

Donna Tartt's Dostoevsky: Trauma and the Displaced Self

PRIOR TO THE ADVENT of the study of trauma in Europe in the 1870s and 1880s, Fyodor Dostoevsky had spent decades exploring the effects of distressing memory on the many aggrieved and wounded characters of his novels. Toward the end of his career, he articulated some of his thoughts on this topic in his *Diary of a Writer*, where he described the impact of a “hideous” childhood on the life and art of the poet Nikolai Nekrasov. According to Dostoevsky’s account, the “most essential” aspects of Nekrasov’s personality were the result of his having been irreparably “wounded at the very beginning of his life”:

This wound of his, which never healed, was the foundation and source of all of his passionate, suffering poetry. . . . If there was to be something sacred in his life, something that could save him and serve as a beacon . . . then it could only be this primary childhood impression of . . . sobbing together [with his mother], embracing, somewhere in secret, so they wouldn’t be seen. . . . No single attachment could have so . . . overpoweringly acted on his will and on the other dark, uncontrollable attractions of his spirit that pursued him all his life as did this one. (26: 111–12)¹

The ambivalence of the description offers a glimpse into the broader meditation on wounded memory that informs Dostoevsky’s writing. The psychic wound, for Dostoevsky, is both debilitating and generative: capable of catalyzing “dark” and “uncontrollable” unconscious behavioral impulses, while also engendering a “sacred” space—a “foundation,” “source,” and “beacon”—within the psyche. In his evocation we can discern the presence, or seed, of at least two distinct traditions: the world of Russian Orthodox spirituality, with its emphasis on the moral value of suffering, and the yet-to-be-born field of psychoanalysis, whose notion of trauma was only just then emerging (unbeknownst to Dostoevsky) at the intersections of neurology and psychology in France.

Although Dostoevsky has often been cited as an important precursor of dynamic psychiatry, and although he was drawn in his writing almost exclusively to psychologically wounded characters, he has not been examined as a theorist of trauma in

¹ From *Diary of a Writer* for 1877. All passages from Dostoevsky are taken from *Polnoe sobranie*. All translations are mine.

any comprehensive manner.² Nor has the legacy of his study of the wound been elucidated for contemporary trauma theory. An unlikely guide through this terrain comes to us not from scholarship but from literary fiction, in the form of Donna Tartt's novel *The Goldfinch*, which can serve as a manual of sorts for reading Dostoevsky as both a forerunner and an outlier of trauma studies. Tartt's novel has received a great deal of attention since its publication in 2013, having won the Pulitzer Prize amid lively critical controversy (see Peretz and Wood) and having sold over three million copies. Yet it has escaped notice that Tartt's portrayal of a traumatized protagonist's coming of age borrows extensively and pointedly from three of Dostoevsky's major novels: *The Idiot* (1869), *The Adolescent* (1875), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880).³ Although Tartt appears to be mindful of her debt to Dostoevsky, she makes no explicit argument about his notion of trauma in her novel and quite possibly had no conscious intention to reconsider his legacy in adapting his work. My purpose in what follows will be to draw out the implications of her creative adaptation in the interest of bringing Dostoevsky's unique and valuable theory of trauma to light.

As students of trauma, Dostoevsky and Tartt belong to very different contexts. Dostoevsky's preoccupation with the wounds of the mind began in the mid-1840s and so took shape before the scientific discoveries in Europe that would follow closely upon his death.⁴ Tartt's *Goldfinch*, by contrast, appears in the wake of a cultural explosion of trauma studies, whose reverberations in popular culture and the humanities have been particularly acute during the period of her activity as a novelist. Indeed, Tartt's two earlier novels, *The Secret History* (1992) and *The Little Friend* (2002), can be read as a descriptive introduction to the insights of what has come to be known as classical trauma theory. Her study of a murder in *The Secret History* presciently portrays the now canonical "aporia" of traumatic memory, engraved neurologically into the brain but unassimilated by the mind—or, in the words of Tartt's protagonist, "burned indelibly upon my optic nerves, but oddly absent from my

² On the traces of past trauma in the protagonist of *Notes from Underground*, see Felman and Laub (9–12) and, more recently, Rapaport, all of whom treat *Notes from Underground* in isolation rather than as part of a broader concept of trauma in Dostoevsky's writing. Alexander Burry has called attention to experiences of trauma in *The Idiot* (see below, note 8).

³ Mentions among reviewers of Dostoevskian undercurrents in *The Goldfinch* have been unspecific (though more than one critic has suggested that the protagonist's name, Theodore—whose Russian form is Fyodor—honors Dostoevsky). The overwhelming critical consensus has been that the novel is strikingly "Dickensian" (see, for example, Heineman).

⁴ Trauma, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, as it has been called since its 1980 inclusion in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, has been characterized as "a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts, or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event." This description is taken from Cathy Caruth, who in the 1990s shaped the foundations of what is now often referred to as "classical trauma theory" (*Explorations in Memory* 4). Genealogies of trauma tend to begin with the advent of the clinical study and theorization of trauma in Europe during the 1870s and 1880s, which came about through the serendipitous fusion of two fields of inquiry: in neurology, the discovery of a connection between distressing experience and physical illness; and, in psychology, the discovery of mechanisms of repression and suppression and their effect on mental health (such genealogies include Young, Luckhurst, and Leys). For a brief survey of commentary arguing for a "pre-history" of trauma, see Young 3–4.

heart" (276).⁵ In *The Little Friend*, Tartt brings to life the equally influential notion of trauma as a "crisis of witnessing" in her depiction of a young heroine's intrinsically futile attempt to solve a violent murder that has long haunted and afflicted the members of her family. The protagonist's realization at the end of the novel that she has "reached the dead untraveled center of the world" only to find "nothing" (614) resonates with the poststructuralist emphasis in trauma theory on "witnessing trauma" as the act of testifying "to an absence" (see Felman and Laub xvii, 57). In *The Goldfinch*, working closely with Dostoevsky's concept of the wound, Tartt shifts her attention to a far less familiar, indeed unorthodox, view that trauma initiates the emergence of a transcendent dimension in the personality. Approaching Dostoevsky through Tartt, then, will help underscore the Russian author's value to contemporary trauma studies as an alternative to the prevailing canon.

The clearest point of convergence between Dostoevsky and Tartt—and thus my point of departure in what follows—is their shared portrayal of the post-traumatic dissociative impulse as the excision of the "soul" from the body. In *The Goldfinch*, Tartt follows Dostoevsky in linking her study of trauma both to the ancient folkloric archetype of the "external soul" (that is, of inner essence displaced into external objects for safekeeping) and to a conception of the healing process as the attempt to bring the externalized soul—along with all its unwanted memories—back into the body from its hiding places. Employing this motif allows both writers to reimagine the concept of the soul in modern secular terms and to ask whether it should, in its ideal state, be conceived of as indwelling. Dostoevsky and Tartt diverge in their handling of this problem: Tartt in presenting post-traumatic "soul loss" as a stage in the aesthetic education of the self; Dostoevsky in exploring the manner in which wounded memory opens up the self to the more expansive and overwhelming trauma of religious experience (Corrigan 5–6). In reading *The Goldfinch* as an interpretive guide to Dostoevsky, I begin with Tartt's development of the notion of the "external soul" as depicted in Dostoevsky's *The Adolescent* before exploring how her treatment of this archetype helps illuminate Dostoevsky's comprehensive meditation on trauma and personality formation in *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Adapting *The Adolescent*: The External Soul

Dostoevsky's *Adolescent* directly informs the somewhat mysterious relationship between the protagonist and his painted bird that lies at the center of *The Goldfinch*. Both novels present the bildungsroman of an adolescent protagonist who possesses, unbeknownst to all but himself, a priceless treasure. In *The Adolescent*, Arkady Dolgoruky arrives in St. Petersburg with an invaluable "document" sewn into his pocket; in Tartt's novel, Theodore Decker steals Carel Fabritius's 1654 masterpiece

⁵ In Caruth's words, "there is an incomprehensible outside of the self that has already gone inside without the self's mediation, hence without any relation to the self" (131n5). See also Van der Kolk. Tartt's descriptions of the anesthetizing and ungraspable nature of the traumatic event in *The Secret History* appear at times to be programmatic illustrations of classical trauma theory. (Tartt's first novel, I should note, predates the emergence of trauma theory in literary studies and, in fact, appeared in the same year as Judith Herman's watershed *Trauma and Recovery*.) The narrator, for example, explains that the traumatic "event itself is cloudy because of some primitive, numbing effect that obscured it at the time," and that "some things are too terrible to grasp all at once. Other things—naked, sputtering, indelible in their horror—are too terrible to really ever grasp at all" (278).

The Goldfinch from the wreckage of a terrorist bombing that takes his mother's life. Both Arkady and Theo keep their treasures hidden, beholding them only in the greatest secrecy. Both protagonists, moreover, have a criminally inclined childhood friend to whom they divulge their secret. In both instances, they do so while in a state of delirium so intense that neither Theo nor Arkady remembers afterward that he has revealed anything at all. Both childhood friends subsequently proceed to steal the hero's treasure from its hiding place, in each case replacing it with a fraudulent surrogate so that the theft goes undetected. These parallel acts of treachery leave both protagonists in the absurd predicament of unsuspectingly guarding worthless items that have been swapped for treasures of inestimable worth.

Underlying these conspicuous plot similarities is a more substantive connection between the two novels: namely, that both authors draw on the folkloric archetype of the "external soul" in imagining their heroes' buried treasures as fetishized substitutes for indwelling principles of identity. As Sir James Frazer explains in *The Golden Bough*, the animating principle of the body was thought by numerous ancient peoples to be "a little man or animal" concealed within, and this meant that a person might choose, under dangerous circumstances, to take "his soul out of his body and deposit it for security in some snug spot" (153). Frazer emphasizes the tactical benefits of such a practice. If one were to find a "place of absolute security," he observes, one might become effectively "immortal" by placing one's soul there (756–57). Building on Frazer's description while exploring the pre-history of modern psychiatry, Henri Ellenberger notes that in many ancient cultures the excision of the soul from the body was viewed as a form of pathology: often occurring after a "sudden fright," the syndrome of "soul loss" would call for medical treatment by a healer whose task would be to "find, bring back and restore the lost soul" (7). Carl Gustav Jung, in his related exploration of the concept, emphasizes its relevance to modern psychology as a stage in personality formation. He recounts in his memoirs how he unwittingly enacted this ancient practice when, as a child, he hid a small figurine and a stone in the forbidden attic of his house. "In all difficult situations," he recalls, "whenever I had done something wrong or my feelings had been hurt, . . . I thought of my carefully bedded-down and wrapped-up manikin. . . . It was an inviolable secret, which must never be betrayed, for the safety of my life depended on it." Jung describes his relationship with the object and his clandestine practice of climbing into the attic to lay eyes upon it as "the climax and conclusion of [his] childhood," as his "first attempt, still unconscious and childish, to give shape," as he puts it, "to the secret" (21–22).

The above descriptions are linked to modern theories of fetishism, whether Marxian, in which trivial objects, as they become commodities, also become endowed with "transcendent" and "mystical" qualities (*Capital* 82), or Freudian, in which objects become "overvalued" as substitutions for something lost. The "external soul" further evokes the modern psychiatric concept of projective identification within the field of object-relations theory. While keeping these in mind, I favor here the more esoteric notion of the "external soul" as an aspect of a literary tradition in which both Dostoevsky and Tartt are participants. As we know from Frazer, the motif appeared in folktales from all corners of the world, stretching back at least three thousand years to ancient Egypt. The villainous Koshchei the

Deathless of Russian folklore, to cite one of Frazer's examples, cannot be killed, for he hides his soul "on the end of a needle" (267). Any glance at modern literature, moreover, suggests the archetype's continued vitality. Oscar Wilde, for example, presents a version of Koshchei in Dorian Gray's relationship with his painting, which by some form of magic comes to embody his mortal self; and, more recently, J. K. Rowling has her villain Lord Voldemort scatter the parts of his soul far and wide into objects and people so as to forestall his own demise.

What distinguishes Dostoevsky and Tartt from these and other modern exemplars is their shared endeavor to transport the notion of the external soul from the realm of folklore and magic into the quotidian world of psychological realism. In Dostoevsky's *Adolescent*, Arkady, as an abandoned child, conceives of the practice of displacing elements of his interior life into specific "locations" as a response to the distressing experience of humiliation and abuse at the hands of his boarding school teacher and peers. In one representative episode from his childhood, Arkady discovers a handkerchief left behind by his mother, a piece of cloth that retains the imprint of her knot upon it. Keeping the object hidden away in his drawer, Arkady takes it out only in secret, drawing on the memory it contains as a refuge from his humiliating and violent circumstances:

I wrapped myself up to the head in my blanket and, from under my pillow, pulled out the little blue kerchief. . . . I instantly pressed it to my face and suddenly began to kiss it. "Mama, mama," I whispered, remembering, and my whole chest became constricted as in a vise. I closed my eyes and saw her face. . . . [My tormentor, Lambert] runs up to me and tries to pull the blanket from me, but I hold to it ever so tightly. . . . He beats me, hitting me painfully with his fist in my back, in the side, more and more painfully. (13: 273–74)

This description of the boy with the handkerchief anticipates Donald Winnicott's notion of a "transitional object" as an instrument in early child development used to attenuate the shock of separation from the mother and to negotiate the gulf between internal and external space.⁶ What is distinctive in Dostoevsky's treatment is that the object becomes, for its bearer, not simply a substitute for or extension of the mother, but the first stage in the hero's endeavor to conceive of a sacred space within the self, protected—by virtue of its displacement into an object—from external threat.

As Arkady enters early adulthood, the sacred dimension once hidden in his handkerchief achieves a more concentrated and secure form in his obsessive preoccupation with the notion of wealth. In a later notebook, Dostoevsky describes money as an "intensification of personality, a mechanical and spiritual embodiment" (27: 49), and it is in this sense—as "intensification" or "embodiment" of self (13: 48, 229)—that Arkady dreams of becoming rich (see Semenov 63–64 and Corrigan 107–9). Inspired by accounts of beggars who sewed thousands of rubles into their rags, Arkady dreams of possessing untold millions in secret, while dressing up in "the oldest clothing" so as to be taken for a "wretched person, who all but begs for alms" (13: 36). Arkady's cherished "document," which he sews into his jacket pocket, comes to serve in this context as the fetishized embodiment of his soul. Although the object is in fact nothing more than blackmail fodder (a potentially

⁶ As Dicks points out, "Winnicott took exception to the term *fetish* on the grounds that it left no room for consideration of the healthy aspects of the overvalued object," and he suggested the term *transitional object* instead (318).

compromising letter written by a high-society lady), it becomes for Arkady, much like his dreamed-of wealth stitched into beggar's clothing, a secret and alternate form of inwardness. Interior in the literal sense (that is, concealed "within"), it acts as a substitution for an inner life in that it gives Arkady the sensation of having infinite depths—of being, as he puts it, "altogether different, higher and deeper" (13: 152) than he appears—and also (since the contents of the document are of great consequence to those around him) possessing boundless, untapped, inward power.

That this "document" is a central element of the novel's plot is largely responsible for the unfavorable reception and neglect of *The Adolescent*. Critics have puzzled over Dostoevsky's use, so late in his career, of a dramatic strategy that does not seem to point toward any "eternal questions" (see, for example, Frank 171). It is of course true that the metaphysical properties of Arkady's "document" are developed only subtly and experimentally in *The Adolescent* and would take a surer form in Dostoevsky's subsequent novel, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), where Dmitry displaces his own "soul" into an "amulet" containing a large sum of money that he keeps next to his heart, sewn into a cloth bag and concealed under his shirt (see Corrigan 127–32). Tartt, in implicitly grasping the significance of Arkady's concealed treasure, weaves the elements she borrows more satisfactorily into the texture of a metaphysically speculative novel. The "yellow finch, against a plain, pale ground, chained to a perch by its twig of an ankle" (26), offers a more fitting external location for the displacement of the self than Dostoevsky's featureless "document," since the bird in the painting immediately evokes, among its numerous echoes, the Platonic notion of the winged soul, desirous of ascent toward the eternal forms while chained unwillingly to a material body: "fluttering briefly," as Theo describes the goldfinch, while "forced always to land in the same hopeless place" (306).

Unlike Arkady, Theo, as narrator, is at least partially aware that he has exported the metaphysical infrastructure of his personality into external space in his relationship with the fetishized object. In describing the painting, Theo continually speaks of it in ways that recall the Romantic notion that essence or soul constitutes a foundation for the experience of subjectivity. In his words, the painting "made me feel less mortal, less ordinary. It was support and vindication; it was sustenance and sum. It was the keystone that . . . held the whole cathedral up" (559). "Even when I couldn't see it," he explains, "I liked knowing it was there for the depth and solidity it gave things, the reinforcement to infrastructure, an invisible bedrock rightness" (304). For Theo, the painted bird undergirds and redeems his embodied self, making him in his own eyes "a better person, a wiser person, a more elevated and valuable and worthy-of-living person on the basis of [his] secret" (559). In describing the identification that occurs between self and painting, he emphasizes the "expansion" of self that the painting provides as it extends his being beyond the merely material: "Even in the act of reaching for it there was a sense of expansion, a waft and a lifting; and at some strange point, when I'd looked at it long enough, . . . all space appeared to vanish between me and it so that when I looked up it was the painting and not me that was real" (304).

Both Dostoevsky and Tartt, then, depict the external object as a substitution for the interior realm of soul—as providing, for both Arkady and Theo, a dimension of

depth, mystery, stability, and expanse within the extended arena of the self. Tartt's treatment of this act of displacement, as we shall see, is part of a larger phenomenology of post-traumatic experience that will help illuminate the important connection in Dostoevsky's writing between the psychic wound and the emergence of an indwelling soul.

The Traumatized *Idiot*: Enchanted Paintings, Uncanny People

In *The Goldfinch*, Theo's act of displacement is described explicitly as a symptom of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Tartt's Koshchei, in this sense, defers his soul onto the needle not simply to render himself invulnerable, but, more importantly, to attempt to displace and banish unwanted memory. According to Theo, it was "as if the explosion had knocked my body and my soul into two separate entities that remained about six feet apart from one another" (383). That distance gradually widens as Theo locks the painting farther and farther away, thus incurring the "strange feeling of being already dead, . . . my soul disconnected from my body" (524).⁷ The excision of memory from the body, however, is only partially effective, and Theo remains tormented by "a poisonous whisper . . . that on some days lingered just on the threshold of [his] hearing but on others roared up uncontrollably into a sort of lurid visionary frenzy": "Waves of shame and horror, *leave me alone*, my mother dead on a marble floor, . . . a cold, intelligent, self-immolating fury that had—more than once—driven me upstairs in a resolute fog to swallow indiscriminate combos of whatever booze and pills I happened to have on hand" (715).

Behind Tartt's depiction of a wounded protagonist struggling to banish unwanted and un-integrated memories from consciousness lies an innovative reading of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. Indeed, in contrast to her covert use of *The Adolescent*, Tartt repeatedly calls attention to the importance of *The Idiot* as intertext. Theo and Boris discuss *The Idiot* at length; Theo writes a term paper about it in college; and the section in which Theo—like Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin—becomes betrothed to a high-society beauty and is paraded before the most illustrious dignitaries of the *beau monde* is titled "The Idiot." Tartt's protagonist, then, like Dostoevsky's eponymous hero, is an awkward bridegroom who attempts to overcome the morbid grip of traumatic memory by entering into society. By recasting Dostoevsky's "beautiful" and "saintly" protagonist as a traumatized individual, Tartt prompts us to reread the Russian novel through her lens.⁸ In so doing, we notice that Myshkin recalls almost nothing from his life before the age of twenty-four and that, like Theo in

⁷ I have not found any reviews that consider the painting as an external soul. In making sense of the role of the painting in the novel, critics have suggested that it operates as "a fetishistic substitute for Theo's dead mother" (Kachka), as a sentimental consideration of the immortality of great art, or, finally, as a threadbare plot device, a "setup," to quote James Wood, "that merely enables a sentimental nexus . . . and a good deal of melodramatic plotting."

⁸ Critics in the last few decades have become increasingly suspicious of the applicability to Myshkin himself of Dostoevsky's stated intention in his notebooks to portray a "positively beautiful (or good) person" (28.2: 251); the figure of the saintly and selfless "Prince Christ," entering into the fallen world of Petersburg society, has accordingly undergone some revision among scholars. See, for example, Vinokurov and Spektor. I know of only two scholarly works that have approached Myshkin as a traumatized figure. Elizabeth Dalton proposes a Freudian reading of the interactions among Myshkin, Rogozhin, and Nastasia Filippovna by emphasizing the pervasive presence of the "sadistic conception of the primal

The Goldfinch, he is embattled by vague interior forces that threaten to surge into the sphere of conscious awareness.⁹ Numerous, often highly opaque, passages depict the Prince's desperate attempts to suppress his thoughts, emotions, and memories. In one scene, when a witness of his childhood unexpectedly appears and attests to Myshkin's having been beaten with birch rods at the age of "ten or eleven," Myshkin declares "I don't remember anything!" (8: 447) and then enters immediately into a state of nervous over-excitement that culminates in an epileptic seizure.

If Theo attempts to displace his interior life into a painting, while plagued nevertheless with haunting "whispers" that he subdues by the use of opiates, Myshkin, for his part, tends to use people as the projective carriers of his memory—especially Nastasia Filippovna and Rogozhin. In one representative episode, Myshkin employs his friend Rogozhin as an uncanny "object" to which he affixes his own memories in order to suppress them: "He attached his memories and mind to every external object, and he liked doing this: he kept wanting to forget something, something present, urgent, but in his first glance around him he immediately recognized his dark thought again, a thought from which he so wanted to untie himself" (8: 189).¹⁰ As Myshkin "attaches" his "memories and mind" to Rogozhin in his attempt "to forget something," Rogozhin pursues Myshkin through the streets of Petersburg and finally attacks him violently, sending him into an epileptic fit. (Both of Myshkin's seizures in the novel, therefore, can be read as provoked by the resurgence of suppressed memory.) A similar phenomenon occurs when Myshkin perceives in Nastasia Filippovna's face another hidden, "familiar face" that "calls" to him (8: 142) by apparently evoking something from his own inaccessible past. In confusing Nastasia with aspects of lost memory, the prince experiences a visceral sense of "horror" at the sight of her face, a "torment" that he is unable to explain to himself.¹¹ It could be argued that all three of the novel's protagonists—Rogozhin,

scene" in the novel; and Alexander Burry traces Dostoevsky's interest in trauma in *The Idiot* in the context of the author's own "unresolved trauma from his averted execution" (269).

⁹ Myshkin's amnesia is generally explained in two ways, as illness and as saintliness. For a balanced discussion that allows for both possibilities, see Murav (73–81). For a robust analysis of Myshkin's epileptic medical condition, see Brian Johnson. For a discussion of Dostoevsky's own accounts of memory loss in connection with his epilepsy, see James L. Rice (*Healing Art* 78–79). Bakhtin's ingenious and influential solution to the absence of memory in Dostoevsky's characters—that is, as an aspect of the author's innovative poetics and of his insistence on imagining his characters free and unfettered by biographical pasts (29)—willfully overlooks the central importance of the notion of personal memory in Dostoevsky's writing.

¹⁰ In placing the emphasis here upon external objects as the anchors of the self, I stay clear (for purposes of concision and clarity) of Dostoevsky's creative reinvention of the doppelgänger tradition. For an examination of Dostoevsky's conception of doubling in the context of traumatic experience and projective identification, see Corrigan 30–35.

¹¹ It is worth noting that in *The Goldfinch* Tartt presents the traumatized lovers Theo and Pippa as medically diagnosed versions of Myshkin and Nastasia Filippovna. Pippa's face makes Theo feel "dumbstruck," "dizzy," and "completely gobsmacked" (604). But, if Myshkin can only wonder at his compulsion to save Nastasia, Theo recognizes his uncanny sense of recognition as a function of a wound. "My love for Pippa," he reflects, "was muddied-up below the waterline with my mother, with my mother's death. . . . All that blind, infantile hunger to . . . repeat the past and make it different, had somehow attached itself, ravenously, to her" (509). Likewise, if Nastasia Filippovna is unable to negotiate her conflicting compulsions with regard to Myshkin, Pippa articulates the dangers involving two damaged and inwardly unballasted individuals who grasp each other through potentially destructive gestures of mutual dependency (762).

Myshkin, and Nastasia Filippovna—each of whom suffers from unnamed psychic wounds—thus engage in a mutual form of projective recognition that leaves them strangely diminished in each other’s presences, as though reduced through their interactions to phantasms of each other’s psyches. If Myshkin dreams of liberating his friends from their status as projective objects—of enabling Rogozhin to be more than a vengeful pair of disembodied eyes staring out of the shadows, or Nastasia more than an ever-suffering, ever-rebellious anima—he remains arrested in his quest by his own incapacity to look inward and by his frantic need for projective interlocutors as a means of keeping the terrors of the inner life in a state of subdued collapse.¹²

Tartt’s pointed adaptation of *The Idiot* also prompts a reconsideration of the significance of the famous painting that appears so prominently in that novel. A copy of Holbein’s *Christ in the Tomb* (1521–22) hangs on the wall of Rogozhin’s shuttered-up house, a gloomy catacomb-like building that is compared to a “graveyard” (8: 338). The painting depicts the brutalized corpse of Christ shortly after the crucifixion, and the novel’s characters react viscerally to the image: it haunts their dreams and preoccupies their thoughts; they recoil from it in fear, reacting in emotionally charged ways to the abrasions on Christ’s body, at times as if to their own wounds. Tartt places Fabritius’s *Goldfinch* (1654) in a similar location when Theo eventually locks it away within the fortified walls of a windowless storage facility, which he compares to “a Mayan burial complex.” His journey into the “burial complex” to check on the painting also recalls Myshkin’s fearful and meandering journeys into Rogozhin’s gloomy and cavernous “graveyard.” To quote from Theo’s description: “Nervously I walked to the elevators. I had set foot on the premises only three times in seven years—always with dread, and then never venturing upstairs to the locker itself. . . . Feeling jittery and observed, . . . I rode to the eighth floor . . . cinderblock walls and rows of faceless doors like some pre-fab Eternity where there was no color but beige and no dust would settle for the rest of time” (474). In the depths of the tomb Theo encounters the “mummified bundle” of the painting, which “had a ragged, poignant, oddly personal look, less like an inanimate object than some poor creature bound and helpless in the dark, unable to cry out and dreaming of rescue” (475). The sequence recalls Myshkin’s journey into Rogozhin’s house at the end of *The Idiot* to find the murdered body of Nastasia Filippovna (a corpse which, as has been observed, ultimately subsumes the place of Holbein’s *Christ* in the novel; see Ivanits 102). In both cases, the cavernous and colorless graveyards are projective figurations of the protagonists’ interior lives, and both Myshkin and Theo journey into these spaces in the hope of rescuing the creature “bound and helpless in the dark”—or, rather, the traumatic memory that lies shrouded in the unconscious.

Reading the treatments of these two paintings together helps bring the metaphysical dimension of Dostoevsky’s concept of trauma into clearer relief. For Theo, grasping onto *The Goldfinch* as a projective soul allows for both the displacement and expansion of self. Theo insists that, unlike the rest of his ostensibly worthless, mortal being, the painting was a “deathless thing” (695), “a radiance that glowed in the mind of the world” (490); and Tartt’s use of a world-famous painting

¹² Cf. Johnson 876–77. The opposing scholarly view presents Myshkin as an ideal interlocutor who is uniquely capable of perceiving Nastasia’s “real self.” See, for example, Young 40.

as Theo's soul-object reinforces the notion of the soul as extending beyond the personal to the universal. Likewise, while the painting at the heart of the "graveyard" seems to evoke an unwanted personal memory in Myshkin ("as if remembering something [Myshkin] felt very oppressed and wanted to leave the house as soon as possible" [8: 181]), the image exerts an equally uncanny and haunting effect on the other characters (especially Ippolit and Rogozhin). Located as it is in the cavernous depths of Rogozhin's house—which, as scholars have noted, acquires symbolic status in the novel as a vehicle for Russian national culture as a whole (see Comer 89–91 and Kasatkina 383–88)—the painting takes on broader significance as an unintegrated memory that lies festering within the civilization. For Dostoevsky, the memory embodied in the painting—of the violent murder of Christ at the hands of human beings—had been all but obliterated in the post-religious cultural atmosphere of late imperial Russia. By depicting the murdered corpse of Nastasia as yet another brutalized instantiation of the dead Christ in the tomb, Dostoevsky suggests that the suppression and loss of this memory will lead to its continual reenactment.¹³

Such a reading of *The Idiot* provides an opportunity to observe the close connections between theology and psychology in Dostoevsky's writing. As fugitives from memory, his protagonists fearfully eschew concerted practices of introspection. The unnamed hero of *Notes from Underground* (1865), for example, if morbidly preoccupied with himself as a subject for observation, nevertheless endeavors to "cut away" (5: 135) the deeper rooms, as it were, of his psyche—especially the reverberations of his "hateful childhood" that visit him in "the most hideous dreams" and "oppressive recollections" (5: 139). In *Crime and Punishment* (1868) Raskolnikov goes about his crime in a semi-hypnotic trance, haunted by a vaguely defined "former past," which surges upward in his nightmares and which he tries to stifle in the waters of the Neva, "in some depths, below, somewhere barely visible below his feet" (6: 90). The murder of the pawnbroker can be seen in this context as an expression of the hero's desire for a more complete amnesia, of the projective deferral of self into an object (in this case, the old woman) that can then be destroyed. The use of Holbein's painting in *The Idiot* suggests that, for Dostoevsky, these characters avoid an introspective turn not simply from fear of personal memory, but rather in their flight from a deeper terror-inducing presence that underlies individual memory: namely, the indwelling energies of the "living God" that threaten to disturb and perhaps even destroy the tentative equilibrium of the self. At the end of *The Idiot*, Myshkin journeys into the depths of the "graveyard" to encounter the horrific reality at its core (the corpse of Nastasia Filippovna), but he lacks the psychological infrastructure to endure what he sees and is irremediably devastated by his experience. For Dostoevsky, then, the Christian notion of resurrection coincides closely with the development of the ability to recover and redeem lost memory; to journey

¹³ In the voluminous scholarship on the role of the Holbein painting in *The Idiot* I have not found a treatment of the painting as a traumatic memory within Russian civilization, although Ivanits evokes something of this idea: "we are dealing . . . with bits and scraps of a moribund civilization whose greatest glory hinged on themes from the life of a 'Sublime Being'" (101–2). Kasatkina has recently re-ignited scholarly discussion by arguing that the painting can be said to depict the very first stirrings of the resurrection. If correct, Kasatkina's argument reinforces the notion, developed below, of the corpse as dead and rotting *because* of the characters' refusal to look at it directly ("Posle znakomstva").

inward, to find and revive the rotting corpse within the psyche, also means to attempt to draw sustenance from the realm of the mind that evokes the greatest terror.

Trauma as Expansion

In imagining the post-traumatic rehabilitation of the self, both Dostoevsky and Tartt focus on the critical moment of lost recourse to the “external soul.” What, they ask, does Koshchei become without his needle? What kind of interiority does the wounded and pathologically dispersed personality discover upon forfeiting its projective hiding places? In her depiction of Theo’s acute crisis after the loss of his painting, Tartt presents her protagonist’s harrowing introspective turn in a manner that closely mirrors Alyosha Karamazov’s experience after the death of the elder Zosima: both protagonists fall into a catatonic state of despair and are subsequently transformed and strengthened by a dream-journey into the psyche to encounter a deceased beloved being who appears as a “visitor” resurrected from the dead.

In her portrayal of Theo’s tremulous journey inward after the loss of his painting, Tartt uses the image of a mirror to represent the terrain of the psyche. In the midst of his suicidal desolation, Theo falls asleep and dreams that he is looking into a mirror whose dimensions expand beyond his own reflection to reveal in their depths the “presence” of his deceased mother: “She was herself. An embodied presence. There was psychic reality to her, there was depth and information. She was between me and whatever place she had stepped from, what landscape beyond. And it was all about the moment when our eyes touched in the glass, surprise and amusement” (725). In Theo’s encounter with his mother, Tartt emphasizes the aesthetic component of the visitation, which Theo likens to the experience of beholding a “perfectly composed” work of art. The mirror serves as the “frame” of a painting: The space behind me in the frame was not so much a space in the conventional sense as a perfectly composed harmony. . . . There was . . . all the charge and magic of a great painting. . . . You could grasp it in an instant, you could live in it forever: she existed only in the mirror, inside the space of the frame, and though she wasn’t alive, not exactly, she wasn’t dead either because she wasn’t yet born, and yet never not born—as somehow, oddly, neither was I. (724–25)

Theo’s dream has a transformative effect upon him: like Dickens’s Scrooge, on Christmas Day he awakens a robust and inwardly stabilized personality, firmly resolved to redeem his misdemeanors and to live an honest life. In presenting the dream-vision, however, as the appearance of a *painting* in the psyche, Tartt suggests that her protagonist’s epiphany is evoked not simply by an otherworldly visitation but, more importantly, by Theo’s prolonged devotion and apprenticeship to a work of art. As Theo puts it, the painting “was the secret that raised me above the surface of life and enabled me to know who I am” (764). The discovery of the self—the “who I am” that Theo comes to know—is portrayed as the conception of an original work of art in the mind, a process that begins, Tartt suggests, through emulation—that is, by adopting Fabritius’s work as a placeholder soul in order to allow Theo’s own artistic work to take shape. Tartt’s depiction of her protagonist’s discovery of a stabilized self thus evokes the postmodern notion of the “soul” as emergent rather than originary. As Jean-François Lyotard puts it, the soul “comes into existence . . . as *affected*,” is “awoken from the nothingness” by an aesthetic experience or, to use

Lyotard's phrase, by an "*aistheton*" that "pierces [the anima's] vacuity with its thunderbolt, [and] makes a soul emerge from it" (242–45). Theo's traumatic ordeal in the museum can be understood in this light as an allegory for the encounter with an immortal object of art, which for Tartt is in itself a form of trauma: shocking, terrifying, and charming the self into being—or in the words of Theo's mentor, Hobie, "crack[ing] your heart wide open, and you spend the rest of your life chasing or trying to recapture" the experience of that beauty (757).

Tartt's treatment of the aesthetic and traumatic formation of the self helps illuminate what is arguably the central metaphysical epiphany of Dostoevsky's writing: Alyosha Karamazov's dream of "Cana of Galilee." Alyosha resembles Dostoevsky's portrait of the poet Nekrasov that I cited at the outset (this entry from *Diary of a Writer* was written just before Dostoevsky began work on *The Brothers Karamazov*) in that he possesses a memory from childhood that "acts upon" him for his "whole life" as a "bright spot in the darkness" (14: 18). Alyosha's sacred memory, like Nekrasov's, is disturbing: he remembers his mother, "sobbing in hysterics, with screams and cries," "grasping him in both arms . . . to the point of pain" as she prays for him to the icon, until "the nanny comes in and tears the child away from her in fright" (14: 18). Although the memory is said to serve, like Nekrasov's, as a source of strength and stabilization, the anxiety and anguish of the scene, together with adjacent descriptions of a scandalized childhood home, suggest the presence of other memories that, if lost or suppressed, nevertheless exert an unconscious effect upon him (cf. Apollonio 154). Indeed, in the first half of the novel, Alyosha appears (his many virtues notwithstanding) as a damaged and unstable youth who, like Prince Myshkin, is given to convulsive fits when reminded of aspects of his turbulent childhood.¹⁴ At the novel's outset, as a way of reinforcing and sustaining his unmoored personality, Alyosha has "welded" himself (14: 201) to his beloved elder Zosima, who serves as an external soul—as anchor, guide, and beacon—and who, by his presence, provides respite from the unruly chaos of Alyosha's own interior life. Acting as "the ruler" of Alyosha's "heart and mind" (14: 305), Zosima helps subdue the distressingly ominous and vague "something" (14: 241, 258, 307) that threatens to rise up from within Alyosha's psyche and continues to "grow in him, and to which he can give no answer" (14: 241), a predicament that recalls the "poisonous whispers" that afflict both Myshkin and Theo.

In his moments of panic and hysteria when faced with the unendurable image of his elder's decomposing corpse, having lost his "external soul," Alyosha undergoes a nervous crisis. But, unlike Myshkin (and perhaps as a result of Zosima's work in preparing Alyosha for his death), Alyosha ultimately finds the courage to endure the sight of Zosima's corpse, and, in its presence, to turn inward to encounter a much-dreaded "something," first in meditative prayer and then in a vivid dream in which he finds himself at a wedding feast. Here, Zosima, very much alive, greets Alyosha and calls his attention to the nearby presence of Christ (at whom Alyosha is "afraid to look"), who is performing the miracle of the conversion of the water into wine (John 2:1–11). Alyosha's dream-encounter with the inward sources of the "new

¹⁴ In deliberately countering the hagiographical critical tendency with regard to Alyosha, Rice has argued that Alyosha suffers from "hysteria in the clinical terms of the time, a major psychiatric disorder" ("Covert Design" 355–75).

wine,” we are told, transforms him from a “weak youth” into “a steadfast fighter for his whole life” (14: 328). If Alyosha’s dreamscape—like Theo’s mirror—can be read as a topography of the psyche, Dostoevsky’s image of the divinely generated “new wine,” as the enlivening and animating principle at the heart of the indwelling feast, evokes a neo-Romantic model of the self, according to which the personality reaches, in its innermost unconscious depths, into the generative and sacred sources of nature and the universe (see Taylor 368–92 and Jones 3).

Trauma theory has typically emphasized a memory that enters the self without becoming part of it, a foreign, unassimilated presence (or rather, absence) within the mind. Dostoevsky’s distinctive contribution to the study of trauma lies in his imagining a form of transformative trauma that underlies wounded memory. For Dostoevsky, if traumatic memory generates a taboo in the mind—that is, the sense that there is “something” menacing and unpalatable within—this experience can be seen as an inkling of the larger, more overwhelmingly traumatic discovery of the radically foreign presence of God at the core of the self. The wound, for Dostoevsky, is a preparation for, and gesture toward, the more considerable terror of encountering something within the self that can never, given its infinite immensity, be integrated into the life of consciousness. Reading Dostoevsky through Tartt’s lens, then, allows us not so much to situate Dostoevsky’s view within contemporary trauma theory as to elucidate his phenomenology of the wound as an alternative model whose reverberations within the genealogy of trauma have perhaps been felt, but never articulated. If some theorists have been wary of a “temptation” in contemporary trauma studies to “sacralize” the wound, “to transvalue the traumatic into an occasion for the sublime” (LaCapra 190), then Dostoevsky (understood through Tartt) is an important source for this uncomfortable pairing of the wound and the sacred. For Dostoevsky, the self finds its sustaining center in an inwardly beheld transcendent presence, but it is the violent shock and the unintegrated terror of unhealed memory that opens up the self to the possibility of this encounter.

Like Freud, who read Dostoevsky and commented on his influence, Dostoevsky champions introspection as a response to the wound that cries out from within the psyche. Dostoevsky’s concept of introspection, however, is non-medical and non-palliative; it gestures not to the alleviation of pathological symptoms but to the metaphysical reorientation of the self. After his epiphanic discovery of the presence of Christ in his dream, Alyosha is not cured of his convulsive disposition; his paroxysmal anxiety is, if anything, more pronounced. In his prophetic utterances to Ivan, the words “tear helplessly from him” while he “suffocates” and speaks “as if beyond himself, as if not of his own will, as if obeying some indeterminate decree” (15: 39–40). Likewise, when called upon to articulate an important truth to his brother Dmitry, “Alyosha was as if all shaken, as if something sharp had gone into his heart, [and the words] suddenly tore forth from his breast in a trembling voice” (15: 36). For Dostoevsky, to become a conduit for the divine energies that find expression through the self means to be invaded by something that is, by its very nature, an incurable wound in the mind. To discover these energies within, although perhaps morally restorative, does not alleviate one’s distress.

Both Dostoevsky and Tartt gesture toward distinctly generative theories of traumatic experience. For both authors, trauma causes one initially to displace one’s “soul” into external objects. If the projective bearer of the “external soul” is worthy

of such a designation—as in the case of Zosima or Fabritius's painting—the experience of interior collapse can be reimagined as a form of apprenticeship. Trauma, in this sense, although evidently pathological, is for Dostoevsky and Tartt also an aspect of healthy emotional and spiritual development. Dostoevsky ends his final novel with the image of a corpse returning to life through the act of remembering—that is, in Alyosha's entreaty to the boys that they keep the tragic and disturbing image of the "dead boy," Ilyusha, alive in their minds as a unifying and nourishing principle and, in fact, as "the best education of all" (15: 195). According to Dostoevsky, educating the developing self means turning one's attention to the decaying corpse in the psyche in the hope of reawakening and reanimating it as a source of strength and stabilization.¹⁵ This, for Dostoevsky, is the practical meaning of resurrection, namely, the turn inward through unwanted, discarded, or suppressed memories in the hope of discovering and awakening that deeper, more primary trauma at the heart of all things.

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¹⁵ In her work at the intersection of theology and trauma studies, Shelly Rambo warns us not to "overlay triumphalistic narratives [of resurrection] on persons and communities who experience trauma" (227). Dostoevsky, I suggest, offers a way of thinking about the Passion narrative that preserves both its redemptive and traumatic dimensions by presenting resurrection not as a deferral or denial of the wound, but as a gesture of extreme attentiveness to it.

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DOSTOEVSKII ON EVIL AS SAFE HAVEN AND ANESTHETIC

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When the concept of evil is addressed in contemporary ethical thought, it is usually in relation to Auschwitz as the emblem of state-sponsored genocide in the twentieth century.¹ A dividing line is often drawn between a more traditional paradigm of evil—one that can be personified in Lucifer as malevolent transgressor—and a new sociopolitical form of evil ushered in by the age of Auschwitz. Following such thinkers as Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault, contemporary discussions have shifted evil's domain away from the psychology of intentionality (of drives, wills, sins, and demonic urges) toward the politics of complicity and consent.² If the worst of human atrocity in our time, it has often been argued, could occur under full state sanction and without the individual malice of many of its perpetrators, then evil at its most formidable is neither malevolent nor transgressive but obedient, impersonal, and thoughtless.³

Fëdor Dostoevskii's career-long meditation on the dark places of human evil may be seen from this latter perspective as largely obsolete. As Simona Forti (a self-professed Arendtian) observed in her recent study of evil, "the time has come [...] to let go of the Dostoevsky paradigm": "we must leave it behind in order to understand the 'black heart' of the twentieth century, and, even more urgently, to be able to contend with the concerns of today" (Forti 5–6). In her assessment, Forti draws on a long-standing canonical approach to Dostoevskii as an ethical thinker who conceived of evil as a disease of freedom, and whose unflinching portrayals of murder, rape, suicide, child abuse, and other wanton acts have been taken as an essential paradigm of Luciferian evil for the modern world.⁴ Dostoevskii's description of evil, in this sense,

1. See, for example, Bernstein, Neiman, Ophir, and Forti.

2. As Bernstein puts it, in calling for a new paradigm of evil after Auschwitz, Hannah Arendt was questioning "a long and deep tradition in theological, philosophical, moral, and legal discourse—that evil deeds presuppose evil intentions and evil motives" (219).

3. For this argument, see especially Ophir and Forti.

4. See, for example, foundational accounts of Dostoevskii on evil and freedom in Nikolai Berdiaev (88–111) and Paul Evdokimov (145–286).

would belong distinctly to the nineteenth century. While his novels warn powerfully against the ideological dangers of unrestricted license, individualism, and will-to-power, they also, for this very reason, can be seen as helpless in the face of contemporary forms of evil whose perpetrators are, if anything, too bereft of the qualities that incite Lucifer to rebel.

I shall argue, on the contrary, that the immense value of Dostoevskii's meditation on evil has not yet been tapped for contemporary ethical thought. I intend, in what follows, to challenge both the canonical view of Dostoevskii on evil and the conceptual barrier widely perceived between forms of evil before and after Auschwitz.⁵ If we approach Dostoevskii first and foremost not as an ideologue but as a psychologist, his novels, I shall argue, can help us reconcile and think beyond apparent oppositions between traditional and post-modern notions of evil. Dostoevskii is especially helpful here in that he continually described evil as simultaneously intentional *and* thoughtless, rebellious and obedient, willful and inert. In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov performs his crime as a radical gesture of rebellion, while also aware that he is under the thrall of an external force that robs him of his "freedom of reason or will" (6: 52).⁶ Kirillov, in *Demons*, commits suicide as an act of metaphysical insurrection; as he puts it, "I kill myself to show my insubordination and my new fearsome freedom" (10: 472). Yet, like Raskolnikov, he, too, is following orders—in this case, those of Petr Verkhovenskii, who waits impatiently in the next room for the suicide to take place. Or, yet again, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, when Smerdiakov murders his master according to the theory that "everything is permitted," he is also ostensibly fulfilling the "instructions" of his mentor Ivan.

Dostoevsky presents both these models of evil (the maliciously transgressive and the thoughtlessly obedient) as diverging symptoms of the same illness. Evil, for Dostoevsky, is caused ultimately by a flight from inwardness, an unreasoning compulsion to seek refuge from "something" in the unconscious mind that lays siege on consciousness. Transgressive forms of violence and submissive gestures of obedience share an underlying motivation: as strategies employed to keep the self at all costs within the comparatively shallow waters of conscious immediacy and frenetic activity. I hope to show that our canonical notion of the ideological Dostoevskii, whose Lucifers are clear-eyed moral rebels, can be enriched by a better understanding of the psychological Dostoevskii, whose same moral rebels are in a state of impulsive and unreflective flight from an indwelling source. Modern ideologies of nihilism,

5. I should note that my focus is on the searching, artistic Dostoevskii whose novels offer an original, prescient, and urgent conception of evil, and not on the ideological Dostoevskii, whose anti-Semitic views might otherwise all but disqualify him from being heard in any discussion touching on the evils of Auschwitz.

6. All passages from Dostoevskii are my translations from Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*.

license, and egoism, for Dostoevskii, are not so much the causes of evil as they are methods of confabulation and self-medication, tactics for coping with and suppressing the menacing dynamisms of deep inwardness. In tracing these strategies over the course of Dostoevskii's career, I shall focus on new readings of *Notes from Underground* (1864), *Crime and Punishment* (1866), and *Demons* (1872).

Notes from Underground: "To Stifle the Living Pain in My Heart with Fantasies"

Notes from Underground is often read as Dostoevskii's coming of age as an ideological novelist. Canonical readings have prioritized the role of ideology in the novella by arguing that Dostoevskii's protagonist suffers from having embraced the wrong ideas, that is, from the "evils of a freedom unstructured by higher values" (Scanlan 75).⁷ According to Joseph Frank's influential formulation, Dostoevskii succeeded in devoting "every feature of the text" in *Notes from Underground* to "bringing out the consequences in personal behavior of certain ideas" and in making "psychology [...] strictly subordinate to ideology" (Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation 1860–1865* 346). I submit, by contrast, that the underground man's credo of egoistic individualism is not so much the primary cause of his malaise as it is a strategy of coping with a debilitating fear of inwardness. In depicting the underground man, Dostoevskii draws directly on his portraits of psychic fugitives from his earlier works—that is, of characters in desperate flight from unnamed subliminal terrors.⁸ In early Dostoevskii, there are usually two avenues of escape for the inwardly afflicted protagonist: first, by means of obsessive idealistic daydreaming (or *mechtatel'nost'*) as a form of dissociative intellectual activity, and second, by means of sudden rushes of intimacy that allow his protagonists to use others as protective shields from their own unexplored anguish. Ordynov, the youthful dreamer of "The Landlady" (1847), employs both methods. As he emerges from months of fanatical daydreaming, we observe him in a state of inarticulate horror, oppressed by vague memories and emotions, and then seeking refuge by attaching himself hysterically to strangers. The dreamer-hero of "White Nights" (1848), similarly embattled by a vaguely defined past in which he has been "frightened and offended in every possible way" (2: 20), tears himself from his obsessive reveries to scour the embankment for an interlocutor to whom he can bind himself with an all-encompassing intensity. Likewise, in *Netochka Nezvanova* (1849), the hero-

7. Dostoevskii's double battle against revolutionary positivism and egoistic individualism in *Notes from Underground* has been elucidated by Skaftymov, Frank (1986), and Scanlan, among others. For Dostoevskii's Christian ethical teaching in *Notes*—that "only through Christian love and self-sacrifice [...] can man break the chain of an inwardly binding and blinding determinism," see Jackson (171–88).

8. On the fear of interiority in early Dostoevskii, see Corrigan 18–50.

ine manages her fits of morbid anxiety by latching rapturously onto another child as a way of “dislodging” her “memories” and “replacing” them with the presence of the other (2: 210).

The underground man appears distinct, at first glance, from such a lineage of panic-stricken and inarticulate protagonists, especially given his intense dedication to thought and introspection. He himself explains, however, that the life of the mind can be used as a means of distraction from something else that oppresses him from within—from “elements,” as he puts it, “that swarmed in me”: “they swarmed in me my whole life, begging to be let out, but I didn’t allow them out [...] They tormented me to the point of shame; they brought me to convulsions, and how fed up with them I got in the end!” (5: 100). The hero describes his penchant for obsessive reading as one of two methods that he employs to stifle these inward elements: “I wanted to suppress,” as he puts it, “everything that was continually boiling up within me with external sensations, and of external sensations the only thing available to me was reading” (5: 128). His other method, he confesses, is the “descent” into “dark, underground, loathsome” acts—sexual compulsions that, like his obsessive reading, allow him to subdue the “anguish” that continually “boils up” from within: “Above all, there was anguish boiling up. [...] I engaged in debauchery alone, at night, secretly, fearfully, filthily, with a shame that didn’t leave me in the most disgusting moments” (5: 128). These two strategies of self-avoidance (manic cerebral activity, on the one hand, and compulsive sexuality, or the need to invade another person, on the other) serve as a foundation for Dostoevskii’s developing psychology of evil.

It is worth noting that the dramatic crises of Dostoevskii’s major novels, in keeping with the flight from memory of his early protagonists, are all, without exception, catalyzed by his characters’ sudden confrontation with the distant past: Raskolnikov’s discovery that his mother and sister are coming to Petersburg in *Crime and Punishment*; Myshkin’s return to Russia in *The Idiot*; Stavrogin’s arrival in his hometown in *Demons*; Arkadii’s reunion with his family in *The Adolescent*; and the brothers’ homecoming in *The Brothers Karamazov*. As a novelist, Dostoevskii drew upon the energy emitted from these kinds of reckonings, which point his characters toward “something” inward, some kind of memory or series of memories that they would prefer not to encounter. This pattern holds in equal measure for the hero from underground who, in fleeing the “elements” that “boil up” from within, seeks out intimacy with strangers rather than former acquaintances, since the latter are connected in his mind with the sources of anguish he desires to escape, memories he has already “cursed and scattered to dust” (5: 140). “I perhaps even moved to a different department in the service,” he tells us, “so I wouldn’t be with them and so I could cut myself away in one go from my entire hateful childhood” (5: 135). Unable to bear his solitude, the hero visits a childhood acquaintance and stumbles instead, disastrously, into a gathering of his old

schoolfellows, thus setting the dramatic action of the novella into rapid escalation. The occurrence brings on an acute intensification of the insurgent “elements” he has been striving to keep at bay, now in the form of the “most hideous dreams”: “It was no wonder: all evening the memories of the prison years of my school life pressed down on me, and I couldn’t untie myself from them” (5: 139).

These newly awakened memories provoke a frantic desperation in the hero to attach himself to others, to endure hours of painful humiliation rather than remain alone with his inner “seething” and “boiling,” to pursue his enemies frenziedly across the city, and finally to seek oblivion in the arms of the first available woman he encounters at the brothel. None of these strategies of distraction, however, succeeds in dampening the rising internal oppression that recommences immediately in the absence of external stimuli:

It wasn’t long before I came to; it recalled itself at once [...] as if it had been lying in wait to pounce upon me. And even in my oblivion there had still remained constantly in my memory some kind of point [*tochka*] that couldn’t be forgotten and around which my drowsy reveries kept turning heavily. (5: 152)

This menacing memory “point”—as the hero chooses to describe the rising energies that confront consciousness—refers not to the his recent humiliations (“everything from that day seemed to me now like an occurrence from long ago”), but to “something” more elusive: “Something (*Chto-to*) was as if hovering over me, brushed against me, excited, and troubled me. Anguish and bitterness boiled up anew and searched for an exit” (5: 152). In the final pages, these energies continue to oppress and electrify the hero in his obsessive misadventures with Liza, as they shift in their mode of description from a quasi-physical sense of pain to the awareness of “something” more essential that lies at the very core of the self: “Something [*Chto-to*] would not die within me, in the depth of my heart and conscience, it did not want to die and expressed itself in a burning anguish [...] Something kept rising up, rising up in my soul continually, with pain” (5: 165). The indeterminacy of this “something,” as both physical and metaphysical (“a burning anguish,” “a living pain in my heart,” “in my memory,” “in my soul”), calls to mind the Eastern Christian notion of the heart, or the “physical seat of the cognitive activities of the soul” (Iurkevich 70–72). The heart, according to Orthodox tradition, is both a bodily organ and an inward aperture that extends beyond the body to the “innermost” realm—that is, to the very “root of the energetic capacities” of the personality (Bulanov 8, 13). The hero’s extended anxiety attack, therefore, can also be described as an encounter with something like the voice of God, an unfathomable inward agency that greatly afflicts its addressee.⁹

9. Evgenia Cherkasova eloquently describes the underground man’s attempts to “petrify” his “inner life,” to deprive “his heart of being immediately and spontaneously receptive to its sources,” and to “shut off the voice of his aching heart” (50). My argument also fits well with Flath’s (Apollonio’s) suggestion that the underground man is “crippled by his fear of faith” (523).

In this more mystical light, the hero's dread of the inward adds a new dimension to the mind-body problem in *Notes from Underground*. The hero's masochism (his delight in his toothache, his contempt for his liver), often interpreted as part of his ideological battle against determinism, becomes, in this context, a form of resistance against specific energies that lay siege, through the body, on consciousness.¹⁰ The hero's willful contempt for his body, in this light, can be seen as a thinly veiled *terror* of the body, which operates as the seat of vast energies that could at any moment rise up and destroy the tentative equilibrium of the mind. In the final scenes with Liza, the underground man, feeling his "heart moan from pity," allows himself recourse to "hideous [...] artificial, cerebral" acts of "cruelty" in order to "suppress" and "stifle" the "moaning" (5: 173) that intensifies in her presence—all, as he explains it, so as to make the uprisings stop: "I wanted 'peace,' I wanted to stay alone in my underground. 'Vital life' [*zhivaia zhizn'*] [...] oppressed me so much that it was even hard to breathe" (5: 176).

The hero's program of escape into the "underground" can thus be described first as a coping mechanism and only then as an ideological position. It should be noted that the "underground" (*podpol'e*)—the place of refuge invented by the hero—is literally "under the floor": a synthetic, human-made place within the mind, and not the deeply indwelling "underground mine" that will, for example, terrify and entice Dmitrii Karamazov.¹¹ The "space under the floor" can be seen, in this context, as a false, diversionary form of interiority that serves to mask and cover over the more terrifying, unconscious, and organic abyss that "howls" from within. The underground man's ideological strategies of willfulness and caprice are also, therefore, desperate attempts at self-control and stabilization—methods of stifling the "something" that threatens to destroy the self from within. In his later novels, Dostoevskii will imagine the education and strengthening of the personality that would make it more capable of hazarding an encounter with this inward "something," while developing, as we shall see, a phenomenology of evil from the various strategies that his characters employ to evade, anesthetize, and stifle these menacing interior energies.

10. For the ideological attack on the body as an element of the "dialectic of determinism" in *Notes from Underground*, see Frank (1986), 316–20. More recently, see Powelstock's discussion of the underground man's willful impulse to "privilege the reflective dimension" as part of his tormented resistance against "absolute determinism" (37).

11. Observing that the "underground" is "part of a human made building," Clowes concludes that Dostoevskii sought "to situate moral psychology in a non-divine space" (126–27). I would suggest, by contrast, that the *podpol'e* is the hero's wishful model of the psyche, and not Dostoevsky's. Bachinin offers yet another way of conceiving of the *podpol'e* (mistakenly, in my view) as a deep "metaphysical 'space' [...] beneath consciousness in which the night soul lives its mysterious metaphysical life" (189).

Crime and Punishment: “To live ... with only room enough for one’s two feet...”

Like the underground man, Raskolnikov has been read primarily in ideological terms: in Raskolnikov’s specific case, as a transgressive thinker who experiments disastrously in deconstructing conventional morality.¹² If we follow the syndrome of flight from interiority into *Crime and Punishment*, we see in Raskolnikov not merely an ideologue but a psychic fugitive who uses violent transgression as a desperate means of self-stabilization. Raskolnikov begins the novel in a catatonic state, falling periodically “into oblivion” (6: 10), and attempting to forget something oppressive: “it was difficult for him in that moment to think about anything. He wanted to fall into utter oblivion, to forget everything, then to awaken and to start altogether from the beginning” (6: 43). Beset by unspecified memories that evoke convulsive responses (6: 8) and beleaguered, like the underground man, by mysterious, inwardly insurgent forces, he searches for a means of escape: “the feeling of boundless disgust that had already begun to oppress and confuse his heart [...] now reached such a measure and presented itself so vividly that he didn’t know where to go to escape his anguish” (6: 10). Critics have generally assumed that the object of suppression is the horrific idea of the murder; but it is precisely the murder that Raskolnikov forces himself to consider constantly, and to rehearse in great detail, as a means of distraction.¹³

Raskolnikov’s crime, then, is primarily a source of relief. It provides the most efficient of all diversions from the hero’s terror of inwardness by offering “a central point” for “all his thoughts [to] circle around” (6: 86). After the crime, the vehicle of his fear is displaced from something vague and internal to something highly determinate, external, and—what is most welcome to Raskolnikov—utterly enthralling to the mind: “Search, search, they’ll do a search now!” he repeated to himself, hurrying home. [...] The recent fear again *grasped him entirely from head to foot*” (84; emphasis added). Apart from providing an all-encompassing distraction, the crime also serves to erect a traumatic barrier against his “former” anguish, which now no longer surges so inexorably from within (“something pressed on him from inside, but not very much. Sometimes he even felt well” (6: 210)). After the murder, it seems “strange to him [...] that he could think about the same things as before”: “His entire former past, and former thoughts, and [...] former impressions, and [...] he himself, and everything, everything seemed to him now to be in some kind of depths [...] somewhere almost visible under his feet” (6: 90). The sense of

12. Frank’s representative analysis of Raskolnikov’s motives places the emphasis on will to power (1995: 101–7). More recently, see Stellino, who argues that Raskolnikov “kills because he wants to prove to himself that he [...] indeed belongs to the category of the extraordinary people” (99–125).

13. For an opposing view, see, for example, Meerson who interprets Raskolnikov as having internalized a profound, unconscious taboo with regard to the murder itself (53–80).

deliverance afforded by the murder is even more pronounced in the novel's first draft, where Raskolnikov reflects that the "(painful) sensation which oppressed my chest" and "oppressed my heart" had now been replaced by new, more urgent thoughts: "Now I had something else to concern me, something else, while all those, all those former sensations [...] were far away as if from another planet" (7: 39–40).

The practical purpose of Raskolnikov's crime, therefore, though he understands it as a philosophical experiment, is to barricade consciousness within a narrow immediacy and to suppress and evade the menacing "depths." Having committed the murder, he imagines himself as living "somewhere high up, on a cliff, in such a narrow space that there was only room for his two feet—and around him, chasms, ocean, eternal darkness [...] and he had to stay like that, standing on a few feet of space, all his life" (123). The effort to escape the broader arena of the self (the "chasms" and "ocean") into the narrow realm of immediacy ("a few feet of space") is also portrayed vividly in Raskolnikov's dream after the murder in which he sits in his tiny room at the top of his building and listens in terror to the "howls, screeches, and laments" from the stairs below. The dream concisely dramatizes the motivations for Raskolnikov's violent crime: that is, to erect a buffer, however flimsy (a thin door with a hook that will not catch), against the energies of the unconscious that howl from below. Wishing to protect himself from the tumult, he attempts "to lock himself in by the hook" while tormented by "an unbearable sensation of limitless horror" (6: 90–91).

The motive of flight from interiority helps illuminate the psychological ground for Dostoevskii's objections to the Russian "nihilists" of the 1860s. What Dostoevskii's philosophical opponents—atheists, rationalists, materialists, positivists, Marxists—all had in common was their categorical rejection of the notion of a non-discursive, non-rational mind, or soul. As the student Razumikhin puts it, "they demand complete lack of personality (*bezlichnost'*)! [...] There's no need for the *living soul!*" (6: 197; Dostoevskii's emphasis). Through Raskolnikov's predicament, Dostoevskii examines the nihilistic position in its various forms as a kind of wishful thinking, a convenient rationalization of escape from inwardness. Herzen's influential figure of the "new man" who has "executed" his past, and who "boldly walks on," is, in Dostoevskii's treatment, an individual chased into future by an unreasoning terror of the past.¹⁴ The ideological hatred of the deeper mind, in this light, can be reinterpreted as a terror of the forces that lie beneath and beyond memory (As in: "I am terrified and haunted by the depths that threaten to erupt and destroy my sense of self; and therefore I reject the out-

14. Herzen's words in *From the Other Shore* would prove decisive for the Russian revolutionary movement: "we have not been called to harvest the past but to be its executioners, to execute, persecute, and recognize it in all its guises and to offer it up as a sacrifice to the future" (44–46).

dated notion of a soul, and conclude that the rational mind is the sole determinant of human identity”).¹⁵

In diagnosing nihilism as a coping mechanism or anesthetic measure in *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevskii explores the consequences of the rejection of deeper forms of inwardness. The modern rejection of the “soul,” as Razumikhin notes, is connected to a desire for political control: “If it’s not living,” he notes, “if it has no will, if it’s slave-like, it won’t rebel!” (6: 197). Just as the absence of “soul” renders the individual “slave-like” in Razumikhin’s brief account of Russian nihilism, so Raskolnikov’s battle against his unconscious mind leaves him radically susceptible to external instruction. Before the murder, as he longs for something that would distract him from the “howling” within, he finds his will effortlessly coopted by randomly overheard tavern banter; he senses that “the worthless talk had an extreme influence on him [...] as if here there really had been some kind of instruction” (55).¹⁶ And, indeed, the overheard conversation delivers the idea to him in the form of an order: “Kill her and take her money” (55). When his mother’s letter evokes a terrible dream that draws on distant childhood memories, his brief and excruciating turn inward—past the shallow threshold of obsessive thinking into the farther realm of the unconscious—represents, for Raskolnikov, a short-lived reprieve; he awakens from his dream-memories momentarily strengthened and released from the sense of external compulsion (“He was free now from these charms, from the magic, the charm, from obsession” (6: 50)). This brief inward turn, however, is too fleeting to protect against the insistent external suggestions that continue to seize hold of his will: the “coincidences” that acquire the feeling of “fate” or of demonic instruction (“When reason fails, a demon fills in!”; “*ne rassudok, tak bes!*!” (6:60)). In the final pages of the novel, Raskolnikov dreams of external agencies, “endowed with mind and will,” that “installed themselves into people’s bodies” causing their hosts to become “immediately possessed and insane,” while considering themselves more “intelligent and unshakable in truth” than ever (6: 419). The description powerfully synthesizes the psychological and ideological dimensions of nihilism—on the one hand, the willful inward vacancy that allows the self to be seized by an external will, and, on the other, the con-

15. My argument about Dostoevskii has much in common with Gemes’ argument about Nietzsche, namely that nihilism “is for Nietzsche an affective rather than a cognitive disorder [...] where the drives, for various complicated reasons, turn against their own expression.” While Nietzsche’s “drives” and Dostoevskii’s “sensations” can be seen as very different phenomena, the two thinkers coincide powerfully in diagnosing nihilism as symptomatic of psychological disorder (459–66).

16. Jackson’s influential reading places the “fatedness” of Raskolnikov’s crime in the context of Dostoevsky’s moral philosophy, arguing that Raskolnikov’s “passivity” is motivated by a “fatalistic outlook that denies freedom of choice or moral responsibility” (205). Though compelling, this reading fails to account, I would argue, for the visceral feeling of helplessness Raskolnikov experiences in the face of specific external agencies and ideas.

fabulation of invaded individuals who believe their actions to be intentional and ingenious. The crisis of nihilism, as Dostoevskii presents it, is of a personality in flight from its own inner sources and thus radically open to the possibility of external annexation.

Such a reading helps explain why the scenes leading up to Raskolnikov's confession are so devoid of repentance and contrition, as has often been noted in scholarship.¹⁷ Indeed, rather than depicting repentance, these scenes explore the hero's excruciating preparation to lift the screen that he has violently erected against the unconscious. Raskolnikov is plagued at the end of the novel by "a morbid-tormenting anxiety, turning sometimes even into a fearful panic" (327, 335), not about his crime and capture, but about "something else":

Perhaps no one would have believed it, but he was somehow weakly, absentmindedly concerned about his current immediate fate. Something else tormented him, something much more important, extreme – about himself and not about anyone else, something other, something vital" (353)

Faced with the possible resurgence of this "something else," Raskolnikov longs to return to his former all-consuming distractions: "No, it would be better to have some kind of battle! [...] some kind of challenge, someone attacking me" (6: 337). On his way to the police station, "crushed" by "hopeless anguish and anxiety," he allows himself for the first time to be seized from within by a "whole, new, full sensation": "It took him over in a kind of fit: a spark blazed up in his soul, and suddenly, like fire, it grasped the whole of him. Everything went soft in him, and his tears gushed out" (405). During his trial and imprisonment, Raskolnikov continues to protect himself, ever more feebly, against this force, which he associates with the feelings evoked by Sonya. After his illness, when he catches sight of her, "something (*chto-to*) as if pierced his heart in that moment; he gave a start and quickly stepped away from the window" (6: 420). The final scene depicts Raskolnikov in captivity, stripped of all diversionary devices, "looking ahead motionlessly," allowing his "thought" to "change into reveries, into contemplation," and therefore open to intrusion from the energies that have long oppressed him from within: "he wasn't thinking of anything, but some kind of anguish troubled and tormented him." Into this contemplative space, which has been stripped of external barriers, the long-dreaded indwelling terrors (that have been assiduously evaded by all of Dostoevskii's psychic fugitives in the more than two decades leading up to this point) suddenly rise up and assume control: "How it happened, he himself didn't know, but something (*chto-to*) suddenly as if took hold of him and threw him at [Sonia's] feet. He wept and embraced her knees" (421). Here we have Dostoevskii's first attempt to describe the mind's encounter with the sources that lie within and beyond it, sources that are

17. Mochulsky, for example, concludes that Raskolnikov is unrepentant and unchanged to the bitter end (311–12).

capable, according to Dostoevskii, of transforming the personality from a narrow, inwardly barricaded, site of consciousness into an “infinite source” of energy (421).

The Demons: “God has tormented me all my life”

Such a reading offers a more visceral understanding of the religious dimension in Dostoevskii than is customary, since it suggests that faith and doubt, for Dostoevskii, are psychological (and even physiological) inclinations before they become ideological ones. For these characters, the more pressing theological question is not whether the Holy Spirit exists but rather how it can be kept at bay within the psyche. Fear of the “elements” that seek to overwhelm the self from within sends consciousness into a state of frantic self-defense, and it is this activity of resistance to the “inner life”—whether by means of extreme violence or by relinquishing the self to external agencies and ideologies—that constitutes Dostoevskii’s moral psychology of evil.¹⁸

The latter strategy of resisting inwardness—to relinquish oneself to external agencies—is central to the study of evil as social epidemic in *Demons* (sometimes translated as *The Possessed* or *The Devils*). Pyotr Verkhovensky, the novel’s political agitator, hinges his revolutionary plans on the absence of inward resources in his collaborators, on what he calls the lack of an “inner idea” (10: 76) that makes them “obedient like wax” (10: 479) and helpless before an “external [...] despotic will” (10: 404). Pyotr’s most effective weapon in seizing control of others, he explains, is their discomfort with their own inner lives: “the most important force—the cement that connects everything—is shame over one’s own opinion. What a force! And who worked it out so that [...] not a single idea of one’s own would be left in anyone’s head. They would consider it shameful!” (10: 299). Aversion for what originates from within, according to Pyotr’s calculations, creates a “boundless thirst” in the self; and his strategy is to fill the vacuum by giving people an external center that would replace the domain of “soul.” He offers his collaborators, as he puts it, the “warm belief” that they are “only one knot in an endless web of knots,” with “blind obedience” to “some central, enormous, but mysterious place” (10: 303), while insinuating his own will into their thoughts and motives. The spy Liputin, for example, realizes that under Pyotr’s influence, he himself is “only a coarse, senseless body, an inert mass [...] moved by a terrible extraneous force” (10: 430); and the conspirators sense in murdering Shatov that they “have lost a part of their consciousness” and therefore cling all the more desperately to Pyotr for guidance. In turning the architecture of these personalities outward, Pyotr’s starting point is the shame, fear, and suppression of the inward.

18. For a study of how Raskolnikov seeks to be annexed by “external minds,” see Corrigan (25–28).

Again, in *Demons*, Dostoevskii depicts ideology as a strategy of confabulation adopted by the rational mind to explain its decisions without confronting its inward terror. This method is most powerfully embodied in Kirillov, the atheist prophet who dreams of liberating humanity from its belief in God by means of his own willful suicide. As he plans his rebellious act, Kirillov admits that he suffers from “moments” of “unbearable” inward pressure, when, as he describes it, “one suddenly feels the presence of eternal harmony,” a sensation that “a human being in his earthly form is not capable of enduring.” “What is most frightening of all,” he explains, “is that it’s so terribly clear and there’s such joy. If it went on for more than five seconds, the soul would not endure it and would have to disappear” (450). Or, as he puts it elsewhere, “God has tormented me all my life” (10: 94). Though this latter phrase has been taken to signify that Kirillov suffers from the *idea* of God, I would suggest that, in the tradition of Dostoevskii’s psychic fugitives, Kirillov intends it quite literally.¹⁹ By distracting his mind with obsessive philosophical reflections, Kirillov attempts to reduce himself to a thesis—or to a “person made out of paper” as Shatov describes him—so as to protect himself from this unbearable source of pressure. Because of his lack of inward breadth, therefore, like Pyotr’s other victims, he is defenseless against external instruction. Though he refuses categorically to be complicit in the murder of Shatov, he finds himself agreeing, only a few pages later and for no discernible reason, to take full responsibility, allowing Pyotr to assume control of him and to dictate his suicide letter, while his own “tormented spirit,” oppressed from within, “plunges headlong” into an “exit” (10: 472).

Stavrogin is similarly oppressed from within—in this case by unwanted memories and apparitions—and finds himself continually foisting himself on others in outrageously invasive intimate acts—biting ears, pulling noses, sending women into fainting fits with contextually absurd caresses (10: 37–43)—all the while utterly confused as to the causes of these compulsions. Stavrogin’s criminal perversity, by his own account, comes from the “intoxication” and “pleasure” he experiences from radical acts of self-control, from an extreme “unfeelingness” toward “his memories”; and he notes his own increasing instability in the face of mounting inner insurgencies and visions.²⁰ When Stavrogin shares his confession with Tikhon, the monk understands that Stavrogin is on the verge of performing more crimes, not for reasons of license and moral caprice, but as a form of “escape” from himself (11: 30).

The self in flight from its interior reaches is also, as we have seen in *Crime*

19. For readings of Kirillov’s rebellion as an intellectual rejection of the idea of God, see, for example, Evlampiev, and the account of Albert Camus’ fertile engagement with the figure of Kirillov as related by Davison (64–85).

20. As Orwin puts it, “his acts of baseness seem connected to a desire to control all feeling, no matter how powerful” (173).

and *Punishment*, a compliant self, and Dostoevskii populates his *Demons* with characters whose intentions are benign and even noble, but who lack the inward resources to withstand external coercion. Though Stavrogin insists firmly “once and for all” (205) that he does not want Fedka the convict to kill his wife and brother-in-law, Fedka has only to stand still and wait quietly for Stavrogin to change his mind. The same can be said for Kirillov, as mentioned above, in his short-lived refusal to be complicit in the murder of Shatov. Dostoevskii calls attention throughout to the feeble humanitarian impulses and intentions of the novel’s political accomplices who often express their principled resistance to Pyotr’s murderous plans—as in the darkly comic scene where Virginsky voices his resolute dissent:

“I’m against it. I protest against this bloody resolution with all the powers of my soul!” Virginsky stood up.

“But?” asked Pyotr Stepanovich.

“What do you mean *but*?”

“You said ‘but’... so I’m waiting.”

“I don’t think I said *but*... I wanted to say, that if it’s decided, then...”

“Then?”

Virginsky went silent. [...] “I’m for the common cause,” he pronounced suddenly.” (421).

Pyotr overcomes Virginsky’s will so effortlessly here not from wielding convincing arguments, but from understanding that the “powers” that Virginsky refers to in his “soul” are illusory. Here we have the core of Dostoevskii’s critique of secular liberalism, or what he sometimes called “quiescent [*uspokoennyj*] liberalism” (22: 7): namely, that without recourse to a deeper form of interiority, even the most compassionate and benevolent individual will be helpless against external instruction.

Dostoevskii’s concept of evil, then, is distinct from the romantic demonic tradition to which it is often relegated, since for Dostoevskii the demonic does not issue from the depths of the self, but from without.²¹ As Stavrogin puts it in his suicide letter, “all that ever flowed from within me was negation, without any magnanimity and without energy. Everything was petty and flaccid” (514). For Dostoevskii, a demon is that which, perceiving a vacancy, enters the self from outside and rescues the individual from the prospect of encountering what lies within. Often an idea or an ideology, a demon, in this sense, can also take the form of an inwardly vacuous personality that seeks to merge with and possess other selves.²² Pyotr, as the central demon of the novel, is at least as empty as his victims. Being “talentless” (176) and “without an inner idea” (76), and feeling a perpetual hunger to insinuate himself into other personalities (179, 408), he understands the psychology of emptiness by judging from himself, since he in turn has also been set into motion by the ideas and

21. For an overview of Romantic demonism, see Gillespie (101–34).

22. For more on Dostoevskii’s idiosyncratic interpersonal demonism, see Corrigan, 83–103.

wills of others.²³ Before his suicide, afflicted and tormented from within, Kirillov bites Pyotr's finger, thus echoing the bewildered actions of Stavrogin and Stepan, the urge to become fused as invasively as possible with the other as a form of escape from oneself. The aggressive intimacies that define the demonic landscape find their climactic expression in the bizarre embraces of the conspirators after the murder of Shatov, as they cling to each other screaming and howling, attempting to dissolve themselves into a collective union, to be filled and replaced by something external so as to be rescued from the oppressive burden of interiority.

Conclusions: The Externality of Evil

Dostoevskii did not conceive of evil as an active force within the psyche. He was not a Manichean thinker, and Dmitry Karamazov's description of "God and the devil" at war in the "human heart" cannot be attributed to Dostoevskii as a definitive description of a dualistic metaphysics.²⁴ Evil, for Dostoevskii, is not deep; rather, it is a strategy of fending off depth, and especially of suppressing and evading what Dostoevskii saw as the transcendent dimension that oppresses the fugitive self from within. A potential objection to this explanation of evil in Dostoevskii can be derived from the treatment of the "Karamazov force" in *The Brothers Karamazov*, which has been characterized as a "blind, amoral force of sensuality" that, while "morally [...] ruinous," is "also the source of life energy" (Clowes, "Self-Laceration and Resentment: The Terms of Moral Psychology in Dostoevsky and Nietzsche" 129). Interpreting Dostoevskii in the neo-romantic mode, Edith Clowes has described his moral psychology as advocating the conscious conversion of these "pre-moral" energies "toward some creative, life-affirming goal" (Clowes 133). Though space does not allow for a full discussion of *The Brothers Karamazov*, in anticipating this objection, I would argue that, for Dostoevskii, the mind at odds with its own inner reaches is always in the process, as we have seen, of confabulating disguises for its terror. In the examples of Fyodor and Dmitry Karamazov, father and son, as ostensible proponents of the Karamazov force in all its pre-moral intensity, the "man of deep passions" emerges as yet another confabulation. In both cases, the exploits of father and son are by no means Dionysian; rather, they show all the hysteria and hunger of collapsed interiority. As Dmitry admits to Alyosha, "unknown ideas were raging within me, and I got drunk, fought, raged about. In order to assuage them within me, I got into fights, in order to calm them,

23. Dostoevskii's demonology is usually explained by placing the onus on the power of ideas themselves or by reference to traditional Russian orthodox conceptions of demonism. For a reading of *Demons* that pursues both of these paths, see Leatherbarrow (116–39).

24. For an opposing view, see, for example, Marina Kostalevsky on Dostoevskii's Manichean treatment of good and evil (148).

to suppress them” (15: 31). Dmitry’s outrageous acts, in other words, like the underground man’s “fearful” debauches, are used to *suppress*, rather than to *express* the subliminal energies that he senses within. In his riotous “bacchanalia” at Mokroe, he is neither lover nor reveler, but a “soul in torment,” oppressed by something “vague, very vague,” and clinging desperately to Grushenka like an obedient “little dog” (14: 378) in the hope that she, the “queen of his soul,” will save him from his insurgent terrors. Fyodor, for his part, is similarly haunted by “a spiritual terror,” a “moral commotion” that at times “almost physically calls out in his soul”—in his words, “as if my soul is trembling in my throat.” Sensing these inward uprisings, Fyodor, like Dmitry, frantically searches out others to help him stifle them: “the main thing was that it would necessarily be an *other* person, [...] that one could call him in a morbid moment, only to look him in the face” (14: 86).

Dostoevskii’s extended treatment of the flight from the unconscious suggests that the energies that “tremble” in Fyodor’s “throat” and the “unknown ideas” that “rage” in Dmitry are by no means morally neutral. As Alyosha discovers in his dream, after struggling unsuccessfully to escape the “something” that oppresses him from within, there is, in the depths of the unconscious, a joyous and life-affirming source of energy, which, in his dream-vision, takes on the imagery of Cana of Galilee—that is, of Christ converting the water miraculously into “new wine.” Having allowed “something firm and unshakeable” to “enter his soul” from within (14: 325), Alyosha comes to recognize and understand the terror of inwardness in others, in Ivan, for example, who is continually struggling to suppress the “sensations that seethe in his soul” (15: 54; 14: 255): “Ivan’s illness was becoming clear to him: [...] God, in whom he did not believe, and his truth were overwhelming his heart” (15: 89). The devil, when Ivan finally encounters him in his nightmare, is a personality without access to any form of deeper interiority and thus forever dependent on the inward dynamism of others. The defining quality of the devil, for Dostoevskii, is his lack of originality, or rather, his lack of inward origin. Here we can perceive a less neurotic, but perhaps more insidious form of evil in Dostoevskii’s works, the evil of the utterly depthless personality (Luzhin, Totsky, Pyotr Verkhovensky, Erkel’), that, unlike Dostoevskii’s psychic fugitives, does not suffer from the “howling” of the “soul,” that has no relationship with the “depths,” neither positive nor negative, is neither “hold nor cold,” and is therefore all the more susceptible to external instruction and suggestion.

In conceiving of evil as inherently shallow, Dostoevskii comes close to anticipating Hannah Arendt’s argument concerning the “banality of evil,” though he also diverges significantly in his prescribed solution. Arendt explained that, by “banality,” she in fact meant that which “possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension”: Evil “can overgrow and lay waste the whole world because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is ‘thought-defying’ [...] be-

cause thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing” (Arendt, *Eichmann* 251). At the end of her life, in considering the question of defense against evil as “absence of thought,” Arendt suggested the process of concerted mental activity itself as a potential antidote: “Could the activity of thinking as such,” she asks, “regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually ‘condition’ them against it?” (Arendt, *Life of the Mind* 5).

Dostoevskii’s perspective can be helpful in considering Arendt’s question, especially given his suspicious attitude toward the activity of thinking. For Dostoevskii, as we have seen, rational thought is most often complicit in the phenomenon of evil as the confabulator of ideological disguises for the fear of inwardness. The rigorous intellectual arguments of modern nihilism—the refutation of the soul, of cultural memory and of traditions of value, the conception of the self as pure rationality—all conveniently facilitate the mind’s escape from its own depths, and, more specifically, in Dostoevskii’s view, from a sacred and collectively shared source that exists beyond personal memory. For the modern consciousness, alienated from these sources, this deeper collective memory presents itself to the mind as a source of affliction. In *The Idiot*, for example, it takes on the horrific form of the swollen and lacerated corpse of Christ that haunts modern Russian society. Prince Myshkin of *The Idiot*, a troubled amnesiac, is oppressed, like many other characters in the novel, by Hans Holbein’s portrait of the dead Christ, a copy of which hangs on the wall of Rogozhin’s cavernous house. When Myshkin journeys into the “tomb” at the end of the novel in the hope of bringing the dead body in its depths to life, he is tracing the trajectory most feared by those psychic fugitives who masquerade as modern nihilists. To turn inward, for Dostoevskii, means to develop the ability to encounter the horrific corpse in the depths of the mind, to resurrect this presence so as to restore one’s inward sources, and thus to be transformed from a flimsy and haunted demon into a generative and robust source of energy. This kind of inner work is the antidote to evil that Dostoevskii offers his readers.

Dostoevskii, therefore, powerfully anticipated the sea change in ethical thought over the question of intentionality. One’s guilt for a crime lies not in intending it, but in failing to build up the inward defenses to resist it. Both Lucifer and Adolf Eichmann, according to his paradigm, are psychic fugitives, anxious to keep themselves in the shallower waters of the mind by any means necessary—whether by violent and transgressive actions that divert the mind from its depths, or by seeking refuge in the agencies and instructions of others. To defy complicity in systemic evil, for Dostoevskii, means not only to wake up to one’s place within a system, but, more importantly, to turn one’s attention toward the “something” that “howls” from within so as to anchor oneself in its energies. I would suggest that Dostoevskii’s warning is all the

more powerful for our time when the project of personal depth is embattled on all sides, not only by social technologies that make solitary concentration and contemplation so difficult, but also from the continuing academic positivism in the humanities whose discomfort with such notions as soul and deep interiority remains at least as pronounced as it was in Nikolai Chernyshevskii's Petersburg. Dostoevskii's practical descriptions of the development of an inward architecture, in this context, deserve another look. It should be noted, however, that, for Dostoevskii, resisting evil does not lead to health and well-being, but rather to a continual state of anxiety, uncertainty, and dread, since it means willingly to sacrifice one's own mental equilibrium in order to be broken and galvanized by a deeper, transcendent agency. Religious experience, for Dostoevskii, offers neither comfort nor security; it is evil, by contrast, that offers the readiest forms of deliverance.

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Достоевский о зле, как убежище и анестетик

В настоящей статье, новые прочтения прозы Достоевского позволяют нам переосмыслить концептуальный барьер между традиционными и постмодернистскими формами зла: между парадигмами Люцифера (зло как трансгрессивное и злоумышленное начало) и Эйхмана (зло как начало бездумное, послушное и безличное). Достоевский представляет обе эти модели (злонамеренно трансгрессивное зло и зло бездумно послушное) как противоположные симптомы одной и той же духовной болезни. Зло, по Достоевскому, вызвано бегством от живых форм внутренней жизни. Для Достоевского, трансгрессивные формы насилия, как и покорные формы послушания имеют общую мотивацию: и те и другие представляют собой ответ на боязнь глубинной, внутренней жизни. В статье прослеживается психология зла в прозе Достоевского выработанная писателем в таких произведениях как «Записки из подполья», «Преступление и наказание» и «Бесы».