Достоевский и мировая культура. Филологический журнал. 2021. № 2 (14).
Dostoevsky and World Culture. Philological journal, no. 2 (14), 2021.

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Научная статья / Research Article
УДК 821.161.1.0
ББК 83.3(2Рос=Рус)
https://doi.org/10.22455/2619-0311-2021-2-65-88

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«Все это одна фантазия»: критика современности в романе Достоевского «Идиот»

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“It’s All One Big Fantasy”: The Critique of Modernity in Dostoevsky’s Novel *The Idiot*

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Аннотация: Идея противостояния между Европой и Россией проходит через весь роман Достоевского «Идиот» и находит свою кульминацию в словах Г-жи Епанчиной о том, что и Европа, и уезжающие в Европу русские – «все это одна фантазия» [Dostoevsky, 1972-1990, vol. 8, p. 510]. Достоевский использует троп изгнания для литературного осмысления и дальнейшего продвижения своей русской идеи. В то время как духовная подоплека национализма Достоевского изучена довольно тщательно, секулярные аспекты этой концепции нуждаются в дальнейшем анализе. Питер Вагнер утверждает, что национализм – это ответ на ностальгию, которая проявляется в изгнании как следствие отхода от традиции. Особенностью национализма девятнадцатого века было то, что он являлся «попыткой воссоздать чувство исходной точки» [Wagner, 2001, p. 103] среди тех, кому пришлось быть свидетелями быстро надвигающейся современности со всеми сопутствующими ее факторами – капитализмом, реформой избирательного права и т.д. Данная статья предлагает рассмотреть троп изгнания, исполь-

зуемый в романе «Идиот», в историческом контексте. Применяя теоретические идеи Вагнера, автор статьи показывает, что выражение национальной идеи в тексте Достоевского – это не просто локальная демонстрация специфически русского чувства, но симптом более обширного феномена, охватившего Европу во второй половине девятнадцатого века. Т.к. на долю Г-жи Епанчиной выпало произнести вердикт в конце романа, ее роль и смысл ее слов будут фокальной точкой данного анализа.

Ключевые слова: Достоевский, «Идиот», русская идея, современность, национализм, изгнание, ностальгия, Питер Вагнер.

Для цитирования: *Джордан К.* «Все это одна фантазия»: критика современности в романе Достоевского «Идиот» // Достоевский и мировая культура. Филологический журнал, 2021. № 2 (14). С. 65-88. https://doi.org/10.22455/2619-0311-2021-2-65-88

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Abstract: The opposition between Europe and Russia runs through Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot*, culminating in Mme Epanchina's declaration that both Europe and the Russians who travel to Europe are "one big fantasy" [Dostoevsky, 2002, p. 615]. In the novel, Dostoevsky uses the exile trope as a literary tool for expressing his Russian idea. Although the spiritual underpinnings of Dostoevsky's nationalism have been well studied, the secular side of this concept bears further exploration. Peter Wagner argues that nationalism constitutes a response to the nostalgia that is developed in exile following one's breaking away from tradition. Nineteenth-century nationalism specifically "was an attempt to recreate a sense of origins in the face of the disembedding effects of early modernity and capitalism" [Wagner, 2001, p. 103]. By applying Wagner's theoretical framework to Dostoevsky's narrative, the author demonstrates that in its secular essence, Dostoevsky's nationalism is not a merely localized manifestation of a uniquely Russian sentiment, but a symptom of a larger phenomenon that was taking place in late nineteenth-century Europe. Because Mme Epanchina gets to say the final word in Dostoevsky's novel, her role and the subtleties of her message will be the primary focus of the present analysis.

Keywords: Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, the Russian idea, modernity, nationalism, exile, nostalgia, Peter Wagner.

For citation: Jordan, Katya. "'It's All One Big Fantasy': The Critique of Modernity in Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot*". *Dostoevsky and World Culture. Philological journal*, no. 2 (14), 2021, pp. 65-88 https://doi.org/10.22455/2619-0311-2021-2-65-88 (In Russ.)

“Enough of these passions, it’s time to serve reason. And all this, and all these foreign lands, and all this Europe of yours, it’s all one big fantasy, and all of us abroad are one big fantasy ... remember my words, you’ll see for yourself!” [Dostoevsky, 2002, p. 615] («Довольно увлекаться-то, пора и рассудку послужить. И все это, и вся эта заграница, и вся эта ваша Европа, все это одна фантазия, и все мы, за границей, одна фантазия ... помяните мое слово, сами увидите!» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 8, p. 510]). This pronouncement, made in Switzerland by one Russian exile in the presence of two other Russian exiles, concludes Fyodor Dostoevsky’s novel *The Idiot* (1868). The opposition between “this Europe” and “all of us” in the novel’s finale is yet another manifestation of Dostoevsky’s Russian idea. Yet any national idea, regardless of its origin or scale, is conceptualized and put into practice by individual human beings, and therefore its success is not guaranteed. Although the spiritual underpinnings of Dostoevsky’s Russian idea have been well studied, the secular side of this concept merits further exploration [see Hudspith, 2004; Grier, 2003; Soina, Sabirov, 2015]. Peter Wagner argues that nationalism constitutes a response to the nostalgia developed in exile following one’s breaking away from tradition, which phenomenon lies at the heart of European modernity [Wagner, 2001]. In effect, exile triggers nostalgia, which leads to idealization of the past, to realization of one’s otherness, and to identity formation; in its turn, nationalism becomes a form of defence of that idealized and to some extent artificial identity. The purpose of this article is to offer a historically situated analysis of the exile trope used in *The Idiot*. By employing Peter Wagner’s theoretical framework, I will demonstrate that in its secular essence Dostoevsky’s nationalism is a symptom of European modernity and not a merely localized manifestation of a uniquely Russian sentiment[1].

As a literary trope, exile may refer to both the physical and the metaphorical rupture that can take a literary character to a variety of places. For Wagner, exile is a type of experience that follows “the moment of leaving, or of being forced to go” from what is familiar, which leads a person to a place where “the view of the world undergoes a fundamental change because the safety of that which preceded one’s own existence goes”

[1] Although some mentioning of Eastern Christianity in the present analysis is inevitable, the choice to focus on the secular side of Dostoevsky’s nationalism within the context of European modernity is deliberate. For a discussion of the role of Orthodoxy in Dostoevsky’s nationalism see, for example, Nikolay Berdyaev’s *Russkaia ideia* [Berdyaev, 2015], V.A. Nikitin’s “Dostoevsky: pravoslavie i ‘russkaia ideia’” [Nikitin, 1990], Nikolay Lossky’s “Dostoevsky i ego khristianskoe miroponimanie” [Lossky, 1997], and Steven Cassedy’s *Dostoevsky’s Religion* [Cassedy, 2005].

[Wagner, 2001, p. 103]. Each major character in *The Idiot* at some point experiences exile when he or she is required to depart from the safety of their home. The novel starts with the protagonist, Prince Myshkin, returning to Russia from his medical exile in Switzerland. During a train ride to St. Petersburg, he meets Parfen Rogozhin who recently ran away from his father's home to save his own life after spending a large sum of his father's money on a gift for Nastasya Filippovna. As a girl, Nastasya Filippovna tragically lost both her family and home in a fire and was raised by her father's acquaintance, Totsky, who eventually made her his concubine. In contrast to Myshkin, Rogozhin, and Nastasya Filippovna stand the three Epanchin daughters – Alexandra, Adelaida, and Aglaya – who, despite having come of age, are in no rush to marry and leave their parents' home. Turmoil begins in the Epanhchin household when Totsky decides to marry Alexandra. Driven by revenge, Nastasya Filippovna tries to interfere with Totsky's plan; yet prone to self-loathing, she is also drawn to the idea of marrying Rogozhin. The novel's plot, which centres around Myshkin's attempts to save Nastasya Filippovna, is complicated by Aglaya's interest in Myshkin. In the end, Aglaya too becomes an exile when she marries a foreigner with a questionable reputation and turns to Catholicism, abandoning her home, country, and faith tradition. Meanwhile, Evgeny Pavlovich Radomsky, a relation of Prince Myshkin's late benefactor, also travels to Europe for no urgent reason other than his personal desire to leave Russia. It is to Radomsky that Mme Epanchina's words, cited above, are addressed when the two of them visit Prince Myshkin at a Swiss clinic.

The sheer variety of causes for exile featured in the novel appears to render Mme Epanchina's admonition to abandon passions and embrace reason – in other words, to return home – simplistic if not untenable. However, Dostoevsky placed a special value on the novel's end. He wrote in a letter to his niece Sofia: "In conclusion, the most important for me is that this Part IV and its finale are the essence of my novel; that is, the whole novel was written and conceived almost solely for the denouement" («Наконец, и (главное) для меня в том, что эта 4-я часть и окончание ее – самое главное в моем романе, то есть для развязки романа почти и писался и задуман был весь роман» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 28_2, p. 318])[2]. Because Mme Epanchina gets to say the final word, her role in the novel and the subtleties of her message will be the focal point of the present analysis.

[2] From Dostoevsky's letter to S.A. Ivanova, sent from Milano, dated Oct. 26, 1868. Except where indicated, translations from Russian are mine.

The Russian National Idea

The Russian national idea is an ill-defined philosophical construct that can be approached in a variety of ways. Pamela Davidson explains that for those writers who engaged with this concept,

> Defining the "Russian idea" served as a means of defining Russia's relation to the West, of establishing its place (as a relative latecomer) on the map of sacred history and European culture. Whatever form the ideal took (whether Slavophile or Westernizing, religious or secular, pro-Orthodox, pro-Catholic, or ecumenical), embracing it enabled its carrier to occupy a place in a tradition which could be traced back to the earliest formulations of national identity in eleventh-century Rus', modelled on the Hebrew prophets' definition of the mission of the Jews [Davidson, 2003, p. 509].

The chief thinkers who have grappled with the Russian idea belong to two main camps. One group considered it a necessary and positive ideal enabling Russia to reach the height of its spiritual development and to fulfil its historical potential. The other group saw it as an imperialist and expansionist idea that united church and state to the detriment of Russian civil society. Dostoevsky, who first introduced the term, belonged to the first camp. He wrote in 1861:

> We anticipate <...> that the character of our future work must be panhuman in the highest degree, that the Russian idea, perhaps, will be a synthesis of all those ideas that Europe with such persistence and courage is developing in some of its discrete nationalities; that perhaps everything that is antagonistic in these ideas will find its application and its future development in the Russian nationality.

> Мы предугадываем <...> что характер нашей будущей деятельности должен быть в высшей степени общечеловеческий, что русская идея, может быть, будет синтезом всех тех идей, который с таким упорством, с таким мужеством развивает Европа в отдельных своих национальностях; что, может быть, все враждебное в этих идеях найдет свое примирение и дальнейшее развитие в русской народности [Dostoevsky, 1972-1990, vol. 18, p. 37].

Dostoevsky believed that Russia, unlike Enlightened Europe, has preserved its faith in the true Christ, and this faith would enable Russia to

fulfil her messianic role in leading the European nations towards a universal brotherhood, harmony, and salvation.

Compared to Europe during the Age of Revolutions, Russia's noticeable "lack of revolutionary activity" was anomalous [see Sperber, 2005, p. 260][3]. In the words of Alex De Jonge, "[a]t the heart of Dostoevsky's hopes for synthesis and resolution lies this unoriginal, jingoistic, but stirring belief in the real likelihood of his country's survival" [De Jonge, 1975, p. 212]. In *The Idiot*, this belief is reflected in Mme Epanchina's ability to spot opposition between everything Russian and everything foreign. For her, "abroad" is simply "associated with disaster"; her "essential Russianness" is manifest in "a vivid, no nonsense Russian idiom"; and her language "celebrates [her] solidarity with [her] native culture" [De Jonge, 1975, p. 212].

Despite her status as a general's wife, a mother of three grown daughters, a fine representative of the old Russian aristocracy, and the protagonist's only, albeit distant, relative, Mme Epanchina (née Myshkina) is rarely taken seriously. Yet, as notebooks on *The Idiot* indicate, Dostoevsky envisioned a special connection between her and the title character. On April 8, 1868, after the first few chapters of the novel have already been published in *The Russian Herald*, Dostoevsky wrote in one of his notebooks: "NB: The Prince only *touched* their lives. But *that* which he could do and undertake, *that* all died with him. *Russia affected him gradually. His insights.* But wherever he *touched* – everywhere he left an inscrutable mark" («NB. Князь только *прикоснулся* к их жизни. Но *то*, что бы он мог сделать и предпринять, *то* все умерло с ним. *Россия действовала на него постепенно. Прозрения его.* Но где только он ни *прикоснулся* – везде он оставил неисследимую черту» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 9, p. 242]). Two days later, Dostoevsky added: "The main task: the Idiot's character. Develop it. This is the novel's idea. How Russia is reflected. <...> Drives the General's wife to insanity in her attachment to the Prince and in adoration for him" («Главная задача: характер Идиота. Его развить. Вот мысль романа. Как отражается Россия. <...> Генеральшу до безумия доводит в привязанности к Князю и в обожании его» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 9, p. 252]). In the published

[3] Hans Kohn explains that because Russia entered Europe at the time of rational, political, and social revolutions, the central question for Russia at that time was, "Should Russia reject the revolution and lead the counter-revolution, as an unshakeable rock upon which the revolutionary wave would break and recede, thus saving Europe from chaos and destruction? Or should Russia accept and head the revolution and thus lead Europe and mankind, as she alone could, out of suffering and darkness to justice and light?" [Kohn, 1945, pp. 388-389].

version of the novel, the connection between these two characters can be traced as follows: Switzerland heals Myshkin, Myshkin returns to Russia, Russia affects Myshkin, Myshkin affects Epanchina. In order to complete this chain reaction, Mme Epanchina also needs to visit Switzerland.

During their first meeting in her home, Mme Epanchina confesses to Prince Myshkin: "I am a child, and I know it. I knew it even before you said it; you precisely expressed my own thought in a single word. I think your character is completely identical to mine, and I'm very glad; like two drops of water. Only you're a man and I'm a woman, and I've never been to Switzerland, that's all the difference" [Dostoevsky, 2002, p. 76] («я ребенок и знаю это. Я еще прежде вашего знала про это; вы именно выразили мою мысль в одном слове. Ваш характер я считаю совершенно сходным с моим и очень рада; как две капли воды. Только вы мужчина, а я женщина и в Швейцарии не была; вот и вся разница» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 8, p. 65]). By eventually sending Mme Epanchina to Switzerland, Dostoevsky virtually obliterates any meaningful difference between her and the prince; yet because of her heightened state of awareness, her impressions of Europe appear to be more detailed and personal, compared to those of Myshkin. As she travels through Europe in search of solace following Aglaya's ill-advised marriage, she is bent on seeing everything in a negative light:

> Poor Lizaveta Prokofyevna wanted to be in Russia and, as Evgeny Pavlovich testified, she bitterly and unfairly criticized everything abroad: "They can't bake good bread anywhere, in the winter they freeze like mice in the cellar," she said. "But here at least I've had a good Russian cry over this poor man," she added, pointing with emotion to the prince, who did not recognize her at all [Dostoevsky, 2002, pp. 614-615].

> Бедной Лизавете Прокофьевне хотелось бы в Россию, и, по свидетельству Евгения Павловича, она желчно и пристрастно критиковала ему все заграничное: «Хлеба нигде испечь хорошо не умеют, зиму, как мыши в подвале, мерзнут, – говорила она, – по крайней мере вот здесь, над этим бедным, хоть по-русски поплакала», – прибавила она, в волнении указывая на князя, совершенно ее не узнававшего [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 8, p. 510].

Her reference to mice in the final chapter is an allusion to the novel's opening chapters. When Prince Myshkin, whose last name is derived

from the Russian word «мышка» (a little mouse), arrives in Russia on a damp and foggy November morning, he is underdressed for the weather. In a foreign attire, he "has been forced to bear on his chilled back all the sweetness of a damp Russian November night, for which he was obviously not prepared" [Dostoevsky, 2002, p. 5-6] («принужден был вынести на своей издрогшей спине всю сладость сырой ноябрьской русской ночи, к которой, очевидно, был не приготовлен [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 8, p. 6])[4]. Later the same day, speaking with a doorman at the Epanhchin residence, Prince Myshkin observes: "Here it's warmer inside in winter than it is abroad <...> but there it's warmer outside than here, while a Russian can't even live in their houses in winter unless he's used to it" [Dostoevsky, 2002, p. 21] («Здесь у вас в комнатах теплее, чем за границей зимой <...> а вот там зато на улицах теплее нашего, а в домах зимой – так русскому человеку и жить с непривычки нельзя» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 8, p. 19]).

The connection between Prince Myshkin and Mme Epanchina goes beyond a shared family name and a sensitivity to weather. Both of them are identified as eccentrics (*chudaki*). Even though, unlike Prince Myshkin, Mme Epanchina does not suffer from epileptic fits followed by periods of physical weakness, with every passing year she is "more and more capricious and impatient, she was even becoming somehow eccentric" [Dostoevsky, 2002, p. 37] («все капризнее и нетерпеливее, стала даже какая-то чудачка» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 8, p. 32]). Her impatience and irritability tend to result in uncontrolled emotional outbursts, usually addressed at her husband, followed by periods of harmony and peace. Mme Epanhchina acknowledges her own eccentricity, but she also quickly recognizes this trait in others[5].

[4] The narrator adds, "what was proper and quite satisfactory in Italy turned out to be not entirely suitable to Russia" [Dostoevsky, 2002, p. 6] («<...> что годилось и вполне удовлетворяло в Италии, то оказалось не совсем пригодным в России» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 8, p. 6]). Dostoevsky's personal reaction to the quotidian side of foreing living is summed up in his lament that all around him was "Swiss reality" («действительность швейцарская» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 28_2, p. 224]), which was ill-suited for a Russian novelist if he wished to continue writing.

[5] Tatiana Kasatkina argues that the word "'eccentric' is yoked with a negative" in Dostoevsky's writing [Kasatkina, 2002, p. 79]. V. Serdiuchenko, however, observes: "For him [Dostoevsky], 'idiots' and 'ideals' were by no means mutually contradictory terms, and Myshkin's truth appears 'idiotic' only to the pragmatists around him. In Dostoevsky's works, the eccentrics (*chudaki*), the blessed, the holy fools, and the poor in spirit are not the exception but a specific and continuously reproduced archetype of human consciousness and/or conduct, conduct that is intrinsically alien and infinitely superior, in all essential ethical respects, to the generally accepted moral code" [Serdiuchenko, 2002, p. 64].

Partly due to her eccentricity, Mme Epanhchina's character elicits a variety of responses from critics. Kenneth Lantz, for example, notes that "Dostoevsky paints many vivid portraits of older women, often imperious figures, who combine healthy common sense with a degree of foolishness," assigning Mme Epanhchina to the society of Pulkheriia Raskolnikova from *Crime and Punishment*, Varvara Stavrogina from *The Demons*, and Grandmother from *The Gambler* [Lantz, 2004, p. 471]. He explains: "These are figures who are not engaged in life in the same way as Dostoevsky's other major characters; despite their essential goodness they are often portrayed with comic touches as characters who are struggling to understand what is happening around them" [Lantz, 2004, p. 471]. Gary Saul Morson identifies some of Mme Epanhchina's actions, specifically in the treatment of her daughters, as absurd [Morson, 1999, pp. 471-494]. Deborah Martinsen, by contrast, redeems Mme Epanhchina by drawing attention to her empathic and shame-healing abilities [Martinsen, 2003, pp. 74-75]. Still, Victor Terras points out Mme Epanhchina's emotional instability, describing *The Idiot* as "a socially and psychologically intriguing novel featuring several characters with neuroses that reflect social problems of universal interest" [Terras, 1990, p. 7]. Among such neurotic characters he lists not only Mme Epanhchina, but also Parfen Rogozhin, Nastasya Filippovna, and Aglaya.

A neurosis constitutes a physical and mental condition with very specific causes, and it typically is a sign of stress-induced mental illness. Mme Epanhchina's most immediate source of stress appears to come from the necessity to marry off her three grown daughters who have formed a united front against their mother. Yet she has more on her plate than Mrs. Bennett ever had: she is forced to consider the implications of not only the woman question for her immediate family, but the effects of nihilism and ideological extremism on the whole of Russian society.

In Part Two, Chapter IX Mme Epanchina visits Prince Myshkin at Lebedev's home where she meets a group of progressive young people. One of them, Burdovsky, has pocketed some of Prince Myshkin's money. Having learned something of their outlook and of their treatment of their naïve benefactor, Mme Epanchina is convinced that these young men have lost all sense of morality or duty. Lamenting their general lack of compassion or respect towards others, she lashes out against them: "Mad! Vainglorious! They don't believe in God, they don't believe in Christ! You're so eaten up by vanity and pride that you'll end by eating each other, that I foretell to you" [Dostoevsky, 2002, p. 285] («Сумасшедшие! Тщес-

лавные! В бога не веруют, в Христа не веруют! Да ведь вас до того тщеславие и гордость проели, что кончится тем, что вы друг друга переедите, это я вам предсказываю. И не сумбур это, и не хаос, и не безобразие это?» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 8, p. 238])[6]. Mme Epanchina's foray to Lebedev's home where she "sat, listening to our young people" [Dostoevsky, 2002, p. 283] («расселась молодежь послушать» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 8, p. 236]) ends for her in a shocking realization of how far nihilism can go. For her, the danger of turning away from tradition lies in the destruction not only of the old social order, but of the very possibility of sociality.

The scene in which Mme Epanchina delivers her tirade is mirrored in a scene in Part Four, Chapter VII, where Prince Myshkin delivers his own speech, addressed to the noble guests gathered in the Epanchin home. During an evening party, Prince Myshkin causes a scandal by breaking a Chinese vase and suffering an epileptic fit in front of everyone; yet before losing consciousness, he affirms the importance of the old order:

> Do you think I'm a utopian? An ideologist? <…> You thought I was afraid for *them*, that I was their advocate, a democrat, a speaker for equality? <…> I'm afraid for you, for all of you, for all of us together. For I myself am a prince of ancient stock, and I am sitting with princes. It is to save us all that I speak, to keep our estate from vanishing for nothing, in the darkness, having realized nothing, squabbling over everything and losing everything. Why vanish and yield our place to others, when we can remain the vanguard and the elders. Let us be the vanguard, then we shall be the elders. Let us become servants, in order to be elders [Dostoevsky, 2002, pp. 552-553].

> Вы думаете, я утопист? Идеолог? <…> Вы думаете: я за *тех* боялся, их адвокат, демократ, равенства оратор? <…> Я боюсь за вас, за вас всех и за всех нас вместе. Я ведь сам князь исконный и с князьями сижу. Я чтобы спасти всех нас говорю, чтобы не исчезло сословие даром, в потемках, ни о чем не догадавшись, за все бранясь и все проиграв. Зачем исчезать и уступать другим место, когда можно остаться передовыми и старшими? Будем передовыми, так будем и старшими.

6 Here too Mme Epanchina displays her eccentricity. She first scolds Burdovsky and in his person his entire generation, but then shows compassion towards Ippolit, a sick young man who also calls her an eccentric [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 8, p. 239].

Станем слугами, чтоб быть старшинами [Dostoevsky, 1972-1990, vol. 8, p. 458].

Prince Myshkin's sudden outburst of patriotism is his only significant statement relating to political matters of the day. Yet, to use Nina Pelikan Straus's words, beyond these "biographically motivated impulses [lie] large literary-nationalistic ambitions" [Straus, 1998, p. 106]. For Dostoevsky, who neither lived nor wrote in a vacuum, only a thin and permeable line separated the invented existence of his fictional characters from present-day issues that directly concerned him and his readers. Obviously interested in spiritual matters, Dostoevsky nonetheless was aware of the ideological and political climate he was living in. Dostoevsky used newspaper accounts of the Masurin affair, the Umetsky case, and the murder of Zhemarin family as inspiration for the quotidian matters in *The Idiot*; he also responded to the ideological claims in Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is to Be Done?* It only stands to reason that the larger sociopolitical issues that were plaguing Russia were also on Dostoevsky's mind, and we find evidence of that in his correspondence. In a letter written on September 29, 1867, Dostoevsky observed that "a visible connection of all matters, common and individual, becomes stronger and more distinct" («видимая связь всех дел, общих и частных, становится все сильнее и явственнее» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 28_2, p. 222]). For many of Dostoevsky's compatriots the economic, the political, the social, and the educational reforms that were publicly discussed during this historical period were not an abstraction: the outcomes of these discussions affected their lives and elicited very personal responses [Polunov, 2005, pp. 51-68]. Without being a merely political novel and to the extent that a literary narrative has the capacity to do so, Dostoevsky's text reflects in a fictional and therefore, arguably, a somewhat exaggerated way the mood of Alexander II's Russia.

Consequences of Exile

The historical reality of Russia in the 1860s provides a valuable context for our understanding of Dostoevsky's work. He wrote *The Idiot* over the course of 1868, at the height of Russia's Great Reforms when, in the words of one historian, in a matter of thirteen years (between 1861 and 1874) "imperial reform acts freed Russia's serfs, restructured her courts, established institutions of local self-government in parts of the empire, altered the constraints that censorship imposed upon the press, and trans-

formed Russia's vast serf armed force into a citizen army" [Lincoln, 1990, p. xi]. Additionally, changes in the education system allowed women a limited access to professional education, and the legal status of illegitimate children was heavily debated [Engel'hardt, 2013, p. 181; Johanson, 1987, p. 42; Christian, 1994, pp. 102-103]. The participation in public discourse of both the intelligentsia and the people of various ranks (*raznochintsy*) also expanded in the 1860s [Wirtschafter, 1997, pp. 63, 90].

These reforms, directed at modernizing Russia's social, political, and economic structure, inadvertently shattered some of the old traditions. While modernity is often defined through the prism of specific historical events (the French and the American revolutions, for example) or socio-economic processes (urbanization, industrialization, or a transition from feudalism to capitalism), Wagner demonstrates that the essential element of modernity in a political sense is the tendency to conceptualize "the singular human being as the unit citizen," and to emphasize "the transformation of people from subjects of an autocracy into citizens of a polity" [Wagner, 2001, p. 60]." In the process of modernizing the state, Russia's subjects, similar to their European counterparts, were forced to start re-examining their old practices while also beginning to see themselves as individuals and citizens. This shattering of traditions, which leads an individual become "the predominant form of understanding the unit of membership in political collectivities" [Wagner, 2001, p. 60], can be traumatic for those living in a country where communal values are believed to constitute the very foundation of its culture [Lincoln, 1990, p. xi]. For this reason, the reforms directed at modernising Russia elicited two types of extreme response among its disaffected citizens: terrorism and emigration.

Acts of terrorism (or any illegal political activity in the Russian Empire) were often followed by forced exile to Siberia, only further exacerbating the sense of displacement. Dostoevsky only alludes to the topic of terrorism in *The Idiot*, but develops it more fully in his next novel, *The Demons* (1872). Nevertheless, as Claudia Verhoeven explains, terrorism is an important, albeit hardly inevitable, side effect of modernity: terrorism emerges when a citizen's desire "to act in accordance with its nature" is blocked [Verhoeven, 2009, pp. 7, 174]. While in the eyes of archconservative thinkers serious reforms were unnecessary and frankly anti-Russian, progressive groups hoped that the uneducated and oppressed masses would lead a revolt against autocracy. Because turning peasants against autocracy was a painfully difficult and slow process, "Russia's revolutionary youth turned from populism to terrorism," which resulted in an

attempt to assassinate Alexander II, carried out by Dmitry Karakozov in April, 1866 [Lincoln, 1990, p. 173][7]. Karakozov's explanation of his own motives was simple:

> I felt sad and distressed that… my beloved people was perishing, so I decided to annihilate the evil tzar and to die myself for my sweet people. If I succeed, I will die with the thought that my death brought benefit to my dear friend, the Russian peasant. But if I fail, then I still have faith that other people will come who will follow my path.

> Грустно, тяжко мне стало, что… погибает мой любимый народ, и вот я решил уничтожить царя-злодея и самому умереть за свой любезный народ. Удастся мне мой замысел – я умру с мыслью, что смертью своею принес пользу дорогому моему другу – русскому мужику. А не удастся, так все же я верую, что найдутся люди, которые пойдут по моему пути [Cited in: Bodunova, 2007, p. 21].

Karakozov's actions were on Dostoevsky's mind as he was working on *Crime and Punishment*, but this case also illustrates the intermingling of "public and private matters" that Dostoevsky observed in the fall of 1867[8]. Activists like Karakozov are prototypes of the nihilists against whom Mme Epanchina lashes out while visiting Prince Myshkin at Lebedev's. They also are the idealists that Prince Myshkin identifies in his speech when he invites Mme Epanchina's esteemed guests to "become servants, in order to be elders." For Dostoevsky, Karakozov's act of terrorism was clearly deplorable; yet he believed that the decrease in public freedoms which followed it could produce only further fragmentation and strife. In a letter written shortly after the failed regicide and addressed to Mikhail Katkov, the editor of *The Russian Herald*, Dostoevsky observed that the supposed rally 'round the flag, produced by the shocking event, was largely misunderstood and mishandled by the authorities: "with such a unification one could expect more trust towards the people and the society displayed by some people in the government. But instead, with fear we anticipate oppression of speech and thought. <…> And how can one fight nihilism

[7] For a discussion of the effect that this assassination attempt had on Dostoevsky, see [Verhoeven, 2009, pp. 85-103]. For Karakozov's response to *The Demons*, see Hersh Remenik's "Dostoevsky and der Nister" [Remenik, 1972, pp. 406-7].

[8] For a discussion of connections between Raskolnikov and Karakozov, see [Verhoeven, 2009, 85-103].

without the freedom of speech?" («при таком единении могло бы быть гораздо более доверия к народу и к обществу в некоторых правительственных лицах. А между тем со страхом ожидают теперь стеснения слова, мысли. <...> А как бороться с нигилизмом без свободы слова?» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 28.2, p. 155]). While nihilism and terrorism were to be condemned, reactionary policies would not help to improve the situation. History proved Dostoevsky right, when the unsuccessful assassination attempt of 1866 was followed by another, and in March 1881 Alexander II was killed, shortly after Dostoevsky's own death in January of that year.

At the time when some, like Karakozov, attempted to build an ideological "new world" right where they lived, others chose to emigrate. For many Europeans, emigration to America – the geographical New World – became especially appealing in the second half of the nineteenth century. Between 1860 and 1890, over one million of Russians emigrated primarily to Europe, with some also going to America [Obolenskii, 1928, p. 11][9]. As Russia's attempts at modernization undermined its own traditionalism, they also "fundamentally contradicted the tsar's right to decide who can leave or return to Russia," making the society increasingly disorganized and further prone to conflict.

Edward Said in his *Reflections on Exile* differentiates between "exiles" proper and "refugees, expatriates, and émigrés" [Said, 2000, p. 181]. Although any number of immediate factors can lead to emigration and determine an individual's legal status upon arrival, people in exile share some common traits. For Wagner, a key element is the feeling of a loss of security: an exile is a person who lost "the confidence of the availability of the world as it was" or of "ontological security" [Wagner, 2001, p. 103]. In effect, the person experiencing a state of exile loses the place "where one was born, where one was thrown into being, [where] the foundations have always already been in place," and where the circumstances "neither require nor permit radical doubt and questioning" [Wagner, 2001, p. 103]. Wagner identifies First World War and the Russian Revolution as major historical events that threw the world into a state of "shattered tradition"; yet the period of the Great Reforms also caused many to "leave the nation at the moment of actual nation-building" [Wagner, 2001, pp.

[9] Over a longer period, from 1828 to 1915, approximately 4.5 million people left Russia legally and peacefully [Akhiezer, 1999, p. 10]. This number does not include unregistered conflict-related and illegal migration to such places as Turkey, Persia, and Poland [Obolensky, 1928, p. 10].

96, 104; also Augusteijn, Storm, 2012]. Ultimately, exile is not a mere fact of relocation – it is a sense of a lost Eden, which often causes nostalgia and a palpable need for re-embedding into a culture of origin [Wagner, 2001, pp. 96, 104; Seidel, 1986][10]. As Said puts it,

> Nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages. Indeed, the interplay between nationalism and exile is like Hegel's dialectic of servant and master, opposites informing and constituting each other. All nationalisms in their early stages develop from a condition of estrangement [Said, 2000, p. 176].

Dostoevsky himself had a repeated emic experience of exile. For his political activity as a young man, he spent a decade in Siberia (1849–1859)[11]. Later in life, due to a lack of privacy and an excess of financial debt, he and his wife Anna Grigorievna left St. Petersburg for Europe, where they initially planned to stay for a year, but remained for over four years (1867–1871). The entire time abroad Dostoevsky hungered for news from Russia and treasured those of his Russian acquaintances for whom Russia had not become an unfortunate part of their past. In September 1867, as he was working out his plans for *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky wrote in a letter to his niece: "It is boring to live abroad, wherever you are" («Жить же за границей очень скучно, где бы то ни было» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 28_2, p. 222]). Yet he especially regretted the fate of those Russians who attempted to make Europe their new home: "they live here with their families, bring up their children, teach them not to speak Russian, and, most importantly, upon their return home, having spent everything they had, they dare to teach us instead of learning from us" («живут здесь семьями, детей воспитывают, по-русски отучают,

[10] Georg Lukács takes the notion of exile a step further, defining transcendental homelessness as "the homelessness of an action in the human order of social relations, the homelessness of a soul in the ideal order of a supra-personal system of values" [Lukács, 1971, pp. 61-62].

[11] In his letter from Omsk to Natalya Fonvizina (dated February 20, 1854), Dostoevsky writes: "I've thought on several occasions that if I ever return to my homeland, I will find more suffering than joy in my impressions. <...> it seems that, upon return home, any exile has to relive again, in his mind and in his memories, all of his past sorrows" («Я несколько раз думал, что если вернусь когда-нибудь на родину, то встречу в моих впечатлениях более страдания, чем отрады. <...> кажется, при возврате на родину всякому изгнаннику приходится переживать вновь, в сознании и воспоминании, все свое прошедшее горе» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 28_1, p. 176]).

а, главное, возвращаясь домой, прожив последние поскребки, еще думают нас же учить, а не у нас учиться» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 28_2, p. 224])[12]. Years later, reflecting on their experiences abroad, Anna Grigorievna remembered how difficult this separation from Russia was on her husband:

> Fyodor Mikhailovich often used to say that if we stay abroad, he will “perish,” he will no longer be able to write, that he will lack the material, that he feels that he is ceasing to remember and understand Russia and Russians, because the Dresden Russians, our acquaintances, in his opinion were not Russians, but voluntary émigrés, who did not love Russia and who left if for good. And that was true: all of them were members of noble families, who could not accept the abolition of serfdom and the altered life conditions, who abandoned their motherland in order to enjoy the Western European civilization. Those were for the most part the people who were angered by the new order of things and by the decrease in their welfare, and who supposed that their life would be easier in a foreign land.

> Федор Михайлович часто говорил, что если мы останемся за границей, то он “погиб,” что он не в состоянии больше писать, что у него нет материала, что он чувствует, как перестает помнить и понимать Россию и русских, так как дрезденские русские – наши знакомые, по его мнению, были не русские, а добровольные эмигранты, не любящие Россию и покинувшие ее навсегда. И это была правда: все это были члены дворянских семей, которые не могли примириться с отменою крепостного права и с изменившимися условиями жизни и бросившие родину, чтобы насладиться цивилизацией Западной

[12] Dostoevsky famously accused Ivan Turgenev of ignorance of Russian affairs in his letter to Maikov from August 16, 1867: “Turgenev, for example, along with else who hasn’t been to Russia in a long time, are completely ignorant of the facts (though they read newspapers). <...> Turgenev said that we must crawl before the Germans, that there is only one common and unavoidable road for everyone, which is civilization, and that all efforts to find a Russian way and independence are baseness and nonsense. <...> I advised him, for the sake of convenience, to order a telescope from Paris. ‘What for?’ he asked. ‘Russia is far away from here,’ I answered, ‘Point the telescope at Russia and stare at us; otherwise, truly, it’s hard to see” (“Тургенев, например (равно как и все, долго не бывшие в России), решительно фактов не знают (хотя и читают газеты). <...> Тургенев говорил, что мы должны ползать перед немцами, что есть одна общая всем дорога и неминуемая – это цивилизация и что все попытки русизма и самостоятельности – свинство и глупость. <...> Я посоветовал ему, для удобства, выписать из Парижа телескоп. – Для чего? – спросил он. – Отсюда далеко, – отвечал я; – Вы наведите на Россию телескоп и рассматривайте нас, а то, право, разглядеть трудно” [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 282, p. 211]).

> Европы. Это были большею частью люди, озлобленные новыми порядками и понижением своего благосостояния и полагавшие, что им будет легче жить на чужбине [Dostoevskaya, 1987, p. 217].

At the conclusion of *The Idiot*, Radomsky stands in for all such Russian émigrés in Europe[13]. His self-imposed exile is intentionally long, if not permanent. Radomsky's wealth and education are sufficient to make him comfortable anywhere; however, he calls himself "a completely superfluous man in Russia" [Dostoevsky, 2002, p. 613] («совершенно лишним человеком в России» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 8, p. 508]) and prefers to live outside of Russia.

Nostalgia and Nationalism

Unlike Radomsky, Mme Epanchina sees her journey to Europe as a regrettable necessity. While she travels to Europe in the hope of recovering from the aforementioned "shock," she begins to exhibit signs of nostalgia, which at the time was recognized as "a disease that occurred during extended absence from one's home" and was believed to be curable by a return home [Wagner, 2001, p. 90][14]. Although over time the emphasis in medical discourse has shifted from a geographical displacement to a temporal one, the distinction between the former and the latter was never very clear.

In the 1800s, nostalgia became "a first form of a critique of modernity" [Wagner, 2001, p. 93]. This longing for a place of origin and a happy time in the past lead to "the fear that modernity would leave people 'homeless,'" which in turn lead to nationalism [Wagner, 2001, p. 95]. As Wagner explains, "nostalgia refers to the movements of a human being across time-space, namely over a part of his or her life-course. The experience of the other space, for which one longs, is always past, and the absent space of home is simultaneously the absent time of the past" [Wagner, 2001, p. 90]. He argues that the very line of thinking expressed by the phrase "we Europeans" refers to "a collectivity that is incapacitated by its past experiences

[13] Strictly speaking, Radomsky is an "expatriate" in Said's classification, a person who "voluntarily [lives] in an alien county, usually for personal or social reasons," who shares "in the solitude and estrangement of exile" without suffering "under its rigid proscriptions" [Said, 2000, p. 181].

[14] Remembering her own experience, Anna Grigorievna Dostoevskaya describes how she became sick with nostalgia while living in Europe: "My longing gradually turned into a sickness, into nostalgia, and I imagined our future to be quite hopeless" («Тоска моя мало-помалу перешла в болезнь, в ностальгию, и наше будущее представлялось мне вполне безнадежным» [Dostoevskaya, 1987, p. 215]).

and the interpretations it holds of them" [Wagner, 2001, p. 94][15]. While nationalism can be perceived as a cure for nostalgia developed in exile, its effects are hardly verifiable. In this regard, Mme Epanchina's verdict about "all of us abroad [being] one big fantasy" puts under question the viability of the nationalist idea that it attempts to assert[16].

The novel touches upon nationalism in reference to yet another exile, Aglaya's husband, the émigré count, "who turned out was not even a count, and if he was actually an émigré, he had some obscure and ambiguous story" [Dostoevsky, 2002, p. 614] («Оказалось, что этот граф даже и не граф, а если и эмигрант действительно, то с какою-то темною и двусмысленною историей» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 8, p. 509]). Nameless, he is mentioned almost in passing, although he is the reason that has ultimately forced Mme Epanchina to undertake her extended trip to Europe after a quarrel with Aglaya: "He had captivated Aglaya with the extraordinary nobility of his soul, tormented by sufferings over his fatherland, and had captivated her to such an extent that, even before marrying him, she had become a member of some foreign committee for the restoration of Poland" [Dostoevsky, 2002, p. 614] («Пленил он Аглаю необычайным благородством своей истерзавшейся страданиями по отчизне души, и до того пленил, что та, еще до выхода замуж, стала членом какого-то заграничного комитета по восстановлению Польши» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 8, p. 509]).

While Mme Epanchina's nationalism is focused on Russia, Aglaya embraces her husband's Polish nationalist convictions. The important difference between the nationalism of Aglaya's mother on the one hand and of Aglaya's husband on the other lies in the religious dimension. Dostoevsky accepted the idea that each European nation could express a strong national feeling; however, the fact that the Catholic church had lost its faith in the true Christ undermined the validity of Polish nationalism or of any other kind of nationalism. Both the existence of various national ideas and Dostoevsky's recognition of them was in and of itself a sign of modernity. Yet paradoxically, his hope that the Russian idea would become

[15] For a more detailed analysis of European nationalism and regionalism, see [Augusteijn, Storm, 2012].

[16] The perceived connection between individual selves in Europe and in Russia is unequal. For Wagner, an "individual" is a singular human being, and "selfhood" is a persistence as the "same" self over time [Wagner, 2001, p. 60]. In Russia, as Yuri Corrigan explains, "there is no direct equivalent for the 'self.' <...> The absence of such a term has been attributed to Russia's unique history in which the concept of individualism emerged later, and with many more attendant difficulties, than in Europe" [Corrigan, 2017, pp. 11-12].

a synthesis of other national ideas coming out of Europe and bring them back to a unified existence is anti-modern.

Modernity constitutes the condition under which external changes affect a person's self-concept, leading to "the redefinition of values and norms" [Wagner, 2001, p. 103]. Regardless of its causes, exile sharpens one's sense of cultural identity. When a person's otherwise unnoticeable characteristics become more apparent in a new environment, his or her self-awareness increases [Gleason, 1983, pp. 910-931]. The disembedding effects of exile that invoke nostalgia are balanced out by nationalism; thus, nationalism, as Wagner understands it, is "a remedy against nostalgia in the form of a re-embedding" [Wagner, 2001, pp. 103-104]. For Mme Epanchina, a physical return to Russia for herself and her compatriots, and better yet an ideological return to Russia's past and to its traditional values, is a form of such re-embedding [Said, 2000, 176]. Her verdict is in effect an invitation from someone who is determined to return to the place of origin, issued to those who cannot or will not return. It is also an expression of what Wagner identifies as "the guiding orientation for social and political life" for people who long to feel "tied to each other by the commonality of the original experiences" in the wake of a massive emigration of the late 1800s [Wagner, 2001, p. 95].

The "good Russian cry" that Mme Epanchina has over an unresponsive Myshkin at the Swiss clinic suggests that he indeed has touched her life, as Dostoevsky intended. Her weeping "with all her heart" [Dostoevsky, 2002, p. 615] when she meets Radomsky in Switzerland is also induced by the "commonality of the original experiences" that she shares with her Russian compatriots abroad. It is this commonality that causes her to encourage people like Radomsky to return home [Wagner, 2001, p. 95]. Her nationalism, while directed against nihilism and chaos, is a reflection of the fact that, for her, while change is unpleasant in any form, radical and irreversible change is completely terrifying.

The three exiles gathered together at a Swiss clinic at the end of *The Idiot* – Prince Myshkin, Radomsky, and Mme Epanchina – represent three different kinds of exile: forced and permanent, voluntary and permanent, and voluntary and temporary. Prince Myshkin's exile is of the first kind. Twice his illness causes him to be removed from Russia and taken to Switzerland. This is supposedly done for his benefit, but because of his illness, he can neither protest nor support this action. Radomsky's exile is self-imposed, permanent, and probably the least traumatic of the three. Mme Epanchina's situation differs from both Radomsky's and Myshkin's.

She leaves Russia, but only temporarily. While she goes of her own free will, she uses every opportunity to express her displeasure at being outside of Russia. Her constant complaining about being abroad suggests that had she had the choice she would have stayed home in the first place. Yet she chooses to go to Switzerland, and while there, she cannot wait to return to Russia and encourages others to do likewise.

Mme Epanchina exemplifies an exile whose nostalgia causes a need for re-embedding and thus intensifies her nationalist feelings. The novel's finale suggests two different discursive trajectories. On the one hand, Prince Myshkin is shown at the end of his metaphorical journey: after a comparatively brief period of lucidity, he has returned to the place which he had left before the novel started. Some readers may argue that this hero's journey is a failure [see Levy, 1985]. Others may hope for a second, perhaps miraculous, recovery [see Stepanian, 2007, p. 114]. Either way, even if Myshkin has failed to save the one person he was trying to save (Nastasya Filippovna), Mme Epanchina's mission to save the whole nation is still underway. On the other hand, Radomsky is a character whose values are antithetical to Dostoevsky's Russian idea. As a former officer who retires from military service in order to visit his landed estates in Russia before putting into practice his wish to go abroad and stay there for "a very long time" [Dostoevsky, 2002, p. 254], Radomsky represents the literary type that will later be identified as a Russian wanderer, the type of a "historical Russian sufferer, whose appearance in our society, distanced from the common people, was caused by the inevitability of history" («исторического русского страдальца, столь исторически необходимо явившегося в оторванном от народа обществе нашем» [Dostoevsky, 1972–1990, vol. 26, p. 137]). Dostoevsky leaves his readers at a crossroads, but he also provides Mme Epanchina, who in her customarily direct manner does not shy away from didacticism. Rooted in her religious faith, her nationalism is meant to cure the maladies of all her contemporaries and compatriots. Dostoevsky's letters and his wife's memoirs convey a similar idea. Yet as Wagner shows, nationalism of any kind is a consequence of displacement and nostalgia, characteristic of modernity and curable by a return to a past place and a past time, none of which is possible.

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Статья поступила в редакцию 22.12.2020
Одобрена после рецензирования 21.01.2021
Принята к публикации 01.04.2021
Дата публикации: 25.06.2021

The article was submitted 22 Dec. 2020
Approved after reviewing 21 Jan. 2021
Accepted for publication 01 Apr. 2021
Date of publication: 25 Jun. 2021