December 11, 1868, Dostoevsky defines the "idealist" character of his realism. He confides to his friend the plan of a "huge novel" to be entitled "Atheism." At its center is a Russian man who suddenly loses faith in God, gets involved with atheistic groups, falls into the power of a Jesuit, but finally, in the end, rediscovers Christ and the Russian land. At this point in the letter, Dostoevsky pauses to exclaim:

Ah, my friend! I have completely different notions about reality and about realism from our realists and critics. My idealism is more real than theirs. Lord! To relate intelligibly all that we Russians have experienced in the past ten years in our spiritual development—now wouldn't the realists shout that this is fantasy! Yet this is the old genuine realism! Precisely this is realism, only deeper, and they are swimming in shallow waters. Now isn't Lyubim Tortsov [the central character in A. N. Ostrovsky's play *Poverty Is No Crime*, 1854] really insignificant in essence—and yet this is all the ideal that their realism allows. Deep realism—hardly! With their realism you won't explain one-hundredth of the real, actual facts that have occurred. And with our idealism we have prophesied even facts. It has happened.<sup>28</sup>

Dostoevsky's point of departure for his defense of his idealism is his formulation of the drama of Russian man in terms of an immense moral and spiritual quest. But this is "realism, only deeper"; it is more real for Dostoevsky because it focuses the historical reality of the

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<sup>27</sup> PPS 21:75.

<sup>28</sup> PSS, 28(2):329. Dostoevsky has in mind here a murder committed by the student A. M. Danilov in 1865. The circumstances of Danilov's crime and his motives were somewhat similar to those of Raskolnikov. (For commentary on Danilov's crime, see PSS, 9:391-392).



moment against a background of the permanent spiritual strivings and aspirations of man. Dostoevsky speaks of "explaining" real facts; he is proud that he even has prophesied facts, that he has grasped the inner dynamic of reality and anticipated its "facts." "They understand only what takes place before their eyes," he is reported to have said of his critics, "but because of nearsightedness they themselves are not only unable to look ahead, but cannot understand even how for another person the future consequences of present events can be clear as the palm one's hand."<sup>29</sup> It is the cognitive function of realism that Dostoevsky values: in its most immediate action true realism captures social reality in movement; in its deeper action artistic cognition approaches religious revelation.

Dostoevsky's defense of his realism in his letter to Maikov had a definite purpose: it was to defend himself against the charge that his art (specifically, *The Idiot*) lacked verisimilitude as a depiction of reality, that his realism was fantastic. Maikov had written Dostoevsky apropos of the second half of part 1 of *The Idiot*:

Here's my impression: an awful lot of strength, genius-inspired strokes (for example, when the Idiot is slapped, and what he says, and various other places), but in the whole action *there is more possibility and plausibility than truth*. The most real person, if you will, is the Idiot (does this seem strange to you?) but the others—all, as it were, live in a fantastic world; all of them have a strong yet fantastic, somewhat exceptional luster. One reads avidly, and at the same time—one doesn't believe in it.<sup>30</sup>

And in another letter, Maikov comments:

Various reviews, the chief reproach being the fantastic quality of the characters; one gentleman even says that such country houses are not to be found in Pavlovsk.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> L. Kh. Simonova-Khokhriakova, "Iz vospominanii o F. M. Dostoevskom," in *F.M. Dostoevskii v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), 2:348.

<sup>30</sup> Letter of A. Maikov to Dostoevsky, March 14, 1868. Quoted by A. S. Dolinin in *F.M. Dostoevskii, Pis'ma*, edited and annotated by A. S. Dolinin, 4 vols. (Moscow: 1928-1959), 2: 419.

<sup>31</sup> Letter of A. Maikov to Dostoevsky, September 30, 1868, *ibid.*, 2: 426.

The charge that his artistic vision, or embodiment, of reality was “fantastic” certainly was not a new one to Dostoevsky. “As far back as the 1840s I was dubbed mockingly a fantasist,” he observed in “Petersburg Visions in Verse and Prose” (1861).<sup>32</sup> “I am a frightful hunter after mysteries. I am a fantasist, I am a mystic, and, I confess to you, Petersburg, I don’t know why, has always seemed to me something of a mystery.”<sup>33</sup> Pushkin perceived and projected the historical-philosophical contradictions of Russian history, its social drama and pathos, in the complex image of a fantastic Petersburg; Gogol further contributed to this image through his Petersburg tales. The notion of the city as a vast, abstract, and impersonal entity, expropriating from man his humanity, threatening to transform him into a nonentity, making his whole existence strange, fantastic, unreal, finds embodiment in Dostoevsky’s early stories, as well as in his later novels. The “fantastic titular councillors” in the early tales—Mr. Proharchin, Vasya Shumkov, Golyadkin Sr., and others—are victims of their own convoluted natures and at the same time are sacrifices of the Petersburg bureaucratic anthill state. Netochka Nezvanova, in Dostoevsky’s work of the same name, writes: “I am not surprised that among such strange people as my father and mother I myself became such a strange, fantastic child.” She is spoiled by her “fantastic, exceptional” love for her father. Her life and the world about her she compares to a “fairy tale,” a “novel,” a strange “dream.” G. M. Fridlender has observed that these comparisons serve to emphasize precisely the strangeness, the fantastic and exceptional character of the reality around Netochka, a reality which appears to the reader of her notes and to Netochka herself not as stable and normal, but as extraordinarily unstable and abnormal.<sup>34</sup> Yet it is recognizably and vividly the real world in a picture that shows, in its distortion, how that world deviates from the ideal.

The criticism of his art as fantastic spurred Dostoevsky to a sharper definition and defense of his realistic method. He writes to his friend Nikolai N. Strakhov, February 26, 1869:

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<sup>32</sup> PSS, 19:73.

<sup>33</sup> PSS, 19:68.

<sup>34</sup> G.M. Fridlender, *Realizm Dostoevskogo* (Moscow and Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1964), 76.

I have my special view of reality [in art], and what the majority calls almost fantastic and exceptional, for me is sometimes the very essence of the real. The everyday aspect of phenomena and the cliché view of them, in my opinion, is still not realism, and even the opposite. In every issue of the newspapers you encounter a report about the most real facts and about most strange ones. For our writers they are fantastic; and indeed, they don't busy themselves with them; and yet they are reality, because they are *facts*. Now who will note them, explain them, write them down. They are daily and of the moment, and not *exceptional* . . . We let all reality . . . pass by our noses. Now who will take note of the facts and go deeply into them? . . . Is it possible that my fantastic Idiot is not reality, indeed even the most common sort! Why, it's just these days that such characters are inevitably found in those social strata divorced from the soil—strata that are in reality becoming fantastic.<sup>35</sup>

Dostoevsky, it will be noted, does not deny that certain phenomena, facts of reality, do indeed *appear* fantastic, improbable, exceptional. Indeed, as he affirms several years later in "Mummer" in *Diary of a Writer* in 1873, "true events, depicted in all their exclusiveness of their chance occurrence (*sluchainosti*), almost always assume a fantastic, almost improbable character."<sup>36</sup> Lebedev in *The Idiot* observes that "almost every reality, though it has its immutable laws, is always incredible and improbable." But the central question here is: fantastic, incredible, improbable from what point of view and to whom? Dostoevsky answers that the facts of reality often appear incredible from the cliché viewpoint of the majority, appear fantastic to those who look at reality with merely surface, as it were, photographic eyes. A fact of reality from this viewpoint often appears fantastic (and indeed, statically perceived, *is* fantastic) because it turns up in all its exclusiveness in a clutter of unrelated and haphazard detail; it

<sup>35</sup> PSS, 29(1):19.

<sup>36</sup> PSS, 21:82. The chronicler in *The Devils* echoes Dostoevsky's idea of fantastic realism. He observes at one point in his narrative (part 1, chapter 2, section vi) that it was difficult to know what was in Varvara Petrovna's heart and that he was not going to try to unravel the contradictions in her plan. "As the chronicler I limit myself only to presenting events in a precise form, exactly as they occurred, and it is not my fault if they appear improbable."

appears fantastic, essentially, because it is unexplained (esthetically—unformed), because it is unrelated to the underlying “immutable laws” which govern its appearance. “The aim of art,” Dostoevsky writes again in “Mummer,” “is not the accidentalities of day-to-day life, but their general idea, keenly perceived and correctly removed from the whole multiplicity of identical phenomena of life.”<sup>37</sup>

Dostoevsky insists, as we have seen, that his “fantastic Idiot” is perhaps a part of even common reality, that there must be such characters in those strata of society divorced from the people. But it is not primarily upon faithfulness to common reality that Dostoevsky ultimately justifies his special realism (though he is proud that he has anticipated real facts in his art). He recognizes, for example, that a fact of reality may indeed be uncommon, exceptional, a rarity. A cruel monk, for example, beats to death a ten-year-old boy in a famous monastery. “Well, now isn’t this a fantastic story at first glance?” Dostoevsky remarks. “And yet it is, it seems, wholly true.” But if one were to write about it, he adds, people would shout that it was improbable, exceptional. “And they would be right, if the matter was judged only from the standpoint of faithfulness in depicting the ordinary run of life in our monasteries.” Life in the monasteries, Dostoevsky freely acknowledges, is quite different, and the incident involving the evil monk will always stand out as an exception to the rule. “But for the narrator, for the poet, there may also be other tasks besides the ordinary run-of-life aspect; these are the general, universal, and, I think, eternally inexhaustible depths of spirit and human character.”<sup>38</sup>

The ultimate test of verisimilitude of a fact, the test of “realism,” then, is not in the identity of fact A to fact B to fact C and so forth; it is in the degree to which fact A, however isolated and exceptional, conducts us to the larger realities of society and the human spirit. An exceptional, seemingly strange or fantastic incident may open up a startling perspective of human evil or goodness. Realism in Dostoevsky’s novelistic universe, as in Dante’s *Commedia*, is vertical; the facts of our lives are starkly represented, sometimes even with naturalistic precision, but they are selected in such a way as to illuminate the hierarchical reality of the human spirit.

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<sup>37</sup> PSS, 21:82.

<sup>38</sup> PSS, 21:83.

The facts of crime for Dostoevsky clearly were prime conductors to reality of human nature. Evidence of his preoccupation with these "facts" and with their deeper significance may be found in his editor's note in his journal *Vremia* in 1861; here, he informs the readers that his publication will carry accounts of criminal trials:

We are thinking of entertaining the readers when from time to time we give accounts of famous criminal trials. Apart from the fact that they are more entertaining than all sorts of novels, because they illuminate these dark sides of the human soul which art does not like to touch (and if it does then only in passing, in the form of an episode)—apart from this, reading about such trials, it seems to us, will not be without use to the Russian reader . . . In the trial we now present we are concerned with the personality of an extraordinary, enigmatic, terrible, and interesting man. Low instincts and weakness in the face of need made him a criminal, but he dares to present himself as the victim of his century. And all this with a boundless vanity. This is a type of vanity carried to extreme limits. The trial was conducted with magnificent impartiality, conveyed with the exactitude of a daguerreotype, of a physiological sketch.<sup>39</sup>

Dostoevsky does not appear to conceive of the journalistic account of criminal trials as an art form. The account of the trial is offered to the reader as a fact of reality that has the exactitude of a daguerreotype. But in a few casual strokes, Dostoevsky suggests that these facts have broad social and human significance. The daguerreotype is but the raw material of reality. He leaves it to the reader to perform, in effect, the act of artistic cognition which gives meaningful shape to the "exceptional" fact of reality.

The novel *Crime and Punishment*, of course, is that act of artistic cognition focused on an "exceptional" crime. Dostoevsky boldly "touches upon" the dark sides of man and society. The problem of the exceptional and fantastic character of Raskolnikov's crime (inseparable from his idea of the crime) is noted by the police investigator Porfiry. "Your article is fantastic and absurd," he comments to Raskolnikov. Raskolnikov's ideas on the relation of the superior man to the human herd, and the rights of crime which derive from this superiority, are

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<sup>39</sup> PSS, 19:89–90.

indeed fantastic when seen from an everyday point of view. But Porfiriy is aware of the deeper social import of Raskolnikov's ideas. "We are dealing with quite a fantastic affair, a somber affair, a modern one . . . We are dealing with bookish dreams." Raskolnikov's crime has social reality (or typicality) for Dostoevsky not because students in the 1860s killed helpless pawnbrokers every day with axes, but because the syndrome of Raskolnikov's moral, psychological, and ideological being reveals in its roots deep imbalances within Russian society, profound spiritual disorder.

It was his critics, Dostoevsky wrote in his notebook around 1875, who were "ignoring facts. They do not observe. *There are no citizens*, and nobody wants to make an effort and compel himself to think and observe. I cannot tear myself away, and all the cries of the critics that I am depicting unreal life have not dissuaded me. There are no *foundations* to our society, no norms that have been worked out [*vyzhity*—literally "lived out"] because there have been none in *life* even. A colossal eruption and all is crumbling, falling, being negated, as though it had not even existed. And not only externally, as in the West, but *internally, morally*."<sup>40</sup>

"Does the fantastic have a right to exist in art?" Dostoevsky asks in a letter of December 23, 1863, to Turgenev in which he defends Turgenev's story-fantasia, "Ghosts." "Now just who answers such questions! If there is anything that one might criticize in 'Ghosts' it is that *it is not quite fully fantastic*."<sup>41</sup> Dostoevsky has in mind here the use of the literally fantastic or unreal in art. Only art can provide an answer to the question Dostoevsky raises. Know-nothing people demand "limited utilitarianism." "Write for them a most poetic work—they will put it aside and take something in which a thrashing of somebody is described. *Poetic truth* is considered nonsense. Only that alone which is copied from real fact is needed." It is the inner reality revealed in Turgenev's fantasy that interests Dostoevsky. The form of "Ghosts" will astonish people, he writes. But the main thing is to understand its real content. What is real here is the anguish of an intelligent and aware person living in our time. Dostoevsky sympathizes with a nostalgic, melancholic element in Turgenev's story, an anguish which Dostoevsky,

<sup>40</sup> PSS, 16:329.

<sup>41</sup> PSS, 28(2):61.

as we have noted earlier, considered a distinguishing mark of the human condition. Dostoevsky significantly singles out in Turgenev's stories images which hint at the "elemental still unresolved idea (that very idea which is in all nature) which we do not know whether human intelligence will ever resolve—but now the heart only anguishes over it and is frightened even more, although it does not want to wrench itself away from it." And Dostoevsky concludes that "such a thought is precisely timely and such fantastic things are extremely positive."<sup>42</sup>

Dostoevsky has the highest regard for E. T. A. Hoffmann's fantasy: it is imbued with poetic truth. Hoffmann, he writes in a "Preface to Publication of 'Three Stories by Edgar Poe,'" "embodies the powers of nature in images . . . and sometimes even "seeks his ideal beyond the earth, in some kind of extraordinary world, positing this world as most lofty, as though he himself believed in the certain existence of a mysterious, magical world." Dostoevsky, however, highly values Poe, his unrivaled "power of imagination," and linked with it his "mastery of details" (*sila podrobnosti*). Yet in the end, he places Hoffmann "immeasurably higher than Poe as a poet. Hoffmann has an ideal, perhaps not very precisely formulated, but in this ideal there is a purity, a real, genuine beauty indigenous to man . . . What a thirst for beauty, what a luminous ideal!" Dostoevsky exclaims with regard to Hoffmann's story.<sup>43</sup> Just this striving for beauty is central to Dostoevsky's higher esthetics in his post-exile period.

Dostoevsky's observations on Edgar Allan Poe's stories provide a further insight into his general conception of the uses of the unreal-fantastic in art. Poe's writing, he argues, cannot be regarded as wholly fantasy, or if his art is fantastic, it must be considered so only in an external sense, and then only initially fantastic. Poe allows for an improbable event, but then "in everything else he is completely faithful to reality." He might be called "not a fantastic but a capricious writer." "He almost always takes the most exceptional reality, places his hero in a most exceptional external or psychological situation, and, with what power of insight, with what striking faithfulness does he not relate the spiritual condition of this man!"<sup>44</sup> Not surprisingly, the feature of

<sup>42</sup> PSS, 28(2):61.

<sup>43</sup> PSS, 19:88–89.

<sup>44</sup> PSS, 19:88.



Poe's realism that Dostoevsky so admires here is an integral aspect of his own realistic method. The same may be said of his admiration for Hoffmann's "ideal": for Dostoevsky presence of an ideal is the characteristic of a great "poet."

Dostoevsky outlines his concept of fantastic realism in his authorial foreword to "A Gentle One: A Fantastic Story" in the November 1876 number of his *Diary of a Writer*. The form of the story (in it the hero or antihero speaks to himself, and as it were, to "some kind of judge"), according to Dostoevsky, constitutes the story's fantastic element. "This supposition about a stenographer writing everything down (after which I polish up the notes) is just what I call the fantastic in this story." Yet the story is "real in the highest degree." Victor Hugo, Dostoevsky adds, employed a similar method in "The Last Day of a Man Condemned to Death." He assumed an even greater improbability, namely, that the condemned man could put down his notes right up to the last minute. "But had he not allowed for this fantasy, there never would have come into existence the work itself—the most real and most truthful of all the works written by him."<sup>45</sup>

Dostoevsky's interest in the fantastic in art reaches back to the earliest beginnings of his creative work. In his story "The Double" ("Dvoïnik," 1846), he strives to combine the wholly real phenomenon of a real clerk's (Golyadkin Sr.) moral and psychological ambivalence with the improbable (in a literal sense) existence of a "real" double, Golyadkin Jr. We have no record at that time of Dostoevsky's views on the fantastic in art. But in the final year of his life, he did set forth a view regulating the use of the fantastic in art, as pertains especially to what might today be called scientific fantasy.

In a letter of June 15, 1880, to Iu. F. Abaza, an amateur writer who had sent him the manuscript of a story he had written, Dostoevsky praised the author's idea as a good one, "but God how impossibly you carried it through! The thought that a breed of people, having received an initial idea from their forebears and *having subordinated themselves to it exclusively* in the course of several generations, subsequently must necessarily degenerate into something peculiar to humanity . . . even . . . something hostile to humanity . . . this thought is correct and profound." But the "descendant" is "*impossibly depicted*." He should have been given only moral suffering. But the writer has invented

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<sup>45</sup> PSS, 24:5–6.

"something crudely physical, some kind of block of ice instead of a heart. The doctors after curing him for so many years did not notice that he had no heart. Now how can a man live without a physical organ?"<sup>46</sup>

Dostoevsky's objection to the absence of a physical heart, however, seems less an objection to an unreal or scientifically impossible occurrence than an esthetic objection: the failure of the storyteller to make the reader suspend his disbelief in the face of the unbelievable, that is, to do what Alexander Pushkin succeeded in doing in his story, "The Queen of Spades" (1834). At the end of his letter, Dostoevsky writes:

Granted that this is a fantastic tale, but after all the fantastic in art has limits and rules. The fantastic must be contiguous with the real to such a degree that you must *almost* believe it. Pushkin, who gave us practically all forms of art, wrote "The Queen of Spades" — the pinnacle of fantastic art. And you believe that Hermann really had a vision, and precisely in accordance with his world view, and yet at the end of the story, that is, after having read it through, you do not know what to think. Did this vision emerge from the nature of Hermann, or is it really one of those [visions] which have touched on another world, full of spirits evil and hostile to mankind? (N.B. Spiritualism and its teachings.) Now this is art! Now in the place where the chemist creates a heart out of wine and communion bread — this you do so crudely that it even makes one laugh. (As a writer I must confess, however, that this scene is daring and not lacking in the picturesque.)<sup>47</sup>

The failure of Abaza, then, is not scientific, but artistic. The notion that the "fantastic must be contiguous with the real to such a degree that you must *almost* believe it," undoubtedly constituted the ideal which Dostoevsky sought to achieve, but without complete success, in one of his earliest stories, "The Double" (1846).

One may distinguish in Dostoevsky's thought, so far, two formally distinct categories of the fantastic in art, or of so-called fantastic

<sup>46</sup> PSS, 30(1):191–192.

<sup>47</sup> PSS, 30(1):192.

realism: the *seemingly* fantastic facts or phenomena which are represented in art and which find a real (even if sometimes rare) correlative in life, and the *actually* or literally unreal phenomena that we encounter in one degree or another, for instance, in Hoffmann and Poe. In the first instance, real phenomena (e.g., facts of crime, violence, eccentric behavior) serve to illuminate the larger reality of man and society; in the second instance, art, returning to its mythic root and function, either strives directly to illuminate the mystery of a deeper reality with purely imaginative elements or posits a palpably unreal, fantastic fact or detail as a point of departure for an otherwise "real" representation of reality.

We say "actually or literally unreal phenomena" in defining the notion of the fantastic as it is exhibited, for instance, in Poe or in Turgenev's "Ghosts." But the very distinction assumed here between real and unreal phenomena or facts is obliterated, or at least seriously blurred, in Dostoevsky's Christian religious illumination of reality.

We noted earlier Dostoevsky's view that man is familiar only with the immediate and visible, "and this only in its appearance, while the ends and beginnings—all this is still a realm of the fantastic for man." The fantastic here, of course, is precisely ultimate reality in the philosophical or religious sense. The philosophically idealist understructure of Dostoevsky's thought on reality is evident at all stages of his career; it is strikingly visible, however, in the last decade of his life, a time when the Christian religious emphasis of his thought is most pronounced. Ultimate reality for the author of *The Brothers Karamazov* is the transcendent reality of the universal Christian ideal. Much on earth is concealed from us, Zosima observes in the chapter "Talks and Homilies of the Elder Zosima" in *The Brothers Karamazov*, "but instead there is granted us a mysterious, precious perception of a living connection with another world, with a lofty and sublime world, indeed the roots of our thoughts and feelings are not here, but in other worlds. That is why also the philosophers say that it is impossible to perceive the essence of things on earth." The assumption of a connection or bond between an earthly reality and "another world," the affirmation of the reality of that other world, leads Dostoevsky to affirm the reality of "facts" which are not of earthly origin but which are manifest in man's earthly existence. Thus, we find these notations or comments in the notebooks of *The Brothers Karamazov*: "NB. If there is a connection with that world, then it is perfectly clear that it can and must be manifested *sometimes* by unusual facts (a flying coffin) which do

not always take place on this earth." "In the world much is inexplicable, if there are no miracles."<sup>48</sup> We read again in the notebooks, "But the lack of faith of people did not disturb him at all; these people do not believe in immortality or another life, hence too they cannot believe in miracles because for them everything is entirely on earth."<sup>49</sup>

We are confronted here not merely with a "fantastic" spiritual reality (revealed, for example, in Myshkin's epileptic fits), but with fantastic *facts* (miracles) on earth. We cannot, therefore, maintain a distinction between "real" and "unreal" facts; we can only distinguish between the origins (earthly or transcendental) of observable facts and phenomena. As Dostoevsky put it—after reading "The Queen of Spades," "You do not know what to think. Did this vision emerge from the nature of Hermann, or is it really one of those [visions] which have touched on another world?" Dostoevsky, to be sure, was concerned with the *art* of the fantastic in this letter, but the question he raises demands attention, too, in regard to his spiritual, indeed, fantastic realism.

The inaccessibility to man of ultimate reality, the lofty and sublime world which is revealed to Zosima, is the tragic fact of man's earthly existence. "The individual cannot divine completely the eternal universal ideal even though he be Shakespeare himself," Dostoevsky writes in his article on Dobrolyubov in 1861.<sup>50</sup> Yet in the final analysis, he believes it is the artist (and above all Shakespeare) who comes closest to divining this universal ideal, to disclosing the idea (the ideal) of reality. "This is not simply a reproduction of the everyday [world] with which, many teachers assure us, all reality is exhausted," Dostoevsky writes in his notebook to *The Devils* apropos of Shakespeare. "All reality is far from exhausted by everyday existence, because a huge part of it exists in it in the form of a still hidden, unexpressed, future Word. From time to time prophets appear who divine and express this integral Word. Shakespeare is prophet sent by God to announce to us the mystery of man, of the human soul."<sup>51</sup> The mystery of man lies not only in the present. "The realists are wrong," Dostoevsky wrote in his notebook to the *Diary of a Writer*, "because man is a whole only in the

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<sup>48</sup> PSS, 15:201.

<sup>49</sup> PSS, 15:201.

<sup>50</sup> PSS, 18:102.

<sup>51</sup> PSS, 11:237.

future and is by no means entirely exhausted by the present."<sup>52</sup> The role of the artist, then, is ultimately that of seer; in him, imaginative (poetic) consciousness and religious prophetic consciousness are one; phenomena to him are not divided into real and unreal, actual and fictitious; he reveals man to himself in the completeness of his destiny, his timeless being.

It is not surprising, considering the syncretic nature of Dostoevsky's thought, that we should find in it a conscious striving to reconcile, indeed, to merge the notions of realism and idealism. Dostoevsky, unlike Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, and other radicals of his generation, stood permanently at the crossroads of realism and philosophical idealism. "The idealist and the realist, if only they are honest and high-minded, have one and the same essence—love for mankind, and one and the same object—man; only the *forms* of the representation of the object differ," Dostoevsky wrote in "Is It Shameful To Be an Idealist?" in the July–August issue of his *Diary of a Writer* in 1876. "There is no reason to be ashamed of one's idealism: it is the same path [as that of realism] and to the same goal. So that idealism, in essence, is just as real as realism and can never disappear from the world."<sup>53</sup>

The real and the ideal, then, merge in man. It is man in the fullness of his material and spiritual being who is both the center and circumference of Dostoevsky's "reality." The highest form of representation of reality, the most supreme realism for Dostoevsky, is inextricably linked with the revelation of man's quest for the ideal, with the revelation, finally, of that ideal itself.

The final dimension of realism belongs to art itself. What is artistic reality? "They say that the artistic work must reflect life, and so forth," Dostoevsky wrote to his young friend E. N. Opochinin. "All that is rubbish: the writer (the poet) creates life, a life in such full amplitude as did not exist before him."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> PSS, 24:247.

<sup>53</sup> PSS, 23:70.

<sup>54</sup> Opochinin, "Besedy s Dostoevskim," *Zven'ia*, ed. L. P. Grossman, 472.

## IN THE INTERESTS OF SOCIAL PEDAGOGY: MAXIM GORKY'S POLEMIC WITH DOSTOEVSKY<sup>1</sup>

I remember an expressive gesture of Aleksey Maksimovich during a conversation about Dostoevsky. The talk was about the integral and monumental character of the novelist-tragedian's work, about the verbal magic of his genius. Gorky sat silently, listening, and suddenly, threatening somebody with his fist, said: "Thus do various gracious sovereigns in Moscow convince themselves and others that Gorky doesn't give a brass farthing for Dostoevsky" — and Gorky cast his head upwards, frozen in prayerful ecstasy — "that's how he looks upon Dostoevsky."

—A. A. Zolotarev, Gorky, Denizen of Capri

Three things may be said about the lifelong polemic of Maxim Gorky (1868–1936) with Dostoevsky. First, it had deep psychological roots in a confrontation with aspects of his own nature; overcoming Dostoevsky, for Gorky, was a process of self-overcoming. Second, this process of self-overcoming became linked with a central effort of Gorky's literary and cultural writings—the task of overcoming Russian history, the painful legacy of violence and disorder in Russian man and life, all that he once called "our most implacable enemy—our past."<sup>2</sup> And third, this overcoming ultimately took on the dimensions of a struggle between worldviews, a struggle, as Gorky conceived it, over whether man is good or evil.

"It is clear and comprehensible to the point of obviousness," Dostoevsky wrote in a review of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, "that

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<sup>1</sup> From Robert Louis Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky: The Overwhelming Questions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 121-133.

<sup>2</sup> M. Gor'kii, *Novaia zhizn'* 5, April 23, 1917, in M. Gor'kii, *Nesvoevremennye mysli. Stat'i 1917–1918*, ed. G. Ermolaev (Paris, 1917), 29. Hereafter this work will be referred to as *Nesvoevremennye mysli*.

evil is more deeply rooted in mankind than the socialist quacks believe."<sup>3</sup> Gorky's greatest fear, we suggest, was that Dostoevsky was right; a good deal of his life was spent trying to prove him wrong.

One of Gorky's lively concerns in the period between the upheavals of 1905 and 1917 was that Russian intellectual and cultural consciousness would get bogged down in what he regarded as the moral-psychological turmoil of Dostoevsky's novels, and in particular in the ideology of that "preacher of passivism and social indifference," Dostoevsky.<sup>4</sup> Gorky, like many of his contemporaries, did not clearly distinguish between Dostoevsky and his heroes and heroines, between the artist-thinker and his complex statement, and the world he sought to decipher in his art. Thus, in a letter to the editor of *Russkoe slovo* in 1913, one accompanying his first article of protest "About Karamazovism," against the staging of Dostoevsky's *The Devils* (*Besy*, 1870), Gorky wrote, "I am deeply convinced that preaching from the stage Dostoevsky's sick ideas can only further unsettle the already unhealthy nerves of society."<sup>5</sup> In his article, Gorky speaks out against the Moscow Art Theater's announced plan to stage what he calls the "sadistic and sick" novel *The Devils*.<sup>6</sup> The Moscow Art Theater earlier in 1910 had staged *The Brothers Karamazov*; it was now preparing a new Dostoevsky production under the title "Nikolai Stavrogin." Gorky's concern is frankly social and utilitarian in character. "Does Russian society," he asks, "think that the depiction on stage of events and people described in the novel *The Devils* is necessary and useful and in the interests of social pedagogy?"<sup>7</sup>

"About Karamazovism" aroused a storm of indignation, including charges of censorship. In a reply, "Once Again About 'Karamazo-

<sup>3</sup> Dostoevskii, PSS, 25:201.

<sup>4</sup> Gor'kii, *Istoriia russkoi literatury*, ed. I.D. Ladyzhnikov et al (Moscow: Khodzhestvennaia literatura, 1939), 276.

<sup>5</sup> Cited by the editors in their commentary on Gorky's "O'karamazovshchine," in Gor'kii, *O literature. Literaturno-kriticheskie stat'i*, ed. N. P. Zhdanovskii and A. I. Ovcharenko (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1953), 836. Hereafter references to Gorky's two articles on "Karamazovism" will refer to *O literature*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*



vism," Gorky defended his position, arguing vigorously for society's right to protest against the "tendencies of Dostoevsky and in general against any artist whatever his preachment."<sup>8</sup> At the same time, he insisted that "Gorky is not against Dostoevsky but against his novels being put on stage."<sup>9</sup> Gorky's effort to join issues of social pedagogy with questions of esthetics throws light on his own ambivalent attitude toward Dostoevsky.

"As gestures, on the stage of a theater," Gorky argues, "an author's thoughts are not so clear." Impoverished by cuts, Dostoevsky's novels will emerge on stage as "nothing but nervous convulsions."<sup>10</sup> Gorky is especially preoccupied with the pictorial representation of Dostoevsky's world. In the opening paragraph of his first article, he questions the significance of showing "pictures" from *The Devils*. The Moscow Art Theater, he writes, proposes to present Dostoevsky's ideas "in images." "Do we need this mutilating 'performance'?"<sup>11</sup> "This 'performance' is doubtful esthetically and unconditionally harmful in a social sense."<sup>12</sup> Thus, in staging Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (1868)—a work produced by another Russian theater at the time—one witnesses in the foreground the "agony of the tubercular Ippolit, the epilepsy of Prince Myshkin, the cruelty of Rogozhin, the histrionics of Nastasya Filippovna, and other instructive pictures of all kinds of illness of body and spirit."<sup>13</sup>

"Pictures," "images," "performance" —for Gorky, all this visual representation constitutes a disfiguration of the written work, "nervous convulsions." In his second article, Gorky expands on his esthetic argument. He distinguishes between "reading the books of Dostoevsky" and "seeing images of him on the stage."<sup>14</sup> Reading, for Gorky, is not a passive performance. In reading the books of Dostoevsky, the attentive reader perceives the "reactionary tendency of Dostoevsky and all his

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 156.

contradictions."<sup>15</sup> He can "correct the thoughts of his heroes as a result of which they significantly gain in beauty, depth and humanity. But when a person is shown an image of Dostoevsky on the stage, even in an exceptionally talented performance, the skill of the artist, enhancing the talent of Dostoevsky, imparts to his images a particular significance and a decisive finality."<sup>16</sup>

Gorky's article has its subtleties. He acknowledges that the Dostoevsky novel as text, even one as tendentious as *The Devils* essentially does not offer a one-sided view of reality, come up with absolute conclusions. The novel of Dostoevsky read as text, he suggests, is open, or in the language used later on by Bakhtin, "dialogical." The stage representation of a Dostoevsky novel, on the other hand, "carries the viewer away from the sphere of thought, one freely admitting argument, to the sphere of suggestions, hypnosis, to the dark region of the peculiar Karamazov-like emotions and feelings, emphasized and concentrated with malicious pleasure." "On the stage the audience sees man created by Dostoevsky in the image of 'a wild and evil animal.'"<sup>17</sup> The Moscow Art Theater, "this gloomy institution," Gorky wrote in the same vein to I. P. Ladyzhnikov August 29, 1913, "exhibits the naked Dostoevsky."<sup>18</sup>

The sense of Gorky's argument is ambiguous: On the one hand, he suggests that a stage performance distorts or narrows Dostoevsky's novelistic universe through naturalistic or visual stage representation; on the other hand, he suggests that a stage representation brings out precisely Dostoevsky's naked truth, that is, the notion that man is "a wild and evil animal." The distinction between the novelist Dostoevsky's truth and the naked Dostoevsky's truth is one that is central to Gorky's approach to his antagonist. It takes different forms in his writing. Thus, Lyutov, in *The Life of Klim Samgin* (1925–1936) at one point outlines the theory that the Russian people only want the kind of freedom that is given by priests: the freedom to commit

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted by B. A. Bialik in "Dostoevskii i dostoevshchina v otsenkakh Gor'kogo," in *Tvorchestvo Dostoevskogo*, ed. M. L. Stepanov, et al. (Moscow: Akademiia nauk, 1959), 68.

terrible sins in order to become frightened, and then find peace within themselves. "A strange theory . . .," remarks Turoboev, adding after a moment of apparent inner uncertainty and debate, "All the same, this is Dostoevsky. If not according to his thoughts, then according to his spirit . . ." <sup>19</sup>

Lyutov's theory, in short, is not in accord with Dostoevsky's thoughts, that is, all that we may ascertain from a reading of his novels. This theory, according to Gorky, does find support in the world of Dostoevsky's characters' experiences and thoughts; a realm in which Dostoevsky, Gorky believed, invested his deepest fears and anguish; a domain, in Gorky's view, where we encounter precisely the "spirit" of Dostoevsky, the "naked Dostoevsky," the "permanent terror" of Dostoevsky, all that that writer sought to come to grips with through religion, but in reality, only "justified." "Dostoevsky has been called 'a seeker of truth,'" Gorky observed in a speech before the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers August 17, 1934. "If he searched for truth he found it in the bestial, animal element in man, and he found it not in order to refute it, but in order to justify it." <sup>20</sup>

We are here at the core of Gorky's polemic with Dostoevsky, one linked with Gorky's despair over Russian history and brutalized Russian man, and his desire to redeem Russian man from the chaos of his past. At the center of his solicitude for the moral and spiritual health of Russian man and his polemic with Dostoevsky is a notion of the disorder of the Russian national character. "Bear in mind," Gorky wrote in a letter to I. D. Surguchev in December 1911, "that our evil genius Fyodor Dostoevsky, 'the knight of the woeful countenance,' by no means popped up on the nose of literature like some unexpected odd pimple: his is a face fully justified by Russian life, by our history and, I may say, not a very original face." <sup>21</sup>

The very same year, Gorky wrote the literary and cultural historian D. N. Ovsyaniko-Kulikovsky (1853–1920) the following apropos of some recent writings of the historian:

<sup>19</sup> M. Gor'kii, *Sobranie sochinenii v vosemnadsati tomakh*, 18 vols. (Moscow: Gosizdatkhudlit, 1962), 12:256.

<sup>20</sup> M. Gor'kii, "Sovetskaia literatura. Doklad na pervom vsesoiuznom s'ezde sovetkikh pisatelei, 17 avgusta 1934 goda," in *O literature*, 705.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted by Bialik, in "Dostoevskii i dostoevshchina v otsenkakh Gor'kogo," *op. cit.*, 90.

This is the first time, I say, that I have encountered in such sharp and precise form this sad but long-needed and surprisingly contemporary indication of the organic tendency of the Great Russian to eastern passivity which, combined with the famed "breadth of the Russian soul," or rather with the formless, chaotic nature of this soul, brings forth that quality so typical of us—"swaggering nihilism," always ruinous, especially ruinous, in our austere times. Precisely here, my dear Dmitry Nikolaevich, lies, I am certain, the foundation of such sick and disfigured phenomena as Karamazovism and Karataevism. "My idea is a corner," repeatedly said F[ydor] Dostoevsky, the evil genius of cultured Russia, a man who with the greatest power and clarity depicted the spiritual illnesses instilled in us by the Mongol, by the mutilation inflicted on our soul by tormenting Moscow history.<sup>22</sup>

In his 1913 article "About Karamazovism," Gorky spells out the spiritual illnesses of Russia as "the sadistic savagery of the completely disillusioned nihilist and its opposite, the masochism of the beaten, frightened creature who is capable of enjoying his suffering, not without malicious pleasure, however, parading it before himself; he has been mercilessly beaten, and he brags about it."<sup>23</sup> Fyodor Karamazov and the Underground Man emerge in Gorky's writings as typical carriers of these two illnesses.

The word "sadism" appears three times in the opening three sentences of "About Karamazovism." Gorky is in step with the critic Nikolai K. Mikhailovsky (1842–1904), who in his study, *A Cruel Talent* (*Zhestokii talant*, 1882) dubs Dostoevsky an intrinsically cruel or sadistic talent.<sup>24</sup> "Dostoevsky himself was a great torturer and a man of sick conscience," Gorky writes.<sup>25</sup> But it is the social-historical dimension of sadomasochism that interests Gorky. He writes in his article "About Karamazovism":

<sup>22</sup> M. Gor'kii, *Materialy i issledovaniia*, ed. S. D. Balukhatyi and V. A. Desnitskii (Moscow-Leningrad, 1941) 3:135–136.

<sup>23</sup> *O literature*, 152.

<sup>24</sup> See Nikolai K. Mikhailovsky, *A Cruel Talent. An Essay on Dostoevsky*, trans. Spencer V. Cadmus, Jr. (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis Publishers, 1978).

<sup>25</sup> *O literature*, 152.

The main person, and the one most subtly understood by Dostoevsky, repeated countless times in all the novels of this "cruel talent," sometimes as fully and sometimes partially, was Fyodor Karamazov. Here is unquestionably the Russian soul, formless and diverse, simultaneously cowardly and insolent, but chiefly morbidly sick: the soul of Ivan the Terrible, Saltychikhi, the landlord who baited dogs with children; the peasant who beats his pregnant wife to death; the soul of the Philistine who raped his bride and there and then handed her over to be raped by a gang of hooligans.<sup>26</sup>

"Here is unquestionably the Russian soul." Gorky insists, however, that Fyodor Karamazov, the Underground Man, Foma Opiskin, Svidrigailov, and Peter Verkhovensky "are still not our sum and substance; after all, it is not just the beastly and crooked that holds sway in us. Yet Dostoevsky saw only those features, and desiring to depict something else showed us the 'Idiot' or Alyosha, transforming sadism into masochism, Karamazovism and Karataevism."<sup>27</sup>

On the stage, the audience "sees man created . . . in the image and likeness of 'a wild and evil animal.' But man is not like that," Gorky maintains. "I know . . . He is far simpler, nicer than he has been conjured up by the Russian wise men."<sup>28</sup> But what does Gorky *know*? Is he so sure about the niceness of Russian man? In the very same article, he warns the reader about the Russian national character. "I know the fragility of Russian national character. I know the pitiful instability of the Russian soul and its inclination, tormented, tired and despairing, toward every kind of plague."<sup>29</sup> Gorky himself, one might say, exhibits an extreme instability in his judgment of the Russian people. Thus, we are confronted by a paradox. On the one hand, he affirms that "all of Dostoevsky's work is a generalization of the negative attributes and qualities of Russian national character."<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, he

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. The term "Karataevism" as used by Gorky refers to the outlook, often viewed as fatalistic, of the peasant Platon Karataev in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 158.

implies that precisely in Fyodor Karamazov Dostoevsky has most subtly embodied the Russian national character.

In Gorky's unfinished cycle of novels, *The Life of Klim Samgin* (1925–1936), Lyutov argues that Dostoevsky was “seduced by prison. What is his prison? A parade. He was an inspector at a [prison] parade. And for the rest of his life he was unable to write about anybody but convicts, while the righteous man for him was the Idiot. He did not know the people.”<sup>31</sup> In turning to Gorky's own works, however, one finds a parade of characters and personalities that offers a far from flattering portrait of the Russian people. In his brutally frank essay “On the Russian Peasantry” (1922), Gorky asks:

Now once and for all—just where is that good-natured, meditative Russian peasant, the inexhaustible seeker of truth and justice, about whom nineteenth century Russian literature so convincingly and eloquently spoke to the world? In my youth I earnestly sought out this person in the villages of Russia and—I didn't find him. I found instead a grim and cunning realist who, when it served his purposes, was marvelously capable of playing the role of a simpleton. By nature he was not stupid, and he himself knew that very well. He created a multitude of sad songs, rough and cruel tales, created thousands of proverbs in which he embodied the experience of his hard life . . . He says: “Don't fear devils, fear people.” “Beat those near you, others will be afraid.” He doesn't have a high opinion about truth: “You won't get full on truth.” “A truthful person, like a fool, is also harmful.”<sup>32</sup>

In Gorky's somber and skeptical *Notes from my Diary* (1923), a work with a title suspiciously resembling that of Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer*, he reviews a parade of troubled and troubling Russian types. “They are a gifted people, but only for anecdotes,” he observes in one of the sketches. This was a bitter judgment. Was Gorky not responding here to Dostoevsky's well-known reference at the end of *Notes from the House of the Dead* to the Russian convict as “really the most highly gifted and strongest of all our people.” Gorky's conclusion to *Notes from*

<sup>31</sup> M. Gor'kii, *Sobranie sochinenii, v vosemnadsati tomakh*, 18 vols. (Moscow: Gosizdatkhudlit, 1962), 12: 256.

<sup>32</sup> M. Gor'kii, *O russkom krest'ianstve* (Berlin: I. P. Ladyzhikov, 1922), 23.

*my Diary* is a startling one: "I have lived among such people for half a century. I hope that this book provides ample evidence that I am not shy about writing the truth *when I want to write about it*" (my italics—RLJ).

Gorky was not trying to avoid the truth of Russian man in his articles about Karamazovism. He saw too much of this truth in Russian life and did not wish to see it displayed on stage. As he wrote in "Once Again About Karamazovism":

Things are not well in Rus', gentlemen! Not Stavrogins should be shown to it now, but something different. What is necessary is a preaching of vitality, what is needed is spiritual health, deeds, and not narcissism; what is needed is a return to the source of energy—to democracy, to the people, to a sense of civic duty and science. We've had enough of that self-denigration which among us replaces self-criticism; we've had enough of squabbling among ourselves, senseless anarchism and all kinds of convulsions.<sup>33</sup>

Gorky sees no reason in 1913 to dwell on these "two sick phenomena [sadism and masochism] of our national psyche and its disfigurements."<sup>34</sup> Rather, one must struggle to create a healthy atmosphere in which these diseases will not flourish. Russia is in crisis. "Our tormented country is experiencing a deeply tragic time."<sup>35</sup> Prophetically, Gorky writes, "Once again clouds are moving upon Rus', auguring great storms and disasters . . . Russian society, having experienced too many dramas shattering to the heart, is exhausted, disillusioned, apathetic." He rejects both "social pessimism" and the "rhetoric" of the "so-called higher demands of the spirit, which among us, in Rus', contribute nothing to ethics, do not improve our relations with each other." Would not a production of *The Devils*, he asks rhetorically, "intensify savage drunkenness, the dark cruelty of our life, the sadism of deeds and words, our feebleness, our sad lack of attention to the life of the world, to the fate of the country and to each other?" In all this, Gorky turns to Pushkin, "a man who knew his

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<sup>33</sup> *O literature*, op. cit., 159.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.



country but was not poisoned by it."<sup>36</sup> Dostoevsky, on the other hand, was for Gorky a man who knew his country but was poisoned by it.

Did Gorky in 1913 sense the relevance of *The Devils* and its demons to the unfolding revolutionary movement? He appended to his article "Once Again About Karamazovism" an excerpt from an article signed by a certain "Independent," entitled "Contemporary Reality and F. M. Dostoevsky." The author of this article regards *The Devils* as a very contemporary work. One cannot, this author writes, make out "where revolutionary party work ends and where the filthy provocation of these filthy operators begins. How contemporary all this is! And how instructive! . . . Here he is, Azef [a notorious police agent working simultaneously for the revolutionaries and the police], a [version of] Peter Verkhovensky . . . Do we not see all this in our times? . . . What a pity that Dostoevsky's *The Devils* is not a reference book for our sensitive youth?"

For Gorky, this article is proof of the "complete satisfaction that the Moscow Art Theater's performance of *The Devils* evoked in the 'reactionary press.'"<sup>37</sup> But Gorky himself could not have failed to recognize the parallel between Azef and other corrupt revolutionaries of the period and Dostoevsky's "devils." Was this one of those cases in which Gorky avoided an unpleasant truth because he wished to avoid it? Or by publishing "Independent's" observations, was he, obliquely, introducing some of his own arguments? Whatever the answer to these questions, Gorky in 1917, barely a few years later, publicly, and very much in the style of "independent," began to criticize the contemporary "devils" of the revolution.

Gorky welcomed the February revolution, but simultaneously expressed fears that the Russian people were not prepared for freedom and democracy. Russia had been corrupted by its past. "The most terrible enemy of freedom and justice is within us," he wrote in the Petrograd newspaper *Novaia Zhizn'* in April 1917. "This is our stupidity, our cruelty and the whole chaos of dark, anarchic feelings nurtured in our soul by the shameless yoke of monarchy."<sup>38</sup> "The conditions of the people's life," he wrote again in May, "have not been able to develop

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 159, 160.

<sup>38</sup> *Nesvoevremennye mysli*, op. cit., 29–30.

in it either respect for the human being or the consciousness of the right of the citizen or the feeling of justice."<sup>39</sup> The fact remains that "the Russian people is organically inclined to anarchism, that the renowned goodness of its soul is a Karamazov-like sentimentalism, that it is terribly unreceptive to suggestions of humanism and culture."<sup>40</sup>

Gorky does not mention Dostoevsky by name in his articles in *Novaia Zhizn'* in 1917–1918. Dostoevsky, however, is clearly on his mind. Gorky's thoughts about the arbitrariness, cruelty, and anarchy in Russian man and life echo the themes of his polemic with Dostoevsky in his articles on "Karamazovism" in 1913 and in his other critical writings and fiction in the pre-Revolutionary period. In these writings, the "underground" type (Karamazov, the Underground Man, etc.) is an individual in whom sadism and masochism form a syndrome of destruction and self-destruction. *Notes from the Underground* for Gorky is always a historical-psychological document that gives expression to the historically-shaped tragedy of the individual in Russian history and society, a tragedy of suffering, one in which the tortured becomes the torturer, the slave—a despot.

The revolution as Gorky perceives it in 1917–1918 is a reenactment on an epic scale of this tragedy. Defending himself in *Novaia Zhizn'* in December 1917, two months after the Bolshevik October revolution, against the charge that he spoke the "language of the enemies of the working class,"<sup>41</sup> Gorky insists on his right to regard the working class critically, no matter who is in power. "And," he went on, "I regard Russian man in power with particular suspicion, with particular distrust; a recent slave himself, he becomes the most unbridled despot as soon as he gets a chance to be his neighbor's master."<sup>42</sup> "The animal, exasperated by its long imprisonment, tormented by centuries-old sufferings, has opened wide its vengeful jaws," Gorky writes again in December. "Yesterday's slave sees its master prostrate in the dust, impotent, frightened—a spectacle of the greatest joy for the slave who has not yet known a joy more worthy of man."<sup>43</sup> The revolution is

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 141.

a period of “monstrous contradictions,” Gorky writes. “At the present-time Russian man is not well, even less well than ever.”<sup>44</sup>

As the October revolution unfolds, Gorky becomes increasingly pessimistic and harsh in his comments in *Novaia Zhizn'*. Referring to the “poisonous inheritance of the Tatar yoke and of serfdom,” he sees Russia as undergoing “a severe revenge for the sins of the past: for our Asiatic inertia, for the passivity with which we suffered the violence done to us.”<sup>45</sup>

In his prophetic story “Karamora,” published in 1924, Gorky continues his polemic with Dostoevsky; yet while criticizing him, he stands closer to him; he calls attention to the links connecting corrupted revolutionaries with the moral-psychological “underground” of Dostoevsky—an underground, we must add, that Dostoevsky himself criticizes.<sup>46</sup>

In “Karamora,” Gorky’s strange and frightening underground antihero, the intellectually agile but morally and spiritually vacuous double agent Peter Karazin who is writing his own “notes” in prison, echoes in a rare moment of moral clarity Underground Man’s final warning of moral and social bankruptcy in *Notes from the Underground* with a diagnosis of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia and a dark prognosis for the future. The words may surely be considered those of Maxim Gorky:

In the years between 1907 and 1914, observing how easily people abandoned their beliefs, I became convinced that something was missing in them, something which had never been there. What was it? Feelings of physical squeamishness over something rejected by their thoughts? Or was there no habit of living honestly? Now here I think I’m on to something: the habit of living honestly—that’s the very thing which people lack. My comrades, too, lacked the habit. Their way of life contradicted their “convictions,” “principles”—the dogmas of faith. This contradiction was most strikingly manifest in the strife among party factions, in the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>46</sup> For a discussion of “Karamora” in the context of Gorky’s polemic with Dostoevsky, see the chapter “Maksim Gorky and *Notes from the Underground*” in my *Dostoevsky’s Underground Man in Russian Literature* (The Hague: Mouton, 1958; repr. Westport, CT: 1981), 127–146.

enmity between people of the same conviction, but of different tactics. Here there took place the most shameful type of Jesuitry, cunning traps and even the vile tricks of feverish gamblers carried away by the game the point of oblivion, playing only for the sake of the processes of the game. Yes, yes—people lack the habit of living honestly. I know, of course, that the majority of them did not have and do not have the chance to acquire this habit. But those who set before themselves the task of rebuilding life, re-educating people—they are mistaken in supposing that “all means are allowed in the struggle.” No, guided by such a dogma one will not teach people the habit of living honestly.

“Karamora” sums up a feeling of disillusionment that Gorky had begun to experience in the earliest days of the February revolution. The publication of lists of people who had worked for the tsarist secret police, people whose hands he had shook, had come as a shock to Gorky. “This is one of the most ignominious mockeries of my faith in man,” he wrote in a sketch entitled “Nightmare” in May 1917. He describes his revulsion at a woman spy who entreated him to protect her from the revolutionary authorities. The experience is a depressing one for Gorky and casts “a dark shadow” over his spirit. “Am I not responsible for all this vileness of life seething about me; is it not I who am responsible for this life that at dawn is so foully smeared with the filth of treachery?” Somber thoughts weigh upon him. Outside in the streets, he hears the elemental hum of the “liberated populace.” He hears the “sharp odor of new words”; he rejoices. “But I feel myself nailed to some kind of rotten wall,” he confesses, “crucified on it by bitter thoughts about disfigured man whom I cannot, I cannot help in any way—ever.”<sup>47</sup>

These lines poignantly sum up Gorky's affinity with a central feature of Dostoevsky as man and artist: anguish over human nature. Gorky's image of himself as a suffering Christ, nailed not to a cross but to some “rotten wall” of human existence, brings to mind Dostoevsky's Ridiculous Man (“The Dream of a Ridiculous Man,” 1877) at the moment in his dream when he becomes aware that he has corrupted the paradise about him. Full of anguish and guilt, weeping and accusing himself, he asks to be crucified. On awakening, however, the ridiculous man, transfigured by his dream, sets forth preaching his vision and his

<sup>47</sup> *Nesovremennyye mysli*, 46.

ethics of love. He is moved no longer by the “monstrous earthly truth” of his nightmare, however, but by the “eternal truth” of his vision of paradise. So too, but in a fatal way, Gorky in the late 1920s, returning to Russia, awoke to his old desire to redeem Russian man and history; awoke with a vengeance to “pedagogy,” to his fatal urge to romanticize reality, awoke to his tendency to blame Dostoevsky for his gloomy outlook on human nature!

Remarking in his speech at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, August 17, 1934, that Dostoevsky had found truth in the “bestial, animal element in man,” Gorky went on to compare Dostoevsky’s artistic genius to that of Shakespeare; but “as a personality,” he added, “as a ‘judge of the world and of people,’ he is easy to imagine in the role of a medieval inquisitor.”<sup>48</sup> Gorky explains why he has given so much space to Dostoevsky in his speech: “Without the influence of his ideas it would be almost impossible to understand the radical turnabout of Russian literature and a large part of the intelligentsia after the years 1905–1906 from radicalism and democracy in favor of the preservation and defense of the bourgeois ‘order.’”<sup>49</sup> However simplistic and crude these words, they attest once again to the central linkage in Gorky’s mind between Dostoevsky and Russian history and culture. These words, finally, signalled his own turnabout in favor of the preservation and defense of the “order” of the party led by Stalin.

In 1906, after reading Leonid Andreyev’s short story “Lazarus,” Gorky wrote the author that he considered the work “the best . . . that has been written about death in all the world’s literature.” He praised “Lazarus” for its style and insight, “In general, as literature, as a work of art, this work gives me immense enjoyment.” However, Gorky adds, “philosophically I cannot accept it. I am infected by life and by its drives for six hundred years, and the longer I live the more optimistically I look on life, although my stomach and teeth hurt unbearably.”<sup>50</sup>

The image Gorky projects here of himself is singularly Dostoevskian, even “underground” in its suggestion of pleasure in the face of severe toothache. Yet a split is always present in Gorky between

<sup>48</sup> M. Gor’kii, “Sovetskaia literatura,” op. cit., 705.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 705.

<sup>50</sup> See *Letters of Gorky and Andreev 1899–1912*, ed. Peter Yershov, trans. Lydia Weston (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 88.

his "philosophy," that is, what he wanted to believe about "proud" man, and his bitter experience about man and life, all that his stomach and teeth told him. Gorky's affinity here, too, with Dostoevsky's heroes could only have added tension to his strained relations with Andreyev. He wrote ironically to him in 1902 about a certain public figure who "preaches love, the scoundrel, so that his life might not be disturbed by the tragedy of his contradictions."<sup>51</sup> The same might be said of Gorky.

The Russian poet Valery Bryusov (1873–1924) put down in his notebook for October 1900 these remarks of Gorky:

"Here's what is dear to me in Dostoevsky. You remember in *Notes from the Underground*, in Part One that man who, in the midst of the reign of universal common sense, will suddenly say: 'Well, now oughtn't we to send all this common sense to the devil?'" And Gorky with a movement of his leg showed how this man would kick that common sense into the abyss. Indeed, he himself is capable of doing this.<sup>52</sup>

Citing this same passage from *Notes from the Underground* in which common sense is sent to the devil, Gorky wrote in his projected *History of Russian Literature*:

Here, I say are concentrated all the fundamental motifs of Dostoevsky's creative work—work most agonizing and, I would say, fruitless, for it does not clarify anything, it does not enhance the positive in life; rather, by emphasizing merely the negative aspects it strengthens them in man's memory, it always depicts him as helpless in the chaos of dark forces and can lead him to pessimism, mysticism, etc.<sup>53</sup>

Taking his distance from the "dark forces" within himself, perceiving in part the historical meaning of the Underground Man as a social type, Gorky nonetheless was unable, or more likely unwilling, to discern the inner pro and contra of *Notes from the Underground*, that is, to distinguish between Dostoevsky's use of the Underground

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>52</sup> V. Ia. Briusov, *Dnevnik: 1890–1910* (Moscow: Sobashnikov, 1927), 94.

<sup>53</sup> Gorky, *Istoriia russkoi literatury*, op.cit., 63.

Man's defense of freedom and his critique of the Underground Man's capricious individualism. Equally important in his later polemics with Dostoevsky, he was unwilling publicly to acknowledge his deep, if paradoxical, affinity with Dostoevsky. In all of Russian literature, there is perhaps no other writer who more closely approximated Dostoevsky in his deeply ambivalent nature and his torment over human suffering than Gorky. Unlike Dostoevsky, however, Gorky as critic and ideologist increasingly embraced the "elevating deception" of a bankrupt rational humanism. Grasping desperately for utopian solutions to the dilemmas of Russian man, life, and history, turning a blind eye in his last years to tragic Soviet Russian reality, he failed to comprehend the profoundly affirmative and active character of Dostoevsky's religious humanism, one that posited a transcendental moral and spiritual imperative in human existence. In ceaselessly and wrongly pointing to Dostoevsky as a preacher of passivity, Gorky concealed a larger truth about Dostoevsky and that writer's impact on him as a young man, a truth that the Russian writer Leonid Andreyev underscored in a scathing letter to Gorky, March 28, 1912:

The West has distorted your view by the instruments of its own struggle, and you have ceased to understand that our instruments for struggle are entirely different, and that our evil genius Dostoevsky is actually a rebel, a teacher of action, and that he taught you rebellion. The glossy bourgeoisie of the West, like every bourgeoisie, falls to ashes in Dostoevsky's presence, and this is the most genuine and the most permanent revolution.<sup>54</sup>

Andreyev might have added that the final lesson Dostoevsky taught his pupil Gorky was rebellion against his teacher. That act of rebellion, however, obscured on every level the complex, intimate, and dramatic relationship between teacher and pupil. It grievously distorted the image of Dostoevsky as man and writer, but it released Gorky from thrall to one of the most powerful writers in world history. On the psychological plane, it made possible the independent growth of one of Russia's great modern writers.

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<sup>54</sup> *Letters of Gorky and Andreev*, op. cit., 130. In a letter to Andreyev, Gorky referred to Dostoevsky as "our evil genius" (*Ibid.*, 120).



BAKHTIN'S *POETICS OF DOSTOEVSKY*  
AND  
"DOSTOEVSKY'S CHRISTIAN DECLARATION OF FAITH"<sup>1</sup>

"God can get along without man," Mikhail M. Bakhtin wrote in "Towards a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book" in 1961, "but man cannot get along without Him."<sup>2</sup> How does Dostoevsky get along with God? Vyacheslav Ivanov answers this question in his Dostoevsky book (1932): "Dostoevsky has long since made his choice: his surety and pledge for it is the figure of Christ shining upon his path."<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> From Robert Louis Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky: The Overwhelming Questions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 269-292.

<sup>2</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics: Theory and History of Literature*, Vol. 8, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, introduction by Wayne C. Booth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 285. All citations in this essay refer to this Emerson translation; it is based upon M. Bakhtin, *Problemy poëtiki Dostoevskogo* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1963), itself an expanded edition of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*, see idem., *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo* (Leningrad, 1929).

<sup>3</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life: A Study in Dostoevsky*, translated from the German by Norman Cameron, ed. S. Konovalov, foreword by Sir Maurice Bowra, with a new introduction by Robert Louis Jackson (Wolfeboro, NH: Longwood Academic, 1989), 111-112. The English translation of Ivanov's book on Dostoevsky was originally published under the same title by Noonday Press in New York, 1952. The German translation from the Russian was first published under the name and title, Wjatscheslaw Iwanow, *Dostojewskij, Tragödie—Mythos—Mystik*, trans. Alexander Kresling (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1932). The original Russian manuscript of the book has been lost. Parts of Ivanov's earlier published writings on Dostoevsky, however, went into the German translation of the book. Ivanov supervised the translation of the Russian text into German.

“infallible criterion” for this claim, Ivanov insists, is “the accord between what Dostoevsky had to teach and the living artistic imagery in which he clothed it.”<sup>4</sup> For Ivanov, “the investigation of Dostoevsky’s religious philosophy remains a serious task for the future.”<sup>5</sup> Bakhtin began writing his book in the immediate post-revolutionary period in Russia several years after Ivanov’s early Dostoevsky studies (1914, 1916, 1917); he published it in 1929 a few years before the appearance of Ivanov’s Dostoevsky book in 1932, one in which Ivanov consolidated his ideas and writings on Dostoevsky. On the surface, Bakhtin has very little to say about Dostoevsky’s religious philosophy. For the most part, he does not cite relevant testimony on Dostoevsky’s views that are to be found in the novelist’s own letters, notebooks, literary criticism, and in his *Diary of a Writer*. Yet a close reading of his study suggests that Dostoevsky’s poetics, as Bakhtin understands it, does address the religious question in fundamental ways, and is organic to Dostoevsky’s declared religious outlook.<sup>6</sup>

Bakhtin’s groundbreaking study, a work proclaiming Dostoevsky as “creator of the polyphonic novel,”<sup>7</sup> architect of a “polyphonic world,” and destroyer of the “established forms of the fundamentally monologic (homophonic) European novel,”<sup>8</sup> relegates the religious question, among other broadly ideological matters pertaining to Dostoevsky, to the back shelf of his concerns. “The present book is devoted to problems of Dostoevsky’s *poetics* and surveys his work from that viewpoint *only*” (Bakhtin’s italics), Bakhtin wrote in the opening line of his preface to his revised *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* in 1963.<sup>9</sup> “The fundamental innovation that this poetics represents, its organic unity within the whole of Dostoevsky’s work,” he adds, “has received

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>6</sup> For discussions of Bakhtin and Dostoevsky, among other questions, see Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of Prosaics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990) and Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> Bakhtin, *Poetics*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 3.

far too little elucidation in scholarship. Literature on Dostoevsky has focused primarily on the ideological problems raised by his work." In the foreword to the original edition of his Dostoevsky book in 1929, Bakhtin put the matter in slightly different words:

The present book is limited solely to theoretical problems of Dostoevsky's art. We have had to exclude all historical problems . . . Dostoevsky's work has been, up to now, the object of a narrowly ideological approach and treatment. Of greatest interest has been the ideology that found its direct expression in the pronouncements of Dostoevsky (or more precisely of his characters). The ideology that determined his artistic form, his extraordinarily complex and completely new novelistic construction, has remained to this day almost completely unexamined.<sup>10</sup>

The "ideology that determined [Dostoevsky's] artistic form" is distinguished from Dostoevsky's "pronouncements," many of which, of course, explicitly addressed his religious point of view. The qualification, "more precisely [those] of his characters," is a noteworthy one. Though Dostoevsky in general shares the religious convictions of some of his characters, these characters for the most part do not give direct expression to the complexity and ambience of his religious outlook. Bakhtin's qualification suggests that he did not wish to place Dostoevsky's pronouncements on religion at a distance from "the ideology that determined his artistic form." At the very outset of his 1929 book, then, Bakhtin leaves the door open for a relationship between Dostoevsky's religious outlook and his poetics, although he chooses to narrow his focus to a discussion of Dostoevsky's poetics.

Bakhtin's book, begun in the early years of the Russian Revolution and published at a time of increasingly heated rhetoric of revolution, was essentially an attempt to lift the question of ideology or worldview above conventional attempts in Western as well as Russian criticism to identify Dostoevsky with this or that character or ideology. It was an effort to locate Dostoevsky and his ultimate statement in the "higher unity" of the so-called polyphonic novel.<sup>11</sup> For Bakhtin, the real

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 275, 276.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 17.

message of the Dostoevsky novel is the author's means of representing the multileveled, multivoiced, nonfinalized, dialogical nature of all character, idea, human experience, life itself. It is in Dostoevsky's way of looking at the world, in the artist's "completely new type of artistic thinking,"<sup>12</sup> his "new form of artistic visualization" of the world,<sup>13</sup> and the "objectivism" of that visualization,<sup>14</sup> rather than in any formal or conventional authorial affirmation of his Christian faith through one or another character, that Bakhtin finds Dostoevsky's ultimate statement on man's relation to God and to the universe.

When Bakhtin says that "one should learn not from Raskolnikov or Sonya, Ivan or Zosima (thereby ripping their voices out of the polyphonic whole and by that act alone distorting the novels)," that one should rather "learn from Dostoevsky himself as a creator of the polyphonic novel,"<sup>15</sup> he in no way denies the importance of what he calls "Dostoevskian ideas,"<sup>16</sup> Dostoevsky's "pronouncements," or the presence of a personal authorial ideology or point of view in his creative works. "A novel without an authorial position . . . is in general impossible," Bakhtin readily concedes.<sup>17</sup> He does not deny, further, that some of Dostoevsky's novels have "conventionally literary, conventionally monologic" endings,<sup>18</sup> that is, definitive or "finalizing" resolutions that give expression to a monological viewpoint. What Bakhtin denies is that these conclusions retain their absolute hegemony in the body of the artistic work or form a basis upon which to judge the authors deepest artistic statement. "The ideas of Dostoevsky, the thinker, upon entering his polyphonic novel change the very form of their existence, they are transformed into artistic images of ideas."<sup>19</sup> What is involved in the Dostoevsky polyphonic novel is "not an absence but a radical change in the author's position." Dostoevsky's "radically

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 92.

new authorial position" led to the discovery of a "new integral view on the person," one that offers "a new form for visualizing a human being in art."<sup>20</sup>

The new authorial position in the polyphonic novel, Bakhtin maintains, is "located above the monological position."<sup>21</sup> The entire realm of the artist's "creative subjectivity" has been objectified in his characters' voices. It follows from this new position that the unity of a Dostoevsky novel as a whole is "above personal style and above personal tone."<sup>22</sup> We are involved, then, not with two Dostoevskys, author-ideologist and artist-philosopher, but with a new positioning of the author-ideologist in the multivoiced world created by the artist, one in which the ideologist participates on equal terms with other voices. It is on this plane of relationships between voices that Bakhtin will find the value orientation of the Dostoevsky novel. The nature of authorial participation in the Dostoevsky novel and the form in which Dostoevsky's point of view manifests itself is crucial to Bakhtin's thinking on Dostoevsky's poetics.

Dostoevsky emerges in his creative work, in Bakhtin's conception, as the creator of "free people, capable of standing alongside their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him." "A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels."<sup>23</sup> The author's "word" or "voice" is but one of a number of voices, none of which are reduced to a single ideological common denominator.<sup>24</sup> Here, too, there is no thought of an ultimate synthesis, of contradictions and bifurcations becoming dialectical and "moving along a temporal path or in an evolving sequence; they were rather spread out in one plane . . . as constant but not merging or as hopelessly contradictory . . . as an eternal harmony of unmerged voices." Not evolution toward some grand synthesis, but "coexistence and interaction . . . space, not time"

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 57, 58.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 17.

constitute the fundamental category in Dostoevsky's mode of artistic visualization.<sup>25</sup>

In chapter 1 of his revised Dostoevsky book, *Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel and Its Treatment in Critical Literature*, Bakhtin to one degree or another faults almost the entire body of critical literature on Dostoevsky before and after his 1929 book for attempting to "monologize" Dostoevsky's "multivoiced world." He directs his attention, first, to Vyacheslav I. Ivanov, a writer, he acknowledges, who nonetheless pointed to the active "fundamental principle at work in Dostoevsky's art."<sup>26</sup> Ivanov, he writes approvingly, defined Dostoevsky's realism "as a realism based not on cognition (objectified cognition) but on 'penetration.'" As Bakhtin formulates Ivanov's position, "The affirmation of someone else's consciousness ["Thou art"]—as an autonomous subject and not as an object—is the ethico-religious postulate determining the *content* of the novel."<sup>27</sup> When Bakhtin later sums up his own theory of the way the "larger sense of [Dostoevsky's] artistic form . . . liberates and de-reifies the human being," he will return to Ivanov's basic "Thou art" formulation: "Thus the new artistic position of the author with regard to the hero in Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel is a fully realized and thoroughly consistent dialogic position, one that affirms the independence, internal unfinalizability, and indeterminacy of the hero. For the author the hero is not 'he' and not 'I' but a fully valid 'Thou,' that is, another and other autonomous I ("Thou art")."<sup>28</sup>

Bakhtin, however, argues that Ivanov, "having arrived at a profound and correct definition of Dostoevsky's fundamental principle . . .

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 30, 28.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 11. For a general discussion of Bakhtin and Ivanov, see Nikolai Kotrelev, "K probleme dialogicheskogo personazha (M. M. Bakhtin i Viacheslav Ivanov)" in *Cultura e memoria: Atti del terzo Simposio Internazionale dedicato a Viaceslav Ivanov*. [2 vols] *Testi in russo*, ed. Fausto Malcovati 2 (Florence: "La Nuova Italia," 1988), 93–103.

<sup>27</sup> Bakhtin, *Poetics*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 63. Or as Bakhtin articulates Dostoevsky's artistic position in his notes "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book," "I cannot manage without another. I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself [in mutual reflection and mutual acceptance]" (Ibid., 287).

proceeded to monologize this principle, that is, he incorporated it into a monologically formulated authorial worldview and perceived it as merely one of the interesting themes in a world represented from the point of view of a monologic authorial consciousness."<sup>29</sup> Bakhtin understates the importance Ivanov attributes to the "Thou art" principle in Dostoevsky's novel; it is considerably more than a "theme." The core of Bakhtin's criticism, however, is that Ivanov committed "a typical methodological error: he moves *directly* from the author's worldview to the content of the author's works, *passing over the form*. In other instances Ivanov more correctly understands the interrelationship between worldview and form" (my italics—*RLJ*).<sup>30</sup> Bakhtin writes:

Vyacheslav Ivanov did not show how this principle of Dostoevsky's worldview becomes the principle behind Dostoevsky's artistic visualization of the world, the principle behind his artistic structuring of a verbal whole, the novel. But it is only in this form, as a principle governing concrete literary construction and not as the ethico-religious principle behind an abstract worldview, that it is essential for the literary scholar.<sup>31</sup>

Bakhtin, then, does not differ with Ivanov on the centrality of the "Thou art" principle in Dostoevsky's art—for Ivanov, the core of Dostoevsky's ethico-religious point of view. His main criticism is that Ivanov did not disclose the pervasive, informing, and structuring role of the "Thou art" principle in Dostoevsky's artistic-philosophical rendering of his novelistic universe, that he did not follow through on his initial insight. On this point, Bakhtin is certainly correct. Yet the Russian philosopher, like Bakhtin, clearly affirms "the great organic unity of Dostoevsky's work as a whole." Ivanov continues:

Indeed, all parts of his "doctrine" have such an inwardly fundamental and living relationship—his ethics, psychology, metaphysics, anthropology, sociology and eschatology so utterly determine and complement each other—that the deeper we penetrate into the nature of the connection between them, the more certain we come to realize that for Dostoevsky the creation

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 11.



of literary form was only a medium for the polymorphous development of a synthetic idea of the universe, which from the outset he had carried within him as a comprehensive vision and a morphological principle of his spiritual growth.<sup>32</sup>

Dostoevsky's "literary form" for Ivanov is an integral part and expression of the novelists "doctrine," his concept of the "polymorphous development of a synthetic idea of the universe." Ivanov puts the word doctrine in quotation marks: he fully recognizes that Dostoevsky's art does not emerge literally from a doctrine. He might have used the word *poetics*, a word which in Bakhtin's usage embraces problems of "literary form" and addresses the whole question of Dostoevsky's fundamental innovation: his artistic construction of "a new artistic model of the world," "a polyphonic world."<sup>33</sup>

In his remarks on Ivanov, Bakhtin uses the notion of *worldview* somewhat ambiguously. He uses this term in the first instance to designate Dostoevsky's ethico-religious outlook, that position ("the author's worldview" [*mirovozzren'e*]) from which Ivanov, erroneously in Bakhtin's view, moves directly . . . to the content of the author's work, passing over the form. In Bakhtin's view, however, the underlying ethico-religious principle of this worldview, "Dostoevsky's fundamental principle," lies at the heart of his "artistic visualization of the world," his artistic worldview. At root, then, Dostoevsky's "abstract worldview" and his "artistic visualization of the world" bear a close resemblance to each other.

Bakhtin's distinction between an "abstract worldview" and a higher worldview, or "artistic visualization" (*khudozhestvennoe videnie*) of the world, however, remains crucial to his understanding of Dostoevsky's poetics. Noteworthy is Bakhtin's consistent use of the noun "videnie" (vision, visualization, or seeing), with its root in the Russian word "videt'" (to see) when speaking of Dostoevsky's artistic

<sup>32</sup> Ivanov, *Dostoevsky*, op. cit., 116. There is no evidence that Ivanov had read Bakhtin's study of Dostoevsky when he was preparing his 1932 Dostoevsky book. Bakhtin, in turn, could have had no knowledge in 1929 of these particular observations of Ivanov, since they do not appear in his earlier essays on Dostoevsky.

<sup>33</sup> Bakhtin, *Poetics*, 3, 8.

worldview.<sup>34</sup> Active or artistic seeing, the creation of images in words, on the one hand, and making abstract ideological pronouncements (such as might constitute a worldview in the conventional use of the term), on the other, are two different things. Thus, Bakhtin cautions apropos of Dostoevsky's capacity to "see and represent the world" only in the "category of coexistence": "The characteristic of Dostoevsky we offer here is not, of course, a trait of his worldview (*mirovozzrenie*) in the ordinary sense of the word. *It is a trait of his artistic perception of the world*" (my italics—RLJ).<sup>35</sup> Bakhtin's qualification, "in the ordinary sense of the word," leaves open precisely the possibility of using the term worldview in the higher sense of the word, as he uses it to a large extent in his discussion of Dostoevsky's poetics. Yet Bakhtin implicitly contrasts *worldview* in the ordinary sense of the word with *visualization* when he juxtaposes Dostoevsky's religious views—in particular as they take shape in the mouths of his characters—with Dostoevsky's "artistic cognition of the human world."<sup>36</sup>

To provide another example: when discussing Dostoevsky's notion of the being of man (in Bakhtin's words, "*to be means to communicate*"), Bakhtin cautions that "all this is no philosophical theory of Dostoevsky's—it is the way he artistically visualized the life of human consciousness, a visualization embodied in the form of a content."<sup>37</sup> Bakhtin, it should be noted, is careful in his formulation to avoid the "methodological error" he attributes to Ivanov; that is, he does not directly "pass over form" to content but speaks of "a visualization embodied *in the form of a content*" (my italics—RLJ). Bakhtin's notion of visualization in the form of a content is important in another respect: it implies that visualization is never passive but always forming, shaping, image producing. Thus, for example, he refers to "Dostoevsky's visualizing power (*videnie Dostoevskogo*) . . . organizing and shaping this diversity [of unmerged voices] in the cross-section of a given mo-

<sup>34</sup> "Videt'," "videnie"—words etymologically linked with "knowing" (as in the German "wissen"). The Russian word "videnie" is rich in meanings and connotations: it means literally "the capacity or possibility of seeing"; it may be "sight" or "eyes"; "vision" (prophetic); or "face" or "image."

<sup>35</sup> Bakhtin, *Poetics*, 29.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

ment."<sup>38</sup> Dostoevsky's "new form of visualization," Bakhtin suggests, is also a kind of unveiling. The polyphonic novel, he writes, contributed to the "seeing and discovery of something new in life."<sup>39</sup> "Artistic form or vision, correctly understood, does not shape already prepared and found content, but rather permits content to be found and seen for the first time."<sup>40</sup> Dostoevsky himself repeatedly stressed the special unveiling character of artistic vision. "Really, examine some fact of real life, even one which at first glance is not very striking," Dostoevsky wrote in his *Diary of a Writer* in October 1876, "and if only you are able and have the eyes, you will discover in it a depth such as is not to be found in Shakespeare. But really here is just the whole point: whose eyes and who is able. Indeed, not only to create and write artistic works, but even just to note a fact, something in the way of an artist is also needed."<sup>41</sup> The artistic visualization of reality here, as Bakhtin recognized, is of a different order than a realism based on cognition.

The words of the critic (or of the author, outside the work of art) may violate the organic form-content unity that emerges from genuine artistic visualization. Expository language or discourse, however subtle, is not the same as the language of artistic visualization. At one point, Bakhtin himself apologetically speaks of translating "into the language of an abstract worldview that which was the object [for Dostoevsky] of concrete and living artistic visualization and which then became a principle of form."<sup>42</sup> Bakhtin's comment serves to remind the reader that he is not concerned with Dostoevsky's worldview "in the ordinary sense of the word," that is, with abstract pronouncements, but with a mode of expression in which words are used not to preach or teach directly but to create or form images. Thus, Bakhtin emphasizes: "As an artist, Dostoevsky did not create his ideas in the same way philosophers or scholars create theirs—he created images of ideas found, heard, sometimes divined by him *in reality itself* that is, ideas already living or entering life as idea-forces."<sup>43</sup> "For Dostoevsky, there

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>41</sup> Dostoevskii, PSS, 23:144.

<sup>42</sup> Bakhtin, *Poetics*, 288.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 90.

are no ideas, no thoughts, no positions which belong to no one, which exist 'in themselves.' Even 'truth in itself' he presents in the spirit of Christian ideology, as incarnated in Christ; that is, he presents it as a personality entering into relationships with other personalities."<sup>44</sup> Yet for all the limitations of the "language of an abstract worldview," it may convey accurately, albeit in a cumbersome way (as is often the case in Bakhtin's study), the truths of the language of imagery, the language of artistic visualization. The point is an important one: the essence and dynamic of Dostoevsky's artistic visualization of reality do find subtle expression in his religious "pronouncements," in his abstract "ideology," and the other way around.

At the beginning of his third chapter, "The Idea in Dostoevsky," a section concerned with the "positioning of the idea in Dostoevsky's artistic world," Bakhtin stresses that in his analysis, he will "avoid matters of content in the ideas introduced by Dostoevsky. What is important for us here is their artistic function in the work."<sup>45</sup> At the end of this same chapter, after citing a passage from Dostoevsky's notebook, in which the novelist affirms his personal faith in Christ, Bakhtin writes, "In these thoughts the important thing for us is not Dostoevsky's Christian declaration of faith in itself, but those living forms of his artistic and ideological thinking that are here so lucidly realized and expressed."<sup>46</sup> Bakhtin, however, all but directly affirms an organic relationship between Dostoevsky's declaration of faith and the "living forms" of his thinking. He simply insists that "Dostoevskian ideas" "enter the great dialogue of the [Dostoevsky] novel on *completely equal terms* with other idea-images."<sup>47</sup> The question, however, is whether these ideas prevail in this dialogue, that is, shape the narrative and its ultimate point of view.

How do "Dostoevsky ideas" ultimately fare in the great dialogue? Bakhtin speaks not of a definitive or finalizing triumph of

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 31–32. See also Bakhtin's comment: "It is characteristic that in Dostoevsky's works there are absolutely no *separate* thoughts, propositions, or formulations such as maxims, sayings, aphorisms which, when removed from their context and detached from their voice, would retain their semantic meaning in an impersonal form" (Ibid., 95).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 92.

Dostoevsky ideas or worldview. With respect to his understanding of “worldview” in general, Bakhtin follows Dostoevsky closely: “Dostoevsky understands worldview not as an abstract unity and sequence in a system of thoughts and positions, but as an ultimate position in the world in relation to higher values,” Bakhtin writes in “Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book” (1961). “Worldviews embodied in voices. A dialogue among such embodied worldviews, in which he himself participated.”<sup>48</sup> In some important lines in the same notes, Bakhtin provides an important clue to the form Dostoevsky’s “ultimate position” takes in his novels, to the way it is manifested. “Not faith (in the sense of a specific faith in orthodoxy, in progress, in man, in revolution, etc.) but a *sense of faith*, that is, an integral attitude (by means of the whole person) toward a higher and ultimate value.”<sup>49</sup> In this definition of faith, there is no final victory; there is only a tension, or movement, of the whole being toward higher value. Man cannot wholly know or appropriate “higher values,” ultimate value, truth, or God, but he can with his whole being sense it, lean toward it, stand in a positive relationship to it. Such is the essence of Luke 12:30: “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” Here there is a tension toward God, not a merging with, or appropriation of, God. When the scribe repeats with some elaboration on this notion (Lk. 12:33), Jesus replies, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God” (Lk. 12:34).

This sense of “an integral attitude . . . toward a higher and ultimate value,” manifested in the tension of unfinalized dialogue within the self, objectified in the clash of voices on the novelistic plane or plane of life, is well illustrated by one of Dostoevsky’s central observations in his notebook, “Man strives on earth for an ideal that is contrary to his nature.”<sup>50</sup> The idea of permanent striving for value, for the ideal, for God, is central to Bakhtin’s understanding of the authorial position in a Dostoevsky novel.

Bakhtin recognizes the centrality of the question of Dostoevsky’s authorial position in his novel. In a letter to the Russian critic Vadim

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 296.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>50</sup> Dostoevskii, PSS, 20:175.

V. Kozhinov in 1961, Bakhtin notes that his discussion on the position of the author in the polyphonic novel "has more than anything else given rise to objections and misunderstanding."<sup>51</sup> In his notes "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book," Bakhtin seeks to address this misunderstanding:

Our point of view in no way assumes a passivity on the part of the author, who would then merely assemble others' point of view, others' truths, completely denying his own point of view, his own truth. This is not the case at all; the case is rather a completely new and special interrelationship between the authors and the other's truth. The author is profoundly *active* but his activity is of a special dialogic sort. It is one thing to be active in relation to a dead thing, to voiceless material that can be molded and formed as one wishes, and another thing to be active in relation to someone else's living, autonomous consciousness. This is a questioning, provoking, answering, agreeing, objecting activity; that is, it is dialogic activity no less active than the activity that finalizes materializes, explains, and kills causally, that drowns out the other's voice with nonsemantic arguments. Dostoevsky frequently interrupts, but he never drowns out the others voice, never finishes it off "from himself," that is, out of his own and alien consciousness. This is, so to speak, the activity of God in His relation to man, a relation allowing man to reveal himself utterly [in his immanent development], to judge himself, to refute himself. This is activity of a higher quality. It surmounts not the resistance of dead material but the resistance of another's consciousness, another's truth.<sup>52</sup>

Bakhtin does not provide any concrete illustrations here of how dialogic "activity" "surmounts" or overcomes the "resistance . . . of another's consciousness," while at the same time, remaining open-ended. What does it mean to surmount the resistance of another's consciousness, another's truth? Dostoevsky's "sense of faith," his "ultimate position in relation to higher values," what we might be called his tension toward the ideal, finds expression in the continuous and continuing process of surmounting another truth, or surmounting

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<sup>51</sup> Bakhtin, *Poetics*, 283.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

the resistance of another truth. Bakhtin, for this reason, rejects as inauthentic and "monological" the conclusions of some of Dostoevsky's novels (as, for example, the epilogue in *Crime and Punishment*); typical of Dostoevsky's abstract ideology, they contradict, in Bakhtin's view, the novelist's polyphonic artistic stance. As opposed to the idea of a finalizing monological conclusion, the concept of surmounting may suggest, however, a permanent tendency toward such a conclusion. The "conclusion" is never reached, and it may certainly be challenged, even mocked by other voices, but in the overall configuration of voices, there is always a felt tendency toward it; or in Bakhtin's words, "a sense of faith," an "integral attitude . . . toward a higher and ultimate value."

In Dostoevsky's notebooks, a close connection may be perceived between the idea of a permanent process of open-ended surmounting or overcoming another's truth in his novelistic universe and his ethico-religious thinking. A consideration of Bakhtin's analogy between Dostoevsky's artistic activity and the "activity of God in His relation to man" serves to open up this question.

Frequent are the comparisons in critical literature between Leo Tolstoy and God (Gorky, Thomas Mann, and others have drawn this analogy). Dostoevsky himself once referred to Tolstoy as "a god of art." Among major critical thinkers, only Bakhtin, it would seem, has drawn an analogy between Dostoevsky, the artist, and God. In this comparison, one simultaneously esthetic and theological, Dostoevsky emerges in his novelistic activity as God-Creator, but above all as God. "In His relation to man, a relation allowing man to reveal himself utterly (in his immanent development)."<sup>53</sup> What is at issue is God's grand design with respect to the salvation of man. The artist-god is not the monologically oriented personal god of the Old Testament, a deity who is always interfering with the destinies of his people, now threatening them, now punishing them, now rewarding them, and always laying out their destiny, but the god of the New Testament who leaves man free to decide for himself, free "to judge himself, to refute himself" in self-regulating dialogical processes.

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<sup>53</sup> There is an analogy here with Bakhtin's whole understanding of form: "Artistic form, correctly understood, does not shape already prepared and found content, but rather permits content to be found and seen for the first time" (*Poetics*, 43).



If Dostoevsky's relation to his multivoiced world may be compared to the activity of God in his relation to man, then the "divine" principle behind Dostoevsky's activity is freedom: open-ended dialogue, interchange, struggle, continual movement, or nonfinalized striving. In this sense, the "new artistic model of the world" that Dostoevsky created is the *world as it is*, the world that God created: a world of endless struggle between good and evil, of many competing truths, autonomous tendencies; a world in which men are in turmoil and "argument" has not ceased; a world, above all, in which "the end is not by and by" (Lk. 21: 8–9).

"As major heroes," Bakhtin writes, "Dostoevsky portrays only those people in his work with whom argument has not yet ended (for indeed it is not yet ended in the world)."<sup>54</sup> An element of unfinalizability defines the strivings of Dostoevsky's heroes. Bakhtin, in this connection, cites Alyosha on his brother Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*: "Oh, his soul is a stormy one. His mind is a prisoner of it. There is a great and unresolved thought in him. He is one of those who don't need millions, they just need to get a thought straight [*nadobno mysl' razreshit'*, literally "they need to resolve a thought"]." "It is given to all of Dostoevsky's characters to 'think and seek higher things,'" comments Bakhtin. "In each of them there is a 'great and unresolved thought'; all of them must, before all else, 'resolve a thought.' And in this resolution of a thought (an idea) lies their entire real life and their own personal unfinalizability."<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, Dostoevsky's heroes are endlessly trying to resolve the unresolvable, to solve the insoluble, to cross uncrossable boundaries. Ivan's supreme effort to "resolve a thought," the problem of freedom itself, is his "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor," a "poem" that sets forth "the unsolved historical contradictions of human nature." Ivan's quest for resolution of this question remains, like the so-called historical contradictions of human nature, unresolved in the legend. It is in the novel as a whole, however, in the developing drama of Ivan and other characters, that one observes a tendency toward a resolution; a point of view emerges out of the configuration of these struggles that gives embodiment to "Dostoevsky ideas."

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 87.

The artistic position of Dostoevsky as “God” is eminently an ethical position but one that does not involve direct action in the form of “an externalizing and finalizing approach” to his characters.<sup>56</sup> Dostoevsky does not overwhelm his characters, in Bakhtin’s view, with his supreme power and knowledge. He respects “that internally unrealizable something in man,” their intrinsic freedom and independence as human beings, their essential unfinalizable character. “In Dostoevsky’s subsequent works [after *Poor Folk* and other early works], the characters . . . all do furious battle with such [finalizing secondhand] definitions in the mouths of other people.”<sup>57</sup>

Dostoevsky’s open-ended godlike approach to his characters may be compared to that of the Lord in the Book of Job or Goethe’s *Faust*. The supreme finalizing approach to, and definitive definition of, man, however, surely belongs to Satan and the Grand Inquisitor, demonic entities who stress the idea of the limited and defective nature of human beings, man’s inability to bear the burden of freedom, his negative dive toward self-limitation and self-destruction. The devil in *Faust* asks only that God allow him to go to work on the “little earth god” Faust to demonstrate the truth of his, the devil’s, tragic definition. God grants the devil’s request; he is confident of his creation and leaves it to Faust to discover the truth: “A good man in his dark striving is conscious of the right way.”

It is in *The Brothers Karamazov* that the Joban and Faustian design finds most dramatic embodiment. The Grand Inquisitor’s definition of man—“I swear, man is weaker and baser by nature than Thou hast believed him”—is tested in the dramas of the Karamazov brothers, in particular in the drama of Dmitry Karamazov.<sup>58</sup> Dmitry spends the two days before the murder of his father “literally casting himself in all directions, ‘struggling with his fate and saving himself,’ as he himself put it later.” Characteristically, the quoted words are spoken by Dmitry, not by the omniscient narrator. Dmitry recognizes his struggle to be a universal one. “God and the devil are fighting there and the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>58</sup> For a more extensive discussion of some of the ideas set forth here on Dmitry Karamazov, see my chapter “Dmitry Karamazov and the Legend,” in *The Art of Dostoevsky: Deliriums and Nocturnes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 335–346.

battlefield is the heart of man." "Struggling with his fate and saving himself" speaks of Dmitry's salvation as something in process. Dmitry does "save himself" from killing his father with his own hand (though he contributes to the murder of his father), but his struggle is still going on at the end of the novel. What is important is that he has become conscious of his inner struggle, of the task, one endless for him as for humanity, of continuously striving, of continuously striving to "save himself." Dmitry rejects, and then not so much in thought as in action, in the drama of his life, the Grand Inquisitor's humiliating definition of man. In seeking to define himself, in his furious and ever-continuing internal dialogue ("unknown ideas are storming within me," "various philosophies are tormenting me"), Dmitry in spite of all backslidings and opposite movements, tends toward a lofty ideal. His ecstasy over the poetry of Schiller serves both to signal these higher ideals and his own inner striving toward them.

It is significant that Dmitry speaks of the birth of a "new man" within himself. Yet even such a happening appears utopian. "You wanted through suffering to be reborn into another man," Alyosha says to his brother. "In my opinion, remember only and always through your life . . . this other man—and that will be enough for you." Memory here serves to foreground the purity of intention, the point of light toward which Dmitry can strive. Ethical behavior in Dostoevsky's artistic universe, in the language of Russian grammar, is in the imperfective or durative aspect, not perfective or punctual. One cannot speak in any sense of a resolution of Dmitry's conflicts; one cannot speak of a new formed outlook or faith in any specific sense. Yet one may speak of a "sense of faith . . . an integral attitude (by means of the whole person) toward a higher and ultimate value." Dostoevsky's representation of the dynamic, ongoing drama of Dmitry validates Bakhtin's view of the Russian novelist's work as "the activity of God in His relation to man, a relation allowing man to reveal himself utterly (in his immanent development), to judge himself, to refute himself."

Bakhtin, however, provides no illustrations of how Dostoevsky's "point of view" manifests itself in his work or in the lives of his heroes; he excludes from his circle of concerns precisely concrete and rounded discussions of the ideological dramas of Dostoevsky's characters. He does indicate that in the realm of competing consciousnesses, truths, voices, *some* voices, *some* truths that sound out are more "authoritative."

After characterizing Dostoevsky's "method of integral juxtapositions,"<sup>59</sup> his "form-shaping ideology," Bakhtin observes:

As a result of such an ideological approach, what unfolds before Dostoevsky is not a world of objects, illuminated and ordered by his monologic thought, but a world of consciousnesses mutually illuminating one another, a world of yoked-together semantic human orientations. Among them Dostoevsky seeks the highest and most authoritative orientation, and he perceives it not as his own true thought, but as another authentic human being and his discourse. The image of the ideal human being or the image of Christ represents for him the resolution of ideological quests. This image or this highest voice must crown the world of voices, must organize and subdue it. Precisely the image of a human being and his voice, a voice not the author's own, was the ultimate artistic criterion for Dostoevsky: not fidelity to his own convictions and not fidelity to convictions themselves taken abstractly, but precisely a fidelity to the authoritative image of a human being.<sup>60</sup>

These lines are among the most important in Bakhtin's study; they deserve the most careful attention. Bakhtin projects, as it were, a horizontal plane to the Dostoevsky novel on which coexist multiple "consciousnesses," separate, albeit "yoked together" "semantic human orientations," "voices," each jostling one another, each bearing its own truths. At the same time, he suggests what we may term a vertical dimension in Dostoevsky's novelistic universe, a hierarchy of voices, orientations, or truths arising out of this sea of autonomous jostling truths. This hierarchy of orientations results from the special activity of the author. "Among [these orientations] Dostoevsky seeks the highest and most authoritative orientation." The highest orientation is the voice of Christ and his "discourse." The highest word, in short, is the word of Christ, and "his voice must crown the world of voices, must organize and subdue it."

One point deserves emphasis here: Dostoevsky, in Bakhtin's view, characteristically "seeks the highest and most authoritative

<sup>59</sup> Bakhtin, *Poetics*, 97.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

orientation; he perceives it not as his own thought"; the image of Christ represents for him "the resolution of ideological quests," a resolution, however, that is clearly not at hand. There is a paradox here. Christ's voice or word is one among many voices or "words" on the horizontal, egalitarian plane of the novel's life and work, as on the stage of life. Yet because of Dostoevsky's seeking—the correlative of the seeking of all characters in his novels ("It is given to all of Dostoevsky's characters to 'think and seek higher things'")—Christ's "word" (in the figurative sense, above all) acquires a privileged, though not uncontested, status as an "authoritative orientation" or ideal.

The concept of Dostoevsky seeking the highest truth within a world of competing truths is a crucial one in Bakhtin's understanding of Dostoevsky's relation to his novelistic universe. Dostoevsky, the seeker, plays no didactic role on the stage of his novel's activity (such a role, for example, is played by Father Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*); he does not impose his point of view through authorial pronouncement. It is Christ's voice, Christ's image, not Dostoevsky's opinions, that must "crown the world of voices, must organize and subdue it" at the end of time—though not at the end of the novel.

The final goal toward which Dostoevsky and his characters strive in light or darkness, consciously or unconsciously, may be previsioned, anticipated, even symbolized in memory, dream, or art, but it cannot be achieved in the novel, as it cannot be achieved in life. All that can be done is to seek; all that can be achieved in the social, ethical, and spiritual realm is "an integral attitude toward a higher and ultimate value." "Do not lose touch with life, preserve your soul, believe in the truth," Dostoevsky wrote Nadezhda Suslova on April 19, 1865. "But seek it intently all life long, or else it is terribly easy to go astray." Dostoevsky's words here and elsewhere in his letters and notebooks give perfect expression to his so-called abstract worldview and his "artistic visualization" of reality. His *monological* "word," one might say—though Bakhtin would not say it—is expressed in a dynamic polyphonic context.

Dostoevsky's relation to his novelistic world, then, is a double one: as ideologist, as a man with a point of view, it is that of any character in his novel seeking truth, striving not to go astray in a world where the end is not yet in sight; as artist, it is that of the grand architect who "allows man freely to reveal himself utterly (in his immanent development), to judge himself, to refute himself." In both

roles, Dostoevsky acknowledges the unfinished or unfinalized nature of human experience and striving, the permanent reality of freedom and uncertainty, dialogue and dilemma, in this world. For both writer and seeker, the voice of Christ has a privileged place as “the highest voice” or truth, but it is a truth that one can only stand in relation to, a truth to which one can only relate imperfectly, and at best, with a sense of faith or fidelity.

The distinction between “fidelity” to an authoritative image as opposed to fidelity to one’s own convictions or convictions taken abstractly is important to Bakhtin’s understanding of the relation of Dostoevsky or his characters to an ideal or ultimate value. In his effort to clarify the distinction between these two types of fidelity, and so establish more clearly Dostoevsky’s special position in relation to his universe of voices, Bakhtin cites the Russian novelist’s response in his notebook (1881) to some remarks by the Russian historian K. D. Kavelin:

It is not enough to define morality as fidelity to one’s own convictions. Even more one must endlessly stimulate within oneself the question: are my convictions true? Only one verification of them exists—Christ. But this is no longer philosophy it is faith, and this faith is a red color . . . I cannot recognize one who burns heretics as a moral man, because I do not accept your thesis that morality is an agreement with internal convictions. That is merely *honesty* (the Russian language is rich), but not morality. I have one moral model and an ideal, Christ. I ask: would he have burned heretics?—no. Well, that means the burning of heretics is an immoral act . . . Christ was mistaken—it’s been proved! A scorching feeling tells me: better that I remain with a mistake, with Christ, than with you . . . Living life has led you, only the formulas and categories remain, and that, it seems, makes you happy. You say there’s more peace and quiet (laziness) that way . . . You say that to be moral one need only act according to conviction. But just where do you get your convictions? I simply do not believe you and say that on the contrary it is immoral to act according to one’s convictions. And you, of course, cannot find a way to prove me wrong.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Bakhtin, *Poetics*, 97–98. See Dostoevsky’s observations in PSS, 27: 56, 57, 58, 85.

At the heart of Dostoevsky's comments is his idea: "better that I remain with a mistake, with Christ," that is, even if Christ were wrong, he would rather remain with him. Bakhtin prefaces his observations on this passage with the remark that "in these thoughts the important thing for us is not Dostoevsky's Christian declaration of faith in itself but those living forms of his artistic and ideological thinking."<sup>62</sup> "Declaration of faith" and "living forms" of artistic thought (like Bakhtin's opposition of "worldview," "in the ordinary sense of the word," to "artistic visualization") seem to emerge here as antithetical categories. Yet it is clear that Dostoevsky's "Christian declaration of faith" not only sums up his religious worldview, but gives precise expression, albeit "in the language of an abstract worldview," to the "living forms" of his "artistic and ideological thinking." Bakhtin, indeed, seems fully conscious of this fact. In his discussion of Dostoevsky's response to Kavelin, Bakhtin centers on the dynamic character of Dostoevsky's religious outlook. "Formulas and categories" are alien to Dostoevsky's thinking, he writes:

[Dostoevsky] prefers to remain with the mistake but with Christ that is, without truth in the theoretical sense of the word, without truth-as-formula, truth-as-proposition . . . A distrust of convictions and their usual monologic function, a quest for truth not as the deduction of one's own consciousness, in fact not in the monologic context of an individual consciousness at all, but rather in the ideal authoritative image of another human being, an orientation toward the others voice, the other's word: all this is characteristic of Dostoevsky's form-shaping ideology. An authorial idea or thought must not perform in the work the function of totally illuminating the represented world, but must rather enter into that world as an image of a human being, as one orientation among other orientations, as one word among many words. This ideal orientation (the true word) and its potential must never be lost sight of [literally, must be before the eyes], but it must not color the work with the personal ideological tone of the author.<sup>63</sup>

Dostoevsky's stress, according to Bakhtin, upon the "quest for truth" as something disclosed not in "the deduction of one's

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<sup>62</sup> Bakhtin, *Poetics*, 98.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*



own consciousness" (that is, merely in words, ratiocination, abstract philosophy), but "rather in the ideal authoritative image of another human being" and in an "orientation" toward that voice; his notion that in Dostoevsky's work, the "ideal orientation (the true word) and its possibility" must remain before the eyes—all of this concords with Dostoevsky's conception of the appearance of Christ and man's relation to him in the design of divine salvation. "Christ," he wrote in his notebook, "is the ideal of man in the flesh."<sup>64</sup> Renan and others consider Christ an ordinary man and criticize the teachings of Christ as inappropriate for our times, Dostoevsky observes in his notebook for *The Devils*, "But here there are not even any teachings, only occasional words, while the main thing is the image of Christ from which comes all teaching."<sup>65</sup> "Not Christ's morality, not the teaching of Christ will save the world, but precisely faith that the Word became flesh. This faith is not just intellectual recognition of the superiority of His teachings, but direct attraction."<sup>66</sup> Jesus, the Grand Inquisitor notes, declared that "man must hereafter with free heart decide for himself what is good and what is evil, having only Thy image before him as his guide."

The hero of the "Dream of a Ridiculous Man" experiences in his dream "real images and forms" of higher beauty. "I saw, I saw," he declares, "and the living image filled my soul forever . . . the living image of what I saw will always be with me and always correct and guide me." The ridiculous man relates directly to the image of beauty; characteristically he has difficulty formulating his vision in words. "After my dream I lost the knack of putting things into words. At least, into the most necessary and most important words." What is important now is his organic relationship to his vision: "I have indeed beheld it [heaven on earth] with my own eyes, though I cannot describe what I saw." Verbal descriptions or affirmations of faith ("the most necessary and most important words") cannot substitute for or convey the image of beauty itself. One can only see the "living image," be drawn toward it, follow it: "The living image . . . will always be with me and always correct and guide me."

<sup>64</sup> Dostoevskii, PSS, 20:172.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 11:192.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 11:187–188.

Dostoevsky relates to the image of Christ much as the Ridiculous Man relates to his "living image" of beauty and truth. In his *Diary of a Writer*, he sets out at times directly to preach his religious idea. In the artistic universe of his novels, however, Dostoevsky, as it were, preaches his idea in imagery. Bakhtin speaks of Dostoevsky's images of ideas. "The idea, as it was seen by Dostoevsky the artist, is not a subjective individual-psychological formation with 'permanent resident rights' in a person's head . . . The idea is a live event . . . the idea is similar to the word . . . like the word, the idea wants to be heard, understood, and 'answered' by other voices from other positions."<sup>67</sup> Similarly, the embodied "idea" of Christ, this "ideal authoritative image," also wants to be heard, understood, and "answered." And indeed, the power and presence of Jesus is felt most strongly in *The Brothers Karamazov* precisely in a moment of dialogue when he is "answered" by the Grand Inquisitor.

What is important in man's orientation toward the "ideal authoritative image," whether he be the Ridiculous Man, Dmitry Karamazov, or the crowd of people in front of the cathedral in Seville who "strive toward" Jesus,<sup>68</sup> is the fact that he continue to strive toward it. The ideal orientation (the true word) and its possibility must always be before the eyes. Man must freely discover Christ, "the ideal authoritative image," "as one orientation among other orientations, as one word among many words." Christ, the idea-image of Christ, emerges as the supreme embodiment of man's never-ending "quest for truth," or in the esthetic and spiritual terms of "artistic visualization," as the supreme ideal of man in his *quest for form*.<sup>69</sup>

The idea of a permanent quest for form, for absolute spiritual beauty, and truth, is embodied in Dostoevsky's readiness to "remain with a mistake," that is, with Christ. The thought that Dostoevsky

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>68</sup> In the opening scene of Ivan's "poem" the people in front of the cathedral in Seville recognize the silent Christ and freely "strive toward" him. "That might be one of the best passages in the poem," Ivan remarks, "I mean, why they recognize Him. The people are irresistibly drawn to Him, they surround Him, they flock about Him. Follow Him."

<sup>69</sup> For a discussion of Dostoevsky's higher esthetic, see Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form: A Study of His Philosophy of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966; 2nd ed., Phyllisardt, 1978).

sets forth here found expression in a letter (one that Bakhtin was perfectly familiar with) wrote to N. D. Fonvizina immediately after his release from prison in 1854. In that letter, he speaks of his religious beliefs:

I am a child of the age, a child of lack of faith and doubt till now, and [this I know] this will be true till the coffin closes over. What frightful torments this thirst to believe has cost and costs me now, one which is all the stronger in my soul the more there are opposite proofs in me. And yet God sometimes sends me moments in which I am perfectly tranquil; in these moments I love and find that I am loved by others, and in such moments I have formed in myself a symbol of faith in which everything is clear and sacred for me. This symbol is very simple; here it is: to believe that there is nothing more beautiful, profound, sympathetic, intelligent, manly, and perfect than Christ, and not only is not but, with jealous love I say to myself, cannot be. Even more, if somebody proved to me that Christ was outside the truth, and it really were so that the truth were outside of Christ, then I would rather remain with Christ than with the truth.<sup>70</sup>

Dostoevsky, in short, is prepared to “remain with a mistake,” with Christ. He allows for the existence of a negative truth—“opposite proofs”—a truth that logically denies the divinity of Christ. Yet in the face of that truth, he makes a leap of faith that places Christ back into the circle of revealed truth. The paradoxical formulation of faith here is central both to Dostoevsky’s “artistic visualization of the world, the principle behind his artistic structuring of a verbal whole, the novel”<sup>71</sup> and to his Christian ethico-religious outlook. Dostoevsky’s “even if,” his choice to remain with Christ even if he were outside the truth, is that of a man who will remain “a child of the century, a child of disbelief and doubt” until his grave closes over. This spiritual condition Dostoevsky describes in these lines is that of a person in a permanent state of spiritual tension in which the “thirst to believe” is continually overcoming the “opposite proofs,” doubt, the negative truth. What defines this condition in him is not a definitive triumph of Christ’s

<sup>70</sup> Dostoevskii, PSS, 28(1):176.

<sup>71</sup> Bakhtin, *Poetics*, 11.

truth but a continual "quest for truth," a continual and agonizing quest for form, a continual positing of an ideal authoritative image.

Dostoevsky's letter to N. D. Fonvizina in 1854 contains the earliest extant formulation of what Bakhtin in his *Poetics* calls Dostoevsky's "Christian declaration of faith." Bakhtin makes no reference to this letter nor does he refer to the most definitive reformulation of this declaration of faith, one that may be found in Dostoevsky's notebook, April 17, 1864. On the occasion of the death of his first wife and at the time of writing *Notes from the Underground*, Dostoevsky put down some thoughts that constitute the core of his worldview. He posits Christ as the "everlasting ideal since the beginning of time, towards whom man aspires . . . The entire history of mankind, and partly that of each individual, is only the development, the struggle, the striving, and the achievement of this goal."

Central to Dostoevsky's entire view of man and history is the idea of permanent movement, development, transition. "Man on this earth is only a developing creature." His life is a permanent process of "achieving, struggling, and, through all defeats, refocusing on the ideal [Christ] and struggling for it." Dostoevsky posits this process as a "law of nature," the "law of striving for the ideal," the law that gives spiritual life through setting into creative movement or tension the opposing truths or realities of human existence. "Man strives on earth for an ideal that is contrary to his nature." Spiritual health for Dostoevsky is not in stasis, not in utopia, and certainly not in dystopia, not in any definitive perfection of personality or society, but in movement, movement toward an ideal, ultimately, the religious ideal. "The teaching of the materialists is universal stagnation and the mechanism of substance, that is, death. The teaching of true philosophy is the destruction of inertia, that is, thought . . . i.e., God, i.e., endless life."<sup>72</sup>

Bakhtin deduces from Dostoevsky's decision to "remain with a mistake, with Christ" Dostoevsky's fundamental understanding of the protean, indeed "unfinalizable" character of truth—truth as movement, truth as something alien to formula, categories, inertia. It is precisely man's endless quest for higher truth, for an authoritative voice, for the ideal—one never to be attained on earth—that distinguishes Dostoevsky's concept of the "teachings of true philosophy," indeed his philosophical outlook, from the tragic perpetual mobile of the

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<sup>72</sup> Dostoevskii, PSS, 20: 172, 173, 174, 175.

Underground Man. This denizen of the underworld also prefers to remain with the mistake, with the irrational leap, with his formula  $2 + 2 = 5$ , but his is a course of action that excludes Christ. In chapter 11, the Underground Man confesses that he is lying when he celebrates the “underground”: “I am lying, because I know, as twice two is four, that it is not at all the underground which is better, but something else, quite different, for which I thirst but which I can in no way find!” In the uncensored but no longer extant manuscript of *Notes from the Underground*, Dostoevsky indicated that this “something else,” the “different ideal” that the Underground Man sought, the ideal that would indeed give meaning to his own and mankind’s seemingly meaningless endless motion, is Christ. Thus, in a letter to his brother Mikhail on March 26, 1864, a letter written but a few weeks before his jottings in his notebook of April 16, Dostoevsky complains of “horrible excisions” of his manuscript by the censor:

It really would have been better not to have printed the penultimate chapter [the main one where the very idea is expressed] (chapter 10 in part 1) than to have printed it as it is, that is, with sentences thrown together and contradicting each other. But what is to be done! The swinish censors let pass those places where I ridiculed everything and blasphemed for show—that is allowed, but where I deduce from all this the need for faith and Christ—that is forbidden. Really, are these censors in a conspiracy against the government or something?<sup>73</sup>

Dostoevsky uses the pronoun “I”—“where I deduce from all this”—yet it was of course not through his own pronouncements or intervention but through the discourse, the internal dialogue of the Underground Man, that Dostoevsky in the original text had disclosed the Underground Man’s religious ideal. In some direct, oblique, or paradoxical way, the Underground Man, in the uncensored edition of *Notes*, must have given expression to thoughts that Dostoevsky set down in his April 1864 notations in his notebook: the law of “striving for the ideal,” the ideal of Christ. The Underground Man is not a believer.<sup>74</sup> Yet it is only a step from the capricious and rebellious

<sup>73</sup> PSS, 28(2):73.

<sup>74</sup> The Underground Man’s lack of religious faith is touched upon obliquely in the censored chapter ten of the novel. He wonders there why he is “so

2 + 2 = 5 of the Underground Man to the spiritually productive 2 + 2 = 5 of the Ridiculous Man, to the 2 + 2 = 5 of Dostoevsky—the novelist's "readiness to remain with a mistake, with Christ," in spite of all "opposite proofs."

The Underground Man could have had only a glimpse of "the need for faith and Christ." That glimpse would not have transformed him or altered the dark ambiguities of the text, but it would have signaled more clearly to the reader what we might today call Dostoevsky's Christian existential design. It might have clearly disclosed, in short, the religious-philosophical foundations the religious credo that underlies his notion of the "unfinalizable" character of truth, the notion of truth as movement, truth as something alien to formula, categories, inertia. What is certain is that Dostoevsky's declaration of Christian faith in his letter to Fonvizina in 1854, his private thoughts in his notebook in 1864, and his remarks about Kavelin in his notebook in 1881, that is, his abstract philosophical-religious worldview, is integral to his poetics and in full harmony with what Bakhtin calls the "living forms of [Dostoevsky's] artistic and ideological thinking," his "completely new kind of artistic thinking."

Bakhtin clearly recognized this direct relationship between Dostoevsky's religious thought, his "pronouncements," on the one hand and his artistic worldview on the other. Indeed, his book may be viewed precisely as an effort to do what he believed Vyacheslav Ivanov did not do: "show how this [ethico-religious] principle of Dostoevsky's worldview becomes the principle behind Dostoevsky's artistic visualization of the world" and is not merely "the ethico-religious principle behind an abstract worldview."<sup>75</sup> His desire to demonstrate that "Dostoevsky is first and foremost an artist"<sup>76</sup> goes a long way to explain his almost principled avoidance of direct discussion of Dostoevsky's religious beliefs. Yet it is obvious that the times in which

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constituted" to have desires for a high ideal. "Can I have been so constituted to reach the conclusion that my whole constitution is nothing but a swindle? Can that really be the whole purpose? I don't believe so (*ne veriu*). Yet the alternate meaning of the words "ne veriu" that lurk in the subtext—"I do not believe"; "I have no faith"—point to his tragic ambivalence and uncertainty in the very realm of his highest yearnings.

<sup>75</sup> Bakhtin, *Poetics*, 11.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 4.

Bakhtin worked on his book and published it (the 1920s and early 1960s) were not propitious to the appearance of a book in which the author would not only more fully acknowledge his indebtedness to the religious philosopher, poet, and thinker Vyacheslav I. Ivanov, but would bring to the foreground the Christian foundations of Dostoevsky's poetics. In his introduction to Caryl Emerson's fine scholarly edition and translation of Bakhtin's study of Dostoevsky, Wayne C. Booth, after justly praising Bakhtin's high achievements, goes on to complain about Bakhtin's "failure to settle into sustained study of any one of Dostoevsky's works . . . Whenever an author dwells at great length on general theories about huge lumps of literature called 'the novel' or even about smaller piles called 'Dostoevsky's works,' without settling into detailed efforts at exemplification, I grow restless."<sup>77</sup> More than one reader has experienced this kind of restlessness with Bakhtin's book. Yet those same readers will also forgive Bakhtin for his omissions: he was obliged to work in conditions of "restlessness" that Russians will long remember.

Bakhtin did not leave behind the kind of sustained study of Dostoevsky's works that many in the more comfortable quarters of the world might have wished for. Such a study might have done much to clarify Bakhtin's view on the authorial position in the Dostoevsky text, among other matters, and perhaps modify his theory of polyphony with respect to Dostoevsky's novels. What Bakhtin did leave, however, is a major work, one which indeed is "devoted to the problems of Dostoevsky's poetics and [which] surveys his work from that viewpoint only" but one which in its in-depth treatment of its theme goes a long way toward meeting Vyacheslav I. Ivanov's appeal for "an investigation of Dostoevsky's religious philosophy" and toward validating what Ivanov considered "the accord between what Dostoevsky had to teach and the living images in which he clothed it."

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., xxvi.



VYACHESLAV I. IVANOV'S POEM "NUDUS SALTA!"  
AND  
THE PURPOSE OF ART<sup>1</sup>

How painful to walk among people  
And pretend to those who have not perished,  
And talk about the game of tragic passions  
To those who have not lived as yet.

And, peering into one's own dark nightmare,  
To find order in the disordered whirlwind of feelings,  
So that by art's pale glow  
They would learn of life's fatal fire!

[Kak tiazhelo khodit' sredi liudei  
I pritvoriat'sia nepogibshim,  
I ob igre tragicheskoi strastei  
Povestvovat' eshche ne zhivshim.

I, vgliadyvaias' v svoi nochnoi koshmar,  
Stroi nakhodit' v nestroinom vikhre chuvstva,  
Chtoby po blednym zarevam iskusstva  
Uznali zhizni gibel'noi pozhar!]

—Alexandr Blok, May 10, 1910

I heard a call from heaven:  
"Abandon, priest, the temple decorated by devils."  
And I fled . . .

[Ia slyshal s neba zov:  
"Pokin', sluzhitel', khram ukrashennyi besov."  
I ia bezhal . . .]

—Vyacheslav I. Ivanov, "Palinodiia," 1937

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<sup>1</sup> From *Russian Literature* 44 (October, 1998): 289-302.

"Nudus salta! The purpose of art—  
Uncovered, unfettered  
To show what you are,  
To relate the dark sensations  
Of hidden sanctuaries—

All that swarms in potholes  
Under the glittering, smooth ice—  
To unseal the dead house,  
Where hides from light of day  
Unconscious Sodom."

Sacred to me is the enclosure of the Muses.  
To the fires of pure altars  
My gift—the best lamb of the herd  
And fruits, the first of the garden,  
Not a nest of bats.

Dear to the Muses are the mountain rock spring  
And in the deserts of nature  
Caraway and thyme and wild grass.  
Pour purifying waters,  
After turning away, into the underground darkness.

["Nudus salta! Tsel' iskusstva—  
Bez pokrovov, bez okov  
Pokazat', kto ty takov,  
Temnye povedat' chuvstva  
Zapovednykh tainikov—  
Vse, chto v omutakh roitsia  
Pod blestiaschim, gladkim l'dom—  
Raspechatat' mertvyi dom,  
Gde ot bela dnia taitsia  
Podsoznatel'nyi Sodom."

—Mne sviashchenna Muz ograda.  
Zharu chistykh altarei  
Dar moi—agnets luchshii stada  
I plody, perviny sada,  
Ne gnezdo netopyrei.

Muzam gornyi kliuch porody  
Mil i v pustyniakh prirody  
Chobr i tmin, i dikii zlak.  
Lei chistitel'nye vody,  
Otvratias', v podzemnyi mrak.]

—Vyacheslav I. Ivanov

Ivanov's untitled poem "Nudus salta! Tsel' iskusstva" ("Dance naked! The Purpose of Art") appears in his *Roman Notebook* (*Rimskii dnevnik*, 1944) and is dated February 18, 1944.<sup>2</sup> Three earlier versions of the poem date from February 15 through February 17, 1944.<sup>3</sup> In those few days, the poem underwent some small, but significant, changes.

"Nudus salta!" consists of four stanzas of five lines each. On the semantic plane, the poem may be divided into two parts, each consisting of two stanzas (referred to in this discussion as parts one and two). The first two stanzas of the poem appear in quotation marks. At the opening of poem, an unnamed speaker, the poet's antagonist, issues a command, "Nudus salta!" (Dance naked!), declaring in sum that the "purpose of art" is to disclose without inhibition the carnal underground of human nature.<sup>4</sup> Art in this perspective engages in a kind of erotic danse macabre.

In part two of "Nudus salta!" that is, the third and fourth stanzas of the poem, the poet himself steps forth, and without engaging in any direct polemic with his unnamed antagonist on the question of

<sup>2</sup> See Ivanov's collection of poems entitled *Rimskii dnevnik* (1944) in Vyacheslav Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 4 vols. (Bruxelles: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1979), 3:594–595.

<sup>3</sup> The original variants may be found in the archives of Vyacheslav I. Ivanov in Rome.

<sup>4</sup> Ivanov's allusions in the first two stanzas of "Nudus salta!" are unmistakably to the ancient Greek "Mysteries of Dionysus," a religious cult of suffering and sacrificial death; this cult was characterized by orgiastic passion rites in which music and dance and drink liberated worshippers from inhibitions and restraints, social and sexual, and plunged them into a state of Dionysian "rapture" and "madness." Ivanov discussed, and in a certain sense, celebrated the Dionysian cult in his series of lectures *The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God: An Essay in a Religious and Historical Description* (*Ellinskaia religiia stradaiushchego boga: Opyt religiozno-istoricheskoi kharakteristiki*) published in *Novyi put'* in 1904, and later in his unpublished manuscript of the same title and work in 1917. Ivanov embraced the Roman Catholic faith in Rome in 1926, and in the 1920s and 1930s underwent a religious-spiritual renewal. In his poem "Nudus salta!" composed during World War II, Ivanov casts a critical eye at the darker side of the Dionysian cult, even as he remains captivated by transcendental elements of the Dionysian cult. Citations in this essay to Ivanov's important study *Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God* refer to a translation (in process) of this work by Dr. Carol Anshuetz. The Russian original manuscript is in the archives of Vyacheslav Ivanov in Rome.

the purpose of art, announces his devout commitment to the Muses and to both a classical and pastoral world where art and the artist are characterized by their sacrificial and devotional functions. In the final line of the poem, the poet returns to the theme of the underground and suggests that the artist can play a role by tempering underground passions.

Part one of the poem posits a Dionysian netherworld of “dark . . . sensations” (*temnye . . . chuvstva*), a chthonic realm of passions out of sight and off limits. The unknown speaker calls for a kind of artistic bacchanalia in which one would dance “uncovered” (*bez pokrovov*) and “unfettered” (*bez okov*) and would “show what you are” (*pokazat', kto ty takov*). He alludes darkly to a “hidden sanctuary” (*zapovednyi tainik*),<sup>5</sup> roiling “potholes” (*omuty*)<sup>6</sup> under the ice (*pod l'dom*),<sup>7</sup> and finally, to a “dead house” (*mertvyi dom*), where lies hidden from light of day “unconscious Sodom” (*podsoznatel'nyi Sodom*)—a reference that would seem to encompass both the notion of a repressed subconscious world of unbridled sexual impulse and desire and the idea of almost anthropomorphic Sodom. Ivanov's end rhymes in the second stanza (*l'dom, mertvyi dom, Sodom*), foregrounding the sound and word “dom” (house) lead the reader to the nethermost house of debauchery: Sodom.

In an early draft of “Nudus salta!” the “dead house” is in fact a place where “where an unconscious Sodom is hiding from punishment” (*gde ot Bozh'ikh kar taitsia / podsoznatel'nyi Sodom*). In a second version of the poem, “a spellbound Sodom” (*zakoldovannyi Sodom*) is hiding from God's punishment. In the final version of the

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of Ivanov's concept of “Zapovednyi tainik,” see footnote 12 of this essay.

<sup>6</sup> “Omut” — pothole, whirlpool, deep hollows at the bottom of a river where currents swirl. A well-known Russian proverb runs “V tikhom omute cherti vodiatsia,” literally, “in a quiet hollow under the water devils are at play”; figuratively, “a quiet, reserved person is capable of doing things that one would never expect of them.”

<sup>7</sup> “Pod l'dom” (under the ice): the phrase “l'dom” may be an indirect reference to the once popular historical novel, *The Ice Palace* (*Ledianoi dom*, 1835) by Ivan I. Lazhechnikov (1792–1869). The “ice house” or “ice palace” actually existed. In Lazhechnikov's novel, it is a symbol of the despotic reign of Empress Anna Ioannovna; it casts a shadow on all aspects of the novel's intrigue and passions. The veiled allusion to the “ice palace,” then, is a fitting image for Ivanov's dark and ominous underworld.

poem, Ivanov replaces the words "from God's punishment" (*ot Bozh'ikh kar*) with "from the light of day" (*ot bela dnia*), thus veiling the notion that "Sodom" is perhaps the devil, the great antagonist of God, and that our violent sexual unconscious or subconscious has been confined here in some kind of spellbound state. These suppositions are echoed in somewhat different imagery in Ivanov's early study, *The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God* (*Ellinskaia religiia stradaiushchego boga*, 1904; 1917), where he writes that "the principle of cosmos and order in everything, having effected a profound transformation of our inner primeval chaos yet not transformed it altogether, has outwardly subdued it and confined it to the sphere of the subconscious, whence it breaks out volcanically in destructive eruptions."<sup>8</sup>

Our violent carnal instincts, Ivanov suggests in "Nudus salta!" have been committed to a deep dungeon or "dead house." Art's purpose, according to the unnamed speaker, is explore and celebrate its interior. On the esthetic plane, his command to "unseal the dead house" (*raspechatat' mertvyi dom*) is a call to depict the human nature in a wholly naturalistic way, that is, to show people what they are. The corollary of this naturalism on the plane of human behavior is that everything is permissible. Naturalism for Ivanov, as for Dostoevsky, posits a thoroughly despiritualized view of the world; it is evidence of moral-esthetic bankruptcy.

The image and concept of a "dead house" in Ivanov's poem, of course, signals Dostoevsky's strong moral and literary presence. The call to unseal the "dead house" and to awaken the unconscious Sodom brings to mind Dostoevsky's *Notes from the House of the Dead* (*Zapiski iz mertvogo doma*, 1861–1862), where a world of violence and moral degradation is disclosed in a variety of ways. Yet in a more direct way, the poem echoes the lubricious and lugubrious world of "contemporary corpses" in Dostoevsky's fantasy-grotesque, "Bobok. The Notes of a Certain Person" — a sketch first published in his *Diary of a Writer* in 1873. It is a tale that satirizes the materialism and so-called realism or naturalism of contemporary art and society.<sup>9</sup>

The still-living, but decaying and dying "contemporary corpses" that the narrator of "Bobok" overhears in his visit to the cemetery

<sup>8</sup> See "Hellenic Religion," 226.

<sup>9</sup> See my discussion of "Bobok" in *The Art of Dostoevsky: Deliriums and Nocturnes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 288–303.

and tomb stones find their most typical representative in the Sadean figure of the engineer Baron Klinevich. He invites his expiring fellow corpses in the time remaining to them unashamedly to engage in a kind of literary and everyday debauch of sensuality. Like the Marquis de Sade, Klinevich has a keen sense of the role of narrative art in the breakdown of moral-spiritual culture. He proposes first of all that "nobody be ashamed of anything" ("Oh, yes, yes, let's not be ashamed of anything!" respond the voices of many corpses). He follows with a proposal for a symposium, a kind of Decameron of the dead, in which nobody will lie:

We'll all tell our stories out loud to the others and not be ashamed of anything. I'll tell you about myself first of all. I am, you see, an animal sensualist. Up above everything was bound by rotten ropes. Down with ropes, and let's live out these last two months in the most shameless truth! Let's become naked and bare ourselves! "Let's bare ourselves," cried all the voices. "I terribly, terribly want to be naked," squealed Avdotya Ignatievna . . .  
"The main thing is that nobody can stop us."

Shamelessly *telling all* is the literary corollary of nakedness, a symptom for Dostoevsky of social and cultural disintegration. (If everybody spoke their mind, he once remarked, the world would drown in a sea of muck). The narrator of "Bobok" himself, Ivan Ivanych early in his narrative complains that he has lost control of his language, his "style" is changing, it has become "hackneyed." Of the painter who meticulously depicts the warts on his, Ivan Ivanych's face, he remarks, "They have no ideas, so they go to town on phenomena. But what a job he did on my warts in the portrait—they're alive! They call this realism!" "Bobok" ends in a whirling danse macabre of "contemporary corpses."

It is noteworthy that Ivanov foregrounded the motif of shamelessness in an early draft of the poem:

"Nudus salta! The purpose of art,  
Freeing oneself from all chains,  
Not being ashamed of what you are . . ."

[Nudus salta! Tsel' iskusstva,  
Svobodias' ot vsekh okov,  
Ne stydias', chto ty takov.]

Ivanov dropped the words "not being ashamed" in the final version of his poem, yet shamelessness remains implicit in the celebration of being uncovered, or without cover (*bez pokrovov*). The word "pokrov" means "cover," but it also suggests "Pokrov'," "protection," "veil," as in the Orthodox Feast of the Intercession, known as "Pokrov'" or "Protective Veil of the Holy Virgin." Thus, an esthetic or art that takes away all "cover" is also intrinsically without spiritual or religious patronage.

In the second part of Ivanov's poem, the action shifts from the profane world of Sodom to the sacred world of the Muses, from a world of darkness to the light of day. This division between night and day echoes formally and semantically the Russian poet Fyodor Tyutchev's poem, "Day and Night" ("Den' i noch'," 1839), a poem of great importance to Ivanov. The "glittering, smooth ice" that covers the abyss in "Nudus salta!" recalls Tyutchev's "Day—that brilliant cover" ("Den'—sei blistatel'nyi pokrov") which hides the "nameless abyss" (*bezymiannaia bezdna*). Tyutchev's "day" animates the "earth-born" and heals the "suffering soul." Night, however, tears away the "beneficent fabric of cover" (*tkan' blagodatnuiu pokrova*) and bares the abyss with its "terrors and fogs."

The theme of "baring" (*obnazhenie*) is common to both Tyutchev's and Ivanov's poems. What night does in Tyutchev's poem is what the unnamed speaker calls upon art to do: tear away the "pokrov" (cover), the sacred veil, and bare the abyss. What is ominous and terrible about the abyss of night in the poem "Day and Night," as Tyutchev puts it, is that "there are no barriers between us and it" (*net pregrad mezh nei i nami*).

Ivanov in "Nudus salta!" distances himself from his abyss. His quotation marks serve to fence in or quarantine the unnamed speaker's literary manifesto. Part one ends with the concept of an unconscious Sodom. In the last analysis, Sodom is not an external, visible, enemy, a monster of the day, but an internal, intangible, nocturnal one who inhabits the dungeon of human spirit and who attacks by stealth.

The explicit motif of "turning away" from the abyss is apparent not only in the final line of the poem, but in the opening line of part two where the poet decisively separates himself from the profane world of Sodom and declares his personal allegiance to a different world where art and spirituality are united. "Sacred to me is the enclosure of the Muses" (*Mne sviashchenna Muz ograda*); the poet's habitation is the "enclosure of the Muses." The poet chooses the protection and



patronage of the classical Muses, those who preside over poetry and the arts, divinities of the open spirit as opposed to the demons of confinement.

The “enclosure” (*ograda*) of the Muses, as Ivanov wrote in *Hellenic Religion*, are the grounds where “great art” was born.<sup>10</sup> Ivanov writes about a specific part of the ancient Greek Acropolis:

This enclosure (*ograda*) which housed a theater and two temples of different antiquity . . . was the most important arena of Dionysiac art. Here the tragic muse first revealed herself to the human spirit in beauty’s unfading forms.

[Eta ograda, vmeshchavshaia teatr i dva khrama razlichnoi drevnosti, byla vazhnisheiu v Gretsii arenoi dionisiiskogo iskusstva. Zdes’ tragicheskaiia muza v pervye otkrylas’ chelovecheskomu dukhu v neviadiushchikh formakh krasoty.]<sup>11</sup>

Dionysiac worship or ritual resulting in the art form of tragedy is, in Ivanov’s presentation, a conflation of both Apollonian and Dionysiac elements, of both suffering and harmony. “A fine line divided the redemptive from the destructive effects of the terrible Dionysiac element,” Ivanov wrote in *Hellenic Religion*. “They found rapture on the edge of the abyss, in the whirlwind of orgies, in the breath of a frenzied god.”<sup>12</sup> A very *firm* line separates the “redemptive” from the “terrible Dionysiac element” in “Nudus salta!” Few hints of this vision of paradoxical and paroxysmal Dionysiac religious ethos are to be found in Ivanov’s “Nudus salta!”<sup>13</sup> Certainly, the implied esthetic of the

<sup>10</sup> “Hellenic Religion,” 47.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>13</sup> One detects in “Nudus salta!” a hint of the “breath of a frenzied god.” Ivanov’s mysterious underground “zapovednyi tainik” (translated here as “hidden sanctuary”) seems to allude to Dionysiac “rapture at the edge of the abyss.” “Zapovednyi tainik” does not lend itself to easy translation. “Tainik” has the meaning of “hiding place,” “cache,” or “recess.” The adjective “Zapovednyi” is often used in the sense of reserve, e.g. “zapovednyi les”—“forest reserve,” “preserve” or “sanctuary”—a place where one may be forbidden to go, or one that is reserved or preserved for other than everyday use. “Zapovednyi” carries with it the idea of prohibition, but also

poet-persona of "Nudus salta!" leaves no room for creative interaction between "day" and "night" in the esthetic process of the contemporary writer or artist.

In an early essay, "Testaments of Symbolism" ("Zavety simvolizma," 1910), however, Ivanov posits a certain "dualism" in the artist's consciousness and creative work, in his spiritual self, precisely a kind of "symbolic dualism of day and night." "Do these worlds exist in a state of enmity?" he asks. "In poetry," he answers, "they are both together. We now call them Apollon and Dionysus, we know their inseparable and undivided nature."

In that same essay, Ivanov writes that the artist "limits his thirst to merge with the 'limitless,' his striving for 'oblivion,' 'annihilation.'" He turns rather to the "clear forms of daytime existence, to the patterns of the 'gold-cloth veil' (*zlatotkannogo pokrova*) thrown by the gods onto the mysterious world of the spirit, onto the 'nameless abyss,' that is, the abyss that does not find its name in the language of daytime consciousness and eternal experience." "All the same," he writes, "the most valuable moment in experience and the most prophetic in creation is submergence in that contemplative ecstasy where there are 'no barriers' (*net pregrady*) between us and the 'naked abyss' opening up—in Silence."<sup>14</sup>

It is a sober and somber Ivanov that composes in 1944 the very cautionary "Nudus salta!" In his poem, as we have seen, there are strong barriers between the poet and this naked abyss; above all, there is no "submergence" in contemplative ecstasy: the Apollonian and Dionysian form stark antitheses. The silent abyss is manifestly a "dead house." The "dead house" and the "enclosure of the Muses"

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the notion of the "sacral" or the "holy" (see, for example, "zapoved"—precept, commandment, as in the Ten Commandments). The notion of a "zapovednyi tainik," then, presents a disturbing ambiguity of meaning. In the context of the stanza, the phrase suggests something sinister: a secret hiding place or dwelling where reprehensible things take place. In the Dionysiac context, however, this same hiding place may be a holy place, recess or grounds where primitive rites, rituals or sacrifices, may take place. "Zapovednyi tainik," in this interpretation, takes on the character of a secret, yet sacred place of corruption, where the borders between holiness and pollution are still undefined.

<sup>14</sup> See "Zavety simvolizma" in Vyacheslav Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 4 vols. (Bruxelles: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1979), 2:590–591.

(*ograda*) stand in stark contrast each another, despite the identification of the “ograda” with Ivanov’s beloved sacred grounds of Dionysus. “Dionysus is more mighty in the soul of Tyutchev than Apollo,” Ivanov had written in “Testaments of Symbolism,”<sup>15</sup> In “Nudus salta!” one may say that Apollo is more mighty in the soul of Ivanov than Dionysus, although the poetic power of “Nudus salta!” nonetheless rests on what Ivanov had called the “symbolic dualism of day and night” in the artist’s creative consciousness. Here poetry, as Ivanov had anticipated in “Testaments of Symbolism,” remains at variance with ideology in the broad sense of the term.

The magic of the ancient classical world, its language and imagery, however, continues to exert its power over the Ivanov. Pushkin in his poem “Poet” (1827) speaks of Apollo as one who calls upon the poet to participate in “sacred sacrifice” (*sviashchennaia zhertva*). In “The Poet and the Crowd” (*Poet i tolpa*, 1828), he refers to the poet’s art as “service, altar, sacrifice” (*sluzhen’e, altar’, zhertvoprinoshenie*). The fires of Ivanov’s “pure altars” (*chistykh altarei*) in “Nudus salta!” appear ready for ritual cleansing and purification. Yet these sacred fires stand ready for another affirmative symbolic offering:

Zharu chistykh altarei  
 Dar moi—agnets luchshii stada  
 I plody, perviny sada,  
 Ne gnezdo netopyrei.

[To the fires of purifying altars  
 (Go) my gift—the best lamb of the herd,  
 And the first fruits of the garden,  
 Not a nest of bats.]

The poet’s “dar,” his “gift,” the lamb, and the fruits of the garden, contrast strikingly with the “nest of bats,” creatures of the night who dwell beneath the sacred grounds of the Muses.<sup>16</sup> The poet’s “gift” (*dar*), of course, is also his talent (*dar*), the art he dedicates to the Muses.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 591.

<sup>16</sup> The negative connotations of this image are manifested in the thrice-repeated syllable “ne, ne, ne” (in Russian “not” or “no”) in the phrase: “*Ne, gnezdo netopyrei.*” In literature, myth and folk saying, bats are typically associated with darkness and the damned. Dante’s Lucifer is buried in

The transcendental habitation of the Muses is symbolized not by the roiling waters of the potholes under the ice, but by a spring that comes out of the bedrock of a mountain. The mountain spring alludes to the Castalian Spring, sacred to the Muses and Apollo, on the slopes of Parnassus in Greece. The mountain there has two peaks, both frequented by the Muses: one sacred to Dionysus, and the other to Apollo, the god of Greek prophecy and healing.

The final stanza of Ivanov's poem opens in the mountains of the muses. The poem then descends to the "deserts of nature" with their spices and wild grass, a point midway between the depths of Sodom and the heights of the Muses. The images of garden, fruits, waters, spices, and wild grass seem to carry intimations of the Biblical Song of Solomon or Song of Songs (Song of Songs 4:14–16) where pastoral paradise cradle a lyric eroticism—one far removed from the frenzied Dionysian eroticism of part one of "Nudus salta!"

The poem that begins with the abrupt command, "Nudus salta!" ends with a gentle imperative:

Pour purifying waters,  
After turning away, into the underground darkness.

[Lei chistitel'nye vody,  
Otvratias', v podzemnyi mrak]

Here is the poet's most direct response to the unknown narrator's esthetic manifesto in part one. It sums up his view of art, an old one, as one involving ritual cleansing and purification. The emphasis on "turning away" suggests not only moral revulsion and perhaps a turning away from temptation, but the poet's own need for spiritual purification.

In this sense, Ivanov's miniscule poem presents itself as a testimonial, an initiation, and an act of redemption. The poem, a didactic one, projects itself—to borrow words from Ivanov's *Hellenic Religion*

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ice. His wings, in Dante's description, were "mighty ones." "They had no feathers, but were like a bat's" (*Non avean penne, ma di vispisrello era lor modo*). See Charles S. Singleton, Dante, *Inferno*. Bollingen Series 80 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970) Canto 35: 49–50.

forty years earlier—as a kind of “spiritual re-education which the contemporary psyche undoubtedly needs.”<sup>17</sup>

In Ivanov’s poem, “Palinodiia” (1927), the poet envisages himself as one who had served as an acolyte or assistant (*sluzhitel’*) in the temple of Dionysus. In the final lines of poem he describes a moment of temptation when, drawn to the old “rebellious longing/ Of indomitable night,” he heard a “call from heaven: ‘Abandon, priest, the temple decorated by demons.’ And I fled,”/ the poet recalls, “and I eat [now] in the foothills of Thebaid/ the wild honey and coarse locusts of silence.”

In “Nudus salta!” Ivanov completes a movement from *Hellenic Religion* through “The Testaments of Symbolism” and “Palinodia.” Old passions, old idols, have been cast out, old syntheses outgrown. Not the tormented, divided, Dionysian, Bacchic underworld, but a softened Dionysian and Apollonian realm of “service, altar, and sacrifice” is celebrated. What emerges in the poem, too, are gestures of solidarity with Dostoevsky’s morally and spiritually-infused realism and Pushkin’s abandonment of classical idols for “stern,” but transcendent “beauty” (“At the Beginning of Life I remember School” [“V nachale zhizni shkolu pomniu ia”, 1830]). Finally, there are hints in “Nudus saltas!” of a new synthesis of a purified classicism and Christianity. Of Christianity, nothing is directly said in the poem, but what is indicated is unmistakable: “My gift is the best lamb of the herd.”

<sup>17</sup> “Hellenic Religion,” 224–225.

*POETRY OF PARTING*

INTIMATIONS OF MORTALITY:  
FYODOR I. TYUTCHEV'S  
"IN PARTING THERE IS A LOFTY MEANING"<sup>1</sup>

We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is  
rounded with a sleep.

—*Shakespeare, The Tempest, IV. I*

V razluke est' vysokoe znachen'e—  
Kak ni liubi, khot' den', khot' vek,  
Liubov' est' son, a son—odno mgnoven'e,  
I rano l', pozdno l' budet probuzden'e,  
A dolzhen nakonets prosnut'sia chelovek.

[In parting there is a lofty meaning—  
However much you love be it one day, be it a century,  
Love is a dream, and a dream is one moment,  
And sooner or later there will be an awakening,  
And man must finally wake up.]

"Here are some bad verses expressing something even worse," Fyodor I. Tyutchev (1803–1873) wrote to his wife with reference to his poem of August 6, 1851.<sup>2</sup> The poem is in no sense a bad one; on the contrary, it is a masterpiece in miniature. Whether it expresses something on the somber or pessimistic side is a question. In any case, Tyutchev's subjective reaction to his poem does not alter the poem's independence or its rich poetic and philosophical texture.

"In Parting there is a Lofty Meaning" ("V razluke est' vysokoe znachen'e," 1851) is a philosophical poem about the pathos of parting

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<sup>1</sup> From *Text and Context: Essays to Honor Nils Ake Nilsson*, ed. Peter Alberg Jensen, et al. *Stockholm Studies in Russian Literature* 23 (Stockholm, 1987): 38-41.

<sup>2</sup> F. I. Tyutchev, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1984), *Pis'ma*, 2:169.



and time. The poet perceives the parting of lovers as a prefiguration of man's ultimate parting from life. The dream of love stands for the dream of life. Life, like love, is a dream from which there is an inevitable awakening. The awakening is to time and mortality. Yet the awakening also carries intimations of immortality. The poem, however, seems finally to suggest that immortality lies in the dream of love and life, that is, in the timeless realm of poetry, all that man must return to eternity. What is certain is that the act of parting is laden with "lofty meaning" (*vysokoe znachen'e*).

The poem consists of five lines and thirty-two words. Six words are used twice, thus reducing the poem's working vocabulary to twenty-six words. The poem is marked by an extraordinary compression and interaction of parts. It is a microuniverse, and as a poem, as a marvel of compression, illustrates the paradox of the timeless dream embedded in the timebound "moment."

The core of the poem—lines 2, 3, and 4—asserts that love is a dream from which there is an inevitable awakening. The two framing lines of the poem—lines 1 and 5—stand in direct relationship to one another. The opening line speaks of the "lofty meaning" (*vysokoe znachen'e*) of parting—an allusion to death and resurrection—while the final line discloses that meaning in the veiled metaphor of "waking up" (*prosnut'sia*). The dash (-) at the end of the opening line establishes the line's privileged status as signaler of the poem's, and man's, solemn concern.

Lines 2 and 4 use groups of words that stand in direct relation to one another and give expression to the notion of noumenal time: "khot' den' odin, khot vek / I rano l', pozdno l'." Line 3, the middle of the poem, speaks of the paradox of the timeless dream (*son*), that is, of phenomenal time, and has as its center of gravity the dream or sleep (*son / a son*).

Lines 2, 3, and 4 break down into two syntactical-semantic units separated by a caesura in the third line of the poem: *Kak ni liubi, khot' den' odin, khot' vek, / Liubov' est' son /caesural, a son—odno mgnoven'e. / I rano l', pozdno l' budet probuzhden'e.* "However / long / one loves, be it for a single day or for a lifetime, / Love is a dream"; that is, in loving, or in love, one is plunged into a dream world that is timeless. "But the dream is a moment. / And sooner or later there will be an awakening"; that is, the dream of love is actually but an instant, a single moment in man's temporal existence: on awakening one is returned to noumenal time. The abstract noun, "probuzhden'e," means "awakening" in the

literal sense, but it carries the figurative meaning of “coming to one’s senses,” waking up to the reality or hard truth.

A *dolzhen nakonets prosnut’sia chelovek*. In the final line of the poem, the poet speaks unambiguously of man’s “waking up”: the verb “prosnut’sia,” with its root “son,” means exactly to wake up from a dream or sleep. Though seemingly a mere reiteration of the thought contained in line 4, the closing line establishes its own independent semantic field. The poet’s thought on the dreamlike character of love has led him into an even more profound meditation on the inevitable ending of the dream of life. Thus, the poem comes full circle back to the first line that alludes to the “lofty meaning” of parting.

The notion of “parting” (*razluka*—with its root in “luchit’”—to splinter) in the poem is both structural and thematic. The caesura in line 3, falling between “son” and “a son,” evenly divides the poem into two groups of sixteen words each. But the matter goes beyond the poet’s obvious delight in formal symmetries; the poet has invested this pivotal caesura, this nonverbal “space,” with metaphysical meaning, indeed, with the poem’s most significant statement: falling between two “sleeps” (*son / a son*) this caesura constitutes a ghostly Pascalian embodiment of the transience of human life. Man’s existence is but a “moment” between two sleeps of eternity. Thus, the poet has converted poetic “space” into time.

One of the most brilliant accomplishments of the poet is the manner in which he puts to use the word “son” with its alternate though closely related meanings of “sleep” and “dream.” “Son” is certainly intended to be understood as “dream” in the syntactic-semantic context of line 3. But “son” as “sleep,” as a metaphor for death, is very active in the poem’s subtext. The use of the words “probuzhden’e,” and in particular, “prosnut’sia,” serve to bring out the meaning of “sleep” in “son.” But the poet has laid the groundwork for this association in the opening line of his poem where he poses in the reader’s mind the question of the “vysokoe znachen’e” of parting. By line 3, the answer—“son”—is advanced phonologically: the stressed vowel “o” and the syllable “so” in “vysokoe” (certainly the most portentous word in the line) recurs significantly in “son / a son”—the two sleeps between which man lives out his lifetime. The “vysokoe znachen’e” of parting is solemn and sonorous “son” (sleep), a fact made explicit only in the poem’s final line. The dominant sense of “son” in line 3, however, is that of “dream.” Man’s awakening from his dream of love (*liubov’ est’ son*), that is, his consciousness of his dream as “one moment,” is

signalled phonologically by the unpleasant cluster of consonants "mgn" in the word "mgnoven'e"; after the sonorous "son / a son" this is indeed an unpleasant "awakening" (*probuzhden'e*). Thus, by line 3, the poet has prepared the way phonologically for the harsh message of lines 4 and 5.

The ultimate fact in man's existence is his mortality. Does the poet view man's parting from earth, that is, death, in a completely gloomy spirit? His conception of death as a "waking up" (*prosnut'sia*) argues against all notions of final closure in human destiny. Too, it is only in a religious sense that one can speak of death, mortality or parting from earth as a "waking up." The opening line of the poem would seem to contain an allusion to resurrection. The "lofty" and "high" (*vysokoe*) meaning that the poet attaches to parting may not only refer to man's final sleep (*son*) but also to his highest dream (*son*): the paradise of love, the paradise where the dream of love achieves its highest and eternal embodiment. In this interpretation the pathos of parting anticipates the pathos of the heavenly reunion.

In this connection, the final rhyming words of lines 1, 3, and 4—"znachen'e," "mgnoven'e," and "probuzhden'e"—deserve consideration. On the surface, these words seem to sum up concisely a view of the poem's content as tragic. Yet the same sequence of words seems to reveal a subtext that argues against a tragic interpretation. In our sequence seen as subtext, the word "mgnoven'e" (rooted in the verb "migmat'," "mignut'" —to wink, to blink) is pivotal in place and meaning (as it is in the tragic interpretation of this same sequence). The awareness of the dream as a moment (*a son—odno mgnoven'e*) here points *not* to the unhappy "awakening" in consciousness, but to awakening in the highest religious sense. "Mgnoven'e" in this interpretation is not only "moment," but movement, transition, as in the revelation of the loftiest religious dream. Thus, we read in 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 in the Russian version: "Govoriu vam tainu: ne vse my umrem, no vse izmenimsia / Vdrug, vo mgnoven'e oka, pri poslednei trube; ibo vostrubit, i mertvye voskresnut netlennymi, a my izmenimsia."<sup>3</sup> (my italics—*RLJ*). The poem's "lofty" Christian-religious subtext is unmistakable. But in the

<sup>3</sup> "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed./ In a moment, in a twinkling of the eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (*King James Version*).

poem, as a whole, is the poet really consoling himself with allusions to an afterlife, or is he speaking of the illusion not only of the dream of love and life, but also of the dream of immortality?

A *dolzhen nakonets prosnut'sia chelovek*. However, one interprets the sequence "znachen'e," "mgnoven'e," "probuzhden'e," this final line strikes the reader with jarring force; it is terminal in position and in meaning. An unpleasant sense of the inexorable, of compulsion, of the idea of paying back a debt is carried by the word "dolzhen." The moment of parting no longer lies in some unspecified time in the future (*rano l', pozdno l'*): the poet speaks of man waking up "at last" (*nakonets*). The end (*konets*) is at hand. In line 2, the poet alludes indirectly to man's lifespan: the maximum time one might love is for a lifetime, that is, a century (*vek*). Line 5 makes it clear that the worm of time is at work in man (*chelovek*), that is, mortality is the very definition of man.

Thus, to the ambiguous sequence "znachen'e," "mgnoven'e," "probuzhden'e," with its hints at the overcoming of time and space, the poet opposes the unambiguous sequence "vek" — "chelovek," with its view of timebound man living out his earthly "moment" between two sleeps. In this perspective, man's inevitable awakening from the dream of love and life preludes *not* resurrection and the kingdom of love, but a reentrance into the dreamless world of eternity: "son" without "son." Here, it would seem, is Tyutchev's *eshche khudshee*.

The poem's allusions to two kinds of revelation, the one religious and optimistic in character, the other agnostic and pessimistic, coexist in the poem in a kind of creative tension. Yet the Christian "presence," though haunting, is passive; it does not fill the poem with a sense of promise; the unmistakable and strange glow it gives to the poem seems only to illuminate the darker, more somber colors.

Yet Tyutchev's "even worse" is nonetheless a one-sided and narrow appreciation of the poem. In the deepest sense "V razluke est' vysokoe znachen'e" is not a pessimistic poem. Man's "moment" in the universe is seen as infinitesimal, transient, even tragic. Yet this moment as dream, illusion, poetry fills the universe. This paradox of man's presence is exemplified by the poet's extraordinary achievement in his microscopic poem: in a single "moment," in a flash of poetry, the poet reveals the landscape of the macrocosm — the infinity of man's universe and its endless dialectic of dream and reality, illusion and disillusionment, of contraction and expansion into and out of time. In this act of language and in the vision it contains, man is neither earthbound nor timebound: he is the measure of his universe.

THE POETRY OF MEMORY AND THE MEMORY OF POETRY:  
IGOR SEVERYANIN'S "NO MORE THAN A DREAM"<sup>1</sup>

Yesterday I dreamed a remarkable dream:  
I was riding with a girl who was reading Blok.  
The little horse moved quietly. The wheels rustled.  
And tears fell. And a russet curl fluttered . . .

And that was all my dream contained . . .  
But shaken by it, moved profoundly,  
All day, trembling with agitation, I kept thinking  
Of the strange girl who had not forgotten Blok . . .

[**Ne bolee chem son**

Mne udivitel'nyi vchera prisnilsia son:  
Ia ekhal s devushkoi, stikhi chitavshei Bloka.  
Loshadka tikho shla. Shurshalo koleso.  
I slezy kapali. I vilsia rusyi lokon . . .

I bol'she nichego moi son ne sodержal . . .  
No potriasennyi im, vzvolnovannyi gluboko,  
Ves' den' ia dumaiu, vstrevozhhenno drozha,  
O strannoi devushke, ne pozabyvshei Bloka . . .]

—Igor Severyanin, 1927<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this essay was published in Russian under the title "Poeziia pamiati i pamiat' poezii: Stikhotvorenie Igoria Severianina. 'Ne bolee chem son'" in *Sub Specie Tolerantiae. Pamiati V. A. Tunimanova* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2008), 466-470.

<sup>2</sup> Igor Severyanin (pseudonym of Igor V. Lotaryov, 1887–1941), an innovative poet in the use of language, was one of the important representatives of Cubo-Futurism, along with Mayakovsky, in pre-revolutionary Russia. He emigrated in 1918 to Estonia where his poetry, though reverting to a more traditional forms, resulted in a body of deeply felt verse that often centered on the drama of the poet's loss of his homeland. "No More Than

### *The Poem*

Igor Severyanin's poem consists of a title, "Ne Bolee Chem Son" ("No More Than a Dream"), and two quatrains, each one numbering twenty-four words. In the first quatrain, the narrator-dreamer relates that he has dreamed a "remarkable" dream. He lists five discrete dream sequences beginning with the scene of his riding in a carriage with a girl who is reading Blok.<sup>3</sup> In the second quatrain, the narrator dwells on the profound impact the dream has had on him and how increasingly moved he was by the thought that the "the strange girl had not forgotten Blok." "No More Than a Dream" is a simple poem. Yet as the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) once noted, "The highest simplicity of structure is produced, not by few elements, but by the highest complexity."<sup>4</sup> The poem's effect, indeed, rests not only on the harmonious and euphonious sound patterns of the verse, but on the complex semantic play of its language and images, and a rich interaction of text and subtext.

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a Dream" (1927) is one of the best in this category, transcending in depth and complexity and quiet beauty Severyanin's beautiful though strikingly self-pitying "Classical Roses" ("Klassicheskie rozy," 1925).

<sup>3</sup> Alexander A. Blok (1880–1921), described as "a monument to the beginning of the century" (Anna Akhmatova), has often been compared, as a poet, to Alexander S. Pushkin (1799–1837). In some of his poetry and writing in the years before the Russian Revolution, he heralded apocalyptic changes in Russia. His poetically remarkable but ideologically controversial poem, *The Twelve* (*Dvenadtsat'*, 1919) was hailed, criticized, and reviled for its attempt to hear the "music of the revolution." Though at first Blok welcomed the Russian Revolution, he soon became disillusioned with it, remarking that he no longer heard the music of the world about him.

Revered as a poet in the literary and cultural community in the first years of the revolution, he received dubious praise from the ruling Bolsheviks: the cultural minister, Anatole Lunacharsky, dubbed Blok "the last poet of the nobility," while Leon Trotsky saw in the author of "The Twelve" a remnant of the old world who had "seized the wheel of the Revolution." Increasingly alienated from the world around him, denied a passport to leave Russia until the very end, Blok died in destitution, sick, hungry, and spiritually broken. "Vile, rotten Mother Russia has devoured me," he wrote in one of the last notebook entries.

<sup>4</sup> "It is the last lesson of modern science that the highest simplicity is produced, not by few elements, but by the highest complexity." See Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Goethe; or the Writer," in *Representative Men*, ed. Pamela Schirmeister (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1995), 195.

The poem's title, "No More Than a Dream," appears to downplay the significance of the dream. Rather than deflating the reader's interest, however, the title intensifies it. Dreams typically come across as impressionistic and fleeting; they seem disengaged from everyday reality; yet they are notoriously rich in meaning. The word "udivitel'nyi" (remarkable, astonishing, amazing) in the opening line of the poem immediately signals that the narrator-dreamer has in fact, experienced something more than *just* a dream.

The first quatrain consists of five seemingly disconnected dream frames or sequences. The image of a girl reading Blok, in the first frame, is a cryptic one. Who is the girl? And what is the underlying significance of her reading Blok? The second, third, and fourth dream-images suggest that the dreamer's dream-memory of Blok is laden with nostalgic, indeed, sad and painful feelings. *Loshadka tikho shla* (The little horse moved along quietly)—the word "tikho" (quietly) echoes Blok's *stikhi* (verse); *shurshalo koleso* (the wheels rustled)—the "sh" or "shushing" sound of the verb "shurshat'" sustains the sense of quiet meditation in the first part of the dream; it carries the reader back along the sound track to the "shushing" sound in "devushka"—the girl who is reading Blok. The positioning of *I slezy kapali* (And tears were falling) as an autonomous image has the effect of drawing everything, animate and inanimate—the narrator, the girl, the horse, and the wheel into the vortex of an almost elegiac sadness and pain. Yet as we shall note again, this mood of elegiac sadness is abruptly contradicted by the final image of the first quatrain, "and a russet curl fluttered," an animated and cheerful one that not only links the girl reading Blok with Eros, but introduces a literary allusion of striking importance to the poem's interpretation.

"I bol'she nichego moi son ne sodержal," the narrator-dreamer says in the first line of the second quatrain as though to emphasize the sad content of his dream. The first line, however, does contain a hint of something new to come. The word "soderzhal" (contained) bears within it in scrambled letters the word "drozha" (trembling). The narrator goes on to describe his agitation when the real import of the strange girl's reading of Blok dawned upon him: "shaken," "moved profoundly," he was "trembling with excitement" (*vstrevozhenno drozha*) all day as he kept thinking "of the strange girl who had not forgotten Blok . . ." The momentous fact implicit in the dream, the message of the "strange girl" that marks the excitement of the dreamer and counteracts his gloom, is that *Blok had not been forgotten*, Blok, in short, is still with us.



The dream has turned out to be more than *just* a dream: it is a revelation of the power of poetry, the power of the word, the power of memory in life and culture, the power of Blok.

Blok, his poetry and its myths permeate the narrator-dreamer's language and imagery. The sounds and letters of Blok's name insinuate themselves into the sound patterns of Severyanin's poem. Thus, the sound and letters "b" "l" "o" "k" can be seen and heard in scrambled forms: "loshadka," "shurshalo koleso," "I slězy kapali," "I bol'she." The phonetic affinity of "lokon" (curl) in the phrase "I vilsia rusyi lokon" with "Bloka" at the end of the second line of the poem establishes a special affinity between Blok and the "strange girl."

The rhyming of "Bloka" and "gluboko" (profoundly) at the end of the second and fourth lines of the second quatrain is of particular interest. In this equation, "Blok" the poet is not only "glubok" (profound; "Blok"—"glubok"), but "profundity" (g L u BOK) itself is pregnant with "BLOK," a Blok who appropriately is seen in a recognizable, though not finally shaped form—"L BOK." Blok emerges in the narrator-dreamer's imagery, then as *the child of profundity*, or wisdom. In turn, the "strange girl" herself emerges in the poem as a familiar, though "strange" Blok-like figure: an "Incognita," that is, in Russian, a "Neznakomka" (unknown woman, stranger), as one of Blok's many literary incarnations of his muse, mythopoetic or real. Severyanin has carried over into his own poem Blok's "Sophia" motif, one linked in turn with the Russian philosopher and poet Vladimir Solovyov's conception of "Sophia" as the "Wisdom of God," a concept that infuses much of Blok's early poetry.

It is not Blok, however, who invokes his muse, but the "strange girl" who surfaces in the narrator-dreamer's dream to read and remember him, thus poetically engendering him, much as the goddess Mnemosyne engenders the muses. It is this strange girl, this dream-companion of the narrator-dreamer, who leads him out of his melancholia and breaks the spell of mourning. Blok and the "strange girl," however, are not the only literary and philosophical presences in "No More Than a Dream."

### *The Poem within the Poem*

A pivotal role in the poem's movement from a somber to an affirmative outlook is played by the final dream-image at the end of the first quatrain: "I vilsia rusyi lokon" (And a russet curl flutte-

red).<sup>5</sup> Its animated spirit of Eros not only contradicts the self-pitying, almost depressed mood of the preceding dream-images, but alludes to the presence in the semantic design of “No More Than a Dream” of Alexander Pushkin’s poem “City of Magnificence, City of Want” (“Gorod pyshnyi, gorod bednyi”, 1827), a work that concludes with the line “A golden curl fluttered” (*V’etsia lokon zolotoi*).

Gorod pyshnyi, gorod bednyi,  
 Dukh nevoli, stroinyi vid,  
 Svod nebes zeleno-blednyi,  
 Skuka, kholod i granit—  
 Vse zhe mne vas zhal’ nemnozhko,  
 Potomu chto zdes’ poroi  
 Khodit malen’kaia nozhka,  
 V’etsia lokon zolotoi.

[City of magnificence<sup>6</sup>, city of want,  
 Spirit of unfreedom, harmonious forms,  
 Green pale vault of the heavens,  
 Boredom, cold and granite—  
 All the same I’m a little sorry for you,  
 Because here at times  
 Walks a small foot,  
 A golden curl flutters.]

The importance of Pushkin’s poem in Severyanin’s design of “No More Than a Dream” cannot be overstated. He establishes formal parallels, symmetries, or correspondences between his own poem and Pushkin’s. Both poems consist of eight lines divided into two quatrains.<sup>7</sup> Each quatrain in Pushkin’s poem consists of sixteen words;

<sup>5</sup> Severyanin’s formulation of words, “I vilsia rusyi lokon” (And a russet curl fluttered) is significant. The words “I vilsia” (And fluttered), if heard, as opposed to being read, could also be taken for “iavilsia” (appeared), that is, the past tense of the Russian verb “iavit’sia” (to appear). Thus the phrase “I vilsia rusyi lokon” could be understood as “There appeared a russet curl” (*Iavilsia rusyi lokon*).” Such an understanding of the line reinforces the reader’s sense of the pivotal role in the poem of the image of the fluttering russet in the poem.

<sup>6</sup> The word “pyshnyi” can be variously translated as “magnificent,” “splendid,” “opulent,” but also as “arrogant,” “proud,” “haughty.”

<sup>7</sup> Unlike Severyanin’s poem, Pushkin’s is not formally divided into two

each of Severyanin's quatrains consists of twenty-four words. The first quatrain in Severyanin's poem, as in Pushkin's, consists of syntactically discrete images or frames. Pushkin uses only nouns and adjectives in his first four lines of his poem; with the exception of the final image, Severyanin focuses on verbs and nouns. Pushkin employs a verb of motion (used for walking) in the phrase "zdes' poroi *khodit* malen'kaia nozhka" (here at times walks a small foot); Severyanin echoes Pushkin by employing a verb of motion (used for vehicles) in his first quatrain: "Ia *ekhal* s devushkoi, stikhi chitavshei Bloka" (I was riding with a girl who was reading Blok). The final image of Severyanin's first quatrain "I vilsia rusyi lokon" (And a russet curl fluttered) closely resembles Pushkin's "V'etsia lokon zolotoi" (A golden curl flutters).

These formal resemblances between the poems support Severyanin's interest in and employment of the semantic motifs of Pushkin's poem. Severyanin is not centrally involved with the subject matter of Pushkin's poem: the city of St. Petersburg as a cultural, historical, and mythopoetic presence. He is very much interested in Pushkin's response to the feelings of moral and historical pessimism that the colossus Petersburg evokes in the reader.

St. Petersburg emerges in Pushkin's mosaic of syntactically free-floating images, not so much as a social phenomenon, but as a monumental and seemingly immutable historical and mythopoetic fact. If there be inhumanity in his Petersburg, Pushkin finds it in the city's epic-indifferent mix of splendor and want, of the spirit of unfreedom and classical harmony or regularity, of an overarching and overwhelming pale-green firmament faced by a cold and granite earth. Pushkin's reference to "boredom" — that final distillation of unfreedom or of unused energies — signals that he is not bullied by St. Petersburg.

In the Petersburg of the first quatrain there would seem to be no room for life, for human narrative, for movement (as the absence of verbs in the first quatrain suggests). Pushkin, however, is far from dismissing St. Petersburg as lifeless. His response in the second quatrain to its spirit of unfreedom and seeming immobility, however, is revolutionary in a manner that anticipates the capricious and irrational ways of the Petersburg dreamers and rebels of Gogol and Dostoevsky. "All the same," the poet observes disarmingly, as though sympathizing

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quatrains, but a clear division between the first four lines and the final four lines exists on the semantic plane of the poem.

with a city stuck with its disagreeable character, "I feel a bit sorry for you, because here at times walks a small foot. A golden curl flutters."

Pushkin's critique of Petersburg unfreedom and immobility is signalled by his use of the contrary and contrarious "vse zhe" (all the same, nevertheless, notwithstanding, in spite of everything). To the masculine mandate of history, to Petersburg's classical and colossal indifference, immobility, and unfreedom, Pushkin counterposes the romantic, fantastic, and capricious *walking little foot* and *fluttering golden curl*—symbols and embodiments here of the spirit of freedom, images that arouse in the reader's imagination a feeling for that which is alive and sensuous, real and ethereal. To the regulated, regulating, and rational and oppressive Petersburg, Pushkin responds with the unregulated, irrational, and above all, elusive poetry of life—the eternal feminine.

The fluttering russet curl of Severyanin's poem, evoking Pushkin's "City of Magnificence, City of Want," links Pushkin's images with the "strange girl," with Blok and his mythopoetic imagery, with Blok's theme of the eternal feminine, and with his identification of that theme with Russia. Above all, Severyanin's waving curl, echoing the golden curl, introduces the irrational affirmation of life, of *all the same, nonetheless, no matter (vse zhe)* into the static and depressed dream world of Severyanin's dreamer. The dreamer's dream of the girl reading Blok and his subconscious recollection of Pushkin and his poetry shatters his sense of cultural and historical doom—all that underlies his fear that Blok and his poetry, perhaps, *had been forgotten*.

Here, the dream is a poetic act of memory, the kind of happening that Mircea Eliade called "a true historical anamnesis," one in which man "unconsciously defends himself against the pressure of contemporary history" by discovering solidarity with the past, in this way opening perspectives to the future.<sup>8</sup> This action, of course, is the work of the poem of Severyanin—a poet whose work in exile after the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917 focused strongly, and often with bitterness, on the drama of the poet's loss of his homeland.<sup>9</sup> His "No More Than

<sup>8</sup> See Mircea Eliade in *Myth and Reality*, translated from the French by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 136–137.

<sup>9</sup> See, in particular, Severyanin's "Classical Roses" ("Klassicheskie rozy," 1925). In "No More Than a Dream," Severyanin carries over from "Classical Roses" the device of literary reminiscence, but puts it to more complex use

a Dream" is a powerful, Pushkin-inspired, response to bitterness and the sense of hopelessness. The strange girl's reading of Blok's verse, rather than being an occasion for tears, mourning, and self-pity, becomes a moment for a return to life.

Finally, Severyanin's "No More Than a Dream" is a poem about the power of poetry as memory and memory as poetry in Russian culture and history. It is no accident that his poem was written at the same historical moment that Rainer Maria Rilke wrote words of encouragement to the Russian painter, Leonid Pasternak, then living in exile in Berlin:

Yet though we shall never live to see it in its resurrection, the deep, the real, the everlasting Russia has only fallen back into its secret root-bed, as happened long ago under *tatarshchina* [the Tatar yoke]. Who could doubt that it is *there*, and in its darkness, invisible to all its children, unhurried in its sacred unhurriedness, is gathering strength for what perhaps still lies in the far-distant future?!<sup>10</sup>

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on both formal and semantic levels of the poem.

<sup>10</sup> "Aber wenn wir es auch nicht mehr in seiner Auferstehung erleben werden, das Tiefe, das eigentliche, das immer überlebende Russland ist nur in die heimliche Wurzel-Schicht zurückgefallen, wie früher einst unter der татарщина [Tatarenjoch]; wer dürfte zweifeln, dass es da ist und sich in seinem Dunkel, unsichtbar für seine eigenen Kinder, langsam, mit seiner heiligen Langsamkeit, zu einer vielleicht noch fernen Zukunft zusammennimmt?!" (Letter of March 14, 1926. See *Rilke Briefe 1919 bis 1926*, 2 vols. [Frankfurt am Mein und Leipzig: Insel, 1991], 2: 424.)

SUPREMUM VALE: THE LAST STANZAS  
OF PUSHKIN'S *EUGENE ONEGIN*.  
GOETHE, ZHUKOVSKY, AND THE DECEMBRISTS<sup>1</sup>

*Faust* is the supreme creation of the poetic spirit, a representative example of contemporary poetry, in the same way that *The Iliad* is a monument of classical antiquity.<sup>2</sup>

Say what you will, Zhukovsky has had a decisive influence on the spirit of our literature; besides, his style in translating will always remain a model.<sup>3</sup>

—Alexander S. Pushkin

No te, kotorym v družnoi vstreche  
Ja strofy pervye chital . . .  
“Inykh uzh net, a te daleche”,  
Kak Sadi nekogda skazal.  
Bez nikh Onegin dorisovan.  
A ta, s kotoroi obrazovan  
Taťiany milyi Ideal . . .  
O mnogo, mnogo Rok ot’ial!  
Blazhen, kto prazdnik Zhizni rano  
Ostavil, ne dopiv do dna  
Bokala polnogo vina,  
Kto ne dochel ee romana  
I vdruk umel rasstat’sia s nim,  
Kak ia s Oneginym moim.

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<sup>1</sup> From *Scando-Slavic Tomus* 48 (2002): 5-24.

<sup>2</sup> “*Faust* est’ velichaishee sozdanie poeticheskogo dukha, on sluzhit predstavitelem noveishei poezii, tochno kak *Iliada* sluzhit pamiatnikom klassicheskoi drevnosti.” See *Pushkin o literature*, ed. N. V. Bogoslovskii (Leningrad: Academia, 1934), 116. Pushkin’s comment dates to 1827, and is one of a number made by Pushkin attesting to his extremely high evaluation of Goethe.

<sup>3</sup> “Chto ni govori, Zhukovskii imel reshitel’noe vliianie na dukh nashei slovesnosti; k tomu zhe perevodnyi slog ego ostanetsia vseгда obraztsovym.” Letter to K. F. Ryleev, January 25, 1825, *Ibid.*, 61.

[But those to whom at friendly meetings  
 the first strophes I read . . .  
 "Some are no more, others are distant,"  
 as erstwhile Saadi said.  
 Finished without them is Onegin's portrait.  
 And she from whom is fashioned  
 the dear ideal of "Tatyana" . . .  
 Ah, Fate has much, much snatched away!  
 Blest who life's banquet early  
 left, having not drained to the bottom  
 the goblet full of wine;  
 who did not read life's novel to the end  
 and all at once could part with it  
 as I with my Onegin.]<sup>4</sup>

—*Eugene Onegin* (8:LI)

"The last stanza of *Eugene Onegin* (*Evgenii Onegin*, 1833) by Alexander S. Pushkin begins with an allusion to the Decembrists," wrote Dmitry Chizhevsky in 1953 in his critical edition of Pushkin's masterpiece, "for they were the only group of Pushkin's friends of whom one could say, 'inykh uzhdet, a te daleche'" (Some are no more, others are distant).<sup>5</sup> That Pushkin was alluding in the opening four lines of the last stanza to the Decembrists has long been affirmed by scholars.<sup>6</sup> In this connection, his reference to the thirteenth century Persian poet Muslih-ud Din Saadi as author of the above-cited line

<sup>4</sup> I use Nabokov's translation of *Eugene Onegin* in this discussion. See Aleksandr Pushkin, *Evgenii Onegin: A Novel in Verse*, translated from the Russian and with a commentary by Vladimir Nabokov, Revised edition, 2 vols., Bollingen Series 72 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), I: 95–319. Volume 2 of this edition, devoted to Nabokov's commentary on *Eugene Onegin*, is divided into two parts, each part with separate pagination. Future references to volume 2 will indicate the volume number, part, and page number.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin, *Evgenij Onegin: A Novel in Verse*. The Russian Text, edited with introduction and commentary by Dmitry Cizevsky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 295.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, N. O. Lerner's discussion of the last chapter of *Eugene Onegin* in "Poslednii privet Pushkina Dekabristam" in *Pushkinologicheskoe etiuudy* in *Zven'ia*, 5 (Moscow-Leningrad, 1935), 108–112.



has evoked lively curiosity. Chizhevsky speaks directly of this "saying of the Persian poet Saadi," but hastens to add that "no one has yet found this quotation in the works of Saadi." "The quotation from Saadi ("Bustan") which K. Chaikin cites,"<sup>7</sup> Chizhevsky continues, "does not correspond with anything in Pushkin's text."<sup>8</sup>

In his commentary to the last stanza of *Eugene Onegin*, Vladimir Nabokov acknowledges that he has "not been able to discover the exact source of Pushkin's motto, which is at the back of LI:3-4." He does, however, find an echo of the line "in a long poem in ten 'portals,' the Bustan, or Bostan, or Bashtan . . . by Saadi." He cites a French version that Pushkin might have seen.<sup>9</sup>

Nabokov devotes roughly five pages to assorted questions: the whereabouts in Saadi's writings of the line "inykh uzh net, a te daleche" (some are no more, others are distant); the notion that Pushkin read the first chapters of *Eugene Onegin* "at friendly meetings";<sup>10</sup> and a consideration of other possible sources for Pushkin, apart from Saadi, of the above-cited line.

Summing up his own research and the work of other Russian scholars on the question of the origins of "inykh uzh net, a te daleche," Nabokov cites a number of formulations or wordings in Russian literature prior to 1830 of the line in question: 1) A line in a poem of 1814 by the minor poet Vladimir Filimonov: "Druzei inykh uzh net; drugie v otdalen'e" (Some friends are no more, others are far off); 2) Pushkin's own prose motto to *Bakhchisaraiskii fontan* (1824): "Inykh uzhe net, drugie stranstvuiut daleche. Sadi" (Some are no more, others are wandering far away)—the wording of the sentence, observes Nabokov again, seems to have been suggested by Filimonov's line; 3) The last two lines of the sixth quatrain of E. A. Baratynsky's poem, "Mara" (*Sud'boi nalozhennye tsepi / Upali s ruk moikh* [The chains layed on by fate / Fell from my hands], 1827, published in full in 1835): "Daleche bedstvuiut inye / I v mire net uzhe drugikh" (Some far-off are destitute /

<sup>7</sup> *Vremennik Pushkinskoi komissii* 2 (Leningrad: Akademiia Nauk, 1936), 468.

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>9</sup> Nabokov, op. cit. 2:2:249-250.

<sup>10</sup> Apart from the Decembrist, Ivan I. Pushchin, to whom Pushkin presumably recited three and a half cantos, Nabokov writes, "We must accept as a piece of lyrical exaggeration the vision of Pushkin reading *Eugene Onegin* at gatherings of Decembrists." Ibid., 248.

And others are no longer in the world)—a line, Nabokov notes, with which Pushkin “may or may not have been acquainted in 1830”; 4) A clear allusion to the Decembrists in an article by the critic N. Polevoi in 1826, where P. A. Vyazemsky inserts a reference to the words of “Saadi, or of Pushkin, who transmitted to us Saadi’s words: ‘Some are no longer, others are wandering distant’” (*Saadi ili Pushkina, kotoryi nam peredal slova Saadi: ‘Odnikh uzh net, drugie stranstvouiut daleko!’*)<sup>11</sup>; 5) A stanza (one that Pushkin struck out) containing a similar phrase in his own draft of an elegy, “Na kholmakh Gruzii” (“On the Hills of Goergia”, 1829): “Inye daleko, inykh uzh v mire net” (Some are distant others no longer in the world).<sup>12</sup>

Nabokov, citing the Russian critic, Boris V. Tomashevsky, draws attention to a line in Thomas Moore’s *Lalla Rookh* (1816) that Pushkin might have read in French translation,<sup>13</sup> as well as two lines by Byron in “Siege of Corinth” (1816): “But some are dead and some are gone. / And some are scatter’d and alone . . . And some are in a far countree” (*Siege of Corinth*, 1816).<sup>14</sup> Nabokov does not cite the second line that we

<sup>11</sup> See footnote 24 for a discussion of Vyazemsky’s words.

<sup>12</sup> See Nabokov, *op. cit.* 2:2:245 for his full discussion of these references.

<sup>13</sup> “Plusieurs ont vu, comme moi, cette fontaine: mais ils sont loin et leurs yeux sont fermé à jamais.” See Tomashevsky’s footnote in his study, *Pushkin* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1956), 506n. Moore’s prose passage in the original English reads: “It was while they rested during the heat of noon near a fountain, on which some hand had rudely traced those well-known words from the garden of Saadi—‘Many, like me, have viewed this fountain, but they are gone, and their eyes are closed for ever!’—that she took occasion, from the melancholy beauty of this passage, to dwell upon the charms of beauty in general.” Thomas Moore, *Lalla Rookh* in *The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore*, ed. A. D. Godley (London: 1929), 393.

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that elements of Byron’s line may be found in the last five lines of the English poet and essayist, Charles Lamb’s popular poem, “The Old Familiar Faces,” first published in January 1798 and later republished in 1817:

So might we talk of the old familiar faces—  
How some they have died, and some they have left me,  
And some are taken from me; all are departed—  
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

Nabokov translated Lamb’s poem into Russian under the title of “Znakomye litsa” (*Familiar Faces*) in January 1923. The translation was never published. A draft of the translation may be found in the Nabokov archives held in the New York Public Library.

have inserted in the citation ("And some are scatter'd and alone)," yet this line points in the direction of Goethe's "Zueignung" (Dedication) to *Faust*,<sup>15</sup> an introductory poem written in 1797, but first published in 1808 with part I of *Faust*.<sup>16</sup> This poem, predating lines by Filimonov, Moore, Byron, Baratynsky, and Pushkin himself, constitutes an important subtext to the opening lines of the last stanza of *Onegin*.

Sie hören nicht die folgenden Gesänge,  
Die Seelen, denen ich die ersten sang;  
Zerstoben ist das freundliche Gedränge,  
Verklungen ach! der erste Widerklang.  
Mein Leid<sup>17</sup> ertönt der unbekanntten Menge,

<sup>15</sup> At the end of his essay on *Eugene Onegin* and *The Little House in Kolomna*, M. L. Gasparov, discussing Pushkin's use of the "octava" form, briefly calls attention to Pushkin's response in his last two stanzas of *Onegin* to Goethe's "Zueignung" and Zhukovsky's poetic version of that poem (See Gasparov, "*Evgenii Onegin i Domik v Kolomne. Parodiia i samoparodiia u Pushkina*" in *Izbrannye trudy. 2, O stikhakh* (Moscow, 1997), 73–74. In his commentary to his German translation of *Eugene Onegin*, Rolf-Dietrich Keil also calls attention to Pushkin's awareness of Goethe's "Zueignung" in his penultimate stanza: "Man erinnert sich unwillkürlich an die 'Zueignung' zum *Faust*," writes Keil. See Alexander Pushkin, *Jewgeni Onegin*. Aus dem Russischen von Rolf-Dietrich Keil (Frankfurt am Mein and Leipzig, 1999), 262, Keil first published his translation of *Onegin* in Giessen in 1980.

<sup>16</sup> According to Goethe's notebook, his "Zueignung" was composed June 24, 1797, at the time he had taken up work again on *Faust*. *Faust* Part I was first published in 1808, along with Goethe's "Dedication."

<sup>17</sup> The question whether "Leid" or "Lied" should appear in line 21 of "Zueignung" has been discussed at length by Goethe scholars. "Leid" appears in this line (line 21) of the poem in the first edition of *Faust I* in 1808. This was a misprint. "Leid" was retained, however, throughout Goethe's lifetime in all editions with the exception of a separate printing. Modern versions of Goethe's "Zueignung" generally have retained "Lied" instead of "Leid" in this position in the poem. Zhukovsky clearly used an edition of *Faust* in which "Leid" appeared in line 21. In a 1985 Soviet edition of Zhukovsky's translations of foreign poetry, where the editors juxtapose Goethe's "Zueignung" with Zhukovsky's Russian version of it, "Leid" indeed appears in place of "Lied" in line 21. However, in the same Soviet reprinting of "Zueignung," "Leid" is *incorrectly* substituted for "Lied" in line 23 of Goethe's poem, thus "Und was sich sonst an meinem *Leid* erfreuet . . . The use of "Leid" in line 23 is a distortion of Goethe's text; we do not find that word used in this position in any edition of *Faust*, old or new. "Leid" in line 23 of the Soviet edition is either a typographical misprint or an error on the part of the editors.

Ihr Beifall selbst macht meinem Herzen bang,  
 Und was sich sonst an meinem Lied erfreuet,  
 Wenn es noch lebt, irrt in der Welt zerstreuet.

[Those souls to whom I sang my first  
 will not hear the following songs;  
 that friendly throng is scattered,  
 the first echo, alas, has died away.  
 My sorrow sounds for the unknown many  
 Whose very applause makes my heart afraid,  
 And all who formerly enjoyed my song,  
 If living still, are wandering scattered through the world.]<sup>18</sup>

Goethe alludes to people to whom he “sang” (*sang*) his first songs who will not hear the “following songs” (*die folgenden Gesänge*); Pushkin, in lines 1–4 of the last stanza of *Eugene Onegin*, speaks of those to whom he had “read” (*chital*) his “first strophes.” Goethe’s reference to the “friendly throng” (*das freundliche Gedränge*) who first heard his songs is echoed in Pushkin’s “friendly meetings” (*v družnoi vstreche*). Where Goethe simply observes that that “friendly throng” is “dispersed” (*zerstoben*), or if living still, is “wandering scattered through the world” (*Wenn es noch lebt, irrt in der Welt zerstreuet*), Pushkin, alluding to Saadi, observes succinctly, “some are no more while others are distant” (*inykh uzh net, a te daleche*).<sup>19</sup>

These lexical parallels, the first of a number, along with a convergence in emotional tonality, suggest that elements from Goethe’s “Dedication” had entered Pushkin’s creative imagination. Had Pushkin read Goethe’s poem in the original himself? Pushkin, as

<sup>18</sup> See Carlyle F. MacIntyre, translator, *Goethe’s Faust*, A New American Translation with Illustrations by Rockwell Kent together with the German text (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1941), 398–200. For purposes of close analysis, I have amended in places MacIntyre’s prose translation.

<sup>19</sup> Goethe himself was familiar with Saadi’s writings through Latin, French and German sources. In 1819, for example, he read a work by Adam Olearius (1500–1671), entitled *Des Welt-berühmten Adami Olearis colligirte und viel vermehrte Reise-Beschreibungen* (Hamburg: 1696), a work which includes Olearius’s translation of *Perslanischer Baum-Garten* and the *Perslanischer Rosen-Thal . . . von dem damahls berühmten und tieff-sinnigen Poeten Schich Saadi*. Goethe’s interest in Saadi and old eastern literature found vivid expression in his *West-Östlicher Divan* (1819; 1827).

Nabokov noted, had less German than English. Was he not capable, however, at least of "listening" to the art of the poem? And did he not have sufficient knowledge of German to make out Goethe's poetic text, albeit with a trot in hand or with help of someone who knew German intimately? Whatever the answer to these questions, we do know that Vasily A. Zhukovsky (1783–1852), the renowned Russian poet, translator and interpreter of Goethe, Schiller, and other German poets, and a close friend of Pushkin's, had translated and published in 1817 his own poetic version of Goethe's "Zueignung" under the title, "Mechta. Podrazhanie Gete" ("A Dream. An Imitation of Goethe").<sup>20</sup>

An examination of Zhukovsky's so-called "imitation" (a conceit on his part calculated to remind his readers that his poem was not a slavish imitation) offers additional evidence that elements from Goethe's "Dedication" directly and indirectly found expression in the last two stanzas of *Eugene Onegin*. Zhukovsky renders Goethe's third stanza as follows:

K nim ne doidut poslednei pesni zvuki;  
 Rasseian krug, gde pervuiu ia pel;  
 Ne vstretiat ikh prostertye k nim ruki;  
 Prekrasnyi son ikh zhizni uletel.  
 Drugikh umchal mogushchii dukh razluki;  
 Schastlivyi krai, ikh znavshii, opustel;  
 Razbrosany po vsem dorogam mira!  
 Ne im poet zadumchivaia lira.

[The sounds of the final song will not reach them;  
 The circle where I sang the first [strophe] is dispersed;  
 No outstretched arms will greet them;  
 The beautiful dream of their life has taken flight.  
 The mighty spirit of parting has swept others away;  
 The happy land that once knew them is deserted;

<sup>20</sup> Zhukovsky's translation first appeared under this title in the journal, *Syn Otechestva*, 39.32 (1817): 226–227. Zhukovsky used this poetic version of "Zueignung" as the introductory poem to his own collection, *Dvenadtsat' spiashchikh dev. Starinnaia povest' v dvukh balladakh* (1810–1817), a fact that is announced in the same issue of *Syn Otechestva* in which his poem appears. In his separate edition of *Dvenadtsat' spiashchikh dev*, however, Zhukovsky makes no mention of the fact that his poem is a version of Goethe's poem. He viewed his translation as an original creative endeavor. In this connection, see his comments on translation in the following footnote.

Scattered are they on all the world's roads!  
The pensive lyre sings not to them.]

Before discussing the opening lines of the third stanza of Zhukovsky's version of Goethe, we may note that while his poetic rendition of "Dedication" is faithful to the form, the *ottava rima* measure, of the German original, he subjects Goethe's poem to a process of Romantic "emotional stylization," as Viktor Zhirmunsky puts it in his discussion of Zhukovsky's poetics of translation.<sup>21</sup>

Further, the subtle changes in words and phrases Zhukovsky made in his version of "Dedication" add up to a significant shift from the original mood and message of Goethe's poem; away from its central theme of artistic creation—the incantatory power of earlier forms and images acting upon Goethe at the moment he returns to work on *Faust* after a break of twenty or more years;<sup>22</sup> away from Goethe's concept of

<sup>21</sup> See Viktor M. Zhirmunskii, *Gete v russkoi literature* (Leningrad: 1937), 107. Zhirmunsky cites Zhukovsky on the latter's own principles of translation: "The translator of prose is a slave, the translator of verse—rival . . . The poet-originator is fired by an ideal which he finds in his own imagination; the poet-imitator is fired to the same degree by his model, one which then becomes a substitute for his ideal: it follows that the translator, while yielding the palm of inventiveness to his model, necessarily must have almost the same [degree of] imagination as his model, the same literary art, the same power of mind and feelings. I will say more: the imitator, while not being the inventor in the whole, must without fail be the inventor in the parts." (*Perevodchik v proze est' rab; perevodchik v stikhakh—sopernik . . . Poet original'nyi vosplamniaetsia idealom, kotoryi nakhodit u sebja v voobrazhenie; poet-podrazhatel' v takoi zhe stepeni vosplamniaetsia obraztsom svoim, kotoryi zastupaet dlia nego togda mesto ideala sobstvennogo: sledstvenno, perevodchik, ustupaia obraztsu svoemu pal'mu izobretatel'nosti, dolzhen neobkhodimo imet' pochti odinakoe s nim voobrazhenie, odinakoe iskusstvo sloga, odinakuiu silu v ume i chuvstvakh. Skazhu bolee: podrazhatel', ne buduchi izobratelem v tselom, dolzhen im byt' nepremenno po chastiam*). See V. A. Zhukovskii, "O basne i basniakh Krylova," *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh*, 4 vols., ed. E. D. Glikman (Moscow and Leningrad: Gosizdatkhudlit, 1959-1960), 4:410. For a discussion in English of Zhukovsky's rendition of Goethe's "Dedication," see André von Gronicka, *The Russian Image of Goethe: Goethe in Russian Literature of the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), I: 55-56.

<sup>22</sup> Goethe's "Zueignung" dates back to June 24, 1797, the moment when after twenty or so years he took up work again on *Faust*. As Erich Trunz notes: "The poem was placed at the beginning of the entire work, as the first of

"dedication" toward that of the more or less melancholy preoccupations of the romantic elegy: a dark meditation on, and recollection of, the past, a lament for the irretrievable loss of friends, and a desire to return to that "mysterious world" (*tainstvennyi svet*) where "yearning for the bliss of former years / warms anew the cold soul" (*toska po blagam prezhnikh let / dushu khladnuiu razogrevaet*).<sup>23</sup>

Goethe refers to those who will not hear the "following" songs (*die folgenden Gesänge*). Zhukovsky writes mournfully that those who have disappeared will not hear the "sounds of the 'final song'" (*poslednei pesni zvuki*). Zhukovsky's poem, in short, with all its romantic figures of speech, represented a bold reorientation of Goethe's poem in the direction of the style of the popular elegy. And yet his strongly sentimental and elegaic representation of Goethe's poem, read against the background of the later tragedy of the Decembrist revolt of 1825, clearly impressed Pushkin by its odd contemporaneity. We shall have more to say of the dark mood of Zhukovsky's version of Goethe's "Dedication" and what it might have contributed conceptually to Pushkin's last two stanzas of *Eugene Onegin*.

One may note here, however, some other points of convergence between Zhukovsky's version of Goethe's lines and Pushkin's opening lines. Pushkin's phrase "at friendly meetings" (*v družnoi vstreche*) recalls Zhukovsky's "circle" (*krug*), while his line "the first strophes I read" (*ia strofy pervoye chital*) echoes Zhukovsky's "where I sang the first [strophe]" (*gde pervuiu ia pel*). Pushkin's "some are no more" (*inykh uzhet*) parallels Zhukovsky's "swept others away" (*drugikh umchal*), while Pushkin's "others are distant" (*a te daleche*) responds to Zhukovsky's

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three prologues, although it gives expression neither to the context of the work's beginning nor to its end, but rather to the renewal [of work on *Faust*]; precisely this motif expresses the poet's relation to his work, and explains its position here." Cf. Goethe, *Faust*. Kommentiert von Erich Trunz (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1986), 505.

<sup>23</sup> Zhukovsky's shift from the theme of the rebirth of artistic creation to that of a major focus on nostalgia was signalled first of all by his replacement of Goethe's title, "Zueignung" to that of "Mechta (Podrazhanie Gete)". The first part of the title, "Mechta," emphasizes dream as fantasy, imagination, daydreaming, not the "dream" (in Russian, "son") of sleep, but also the idea of something strongly desired, beckoning. The second part of the title, "An Imitation of Goethe," as we have suggested, would appear to have been deliberately designed to call attention to the creative character of his translation.



“Scattered are they on all world’s roads!” (*Razbrosany po vsem dorogam mira!*)—itself echoing Goethe’s “wandering scattered through the world” (*irrt in der Welt zerstreuet*).

Other isolated lexical elements or fragments in Zhukovsky’s version of Goethe’s poem seem to have been caught in the web of Pushkin’s creative imagination and echoed in the penultimate stanza of *Eugene Onegin*: Pushkin’s “Prosti zh i ty, moj sputnik strannyi” (Farewell to you, too, my strange fellow traveler) recalls Zhukovsky’s reference to “travelling companions who earlier left the path” (*Soputnikov, c puti soshedshikh prezhe . . .*). Pushkin’s “besed[a] sladkikh druzei” (sweet converse of friends) picks up on “Let me taste sweet memories” (*Dai sladkogo vkusit’ vospominaniia*) in Zhukovsky’s last stanza; Pushkin’s “promchalos’ mnogo, mnogo dnei” (many, many days have rushed by) phonologically recalls the verb in Zhukovsky’s “You summoned images of joyful years” (*Ty obrazy veselykh let primchala*).

Both Goethe’s “Dedication” in the German original and in Zhukovsky’s elegaic version in Russian constitute a lively subtext at the end of *Eugene Onegin*; they broaden and intensify the imaginative and emotional content of Pushkin’s allusion to his early Decembrist readers and comrades, that is, to the theme of the Decembrist uprising and its tragic consequences.

At first glance, Pushkin’s reference to those who heard the first strophes of *Eugene Onegin* seems merely to overlap with Goethe’s benign references to those to whom he “sang” his first songs. Yet if we place Goethe’s lines in the context of his, Goethe’s, *own* poem, and then in the more melodramatic context of Zhukovsky’s version of “Dedication,” we find that Pushkin’s allusions to Goethe take on an even more meaning.

Pushkin’s reference point in Goethe’s “Dedication” is not only Goethe’s lines, “Sir hören nicht die folgenden Gesänge, / Die Seelen, denen ich die ersten sang,” but the verses that lead up to these lines. “Zueignung” opens with a reference to the wavering or hovering shapes (*schwankende Gestalten*) that first appeared before the poet’s gaze. These shapes press upon him. His heart, he writes, is stirred:

Mein Busen fühlt sich jugentlich erschüttert  
Vom Zauberhauch, der euren Zug umwittert.

[I am stirred like a boy by the magic breath blowing around your procession.]

Goethe continues:

Ihr bringt mit euch die Bilder froher Tage,  
Und manche liebe Schatten steigen auf;  
Gleich einer alten, halbverklungenen Sage  
Kommt erste Lieb' und Freundschaft mit herauf;

[You bring with you visions of happy days,  
and many beloved shadows arise;  
like an ancient half-dead legend  
comes first love and friendship with it.]

The happy days, first love and friendship, however, are quickly replaced with pain. It is these words that deserve our attention:

Der Schmerz wird neu, es wiederholt die Klage  
Des Lebens labyrinthisch irren Lauf,  
Und nennt die Guten, die, um schöne Stunden  
Vom Glück getäuscht, vor mir hinweggeschwunden.

[The pain is renewed, the lament repeats  
the labyrinthine crazy course of life,  
and names the dear ones who, cheated of joy  
by fortune, have vanished before me.]

These words, especially, "Die Guten . . . Vom Glück getäuscht"—the dear ones cheated or deceived by fortune, chance, or ill-luck—give special resonance to the verses that follow:

Sir hören nicht die folgenden Gesänge,  
Die Seelen, denen ich die ersten sang;  
Zerstoben ist das freundliche Gedränge,  
Verklungen, ach! der erste Widerklang.

[Those souls to whom I sang my first  
will not hear the following songs;  
that friendly throng is scattered,  
the first echo, alas, has died away.]

Pushkin, as we have noted, echoes these lines in his allusion to the Decembrists:

No te, kotorym v družnoi vstreche  
Ja strofy pervye chital . . .  
Inykh uzh net, a te daleche . . .

Goethe's lament over the "dead ones cheated by fortune" does not, as in Pushkin's case, pertain to participants in any broad national or historical tragedy, though the resonance of Goethe's line clearly extends beyond personal friends or family. Yet as subtext to Pushkin's lines, this lament, along with its reference to life's "labyrinthisch irren Lauf," serves to intensify and sharpen the sense of pain and disaster surrounding Pushkin's seemingly benign references to people who first heard him recite parts of *Eugene Onegin*—people whom we know to be friends among the Decembrists.

One may speak, additionally, of Pushkin's poetic response to Goethe's reference to the capricious role of "Glück" (luck, fortune, chance) in the affairs of his friends. Pushkin echoes this idea of arbitrary forces at work in the lives of people in line 8 of his stanza: "O mnogo, mnogo Rok ot'ial!" (Ah, fate has much, much snatched away). Yet here, Pushkin does not play with any of the Russian words that correspond to "Glück," such as "udacha" or "vezenie," or "schast'e," (fortune, luck) but uses a quite different word and concept: the ancient and dread Russian-Norse "Rok" or "Fate" (here, equivalent to English "doom" or the German "Verhängnis"): an evil, hostile power linked with idea of "term," "an appointed time," a power or action that, like the edict of Death, carries with it something the irreversible.<sup>24</sup> To intensify the idea of an ineluctable, overwhelming, fateful force, Pushkin has capitalized the word "Rok."

<sup>24</sup> "Rok," as a term for "fate," must be distinguished from the Russian "sud'ba," usually translated into English as "fate." "Sud'ba" may bring good fortune or evil, as is indicated in the Russian phrase: "sud'ba mozhet peremenit'sia." This thought is perfectly illustrated in Tatyana's words to Onegin in Canto VIII: xlvii: "A schast'e bylo tak vozmozhno,/ Tak blizko! No sud'ba moia/ uzh reshena..." In a word, Tatyana's fate or "sud'ba" *might have been different*, but things turned out otherwise, and there is no going back. "Rok," however, is implacable from the outset. "Rok," or the power, or decree, of "rok," is consistently negative, irreversible, and often linked with death. Russian folk sayings make this crystal clear: "Takov nash rok, chto vilami v bok," "Lovit volk rokovoii ovtsu" or the ominously succinct: "Rok golovy ishchet." The word "Rok" as noun or adjective appears a number of times in Pushkin's works. In his poem, "K Chaadaevu" (1818), we find the word "rok" used in its adjectival form; it suggests a powerful, negative force: "pod gnetom vlasti rokovoii"—a reference to the tsarist government. In "Chem chashche prazdnuet litsei" (1831), Pushkin's lines— "My vozmuzhali; rok sudil/ I nam zHITEISKI ispytan'ia,/ I smerti dukh sred' nas khodil/ I naznachal svoi zaklan'ia"—well conveys the deadly power of "rok."

Pushkin's choice of "Rok" wholly concords with Zhukovsky's version of Goethe's text. In his rendition of "Dedication," Zhukovsky substitutes "Rok" for Goethe's "Glück"; this was done, obviously, not out of a desire to find an exact corresponding word in Russian for "Glück" ("Rok" is the wrong match for "Glück"), but rather out of necessities rooted in his own interpretation of Goethe's text, out of a romantically inspired effort to give Goethe's poem a dark, indeed tragic, formulation.

Here is Zhukovsky's rendition of Goethe's second stanza, the one in which he replaces the German "Glück" with the Russian "Rok":

Ty obrazy veselykh let primchala—  
 I mnogo milykh tenei vosstaet;  
 I to, chem zhizn' stol' nekogda pleniala,  
 Chto rok, otniav, nazad ne otdaet,  
 Ty vse opiat', dusha moia, uznala;  
 Prosnulas' skorb', i zhaloba zovet  
 Sopotnikov, s puti soshedshikh prezhde  
 I zdes' votshche poverivshikh nadezhde.

[You summoned images of joyful years,  
 So many precious shadows rise;  
 And that with which life so captivated one,  
 Which once taken away by fate are never returned,  
 All that, my soul, you grasped once more;  
 Sorrow awoke, and a plaint called out  
 To travelling companions who earlier left the road  
 And vainly put their faith in hope.]

In Zhukovsky's striking reformulation of Goethe's verse, we find not only Pushkin's "Rok," but "Rok, otniav," a phrase that is identical with Pushkin's more archaic, "Rok ot'ial."

"Rok" in contrast to Goethe's "Glück" conveys a sense of irreversible action and loss. Zhukovsky's version of Goethe's line, "Und nennt die Guten, die, um schöne Stunden / Vom Glück getäuscht, vor mir hinweggeschwunden" reinforces a sense of tragedy. Zhukovsky's "Sopotnikov, s puti soshedshikh prezhde / I zdes' votshche poverivshikh nadezhde" (travelling companions who earlier left the path / And vainly put their faith in hope) seems, prophetically, to define the tragedy of the Decembrists.

It is appropriate at this point, and with the Decembrist theme in mind, to turn to the structural and ideological axis of Pushkin's last

stanza of *Onegin*, the anguished cry “O mnogo, mnogo Rok ot’ial!” This line points backward and forward in Pushkin’s stanza; it follows three important lines (5–7) that deserve particular attention:

Bez nikh Onegin dorisovan.  
A ta, s kotoroi obrazovan  
Tat’iany milyi Ideal . . .

[Finished without them is Onegin’s portrait  
And she from whom is fashioned  
the dear ideal of “Tatyana” . . .]

Appearing immediately after the word “Ideal,” Pushkin’s “O mnogo, mnogo Rok ot’ial!” (Ah, Fate has much, much snatched away!) at first glance seems a non sequitur, but the impression is deceptive; in this line, Pushkin no longer speaks of individuals or of people who had heard him recite portions of *Eugene Onegin*, people who in Goethe’s poem had been cheated by “fortune” (Glück) of blissful hours. Pushkin speaks of all-powerful “Rok”: a hostile force that has “snatched away” (*ot’ial*) “much, much.”

“Ot’iat” or “otniat” means to take something away from somebody by force, or against their will. What has “Rok” snatched away by force? Comrades to whom Pushkin had read his first verses, yes; but also the model for his Tatyana, “ta, s kotoroi obrazovan Tat’iany milyi Ideal . . .” (she from whom is fashioned / the dear ideal of “Tatyana”).

Pushkin, however, speaks of “much, much.” Significantly, he capitalizes “Ideal,” as he does “Rok.” The juxtaposition of “Ideal . . .” (Tat’any milyi *Ideal* . . .) and “ot’ial” (O mnogo, mnogo Rok *ot’ial!*) is a suggestive one: Fate has snatched away the Ideal: “Ideal . . . / Rok ot’ial.” And as Zhukovsky puts it in his “imitation” of Goethe, “I to, chem zhizn’ stol’ nekogda pleniala, . . . rok, otniav, nazad ne otdaet” (And that with which life once so enchanted one . . . once taken away by fate is never given back).

It is noteworthy that Pushkin places trailing ellipses after “Ideal . . .” — a device that in Russian frequently calls special attention to the preceding word, phrase or thought. Further, the ellipses after “Ideal . . .” (end of line 7) parallel the ellipses after “chital . . .” (end of line 2). In this juxtaposition of ellipses, and indeed, in the juxtaposition of lines 1 and 2 with lines 6 and 7, Pushkin accents the link between the Decembrists and the “Ideal.”

No *te* kotorym v družnoi vstreche  
Ia strofy pervye *chital* . . .

A *ta*, s kotoroi obrazovan  
Tat'iany milyi *Ideal* . . .

Pushkin identifies "Ideal" in his last stanza directly with his beloved Tatyana and "she" from whom the Ideal was fashioned. The "Ideal," however, is something that transcends Tatyana even as she embodies it. The capitalized "Ideal" here is an amalgam of the highest ethical, social, and esthetic beliefs. "Rok," in short, has shattered the hopes, dreams, ideals, albeit naïve and illusory ones, of the best people of Pushkin's time. So too, "Rok" denied the innocent fantasies, the "infantine dreams" (*mladencheskie mechty*), of Tatyana's childhood.

Pushkin's friend, Prince Peter Vyazemsky, wrote in 1827 of the preceding two years, "Much of those lively dreams which roused us at that time has flown by and disappeared. I look at the circle of our friends, once lively, cheerful, and often (thinking of you) sadly repeat the words of Saadi, or of Pushkin, who transmitted Saadi's words to us: 'Some are no longer with us, others are wandering far away.'"<sup>25</sup> Vyazemsky, of course, was referring to the daydreams of the Decembrists, to their naïveté and tragic innocence.

The "Ideal" Tatyana represents, then, is brought into momentary contact in the last stanza of *Eugene Onegin* with the idealism of the Decembrists. Yet whatever elements of daydreaming or reverie contributed to the misfortunes of the Decembrists or the youthful Tatyana, Pushkin finds the "Ideal" or idealism neither blameworthy nor ridiculous. This is no longer Lensky's "fashionable word 'ideal'" (*modnoe slovo 'ideal'*) (6:23), but a word now uttered by Pushkin without

<sup>25</sup> "V eti dva goda (1825–1826) mnogo proletelo i ischezlo tekhn rezvykh mechtanii, kotorye veselili nas v byloe vremia . . . Smotriui na krug družei nashikh, prezhdie ozhivlennyyi, veselyi i chasto (dumaia o tebe) s grust'iu povtoriaiui slova Saadi ili Pushkina, kotoryi nam peredal slova Saadi: 'Odnikh uzhd net, drugie stranstvuiut daleko!'" Vyazemsky here is citing from Pushkin's prose motto to Bakhchisaraiskii fontan (1824): "inykh uzhd net, drugie stranstvuiut daleche. Sadi." These words by Vyazemsky appear in an article by N. Polevoy, "Vzgliad na russkuiu literaturu 1825 i 1826 (Pis'mo v N'iu-Iork k S. D. P.)" in *Moskovskii Telegraf*, No. 1 (1827). Quoted and discussed by Iu. M. Lotman in his commentary to *Eugene Onegin* in A. S. Pushkin, *Eugeny Onegin. Kommentarii Iu. M. Lotmana* (Moscow: A.T.R.I.U.M., 1991), 606.

irony. In the double movement of the final stanza, Pushkin both acknowledges a defeat of the Ideal in history and its restoration in poetry. "There is no reason to be ashamed of one's idealism" (*Stydit'sia svoego idealizma nechego*), Dostoevsky wrote in his July–August 1876 issue of his *Diary of a Writer*. This is always the point of view of Pushkin the artist, even when he, like Dostoevsky, acknowledges the naïveté, benign or tragic, of innocent idealism.

Pushkin's last stanza, for all its covert and overt affirmation of the Ideal, remains one of his most poignant utterances about Russia and the tragedy of its history. Not accidentally are the final lines of the last stanza marked by an elegaic note. Pushkin recalls not only the tragic past, but intimates a tragic future: for what has taken place in Russian history in the lives of his friends, the Decembrists, must repeat itself in the narrative future of Eugene Onegin (the fragments of chapter 10 of *Eugene Onegin*), regardless of how he, Onegin, might personally relate to Decembrism. Thus, in Pushkin's last stanza, to borrow the phrase from H. D. F. Kitto, *the future throws its shadow behind it*.<sup>26</sup>

Lines 5 and 6 of the closing stanza of Zhukovsky's "imitation of Goethe" read: "And a yearning for the blessings of past years / warms anew the chilled soul" (*I dushu khladnuiu razogrevaet / Opiat' toska po blagam prezhnikh let*). (Zhukovsky here diverges from Goethe's original text.) In his final stanza 51 of *Eugene Onegin*, however, Pushkin does not yearn for the blessings,<sup>27</sup> bliss, or good things (*blaga*) of past years, but rather blesses (*blazhen*) him who early take leave of banquet of life. And what he blesses is not the person alone, but also the philosophical, the stoic, view of one who must abruptly take leave of the good things of life (*blaga*). Pushkin concludes *Eugene Onegin* (chapter 8, stanza 51) with lines that pick up on the philosophically pivotal lines of the concluding stanza 51 of chapter 4: "Blest hundredfold who is to faith devoted, / who having curbed cold intellect" etc. (*Stokrat blazhen, kto predan vere, / Kto khladnyi um ugomoniv . . .*) Pushkin's view of life at the end of *Eugene Onegin*, however, is devoid of any irony. Indeed, the poet in his final lines steps forward without a mask:

<sup>26</sup> "The Past is always a menace to the Present, 'the art of Calchas is unerring,'" H. D. F. Kitto wrote in connection with the *Oresteia*. "Even the future throws its shadow behind it." Cf. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (New York: 1954), 74.

<sup>27</sup> The word "blago" can also be translated as "happiness," "well-being," "welfare," "good" or "good things." "Blago" is etymologically linked with "blazhenyi" – "blest," "happy in the highest sense."



Blazhen, kto prazdnik zhizni rano  
 Ostavil, ne dopiv do dna  
 Bokala polnogo vina,  
 Kto ne dochel ee romana  
 I vdrug umel rasstat'sia s nim,  
 Kak ia s Oneginym moim.

[Blest who Life's banquet early  
 Left, having not drained to the bottom  
 The goblet full of wine;  
 Who did not read life's novel to the end  
 And all at once could part with it  
 As I with my Onegin.]

From the pagan "Rok," cruel and vindictive, Pushkin shifts for the last time (in the canonic *Onegin*) to the spiritual "Blazhen" (a word often used in *Eugene Onegin*), with its root meaning in Russian, "to do good"; he shifts from the deadly power of "Rok" to "life." He speaks of early leaving "life's banquet" (*prazdnik zhizni*), but he does so in the tempered spirit of Prospero's words, "Our revels now are ended" (*The Tempest* (IV: I)).

There is a meditative, almost elegaic air to the last lines of *Onegin*—lines that seem to echo a kind of Horatian withdrawal from the world, not so much, however, from mundane passions and power struggles, as in Horace, as from life's highest expectations, indeed, from life itself.<sup>28</sup> There is something, too, in Pushkin's lines, of Zhukovsky's "pensive lyre" (*zadumchivaia lira*). In Pushkin, however, there are no romantic longings, no yearning for a mystical world of the past; there is only a sober clarity. Here, Pushkin demonstrates, as he is prepared to argue in chapter 4, stanza 33 of *Eugene Onegin*, that not everything in the genre of the elegy is "null" or "pitiful" (*nichtozhno, zhalko*).

It would be a mistake, however, to overstress the elegaic character of these concluding verses. In them, Pushkin surveys life, history, and

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See the usurer Alfius's monologue announcing his retreat to the pastoral world, in Horace's Epode ii: "Beatus ille qui procul negotiis,/ ut prisca gens mortalium,/ paterna rura bobus exercet suis/ solutus omni faenore, neque excitatur classico miles truci,/ neque horret iratum mare," etc. Cf. Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, in the Loeb Classical Library, trans. C. E. Bennett (Cambridge, MA and London: 1999), 364–365.

fiction from the standpoint of the highest vision or wisdom. These last six meditative lines (they stand, in their tranquility, in dramatic contrast to the emotionally agitated “O mnogo, mnogo Rok ot’ial!”) are marked by a rueful acceptance of the harvest of life and of worldly experience in general. In their philosophical content, however, these lines give expression to a recognition that limitation constitutes a boundary to all human expectations—an outlook that imbues Tatyana’s viewpoint in chapter 8.<sup>29</sup>

In his last lines, Pushkin counterposes the freedom of the individual (a freedom, as Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, that is also fate<sup>30</sup>) to the fatality of forces beyond his control. Pushkin’s freedom, like Emerson’s, is a freedom to limit oneself and to find good in limitation.<sup>31</sup> It is the freedom of a poet, Pushkin, whom Merezhkovsky once alluded to as Russia’s preminent “genius of measure.”<sup>32</sup>

There is more than “philosophical resignation” in the last lines of *Eugene Onegin*, more than “sad reflections”,<sup>33</sup> there is existential riposte. “Rok” does not wholly triumph and Pushkin the poet does

<sup>29</sup> In this connection, see Olga Peters Hasty’s discussion of Tatyana in Chapter VIII of *Eugene Onegin*, in *Pushkin’s Tatiana* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1999), 179–180, 183, 186.

<sup>30</sup> See Emerson’s observations on the theme of fate (limitation) and freedom in *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 330–352. Emerson seeks to reconcile Fate (limitation) with freedom. “To hazard the contradiction—freedom is necessary. If you please to plant yourself on the side of Fate and say, Fate is all, then we say, a part of Fate is the freedom of man” (340).

<sup>31</sup> The conception of limitation is central to Goethe’s thought. See, for example, his remark to Eckermann, April 20, 1825, “Im Übrigen . . . ist es zuletzt die grösste Kunst, sich zu beschränken und zu isolieren.” Cf. Johann Peter Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe in den Letzten Jahren seines Lebens* (Baden-Baden: 1955), 143.

<sup>32</sup> In a speech on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Ivan Turgenev, Merezhkovsky spoke of “Turgenev, after Pushkin, as almost [Russia’s] sole genius of measure, and therefore a genius of culture.” D. S. Merezhkovskii, “Turgenev,” in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 24 vols. (Moscow: I. D. Sytina, 1914), 18:58.

<sup>33</sup> “There could be no question, it seems, of any struggle with fate [rok] in Pushkin,” Danilevsky writes. “There were sad reflections, here there was philosophical resignation” See R. Iu. Danilevskii, *Pushkin i Gete. Sravnitel’noe issledovanie* (Sankt-Peterburg: Nauka, 1999), 166–167.

not resign. Identifying with those who through choice or character choose limitation, who choose to leave life early, who choose not to drink to the bottom their goblet of wine, not to read the book of life to its end, Pushkin parries the dread power of "Rok." The "Ideal" has been affirmed and vindicated. Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* remains, as he himself asserts in the penultimate stanza of the novel, a "free novel" (*svobodyi roman*). Put another way, Pushkin forces a draw in the end game. Fate against Fate. In realistic terms, this draw is a triumph for man and art.

To move toward the end of this discussion, Goethe, though he writes "Dedication" after he began work on *Faust*, nonetheless places it where such writing usually belongs: at the beginning of the work. In the course of his dedication, he looks back upon the past, lamenting the loss of dear friends, people who had heard him read his first verses. His stress is upon the rebirth of his muse and upon the songs to come, *not* upon "the sounds of the final song" (*poslednei pesni zvuki*) or on a longing for the past, as in Zhukovsky's rendition of Goethe's poem. Memories, old forms, shapes, images, music, and poetry, the stuff of imagination, surge up again in the poet. Goethe is overcome by his muse, one rising out of the past, out of "Dunst und Nebel" into the present and carrying him forward into the future on a wave of inspiration. This overwhelming moment of psychic breakthrough is experienced by the poet physically, as well as psychically:

Ein Schauer fasst mich, Träne folgt den Tränen,  
 Das strenge Herz, es fühlt sich mild und weich;  
 Was ich besitze, seh' ich wie im Weiten,  
 Und was verschwand, wird mir zu Wirklichkeiten.

[I tremble, tear follows tear,  
 the stern heart grows gentle and soft;  
 what I possess I see as in the distance,  
 and what vanished becomes my reality.]

Pushkin's last stanza is also a dedication, but it is one he has placed at the *end* of his epic poem. He, too, recalls the past, the period of his first creative endeavors. He recalls, as well, those who had heard him read the first lines of *Eugene Onegin*. Between the reading of the first lines and the composing of the last, however, a great and tragic event has intervened: not only friends, but an entire historical epoch has been swept away. That drama, a historical convulsion for Russia,

is punctuated by one line in the middle of his last stanza: "O mnogo, mnogo Rok ot'ial!" —a line that has resonances in both Goethe's and Zhukovsky's poems; it is a line, however, that is Pushkin's in its form and content.

Pushkin responds to Goethe's poem, he responds to its great poetry and pathos. Yet Zhukovsky's poetic rendition of Goethe's poem, his imposition on that poem of dark tonalities, his creative misinterpretation of Goethe's poem, also appear to color Pushkin's own recollection of the Decembrist cataclysm. Reading the third stanza of Zhukovsky's version of Goethe's "Dedication," reading it as Pushkin must have consciously or unconsciously recollected it at the time he composed his last stanzas, the reader feels that almost every line addresses the disaster that befell the Decembrists and Russia; he feels, finally, that in many respects Zhukovsky's elegy provided an important subtext for Pushkin, a reference point. Zhukovsky's dark romantic elegy, composed eight years *before* the Decembrist event, yet meditated upon in the context of the abortive Decembrist uprising, transmutes strangely in the reader's consciousness into a realistic elegy on the catastrophe of Decembrism.<sup>34</sup>

K nim ne doidut poslednei pesni zvuki;  
 Rasseian krug, gde pervuiu ia pel;  
 Ne vstretiat ikh prostertye k nim ruki;  
 Prekrasnyi son ikh zhizni uletel.  
 Drugikh umchal mogushchii dukh razluki;  
 Schastlivyi krai, ikh znavshii, opustel;  
 Razbrosany po vsem dorum mira!  
 Ne im poet zadumchivaia lira.

[The sounds of my final song will not reach them;  
 The circle where I sang the first (song) is dispersed;  
 No hands will reach out to greet them;  
 Their beautiful dream of their life has taken flight.  
 The mighty spirit of parting has swept others away;  
 The happy land that once knew them is deserted;  
 Scattered are they on all the world's roads!  
 The pensive lyre sings not to them]

<sup>34</sup> Lerner makes this point in general with respect to the contemporary reader's response to the last stanza of *Eugene Onegin*. Lerner, op. cit., 111–112.

Of course, in his last stanza, Pushkin's meditative lyre *does* "sing" across the years, to and about his lost friends. Unlike Goethe in his "Dedication," however, but like Zhukovsky in his arbitrary interpretation of Goethe's poem, Pushkin's sounds (*zvuki*) are indeed those of his "final song," that is, his last stanza in the canonic version of *Eugene Onegin*.

Let us draw together Pushkin's ending with Goethe's beginning in one final comparison. Goethe begins his "Dedication" with the following lines:

Ihr naht euch wieder, schwankende Gestalten,  
Die früh sich einst dem trüben Blick gezeigt.  
Versuch' ich wohl, euch diesmal festzuhalten?  
Fühl' ich mein Herz noch jenem Wahn geneigt?  
Ihr drängt euch zu! nun gut, so mögt ihr walten,  
Wie ihr aus Dunst und Nebel um mich steigt;  
Mein Busen fühlt sich jugendlich erschüttert  
Vom Zauberhauch, der euren Zug umwittert.

[Hovering forms, you come again who once  
showed yourself early to my turbid glance.  
This time shall I try to hold you fast?  
Is my heart still bent toward that illusion?  
You press upon me! Good! Then you may rule  
As you rise about me in cloud and mist;  
I am stirred like a boy by the magic  
breath blowing around your procession.]

Pushkin's last stanza, we have noted, is not a transition to new poetic creation; it is not a beginning, but an ending. He ends his poem, however, as Goethe begins his *Faust*: with a recollection of early, almost inchoate moments of creation when he began work on *Eugene Onegin*. His recollection in the penultimate stanza of that work picks up on lexical elements and images from Goethe's own remembrance of how he was re-inspired to work again on *Faust*: Pushkin's "smutnyi son" (blurry dream) echoes Goethe's "trüben Blick"; Goethe's "schwankende Gestalten," hovering forms or apparitions, materialize, as it were, in Pushkin's Tatyana and Onegin. Finally, Pushkin's "magicheskii kristal," his magic crystal, recalls, in part, Goethe's "Zauberhauch," or "magic breath." These images or reminiscences, not to be found in Zhukovsky's poetic rendition of Goethe, left an imprint on Pushkin's imagination:

Promchalos' mnogo, mogno dnei  
 S tekh por, kak iunaia Tat'iana  
 I s nei Onegin v smutnom sne  
 Iavilisia vpervye mne—  
 I dal' svobodnogo romana  
 Ia skvoz' magicheskii kristal  
 Eshche ne iasno razlichal.

[Many, many days have rushed by  
 Since young Tatyana,  
 and with her Onegin, in a blurry dream  
 appeared to me for the first time—  
 and the far stretch of a free novel  
 I through a magic crystal  
 Still did not make out clearly.]

In the last lines of his “Dedication,” Goethe writes, “Was ich besitze, seh’ ich wie im Weiten, / Und was verschwand, wird mir zu Wirklichkeiten” (What I possess I see as in the distance, and what vanished becomes my reality). What is ahead of Goethe lies behind Pushkin, that is, his narrative has already appeared in his “free novel. In a special sense, however, what has disappeared for Pushkin, the world of his fellow travelers, his companions, the Decembrists, becomes a reality for him in *Eugene Onegin*, but only for a fleeting moment, and for the last time.

Pushkin’s pointed allusions in his final stanza to the dead or scattered Decembrists and again to Tatyana are, we might say, his last farewell, his *supremum vale*—words Ovid uses (*Metamorphoses* X) to mark the moment when Orpheus loses his beloved Eurydice for the second and final time. Thus, Pushkin, in and through his allusion to the Decembrists, imbues the end of the eighth and final chapter of *Eugene Onegin* with the spirit of the lines that grace the beginning of that chapter, Byron’s “Fare thee well, and if for ever,/ Still for ever, fare thee well.”<sup>35</sup>

It is in the spirit of this last farewell that Pushkin addresses his beloved Tatyana and Onegin in the penultimate stanza of *Eugene*

<sup>35</sup> Pushkin quotes these lines from Byron’s poem, “Fare Thee Well” (March 17, 1816) in the original English. With his exact punctuation, Byron’s lines read, “Fare thee well! And if for ever,/ Still for ever, fare thee well.”

*Onegin*, one in which the word "sputnik"<sup>36</sup> (traveling companion), addressed to Onegin, seems to echo Zhukovsky's "fellow travelers" (*soputniki*) who had earlier left the path.

So too, in the opening lines of the last stanza of *Eugene Onegin*, Pushkin unmistakably addresses the Decembrists, friends who in their own way had remained faithful to the Ideal:

No te, kotorym v družnoi vstreche  
 Ja strofy pervye chital . . .  
 "Inykh uzh net, a te daleche",  
 Kak Sadi nekogda skazal.  
 Bez nikh Onegin dorisovan.  
 A ta, s kotoroi obrazovan  
 Tat'iany milyi Ideal . . .  
 O mnogo, mnogo Rok ot'ial!  
 Blazhen, kto prazdnik zhizni rano  
 Ostavil, ne dopiv do dna  
 Bokala polnogo vina,  
 Kto ne dochel Ee romana  
 I vdrug umel rasstat'sia s nim,  
 Kak ia s Oneginym moim.

<sup>36</sup> "Prosti zh i ty, moi sputnik strannyi" (You, too, farewell, my strange traveling companion.)



FROM THE OTHER SHORE: NABOKOV'S TRANSLATION INTO  
RUSSIAN OF GOETHE'S "DEDICATION" TO *FAUST*<sup>1</sup>

*Iz Gete*  
Posviashchenie k "Faustu"

Vy snova blizko, reiushchiia teni.  
Moi smutnyi vzor uzhe vas videl raz.  
Khochu-l' teper' bezumiia videnii?  
Zapechatlet' poprobuiu li vas?  
Tesnites' vy! Sred' dymnykh isparenii  
—da budet tak!—vy iavites' seichas;  
po-iunomu mne serdtse potriasaet  
tuman chudes, chto vas soprovozhdает.

Otrada v vas mne chuditsia bylaia,  
i ten' vstaet rodnaia ne odna;  
vstaet liubov' i družhba molodaia,  
kak poluzvuk, predan'e, starina;  
i snova—bol', i zhaluias', bluzhdaia  
po labirintu zhiznennago sna,  
zovu ia milykh, schastiem zhestoko  
Obmerennykh, ischeznuvshikh do sroka.

Te, dlia kogo ia pel pervonachal'no,  
ne slyshat pesen nyneshnykh moikh;  
ushli druž'ia, i zamer otzvuk dal'nii  
ikh pervago priveta. Dlia chuzhikh,  
nevedomykh, zvuchit moi stikh pechal'nii,  
boius' ia dazhe odobren'ia ikh,  
a vernyia mne dushi, esli zhivy,  
skitaiutsia v izgnan'e sirotlivo.

Po istovom i tikhom tsarstve dukha  
vo mne toska zabytaia zazhglas',  
trepushchet pesn', neiasnaia dlia slukha,  
kak po strunam eolovym struias',  
i plachu ia, i uzhasaius' glukho,  
v surovom serdtse nezhhnost' razlilas';  
vse nastoiashchee vdali propalo,  
a proshloe deisvitel'nost'iu stalo.

—V. Sirin [Vladimir Nabokov]

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<sup>1</sup> Published here for the first time.

*Zueignung*

Ihr naht euch wieder, schwankende Gestalten,  
Die früh sich einst dem trüben Blick gezeigt.  
Versuch' ich wohl, euch diesmal festzuhalten?  
Fühl' ich mein Herz noch jenem Wahn geneigt?  
Ihr drängt euch zu! nun gut, so mögt ihr walten,  
Wie ihr aus Dunst und Nebel um mich steigt;  
Mein Busen fühlt sich jugendlich erschüttert  
Vom Zauberhauch, der euren Zug umwittert.

Ihr bringt mit euch die Bilder froher Tage,  
Und manche liebe Schatten steigen auf;  
Gleich einer alten, halbverklungenen Sage  
Kommt erste Lieb' und Freundschaft mit herauf;  
Der Schmerz wird neu, es wiederholt die Klage  
Des Lebens labyrinthisch irren Lauf,  
Und nennt die Guten, die, um schöne Stunden  
Vom Glück getäuscht, vor mir hinweggeschwunden.

Sie hören nicht die folgenden Gesänge,  
Die Seelen, denen ich die ersten sang;  
Zerstoben ist das freundliche Gedränge,  
Verklungen ach! der erste Widerklang.  
Mein Lied ertönt der unbekanntnen Menge,  
Ihr Beifall selbst macht meinem Herzen bang,  
Und was sich sonst an meinem Lied erfreuet,  
Wenn es noch lebt, irrt in der Welt zerstreuet.

Und mich ergreift ein längst entwöhntes Sehnen  
Nach jenem stillen, ernsten Geisterreich,  
Es schwebet nun in unbestimmten Tönen  
Mein lispelnd Lied, der Äolsharfe gleich,  
Ein Schauer fasst mich, Träne folgt den Tränen,  
Der strenge Herz, es fühlt sich mild und weich;  
Was ich besitze, seh' ich wie im Weiten,  
Und was verschwand, wird mir zu Wirklichkeiten.

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

And yet the ear cannot right now part with the music and allow the tale to fade; the chords of fate itself continue to vibrate; and no obstruction for the sage exists where I have put The End.

(I vse zh slukh ne mozhet srazu rasstat'sia s muzykoi, rasskazu dat' zameret' . . . sud'ba sama esche zvenit—i dlia vnimatel'nogo net granitsy.)

—Vladimir Nabokov, *The Gift (Dar)*

In the preceding chapter we began our discussion of the last stanza of *Eugene Onegin* with Nabokov's search for the source of Pushkin's so-called Saadi line, "Some are no more, others are distant" (Inykh uz net, a te daleche), and begin this one with a question: Why did Nabokov pass over specific allusions to Goethe's "Dedication" (*Zueignung*) to *Faust* and to Zhukovsky's "Imitation of Goethe"? Nabokov had composed a verse translation of Goethe's poem into Russian in 1923. He published that poem in 1932 on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Goethe's death.<sup>2</sup> He was thoroughly familiar with Zhukovsky's well-known adaptation of Goethe's "Dedication," as well as with his theory of translation. It cannot be said, then, that in his commentary on the two final stanzas of *Eugene Onegin* he overlooked Goethe and Zhukovsky. He simply passed them over in silence.

In his commentary in general, Nabokov addresses various matters pertaining to Pushkin and Goethe. He is occasionally testy with Goethe.<sup>3</sup> He acknowledges that Pushkin had a "boundless admiration" for Goethe and "placed him above Voltaire and Byron, next to Shakespeare."<sup>4</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that he chooses *not* to

<sup>2</sup> Nabokov, using the pseudonym V. Sirin, published his translation of Goethe's poem under the heading, "Iz Gete. Posviashchenie k *Faustu*," in the Paris-based Russian newspaper, *Poslednie novosti* (December 15, 1932), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Nabokov was deeply ambivalent about Goethe. As Omry Ronen puts it, "Nabokov manifested throughout his art mixed feelings toward Goethe: a proud attraction tinged with a streak of equally deep revulsion." See Ronen, "The Triple Anniversary of World Literature: Goethe, Pushkin, Nabokov," in *Nabokov at Cornell*, ed. Gavriel Shapiro (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 175, as well as his "Nabokov and Goethe" in *Cold Fusion: Aspects of the German Cultural Presence in Russia*, ed. Gennady Barabtarlo (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 241–251.

<sup>4</sup> Aleksandr Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse*, translated from Russian,

mention Pushkin's lavish praise of Goethe's *Faust* as a "supreme creation of the poetic spirit," a work, Pushkin wrote, that is "a representative example of contemporary poetry in the same way that *The Iliad* is a monument of classical antiquity."<sup>5</sup> This omission fully accords with Nabokov's decision to ignore echoes of "Dedication" in the last stanzas of *Eugene Onegin*. In any case, Pushkin's testimony in behalf of *Faust* would not have resonated well with Nabokov's dismissive remark that "there are readers who prefer Pushkin's 'Scenes from *Faust*' (1825) to the whole of Goethe's *Faust*, [a work] in which they distinguish a queer strain of triviality impairing the pounding of its profundities."<sup>6</sup>

In his commentary, Nabokov minimizes any serious impact on Pushkin of the German language, literature, or culture. Though he had earlier, and elsewhere, argued that Pushkin had a good knowledge of German, English, and Italian,<sup>7</sup> he reaches the opposite conclusion in his commentary. He flatly states that "Pushkin had even less German than he had English, and only vaguely knew German literature. He was immune to its influence and hostile to its trends. The little he read of it was either in French versions (which quickened Schiller but asphyxiated Goethe) or in Russian adaptations."<sup>8</sup> In fact, Nabokov writes again, "All that Pushkin knew of German literature and culture was through Zhukovsky's adaptations and translations and through Mme. de Stael's *De l'Allemagne*."<sup>9</sup> Nabokov bars Pushkin's way to any first-hand knowledge Goethe and *Faust*. At the same time he leaves open

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with a commentary by Vladimir Nabokov in Two Volumes, Bollingen Series LXXII (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975) 2: Part 1, 236.

<sup>5</sup> See *Pushkin o literature*, ed. N. B. Bogoslovskii (Leningrad: Academia, 1934), 116.

<sup>6</sup> Nabokov, op. cit., Part 1, 235–236. "There is dreadful streak of *poshlost* running through Goethe's *Faust*," Nabokov writes in his book on Gogol in connection with the subtleties of the Russian word "poshlost" (the banal, the trivial, the mediocre, etc.). See Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol* (New York: New Directions, 1961), 64. Véra Nabokov was one of the people who shared her husband's view of *Faust*. "I consider *Faust* one of the shallowest plays ever written," she is reported to have remarked, much to the delight of Nabokov. See Stacy Schiff, *Véra: Mrs. Vladimir Nabokov* (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 187.

<sup>7</sup> See "Zametki peredvodchika," in *Novyi zhurnal* 49 (1957): 131–132.

<sup>8</sup> Nabokov, *Eugene Onegin*, op. cit., 235.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

a path to Goethe through Zhukovsky's "adaptations and translation." He does not go down that path, however, in his commentary on the last two stanzas of *Eugene Onegin*.

In general, Nabokov's discussions of Zhukovsky's poetics, style, literary sensibilities, adaptations of English and German writers, and of the poet's literary relations with Pushkin, are abundant, subtle, and generous, though marked occasionally by a gentle irony. Nabokov's fine critical understanding and appreciation of Zhukovsky's work may be felt, for example, in his observations on Zhukovsky's *Zamok Smal'gol'm* (*Smaylhome Castle*, 1822), an adaptation of Sir Walter Scott's *The Eve of St. John*—a work, Nabokov notes, that in the hands of Zhukovsky takes on "a more romantic and pathetic air."<sup>10</sup> This observation could have been directed as well to Zhukovsky's "Imitation of Goethe."

Nabokov's comments on Zhukovsky's work as a translator or adaptor are always acute. "His versions of foreign poetry are not really translations but talented adaptations remarkably melodious and engaging; and they seem especially so when the original is not known to the reader. Zhukovsky at his best communicates to his reader much of the enjoyment he obviously experiences himself in molding and modulating a young language while having his verses go through this or that impersonation act."<sup>11</sup> Zhukovsky's "Imitation of Goethe" is an example of just such an act of impersonation.

In the jigsaw puzzle of his commentary, Nabokov left a space for a piece called "A Dream. An Imitation of Goethe." That space remains invisible, however, and Nabokov holds the fitting piece tightly in his hand, as he does Goethe's "Dedication" and his own "Dedication to *Faust*." How can one explain Nabokov's reluctance to raise the question of Goethe's presence in the last stanzas of *Eugene Onegin*?

In the period of Nabokov's *Eugene Onegin* project, a time when he was formulating, defending, and putting into practice his theory of literal faithfulness in translation, a discussion of Goethe's "Dedication," Zhukovsky's adaptation of it, and, perhaps, allusion to his own verse translation of Goethe's work, might well have complicated his polemical arguments. Nabokov's harsh criticism of verse translations of *Eugene Onegin* into English, as well as his polemics with Edmund

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Part Two, 146.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Part Two, 145.

Wilson on matters pertaining to his own literal translation of *Eugene Onegin*, are well known. In characteristically strong opinions Nabokov had denounced what he called the "dictatorship" of verse translation. He had referred scornfully to the "facile beauty" which results from an effort to imitate verse forms. "Why adaptation rather than faithful translation," Nabokov asks in a scathing review of Robert Lowell's adaptation of the poetry of Osip Mandelstam (1892–1938). "What . . . is there especially adaptive or adaptational in an obvious travesty? . . . 'Adapted' to what? To the needs of an idiot audience? To the demands of good taste? To the level of one's own genius?"<sup>12</sup> One recalls Nabokov's remark that Zhukovsky's adaptations of German and English poetry seemed especially "melodious and engaging" to the Russian reader who did not know the original.

Nabokov would hardly have adopted strident tones in addressing the poetic extravagances of "gentle Zhukovsky," as he dubs him in his commentary, had the latter's "Imitation of Goethe" come under his microscope. In that work Zhukovsky had engaged in the kind of fanciful circumlocutions that Nabokov later found intolerable in American translators of *Eugene Onegin*. Zhukovsky, as a theoretician and practitioner of translation, had also advanced a militant translator's declaration of independence.<sup>13</sup> He had insisted that the translator "necessarily must have almost the same [degree of] imagination as his model, the same literary art, the same power of mind and feelings." In the same breath Zhukovsky denounced translators who "slavishly" adhere to the text. The translator of *Eugene Onegin* surely did not want to complicate his task by getting into a discussion of Zhukovsky's theory of translation or of the merits and demerits of his translation of Goethe's "Dedication." Such a discussion would inevitably open the gates to a consideration of his own verse translation of Goethe's poem.

Nabokov's "Dedication to *Faust*," however, is in no sense a "slavish" translation; it is not a melodious adaptation for readers who do not know the original; nor does it involve "impersonation." It is an empathetic yet at the same time independent response to the poem, its poignant motifs of parting and loss, and its poetics of transcendence. It is a translation on the highest level of the young Nabokov's genius. His

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<sup>12</sup> *New York Review of Books*, December 4, 1969.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of Zhukovsky's theory of translation, see footnote 19 in the preceding chapter.

rhymed translation, lithe and alive, is a feat of Pushkinian compression and economy of means: it conveys the power that created a great style, as well as the power of the translator to make a poetic statement of his own. All this is accomplished with a remarkable degree of fidelity to the form and content of the original, that is, with a minimum of compromise of the original text. Nabokov's "Dedication to *Faust*" is an important poem in its own right.

Nabokov not only translated Goethe's poem, he "translated" himself into the poem: his exile, the loss of his native cultural milieu, the scattering and death of friends and family. To the loss of his homeland (he left Russia in April 1919) was added the death of his father—murdered by an assassin in Berlin, March 28, 1922. In his translation Nabokov relates directly to the pathos of Goethe's poem, its motifs of parting and loss and—the crux of poem—its movement towards an imaginative evocation and renewal of the past in art, the poet-narrator's decision in the face of anxiety and nostalgia to plunge again into the creative process.

Remarkable with respect to Nabokov's own artistic genius is the way Russian word and image in his translation maximally convey the poetic idea and material of the original text, while at the same signalling his, the translator-poet's, own heightened emphases with respect to the poem's major themes. This double-action is one of the major poetic achievements of Nabokov's poem; it marks the opening line of Nabokov's translation of the second stanza of "Dedication" where Goethe refers again to those wavering forms or figures from out of his past that have come before his inner gaze:

Otrada v vas mne chuditsia bylaia,  
i ten' vstaet rodnaia ne odna

[Past joy in you appears before me,  
And not alone the familiar shadows of home]<sup>14</sup>

The phrase "ten' . . . rodnaia" (dear shadows) well approximates Goethe's "liebe Schatten" (dear or precious shadows). At the same time, the word "rodnaia," through its root, "rod" (family, kin, clan), also conveys the idea of something that is close, familiar or native,

<sup>14</sup> Goethe's German text reads: "Ihr bringt mit euch die Bilder froher Tage,/ Und manche liebe Schatten steigen auf."



as in "rodnoi iazyk" (mother tongue) or "rodina" (one's native land, motherland). "Ten' . . . rodnaia," then, suggests native shadows or shadows of home. "Rodnoi" here contrasts with Nabokov's use of the word "chuzhoi" (alien, foreign) in the third stanza to characterize Goethe's "unknown multitude" who hear the poet's song.

Meanwhile, Nabokov in his rendition of Goethe's lines about "die Guten, die, um schöne Stunden/ Vom Glück getäuscht, vor mir hinweggeschwunden" (those dear ones who, cheated of joy by fortune, have vanished before me), without the slightest doubt conveys personal pain ("bol'"—Goethe's "Schmerz"), anguish and bitterness over the suffering and loss of his *own* dear ones. Nabokov's narrator-poet cries out: "Zovu ia milykh, schastiem zhestoko/ obmerennykh, ischeznuvshikh do sroka (I call out to the dear ones/ by fortune cruelly struck, vanished before their time). The word "zhestoko" (cruelly, savagely) stands out starkly. "Schast'e" is used not as "happiness," but as "lot," "fortune," "fate."<sup>15</sup> The "cruel" lot, indeed, the tragedy of the poet's "dear ones" is highlighted in Nabokov's rendition of Goethe's third stanza:

Te, dlia kogo ia pel pervonachal'no,  
ne slyshat pesen nyneshnykh moikh;  
ushli druz'ia, i zamer otzvuk dal'nii  
ikh pervago priveta. Dlia chuzhikh,  
nevedomykh, zvuchit moi stikh pechal'nii,  
boius' ia dazhe odobren'ia ikh,  
a vernia mne dushi, esli zhivy,  
skitaiusia v izgnan'e sirotlivo.

[Those for whom I originally sang,  
do not hear my present songs;  
friends have gone, the far off echo  
of their first greetings fades. To strangers,  
unknown people, my sad verse rings out,  
I even fear their applause,  
while souls true to me, if alive,  
are wandering like orphans in exile.]

<sup>15</sup> Nabokov, unlike Zhukovsky who translates "Glück" as "rok" (dark inescapable fate or doom), uses the Russian word "schast'e," one that matches Goethe's "Glück." "Sud'ba" suggests a notion of "fate" or "fortune" as something that is not inevitable; one can alter one's "fate" (sud'ba). "Rok," or destiny, on the other hand, represents absolute fatality.

The words and lines are as close as possible to Goethe's original text, to its basic idea. Yet to the Russian reader of the time Nabokov's verses evoke the bitter taste of exile and loss.

Goethe's poet first sang to a friendly audience, one that has passed away; now he sings his song (*Lied*) to an "unknown crowd" (*unbekannten Menge*). In Nabokov's translation the poet who sang his first songs to friends, now sings his "sad verse" (*stikh pechal'nyi*) to foreigners, alien people, strangers.<sup>16</sup> These people, the *chuzhie*, contrast with the "rodnye" (kin, family) referred to in the first stanza. The poet, in fact, is living in exile. Nabokov declares this outright in his rendering of Goethe's lines, "Und was sich sonst an meinem Lied erfreuet/ Wenn es noch lebt, irrt in der Welt zerstreuet," as "a vernye mne dushi, esli zhivy,/ skitaiutsia v iz'gnan'e sirotlivo" (while souls true to me, if alive,/are wandering like orphans in exile). Nabokov's verse, more directly than Goethe's, draws upon a biblical subtext: the ancient Jews who unwillingly and sadly sang the Lord's song in a foreign land (Psalm 137). Like the biblical Jews with their harps, Nabokov's poet is orphaned and exiled. Quite understandably, he is uncomfortable with the applause or acclamation ("Beifall," "odobren'e") of his audiences. Nabokov's open reference not only to personal exile, but to the exile of a people, a nation; his reference to the poet's "sad verse," and to the poet's reluctance to sing, inevitably awakens in the reader's mind the oath of the weeping Jews: "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither." Thus Nabokov in the third stanza of his translation of "Dedication," like Pushkin in the opening sentence of the last stanza of *Eugene Onegin* (But those to whom at friendly meetings/the first strophes I read . . .), *historicizes* Goethe's poem. Where Pushkin's subtext alludes to the tragedy of the *Decembrists*,<sup>17</sup> friends and acquaintances whose lives were cut short or exiled, Nabokov's subtext points to the tragedy of other Russian people a century later—friends, families, political figures, artists, poets, indeed, representatives of a whole nation, country,

<sup>16</sup> "Stikh pechal'nyi": The first edition of Goethe's *Faust* contained a misprint ("Leid" for "Lied") which Goethe subsequently retained. Modern editions of the poem return to "Lied.": "Mein Lied ertönt der unbekanntten Menge." In his use of "Leid" as opposed to "Lied," in this instance, Nabokov adheres to an earlier tradition.

<sup>17</sup> Pushkin's purely *literary* subtext, of course, is Goethe's line from "Dedication": Sie hören nicht die folgenden Gesänge,/ Die Seelen, denen ich die ersten sang."

or *rodina*—who were cast into exile or perished in the whirlwind of the Bolshevik revolution. Such is the brutal and tragic subtext of Nabokov's translation of "Dedication." In its subtext Nabokov's poem echoes Zhukovsky's somber and tragic (albeit Romantic) evocation of Goethe's "Dedication" in his "Imitation of Goethe."

As in Goethe's poem, however, Nabokov moves toward a resolution of pain and nostalgia in renewed creative activity. He renders Goethe's powerful, but emotionally restrained and spiritual—"Und mich ergreift ein längst entwöhntes Sehnen/ Nach jenem stillen, ernsten Geisterreich . . ."—with a line that begins (as Goethe's line ends) in spiritual quiet, but ends (as Goethe's line begins), with a moving inner event: "Po istovom i tikhom tsarstve dukha/ o mne toska zabytaia zazhglas'" (a forgotten and quiet yearning has been kindled in me/ for the deep and quiet kingdom of the spirit). The yearning, the kindling of inspiration to create, comes almost as a response to the final lines of the third stanza with its cold and bleak vision of orphaned souls wandering in exile.

Pain and bitterness are not forgotten, but sublimated now in a new and powerful yearning to create. The words, "I plachu ia i uzhasaius' glukho,/ v surovom serdtse neshnost' razlilas'" (And I weep, and feel a silent terror/ Tenderness floods the severe heart) signal a catharsis, an end to a crisis, a movement toward creation, self-mastery, overcoming of history, reappropriation of the past and its renewal, in art, in the present:

Vse nastoiashchee vdali propalo,  
a proshloe deistvitel'nost'iu stalo.

[Everything present has disappeared in the distance  
while the past has become present.]

The theme of loss and grief, one may note in conclusion, might well have been a factor in inclining Nabokov to undertake in 1923 a translation into Russian of Charles Lamb's popular poem, "The Old Familiar Faces" (1798; 1817). Lamb sums up the pervasive theme of loss in the final lines of the poem:

So might we talk of the old familiar faces—  
How some they have died, and some they have left me,  
And some are taken from me; all are departed—  
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

In the first lines of the original 1798 poem (lines deleted from the 1817 edition), Lamb alludes to the horrendous death of his mother—she had been stabbed to death by his deranged sister, Mary Lamb:

Where are they gone, the old familiar faces?  
I had a mother, but she died, and left me,  
Died prematurely in a day of horrors—  
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

Nabokov, of course, had had a similar day of horrors: the assassination of his father in 1922. It is of special interest, in this connection, that he renders the last three words of the poem's refrain—"old familiar faces"—in a way that vastly and emotionally intensifies the notion of familiar faces: he writes of "indescribably familiar faces" (*neskazanno-znakomye litsa*).<sup>18</sup>

Nabokov's translation of Lamb's poem, finally, is of interest in the context of his later search for the origin and echoes in literature of Pushkin's so-called "Saadi" line in the opening lines of the last stanza of *Eugene Onegin*:

No te, kotorym v družnoi vstreche  
Ja strofy pervye chital . . .  
"Inykh uzh net, a te daleche",  
Kak Sadi nekogda skazal.

[But those to whom at friendly meetings  
the first strophes I read . . .  
"Some are no more, others are distant,"  
as erstwhile Saadi said.]

In his commentary on *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov was as aware of Lamb's "Saadi" line, "How some they have died, and some they have left me," as he was of Goethe's "Dedication" to *Faust*, Zhukovsky's "Imitation of Goethe," and his own "Dedication to *Faust*." He preferred not to introduce these works into the discussion for a complex of reasons, not the least of which were his own painful and tragic parting with

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<sup>18</sup> Nabokov, however, translates the *title* of Lamb's poem, "The Old Familiar Faces," as simply "Znakomye litsa" (Familiar Faces). The original unpublished draft of Nabokov's translation into Russian of Lamb's poem is held in the Archives of Vladimir Nabokov in the New York Public Library.

family (rod) and country (rodina). Nabokov left a puzzle behind him in his commentary on Pushkin's last stanza of *Eugene Onegin*. True to his creative method, however, he left clues to that puzzle—"something in a scrambled picture . . . that the finder cannot unsee once it is seen" (*Speak, Memory*).

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IN RUSSIAN CULTURAL SEMIOTICS**

*Victor ZHIVOV, University of California, Berkeley and the Russian Language Institute  
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