The Prison Worlds of Dostoevskii, Tolstoi, and Chekhov

Dissertation

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By

Gregory Ormiston, M.A.

Graduate Program in Slavic and East European Languages and Cultures

The Ohio State University

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Dissertation Committee:

Alexander Burry, Advisor
Angela Brintlinger
Helena Goscilo
Abstract

It may be unsurprising that in nineteenth-century Russia, under a politically sensitive tsarist regime notorious for sending some of the country’s most famous writers into exile, prison became a conspicuous topic in literature. In the second half of the century, the works of three of Russia’s best realist authors - Fedor Dostoevskii, Lev Tolstoi, and Anton Chekhov – prominently featured prison, and even prisoners as heroes. Nevertheless, critical treatment of these prison-related works tends to isolate them to the context of each individual writer. This dissertation explores the carceral connections between these authors to see how prison, as a common theme, played a larger role in the development of nineteenth-century Russian literature than has previously been recognized.

My study focuses especially on how prison influences the creation of the three authors’ literary worlds. Specifically, through close reading and analysis of selected texts, I show how the realists use the time and space of prison to produce the themes and forms of their fiction. Thus prison becomes foundational in the works of Dostoevskii and Chekhov, and revelatory in Tolstoi’s late period. Theoretical support for this analysis comes mainly from Mikhail Bakhtin, whose notion of the “chronotope” aids in the investigation of prison-like settings, and Michel Foucault, who tracks the changing nature of prison and its increasing effect on society leading into the era of the Russian realists.
The works of Dostoevskii, Tolstoi, and Chekhov have common origins in the modern penal system Foucault describes, which shifts its focus from the crime to the criminal, and from the body to the soul. The Russian realists, I conclude, engaged with prison in a way that not only drove their own thematic and formal innovations, but also provided a framework for subsequent generations of Russian “prison writers.”
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Vita

2011---------------------------------------------B.A., Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies, Miami University

2013---------------------------------------------M.A., Slavic Literature, Film, and Cultural Studies, The Ohio State University

2011 to present-----------------------------------Graduate Teaching Associate, Department of Slavic and East European Languages and Cultures, The Ohio State University

Fields of Study

Major Field: Slavic and East European Languages and Cultures
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Introduction

Why did three of Russia’s greatest realist authors all turn to the topic of prison? Unfortunately, the general relationship between the writer and the penal system in Russia is not difficult to establish. The penal system was especially culturally significant in nineteenth-century Russia, as the Siberian exile system continued to expand along with its roster of famous inmates. Of the many political prisoners, the Decembrists were probably the most widely mythologized and admired by the writers of their century. Their unsuccessful revolt against Nicholas I in 1825, in which they demanded a constitutionally-bound government, resulted in the execution of five people and the exile of many others. The Decembrists had close ties to Russian literary circles (the poet Kondratii Ryleev was hanged), and included associates of Aleksandr Pushkin and Aleksandr Griboedov. Beyond the Decembrists, there were arrests, imprisonments, and exiles of writers in every generation, such as Aleksandr Radishchev (in the 1790s), Aleksandr Gertsen (1830s), Fedor Dostoevskii (1840s-1850s) and Nikolai Chernyshevskii (1860s-1880s), to name just a few. Others met stranger fates, such as Petr Chaadaev, who was declared insane and placed under house arrest in the 1830s for writings critical of Russia. Of course, the relationship between Russian writers and the penal system became tragically worse in the twentieth century.
However, of primary interest to the present study is the influence of prison on Dostoevskii, Tolstoi, and Chekhov. In particular, I explore how prison plays such a significant role in their works even more so than why. I then examine the individual writers within the larger context of the phenomenon of modern prison, arguing that the rise of Dostoevskii and Tolstoi, masters of the redemption narrative, coincided with the modern penal system’s shift in focus from the crime to the criminal, and from the body to the soul.

Dostoevskii’s *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov* consider the nature of criminals and sinners, as well as the world that creates them. *Resurrection, War and Peace*, and *Anna Karenina* all, at some point, see Tolstoi fixating on the moral corrective: How is the sinner to live? To find redemption? How can one “correct” oneself and even society? Chekhov, who decided to travel thousands of miles to a penal colony despite substantial risk to his health, was clearly fascinated by institutional punishment, though he did not take such an explicit moral stance in his fictional works. Ever concerned with issues of freedom, judgment, and punishment, all three of these Russian realists wrote in the context of the modern penal system that began to pervade Russian society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

**Theoretical Foundation and Methodology**

My historical and theoretical starting point is Michel Foucault, who tracks the changing nature of prison and its increasing effect on all of society leading into the era of the Russian realists. Like much of Western Europe, Russia witnessed a transformational
period in which punishment was modernized, systematized, and began to seep into everyday life and consciousness. Foucault proposes this paradigm in a largely Western context in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), but certain elements of his theory of discipline and punishment are also key for understanding Russian writers’ great concern with prison, which in turn contributed to the flourishing of Russian prose.

Of chief importance to my study is the change in the mode and visibility of punishment Foucault that describes. There is a shift in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from punishment-as-spectacle to a more decentralized, less noticeable form of discipline. Punishment becomes hidden, and discipline spreads throughout society, turning schools and workplaces, for example, into prison-like spaces. It was just this process of concealing discipline and punishment that offered the Russian realists, who had a penchant for exposing urgent social issues, an opportunity to uncover it.

In addition to Foucault, my analysis builds on the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin, whose concept of the literary chronotope raises the status of setting and enables much of the close reading of prison and prison-like spaces in this study. When the reader senses a difference in the time and space of scenes in, for example, an alleyway, a prison cell, a hospital, a public square, or the open Siberian steppe, the author is delivering this sensation through the literary chronotope. By employing Bakhtin’s ideas, I am able to better segment and categorize the way artificially constructed settings affect and interact with characters.

The chronotope thus provides a bridge between actual prison spaces and prison-like spaces. Settings can be analyzed for their effects. This is crucial for understanding
how Dostoevskii’s settings in novels such as *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov* stem from prison and *Notes from the Dead House*. Dostoevskii’s prison experience significantly influenced his mode of literary creation and his representation of the world.

These prison and prison-like spaces are not simply background. They are eminently consequential, and should be considered in light of what Georgy Lukács sees as “the totality of objects” in the works of realists. With Tolstoi in mind, Lukács explains,

> The epic presentation of the totality of life – unlike the dramatic – must inevitably include the presentation of the externals of life, the epic-poetic transformation of the most important objects making up some sphere of human life and most typical events necessarily occurring in such a sphere. Hegel calls this first postulate of epic presentation ‘the totality of objects’…The crucial difference between the genuine epics of the old realists and the disintegration of form in the declining newer literature is manifested in the way in which this ‘totality of objects’ is linked with the individual destinies of the characters. (78)

For Lukács, while Zola’s presentation of the “totality of objects” (his “markets, stock exchanges, underworld haunts, theaters, racetracks, etc.”) has “a being entirely independent of the fate of the characters” and “[forms] a mighty but indifferent background to human destinies with which they have no real connection,” Tolstoi’s “totality of objects,” for example, resembles epic presentation (78). Tolstoi, Lukács argues, is more like Homer, who only presents objects when needed, such as Achilles’ weapons right before his battle with Hector (79). Thus “the ‘totality of objects’ in Tolstoi always expresses, in immediate, spontaneous, and palpable form, the close bond between individual destinies and the surrounding world” (80). In this dissertation, I propose that carceral space should be viewed as a crucial part of Dostoevskii’s, Tolstoi’s, and
Chekhov’s “totality of objects,” and therefore as equally worthy of analysis alongside the characters.

Indeed, Dostoevskii’s prison world is a way of getting to the truth of life. His reader is forced to reexamine the everyday in terms of its capacity to imprison. In “Art as Technique,” Viktor Shklovskii famously outlines art’s role in “defamiliarizing” the world:

Habitualization devours work, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. “If the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been.” And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. (2)

Captivity is one of the main sensations that Dostoevskii’s works impart, particularly through setting. His most important characters are nearly always imprisoned or trapped, or end up that way. Whether through literal or metaphorical prison, Dostoevskii defamiliarizes the sense of freedom we would grant ourselves, portraying a world imprisoned. Is Raskol’nikov freer in St. Petersburg or in Siberia? Does Myshkin’s freedom to help others do any good for those trapped by the seemingly universal condition of degradation? Is there any escape from the curse of karamazovshchina?

Bolstered especially by the theories of Foucault and Bakhtin, my methodology will consist largely of close readings of selected texts. Each of the three chapters will center on a new interpretation of a major work from a perspective that highlights the role of prison in the evolution of the author’s writing.1 These works are: Dostoevskii’s The

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1 Of course, it should be noted that the three authors had different personal experiences with prison, which will be discussed further on in more detail: Dostoevskii’s Siberian imprisonment, Chekhov’s research on
Brothers Karamazov, Tolstoi’s Resurrection, and Chekhov’s The Island of Sakhalin. In order to maintain the focus of my study, I have tried to concentrate on descriptions of actual prisons in my selection of works by Tolstoi and Chekhov. For this reason, I have left aside works such as The Kreutzer Sonata and The Death of Ivan Il’ich despite the potential “imprisonment” of their main characters. Similarly, I have made only references to some of Chekhov’s many “prisoners” sentenced in places outside of actual prisons. After an examination of Sakhalin, I hope that it will become clearer to the reader of Chekhov just how prevalent prison is in his post-Sakhalin works. In the case of Dostoevskii, it is not sufficient to dwell on the original literary source in Notes from the Dead House, as the use of carceral space in his novels becomes subtler and more sophisticated in the end, reaching a creative peak in The Brothers Karamazov.

Overview of Primary and Critical Sources

Existing studies of prison in nineteenth-century Russia tend to be historical and/or criminological in focus, preferring official records and the personal accounts of political figures such as Aleksandr Gertsen and Mikhail Bakunin to fictional portrayals of imprisonment. Bruce Adams’ The Politics of Punishment: Prison Reform in Russia 1863-1917, for example, mentions Dostoevskii’s Dead House only twice, including once to distinguish literature from “knowledge.” In a debate in the Third Duma (1908) regarding judicial reforms, Adams explains,

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Sakhalin, and Tolstoi’s encounters with the penal system, which seemed to feed his feeling that society overall was held captive by the violence of its institutions.

2 I have chosen to abbreviate Notes from the Dead House as Dead House throughout my dissertation, largely for practical reasons.
some [of the Kadets (Constitutional Democrats)] displayed more enthusiasm than knowledge. Kadet A. F. Babianskii, for example, had rather quaint ideas about criminal offenders and prisons. Russian criminality, he was persuaded, was different from that of cold and calculating Europe; it was an impulsive and unpremeditated kind that needed little in the way of correction. Where other speakers cited native and foreign criminological and penological experts, Babianskii seems to have formed his impressions of prison from reading Dostoevskii’s *House of the Dead*, published in 1860, and Tolstoi’s *Resurrection*, which was at least more recent (1899). (177)

Despite his dismissiveness (for which there are legitimate reasons, of course), Adams’ anecdote points to the cultural impact of nineteenth-century prison literature, which for this member of the Duma goes back forty years to Dostoevskii and continues through contemporary Tolstoi.

In my dissertation, I examine prison as a literary and cultural phenomenon in Russia to which many writers and thinkers contributed, as the Babianskii example demonstrates. To my knowledge, while critics have uncovered many links between Soviet prison literature and nineteenth-century works, up to now there has been no study of nineteenth-century prison literature as a significant development in its own right. In my dissertation, I will try to show that the theme of prison was not treated in isolation by Dostoevskii, Tolstoi, and Chekhov, and that their prison works should not be viewed as something apart from their other novels and stories. Instead, I propose that the questions of prison (e.g. What does imprisonment mean for an individual? What does it mean to live in a society that systematically imprisons its people?) should be considered of central interest to nineteenth-century writers.

Literary scholarship on this subject has been limited chiefly to research on individual authors, but even there writers’ prison experiences are most often presented as
biographical, rather than literary, points: Dostoevskii underwent his “conversion” in Siberia; Chekhov took a miserable trip to Sakhalin Island, which was not only a strange decision, but also one detrimental to his health; Tolstoi at times desired the martyrdom offered by prison, but the authorities, fearing backlash, never dared to arrest him and instead persecuted his followers. While taking the biographical details into account, my study looks specifically at the literary representation of prison and the role it played for the three writers in their artistic works. In this way, I hope to provide a new perspective on both classic and lesser-studied works of Russian literature.

Although prison literature of the Soviet era falls outside the scope of this dissertation, in my conclusion I briefly analyze works by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Shalamov, who were not only voices of the Gulag, but also inheritors and renewers of an essential concern of the nineteenth century. This look toward the twentieth century in the conclusion is not intended to be a complete study by any means, but rather evidence that Dostoevskii, Tolstoi, and Chekhov laid a literary foundation for these later prison writers. Of course, due to the horrific scale of the Gulag, and the fact that it remains relatively fresh in the collective memory, these twentieth-century writers have been more strongly associated with prison literature in Russian culture and literary criticism than their predecessors.³

In researching Russian prisons in the nineteenth century from a largely literary, rather than historical or criminological, perspective, I have found the single most useful

³ Still, despite the great deal of attention paid to Gulag literature, Andrea Gullotta discusses the challenges to its recognition as a genre, including the extended time period it covers, as well as reader fatigue from the sudden overabundance of publications in the late 1980s.
and illuminating source on the subject, beyond the writings of the three spotlit authors, to be American explorer and journalist George Kennan’s *Siberia and the Exile System* (1891). Kennan spent years traveling Siberia and the Caucasus in the 1860s and 1870s, originally as an agent of a telegraph company. However, after he toured the Siberian outposts of the Russian penal system in 1885-1886, his writing on the country that so fascinated him took a political turn against the tsarist government. Kennan abhorred the overcrowded cells and scarcely breathable air of the prisons he visited, and skillfully conveyed his impressions in vivid descriptions. Furthermore, among the exiles he met revolutionaries who impressed him with their dedication and won him over with the nobility of their cause.

Both American and Russian audiences read Kennan’s accounts (first published serially, and then later collected into his 1891 book) with great interest. Indeed, they are a compelling mixture of journalism, travel writings, and essays on the history and politics of the Russian penal system. Significantly, Chekhov read Kennan before he went to Sakhalin, and Tolstoi both read and briefly hosted the American explorer at Iasnaia Poliana. Kennan’s influence is evident in the works of both writers. Just a month before the outset of his 1890 expedition to Sakhalin to view the infamous island penal colony (which is located north of Japan, off Russia’s Pacific coast) up close, Chekhov specifically insisted that his plans were not “Kennanian” (*Chekhov Letters* 158). Nevertheless, while the book that resulted from Chekhov’s trip generally lacks the political edge of Kennan’s reportage (*Chekhov was never allowed contact with political*
prisoners), it does expose the inhumane conditions suffered by the prisoners and the exiles in a similar manner.

If Chekhov resembles Kennan in deed, Tolstoi more closely echoes him as a writer. Nekhliudov’s tour of a stage prison (етапная тюрьма) on the road to Siberia in *Resurrection* reads like a passage from Kennan’s own account: the miserable prisoners packed on top of one another, filling every crevice of a filthy cell; the stinking bin in the corner; and a smell so overpowering and uniquely repulsive that one struggles even to breathe. Nekhliudov’s Kennan-like visit helps to bolster the urgency and worthiness of his fight to eliminate the institution of prison.

Intentionally or not, Kennan also reinforced and elaborated on certain aspects of prison that Dostoevskii had highlighted in *Dead House*. Tolstoi and Chekhov followed, joining in the collective creation of an idea of Russian prison based on first-hand experience and literary works alike. Prison, they showed, existed at an intersection of philosophy, art, and social issues. While non-fiction works like *Siberia and the Exile System* brought public attention to the facts of the Russian penal system, Dostoevskii, Tolstoi, and Chekhov drew prison into the cultural landscape.

**Overview of Chapters**

Of the three writers I have selected for analysis, modern prison most profoundly shapes Dostoevskii’s literary world. Up to now critics have insufficiently explored the role of prison in both the form and content of his art, having focused largely on the writer’s prison term (his “conversion”) as a biographical point. If Siberia was responsible
for Dostoevskii’s spiritual awakening, I would argue that it was no less impactful in his artistic resurgence.

Dostoevskii’s best works are the unique products of a worldview forever remade by imprisonment, from the space his characters inhabit to the air that they breathe. At work are both the facts of imprisonment and the prisoner’s impression of it, often applied to places that are not prisons, such as a monk’s cell, a rented room, a provincial town, or St. Petersburg. In “The Art of Fiction as a Theme in The Brothers Karamazov,” Victor Terras reminds us that the “reality” of Dostoevskii’s realism is as much derived from art as it is from fact. To use Terras’ terminology, in Chapter One I look at how prison enters Dostoevskii’s novels simultaneously as both “realistic detail” and “grand invention” (204).

In addition to Kennan and the theoretical underpinnings of Foucault and Bakhtin, my chapter on Dostoevskii builds on the critical analyses of Donald Fanger and Robert Belknap in particular. Using Fanger’s idea of the relationship between the “romantic realists” and the city, I will focus on the element of prison (via Foucault), which is key to the “unnatural settings” and “pressures” of Russian urban life in the nineteenth century. My study of The Brothers Karamazov also engages with Robert Belknap’s analysis of the structure of that novel.

While prison helped to shape Dostoevskii the artist, it stirred the moralist in Tolstoi. In the modern prison system the late Tolstoi identified a moral opponent to the potential brotherhood of mankind. Just as “Father Sergius” uncovers the worldly ambitions and desires of the monastery, Resurrection reveals the penal system to be built
upon illegitimate power and judgment passed by hypocrites. Still, while the late Tolstoi finds institutional justice utterly corrupt, his earlier works suggest that imprisonment can serve the cause of spiritual transformation. In Chapter Two, I trace the evolution of Tolstoi’s concept of prison and show how it can contribute to a better understanding of his work. The “Sage of Iasnaia Poliana,” as it turns out, is closer to the topic of the penal system than one might think.

In writing the chapter on Tolstoi, I found the work of Galina Galagan and E. N. Kupreianova to be most useful in developing a new perspective on the relationship of Tolstoi, Nekhliudov and Resurrection. Both Galagan and Kupreianova write about the suddenly limited role of internal change for the hero of Tolstoi’s last novel, which upsets the author’s plans as well as the novel’s structure.

In contrast with the critical and clearly demarcated views of Tolstoi, Chekhov in his approach to the topic of prison is ostensibly “objective” and journalistic. The writer recounted his experience on Sakhalin a few years after his return in The Island of Sakhalin (1893-1894), a work of nonfiction that, in my view, shows how prison provided substantial “raw material” for his fictional works. In additional to Sakhalin, in Chapter Three I analyze two pre-Sakhalin short stories (“A Malefactor” and “The Bet”), as well as three works written after Chekhov’s time on the island (“Gusev,” “In Exile,” and Ward No. 6). “The Bet” in particular considers the bleakest question of Chekhovian prison, which returns repeatedly in subsequent works: What does it mean to exist without, or outside of, life?
Since my study of Chekhov centers on *Sakhalin*, the scholarship of Juras Ryfa has helped to provide essential critical background. However, as Ryfa and many other critics of *Sakhalin* are above all concerned with issues of genre, much of their analysis is less directly related to my own. Rather than extend or build on certain critics, I have found several to be valuable in setting parameters and guiding my search of Chekhov the prison writer. Following the advice of A.P. Chudakov and Vladimir Kataev, I make no attempt to unify all of Chekhov’s works by one theme. In fact, I will show that Chekhov provides different perspectives on, and consequences of, prison and the idea of prison.

The reputation of Chekhov’s objective authorial voice withstands even this theme, which he is able to mine for artistic technique and philosophical insight while observing from an indeterminate position. Nevertheless, as I try to discern the meanings of Chekhov’s prison, two other critics also provide a useful framework: Lev Shestov, who claims that the Chekhovian hero is forced to create from a void, and Valentine Bill, who argues that this hero faces not a void, but an “agglomeration of obstacles.”
Chapter 1: Dostoevskii’s Prison Time and Space

The period of 1849 to 1854 marked a major turning point in Dostoevskii’s life. It was then that he was arrested in St. Petersburg as a member of the revolutionary Petrashevskii circle and brought before a firing squad. The execution was not carried out, however, as his sentence was reduced at the last minute to exile and hard labor. Dostoevskii spent the next four years in a Siberian labor camp before being released in 1854 to military service in exile. Though his reputation as writer was established prior to his arrest, most of his major works were published after his return to European Russia in 1859.

The overall goal of this chapter is to uncover how Dostoevskii’s imprisonment, and prison in general, influenced his subsequent works in terms of their literary creation. Starting with Dead House, but focusing largely on The Brothers Karamazov, I will look at prison as an important element in the making of Dostoevskii’s understudied settings. Critical discussions of Dostoevskii’s literary time and space have up to now failed to follow these essential components of his art back to their source in prison.

I believe the prison-like qualities of Dostoevskian space have been overlooked for two major reasons. First, critics have already provided the “answers” to his so-called
fantastic realism by way of literary influence. According to Donald Fanger, the idea of
the city especially struck the imaginations of the “romantic realists,” (Dostoevskii,
Nikolai Gogol’, Charles Dickens, and Honoré de Balzac), who

built their myths by returning to [the theme of the transformation of the great
modern city], by returning to it obsessively, in a variety of essays, from a variety
of angles, their obsessive concern being with the character of this new urban life,
with what happened to the traditional staples of human nature when placed in an
unnatural setting and subjected to pressures, many of them new in kind and all of
them new in degree…Technique and theme, in short, go hand in hand, and both
are directly connected with urban social history. (viii)

The literary frontier shifts from nature to the city. Fanger finds an explanation for what is
“Dostoevskian” at this intersection of romantic and realist elements. On a smaller scale,
the romantic realists’ fascination with the city turned toward “the notion that [an
individual’s] living quarters are nothing less than a symbolic revelation of an individual’s
inmost being” (Fanger 23). Fanger traces this inward turn - from nature to the city to
one’s own room – as a chiefly literary phenomenon, though he does reach outside
literature to include “urban social history.” Belknap, too, finds the primary source of
what is Dostoevskian to be a matter contained within literature and literary influence.

Still, while acknowledging the great influence on Dostoevskii of other writers
(Russian and Western), literary movements, the much-discussed cultural myth of St.
Petersburg, urban social history, and many other factors, one should not forget that it was

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4 Robert Belknap, for example, states: “These studies [such as Leonid Grossman’s on the connection
between Poe and Dostoevskii] show us the sources for many individual passages, but they also reveal the
source of much of what is most ‘Dostoevskian’: the exploration of the perverse, of abnormal mental states,
the enunciation of emotions more intense than those of ordinary folk – as well as doubles; hallucinations;
extraordinary holy figures… and a host of other elements that de Vogue and other Westerners have tended
through ignorance or a need for alien excellence to call archetypically and exotically Russian” (Genesis
31).
Dostoevskii alone among Fanger’s romantic realists who spent years outside of the city in the “unnatural setting” and “pressures” of prison before eventually returning to write his best works.  

In other words, prison heavily influenced Dostoevskii’s perception of urban space. As I analyze the prison underpinnings of Dostoevskii’s literary world, I will build on Fanger’s argument, bringing in the social history of prisons and punishment as theorized by Foucault and experienced by Dostoevskii. Dostoevskii’s works are “Dostoevskian,” I will argue, not only due to the writer’s specific combination of literary influences. Prison deeply affected Dostoevskii’s view of the world, and I will attempt to show how it also affected (and infected) both the form and content of his greatest novels.

The second reason prison has been omitted in the analysis of Dostoevskii’s form, in my opinion, is that the dominant biographical narrative of the writer’s Siberian period focuses on his spiritual transformation. While there is no disputing that the possibility of spiritual redemption is a major theme in Dostoevskii’s post-exile works, this account turns the writer’s time in Siberia into a step in his ideological “development.” This was Dostoevskii’s own narrative, and has perhaps been too easily accepted. The spiritual narrative oversimplifies Dostoevskii’s Siberian experience in at least one of two ways:  

5 While Dickens’ father served time in debtor’s prison in 1824, an event that affected his son greatly, Dostoevskii’s personal experience as a prisoner in a labor camp in Omsk, Siberia (1,300 miles from Moscow) was, of course, significantly different in duration and environment.  

6 Harriet Murav’s summary of Dostoevskii’s relationship with Siberia is a good example: “Dostoevskii’s writings on Siberia, which span over a decade, describe his passage from hell to heaven, from an unredeemed and alienated state of isolation to one of union with the people. For Dostoevskii, Siberia is not a part of a forward movement toward a new political ordering but part of a renunciation from revolutionary thought and the embrace of an idealized primitive state: the primitive state of the narod and of the author’s own childhood” (103).
either ignores his artistic development during this time, or it assumes that Dostoevskii’s art flows from his convictions, i.e. that his spiritual/ideological development was his artistic development.  

With the complex creation of a writer’s internal landscape in mind, I propose another layer to Dostoevskii’s prison experience, in which he was influenced both ideologically and artistically by the spaces and temporalities of prison, whether or not he was wholly aware of it. In Dostoevskii’s era, prison had begun to permeate modern society and the consciousness of individuals, and it became a key element in the structure and vitality of the former prisoner’s fiction. Finally, I should note that in this chapter, more so than in the others, I am defining literary prison chronotopes quite broadly to include both actual prisons and prison-like conditions. Therefore, in my analysis, I will jump between the prison texts and the prison-like texts in an attempt to draw a larger picture of how prison lies at the foundation of Dostoevskii’s art.

**Dostoevskii and Foucault**

In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault tracks a transformation of Western punishment from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. The spectacle of torture in the public square, Foucault argues, gives way to the permeation of discipline throughout society and the daily life of the individual, a shift from the “public execution to the time table” (7). As a result, punishment

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7 Murav also argues that “what is at stake in Dostoevskii’s reflections on his prison experience in Siberia is the author’s own internal landscape and not the external political order” (103). Certainly, Dostoevskii’s “internal landscape” was formed in part by Siberia, and the breadth suggested by this terminology is more suitable than a conversion narrative.
will tend to become the most hidden part of the penal process. This has several consequences: it leaves the domain of more or less everyday perception and enters that of abstract consciousness; its effectiveness is seen as resulting from its inevitability, not from its visible intensity; it is the certainty of being punished and not the horrifying spectacle of public punishment that must discourage crime; the exemplary mechanics of punishment changes its mechanisms. As a result, justice no longer takes public responsibility for the violence that is bound up with its practice. If it too strikes, if it too kills, it is not as a glorification of its strength, but as an element of itself that it is obliged to tolerate, that it finds difficult to account for...Now the scandal and the light are to be distributed differently; it is the conviction itself that marks the offender with the unequivocally negative sign: the publicity has shifted to the trial, and to the sentence; the execution itself is like an additional shame that justice is ashamed to impose on the condemned man; so it keeps its distance from the act, tending always to entrust it to others, under the seal of secrecy. (9)

The Russian Empire’s history with the Siberian exile system closely followed this model. Kennan traces Siberia’s designation as a place for Russia’s unwanted to the first half of the seventeenth century, shortly after the territory was brought into the Empire. At this time, the government still tortured prisoners first and then exiled them. Exile was not the official punishment, but a way of getting rid of undesirables. By the end of the seventeenth century, Russia had begun to view Siberia as a promising territory to populate and “therefore, we find a number of ukazes abolishing personal mutilation as a method of punishment, and substituting for it, and in a large number of cases even for the death penalty, the banishment of the criminal to Siberia with all his family” (Kennan, Siberia 23).

Gradually, the spectacle of punishment traced by Foucault in the West - torture, flogging, hanging, and so on – was phased out in Russia in favor of exile and/or hard labor in Siberia. Tsarina Elizaveta Petrovna abolished capital punishment in 1753.

8 In fact, Kennan notes that “the earliest mention of exile in Russian legislation is in a law of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich in 1648” (Siberia 22).
However, as flogging or execution on the public square became less frequent, the modern system of punishment began to overtake the spectacle in just the way Foucault describes. While the government could boast of its more humane policy, in reality the punishment was no less harsh – the authorities simply began to hide it, keeping it at a distance from public view. There is no telling how many people died on the road to Siberia, where they were subject to frequent outbreaks of disease and had very little in the way of food, shelter, or clothing.

At the end of the eighteenth century, “the exile system…was nothing but a chaos of disorder, in which accident and caprice played almost equally important parts” (Kennan, *Siberia* 25). Prisoners were misidentified and poorly tracked. They sometimes made bargains with each other and traded identities. Concurrently, authorities at all levels (down to the landowners and peasant communes) continued to exile individuals for an ever-expanding list of crimes, from the serious to the absurd.9

It is impossible not to notice how the systemized, yet often arbitrary application of law and punishment under the tsars prefigures Stalinism.10 For example, the discovery of Siberia’s natural resources in the eighteenth century demanded more labor in the mines. As a result, in the early nineteenth century, the government began to better organize punishment for the sake of expanding the Siberian work force. Stalin’s Gulag operated

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9 Kennan lists exile-worthy offenses such as “fortune-telling, prize-fighting, snuff-taking, driving with reins (a Western or European innovation – you’re supposed to ride the horse or run beside it), begging with a pretense of being in distress, and setting fire to property accidentally” (*Siberia* 23).

10 Nevertheless, Sarah J. Young notes that in the twentieth century, “most Gulag survivors [such as Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov] emphasize…the differences between the Soviet and tsarist penal systems,” which is to say that they believe the tsars’ exiles had it much easier (69).
on a similar principle of exploiting prison/slave labor, only on a larger scale and with the more advanced technology of the twentieth century.

In the shadow of Stalinism, it is easy to forget that the tsars had similar designs for policing the public that also led to mass incarceration. As Kennan explains,

On the 12th of March, 1882, the Minister of the Interior drew up, and the tsar approved, a set of rules for the better regulation of police surveillance and administrative exile [i.e. without trial]…It is entitled, ‘Rules Relating to Police Surveillance.’ The first thing that strikes the reader in a perusal of this document is the fact that it declares exile and police surveillance to be not punishments for crimes already committed, but measures of precaution to prevent the commission of crimes that evil-minded men may contemplate. The first section reads as follows: ‘Police surveillance,’ which includes administrative exile, ‘is a means of preventing crimes against the existing imperial order; and it is applicable to all persons who are prejudicial to public tranquility.’ (Siberia 85)

Kennan is outraged by the vague notion of being “prejudicial to public tranquility’ and warns against a kind of surveillance society where an increasingly large group of people has the power to exile a person for nearly any reason. Through factual and fictionalized accounts of prison in Russia, such as those written by Kennan and Dostoevskii, it is possible to see the history of modern punishment unfold into the twentieth century.

More important than the growth of the surveillance state during Dostoevskii’s era was the reality that punishment began to target the “soul,” or the “shadows lurking behind the case itself that are judged and punished” (Foucault 17). Foucault adds:

The question is no longer simply: ‘Has the act been established and is it punishable?’ But also: “What is this act, what is this act of violence or this murder? To what level or to what field of reality does it belong? Is it a phantasy, a psychotic reaction, a delusional episode, a perverse action? It is no longer simply: ‘Who committed it?’ But: ‘How can we assign the causal process that produced it? Where did it originate in the author himself? Instinct, unconscious, environment, heredity?’…. ‘What would be the best way of rehabilitating [the offender]?’ (19)
For Foucault, “a whole set of assessing, diagnostic, prognostic, normative judgments concerning the criminal…become lodged in the framework of penal judgment” in the early nineteenth century (19). The new alignment of punishment – to target the soul, to ask not just what was done, but why it was done – recalls the note in which Dostoevskii stated his grand artistic objective: “with full realism to find the man in man” («при полном реализме найти в человеке человека») (Strakhov 373). Dostoevskii and the nineteenth century’s “framework of penal judgment” had a common goal. Both searched for the origin of crime inside a person, wanting to see how that person thinks and behaves, and to discover how he or she may be redeemed. Considering this philosophical and psychological ambition (recall how important psychology is in *Crime and Punishment* for both Raskol’nikov and the investigator, Porfirii Petrovich), it is fitting that the influence of prison permeates Dostoevskii’s novels. In creating his fictional prison worlds, Dostoevskii incorporates both the immediacy of the prisoner’s torment and the more detached philosophizing of the judge.

Dostoevskii’s fictional prison world mimics the real prison world theorized by Foucault in that one can speak of a “soul” produced through the exercise of power on the imprisoned. Foucault writes:

Rather than seeing this soul as the reactivated remnants of an ideology, one would see it as the present correlative of a certain technology of power over the body. It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished – and, in a more general way, on those one supervises, trains and corrects, over madmen, children at home and at school, the colonized, over those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives. This is the historical reality of this soul, which, unlike the soul represented by Christian theology, is not born in

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sin and subject to punishment, but is born rather out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint. (29)

The soul is an element of the power-knowledge relationship for Foucault. In the soul “are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowledge, the machinery by which the power relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power” (Foucault 29).

Similar machinery operates in Foucault’s theory and in Dostoevskii’s fiction and, as a result, the “soul” is produced in both. The difference is that the two writers are focused on different ends of the power relationship between prison and prisoner. Foucault analyzes the machinery and power production while Dostoevskii is concerned with its effects, particularly the soul. Foucault writes the history of how the prison world came to be. Dostoevskii uses the machinery of the prison world as it was in his time to experiment with what it can do to a person, and to see how a person might live under different (usually extreme) circumstances. That Dostoevskii’s fictional world operates by the reality of Foucauldian machinery helps to explain why Dostoevskii’s results – the effects/souls he produces – are as diverse as the real world he emulates. He does not wrap his novels in monologic Christian morals because his world does not operate by Christian “machinery” (as do hagiographic tales, for example). In striving to recreate the reality of the world in his novels, Dostoevskii exerts the power of prison machinery on his characters, which produces the saint and the murderer, the downtrodden and the redeemed, and everything in between.
In his own life, Dostoevskii experienced the transition from medieval to modern punishment: the spectacle of punishment, its concealment, and its new grip on the “soul.” Subjected to a mock execution in a public square, Dostoevskii was greatly affected by the spectacle, an impression he passed on to The Idiot’s Prince Myshkin, who ponders the thoughts of a condemned man being led to the guillotine. Still, the torture inflicted upon Dostoevskii and the others was not bodily, as Foucault defines the former site of spectacular punishment, but rather psychological. The prisoners were left to spend their last minutes turning over the certainty of imminent death in their minds, only to be shocked by the tsar’s stay in the final moment (even if it was preordained). It is especially evident in The Idiot that the older mode of punishment - the spectacle – had a lasting influence on the author’s perception of time, and how time is felt and functions in his works.

After the mock execution, Dostoevskii spent four years at a hard labor prison camp in Omsk, Siberia, experiencing firsthand the regimented life of schedules and walls, restrictions of time and movement that Foucault sees spreading outside of the prison into society as a whole. Dostoevskii returned to a society in disciplinary transition toward this new model of systematized, hidden, and widespread punishment. While the medieval spectacle (of the mock execution, for example) speaks to Dostoevskii’s literary time, modern punishment brings about his unique concept and use of space. Carceral space becomes Dostoevskii’s primary source for the creation of literary space and atmosphere, as is originally seen in Dead House.
By *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevskii’s writing suggests that he perceives many of the most important stages and concepts of modern punishment that Foucault describes. The real prison world in some ways has shaped his thinking. The chronotopes and themes of *Crime and Punishment* reflect a society infected by prison. It has entered the “abstract consciousness,” as well as the spaces and moments, of people’s lives. Dostoevskii creates a modern prison world that oppresses and liberates without need of the spectacle of the tsar’s power. For Dostoevskii, as for Foucault, it is not the punisher who reigns, but the “certainty of punishment.”

One way in which Dostoevskii’s prison in the “abstract consciousness” resembles Foucault’s world of modern discipline and punishment is that it operates through the “micro-physics of power.”

Now, the study of this micro-physics presupposes that the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to ‘appropriation,’ but to dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess; that one should take as its model a perpetual battle rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory. In short this power is exercised rather than possessed. (Foucault 26)

Due to the influence of Bakhtin’s concept of the polyphonic novel, it is a critical custom to acknowledge the unusual freedom of Dostoevskii’s characters. The author and his characters are in dialogue on an equal plane, and a voice of dissent can be just as loud as Dostoevskii’s.

As true as this may be, Bakhtin’s observations about ideological freedom may have caused us to overlook how Dostoevskii actually does manipulate his characters. In fact, it seems that Dostoevskii gains a certain amount of control through the push and pull
of his prison-like settings. Not unlike the phenomenon of discipline Foucault describes, carceral spaces allow the author to “exercise power on the body” (i.e. on the character) while maintaining an illusion of freedom, an effect accomplished through the subtlety of “maneuvers,” “tactics,” a dynamic network of relations - the power exercised rather than possessed. In this way, Dostoevskii’s art reveals a Foucauldian world, where punishment is hidden and freedom is largely imagined, both in content and in form. Even Raskol’nikov’s story could be described as a journey from an illusory freedom (that he is permitted “extraordinary” transgressions) to the recognition of his real state of imprisonment. Dostoevskii exercises power over his characters in a Foucauldian “perpetual battle.”

**Critics on Dostoevskian Space**

Several prominent critics have discussed the significance of space in Dostoevskii’s works in depth. Jacques Catteau, for example, examines the theatricality of Dostoevskii’s space and his notorious scandal scenes. Robin Feuer Miller’s analysis of *The Brothers Karamazov* (1878-1880) details a “doubling” of setting. Of more direct use to the present chapter, however, are the ideas of Bakhtin and Belknap.

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11 Miller explains: “Rather than have one character ‘double’ another – a standard technique for which Dostoevskii is exceedingly well known – he has employed a more subtle kind of doubling: the setting doubles a philosophical theme. The back alley dominates Mitia’s confession geographically and morally; it is a feature of the narrator’s description and of the character’s worldview. Throughout the novel – and this is a feature of Dostoevskii’s art in general – these unexpected doublings continue to arise and are the source, when we notice them, of pleasure – of the discovery of harmony amid seeming disarray, or as Mitia puts it, of ‘precious metal in the dirt’” (*Worlds* 34).
Bakhtin contributes greatly to the study of literary setting and artifice with his concept of the chronotope (literary time and space). One example he gives is the function of the threshold in *Crime and Punishment*, which he sees as a chronotope of crisis essential to the novel. Bakhtin argues more generally that, through the literary chronotope, “time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible; the chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins” (*TDI* 250). He continues:

...For example, the threshold and related chronotopes - those of the staircase, the front hall and corridor, as well as the chronotopes of the street and square that extend those spaces into the open air - are the main places of action in [Dostoevskii’s] works, places where crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man. In this chronotope, time is essentially instantaneous; it is as if it has no duration and falls out of the normal course of biographical time. (*TDI* 248)

Bakhtin’s chronotope will be a chief instrument of my analysis, as it provides a foundation to look at carceral space and time apart from actual prisons. Thus it is possible to observe prison chronotopes pervading Dostoevskii’s works long after *Dead House*.

In another work of importance to my analysis, *The Structure of The Brothers Karamazov*, Belknap looks for the structure of the novel in the language of the characters – recurring words, descriptions, anecdotes, and so on. Belknap’s viewpoint differs from my own in that I am primarily interested in considering the novel’s structure through setting, time, and space rather than characters, relationships and dialogue. Nevertheless, our studies have similar goals and limitations. As Belknap states,

It would be absurd to attribute the impressions I have quoted wholly to structural techniques, but I hope to show some of the ways in which the novel’s structure
intensifies [its effects and themes]...as well as the passionate involvement felt by so many readers of *The Brothers Karamazov*. (21)

Using different approaches, we both seek the intensifying effect that is such a prominent feature of Dostoevskii’s works.

My analysis of Dostoevskian space provides an alternative, or at least a complementary, explanation for the famously extreme states of his characters. Indeed, what Belknap calls “intensifying,” and Fanger calls “heightening,” is all a matter of character and literary influence that largely overlooks the activity of the setting. Fanger does not tie the effect so much to the structure of dialogue and relationships, but rather to the individual aspects of characters. Dostoevskii’s heightening, for Fanger, means putting a character’s unique traits on display and enlarging them, a tendency he and others, such as Lukács, attribute especially to the influence of Balzac.

Having considered the possible literary influences on Dostoevskii’s characters of extremes, Fanger theorizes the technique of their creation: “If individual characters are depicted, each at the top of his bent, it follows that the works in which they meet will be dominated by the principle of contrast, from the inevitable shock of opposites” (17). Moreover, “if the character is heightened in part to emphasize the moment of the conflict, that conflict itself will naturally enough be presented with analogous emphases. To complement heightening of character, we find, then, a heightening of pace and situation, of drama” (18). The description is not entirely satisfying, especially the more it is

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12 In Fanger’s version, “that the [‘romantic realist’] novelist does his best to record the real world is assumed; but his recording is shaped by his vision of that world, and his vision is inevitably a function of his autobiography – as personal and inimitable” (15). This, he continues, points to “a practice affecting the rendition of characters and situations, which I shall call heightening” (15). Finally, “by heightening is meant intensification of the original datum (whatever it may be), a tendency to extremes” (16).
reduced to a simple duality. “We have a world of black and whites,” Fanger writes, “where the greys on examination turn out to be only subtler twinnings of the same basic threads” (18). Inside all of us, he insists, there is an “irrational mixture” of black and white (18).

Like Belknap, Fanger focuses too heavily on content and character at the expense of the key, and very active, component of setting. In particular, Dostoevskii’s prison-like spaces can actually account for the “principle of contrast,” the “shock of opposites,” and the “heightening of pace and situation, of drama,” as I will try to demonstrate further on with *The Brothers Karamazov*. The prison effect is especially pronounced at the scenic level of space and time. Before examining the implementation of these Dostoevskian literary mechanisms, it is worth considering their source in the prison of *Dead House*.

**Siberian Prison and the Origin of Dostoevskian Space**

Bakhtin writes that Dostoevskii “saw and conceived his world primarily in terms of space, not time,” though the two are always interrelated (*PDP* 28). Indeed, though time plays a significant role in Dostoevskii’s novels, space is structurally dominant, especially in the post-Siberia years. The roots of Dostoevskii’s spatial conceptions seem to have taken hold during his Siberian imprisonment and the writing of *Dead House*. The first paragraphs of Gorianchikov’s (the narrator’s) memoirs describe the spaces of the prison in significantly intricate detail, as if the space itself must be characterized before the reader can understand the nature of its inmates. This initial emphasis on space
continues throughout the novel. Even the “house” of the novel’s title emphasizes the space of its unfortunate inhabitants.

The chronotope comes into clear focus as Gorianchikov opens his prison notes:

Our prison stood at the edge of the fortress, right next to the ramparts. You would sometimes take a look at God’s world through the cracks in the fence: surely there must be something to be seen? – and all you would see would be a corner of sky and the high earthen ramparts, overgrown with weeds, and on the ramparts the sentries pacing up and down, day and night; and then you would think that whole years would go by, and you would still come to look through the cracks in the fence and would see the same ramparts, the same sentries and the same little corner of sky, not the sky that stood above the prison, but another, distant and free. (*Dead House* 27)

Space and time are not merely the setting for a story, but are players themselves, acting on Gorianchikov’s senses, as well as the reader’s. The chronotope links the character psychologically to the space and time of the novel. In some ways, it both accounts for and describes Gorianchikov’s state of mind. Images of spatial boundaries are frequently repeated in this passage, including the edge of the fortress, the ramparts, and the fence. Even the weeds and the sentries serve to reinforce boundaries. The physical boundary dictates Gorianchikov’s sight and access to “God’s world.” The psychological effects of the space are underscored by the way the fence frames the sky, which to Gorianchikov represents a kind of unreachable freedom. Thus both imprisonment (the boundaries) and freedom (the sky) are immediately defined by space.

At the same time, space does not account for all of Gorianchikov’s experience, even in this opening paragraph. Time is entangled with space. When one looks through the crack – a momentary action, even if occasionally repeated – one sees the sentries pacing “day and night.” The prisoner’s experience of time is placed adjacent to that of a
free sentry, and the former’s clock ticks much more slowly. Gorianchikov looks at the sentry and suddenly sees the days, nights, and years of a free person moving by. A moment in captivity appears frozen against the backdrop of an outside world in continual motion, leaving the prisoner behind. This feeling of artificially slowed time is an effect of the prison chronotope. As Bakhtin would say, this is time “thickening” and “taking on flesh.”

Elsewhere Gorianchikov’s comments even more directly reflect the prison chronotope:

At length a mustachioed NC opened the door for me into this strange house in which I was to spend so many years, to endure sensations of which I could not have had even an approximate conception, had I not experienced them in actuality. For example, I could never have conceived how terrible and agonizing it would be not once, not even for one minute of all the ten years of my imprisonment, to be alone. (30)

The space of the house is directly linked to time (years), which is then reframed as time spent in that space (years of never being alone). The narrator’s depiction of time and space bares the chronotope as it creates a feeling – here, a seemingly endless hell of other people.

Not all of the chronotopes in Dead House create such a negative atmosphere. The chronotope of the steppe next to the prison offers a sense of relief to Gorianchikov:

I speak of this river bank so often because it was only from there that one could see God’s world, the pure, clear distance, the free uninhabited steppes, the desolation of which had a strange effect on me…Everything here was beloved and enchanting to me: the brilliant, hot sun in the bottomless blue sky… One would scrutinize the distance for a long time and at last make out the poor, smoke-stained yurt of some nomad…The whole scene would be one of poverty and a primitive wilderness. (277)
A counterpoint to the confining prison chronotope of the opening paragraph, the space of the steppe opens up (the sky is no longer surrounded by boundaries, but is bottomless), and time seems to vanish. The image of the sweeping, desolate steppe contrasts with the crowded prison spaces, where there are thirty convicts sleeping together on a plank bed. The steppe’s only inhabitants, the nomads, characterize both the chronotope’s space in terms of freedom of movement, and its primitive time (or timelessness). This is Gorianchikov’s favorite place in *Dead House*, not just because of the space, but also because of the feeling that it gives through its interaction with time. Raskol’nikov has a similar experience with the chronotope of the steppe in *Crime and Punishment* when he is imprisoned in Siberia and yearning for a new beginning.

In Dostoevskii’s oeuvre, *Dead House* establishes the importance of spatial deprivation on his thinking. Along with the open Siberian steppe, there are other spaces in *Dead House* that serve as antecedents to the treatment of space in Dostoevskii’s later novels. For example, Gorianchikov “always found it hard to come into [the] barrack from outside,” as the inmates’ living space is a “long, low unventilated room…with a heavy suffocating smell” (*House* 29). Gorianchikov observes the difficulty of moving into enclosed, crowded spaces from the open air, a feeling that will eventually lead to *The Brothers Karamazov*’s pattern of “pressure” and “relief” spaces.

In *Dead House*, Dostoevskii also sets precedents for the small, prison-like space and community of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Gorianchikov writes about how “terrible and agonizing” it is never to be alone for ten years, but he is often ambivalent toward the communal existence of the prison space, which forces a diverse population of inmates
(Muslims, Jews, Ukrainians, Russians, Poles, and others) “to get along with one another” (54). He sees how in confinement people “grow to detest one another more readily than they do in freedom,” but at the same time he becomes personally attached to many of the convicts through the shared experience of suffering (325).

Finally, two scenes and their respective spaces in *Dead House* lay the foundation for *The Brothers Karamazov*’s intensifying pressure spaces. First, there is the bathhouse - a “hell” of twelve by twelve paces, with 80 to 100 men inside at once:

> On the whole floor area there was not a space the size of a man’s palm on which convicts were not sitting huddled, splashing themselves from their tubs. Others stood erect in their midst, and, holding their tubs in their hands, washed themselves standing up; the dirty water streamed off them straight onto the shaven heads of the men sitting below. (155)

The second critical scene for Dostoevskian space is the staging of the Christmas play. As the inmates pack the room for the performance, they become increasingly agitated to the point that they become part of the spectacle. The space and tension of this scene produces an effect similar to that of *The Brothers Karamazov*’s dramatic court scene, when the excited crowds energize the overflowing spaces of the courthouse. The scene in *Dead House* anticipates such madness:

> Finally, behind the benches there stood the convicts…wearing their jackets or sheepskin coats in spite of the stifling, vapor-laden atmosphere of the room. Needless to say, not enough space had been provided for all the convicts. It was not merely that some were literally sitting on top of others, especially in the back rows – the plank bed and the stage wings were also jammed with men…the crowding in the front half of the room was unbelievable… (190)

The feelings and atmospheres produced by *Dead House*’s carceral spaces (derived from Dostoevskii’s real life experience), from the walls, to the steppe, to the bathhouse and the space of the Christmas play, reappear continuously throughout his novels.
Dostoevskii was not the only writer to characterize Siberian prison as an oppressive mixture of crowded and breathless spaces. Kennan recounts a visit to a forwarding prison with an inordinate focus on space and air. He describes one cell as having “air space for 35, or at most 40 men,” but with an occupancy of 160 (Siberia 30-31). This is not an exception but actually reflects the common state of overcrowding in all of the cells, where everyone is forced to sleep in every possible space and position without pillows or bedclothes. Kennan refers to the quality of the air again and again. “There was practically no ventilation whatever, and the air was so poisoned and foul that I could hardly force myself to breathe it” (Siberia 31). Based on Dead House and later works, it seems that the air and space of prison made a similarly strong impression on Dostoevskii. Kennan’s journalistic account reinforces the reality of Dostoevskii’s spaces, which the novelist uses to artistic effect.

Over the course of Dostoevskii’s post-Siberia career, his usage of prison-like literary spaces evolves. In the earlier works, such as Crime and Punishment, Dostoevskian space primarily isolates, but by The Brothers Karamazov it serves to connect everything in accordance with Zosima’s “flowing and blending” ocean.

**The Stifling City of Crime and Punishment**

Outside of Dead House, Dostoevskii first develops literary prison spaces most notably in Crime and Punishment. They are employed, however, in a more rudimentary, less patterned, and less rhythmic way than he eventually will use them in The Brothers Karamazov. Crime and Punishment’s spaces characterize their inhabitants:
Raskol’nikov’s room is like a coffin; the downtrodden Marmeladovs live among rags and disorder; Sonia’s place is deformed by its strange angles but has a trinity of windows to the outside; Porfirii Petrovich’s office is partly closed off, where anything may be hiding; Svidrigailov’s apartment is situated between two empty apartments, reflecting his isolation and perhaps the deaths on his conscience. Of course, to characterize by setting is not Dostoevskii’s innovation – Gogol’, for instance, famously did so with the estates of the colorful landowners of Dead Souls, as did Pushkin with Eugene Onegin’s library. Fanger finds this technique to be typical of the “romantic realists,” who expressed “the notion that [an individual’s] living quarters are nothing less than a symbolic revelation of an individual’s inmost being” (23).

In Crime and Punishment, Dostoevskii is so attentive to some of his spaces that they reflect the arcs of the characters over the course of the novel. Raskol’nikov’s journey takes him from his coffin-like room to the “boundless, sunbathed steppe” of Siberia, where “there was freedom, there a different people lived, quite unlike those here, there time itself seemed to stop, as if the centuries of Abraham and his flocks had not passed” (549). He moves from the isolation of his cramped room and the corrupting effect of the city to the vastness of Siberia, which is characterized as a place of renewal and regeneration (the scenes in the novel occur in the spring, not long after Easter). In Siberia he is able to connect more fully with Sonia, and even some of the other prisoners.

The Marmeladovs’ spaces also signal their tragic fate. Every member, at one point or another, ends up “out on the street.” Marmeladov is crushed by a wagon on the street, Sonia is driven to prostitution, and Katerina Ivanovna and her children are evicted.
with nowhere to go, forced to beg and perform songs for passersby. In the end it seems that even the Marmeladovs’ dilapidated rooms had provided a degree of protection from the hostile city.

Once Svidrigailov arrives in the city from the provinces (as does Raskol’nikov), his arc, as reflected in his surroundings, is roughly the inverse of Raskol’nikov’s. With the exception of the beginning of his “career” as a cardsharp, when he was in St. Petersburg, Svidrigailov moves from a provincial setting surrounded by Marfa Petrovna and servants, back to an empty place in the city, and finally to utter isolation in a dark hotel room. This last space resembles Raskol’nikov’s own “closet,” and is even described in the same way. Raskol’nikov, by contrast, progresses from closet to steppe, and from isolation to community.

The spaces of *Crime and Punishment* not only speak about the characters, but also affect them over time. Raskol’nikov’s astonished mother is sure his room is “responsible for at least half of [his] depression” (196). She has an intense desire to leave this place but, once outside, finds her relief short-lived as “even in the streets it is like an unventilated room” (203). Unlike the more balanced atmosphere of Skotoprigon’evsk, which offers relief in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the St. Petersburg of *Crime and Punishment* is overwhelmingly characterized by harrowing, stifling spaces: the moneylender’s closed windows (despite the summer heat), the stuffiness and overwhelming smells of the police station, Raskol’nikov’s acknowledgment that “low ceilings and cramped rooms crush the mind and the spirit” (352), and Svidrigailov’s
insistence that “every man needs air, air, air!...more than anything!” (371), which Porfiri Petrovich echoes.

While these remarks have additional layers of meaning for Raskol’nikov, Dostoevskii’s spaces are not necessarily character-centric. The perception of harrowing, suffocating, or relieving space is not limited to Raskol’nikov’s point of view. Everyone in the novel experiences these environmental effects and, as a result, Dostoevskii’s creation appears as a whole world of prison-like spaces that exists independently from Raskol’nikov’s state of mind. As these spaces produce a certain atmosphere and influence the characters, they also help to move the plot, often toward collision points. In this sense Dostoevskii’s spaces are deceptive, giving the reader an impression of verisimilitude while simultaneously serving the creative interests of the author.

The function and distinct artfulness of Dostoevskii’s multifaceted settings may be demonstrated by a comparison of his works in different media. Director Dmitrii Svetozarov’s 2007 version of Crime and Punishment, serialized for television, is a seemingly faithful adaptation of the novel, including the portrayal of Raskol’nikov’s surroundings. His room, building, and neighborhood are dreary and rundown. The poverty of the people is evident in nearly every scene. Svetozarov’s interpretation of Dostoevskii’s city emphasizes nineteenth-century “realism” in both its mimesis and its focus on the once-overlooked world of poor and ordinary people.

As accurate and well intentioned as it may seem, much of Svetozarov’s Crime and Punishment feels flat in comparison with the novel. It is missing a level of excitement, tension and urgency. Of course, it is unreasonable to expect a filmed
adaptation to completely replicate a novel, but in the case of *Crime and Punishment*, the absence of Dostoevskii’s artificial, prison-like space is conspicuous.

A close reading of the scandalous scene at Marmeladov’s funeral meal, I hope, will illustrate the gap between novel and film. The funeral scene begins in Part Five, Chapter II, but the narrator actually describes the space of the Marmeladovs’ apartment much earlier, when Raskol’nikov first visits in Part One, Chapter II.

At the head of the stairs, at the very top, a small, soot-blackened door stood open. A candle-end lighted the poorest of rooms, about ten paces long; the whole of it could be seen from the entryway. Everything was scattered about and in disorder, all sorts of children’s rags especially. A torn sheet hung across the back corner. Behind it was probably a bed. The only contents of the room itself were two chairs and an oilcloth sofa, very ragged, before which stood an old pine kitchen table, unpainted and uncovered. At the edge of the table stood an iron candlestick with the butt of a tallow candle burning down in it. The door to the further rooms, or hutches, into which Amalia Lippewechsel’s apartment had been divided, was ajar. Behind it there was noise and shouting. Guffawing. Card-playing and tea-drinking seemed to be going on. Occasionally the most unceremonious words would fly out. (1, II)

Маленькая закоптелая дверь в конце лестницы, на самом верху, была отворена. Огарок освещал беднейшую комнату шагов в десять длиной; всю ее было видно из сеней. Всё было разбросано и в беспорядке, в особенности разное детское тряпье. Через задний угол была протянута дырявая простыня. За нею, вероятно, помещалась кровать. В самой же комнате было всего только два стула и клеенчатый очень ободранный диван, перед которым стоял старый кухонный сосновый стол, накрошенный и ничем не покрытый. На краю стола стоял догоравший сальный огарок в железном подсвечнике. Выходило, что Мармеладов помещался в особой комнате, а не в углу, но комната его была проходная. Дверь в дальнейшие помещения или клетки, на которые разбивалась квартира Амалии Липпевехзель, была приотворена. Там было шумно и крикливко. Хохотали. Кажется, играли в карты и пили чай. Вылетали иногда слова самые нецеремонные.

This description establishes the facts of the Marmeladovs’ home. It is dark, only ten paces long, and scarcely furnished. What is most striking is the Marmeladovs’ dire poverty, evident in the ragged clothing and bare table.
In the funeral meal scene in Svetozarov’s film, the viewer can see that the factual accuracy of the Marmeladovs’ space has been diligently reconstructed on screen. In the first shot, Katerina Ivanovna and Alena Ivanovna are talking next to a long table set for the meal (Episode 6, 24:28). We see the 10-step long view of the room, which indeed, is wholly visible from the entrance. The walls are dirty and beige, unadorned except by a clothesline with hanging rags.

In the novel, toward the end of this descriptive passage, the reader starts to get a sense of what the space feels like beyond the facts of its appearance. The other tenants pass through the room. In effect, this shrinks the size of the room. The implication is that the room is more like a hallway, and that people are coming through, intruding on the family’s space. The unwanted noises from behind the door constitute another intrusion, another sensation from which one wants to pull away, and thus it feels as if the room grows smaller again. In his analysis of the novel’s funeral meal scene, Fanger sees a “grotesque inversion” of the comic device of the public scandal (235). For Fanger, the narrator’s comic details, “by their oppressive accumulation…establish the tonality of the scene,” which among death and madness becomes tragic (236).

Redirecting Fanger’s idea, I would argue that the “oppressive accumulation” of details affects not only the tone of the scene, but also the space. In fact, it is not just the details themselves, but the sensations or feelings they trigger in the reader and in the characters that continuously define and redefine the space throughout the passage. The scene takes place during Part Five, Chapters II and III of the novel, over the course of which the narrator repeatedly implies the smallness of the space in various ways. This
technique has a much stronger and more oppressive effect than the earlier chapter, in which he more simply “set the scene.” Here the space comes to life. It no longer merely reflects the characters (for example, how the bare table signifies the Marmeladovs’ poverty), but now also interacts with them. The narrator describes the food and how the guests gather in Katerina Ivanovna’s home:

In short, the only ones who came were: the little Pole; a miserable runt of a clerk, mute, covered with blackheads, in a greasy frock coat, and with a disgusting smell; and then a deaf and almost completely blind old man, who had once worked in some post office and whom someone from time immemorial and for unknown reasons had been keeping at Amalia Ivanovna’s. There was also a drunken retired lieutenant, actually a supply officer, who had a most indecent loud laugh, and, ‘just imagine,’ was not wearing a waistcoat! One of them sat right down at the table without so much as a bow to Katerina Ivanovna, and finally one personage, for lack of clothes, appeared in his dressing gown, but this was already an impossible degree of indecency, and, through the efforts of Amalia Ivanovna and the little Pole, he was successfully removed. The little Pole, however, brought along two other little Poles, who had never even lived at Amalia Ivanovna’s, and whom no one had seen in the house before. Katerina Ivanovna found all this quite unpleasantly annoying. ‘Whom were all these preparations made for, then?’ To gain space, the children were not even put at the table, which took up the whole room anyway, but had to eat in the back corner on a trunk, the two little ones sitting on a bench, while Polechka, being a big girl, looked after them, fed them, and wiped their little noses ‘as is proper for noble children.’…Finally they all sat down. (5, II)

Одним словом, явились только: полячок, потом один плугавенький канцелярист без речей, в засаленном фраке, в угрях и с противным запахом; потом еще один глухой и почти совсем слепой старичок, когда-то служивший в каком-то почтамте и которого кто-то, с незапамятных времен и неизвестно для чего, содержал у Амалии Ивановны. Явился тоже один пьяный отставной поручик, в сущности провиантский чиновник, с самым неприличным и громким хохотом и, "представьте себе", без жилета! Один какой-то сел прямо за стол, даже не поклонившись Катерине Ивановне, и, наконец, одна личность, за неимением платы, явилась было в халате, но уж это было до такой степени неприлично, что стараниями Амалии Ивановны и полячка успели-таки его вывести. Полячок, впрочем, привел с собою еще каких-то двух других полячков, которые вовсе никогда и не жили у Амалии Ивановны и которых никто до сих пор в нумерах не видел. Всё это чрезвычайно неприятно раздражило Катерину Ивановну. "Для кого же после
этого делались все приготовления?" Даже детей, чтобы выгадать место, посадили не за стол, и без того занявший всю комнату, а накрыли им в заднем углу на сундуке, причем обеих маленьких усадили на скамейку, а Полечка, как большая, должна была за ними присматривать, кормить их и утирать им, "как благородным детям", носики… Наконец уселись.

To trace the “oppressive accumulation” of details over the course of Chapters II and III is to locate the otherwise intangible sense of pressure with which Dostoevskii mounts an explosive scandal scene.

First, there is a much more extensive use of the same effect that creates the feeling of the Marmeladovs’ space at the end of the description in Part One. The details repel the reader (i.e. give the reader a sensation of being driven back), who already feels trapped inside this prison-like space with the other characters. Dostoevskii’s space permits no escape, and yet continuously repels the reader in one direction or another, thus producing the oppressive pressure that both the reader and the characters feel.

It should be noted how many times the reader, who is confined as a witness in the Marmeladovs’ tiny room, is pushed back by the details as Dostoevskii fills (and overfills) the space. The clerk’s face is covered in acne; he has a greasy coat and a disgusting smell. The reader draws back. The drunken lieutenant has an unpleasant and loud laugh. Again, the reader wants to step back. The party is full of indecently dressed, obnoxious drunks, who are effectively sitting next to, if not running into, the reader. Right behind the table there are children who need to have their noses wiped.

Individually, the details may be inconsequential or unthreatening, but the cumulative effect is that the space becomes more and more oppressive. The smallness of the space has physical limits, of course. At the same time, the number of repellent details
the author may use to evoke the feeling of being driven into a progressively smaller space is essentially limitless. The effect comes from the prison spaces of *Dead House* (and Dostoevskii’s real life), in which confined physical space has the ability to constrict the mind infinitely. In this space the walls close in, tension builds over time, nerves become raw, and disaster seems inevitable. Thus the Marmeladovs’ prison-like room is physically small to a certain point and yet can feel small to an infinite measure.

Other details crowd the Marmeladovs’ space, which the reader already knows to be too small to accommodate one family suitably, let alone an entire party of people. The “little Pole” brings along two other “little Poles.” Marked as unexpected and superfluous, they further crowd in the reader and the other characters. The table fills the entire room, and yet the children are somehow squeezed in with a trunk and a bench. The details prime the scene for its scandalous eruption in a gradual way that is almost invisible to the reader, who simply feels the tension of the scene, without knowing exactly why. Dostoevskii first creates the space, and then continuously redefines the boundaries by pushing up against the reader with intrusive details.

In the funeral meal scene, Dostoevskii does this in not one paragraph, but throughout Chapters II and III. In addition to the list above, Katerina Ivanovna occasionally interrupts everything with a tormenting and bloody cough (repelling the reader); Kolia swings his feet when there is no space (crowding); Luzhin enters, causing Raskol’nikov to “step[] aside to let him pass” (crowding), the two noble ladies peek in the doorway (crowding), Katerina Ivanovna throws money at Luzhin, hitting him in the eye (repelling), Lebeziatnikov enters the room (crowding), a glass is thrown at Luzhin
and Amalia Ivanovna (repelling), and Amalia Ivanovna starts throwing everything on to the floor (repelling) (5, III). All the while, there is no escape from the tiny space of the Marmeladovs’ room, and the pressure builds.

In addition to the repelling and crowding effects, two other significant narrative phenomena contribute to the pressure of the space: (1) the grouping of individuals into a collective “all,” and (2) an observable breathlessness. As Luzhin’s spontaneous trial of Sonia plays out, the narrative merges the observers, who were previously individualized with comic detail, into a single public entity that responds to the unfolding drama.

Accused of stealing Luzhin’s money, “Sonia looked around. They were all staring at her with such terrible, stern, mocking, hateful faces” («Соня осмотрелась кругом. Все глядели на нее с такими ужасными, строгими, насмешливыми, ненавистными лицами») (5, III). The effect of the narrator’s use of the collective “all” (все) is to surround the main characters, and the reader, with a hostile force encroaching upon their space. This further increases the pressure of the space. When Luzhin makes a persuasive point, it is not just one drunken lieutenant who says something obnoxious. Instead, “loud talk suddenly arose on all sides. Everyone stirred” («Со всех сторон поднялся вдруг громкий говор. Все зашевелились») (5, III). When the hundred-ruble note flies out of Sonia’s pocket, “Everyone saw it; many cried out” («Это все видели; многие вскрикнули») (5, III).

Sonia is surrounded. The space of the room has been reduced in effect to the space of one person. Everything is against pushing against her, “exclamations came flying from all sides” («со всех сторон полетели восклицания») (5, III). Katerina
Ivanovna embraces her, “as if wishing to shield her from everyone with her own breast”
(«как будто грудью желая защитить ее ото всех») (5, III).

The phrase “from all sides” («со всех сторон») is used again and again, especially in Chapter III, as the space closes in: “Various exclamations began coming from all sides, mostly indicating surprise, but some of the exclamations also took on a menacing tone. Everyone pressed towards Petr Petrovich” («Со всех сторон стали раздаваться разнообразные восклицания, всего больше означавшие удивление; но послышались восклицания, принимавшие и грозный тон. Все затеснились к Петру Петровичу») (5, III). As the scene begins to turn badly for Luzhin (Petr Petrovich), “murmuring was heard on all sides” («послышался со всех сторон ропот») and “people came and gathered from all the rooms” («сошлись и собрались изо всех комнат») (5, III).

Considering that the room is only ten steps long, like a hallway, and already taken up by a big table, it is unlikely that Luzhin, Sonia, and Katerina Ivanovna could all be physically trapped in the middle of this space, feeling the immense pressure from “all sides,” but Dostoevskii makes it seem this way. It is as though the oppressive effect of the space expands outward to “all sides” to press inward with greater force as the physical space seems to shrink. As Luzhin finally tries to make his escape, the observers of the hasty trial have become a “crowd” or “throng” he must push through: “Excuse me, gentlemen, excuse me; don’t crowd, let me pass!” he said, making his way through the throng” («Позвольте, господа, позвольте; не теснитесь, дайте пройти! -- говорил он, пробираясь сквозь толпу») (5, III). Thus Dostoevskii uses the collective “all” as an
instrument to intensify the space, surrounding his readers and characters, and locking them up together in a prison cell of a scene.

Though the idea of breathlessness is not used in *Crime and Punishment* to the extent it will be in *The Brothers Karamazov*, it is worth noting how it accompanies the funeral meal scene. At different times near the denouement of the scene, when the spatial pressure is greatest, both Lebeziatnikov and Katerina Ivanovna are described as breathless. “Lebeziatnikov was almost breathless” («Лебезятников чуть не задыхался») and “Katerina Ivanovna was breathing hoarsely and with difficulty” («Катерина Ивановна трудно и хрипло дышала») (5, III). Air, and especially a lack of air, will continue to play an important role in the characterization of Dostoevskian space. Here, admittedly, one could account for the breathlessness of the two characters in other ways. For example, Katerina Ivanovna is consumptive and Lebeziatnikov has just given an impassioned speech. Nevertheless, in this scene there is also the sense that there are too many bodies in this space, too much pressure, and one simply cannot breathe. Alesha Karamazov’s experiences in Skotoprigon’evsk will echo this early version of breathlessness in carceral space.

With this close reading of the funeral meal scene, I have tried to illuminate some of the intricacies of Dostoevskii’s literary space and to show how complex it really is. Dostoevskii’s settings are more artificial than they first seem. Most often, they do not draw attention to themselves so much as they affect the characters and drive the action. Nonetheless, without Dostoevskii’s skill in creating space for chaos, his scenes would be far less potent.
Svetozarov’s film is a good case in point. In the film, after the space of the Marmeladovs’ room is established, Amalia Ivanovna and Katerina Ivanovna are finishing up preparations when the latter calmly tells Sonia not to forget to wipe the children’s noses and to give Polia a handkerchief. This moment has almost no impact whatsoever on the space of the scene. It only shows that Katerina Ivanovna is concerned with keeping a presentable household and that she has a lot on her mind. In the novel, the detail about the children’s noses comes at the very end of a paragraph in which Dostoevskii fills up the space with tension through a succession of repellent and oppressive details. In the film, the detail characterizes Katerina Ivanovna. In the novel, it does this as well, but at the same time it helps to redefine the space and create a tenser atmosphere. The Marmeladovs’ room is just the backdrop for a dramatic (and comic) scene in Svetozarov’s film, whereas in the novel the room takes part in the event.

After the dinner commences in the film, the guests behave poorly, Katerina loses her patience, and Luzhin enters to cause a scandal. It is the same chain of events that Dostoevskii writes, but the space in the film remains static throughout, and the scene is less powerful and engaging. Dostoevskii’s novel excels at creating a feeling of tension and impending disaster, while Svetozarov’s film is much more bound by the physical limitations of the space. There is a balance struck by Dostoevskii’s “fantastic realism,” in which the author’s artificial space plays a major role. As Konstantin Mochulsky notes, *Crime and Punishment*’s reality is “real because it discloses the very essence of being, but it is not realistic because it does not reproduce our reality” (Miller *Critical 90*).
Dostoevskii himself writes, “I am only a realist in a higher sense, i.e., I depict all the depths of the human soul” (Strakhov 215).

The importance of Katerina Ivanovna’s space is not that it reflects her poverty, but that it actually compounds her humiliation and indignation about her poverty. Thus with help from the prison-like space Dostoevskii reveals her “soul” through the “higher sense” of realism. According to Dostoevskii, what is important “is not in the object, but in the eye; if you have an eye, the object will be found; if you don’t have an eye, if you are blind – you won’t find anything in the object” (Balukhatyi 198). Svetozarov’s film lacks Dostoevskii’s “eye” for space, and it produces realism rather than “realism in a higher sense.”

Dostoevskii manipulates space throughout Crime and Punishment. Only in the end does he offer Raskol’nikov relief in the relative peace and fresh air of Siberia, evoking Gorianchikov’s walks along the fence of the prison grounds in Dead House. The elements of spatial “pressure” and “relief” that will be seen in The Brothers Karamazov are present in Crime and Punishment, but pressure spaces dominate.

**The Pressure-Relief Pattern of Space in The Brothers Karamazov**

The Brothers Karamazov sees the evolution of Dostoevskii’s prison-like spaces, which had remained largely unchanged since Crime and Punishment. With a gap of more than twenty years between Dostoevskii’s imprisonment and the writing of The Brothers Karamazov, it is reasonable to question whether his term in Siberia could really have had such an impact on his final novel, but even the main plotline bears this
influence. It is well known that Dostoevskii based Dmitrii Karamazov in part on a fellow prisoner named Il’inskii, who had been convicted of parricide. Il’inskii, who, incidentally, was not actually guilty of the crime, is also described in Dead House. It is therefore probable that at the time he was working on major aspects of The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevskii was thinking about prison, Siberia, and Dead House.

The structural scheme I present for The Brothers Karamazov differs from the findings of Robert Belknap’s analysis, which focuses on dialogue and the relationships between characters. For example, Belknap lists all of Ivan’s anecdotes in the chapter “Mutiny,” observing that any one of these nine stories [of child abuse and suffering] would shock readers, however it might be presented, but the bombardment with all of them, within a few pages, inflicts Ivan’s mood upon the reader, preparing him for the Legend [of the Grand Inquisitor] in the next chapter. Here the sequential structure is inseparable from the structure of inherent relationships, and the affinity of anecdote to anecdote works with the proximity of anecdote to anecdote, presenting an overarching element directly to the reader, tampering with his understanding without the intervention of his formulating consciousness (Structure 56)

In other words, for Belknap, here the structure and intensifying effect are found in the rhythm and content of Ivan’s anecdotes. The characters color the space and affect the reader.
I would argue for the greater importance of setting and especially space - its physical and psychological effects - in the novel, which better address one of the main problems Belknap sets forth: “Critics occasionally discuss the motion or rhythm of events in The Brothers Karamazov, but I know of none who satisfactorily trace these matters to the text of the novel itself” (*Structure* 54).

In my view, both Belknap and Edward Wasiolek (whom he cites\(^{13}\)) err in trying to tie a certain space to a certain character, as if one is an unchanging reflection of the other. Dostoevskii’s space works in a more complex manner. For example, whether or not Alesha’s monastery is far away from Fedor Pavlovich has little to do with the purity of his character. In fact, he hardly lives in the monastery during the time of the novel, but instead regularly moves in and out of other spaces. *The Brothers Karamazov*’s spaces can be viewed as set pieces, but in the bigger picture they comprise a current that moves beneath the plot. Space flows into space, interacting with the characters while never being possessed by them.

In place of Belknap’s character-driven structure, I propose a structural model based on the setting of *The Brothers Karamazov*, with two major layers. The first is the inescapable, prison-like provincial town. The town entraps its inhabitants (most

\(^{13}\) Belknap proceeds from an analysis of setting by Edward Wasiolek, who “points out (in “7,” *The Explicator*, Vo. XVI, No. 1, October 1957) that those who inhabit Fedor’s house, Ivan, Fedor, and Smerdiakov, are corrupt and are destroyed, while Mitia, who lives nearby, is partly corrupt and partly destroyed, and Alesha, who lives off in the monastery is almost pure and unhurt” (*Belknap, Structure* 66). Arguing that Wasiolek misses how “the corruption in proximity to Fedor disregards the absolute swine, Liagavyi and Karp, who are far from Fedor, and the faithful Grigorii, who is near him,” Belknap nevertheless concludes that “in general, *The Brothers Karamazov* cannot safely be included among those excellent books like *Ethan Frome*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Robinson Crusoe*, in which the relationship between persons and scenes weighs heavily in the plot” (*Structure* 67).
importantly the titular brothers), guaranteeing a spectacular collision of people and ideas. Inside the larger space of the prison-like town in *The Brothers Karamazov*, I will also look at a structural evolution in Dostoevskii’s art that has gone unmentioned by Bakhtin and other critics, and makes up the second layer of my structural model. With Dostoevskii’s final novel, the prominence of the isolated chronotope gives way to an underlying chronotopic pattern.

The pattern is at least in part responsible for the structural success of Dostoevskii’s final novel. Though not constantly present, it is repeated throughout the novel as a mechanism to incite the drama and intensify the emotions of the characters. It can affect groups of characters at once, driving them into extreme states through extreme spaces. Confined within the invisible walls of the fictional town of Skotoprigon’evsk, the chronotopic pattern alternates between harrowing, suffocating spaces that intensify the states of the characters, and open, breathable, regenerative spaces that afford them relief.

Before further describing this pattern, it will be useful to look at another example from Belknap’s structural analysis of *The Brothers Karamazov*, which emphasizes the characters, their interactions, and juxtapositions, rather than the time and space of the setting, which is the focus of my analysis. Belknap ascribes different effects to this structure as he sees it:

Contrast is not always cutting. When Alesha opens Lise’s love-letter after hearing of Zosima’s impending death, the contrast is gentle and relaxes the tension that has built up. Mitia’s encounter with Lise’s mother offers basically comic relief, and in general, the buffoons appear at moments of high tension, where their non-sequiturs confront the tight causal connections leading to the various catastrophes. Mitia’s passion and Fedor’s illogic alternate in Zosima’s cell, and through the fifty pages which follow that scene. (*Structure* 56)
Belknap attributes the structure of the novel to the characters, but this overlooks the pressure-relief pattern at the level of setting, which is responsible for much of the novel’s rhythm and movement. Alternatively, one could think of the novel’s structure as two-tiered, but in this model the setting still acts first upon the characters, and thus affects their behavior at the second tier.

Father Zosima’s cell at the monastery’s hermitage may be an unlikely space of pressure, but the details of the setting and the action begin to add up to such a characterization over the course of the scene. The cell is described as sparsely furnished, faded, and “not very large” (BK 39). Dostoevskii then quickly undermines the monastic tranquility of Zosima’s environment and the space is revealed as the writer’s trap. The characters are packed tightly together and the doors are effectively sealed shut. The Karamazovs, Zosima, and others meet in these cramped quarters, totaling no fewer than eleven people (Alesha, Ivan, Dmitrii, Fedor Pavlovich, Miusov, Kalganov, Zosima, Rakitin, a novice, and two hieromonks) by the time Dmitrii finally arrives and sits “in the only empty chair” (64).

Once Dmitrii occupies the last available space, the pressure and tension mount until the room finally erupts in scandal. It may seem inevitable, given the volatility of some of the personalities present, but the scene’s detonation is quickened, even necessitated, by the space and the way the characters are thrust into it. Dostoevskii’s space is key to creating, as Bakhtin puts it, “an environment in which human consciousness [can] be revealed in its deepest essence” - a place for Dostoevskii to test “the man in man” (PDP 31).
The characters are forced into artificially intensified states of mind, but remain relatively “free” in the content of their thoughts. Bakhtin distinguishes the author’s “pragmatic surplus” needed to move the plot from the “essential surplus” of meaning that would finalize the characters and force them to react in a specific way, thereby threatening the novel’s polyphony (PDP 73). As Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson describe it, the author’s pragmatic surplus allows him to “pick the hour and room for a dialogic encounter with a character, but once he himself [has] entered that room, he [has] to address the character as an equal” (242). Dostoevskii does exactly this, but often ensures that the room will be physically and mentally unbearable. The pressure-relief pattern is an instrument of authorial manipulation that reveals Dostoevskii’s characters to be less free than Bakhtin suggests.

All of this is not to say that Zosima’s cell causes a disaster by itself (Zosima lives there peacefully most of the time, of course) but that the novel’s spaces serve to heighten, in some cases to an extreme level, the predominant moods and feelings of those inside. Opinions and ideas are confronted and transformed as Dostoevskii sends the characters through a gauntlet of spaces. Even before Dmitrii’s arrival, Zosima’s overcrowded cell serves to exacerbate the buffoonery Fyodor Pavlovich initiates outside. It encourages both his insolence and strong reactions to it. He jokes, mocks, lies, and becomes an increasingly offensive and blasphemous spectacle until Zosima leaves, with Alesha fleeing behind him, “breathless...glad to leave” (BK 45). This quietly desperate action marks a transition into relief space, the counterbalance to the cell’s pressure and the
second half of Dostoevskii’s dramatic spatial scheme. After the pressure of the monk’s cell, the space outside offers Zosima and Alesha a chance to breathe again.

The effects of the scene’s spaces and the shift between them call to mind Kennan’s exit of a forwarding prison he visited in Tiumen’ in the 1880s:

I told the smotritel’ that I had seen enough; all I wanted was to get out of doors where I could once more breathe…At last, having finished our inspection of the main building, we came out into the prison yard, where I drew a long, deep breath of pure air with the delicious sense of relief that a half-drowned man must feel when he comes to the surface of the water. (Siberia 36)

Kennan’s depiction of the feeling of prison spaces, the oppressiveness of the air, and the sense of relief upon moving outside closely parallels Alesha’s experience in the cell and The Brothers Karamazov’s pattern of pressure and relief in general. Dostoevskii uses these effects of carceral space to his dramatic advantage.

Thus the spaces inside and outside of Zosima’s cell show the scene to be more complex than Belknap’s character-based structure allows. Indeed, Belknap seems to have felt that something was missing, writing:

If the novelist underscored the succession of parts constantly, the repetitions and contrasts would become irksome. He therefore conceals most juxtapositions in order not to dull the edge of his more striking devices. The concealment of juxtaposition is called transition. At best Dostoevskii’s transitions are engineered invisibly. (Structure 56)

Dostoevskii “invisibly” engineers such transitions through the pattern of spatial pressure and relief. By bringing the idea of the chronotope into an analysis of The Brothers

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14 Kennan only refers to Dostoevskii once in Siberia and The Exile System, on p. 81, when he calls him a “talented novelist” and mentions the fact that Dostoevskii was required to serve as a soldier after his term of hard labor in Omsk.
*Karamazov* it is possible to build upon Belknap’s character-based view and fill in the rest of the picture.

The breathlessness of Dostoevskii’s pressure spaces is even more evident in Captain Snegirev’s tiny cottage, another space of palpable pressure. Hesitating to knock on Snegirev’s door, Alesha notices a “strange hush within” (*BK* 172). He knows an entire family is living there, but hears no one from the outside, as if the space is closed off airtight from the rest of the world. The moment recalls Makar Devushkin’s description of a poor family in Dostoevskii’s *Poor Folk* (1844-1845). It is worth quoting at length to examine how a similar idea (the disturbing silence of a poor home) is treated in two novels with over thirty years and the author’s prison term separating them.

Devushkin writes,

> For example, there is a family of poor folk who have rented from the landlady a room which does not adjoin the other rooms, but is set apart in a corner by itself. Yet what quiet people they are! Not a sound is to be heard from them. The father—he is called Gorshkov—is a little grey-headed *chinovnik* who, seven years ago, was dismissed from public service, and now walks about in a coat so dirty and ragged that it hurts one to see it. Indeed it is a worse coat even than mine! Also, he is so thin and frail (at times I meet him in the corridor) that his knees quake under him, his hands and head are tremulous with some disease (God only knows what!), and he so fears and distrusts everybody that he always walks alone... As for his family, it consists of a wife and three children. The eldest of the latter—a boy—is as frail as his father, while the mother—a woman who, formerly, must have been good looking, and still has a striking aspect in spite of her pallor—goes about in the sorriest of rags. Also I have heard that they are in debt to our landlady, as well as that she is not overly kind to them.... Yes, they certainly are poor—Oh, my God, how poor! At the same time, never a sound comes from their room. It is as though not a soul were living in it. Never does one hear even the children—which is an unusual thing, seeing that children are ever ready to sport and play, and if they fail to do so it is a bad sign. One evening when I chanced to be passing the door of their room, and all was quiet in the house, I heard through the door a sob, and then a whisper, and then another sob, as though somebody within were weeping, and with such subdued bitterness that
it tore my heart to hear the sound. In fact, the thought of these poor people never left me all night, and quite prevented me from sleeping. (*Poor Folk* April 12)

Devushkin describes the space as a reflection of the family’s poverty. The room is isolated, just as the father is when he walks alone. There is nothing particularly interesting about the space itself, but it helps to paint a picture of the family’s unhappy life. The room is another detail, which alongside the ragged clothing, the parents’ age and physical ailments, the son’s frailty, and the debt owed the landlady, shows how poverty has silenced any joy in their lives. Dostoevskii frames the passage in a way that suggests that what is most important, in terms of the artistic effect, is not the family or their poor home, but the overall impression that such poverty has on Devushkin. When Devushkin cannot sleep, neither should the sympathetic reader. The influential Russian literary critic Vissarion Belinskii would have appreciated this kind of effect when praising the novel for its social consciousness.

With Snegirev’s cottage in *The Brothers Karamazov*, what is essentially the same silent room from *Poor Folk* has become more complex and active in Dostoevskii’s prison world. Certainly, Snegirev’s story is pathetic and his room is meant to arouse compassion in the reader, but the room is no longer just a reflection of the captain’s poverty or the social concerns of the time. Dostoevskii’s space has become more three-dimensional, transforming from an object of observation into an experience of captivity. In Bakhtinian terms, the development of the chronotope has caused the room to become an “event,” to “take on flesh.”

The reader is now locked inside, actively engaged with the space like the characters. As described, the room that Alesha walks into is suffocating. It is “stuffy”
and “cluttered up with domestic belongings” and people (172). Rags hang about on a string, and light can hardly pierce the closed, “mildewy” windows (172). Alesha finds the occupants in a corresponding state of charged, unstable, or stifling emotion. Dmitrii has recently humiliated Snegirev in public, an injustice each member of Snegirev’s family now feels acutely. The captain’s exhausting mixture of shame, anger, and defiant pride stews in this overcrowded space, where everyone breathes the same stagnant air. Snegirev’s daughter hurls insults at her father and Alesha from next to the window as they try to talk, and the two men are forced to sit so close that Snegirev’s knees “positively [knock] against Alesha” (174).

It is only when Snegirev and Alesha go outside that the pressure subsides and the captain begins to speak more coolly and rationally. “The air is fresh, sir,” he remarks, breathing freely again, “but in my mansion it is not so in any sense of the word” (177). Relieved from the pressure of his prison cell-like cottage, Snegirev draws attention to its suffocating characteristics by sarcastically referring to it as a “mansion” («хоромы») and remarking upon the contrasting qualities of the new space. Furthermore, this line comes directly after the title of the chapter, “And in the Fresh Air.” As Alesha and Snegirev stroll toward an open area with a large stone near a pasture, the two begin to come to an understanding. The proud captain becomes willing to accept charity from a sympathetic Katerina Ivanovna (Dmitrii’s fiancée), and even speaks optimistically about the future. The stone marks a space of relief - of open, fresh air where Snegirev and his son walk in the evenings to get away from their cottage. The space has such an effect on Snegirev that Alesha nearly succeeds in his charitable plan before the captain ultimately rejects the
aid out of pride. Though there are several possible reasons for Snegirev’s vacillations, the way they correspond to spatial changes suggests that Dostoevskii’s chronotopic pattern affects the character’s state of mind, if only to intensify his feelings.

Snegirev refuses Katerina Ivanovna’s charity at the end of Book Four, in which five of the seven chapters are titled in reference to their spaces (“At His Father’s,” “At the Khokhlakovs’,” “A Laceration in the Drawing Room,” “A Laceration in a Cottage,” “And in the Fresh Air”). Clearly, Dostoevskii structures much of the novel around its spaces. The pattern of pressure and relief spaces even has a musicality not unlike that of the contrapuntal voices Bakhtin sees in Dostoevskian dialogism (via Leonid Grossman and Mikhail Glinka) (PDP 42). Building from J.M. Meijer’s 15 notion of the “situation rhyme,” Miller also discerns a musical quality in the novel:

The early events and each idea that the characters express at the beginning rhyme with other parts of the novel. Indeed, the very rhyming or interconnectedness of the parts of The Brothers Karamazov becomes the reader’s own thread through the labyrinth of events and ideas that are to follow. (Worlds 13)

To the choir of voices and the rhyming of events and ideas, I would add the rhythm of spaces. At times the novel’s spaces flow with a remarkable rhythm from pressure to relief, or the other way around, a breathing pattern that Dostoevskii can restrict or relax at will.

This is seen much later in the novel as well. For example, leading up to Ivan’s third visit to Smerdiakov, he has already talked to Smerdiakov twice without reaching the truth behind his father’s murder. As he walks to Smerdiakov’s house in the dark, a

15 See J.M. Meijer’s “Situation Rhyme in a Novel of Dostoevskii” (1958) and Meijer and J. Van Der Eng’s “The Brothers Karamazov” (1971)
snowstorm whirls up around him. The storm does not prevent Ivan from getting to Smerdiakov’s, but the space changes his state of mind. There are few street lamps to light his way in the darkness. Irritated and ill, Ivan knocks down a drunken peasant who unknowingly taunts his conscience by singing a song: “Ach, Vanka’s gone to Petersburg, I won’t wait till he comes back” (BK 522). The peasant’s song evokes Ivan’s complicity in his father’s murder. The mocking voice in the storm adds to the charged nature of the space, and torments Ivan before his arrival.

Primed by a combination of environmental and psychological factors that aggravate his body and mind, Ivan enters the pressure space of Smerdiakov’s room. It is “overheated,” and the furniture has been rearranged since their last meeting “so that there is hardly room to move” (523). For Miller, “the heat of hell prevails” in Smerdiakov’s room (Worlds 119). Still, the same type of pressure is applied to characters in different scenes throughout the novel, and they are not all hellish. Ivan remarks on the uncomfortable surroundings, asking, “Where can one sit down?” (523). The conversation quickly acquires a hostile tone in the pressure space, and before long the murderer reveals the truth with a sneer. During this scene of escalating, mutual contempt, Smerdiakov gives looks of “insane hatred,” and Ivan alternates between “shout[ing] madly” and paroxysms of “horror” (524). Dostoevskii brings them to this level of antagonism and fear in part through the pressure of Smerdiakov’s room, which is not only infernal. The space physically encourages confrontation.

Ivan leaves Smerdiakov’s room threatening to kill him and steps out again into space of the snowstorm, the character of which has since transformed. Instead of
intensifying Ivan’s irritation, the space outside of Smerdiakov’s house now offers relief. He notes the change in how he feels after walking outside. “‘It’s something physical,’ he [thinks] with a grin. Something like joy was springing up in his heart” (532, emphasis added). Though much is running through his mind that may account for his relief (such as the revelation of the murderer), Ivan’s thought directly acknowledges a physical effect outside. At this point he comes to a resolution about what he will do, “‘and now it will not be changed,’ he [thinks] with relief” (532).

The effect of the space has changed and aids in Ivan’s relief. Before, there was a peasant in his way, taunting him. Now the same space contains the same peasant, but the peasant is no longer an obstacle. He is an opportunity for Ivan to reconnect with humanity and further his own recovery (though the reprieve does not last long, as he meets the “devil” back in his own room). One might argue that the effect on Ivan indicates the perception of a space rather than its character, but the perception of a space is a factor in its characterization. As Jacques Catteau argues, in Dostoevskii’s works “space acquires the existential presence of an environment. It results not from a proposed way of seeing but from a perception which is continuously reorganizing it” (384). I would apply Catteau’s idea to the pattern of The Brothers Karamazov. A given space is never permanently designated as one of “pressure” or “relief.” That one space may play either role does not weaken the novel’s chronotopic pattern – on the contrary, this
versatility adds to its strength as an instrument of the author and reflects Dostoevskii’s masterful use of literary space.\footnote{There are similar instances elsewhere in Dostoevskii’s oeuvre. For example, Robert Louis Jackson notes that in Dostoevskii’s short story “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man,” “the narrator goes out into the fresh air…but there is no sense of relief outdoors in the cold, grey October day” (297). Ivan has a similar experience in the snowstorm.}

Moreover, the pressure-relief pattern is not simply a matter of inside (pressure) and outside (relief) spaces. The pattern of spaces sometimes aligns this way, but not always. Outside spaces can be harrowing, as Ivan experiences in the snowstorm, and inside spaces can provide relief, as the empty tavern is for Alesha and Ivan leading up to the poem of the “Grand Inquisitor.” Belknap writes,

> There are places… which have a direct influence upon a person…but such relationships are far less interesting than the failure of such an influence to exist when Ivan and Alesha meet in the room of a tavern and divorce their minds from it, or when Alesha’s mind moves from the presence of Zosima’s corpse in a cell to the presence of Zosima alive at Cana…” (Structure 66)

Where Belknap finds a “failure of influence,” I see the influence of a relief space. In the tavern, for example, the two brothers are able to have a conversation without the escalating intensity of Zosima’s cell. They discuss Ivan’s poem, “The Grand Inquisitor,” along with a couple of childhood memories (such as Alesha’s fondness for cherry jam) on more or less friendly terms, even though the content is of the utmost seriousness. While one could argue that the specific actors in this scene account for the lack of tension, the space of the tavern encourages it as well. Ivan and Alesha sit alone in the room except for one other, unknown customer. It is a place “by the window,” “shut off by a screen, so that it was unseen by other people in the room” («Это было только место у окна, отгороженное ширами, но сидевших за ширами все-таки не могли видеть»)
посторонние») (2, 5, III). The proximity to the window gives the space an outlet – a significant detail that will turn up again when Alesha falls asleep next to Zosima’s body in his cell. There is the “usual bustle going on in the other rooms of the tavern; there were shouts for the waiters, the sound of bottles being opened, the click of billiard balls, the drone of the organ,” («в остальных комнатах трактира происходила вся обыкновенная трактирная возня слышались призывные крики, откупоривание пивных бутылок, стук бильярдных шаров, гудел орган»), but the familiarity of the sounds and the way they blend together suggest a kind of tranquil hum in the background (2, 5, III). The way the tavern scene is configured gives Alesha a respite from the breathless sequence of places and events he runs through early in the novel. The space of the tavern does have an influence on the characters, but it is a soothing one.

Like the road to and from Smerdiakov’s place, Father Zosima’s cell is a versatile space. A space of pressure in the novel’s opening, the cell later leads to Alesha’s regeneration. After Zosima’s death, the elder’s body gives off an unsaintly odor as it lies in his cell, resulting in a public scandal and an inner crisis for his ardent disciple Alesha. The monks and crowds of gawkers eventually disperse, and Alesha returns to the cell, which has suddenly been recast and reorganized as a space of relief. The only people left in the room are two monks: one asleep, and one quietly reading scriptures over the body. In contrast to the scandalous odor from before, now “one window of the cell [is] open” and “the air [is] fresh and cool” (BK 309). In the re-characterized cell space Alesha falls asleep and dreams of a biblical story, the wedding in Cana of Galilee.
The whole sequence surrounding the dream is both a revelation for Alesha and a complex convergence of Dostoevskian themes and literary devices. Indeed, Alesha’s epiphany shows the interconnectedness of Dostoevskii’s conception of space and philosophical ideas. When Alesha kneels down and begins to pray, the description suggests his inner soul operates much like his outer surroundings: “His soul was overflowing but with mingled feelings; no single sensation stood out distinctly, on the contrary, one drove out another in a slow, continual rotation” (Душа его была переполнена, но как-то смутно, и ни одно ощущение не выделялось, слишком сказываясь, напротив, одно вытесняло другое в каком-то тихом, ровном коловоротении) (309). The verb «вытесняло» is translated as “drove out,” but could also be rendered as “displaced,” “edged out,” or “crowded out.” Likewise, «переполнена» could mean “overflowing,” “packed,” or “overcrowded.” The language, including the “rotation” of feelings, recalls the pressure-relief pattern, and thus the workings of Alesha’s soul in this key moment resemble those of Dostoevskii’s space.

Alesha’s thoughts and feelings begin to flow (or rotate) from negative to positive, as though from “pressure” to “relief.”

But there was a sweetness in his heart and, strange to say, Alesha was not surprised at it. Again he saw that coffin before him, the hidden dead figure so precious to him, but the weeping and poignant grief of the morning was no longer aching in his soul. As soon as he came in, he fell down before the coffin as before a holy shrine, but joy, joy was glowing in his mind and in his heart. The one window of the cell was open, the air was fresh and cool. ‘So the odor must have become stronger, if they opened the window,’ thought Alesh. But even this thought of the odor of corruption, which had seemed to him so awful and humiliating a few hours before, no longer made him feel miserable or indignant. He began quietly praying, but he soon felt that he was praying almost mechanically. Fragments of thought floated though his soul, flashed like stars and went out again at once, to be succeeded by others. But yet there was reigning in
his soul a sense of the wholeness of things – something steadfast and comforting - and he was aware of it himself. Sometimes he began praying ardently, he longed to pour out his thankfulness and love…But when he had begun to pray, he passed suddenly to something else, and sank into thought, forgetting both the prayer and what had interrupted it. (309)

From grief to joy, humiliation to relief, Alesha begins to understand, perhaps without quite knowing it exactly, that all of these feelings, which can seem extreme and opposite, flow from one to the next as part of a larger whole. The sweetness in his heart is perhaps not surprising to him because he has already experienced this same kind of cycle physically through the spaces of Dostoevskii’s world. The fresh air from the open window seems to remind him of this movement of life, from conflict to peace, from “pressure” to “relief,” which he has already experienced in this very cell and the space outside. With the fresh air comes Alesha’s nascent awareness of the “wholeness of things” and the sweetness of understanding.

It is important to note that Alesha’s new understanding of the world develops explicitly apart from the more traditional monastic ways of seeking God and expressing one’s faith. Twice in this passage he tries to pray but it becomes mechanical and is overtaken by “something else.” What is this “something else” outside of prayer? As Alesha falls sleep listening to Father Paisii reading about Cana of Galilee, the “something else” starts to come into focus in a meeting of the biblical story, Zosima’s teachings, and the metaphysical implications of Dostoevskian space. In fact, space is emphasized repeatedly in this passage. Miller discusses how the story of Kolia Krasotkin and the schoolboys “underline[s] Zosima’s religious pronouncement that everything is connected to everything else in the great ocean of being” (48). Similarly, the pressure-relief pattern
of space reflects the currents of Zosima’s great ocean, and helps Alesha to broaden his view of the world.

Alesha sleepily ponders the villainous Rakitin, who will “always go off to the back alley,” while “the high road…The road is wide and straight and bright as crystal, and the sun is at the end of it” (BK 310). When he associates the more confined, negatively marked space with Rakitin, his thoughts immediately flow to the “wide and straight” open road. Alesha’s mind is beginning to work like the spaces of his world, signifying a deeper union with it.

His enlightenment does not come without a struggle. Primed by Father Paisii’s reading, Alesha dreams of the wedding at Cana (the scene of Christ’s first miracle, in which he turns water into wine). Though he loves this story, Alesha’s joy at hearing it quickly fades, and the dream becomes confused.

But what’s this, what’s this? Why is the room growing wider?...Ah, yes...It’s the marriage, the wedding...yes, of course. Here are the guests, here are the young couple sitting, and the merry crowd and...Where is the wise governor of the feast? But who is this? Who? Again the walls are receding...Who is getting up there from the great table? What!... He here, too? But he’s in the coffin...but he’s here, too. He has stood up, he sees me, he is coming here...God! (310)

Christ’s first miracle evokes the catastrophe of Zosima’s stinking body, the failure of his miracle to materialize. Zosima is the “he” who is supposed to be in the coffin. Alesha’s dream suddenly transforms from wedding to funeral; the walls push out and then recede. The space shifts with Alesha’s feelings.

Zosima finally appears, reminding Alesha to see the ripples of good deeds one can send into the world just by giving a beggar an onion, a miracle of the “prosaic Christianity” in the novel Morson discusses at length (“God of Onions” 112). Miracles,
catastrophes, suffering, and relief – all are part of Zosima’s “flowing,” “blending” ocean (BK 275). Alesha awakes with a much greater understanding of the world, seen in part by the consonance between him and the environment. He is “overflowing with rapture, [yearning] for freedom, space, openness” (311).

When Alesha exits the cell he immediately perceives the spatial order of everything, a broad but lucid view of the universe, in which he can see the connection of the stars in the sky to the flowers in the earth.

The vault of heaven, full of soft, shining stars, stretched vast and fathomless above him. The Milky Way ran in two pale streams from the zenith to the horizon. The fresh, motionless, still night enfolded the earth. The white towers and golden domes of the cathedral gleamed out against the sapphire sky. The gorgeous autumn flowers, in the beds round the house, were slumbering till morning. The silence of the earth seemed to melt into the silence of the heavens. The mystery of the earth was one with the mystery of the stars….Alesha stood, gazed, and suddenly threw himself down on the earth. (311)

Alesha, too, has become “one” with the mystery, in that he understands that his task is not to solve it – to uncover some kind of universal truth – but rather to see universal interconnectedness. It is not just the Milky Way that links heaven and earth, and the “stars, which were shining to [Alesha] from the abyss of space,” but all things, all “threads from all those innumerable worlds of God, linking his soul to them,” a soul which “[trembles] all over ‘in contact with other worlds.’” (312). Alesha now “[longs] to forgive everyone and for everything, and to beg forgiveness. Oh, not for himself, but for all men, for all and for everything” (312). A greater understanding of space, of the “flow” of the world, leads Alesha to the idea of universal responsibility.

Thus in the revelation of Zosima’s great ocean through Alesha, the philosophy of The Brothers Karamazov – its overarching idea – is shown to be in harmony with its
structural form. Dostoevskii’s chronotopic pattern is the quiet current beneath, governing
the ebb and flow of the novel and carrying its heroes to new places.

The dream of the wedding at Cana marks a turning point for Alesha. He “[falls]
on the earth a weak youth, but [rises] up a resolute champion,” ready to live by the order
and wisdom of his mentor, Zosima (312). This important scene is facilitated by the
serenity of a relief space. The cell with the open window brings Alesha into the fresh
air in more than one sense. Of course, his regeneration would have been hardly possible in
this cell before, when it was characterized by the “pressure” of the unruly mob of
Zosima’s mockers and the stench of the dead elder. Zosima’s cell shows that every space
can be a transition space, and that everything is always on the threshold.

The Pressure Space of the Court

The dramatic culmination of The Brothers Karamazov takes place in the court,
which is also the most prominent pressure space in the novel, and the one most directly
linked to the prison spaces of Dead House. The tension steadily builds in the court,
greatly increasing the characters’ emotional volatility, even to the point of hysteria.
Zosima’s cell seems relatively comfortable compared to the extremes of the court space
leading up to the trial. The narrator observes:

I saw at the end of the room, behind the platform, a special partition hurriedly put
up, behind which all these lawyers were admitted, and they thought themselves
lucky to have standing room there, for all chairs had been removed for the sake of
space, and the crowd behind the partition stood throughout the case closely
packed, shoulder to shoulder. (554)
Unlike in Zosima’s cell, there is standing room only, and still people continue to crowd inside. Dostoevskii bars their exit until the drama has played out. The court is a prison-like space similar to the bathhouse and the “theater” (in the Christmas play scene) of Dead House. As observers stand on top of one another, the action begins with the levelheaded testimony of less excitable characters (Grigori, Rakitin, the doctors), continues to the mostly reserved, Katerina Ivanovna and Grushenka, and escalates to the nearly mad Ivan, who laughs and rants incoherently about the devil and Smerdiakov. The audience responds with a discordant mixture of approval and indignation throughout, compounding the pressure of the space. The reader, too, feels the rising tension.

Under this increasing pressure, after Ivan’s outburst, Katerina Ivanovna (seemingly) instantaneously decides to give Dmitrii’s damning letter to the judges. Soon after, she is in “hysterics, [falling] on the floor, sobbing and screaming” (581). This in turn triggers a wild outburst from Grushenka, the two attorneys give their dramatic speeches, and the verdict approaches in a progressively more unbearable atmosphere. Dostoevskii ensures a dramatic finale before the trial even starts, creating a space that truly weighs on the characters. Those “imprisoned” inside perpetuate and intensify the pressure of the space through their agitated interactions with others, resulting in an inevitable eruption of chaos.

These explosive scenes result in the “incredible” or “fantastic” reality that Jackson discusses:

Artistic creation here means receiving impressions from reality and forming them into images...And for Dostoevskii it involves above all a moral and spiritual reshaping, or transfiguration, of the material of reality. But it does not involve invention or fabrication. Rather the writer reveals incredible reality or truth in his
art; he makes credible to the everyday eye of man all that may seem too extraordinary or improbable to admit of belief. (Art 263)

The “impressions from reality” include the Dostoevskian sense of physical space that goes back to prison in Siberia. The world of The Brothers Karamazov gets a physical reshaping that aids in its moral and spiritual reshaping. Dostoevskii does not invent a physical reality, he just intensifies it, and this process has an effect on everything. Most importantly, it affects the characters’ states of mind, which, of course, influence their actions and ideas. Thus the pressure space of the court is partly to blame for Katerina Ivanovna’s “instantaneous” public breakdown.

The Prison of Skotoprigon’evsk

While there is a scheme of smaller settings that increase or alleviate dramatic tension in the scenes of The Brothers Karamazov, the town of Skotoprigon’evsk taken as a whole acts as an enclosed space of pressure. Bakhtin describes Crime and Punishment’s Petersburg as unstable and “on the threshold,” though various chronotopes exist inside of it (PDP 167). Skotoprigon’evsk likewise features different chronotopes, but is more akin to Dead House’s prison camp, which contains both cramped barracks and open fields while nevertheless prohibiting escape. Dostoevskii collects all of his characters into this prison-like small town and walls it off, just as he does with the group in Zosima’s cell, but on a larger scale. Those who stray from Skotoprigon’evsk are pulled back or die attempting to leave, much like the prisoners of Dead House.
For example, Smerdiakov wants to move to Paris, but kills himself in Skotoprigon’evsk instead. Grushenka plans to leave the town forever with her Polish officer, but changes her mind in the pressure space of the inn. Ivan wants to leave, and does go to Moscow, but immediately realizes he should not have left and returns. Fedor Pavlovich’s first wife escapes to Petersburg, but then “somehow suddenly [dies],” of typhus or maybe starvation, according to rumor (BK 13). Given the fates of other characters, we can conclude that the “real” reason for her death is indeed as unimportant as the narrator implies. In fact, she dies because she tries to flee Dostoevskii’s prison-like pressure space, Skotoprigon’evsk, and in doing so makes herself irrelevant to the novel.

While the characters are relatively free to pick their views and ideologies, whether or not they coincide with Dostoevskii’s, they are never free from Dostoevskii the experimenter-author-dramatist. There is no escaping Skotoprigon’evsk, a word that appropriately comes from the Russian for “stockyard” (skotoprigonka). Dostoevskii’s characters are forced into conflict by the condensed physical space of the novel. It is effectively a prison and the whole world – a potentially fertile testing ground for “the man in man.” No one leaves Dostoevskii’s world (except through death) or truly lives apart from others. Dostoevskian prison does not isolate but rather brings people together (though not necessarily in a harmonious sense) to engage in the type of dialogue Bakhtin describes. This is why Zosima’s command to Alesha - “work, work unceasingly” - is central to understanding the novel (71). Alesha’s work is not to be performed in monastic isolation but, as Zosima specifies, through “great service in the world” where he
is needed more, where “there is no peace” (71). One can interpret this “world” to mean
the whole world outside of the monastery, but in The Brothers Karamazov

Skotoprong’evsk is representative of that outside world, in which we are all, in a sense,
imprisoned. Though neither Skotoprong’evsk nor the world beyond it has peace,
Dostoevskii has a measure of control over his artificial, provincial prison that is meant to
lead us to universal truth.

Though all of the characters of The Brothers Karamazov are confined in one
relatively small space, the prison town feels overcrowded by the presence of just two of
them: specifically, the larger-than-life personalities of Fedor Pavlovich and his son
Dmitrii. Clearly, their co-imprisonment is part of Dostoevskii’s test, but they are far
from alone in captivity. It is significant, for example, that Dmitrii, Grushenka, and
Alesha all talk of leaving in the epilogue without it ever occurring in the novel. If they
were to depart, it would require another novel, such as the sequel alluded to in the
preface, because the broad characters and wide-reaching ideas of The Brothers
Karamazov must somehow be contained in this one small town. Any escape from the
town would mean an outlet for the overall pressure, and that would weaken the
intensifying effect of Dostoevskii’s space. The town must act as a prison, a space that is
inherently restrictive and too small, forcing contact and conflict amongst the “prisoners.”

Dostoevskii seems to have had a sense of the world’s prison-like closeness even
outside of his fiction. In an article in A Writer’s Diary regarding Anna Karenina’s Levin
and his lack of feeling for the Slavs dying far away in the Russo-Turkish War,
Dostoevskii poses the question, “At what distance does love of humanity end?” (AWD
1096). He answers this by mocking and berating Levin (and by extension Tolstoi) for callousness to humanity at a distance. He describes the reported atrocities of the Turks toward women and children and then, significantly, furthers his point with a philosophical experiment of space:

…just imagine that there are people living on the planet Mars and that they are piercing the eyes of some infants there. Do you think we’d feel any pity here on earth, any great amount of pity, at least? The same thing happens on earth, perhaps, when very great distances are involved: ‘Ah, it’s happening in another hemisphere, not right here!’ (1095)

Dostoevskii ridicules cold philosophical conclusions made far away from the fresh horrors of real life. He instead suggests that human suffering is always close, and thus love for mankind must extend infinitely in space. For Dostoevskii, all of humanity shares a single cell.

In this light, it seems fitting that the underlying form of *The Brothers Karamazov* pulls all varieties of people and ideas into one small space where they are forced to interact and coexist as a kind of experiment. All of what Dostoevskii explores as humanity’s fundamental problems exists or could exist in a place as insignificant as Skotophrigonev’svsk. Wherever they might go, the brothers would face the same eternal questions that keep them trapped in Skotophrigonev’svsk.

**The Karamazov Prisoners**

It is worth considering more closely the positions of the titular brothers in the prison space of Skotophrigonev’svsk and the pattern of pressure-relief spaces that make up its interior. Dmitrii views Skotophrigonev’svsk as a place from which to run, and yet only
proves the impossibility of physical escape. He initially arrives in Skotoprigon’evsk looking for Grushenka and money from his father. Upon finding these, he plans to go away with Grushenka and cut all ties to his father. Instead, Grushenka eludes him, he intends to kill himself but does not, and is finally arrested and jailed as a murder suspect. In the end, it seems Dmitrii’s only means of “escaping” Skotoprigon’evsk is (1) imprisonment in Siberia or (2) flight to America. Both options would place Dmitrii outside of the town, but neither offers a true escape, only the illusion of it.

The end of Crime and Punishment provides insight. Raskol’nikov chooses the first option and actually reconnects to the world through Sonia and the other prisoners after his extreme isolation. This ending does not denote escape, but rather the hard work of redemption through suffering. The second option recalls Svidrigailov’s suicide. Hence the first is more of a prison “transfer” than an escape, and the second is death. Even with these ostensible options, it is telling of Dostoevskii’s tight spatial control that Dmitrii is denied either possibility before the end of the novel. A small group of his friends and relatives are planning to break him out, but we do not see the plot put into action. Whether or not this plan might succeed beyond the final pages of the novel is less important than the fact that Dostoevskii does not write it. Skotoprigon’evsk, and thus the world, remains inescapable.

Ivan similarly views Skotoprigon’evsk as a trap, but one that is philosophical, intellectual, or spiritual rather than physical. His experience proves the impossibility of escape on a more abstract level. He wants to distance himself from his family, but cannot lose the ever-growing sense of guilt over his father’s murder that is aggravated by
Smerdiakov. Ivan is able to reject God and corresponding moral restrictions on a theoretical level, but he still feels responsible for his father’s death, which may have been caused, in part, by the influence of his philosophical ideas on Smerdiakov.

Like Dmitrii, Ivan never understands the impossibility of escaping the world. Instead of working to help others “in the world” (by bringing a more sound testimony to the trial of his brother, for example), Ivan retreats to the philosophical plane that brought him to conclude that “everything is permitted” in the first place. His argument with the devil is a philosophical/intellectual/spiritual escape attempt that fails, as is clearly shown by the brain fever he subsequently develops as a result of his guilty conscience.

Furthermore, Ivan reveals his inclination to philosophizing at a distance, the same self-isolating tendency that Dostoevskii criticized in Levin, when he tells Alesha: “I could never understand how one can love one’s neighbors. It’s just one’s neighbors, to my mind, that one can’t love, though one might love those at a distance…For anyone to love a man, he must be hidden, for as soon as he shows his face, love is gone” (204).

If in his isolation and attempts at escape, Ivan never comes to fully grasp the nature of the prison-like world, he nevertheless contributes meaningfully to the reader’s understanding of that world, and more generally to the novel’s prison theme. Ivan’s rebellion against God, one of his most significant contributions to the ideological makeup of The Brothers Karamazov, is born of a story of imprisonment. Ivan is outraged at the case of a five-year-old child whose parents locked her up in an outhouse because she wouldn’t ask to be taken out at night…for that they smeared her whole face with her excrement and made her eat that excrement, and it was her mother, her mother who made her! And that mother could sleep at night, hearing the groans of that poor little child, locked up in that vile place! Can you
understand that a little being, who still can’t even comprehend what is being done to her, in a vile place, in the dark and cold, beats herself with her tiny little fist on her strained little chest and cries her bloody, unresentful, meek little tears to ‘dear God’ to protect her…do you understand why this nonsense is necessary and created?...Why should [man] know that diabolical good and evil, when it costs so much? The whole world of knowledge is not worth the little tears of that little child to ‘dear God.’ (2: 5: IV)

Ivan’s story is much more than an anecdote about a single child. The suffering of the little girl in the outhouse is a metaphor for the entire worldview that Ivan represents. She is imprisoned in an awful place without knowing why, just like the inhabitants of Skotoprigon’evsk and, on a greater scale, human beings on the earth. She is “smeared” (обмазывали) with excrement by her parents in the same way the brothers have been smeared with Karamazovism by Fedor Pavlovich. Dostoevskii’s word choice can be no mistake, as the name “Karamazov” is derived from a Turkish word for black (“Kara”) and the Russian word mazat’ (“to smear”). The little girl’s tiny prison space makes up a layer of walls in The Brothers Karamazov on the smallest scale, analogous to her tears in Zosima’s great ocean. Of course, Ivan’s point is that neither her prison nor her tears are insignificant, and are even the most important reasons to “return the ticket” to God’s world.

The connection of prison to the novel’s main themes is further strengthened when Ivan casts Christ as a prisoner in “The Grand Inquisitor.” Under the Inquisitor’s orders, “the guards lead their prisoner to the close, gloomy vaulted prison in the ancient palace of the Holy Inquisition and shut Him in it. The day passes and is followed by the dark, burning ‘breathless’ night of Seville” («Стража приводит пленника в тесную и мрачную сводчатую тюрьму в древнем здании святого судилища и запирает в нее."

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Проходит день, наступает темная, горячая и «бездыханная» севильская ночь») (2: 5: V). Ivan’s description has all of the major characteristics of Dostoevskian carceral space. Christ, called a “prisoner,” is “shut” (zapiraet) into a “close” (or “tight” or “confined”) space. The night is “breathless.” Ivan uses the word zapirat’ (“to lock in,” “to shut in”) to describe what is done to Christ - the same word that he uses earlier to describe the parents locking (zapirali) their daughter in the outhouse. The little girl and Christ are linked through their common imprisonment. Neither is spared suffering despite their pleas to God. The difference between Christ and all of the other prisoners in The Brothers Karamazov is revealed in the end of “The Grand Inquisitor.” After sitting in prison in silence, as the Grand Inquisitor tells him that human beings should not be free, Christ’s kiss triggers his sudden release.

But He suddenly approached the old man in silence and softly kissed him on his bloodless aged lips. That was all his answer. The old man shuddered. His lips moved. He went to the door, opened it, and said to Him: ‘Go, and come no more…come not at all, never, never! And he let Him out ‘into the dark squares of the town.’ The prisoner went away. (2: 5: V)

As a prisoner, Christ provides the answer for opening all the doors in all the layers of prison walls in the novel and in the world. Boundless love and compassion for mankind (including his jailer, the Inquisitor) set him free.

Alesha, whom the author designates as his hero in the first line of the novel’s foreword, is best able to follow Christ’s model. Like his brothers, Alesha first sees Skotoprigon’evsk (and therefore the world) as a place one needs to escape, and he intends to flee through monastic isolation. However, his plans are quickly upset by Father
Zosima’s command to work in the world.\textsuperscript{17} Alesha comes to embody the idea that one’s “imprisonment” in the world does not necessarily make it a place one needs to escape, but rather a place in which one must live and work. More than any other character he is able to endure and successfully pass through the various pressure and relief spaces of the novel. Significantly, Alesha often acts as a messenger, going from his father’s house to Dmitrii’s to Katerina Ivanovna’s to Captain Snegirev’s, and so on. He links the spaces of the novel and moves between them. He is tasked with a journey (a “pilgrimage,” [«много тебе еще странствовать»] as Zosima puts it) from the outset, and navigates the world’s spaces as he works to bring peace and happiness to those around him (71).

Alesha knows, or perhaps feels, that the pressure, strain, or scandal of one space is followed by the relief of another. He learns the rhythm of Dostoevskii’s world. Over time he develops a tendency to lead others to these spaces of relief. This is best shown in the novel’s final scene and space. After the funeral of the boy Iliusha, Alesha gathers Iliusha’s friends at the same stone (and relief space) that has such a positive effect on Captain Snegirev in Part Two. He then gives a speech celebrating the memory of Iliusha in which he envisions a brighter future for everyone. “Don’t be afraid of life!” he tells the boys, “How good life is when one does something good and just!” (646). Miller observes that, in this scene, “the power of truth and stones to injure is counterbalanced…by their power to heal as well,” and that Iliusha’s stone is a place “where [Alesha and the boys] can speak the truth to each other” (\textit{Worlds} 53).

\textsuperscript{17} These differing ideas on monasticism correspond to the Antonii model (cave monasticism) and the Feodosii model (social engagement), respectively, as described by Fedotov (Mjør 132).
Implicitly, Miller hits upon the depth of Dostoevskii’s settings at their artistic best; that is, when they provide a dynamic connection between the lower, physical world and the higher, transcendent “truth.” As they bury Iliusha in the ground near the stone they ensure he will live on in their memories alongside their newfound sense of brotherhood, love of life, and future good acts. Belknap stresses the importance of memory in the scene at the stone:

> In [Alesha’s] final speech in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevskii presents memory as an actual moral force, latent for years, perhaps, as science, literature, and personal experience had taught him it could be, but offering the immortality on earth that had concerned him early in his career, and at the same time offering a rationally acceptable repository for the good whose preservation was indispensable to his theodicy. (*Genesis* 87)

Memory is associated with another prominent relief space in *The Brothers Karamazov*: Zosima’s cell in its final mode, when Alesha dreams of the wedding at Cana and hears the voice of the dead elder. It is precisely memory that has tormented Alesha leading up to this scene – specifically, how the once-saintly Zosima will be remembered after the scandal of his rotting body. However, in the relief space, Alesha remembers Zosima’s voice and his words, and his mind is put at ease. Consequently, from the scenes at the stone and the cell (the wedding at Cana), one can see how Dostoevskii’s spaces are involved in reaching the “truth” his hero seeks. The space affords relief, and with such peace comes the possibility of new understanding.

The novel ends at the stone; not with Dmitrii’s exile or escape in some distant place, but in Skotoprigon’evsk in a space of relief. Work in the world leads Alesha to this positive space. Furthermore, he no longer toils in isolation, as he would have in the monastery, but with a group of people he sees as his friends. “Well, let us go!” he says,
“And now we go hand in hand” (646). With this newfound wisdom, Alesha fulfills Zosima’s wish and offers a path to peace overlooked by his brothers in their misguided attempts to escape Dostoevskii’s prison world.
Chapter 2: Prison, Poriadok, and the Late Tolstoian Hero

Tolstoi’s early treatment of prison is generally more abstract and philosophical than the gritty reality of Dostoevskii’s Dead House. Prison makes its first important appearance in Tolstoi’s oeuvre in War and Peace (1869), followed by the 1872 short stories “God Sees the Truth, But Waits” (based on a parable told in War and Peace) and “The Prisoner in the Caucasus.” I begin this chapter by examining the first two of these works for the role prison plays as a catalyst of moral or spiritual transformation. The central piece of this analysis is a close reading of Pierre Bezukhov’s imprisonment in War and Peace, and a look at how Tolstoi’s fiction and Foucault’s theories illuminate one another. I propose that Tolstoi’s perception of a mysterious order (poriadok) at work corresponds to Foucault’s ideas about the power structure behind modern discipline and punishment. The second major section of this chapter is devoted to a close reading of Resurrection, which sees the debut of a new type of Tolstoian hero. The action-oriented Nekhliudov, I argue, emerges out of the prison theme to elude Tolstoi’s heroic formula and break free from the bindings of the authorial voice.

Tolstoi’s engagement with prison has been greatly underappreciated by critics as an influential force in his literature. Unlike Dostoevskii, Tolstoi never served time in prison, though it was not from lack of trying. In the later period of his life, Tolstoi’s writings were often heavily censored or banned due to their criticism of the Russian
government and the Orthodox Church, two institutions that he felt worked against
Christ’s teachings as well as the narod. Fearing both popular and international backlash
if they were to incarcerate the most famous Russian writer in the world – and one
considered by many Russians to be the nation’s moral compass - the authorities never
took that step, instead preferring to persecute his “Tolstoian” followers.

Tolstoi felt guilty about remaining free while others were jailed for spreading his
ideas and more than once expressed his wish for the martyrdom of arrest and
imprisonment. Still, Tolstoi was ambivalent about this desire, which was encouraged by
his influential follower, Vladimir Chertkov, and yet tempered by Tolstoi’s real fear of
prison. Much of this anxiety came directly from an experience as the object of an
investigation in court, which left him thinking “he could kiss the jailer’s hand in
exchange for being left alone for a week so he could write” (Medzhibovskaya 149). The
author’s increased interest in martyrdom through imprisonment roughly coincides with
the early stages of writing Resurrection, which he had begun in 1889 and would be
completed a decade later. In preparation for the novel, around this time Tolstoi also
visited a court and a prison in Krapivna, in Tula Oblast’.

18 Inessa Medzhibovskaya explains: “Tolstoi hopes for imprisonment, vaguely imagined, as a prisoner
might hope for the possibility of escape, as a vainglorious ‘desire to nail a stick horizontally on to a cross’
[from a letter to Vladimir Chertkov, Tolstoi, PS 85: 223-24]. Yet Tolstoi likens this desire to a cheap
longing for martyrdom, which is worse than a desire for ‘superficial benefits’ of life. It may well be
Chertkov’s bull-headed insistence on setting an example by becoming an emblematic and prophetic
prisoner that forever changed Tolstoi’s mind about the special potential of prison for heroism…Tolstoi’s
view on vita activa consists in what he identifies with the ability to align himself with the ‘conditions of a
possibility of service’ to life irrespective of the conditions of freedom or confinement (Tolstoi, PS 85:
236)” (Medzhibovskaya 148).
Before exploring Tolstoi’s literary and philosophical relationship with the penal system, it is worth considering a number of his personal experiences with crime and punishment that may have influenced his thinking on the subject. The first occurred shortly after the death of Tolstoi’s father, when Tolstoi was only eight years old and in the care of his grandmother. One day, in a memorable moment for the young Tolstoi, his new French tutor locked him in a room for some offense and threatened to beat him with a rod. Tolstoi later referred to this formative experience as being “in prison.”

Outside of childhood trauma, but still personal in a way, the history of the Decembrist revolt, including the execution and exile of its leaders, undoubtedly influenced Tolstoi’s view of Russian punishment. A topic of lifelong interest for the author, the Decembrists included one of his relatives, a second cousin named S.G. Volkonskii, whom he met in 1860 after Volkonskii’s exile of more than thirty years ended with a pardon. Tolstoi began to write a novel on the subject of the Decembrists that eventually developed into *War and Peace*.

Beyond personal memories and historical connections, there are, of course, literary sources that may have contributed to Tolstoi’s thinking on prison. An admirer of Dickens and Hugo, Tolstoi read *Les Miserables* in 1863, calling it “powerful” (Orwin, *Cambridge* 10). His favorite among Dostoevskii’s works was *Dead House*, which he read first in 1862 and again in 1880. Dostoevskii’s novel made a strong impression.

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19 Rosamund Bartlett writes that “in terms of its significance, the incident was certainly not on a par with his father’s death, but it nevertheless left a very deep impression on Tolstoi – so much so that some sixty years later he recalled in his diary the humiliation and misery of overhearing his family’s laughter and merriment while he was locked up ‘in prison.’ In his memoirs, he went so far as to date his lifelong horror of violence back to this ordeal” (59).
Upon reading it a second time, Tolstoi told his close friend (and colleague of Dostoevskii), N. N. Strakhov, “tell [Dostoevskii] that I love him” (Orwin, *Cambridge* 21).

Though Tolstoi lacked Dostoevskii’s firsthand experience as a prisoner, both writers bore witness to the power of institutional punishment at its most terrible. Tolstoi observed an execution at the guillotine in Paris in 1857 and was deeply affected, though not in quite the same way Dostoevskii was as he faced the firing squad. What for Dostoevskii triggered a reflection on the nature of being and the certainty of death aroused in Tolstoi utter indignation at government power. On the same day the execution took place, Tolstoi wrote: “Human law is nonsense! The truth is that government is a conspiracy not only to exploit, but mainly to corrupt citizens…I will never serve any government anywhere” (Orwin, *Cambridge* 6). 20 Both writers delivered literary responses to the phenomenon of execution. The most prominent examples include: Myshkin, who echoes Dostoevskii’s thoughts on the absurdity of the condemned’s last moments in *The Idiot*; Bezukhov, who stands stunned and helpless as the French execute his countrymen in *War and Peace*; and Nekhliudov, whose outrage at the “murder” of prisoners dying on the road to Siberia reflects Tolstoi’s own rejection of mankind’s unfounded claim to judgment in *Resurrection*. The range of thought addressed in even these three examples is telling of how fertile Russia’s culture of punishment was for these two writers.

Tolstoi had other encounters with the law, which were perhaps less profoundly influential than the 1857 execution in Paris, but significant all the same. In 1862, while

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20 Medzhivbovskaya credits the Paris execution with “[paving] the way for [Tolstoi’s] ethical radicalism in rejecting the possibility of normative coercion from above and in the name of le bien publique” (151).
Tolstoi was away from home, the government’s secret police searched Iasnaia Poliana, looking for evidence of radical political agitation relating to the peasant schools he had founded and was operating in the area. Nothing came of the search, but Tolstoi was “so infuriated that he [considered] immigration” (Orwin, Cambridge 9). Later, in 1870, Tolstoi served on a jury in Tula, finding it “very interesting and instructive,” though he refused the same duty in 1883, citing religious reasons (Orwin, Cambridge 23). A bull at Iasnaia Poliana killed its keeper while Tolstoi was away in Samara in 1872, an incident that resulted in a charge of criminal negligence for the writer (the same legal experience that led to the aforementioned anecdote about kissing the jailer’s hand). This investigation, like the 1862 search, so enraged Tolstoi that he again considered leaving the country. But Tolstoi remained, and in the 1880s, police began to track the writer closely for his links to religious sectarians.

I have listed this handful of Tolstoi’s personal and legal experiences not only because they seem relevant as a background to the literary analysis that follows, but also as a reminder that he did not write Resurrection and other prison-related works a priori. Even the so-called “sage of Iasnaia Poliana” – a writer, a schoolteacher, a philosopher, and a count from a line of nobility going back to fifteenth-century Muscovy – was throughout his life surrounded and influenced by Russian prison culture.

**Prison as Catalyst of Spiritual Transformation**

Tolstoi’s early portrayal of prison is more conceptual than mimetic. On the one hand prison is an unjust, oppressive, and morally unacceptable notion, but on the other
hand it is capable of triggering the captive’s spiritual change. This model is somewhat analogous to author’s experience in Paris, which stimulated the author’s inner change and strengthened his resolve, even as an observer.

Late in War and Peace, as Napoleon’s army overtakes a burning Moscow, Pierre Bezukhov is arrested by the French on suspicion of incendiary activity and locked up in a guardhouse. The guardhouse is not a Russian prison per se, but that only underscores the point that prison is largely an idea for Tolstoi at this time. He is not writing as a journalist or developing the kind of exposé of the Russian penal system that he will approach in Resurrection. In War and Peace, imprisonment is a state of one’s soul. It is captivity within one’s self, where there is also potential for God and freedom.

The typical mode of Tolstoi’s hero is to follow this inward route, seeking the universal within. Since Pierre’s change is almost wholly internal – a series of reflections and revelations that just needs to be set into motion by the right thought or inspiration – it could happen anywhere, in any kind of environment. Still, the fact that Pierre is imprisoned suggests that at the point of his capture his soul is not free. At the same time, prison allows him to escape the external world in order to find the internal path to truth.

This is vastly different from the way prison enters Dostoevskii’s world through time and space. Dostoevskii’s settings continuously create and reflect an imprisoned reality. Tolstoi instead places Pierre in a simple guardhouse, without giving much detail regarding the physical environment, because what matters more at this critical conjuncture is the internal state of the character, which Tolstoi clearly distinguishes from setting, unlike Dostoevskii. Tolstoi’s hero strives to be self-contained, to strike an inner
balance. Thus Pierre’s internal condition is always more important than the external conditions of his environment – more important than the forces of punishment, which will eventually fall away, and more important than his fellow prisoner Platon Karataev, whose life is most significant not on its own, but rather for the imprint it leaves on Pierre’s soul.

At the moment of Pierre’s arrest he does not know these truths. He is no one, an utterly lost seeker. Prison becomes a tool for Tolstoi to narrow the focus of his hero on his internal self. He must defend himself from the attack of the external forces of prison, which call into doubt the basic worth of his very being. At first Pierre’s capture mostly confuses him. French officers question him about who he [is], where he had been, with what purpose, and so on. These questions, leaving aside the essence of life’s business and excluding any possibility of discovering that essence, like all questions asked at trials, were aimed only at furnishing that channel down which the judges wished the answers of the accused to flow, leading him to the desired goal, that is, incrimination…Pierre experienced the same thing that an accused man experiences in any court: perplexity as to why all these questions were being asked him. (960)

With the characteristic, deceptive easiness of his prose (“If the world could write by itself, it would write like Tolstoi,” Isaak Babel’ said of War and Peace), Tolstoi draws much into this scene that is easy to overlook, but should be unpacked in order to see how his idea of the penal system affects his hero. First, the authorities interrogating Pierre ask “all” the same questions asked at all trials. Thus with just a phrase Tolstoi universalizes this court and its judges. Here the authorities represent not just the law of Napoleon, but human law and government in general, the violence of which Tolstoi had already
repudiated in 1857, horrified by the guillotine. The fact that they are French is of no consequence, as Tolstoi views all governments as perpetrators of violence.

Secondly, Pierre’s judges (the French officers) attack him with a barrage of questions (in the manner of all judges, it is implied), all of which miss what is most essential. They want to know why Pierre was near the fire, but they do not care about the fact that he rescued a child from it. Pierre is baffled by their interest in his fight with the French soldier, which he considers a minor detail, and it starts to feel as though his entire being is on trial. “Why had he fought with the looter [the French soldier]? Pierre answered that he was defending a woman, that to defend an offended woman was the duty of every man, that…He was stopped: that did not suit the case” (961).

Pierre has a tendency to universalize, a Tolstoian way of getting to the heart of the matter. Accordingly, his account quickly transitions from a concern with his personal responsibility to a concern with “every man’s” obligation (i.e. universal law). Pierre is approaching Tolstoi’s ideal, the law of compassion and universal brotherhood, when he is rebuffed by the representatives of human law, who see only the most narrowly defined version of Pierre and his case.

The cluelessness of the military court about what Tolstoi finds to be essential in a human being recalls his criticism of science, which he believes seeks answers to any

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21 This brings up an interesting parallel between Pierre and Dostoevskii’s Raskol’nikov, who both rescue children from fires. These incidents are brought up in both of their trials. In Raskol’nikov’s case, a friend uses the rescue story as an example of an external action that reflects upon the murderer’s true inner goodness. This seems to help his case, as he is sentenced to only eight years after the court considers all of the external factors and extenuating circumstances. For Pierre, the external good action of the rescue is considered by the court to be irrelevant to their judgment, which quickly becomes focused on his being rather than his action – a turn that recalls Foucault’s insistence that modern punishment targets the soul. The difference between the two cases, I would argue, reflects Tolstoi’s emphasis on being as a matter of the inner self, while in Dostoevskii’s works the concept is more fluid, a combination of inner self and external action.
number of insignificant problems without addressing the chief question: how and why one should live. Pierre, as the reader knows, is focused on precisely this question. While the court in *War and Peace* would claim to judge a human being, it has no access to his internal state, which is the most important aspect of Tolstoi’s heroes at this time. It can only see Pierre’s actions, the external and secondary aspect of his being, but it judges even this incorrectly, marking him an incendiary rather than a rescuer. Tolstoi unmasks the court as an institution that punishes out of place, lacking God’s moral authority to judge.  

The court’s inability to accurately judge Pierre demonstrates the great distance between the individual’s inner being and the society that would corrupt him from the outside. In the end, Tolstoi’s message is a hopeful one for Pierre. His true self is deep within, out of the court’s (and society’s) reach. As Pierre begins to understand this during his imprisonment, human law and society start to look petty and meaningless in comparison with the great truths held in one’s self. Prison in *War and Peace* thus provides a path for the hero to the empowerment and transformation of his soul.

It might seem too grand a conclusion to derive from the context of such a small scene, but in his other works, such as *Resurrection*, Tolstoi consistently portrays courts in the same manner. In Tolstoi’s world, to presume the power of judgment constitutes an exercise in human vanity and an affront to God. Hence Tolstoi’s version of the penal system can simultaneously inspire moral outrage (the court has no right) and outright incomprehension (how does the court not know it has no right, nor any real power?).

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22 This also anticipates the famous biblical epigraph to the later *Anna Karenina*: “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.”
Sensing the gap between the judgment of the court and his internal self-assessment, Pierre is “perplexed” at the court’s proceedings before eventually realizing its powerlessness over him. Prison reveals the independence and the resilience of the internal self.

The separation between human law, which is nothing to Tolstoi ("nonsense" in his 1857 letter), and universal (God’s) law, which is everything, means that imprisonment does not preclude the potential for inner freedom. Pierre learns the lesson that life is within him, independent of the corrupt world on the outside, and he is led to Tolstoian enlightenment. Pierre’s prison experience furthermore bares the callousness of human law, by which people are executed seemingly at random. The courts permit the most disinterested, selfish, and hypocritical people to determine matters of life and death. This line of critique is picked up again and explored more fully in Resurrection.

Prison is a catalyst for Pierre’s moral and spiritual transformation at his most critical moment in War and Peace. Just as it confines Pierre to reveal his transcendent freedom, prison isolates him so that he may connect with “the people,” who are almost always a source of good in Tolstoi’s works.

**Namelessness**

Within Tolstoi’s transformative prisons there is a recurring phenomenon of namelessness. Upon his arrest, Pierre makes a point to withhold his name from the French soldiers, and so they call him “celui qui n’avove pas son nom” (“He who does not divulge his name”) (962). Though he has practical reasons to hide his identity (“to reveal
his title and position was both dangerous and shameful”), his new designation (or lack thereof) is significant on several levels, corresponding to aspects of the penal system’s role in society as well as Pierre’s personal journey (963).

Pierre’s namelessness first reflects his lost identity as a prisoner. From the perspective of the authorities and the powerful machine of punishment, Pierre’s life is as worthless as any other prisoner’s. Power, in the Foucauldian sense, is not concerned with his individual identity, but rather with the control of his body and soul, which enables the further production of more power. Namelessness thus signals Pierre’s dehumanization.

At the same time, imprisonment alone does not erase Pierre’s identity. In fact, he spends much of the novel trying on ill-fitting new selves, whether as the darling of high society or as a freemason. Hence his capture and dehumanization only hasten a crisis of self long in the making.

Fortunately for Pierre, the destruction of his identity serves the creation of a new self. This brings to mind Tolstoi’s later words about the process of dying: “The consciousness of the continuous process of dying is useful because one cannot have this consciousness without the consciousness of life, which evokes the necessity of using one’s dying life for some task” (PSS, 51, 15; 1890). Namelessness may be a sign that Pierre is coming into consciousness of his dying life.

Tolstoi touches on this positive aspect of namelessness as General Davout interrogates Pierre after his arrest. When Pierre finally surrenders his name, the general is incredulous. In a sense, his instincts are correct. Pierre’s identity is still in question for
even the hero himself. Perhaps he is no longer the “Bezouhoff” he says he is. What follows this exchange is a moment of unexpected humanity:

Davout raised his eyes and looked fixedly at Pierre. For a few seconds they looked at each other, and that gaze saved Pierre. In that gaze, beyond all the conventions of war and courts, human relations were established between these two men. In that one moment, they both vaguely felt a countless number of things and realized that they were both children of the human race, that they were brothers. At first glance, for Davout, who had only just raised his head from his list, where human deeds and life were known by numbers, Pierre was only a circumstance, and Davout could have shot him without taking a bad act on his conscience; but now he had seen him as a human being. (964)

Tolstoi uses the dehumanizing penal system to reestablish the common humanity within everyone, including ostensible enemies. He sets “the conventions of war and courts” in direct opposition to “human relations” and the feeling of brotherhood. In this moment, the whole idea of prison falls away, exposed as an arbitrary and absurd list of numbers. It is Tolstoi’s ostranenie applied to the penal system that compels one person to order the murder of another based on a piece of paper. An adjutant interrupts Davout with a new matter before the exchange is finished, and Pierre is marched out in uncertainty, but there is still something reassuring in the way the general “had given him such a human look” (965). The human connection transcends the powerful forces of punishment.

Over the course of his incarceration, the spirit of his fellow prisoner Platon Karataev inspires him, and the loss of identity starts to look like an opportunity to begin anew. Tolstoi transfigures the destructive namelessness of prison into Pierre’s kenosis, eliminating all obstacles of his past life that might stand in the way of his transformation.
The Christlike Platon Karataev embodies a spirit of brotherhood and compassion that can be described as an ideal born of namelessness: always to place others’ needs before one’s own, to exchange egoism for selflessness and acceptance. Even the dog who follows Karataev around reflects the namelessness that enables a greater connection to people of all kinds.

This dog lived in their shed, spending the nights with Karataev, but occasionally went to town somewhere and came back again. It had probably never belonged to anyone, and now, too, it was no one’s and had no name at all. The French called it Azor, the storytelling soldier called it Femgalka, Karataev and the others sometimes called it Gray, sometimes Floppy. Its not belonging to anyone and the absence of a name and even of a breed, even of a definite color, seemed not to bother the purplish dog in the least. (1009)

Though Pierre associates the dog with Karataev, he has more in common with it himself. Both are Karataev’s followers; both have taken up his nameless spirit, which allows them to live freely among all people without “belonging” to anyone. Their identities are fluid in name but steady in spirit, not unlike the way Tolstoi thought of all religions as approaching the same truth. Karataev’s example demonstrates a profound connectedness to life and humanity, and his nameless followers empty themselves so they might follow his Christlike way.

As a disciple, Pierre becomes physically Karataev-like (he eventually slims down, grows out a beard, and dresses like a peasant), but what is more significant is the “firmness, calm and…lively readiness in the expression of his eyes, such as had never been there before” (1009). Just like Davout’s gaze, which “saved” Pierre after his arrest, the spirit of humanity again shines through the eyes. Internally reborn through a new, greater understanding of life, Pierre strives to follow Karataev’s example to live in the
present moment with simple compassion. He helps peacefully to end a fight that breaks out between the prisoners and their captors. One of the French soldiers credits Pierre’s noble action to his education and class, but this could not be further from the truth. Instead, it is Pierre’s journey through imprisonment and namelessness, and his kenotic denial of education and class that allows him to internalize Karataevism and become a conduit of peace and understanding.

**Tolstoi and Foucault**

Pierre’s utopian feeling is born out of dystopian circumstances, which can be better understood within a Foucauldian framework. Though Tolstoi and Foucault might seem to have little in common at first, the two writers’ concerns overlap in regard to power, discipline, and prison. In fact, Tolstoi, like Foucault, discerns a change in punishment’s methodology in the modern era while rejecting its claim to humaneness, as is reflected in this entry on his *Circle of Reading* calendar: “Punishment is always cruel and tortuous. If it were not cruel and tortuous it would never be meted out. Imprisonment is as cruel and tortuous for people of our time as was flogging by knout a hundred years ago” (*PSS* 42: 17-18). The shift from the spectacle to the timetable is no less of a challenge to Tolstoi’s idea of universal “truth.”

Tolstoi’s belief that no one except God has the power to punish requires the difficult resolution of Foucauldian reality with Tolstoian truth. Medzhibovskaya reasons that “if Tolstoi’s absolute form of justice, which rejects the notion of power and, hence, punishment, were applied in the courtroom, Eichmann’s claim that he merely followed
orders would become indefensible, as would Foucault’s doctrine of punishment” (153). Regardless of Tolstoi’s preferred the arbiter of justice, and whether he would deny the existence of worldly power, in his fiction he remains relatively bound by the reality he observes. The reality of “what is” often threatens to undermine the higher truth of “what should be.” This conflict is at the core of Resurrection, which attempts to oppose immense injustice with virtuousness on an equal scale.

As writers of prison, Tolstoi and Foucault provide different vantage points on how power works to discipline and punish. While Foucault prefers to visualize the whole network of power from above, Tolstoi is generally more focused on the ground level, on the network’s individual nodes. This provides another major topic for Resurrection, in which Tolstoi describes with sincere amazement the way people pledge allegiance to manmade authorities, absolving themselves of responsibility for the violence they carry out, and ignoring God’s law of compassion.

It is an issue that had found its way into Tolstoi’s fiction for decades. In War and Peace, Pierre is caught in a decentralized authority’s network of power. Pierre’s loss of identity frightens him, and the dystopian language is Tolstoi’s own: Pierre feels “like an insignificant chip of wood fallen into the wheels of a machine unknown to him but functioning well” (963). After his “trial,” on his march to possible execution, “there was one thought in Pierre’s head all that time. It was the thought of who, finally, had sentenced him to be executed” (965). He finally determines that it was “no one,” but rather “some order of things” (poriadok kakoi-to), “the turn of circumstances” (965).
Nekhliudov ponders the same question of responsibility in *Resurrection*, where the “order of things” (*poriadok*) resurfaces. It remains unnamed in the later novel, but the same *poriadok* is evident from the coercive and yet blameless nature of its destructive work. After two prisoners die in the heat of a forced march to Siberia, Nekhliudov thinks,

And the most terrible thing of all is that the man was murdered and no one knows who murdered him. But it was murder. He was brought out, like all the rest of the convicts, on Maslenikov’s [the official who oversees the convicts] instructions. Maslenikov probably made out the usual order, putting his stupid florid signature on some formal document with a printed heading, and naturally he won’t consider himself responsible. Still less will the careful prison doctor who examined the convicts…The prison inspector? But the inspector was only obeying orders…Nor could the officer of the convoy be blamed either, for his business was to receive a certain number of prisoners at such and such a place and deliver the same to such and such a place…Nobody is to blame, and yet the men are dead – murdered by these very men who are not to blame for their deaths. (446)

Through his damning and yet baffled portrayal of the penal system, Tolstoi describes differently the same power relations Foucault will theorize much later in *Discipline and Punish*. In both *Resurrection* and *War and Peace*, the awesome power that would have been wielded by an emperor in the premodern era of punishment (according to Foucault’s ideas) has been decentralized and distributed to subordinates. Their sense of duty, obedience to a chain of command, and submission to the order of power relations compel the agents of the penal system to enact violence on their fellow human beings at a comfortable distance from the autocrat, who is bound by power himself. Consequently, power produces and reinforces the relationship between the punishers and the punished, creating stability and discipline in the system, which aims to keep everyone under its control.
Of course, Tolstoi did not describe his works this way, but his novels provide insight into Foucault’s theories on the ground level. In the latter half of *Resurrection*, Nekhliudov continuously reframes a problem of power in his head, eventually arriving at possibly the best Tolstoian description of Foucault’s modern system of discipline:

Suppose a problem in psychology were set to find means of making people of our time – Christians, humane, simple, kindly people – commit the most horrible crimes without having any feeling of guilt, only one solution would present itself: to do precisely what is being done now, namely, to make them governors, inspectors, officers, policemen and so forth; which means, first, that they must be convinced that there is a thing called government service which allows men to treat other men like inanimate objects, thereby banning all human brotherly relations with them; and secondly, that the people entering this ‘government service’ must be so conjoined that the responsibility for the results of their treatment of people can never fall on any one of them individually…The whole trouble is that people think there are circumstances when one may deal with human beings without love, but no such circumstances ever exist. (450)

Nekhliudov identifies the *poriadok* as his own nemesis as well as that of mankind at large. As he loses and gives up friends, family, and property, Nekhliudov’s fight against the power and control of this ubiquitous force becomes the sole reason for his existence.

Thus Foucault’s insight allows a deeper interpretation of the power at work in *Resurrection* than the moral Tolstoi provides on the surface. Without looking at the Foucauldian power relations in the novel, critics such as Andrew Kaufman, for example, see the major problem of the *Resurrection* as how “social power, financial success, and a comfortable lifestyle can be powerful deterrents to change, and can blind us to our authentic inner selves and needs” (215). Kaufman argues that *Resurrection*’s evil is the type of Stiva Oblonskii, referring to what Gary Saul Morson identified as “right here, right now” evil, which “conquers by redirecting our attention from what we should do. It tempts us to negligence” (Kaufman 216, Morson *Anna* 49). The danger of comfort and
negligence is indeed one of the lessons of the novel, but the two previous passages from
Resurrection above point to something more mysterious and powerful behind the
violence and oppression of human beings than Stiva Oblonskii’s everyday laziness. To
challenge the whole network of power relations, which can compel a prison guard
(against his instinct of compassion) to march a sick man to his death, is not simply a
matter of rousing the proverbial Oblomov from bed. Tolstoi wants to awaken the
aristocratic conscience, but at the same time he perceives the more profound problem of
modern discipline, which he has already designated as the reigning poriadok.

In War and Peace, the problem of the poriadok is most brutally evident in the
scene of the firing squad, when Pierre cannot manage to place the blame for his
imprisonment or the executions he is forced to witness. For Foucault, the premodern
public execution was “the manifestation of force; or rather, it was justice as the physical,
material and awesome force of the sovereign deployed there. The ceremony of the public
torture and execution displayed for all to see the power relation that gave his force to the
law” (50). The presence of the sovereign is conspicuously absent from the execution
scene in War and Peace.

Indeed, Tolstoi’s execution has a rather modern Foucauldian character. The
language of the narrator is telling. The same word he uses to describe the “order of
things” (poriadok) turns up again as the doomed prisoners are brought out to be shot:
“The criminals were placed in a certain order, which was on the list (Pierre was sixth),
and led to the post” («Преступников расставили по известному порядку, который
был в списке [Пьер стоял шестым], и подвели к столбу») (965). The sentence is
rendered passive in English because in Russian the subject is not explicitly named.
Rather, it could be inferred by the verbs rasstavili and podveli as an undefined “they.”
This kind of construction is not unusual in Russian, but the absence of a subject who
could be held responsible, combined with the recurrence of poriadok, which is again
associated with a dehumanizing list, suggests a force at work outside of human agency.
The phrase po izvestnomu poriadku (“in/by a certain order”) is also interesting in that
izvestnyi may connote “known” or “established,” which only adds to the omnipresent
character of this force.

The mysteriousness of who or what is causing the cruel event is reinforced several
times in the description of the execution. “There was movement in the ranks of soldiers,
and it was noticeable that they were all hurrying, and hurrying not as people hurry to do
something everyone understands, but as they hurry in order to finish a necessary but
unpleasant and incomprehensible business” (966). The soldiers, like Pierre, do not
understand what has ensnared them and compelled them to perpetrate such horrors. They
carry out their supposed duty with “pale, frightened faces” and “trembling hands” (966).
As trapped and blameless as Pierre himself, they are instruments of power coerced to
murder. Everyone is subordinate to the invisible but terrible poriadok. As the prisoners
are being shot,

Pierre, breathing hard, looked around as if asking, ‘What does it mean?’ The
same question was in all the gazes that met Pierre’s gaze. On all the Russian
faces, on the faces of the French soldiers and officers, on all without exception, he
read the same fear, horror, and struggle that were in his heart. ‘But who, finally,
is doing this? They’re all suffering just as I am. Who is it? Who?’ flashed for a
second in Pierre’s soul. (966)
Just as General Davout’s gaze connects with Pierre and establishes their common humanity during his interrogation, here the gaze also indicates a mutual understanding, or a mutual failure to understand, though Pierre does not immediately recognize it. As he witnesses the executions, his “faith in the world’s good order [«благоустройство»], in humanity’s and his own soul, and in God, [is] destroyed” (968). At the same time, the fearful looks shared during the executions give proof of an enduring human relationship that exists in spite of the violence of the power structure. In Tolstoi’s utopian vision, this common humanity has the potential to unite all people to overthrow the murderous 

*poriadok*. Pierre better understands the hope of this wordless connection after meeting Platon Karataev, through whom his faith in humanity is renewed. The world’s *poriadok* is found to be at odds with its people, and Pierre and Tolstoi resolutely side with the latter.

Indeed, Tolstoi shows the lists of numbers and names, the differences of nationality and rank, the power that compels violence – that is, the general “order of things” - to be outside of and alien to humanity. They do not come from inside the soul of a person, where the spirit of brotherhood still remains somewhere, even if it is buried beneath a layer of worldly corruption, distracting superficialities, and false institutions that would lead one astray. Nekhliudov articulates this point of view in *Resurrection* when he considers how the chain of command that “murdered” two prisoners by forcing them to march in the unbearable heat is somehow blameless.

Every one of them – Maslennikov, the inspector, the officer of the escort – if he had not been a governor, an inspector, an officer, would have thought twenty times before sending people off in such heat and such a crowd; they would have stopped twenty times on the way if they had noticed a man getting faint and
gasping for breath – they would have got him out of the crowd and into the shade, given him water and allowed him to rest, and then if anything had happened they would have shown some pity. They did nothing of the sort: they even prevented others from helping; because they were thinking not of human beings and their obligations towards them but of the duties and responsibilities of their office, which they placed above the demands of human relations. That is the whole truth of the matter…If once we admit, be it for a single hour or in a single instance, that there can be anything more important than compassion for a fellow human being, then there is no crime against man that we cannot commit with an easy conscience. (447)

Even as Tolstoi diagnoses the same epidemic of modern disciple and punishment that Foucault defines, he remains hopeful. The solution, Tolstoi suggests through Nekhliudov, is to bring the shadowy poriadok, which controls all of us, into the light. If we see that its immoral foundation – obedience, self-interest, greed, careerism, and so on – is not in line with God’s law of compassion, humanity can and will build a new order. Moreover, Resurrection suggests, if Nekhliudov, a representative of the class that benefits the most from this “order of things,” can recognize and take to heart the law of compassion, then the rest of us can as well.

As in many of Tolstoi’s works, there is an undercurrent of optimism in War and Peace, a tireless belief in the inherent good of the individual, by which even the poriadok of the punishing power structure is threatened. Tolstoi’s optimism, which is not shared by Foucault, accounts for the duality of his prisons, in which a new understanding of life can counterbalance the prisoner’s suffering.
Prison and the Return to Life

In *War and Peace*, Platon Karataev embodies this hope for humanity. He remains just outside the reach of the coercive *poriadok* of society, living closer to “real” life as Tolstoi presents it – the simple and humble life of the *narod*. As the power structure has flattened and expanded to fill in the distance between the people and the tsar, Tolstoi presents the people as having the potential to remain uncorrupted. Critical of all forms of government rule, Tolstoi did not dream about the rule of a benevolent tsar, unlike some of his Slavophile contemporaries. His idea instead was to return to the peasantry, to move away from hierarchy and whatever power was behind its incredible domination of the fundamental compassion of human beings. The inhuman *poriadok* is defined by differentiation that compels one person to exercise power over another. Karataev, in contrast, is connected to everyone through a humanity and compassion that Tolstoi portrays as perfectly common, and thus attainable.

Pierre meets Karataev in captivity just after the executions of several men have left him with little faith in humanity. Karataev is a peasant and a soldier, but most importantly for Pierre, he lives in a kind of harmony with the people around him. He has a strangely profound bond to everything, which makes him especially striking to Pierre, who has never felt more disconnected from life.

Karataev’s peaceful accord with the world is the result of an all-encompassing acceptance: “Fate seeks a head. But we keep judging: this isn’t good, this isn’t right. Our luck is like water in a fishnet: drag it and it swells, pull it out and nothing’s there. So it is” (971). The peasant’s words hold special meaning in the wake of the executions.
What for Pierre is a monstrous act perpetrated by the faceless and incomprehensible order of things, Karataev perceives as a ripple in the river of fate. In the same vein, Karataev refuses to lament his own “fate” (how he was brought to war and prison), reasoning that if it had not been he, it would have been his younger brother. Karataev’s acceptance of the poriadok recalls Tolstoi’s famous advocacy of nonresistance to evil. But how does this work in the novel, especially in consideration of Karataev’s quick and undeserved death, when he falls ill on the road from Moscow and is shot by the French?

The key to understanding Karataev is that, as described above, he is the human carrier of a spirit of brotherhood. Thus, like a good artist for the late Tolstoi, his worth lies in his ability to infect his viewer or listener with a noble feeling. The relationship between Karataev and Pierre, like the relationship between artist and audience in What is Art?, is antithetical to the power relations of Foucault’s model (or Tolstoi’s poriadok). While the latter uses the individual (and thus the masses as a network of individuals) to produce discipline and power for the continuous reinforcement of an inhuman political machine, the former is based on a freely given feeling of love from one person to another, which could potentially collapse the poriadok. In the case of Karataev, that feeling of brotherhood is passed on to Pierre, and then hopefully on to those he meets, as well as to the reader of War and Peace, and so on. It is an undoubtedly idealistic model, but one in which the author clearly believed, providing his reader with an example of a first infection of feeling. After Karataev’s death, he “remained forever in Pierre’s soul as the strongest and dearest memory and the embodiment of everything Russian, kindly and round” (972).
Within the overall context of the distance of power, the poriadok, and Tolstoi’s alternative, it is still more illuminating to look at Karataev as Tolstoi’s living spirit of brotherhood in prison. His physical description is odd for its geometric imagery.

[Pierre’s] first impression of something round was fully confirmed: the whole figure of Platon in his French greatcoat tied with a rope, in a peaked cap and bast shoes, was round, his head was perfectly round, his back, chest shoulders even his arms, which he held as if always about to embrace something, were round; his pleasant smile and his large, brown tender eyes were round. (972)

The roundness suggests Karataev’s wholeness, that the “kingdom of God is within him,” and indeed he is somehow everything at once. For Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, “this rotundity typifies the eternal completeness of all that is simple, natural and artificial, a self-sufficingness, which seems to the artist the primary element of the Russian national genius” (88). In his completeness, Karataev encompasses opposites, revealing them all to be different sides of the same shape. His French coat is countered in effect by his rope belt and bast shoes, marked items of the Russian peasantry. Thus national boundaries fall apart on Karataev, or at least seem absurdly contrived. He is also a soldier of war and yet ready to embrace. As a prisoner, his easy-going nature and pleasant smile stand out in great contrast with Pierre’s misery and despair. He knows “how to do everything, not very well, but not badly either” (973). He is full of contradictions, but in Karataev contradictions signify balance rather than disorder or inconsistency, as for example, in the following description:

[Karataev] must have been over fifty, judging by his stories of the campaigns he had taken part in long ago as a soldier. He himself did not know and had no way of determining how old he was; but his teeth, bright white and strong, which kept popping out in two semicircles when he laughed (which he often did), were all sound and intact; there was not a single gray hair in his beard or on his head, and his whole body had an air of suppleness and especially of firmness and hardiness.
His face, despite its small, round wrinkles, had an expression of innocence and youth; his voice was pleasant and melodious. But the main peculiarity of his speech consisted in its immediacy and promptness. He evidently never thought of what he had said or would say; and owing to that, there was in the quickness and certainty of his intonation a special, irresistible persuasiveness. His physical strength and agility in the first period of captivity were such that it seemed he did not understand what fatigue and illness were. (972)

Old in experience, but physically youthful and strong, Karataev is attuned to all facets of life. The confidence and quickness of his speech indicates an abundance of wisdom and a complete lack of pretense.

As interesting and exemplary as all of Karataev’s traits may be individually for Pierre, they are more important when considered as a whole, as is only appropriate given his “roundness.” Karataev is the model of a free life, which is of course underscored by the fact that he is a prisoner. Captivity does not affect him, unlike Pierre, who has been crushed by the poriadok responsible for senseless suffering and murder. As such, Tolstoi defines Karataev’s freedom, connection with the peasantry, and irrationality (e.g. embodied and spoken contradictions) as something apart from the violence and injustice of prison and its incomprehensible governing order. While Pierre’s experience reveals the existence and character of this inhuman poriadok, Karataev’s presence reassures us that it is wholly outside our nature: “Having been taken prisoner and grown a beard, he had evidently thrown off everything assumed, alien, soldierly, and involuntarily returned to his former peasant, folkish ways” (973).

War and the penal system are alien to the world’s Karataevs, whom Tolstoi presents as humanity’s best representatives, the least corrupted by a society that imprisons and murders its own. Hence Karataev is not so much a real person as the spirit
of what Tolstoi portrays as the true essence of humanity, with which the rest of us have
lost touch in the machinations of the *poriadok*.

Karataev had no attachments, friendships, or love, as Pierre understood them; but
he loved and lived lovingly with everything that life brought his way, especially
other people – not any specific people, but those who were there before his eyes.
He loved his mutt, his comrades, the French, he loved Pierre, who was his
neighbor; but Pierre sensed that, despite all his gentle tenderness towards him (by
which he involuntarily gave Pierre’s spiritual life its due), Karataev would not
have been upset for a moment to be parted from him. And Pierre was beginning
to experience the same feeling toward Karataev. Platon Karataev was for all the
other prisoners the most ordinary of soldiers…But for Pierre he remained forever
as he had seen him the first night, the unfathomable, round, and eternal
embodiment of the spirit of simplicity and truth. (974)

Karataev has almost no worldly presence other than the lives he touches as a “spirit.”
“Simplicity and truth” may be read as “unspoiled” by society’s corrupting influence, a
common trope for Tolstoi, an admirer of Rousseau, in his more idealistic portrayals of the
Russian peasantry. Thus Tolstoi uses the inhumanity of prison to drive Pierre into the
embrace of the law of compassion and brotherhood that could destroy it. Not unlike
Raskol’nikov, who begins to reconnect with life and the people in Siberia, a spirit of
humanity visits Pierre in prison, offering him a kind of transcendent freedom.

Tolstoi’s narrator leaves no doubt about prison’s role as a catalyst in Pierre’s
positive spiritual transformation. In fact, the didacticism that comes to the surface of the
narration in the aftermath of Pierre’s imprisonment is indicative of how the difference
between Tolstoi’s pre- and post-conversion works has been overblown. According to the
narrator, over the course of his four-week imprisonment, Pierre “received the peace and
contentment with himself that he had previously striven for in vain” (1012). His
transformation is described as freedom, and specifically as an inner freedom.
The absence of suffering, the satisfaction of one’s needs, and the resulting freedom to choose one’s occupation, that is, one’s way of life, now seemed to Pierre the highest and most unquestionable human happiness...The satisfaction of his needs – for good food, cleanliness, freedom – now that he was deprived of them all, seemed perfect happiness to Pierre...All of Pierre’s dreams were now turned to the time when he would be free. And yet afterwards and for the whole of his life Pierre thought and spoke with rapture of that month of captivity, of those irrevocable, strong, and joyful sensations, and above all of that full peace of mind, that perfect inner freedom, which he experienced only in that time. (1013)

Prison is, for Pierre, an opportunity for privation, to cleanse the soul of worldly corruption. His overall well-being as a seeker of truth and happiness depends on his imprisonment. Through his experience, Pierre has achieved a “readiness for anything,” a “moral fitness” («нравственная подобранность») (1014). He comes to resemble Karataev not only in looks and dress, but also in spirit. The best example of this is the characteristic laugh he acquires from Karataev, which is accompanied by the newfound freedom of his soul: “‘Ha, ha, ha,’ laughed Pierre. And he said aloud to himself: ‘The soldier wouldn’t let me go. They caught me, they locked me up. They’re holding me prisoner. Who, me? Me? Me – my immortal soul! Ha, ha, ha!...Ha, ha, ha...’ he laughed, with tears brimming his eyes” (1020). The reader can join in Pierre’s knowing laugh, with which he accepts the outside world only to dismiss it, because the reader is privy to the lesson learned from Pierre’s imprisonment:

In captivity, in the shed, Pierre had learned, not with his mind, but with his whole being, his life, that man is created for happiness, that happiness is within him, in the satisfying of natural human needs, and that all unhappiness comes not from lack, but from superfluity; but now, in these last three weeks of the march, he had learned a new and more comforting truth – he had learned that there is nothing frightening in the world. He had learned that, as there is no situation in the world in which a man can be happy and perfectly free, so there is no situation in which he can be perfectly unhappy and unfree. He had learned that there is a limit to suffering and a limit to freedom, and that those limits are very close. (1060)
Tolstoi delivers his lesson in a heavy-handed manner very similar to the one he employs in *Resurrection*, but the message will change significantly in the later novel. In *War and Peace*, prison teaches Pierre that everything he needs to be happy is internal. Furthermore, in this total reorientation to his internal self, Pierre learns to accept the external, imperfect world around him. The metaphysical turn here from the importance of the external being (e.g. Pierre’s social status, high society life) to the internal being is accompanied by a shift in focus from the incomprehensible *poriadok* of that external world to the supposedly inherent simplicity and acceptance of the Russian peasant’s world. Thus Tolstoi uses prison in *War and Peace* to preach withdrawal from the incomprehensible and alien external world to a common brotherhood grounded in one’s internal, human feelings of compassion. This relationship between the external and internal, as well as the wisdom of withdrawal from the world, will be greatly challenged in *Resurrection*.

In *War and Peace*, Tolstoi’s prison is at the nexus of the spiritual and the social, a moral battleground where the internal, metaphysical struggle of his hero is complicated, and then clarified, by the external, Foucauldian power structure perceived as the *poriadok*. Just as Foucault’s ideas are useful in analyzing aspects of Dostoevskii’s works, they also provide a new perspective on Tolstoi, revealing how some of his major concerns as a writer are closely linked to problems of the modern penal system. In fact, by using Foucault, one can see how well the two Russian novelists complement each other in describing the evolution of the penal process that will later concern the French philosopher.
Foucault’s theory of this process, which I quote at length in Chapter One, includes a couple of main points regarding its new character in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The first idea is that punishment becomes hidden and abstract; it is now in the mind rather than before our eyes. As I have tried to show in Chapter One, Dostoevskii’s fiction reveals the heavy influence of prison on modern consciousness. As punishment becomes more abstract, it becomes more pervasive and ordinary, and thus hidden. This is why prison is prevalent not only in the content of Dostoevskii’s works, but is also inscribed in its very structure. Dostoevskii spent years in carceral space and time, and perhaps this is why the hidden and abstract element of the penal system is most pronounced in his fiction, rather than in Tolstoi’s, for example. Dostoevskii has a feel for the source of the punishment diffused in the everyday that remains veiled to most.

Foucault’s second major point about the modern penal system builds from the first. As the mechanisms of punishment become more hidden and abstract, “justice” puts a great distance between itself and the violence done in its name. In practical terms, this means that those charged with enacting justice (kings, presidents, judges, governments, and so on) refuse responsibility for the violence of punishment because a network of power relations (hierarchies, chains of command, institutions, bureaucracies and so on) now keeps them far away from the punished. If Dostoevskii is the writer of punishment unseen, Tolstoi’s fiction belongs to the supplementary idea: that an inhuman network of power relations has grown up all around us, creating a vast distance between the authorities and the site of their violence. This distance is so great, and the responsibility
for violence so seamlessly distributed in the network, that the punished, like Pierre in
*War and Peace*, cannot determine who is actually acting upon them.

Tolstoi abhorred the penal system in Russia, as is obvious to any reader of
*Resurrection*, but the question remains: Why did he keep returning to the topic of prison
in his fiction? The answer mostly likely lies in the fact that, in addition to the possible
biographical reasons for Tolstoi’s concern with the penal system, prison signified a
challenge to his overarching philosophy and moral system. Indeed, the penal system was
in direct opposition to the idea Tolstoi championed for more or less his whole life, and to
which I have already made several allusions: the law of compassion and universal
brotherhood.

Enthusiasm for the tantalizingly simple idea of universal brotherhood arose in
Tolstoi even as a child, as evidenced by his fond memories of the game of the “little
green stick.”

When [Tolstoi] was about five years old, his beloved eldest brother Nikolai, then
about eleven, announced that the secret to human happiness was written on a little
green stick which was buried in the woods a short walk from their house. When
the secret was revealed, he told his brothers, people would not only be happy, but
they would also cease to be ill, and would no longer be angry with each other. At
that point everybody would become ‘ant brothers’ («муравьиные братья»).
Tolstoi explains in his memoirs that Nikolai must have read something about the
Moravian Brethren («моравские братья»). (Bartlett 52)

In his later years, Tolstoi asked that upon his death he be buried on the spot where the
little green stick was supposedly hidden, and his request was granted. While the life
lived between these two points produced complex and nuanced works of fiction, as well
as lengthy treatises on subjects such as religion and art, 1899’s *Resurrection* shows
Tolstoi paring his philosophy back down to this fundamental law.
It is not a coincidence that brotherhood in its simplest form (compassion for one another, living for one another) emerges as Tolstoi’s one moral law in a novel that directly confronts the Russian penal system. The hypocritical judgments of crooked courts and the suffering people inflict on one another – all done with the ostensible goal of making society better - are antithetical to universal brotherhood. Furthermore, the penal system, with all of its Kafkaesque intricacies and absurdities, as well as its network of dehumanizing Foucauldian power relations, offers a thousand complications and thus a thousand excuses for our cruelty to one another. Tolstoi believes that all of this can be overthrown if people follow the rule of compassion that already resides within them. In this way, prison represents one of the great opponents of Tolstoi’s philosophy.

*Resurrection* and *Nekhliudov the Advocate*

Tolstoi’s most explicit attack on the penal system occurs in *Resurrection*. Far less critical attention has been paid to Tolstoi’s final novel than to *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, perhaps because the author’s post-conversion fiction favored accessibility and clear moral messaging over the complexities of his earlier works, a preference he stated in *What is Art?* Still, *Resurrection* remains of interest as Tolstoi’s greatest attempt to imbue the hero of a complex, large-scale piece of fiction with his late ideology, which the author had mostly laid out in essays and shorter works (*The Death of Ivan Il’ich* [1886], *The Kreutzer Sonata* [1889]) up to that point. Tolstoi wrote *Resurrection* after he had supposedly given up writing novels, his last being *Anna Karenina* in 1877. In spite of the author’s new artistic and moral goals, *Resurrection* is not an oversized parable, nor is it
exactly a return to the form that brought Tolstoi international fame with *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*.

Many critics of *Resurrection*, such as Orwin and Richard Gustafson, whom I will discuss throughout this section, seem to apply a formula for how to read Tolstoi derived from these two earlier novels, overlooking how the final novel exhibits new and surprising elements for the author. Others, such as Käte Hamburger, look at Nekhliudov as a continuation of the “Nekhliudov” character from some of Tolstoi’s earliest works. *Resurrection*, she argues, “completes the ring begun with *Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth*” and “can be added to the series of early [biographical] works of the 1850s” (67). B.M. Eikhenbaum, in contrast, reminds us that Tolstoi was an artist of crises, and that “the real basis of all of these crises in Tolstoi was the search for new artistic forms and a new justification for them” (“Crises,” 54).

In the spirit of Eikhenbaum’s argument, I will attempt to investigate what is new about *Resurrection* for Tolstoi, to reexamine its hero and central crises, and to explore the theme of prison that underlies it all. Tolstoi’s venture begins with a difficult undertaking: the combination of the psychologically deep characters and mimesis of his earlier fiction with the universalizing simplicity of his later moral viewpoint. Caught in the middle of this literary experiment is the hero, Dmitrii Nekhliudov, a would-be Levin or Pierre type of truth-seeker who must try to justify his existence in Tolstoi’s most ethically rigid world.

Critics of *Resurrection* are quick to point out the dominance of the author’s point of view over his characters in the novel. As Galina Galagan describes it, “the author
stands above the hero,” and having himself lived through the spiritual turmoil the hero must now endure, “knows immeasurably more than the hero” (241). As Tolstoi writes *Resurrection*, Galagan states, “[He] now considers the truth («истина») to have already been found by him and that the task lies in realigning oneself in accordance with this truth” (241). In this line of thought, the all-knowing author passes his wisdom down to the hero. Tolstoi presents the “truth” to Nekhliudov, Nekhliudov changes his life and way of thinking in harmony with this enlightenment, and the reader is meant to follow. The author’s overriding voice is likely responsible for the narrative “straight line” that Renato Poggioli sees: “the tragic curve of transgression and retribution [seen in The *Kreutzer Sonata* and *The Powers of Darkness*] is…replaced by the straight line of a new ‘pilgrim’s progress’” (25).

While Tolstoi certainly speaks over the hero in *Resurrection*, critical treatment too often assumes the hero to be in lockstep with the viewpoint that Tolstoi is trying to advance. *Resurrection’s* interest lies in the fact that its hero is actually created out of a friction with the author’s plan rather than accordance with it. As Galagan notes, Nekhliudov’s social (rather than spiritual) focus was not part of Tolstoi’s initial design but actually came about as late as 1898, in the novel’s third iteration (Galagan 250). Even in the final version, the structure of the novel is out of sync with the hero, a problem Galagan attributes to the unusual nature of Nekhliudov’s social aspect for Tolstoi. I would take this further and propose that Nekhliudov, coming from the Tolstoian conflict

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23 Translations from Galagan are my own.
24 The narrative “straight line” was also attractive to the Soviets. Orwin notes that “all Soviet critics regard *Resurrection* as representative of a new genre, the social novel, which, as the novel of the people, was historically destined to replace the psychological novel” (“Riddle” 481).
between “what is” and “what should be,” creates his own truth out of the Tolstoian truth he is given.

Tolstoi’s narrator moralizes with such force that it is easy to conflate the author’s message with the hero’s. One can perceive Nekhliudov’s steady, gradual progression from spiritual darkness to light in *Resurrection* because that is almost certainly how Tolstoi wants us to read it. Instead, the hero finds his purpose as a prisoners’ advocate, only to be slowly undone in the end by the author’s imposition of inward gazing and moral abstraction.

The cause of this disconnect is the subject of prison, due to which the hero’s focus on interiority and a philosophy of acceptance (evident in Levin, Pierre, and others) reverses course, turning toward advocacy, engagement with the world, and challenge to authority. It is precisely the cruel reality of the penal system that leads Tolstoi to create a crusading hero outside of his usual mold - a hero for whom he struggles to find a place in the conclusion of his final novel.

At first glance, *Resurrection’s* Nekhliudov would seem to accord well with the rest of the gallery of semi-autobiographical Tolstoian heroes. Hamburger calls Nekhliudov “the name by which Tolstoi henceforth personified his moral “I”…He is depicted [in *Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth*] as the youth’s friend, whose still vague ideal conviction that it is the duty of each human being to strive for moral perfection determines Tolstoian life decisively from the beginning” (67). This internal striving continues in Tolstoi’s later heroes. Like Levin and Pierre, *Resurrection’s* Nekhliudov is drawn from the life of the truth-seeking, moralizing, and sometimes brash author. All
three heroes are marked by an independence of thought, a desire for self-improvement, and an active search for God, which for Tolstoi means a search for how to live.

Nekhliudov begins his search while serving on a jury for a case in which a prostitute - a former ward of his aunt’s whom he had “seduced” a decade earlier, when he was a university student and she was sixteen – is accused alongside a couple of hotel workers of robbing and murdering a guest. Blaming himself for originating the chain of terrible events that has befallen Maslova, the prostitute, Nekhliudov takes her case upon himself in a bid for personal salvation. Thus his search for truth begins as a journey inward, a reexamination of his soul, as was the case of the major Tolstoian heroes before him. In the end, however, Nekhliudov will be distinguished from the others in two major ways: (1) his preference for action and work in the world and (2) his refusal to accept the world as it is.

**Interiority and Acceptance**

A look at Nekhliudov’s predecessors reveals the dominant interiority of Tolstoi’s truth-seeking heroes. In *War and Peace*, Pierre and Andrei Bolkonskii are both spiritual wanderers, discovering, accepting, or rejecting Tolstoi’s truths within themselves. Though there are, of course, external factors and influences, such as prison and encounters with wise peasants, their journeys of self – the trials and revelations – remain largely internal. Finding the “truth” means coming to the right perspective and gaining understanding of the world and oneself. In other words, the hero’s chief action is thinking and rethinking. While this seems logical enough, it also means that Tolstoi’s
truth seekers before Nekhliudov have a tendency to be disconnected from the world. Once they stumble upon the right inspiration, like the drip of wax on Mikhailov’s canvas in *Anna Karenina*, they pursue enlightenment alone in a kind of state of spiritual hermitism.

In terms of prisoners, a comparison of Pierre’s captivity in *War and Peace* with the portrayal of prison in *Dead House* shows the overwhelming physicality and external pressures of Dostoevskii’s novel to be nearly absent in Tolstoi’s work. Of course, the circumstances of captivity differ significantly in the two works, but Tolstoi’s treatment of prison is characteristically cerebral, while Dostoevskii’s remains more experiential. Tolstoi’s hero is at times outraged, despondent, resolute, and ecstatic, but all of these states are treated as stops along the internal road that leads to a new understanding of life. In *Dead House*, the walls themselves are oppressive, as is the air each prisoner is forced to breathe. Tolstoi’s prison signifies unfreedom of the soul (even if it is illusory), whereas Dostoevskii’s prison is a lived-in world full of external forces acting upon the incarcerated.

Once Pierre learns through Karataev to accept the injustice of the world as it is, he also realizes that freedom is within him, as if there is no way to imprison a person who understands this supposed truth. Acceptance is the conclusion of the internal search for most of Tolstoi’s truth seekers. Like Pierre, *Anna Karenina*’s Levin undertakes a spiritual journey from unbelief to faith in God (or at least to faith in life, which Tolstoi
presents as equating to faith in God).\textsuperscript{25} Try as he might to stop the unhappiness of constant thought, by mowing the grass with the peasants or other means of distraction, he finds that he can neither stop thinking nor change the world with which he is so concerned. Instead, he learns to accept his place in it as a landowner and family man. Even after external circumstances change, such as his marriage to Kitty and the birth of their child, Levin’s past melancholy continues to plague him until he alters his way of thinking. Tolstoi’s heroes tend to rely on internal means for internal change (though occasionally aided by “simple folk,” such as the peasant who triggers Levin’s change).

The importance of interiority is no less in Tolstoi’s shorter works. The tale of the dying Ivan Il’ich can only be told because he finally looks inward for once in his life. Again, interiority leads to acceptance (in this case, of the inevitability of death). Acceptance is the defining theme of “God Sees the Truth, But Waits” (a version of which is told by Karataev in \textit{War and Peace}, but which was also published separately in 1872). In this short story, Tolstoi again uses prison as a setting of spiritual change, which is not a coincidence, since the story originates with Karataev, a prisoner. As with Pierre (falsely accused of setting fire to Moscow) and \textit{Resurrection}’s Maslova (falsely accused of murder), the story involves an innocent person in jail. Innocence is almost a prerequisite for the Tolstoian prisoner, corresponding to the author’s belief above all that one sinner

\textsuperscript{25} For example, while Pierre is being held by the French, and right before he dreams of the globe, he has the following thoughts: “Life is everything. Life is God. Everything shifts and moves, and this movement is God. And while there is life, there is delight in the self-awareness of the divinity. To love life is to love God. The hardest and most blissful thing is to love this life in one’s suffering, in the guiltlessness of suffering” («Жизнь есть всё. Жизнь есть Бог. Все перемещается и движется, и это движение есть Бог. И пока есть жизнь, есть наслаждение самосознания божества. Любить жизнь, любить Бога. Труднее и блаженнее всего любить эту жизнь в своих страданиях, в безвинности страданий») (1064).
has no right to punish another. Tolstoi’s definition of “sinner,” of course, includes us all. Thus his “innocent” prisoner could be more accurately described as one who is no guiltier than the rest, and is therefore unjustly punished. In his treatment of the penal system, Tolstoi works constantly to erode its moral foundations.

The innocent prisoner in “God Sees the Truth, But Waits” is a merchant named Aksenov, framed for the robbery and murder of another merchant at an inn. He spends the next 26 years languishing in a Siberian camp before the arrival of the prisoner Makar Semenych, who turns out to be the merchant’s real murderer. After everything is revealed, Makar Semenych asks Aksenov for forgiveness before the latter dies.

The story works on two levels characteristic of Tolstoi’s early treatment of prison. For Aksenov, prison (and the suffering it causes) serves as catalyst for spiritual transformation, just as it does for Pierre in *War and Peace*. On a larger scale, “God Sees the Truth, But Waits” challenges the legitimacy of human institutions of authority through juxtaposition with the mysterious wisdom and power of the divine. Together these themes create a narrative of internal spiritual triumph over unjust worldly conditions.

As it does for Tolstoi’s other imprisoned heroes, Aksenov’s spiritual path leads to an acceptance of God’s world and one’s place in it.\(^{26}\) Shortly after his arrest, Aksenov’s wife writes a petition to the tsar, which is denied. The rejection both implicates the tsar in the suffering of the innocent prisoner and undercuts the authority of his penal system, which is corrupt and unable to produce justice. At the same time, the tsar’s decision

\(^{26}\) By “God’s world,” I refer to the world as the believer Aksenov sees it, which can be confounding and cruel, but is nevertheless part of God’s mysterious design.
pushes Aksenov along his hagiographic path. When even Aksenov’s wife writes a letter in which she questions her husband’s innocence, he says to himself, “It seems that only God can know the truth; it is to Him alone we must appeal and from Him alone expect mercy” (79). Like Job, Aksenov is deprived of all his former life, including his wife and son, but remains assured in God’s plan, which now demands his suffering. At this point he “wrote no more petitions, gave up all hope, and only prayed to God” (79).

Acceptance of the injustice of his imprisonment turns Aksenov into a saint-like figure. He prays, buys The Lives of the Saints, and earns the respect and trust of his fellow prisoners, who refer to him as “Grandfather” and “The Saint” (79). Though he cannot say why, he decides that he “must have deserved” his 26 years in prison. Aksenov’s ultimate submission to God’s world culminates in his refusal to condemn even Makar Semenych. “God will forgive you! Maybe I’m a hundred times worse than you!” he says (83). Finally,

At these words [Aksenov’s] heart grew light and the longing for home left him. He no longer had any desire to leave prison, but only hoped for his last hour to come. In spite of what Aksenov had said, Makar Semenych confessed his guilt [to the authorities]. But when the order for [Aksenov’s] release came, Aksenov was already dead. (83)

The lightness of his heart signifies Aksenov’s own forgiveness of Makar Semenych, though he acknowledges only God’s ultimate authority to forgive. By extension, “God Sees the Truth, But Waits” suggests that only God has the power to punish, and therefore the judgments of the tsar and the punishments of the penal system cannot touch the soul of one who recognizes God’s singular authority.
Through these various examples, from Levin and Pierre to Aksenov and Ivan Il’ich, it can be said that Tolstoi’s truth seekers are dominated by interiority, by changes achieved through thought and spirit rather than action. They transform by looking inward while accepting the outside world, and prison serves as the catalyst for some of these transformations. Tolstoi’s more metaphysical prisons, in *War and Peace* and “God Sees the Truth, But Waits,” deliver more metaphysical results: spiritual transformations, changes in how the characters see their place in the world, and most importantly, acceptance of the world as it is, as part of God’s unassailable design.

**Nekhliudov’s Turn Outward and Change Through Action**

With *Resurrection*, Tolstoi’s concept of prison becomes less abstract. The social message begins to rival the moral message unlike ever before in his fiction. He describes the awful conditions of the prisoners, the hypocrisy of their judges, and the arbitrariness, incompetence, and cold-heartedness that reign over an entire system of human suffering. Accordingly, Tolstoi’s tone becomes angrier and more satiric. His prisoners suffer needlessly, no longer for their own good, to learn a lesson. Suffering can still provide an angelic glow, but this comes more from the endurance of injustice rather than any kind of inherent transformative good it does. The “acceptance” narrative of heroes such as Levin, Pierre, and Aksenov has not vanished completely in *Resurrection* - Maslova learns to accept her fate, for example - but it no longer defines the hero, who is now marked precisely by his rejection of the world as it is, the state of the penal system and human beings’ punishment of one another.
Many of Tolstoi’s works before *Resurrection* exhibit a clash between the writer’s desire for verisimilitude and his idealistic “truths” of how the world should be. For example, in *The Kreutzer Sonata* the increasingly impractical strictness of Tolstoi’s moral code, which calls for celibacy even in marriage, threatens the logical extinction of the human race. The lesson approaches the absurd, though Tolstoi nevertheless depicts it as a hard “truth.” This tension between Tolstoi the realist and Tolstoi the moralist becomes even more pronounced in *Resurrection*, which works with great ambition to stay true to both the realist and the moralist, to turn the real into the ideal. This doomed task undoubtedly accounts for the occasionally confused feeling of the novel, which has produced mixed reviews.

In order to examine *Resurrection*, it is helpful to see where Tolstoi takes his favorite type of character from the past: the hero dominated by interiority who comes to accept the world. From Nekhliudov’s initial appearance in the novel, the reader begins to detect this familiar Tolstoian pattern in him, who lives in the utmost material luxury. The air in his dressing room is “oppressive with the artificial odors of elixirs, eau de Cologne, pomatum and perfumes. There, with a special powder, he cleaned his teeth, many of which had gold fillings, rinsed his mouth with scented water and then began to wash his body all over, drying himself with various different towels” (30). The description continues in this manner, juxtaposing Nekhliudov’s blissfully ignorant dandyism with the woeful tale of the abused and forgotten Maslova, which is told just before. A fateful collision between these two worlds seems inevitable and potentially powerful as an agent of change in Nekhliudov’s life, which Tolstoi’s narrator implies is desperately needed.
Nekhliudov is not merely vain but also marked as morally degraded, once a man of high ideals (for example, in his principled objection to private property in his student days) who has been cut down in the most ordinary way by an affair with a married woman. Nevertheless, within Nekhliudov a seed of future salvation is already growing. He is aware of some of his moral failings, and is described as a victim of sin. Indeed, the narrator tells us that the married woman had “drawn him into an intimacy that entangled him further every day, and every day grew more distasteful. At first Nekhliudov had not been able to resist the temptation, then, feeling guilty towards her, he could not bring himself to force a break against her will” (33). The guilt for this affair weighs even more heavily upon him for the fact that at the same time he is courting the young Princess Korchagina, whom he is leading on without any real intention of marriage. Nekhliudov is a prisoner of lust, a vice which, as Tolstoi wrote, he “abhorred with all his heart” and took specific aim at in the novel (Resurrection 7).

All of this indicates another hero’s conversion or moral resurrection in the making, which, of course, the author promises in the novel’s title. But while the clearer moral vision of the author as he began work on Resurrection in the late 1880s may have produced what Rosemary Edmonds called “the great imaginative synthesis of Tolstoism,” it also proves to be an unsatisfying resolution for the tenacious Nekhliudov, who, as a result of Maslova’s trial, immediately sets his sights on fixing the world beyond himself.

It is impossible to miss the injustice that galvanizes Nekhliudov. As Tolstoi’s narrator describes the judicial process, in which everything and everyone is corrupt, it quickly becomes clear that Tolstoi is the one sitting in judgment, attacking the entire
penal system. The president of the court leads “a very dissolute life” and is anxious to get through the proceedings as quickly as possible so he can meet his mistress (41). The assistant prosecutor spends the night before the trial drinking, gambling, and visiting the very brothel where Maslova works (which counts against her character at the trial, but not against his). He also tries to transfer a different case to a provincial jury of uneducated peasants for a better chance at a false conviction. The narrator further recounts how the court has been used essentially to steal property from an old woman.

Other injustices and indignities abound. The usher is a drunk. One court member is distracted by a petty fight with his wife over money. Another court member believes that his medical treatment will be successful if the number of steps from the door of his study to his chair is divisible by three. A priest has the jury swear oaths on the Gospel while the narrator notes that the Gospel forbids all oaths. One member of the jury is drunk before the trial even begins. All of the men stare lecherously at Maslova during the trial – that is, when they are not falling asleep - and the presiding judge even uses a different tone when speaking with her. “He was always the ladies’ man,” the narrator remarks (54). Tolstoi continues to accumulate damning evidence against the court to the point where it is almost comic, but Maslova’s real peril, and Nekhliudov’s genuine concern for her, gives the laughter a hollow ring.

The wild corruption of the court opens Nekhliudov’s eyes, especially as a divided and ill-informed jury, with the help of judicial laziness, indifference, and incompetence, manages to find Maslova guilty of poisoning the merchant without intent to steal, i.e. murder without motive. Despite the absurdity of such a conclusion and the flimsiness of
the case and the court hearing it, the conviction proves to be unchangeable and permanent. Maslova receives a sentence of four years of penal servitude in Siberia.

I would argue that, at this relatively early moment in the novel, the injustice of the penal system and the idea of challenging it overtake Nekhliudov’s spiritual journey as the core themes of Resurrection. It is in the wake of Maslova’s guilty conviction that Nekhliudov visits the wealthy Korchagins, whose comfort and obliviousness now make them repulsive, and examines an expensive and “half-naked” portrait of his mother with newfound disgust. From this point on, Nekhliudov gradually turns away from his family and social circle and focuses on finding help for Maslova, Maslova’s acquaintances, and then other acquaintances and strangers entangled in the penal system. He starts to take action in society. Whenever the novel returns to the topic of Nekhliudov’s spiritual transformation, as it often does, it feels repetitive and long-since resolved.

Nekhliudov completes his internal change with remarkable quickness, finding his new moral footing in the first quarter of the novel, whereas Tolstoi’s other heroes require most of the duration of the story. For E. Kupreianova, “Nekhliudov’s resurrection differs from the resurrection of Maslova, as well as that of Levin, in that it no longer has a moral, but a straightforwardly ideological, character” (298). I would add that the

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27 A few other critics, such as E. N. Kupreianova, Galagan, and McLean, express similar views. Galagan notes that “the plot (siuzhet) in Tolstoi’s works previously developed as the hero’s overcoming of the internal conflicts of his conscience. The hero’s attempts to become close with other people were connected with major obstacles, the overcoming of which complicated the hero’s spiritual development. In Resurrection, these obstacles exist as well, but they are no longer the main theme of the story.” (241)

28 Kupreianova writes that “Nekhliudov’s search for the truth is no longer a process of psychological development, but only the basic premise of artistic explication, the self-discovering of that truth, the moral aspect of which he acquires in the very beginning of the novel and the social concretization of which all further action of the novel is devoted” (298). All translations of Kupreianova are my own.
ideological resurrection changes the internal orientation of the hero as well. It gives him the freedom to act. Nekhliudov thus turns outward, away from self, toward the external world. For all of his personal guilt, repentance, truth-seeking, and philosophizing throughout the rest of the novel, it is Nekhliudov’s fight against the system (with Maslova as his most personal connection to it), and especially for other people, that makes up his primary purpose.

Despite the rebellious turn of the narrative and the hero through the social cause he has embraced, Tolstoi’s narrator tries to frame the path forward as one that requires individual enlightenment.

In Nekhliudov, as in all of us, there were two men. One was the spiritual being, seeking for himself only the kind of happiness that meant happiness for other people too; but there was also the animal man out only for his own happiness, at the expense, if need be, of the good of the rest of the world. (80)

The version of Nekhliudov presented in this passage reflects Tolstoi’s belief in a model of social change through individual transformation. Isaiah Berlin explains how Tolstoi’s collective is reducible to the individual.

[Tolstoi] denounces as myth, as metaphysical obfuscation, anything that implies that collective behavior is not analyzable into the behavior of the individuals who compose the collective; and to this he adds the corollary that the real activity of a man is the ‘inner’ activity of his spirit, and not the ‘outer’ activity as expressed in social or political life. (44)

Berlin argues that “the whole of War and Peace and much of Anna Karenina and Resurrection is an incarnation of this central idea” (44). While the first half of Berlin’s assertion applies to Nekhliudov, who represents a model for the individual to start enacting social change, the “corollary” belongs to Tolstoi’s earlier novels, and is thoroughly overturned in Resurrection. The problem with analyzing Resurrection with
Tolstoi’s old heroic model is exactly this note of isolation from the world. Nekhliudov’s interest in Maslova takes him in the opposite direction, to the point where his outer activity is actually more critical than his inner activity, even though a spiritual change initially brings him to action.

There is, after all, a sense of urgency to the “outer” problems Tolstoi articulates, as the court’s sentence puts the innocent Maslova on the deadly road to Siberia while officials take their time with the appeal. Action is demanded beyond mere self-reflection, and Nekhliudov is eager to take up the cause. One must not only love one’s neighbors, but advocate for them. Of course, the behavior of Nekhliudov’s “animal” self in seducing and leaving Maslova a decade before is the original reason for his deeper involvement with her case, but he has surprisingly little struggle with lust after he has accepted his guilt and apologized to her (which she hardly acknowledges as necessary). Nekhliudov briefly considers the romantic possibility of a St. Petersburg socialite he meets, but his infatuation quickly turns to disgust for the superficial love and affairs of the upper classes.

By the time the narrator muses on the idea of the spiritual and animal man, it is not so much Nekhliudov’s past but the current activity of the court that suggests that animal men are in control. Nekhliudov’s sin can hardly compare to the system of human suffering Tolstoi portrays, which awards and promotes dishonesty, selfishness, and depravity. Gradually, Tolstoi reveals the penal system to be subordinate to an invisible power structure that oppresses by gender (women, especially Maslova, are noticeably depicted as abused by men in more powerful positions) and class. This is the same
dehumanizing and compelling force that Pierre detects in *War and Peace* when he fails to comprehend who is to blame for the executions performed entirely by unwilling participants. In spite of Tolstoi’s efforts to balance the two themes, or at least draw a proportionate parallel, Nekhliudov’s animal man is overshadowed by the monster of the penal system and the Foucauldian power structure at work behind it.

Besides the sonorous moral outrage directed at the hypocritical enablers and profiteers of power and punishment in society, the fading importance of the Tolstoian hero’s interiority in *Resurrection* is signaled by other changes in the author’s treatment of prison. Significantly, the prisoner who comes to accept the world that has brought about their imprisonment (such as Pierre and Aksenov) is no longer the hero. In *Resurrection*, Maslova takes up the acceptance narrative when she is finally freed in Siberia, but decides to stay with Simonson (another prisoner) anyway. Tolstoi does not endow her with much depth or interiority, nor does he make her the hero, of course. Maslova is a captive angel, a beauty of dead feeling resurrected by agape.

The hero of *Resurrection* remains outside of the cell. Nekhliudov’s roles as the cause of Maslova’s downfall and a member of the jury that wrongly convicts her make him part of the system that is anathema to Tolstoi, who is not afraid to draw a line between the powerful and those they abuse. Those who are not victims of the system, including essentially all of high society, such as Nekhliudov’s old school friends and even his sister’s family, are deemed complicit in the violence of the powerful.

Thus Nekhliudov’s awakening at the trial, when he realizes which side he is on, inspires him to create a new role for himself as a champion of the oppressed. Since the
penal system and the compulsive power structure are the villains of the novel, and are
more generally the enemies of Tolstoi’s concept of brotherhood, the hero Nekhliudov
becomes a prisoners’ advocate, an insider crusading against the system to which he once
belonged and to which he owes his privilege.

Nekhliudov’s external orientation – his fight with society rather than self – marks
a significant departure from Tolstoi’s previous heroes. Given that the idea for the novel
is rooted in the true tale of a young man’s quest for personal redemption, it is possible
that the way Nekhliudov’s social cause quickly grew to overtake the narrative of
individual sin surprised even the author. Tolstoi never does abandon Nekhliudov’s
personal story, but the social cause drowns it out, rendering it seemingly old-fashioned or
obsolete for the author. For example, directly after Nekhliudov seduces Maslova (the sin
that is clearly meant to torture him until he can be redeemed), he wonders, “What is the
meaning of it all? Has a great happiness or a great misfortune befallen me?...It happens
to everybody, everybody does it [всегда так, все так]” (93). The individual’s sins are
recast as society’s evils, and the scale of the problem looks increasingly worse the more
Tolstoi turns his critical eye toward those other than Nekhliudov.

The idea that “everybody does it” is not just Nekhliudov’s excuse to drive away
the thoughts of a guilty conscience, but also Tolstoi’s condemnation of a society that
tacitly supports and encourages sinful behavior such as lust. This corrupting influence is
made all the worse by society’s hypocrisy. Court members and prosecutors who visit

29 A story just like Nekhliudov and Maslova’s was told to Tolstoi by his friend Anatolii Koni, a famous
lawyer. Tolstoi did have a more personal connection to the original idea, though, having confessed to the
“seduction” of a chamber maid as a young man (Kaufman 216-217). Still, in expressing dissatisfaction and
difficulty with the novel, Tolstoi blamed the fact that the topic “was not born in” him (McLean 100).
brothels hold respected positions and sit in judgment of others. As Nekhliudov navigates the aristocratic channels that could remedy Maslova’s erroneous sentence, nearly everyone he meets smokes cigarettes, a sign from the author of “Why Do Men Stupefy Themselves?” (1890) that one is hiding from one’s conscience. Only Nekhliudov refrains from smoking, a change that occurs between the time before Maslova’s trial and his moral awakening.

There is a lot from which to hide, as Tolstoi finds every kind of crime prosecuted in the poorer classes to be committed freely by those in power or by the system they serve. For example, the same system that wrongly convicts Maslova of murder kills two prisoners by marching them through brutally hot conditions on the road to Siberia (they die of sunstroke). The narrator identifies these events as “murders.” From a Foucauldian viewpoint, Tolstoi defamiliarizes the abhorrent behavior normalized by power. In another example, there is a fatal duel in St. Petersburg, but society calls such aristocratic killing a defense of honor, and the murderer is set to go free after a couple of weeks. Power is produced and reinforced by the ritual, but Tolstoi throws off this false veil of honorability. In a third example, the general who oversees the prisoners in the capital makes his career by commanding Russian peasants to “commit all sorts of crimes” against those defending their homes in the Caucasus and in Poland, for which he perversely “got more orders and decorations for his uniform” (345).

By the end of the novel, the injustice of the rich’s exploitation of the lower classes becomes central to Nekhliudov’s thinking and work as a prisoners’ advocate. Tolstoi, characteristically anxious to avoid the confines of an association with any political
movement such as socialism (though Nekhliudov argues on multiple occasions for the elimination of property and class privilege), always tries to frame his hero’s social crusade as his simply getting to the “truth.” For instance, when Nekhliudov argues with a prisoner that a common thief does not understand that stealing is wrong, based on the fact that the factory owners steal his labor and the government steals his taxes, the prisoner remarks, “This sounds like anarchism” (411). Nekhliudov rejects this ideological label in favor of an intuitive truth.

“I don’t know what it sounds like. I only know what happens,” Nekhliudov continued. “[The thief] knows that the Government robs him; he knows that we landed proprietors robbed him long ago when we took the land which ought to be common property. And now if he gathers a few sticks from that stolen land to light his fire we clap him in jail and tell him he’s a thief.” (411)

Deep into the novel, Tolstoi continues his attempt to mask Nekhliudov’s political awakening as a Pierre-like search for the truth that will show him how to live, but Nekhliudov has long since turned his focus outward.

What concerns Nekhliudov is no longer the fact that the courts punished Maslova instead of him, but that justice in general is not the aim of the courts. Rather, according to Nekhliudov, the courts exist for “the maintenance of class interests” (414). This is not just a passing comment. On the journey to Siberia, the system has become his chief topic of thought as he fades out of Maslova’s life. Maslova, who had previously accused Nekhliudov of purely selfish motives, (“You had your pleasure from me in this world, and now you want to get your salvation through me in the world to come!”), only to be followed by him on the prison convoy, eventually comes to part with Nekhliudov after he successfully has her sentence commuted to exile without hard labor (219). Their final
break is somewhat awkward because of the apparent irrelevance of their original sin, long forgotten by Maslova and of decidedly secondary importance to Nekhliudov, who has since taken up a selfless cause. While Maslova has accepted the agape love of Simonson, Nekhliudov’s work as a prisoners’ advocate has changed him. He is no longer selfish or lustful, but has come to live almost entirely for other people, a model of Tolstoian brotherhood. Nekhliudov’s journey comes to be characterized by action, and by work rather than by what he thinks of himself - a theme that distinguishes him from other Tolstoian heroes.

While Pierre’s imprisonment produces in him a “moral fitness” («нравственная подобранность»), Nekhliudov’s experience with prison manifests as a “moral nausea” («нравственная тошнота») - a phrase that shows up more than once. Significantly, Nekhliudov’s nausea is not inspired by his own past with Maslova, i.e. his journey inward, but rather how he perceives prison as a great injustice inflicted upon everyone else. Moral nausea is a side effect of his journey outward into society, a sign that he is sickened by the external conditions he sees.

Nekhliudov is first struck by this affliction when for the first time he enters the visiting room in Maslova’s prison and observes a chaotic scene of human suffering:

He was astonished that such a dreadful state of affairs, this outrage to human feelings, should apparently offend no one. The soldiers, the warden, the visitors and the prisoners acted as though they thought all this was as it should be. Nekhliudov stayed in this room for about five minutes, conscious of a curious sort of depression, aware of how powerless he was, how at odds with the whole world. A moral sensation of nausea (нравственное чувство тошноты) seized him, like seasickness on board ship. (191)
Even though he has yet to meet Maslova at this moment since serving on her jury, issues of society, not self, first concern Nekhliudov. The seasickness metaphor suggests that it is something new and uncomfortable for Nekhliudov to look beyond himself. After all, he is a creature of ordinary selfishness before his revelation at the trial. When he finally does meet Maslova, she asks him to look into the case of a woman she knows and her son (the Menshovs), both of whom have been wrongly imprisoned. Nekhliudov agrees immediately, seemingly without even thinking about it, and thus begins his work as an advocate.

On another visit, he encounters a group of forty men who have been held for two months because they do not have identity papers. They have been deprived of civil rights, treated as badly as anyone else, and even flogged. After the meeting Nekhliudov is again troubled by moral nausea.

Nekhliudov remembered what he had seen the day before while waiting in the hall [to visit Maslova], and realized that the punishment [the flogging of these prisoners] was being inflicted even then, and the very time he was there; and he was swept to an especially overwhelming degree by a mixed feeling of curiosity, depression, bewilderment and moral – and very nearly physical – nausea, such as he had experienced before, but never so strongly as now. (236)

Shortly after this incident, he ruminates over the injustices he has seen in the prison, notably without thinking of Maslova or his own situation: “‘Why should these things be?’ Nekhliudov wondered, aware this time more than ever of the moral nausea which turned into a physical sickness that he experienced whenever he visited a prison; and found no answer to the question he had asked himself” (244). Nekhliudov’s malady of compassion returns one last time, but no less intensely, when he visits the political prisons at a halting station on the way to Siberia.
As enlightened as Levin, Pierre, Aksenov, and other inward-looking Tolstoian heroes may become, none is as preoccupied as Nekhliudov with working to better the conditions of others and society as a whole. Galagan sees Nekhliudov as representing a new relationship between Tolstoi and his hero: “New goals change the method of the Tolstoian hero’s portrayal: the attention of the author is concentrated not on the thoughts of Nekhliudov, but on his activities («дела»)” (242). I would argue that the hero’s turn outward – his focus on action – so defines Nekhliudov as a character that it signifies an alternative to the author’s overarching moral of compassion. Nekhliudov shows that perhaps happiness is not within oneself, but out in the world, attainable through brotherly and sisterly work for others and the fight against injustice. This means engagement with society and an active rejection of its evils, not a passive acceptance of them.

Good work in the world provides Nekhliudov, as well as society, an opportunity for resurrection, a notion that strongly recalls *The Brothers Karamazov*. This would appear hardly a coincidence, as Tolstoi was actually reading *The Brothers Karamazov* at the time he started work on *Resurrection* in the late 1880s and early 1890s.30

For Galagan, the Dostoevskii connection is “interesting to note” as a possible parallel or influence for the author’s emphasis on his hero’s good acts. She refrains from drawing any larger conclusions, however, mentioning only that Tolstoi has in mind an

30 Galagan explains: “In a letter to L. P. Nikoforov on March 31, 1891, Tolstoi notes the idea that got his attention in *The Brothers Karamazov* was about how ‘every good act, like a wave, stirs the entire sea and is reflected on the shore.’ This idea is very close to Tolstoi’s own thinking. In January, 1891, in a letter to D. A. Khilkov he writes: ‘True life is given to man under two conditions: 1) in order that he do good for people (and there is only one good – to increase the love in people – to feed the hungry, to visit the sick, and so on – all of this only to increase the love for people), and 2) in order that he strengthen the power given him to love. One stipulates the other...’ (PSS 65, 222). And after some time the idea about “good acts” as a way of resurrecting a man takes a significant place in the work on *Resurrection*” (245).
idea from the chapter “From the Conversations and Exhortations of Elder Zosima.” I would contend that Dostoevskii, who died in 1881, and whom Tolstoi seldom acknowledged during his lifetime (with the notable exception of Dead House), had a great influence on Nekhliudov and Resurrection. Alesha Karamazov (whom Galagan does not directly link to Nekhliudov) transforms into the hero of Dostoevskii’s novel—and its best answer to Ivan Karamazov’s rebellion against an unjust world—precisely through the kind of good work in the world advocated by Zosima. Nekhliudov follows a strikingly similar path. Both become the most positive heroes of their respective novels by embodying lofty ideas of compassion and making them practicable. One of the major reasons that Nekhliudov is so different from Tolstoi’s other heroes, and at times fits so uncomfortably alongside the monologic narrative, is that he embodies his idea in an almost polyphonic, Dostoevskian way. Were it not for his past sins, Nekhliudov’s reformed self would in many ways resemble Alesha Karamazov. At the very least, to put it in more Tolstoian terms, Nekhliudov shows that, in their later years, both Tolstoi and Dostoevskii were approaching the same “truth.”

This “truth”—that one should live primarily through active, good work in the world—is found in Dostoevskii’s novels through the influence of the author’s prison experience and ideological experiments in his fictional prison world. For Tolstoi, the “truth is stupidly simple: it is better for people to live not each for himself but for all, as God wants it” (PSS 55, 173; 1905). His idea for the 1898 short story “Father Sergius” is similar: “There is no peace of mind either for the man who lives a secular life in the world or for the man who lives a spiritual life on his own. Peace of mind only comes
when man lives to serve God in the world” (PSS, XXXI: 264). Simple as it may be, it
takes the theme of prison to energize the Tolstoian hero to embrace this Alesha
Karamazov-like truth with anything more than words. Levin and Pierre talk about
happiness for mankind, but end up settling for a semblance of personal happiness.

In *Resurrection*, the idea of prison from *War and Peace* and “God Sees the Truth,
But Waits” meets a journalistic reality (particularly by way of Kennan’s book, which will
be discussed further on) seen through a satiric lens. As a result, Tolstoi’s hero of old is
finally driven beyond the realm of his own thoughts and called into action. The injustice
of prison is such that Nekhliudov cannot reason it away, as might have been sufficient for
Pierre or Aksenov, and so, in the Dostoevskian sense, he must embody the idea that
opposes it. By taking on this idea, Nekhliudov, who begins on the familiar Tolstoian path
of inner redemption, gains a measure of independence from the author and corresponding
devotion to the idea that is rather Dostoevskian. The hero of *Resurrection* makes
Tolstoism human, and it turns out to be an ideology of action. Prison is the problem that
creates the new Tolstoian hero and gives him purpose.

Unlike Levin, whose attempt to work in the fields with the peasants brings a short
respite for his mind without a lasting solution to his existential problem, Nekhliudov in
his work utilizes both his talents and his privileged status to help those crushed by the
penal system.31 Nekhliudov is principled and stubborn, and works tirelessly through his
substantial social connections to help set the innocent free, or at least to improve their

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31 Of course, Tolstoi, the count who worked the fields in peasant dress, was extremely ambivalent about the
worth of the educated classes, writing to Strakhov in October of 1895 that his writing in *Resurrection* was
“insignificant, vulgar, and the main thing is that I hate writing for the parasitic, good-for-nothing
intelligentsia, from which there has never been anything but futility [цема] and will never be” (McLean
98). Nevertheless, Nekhliudov becomes a model of an aristocrat using his privilege for the good of others.
positions in some way. When Levin comes to accept that he, unfortunately, will never be like a peasant, he does not know how to best play his role as a Russian aristocrat other than as a good khoziain. He, too, ponders involvement with a governmental organization when he attends the zemstvo meeting, but the seemingly arbitrary manners and customs of political activity only bewilder him. The zemstvo has its own impenetrable logic.

Nekhliudov, in contrast to Levin, finds in prison an institution that is vulnerable to the power of simple human compassion, which Tolstoi considers to be a natural and readily accessible resource. As an advocate, Nekhliudov creates a role for himself to benefit those beyond his estate, the possession of which is not in accordance with his stance against private property anyway. Nearly fifty years before he wrote Resurrection, Tolstoi observed:

> The goal of a person’s life is the most possible enabling in all directions of the development of all that exists…If I look at nature, I see that everything in it is constantly developing and that every component part in it unconsciously enables the development of the other parts. Man, since he is just such a part of nature but endowed with consciousness, ought just as the other parts to strive for the development of everything that exists but consciously using his mental abilities… (PSS 46, 30-31; 1847)

Nekhliudov is an advancement of the Tolstoian hero in that he learns to develop more aspects of himself (his intelligence, his wealth, his compassion, his social standing, his education, and so on) in more directions (for the peasants, for the prisoners, for Maslova, for himself) than Levin and Pierre ever do. These directions are invariably outward, aligning Nekhliudov with what Gustafson calls Tolstoi’s “centrifugal” model of self-perfection (6).
As a prisoners’ advocate, Nekhliudov does extremely practical and useful work.\(^{32}\) In a meeting with a lawyer, he objects to the arbitrary power of officials, who take away people’s rights and sentence them to Siberia at will, and wonders why the courts exist at all if they apply the law so selectively. The lawyer laughs at Nekhliudov, accusing him of being interested in “philosophy” and “abstract problems.” His naiveté is rewarded with an invitation to a party where intellectuals and artists will be discussing such questions over drinks, undoubtedly to no purposeful end. But he does not attend, as this conversation showed Nekhliudov how very differently he and the lawyer, and the lawyer’s friends too, probably looked at things; and he felt that, great as was the gulf that now separated him from his former friends [from his school days], Schonbock and the rest, he had even less affinity with the lawyer and his set. (313)

As an advocate, Nekhliudov is interested in liberating the innocent from prison above all else. Though he himself does plenty of philosophizing in the novel, the work he takes up against the penal system demands real results quickly, and thus he breaks the spell of idleness that tends to fall upon philosophizing Tolstoian heroes.

Nekhliudov the advocate is a fascinating development of the hero for the late Tolstoi, who is usually noted for his strict morality rather than his artistic innovation. In

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\(^{32}\) Though most critics seem to agree on the positive nature of Nekhliudov’s role (at least before the novel’s ending), it is worth noting the outlying criticism of Lukács, Nekhliudov’s greatest detractor, which holds a place in complete opposition to my argument for Nekhliudov the advocate: “In Nekhliudov’s figure, Tolstoi did of course attempt to present the individual good deed itself. But his inexorable truthfulness produces a quite different, bitterly ironical result. Only because Nekhliudov himself belongs to the very ruling class he hates and despises, only because in his own social sphere he is regarded as a good-natured fool, as a harmless eccentric bitten by the bug of philanthropy, only because he can make use of old family and other connections, can he accomplish his ‘good deeds’ at all. And objectively all these good deeds are mere insignificant trifles; they are as nothing in comparison with the horrible inexorability of the machine, and they fit easily into the amorous or ambitious intrigues of those who are parts of the machine. Subjectively Nekhliudov himself is forced – often unwillingly, often full of self-contempt, but sometimes also yielding to a temptation – to wear the mask of the courtier in order to be able to accomplish at least a few of his ‘individual good deeds’” (93).
Resurrection, what begins as a narrative of individual redemption is interrupted and commandeered by the overwhelming injustice of the penal system, compelling Tolstoi to fight a more urgent moral battle than the one he wages against lust. Out of this necessity, he finally created in Nekhliudov a man of action where he had previously found inner paths to happiness through a passive acceptance of the world. As much as Nekhliudov represents a departure from earlier heroes such as Levin and Pierre, it is worth noting that Tolstoi’s two most important works preceding Resurrection also foretell his development. With The Death of Ivan Il’ich (1886), Tolstoi examines the mind of a magistrate who realizes too late that he has wasted his life. The penal system is still ominously present, as it was in War and Peace and “God Sees the Truth, But Waits,” but the focus shifts from prisoner to judge. One wonders if Tolstoi, who was able to read Dead House freely while his followers were arrested and exiled, did not feel the guilt of the judge more sharply than the suffering of the prisoner. From The Kreutzer Sonata’s Pozdnyshev, Nekhliudov seems to have inherited a vehement rejection of the world’s evils, and the will to take action against them. Of course, Pozdnyshev, who is adamantly opposed to anything resembling lust and murders his wife because of it, is the far less palatable character.

Nekhliudov’s arc in Resurrection traces his path from inward gazing and self-torture to work for others in the external world, from self-absorption to selflessness. It follows that his activity as an advocate leads to greater dreams of social change in land ownership and class equality, but his immediate goals always remain clearly in view. After Nekhliudov’s successful work advocating for prisoners in St. Petersburg, Tolstoi
brings his hero out on the road to Siberia to witness the horrifying conditions of the prisons outside of the city, to use his influence a few more times (in getting Maslova moved to the political group and helping those injured or fallen ill on the march, for example), and finally to see off Maslova and the others he has befriended. Nekhliudov’s work has brought him into a community that he now leads. People visit and write to Nekhliudov, pleading for him to take up their cases or the cases of their loved ones.

His work for others – his “centrifugal” model of self-perfection - creates ripples outward in society, from his own change to Maslova’s; from prisoners like Lidia Shustova to their families; from self to friends to acquaintances to strangers. These ripples can even be felt in the power structure of the penal system itself. For example, Selenin, Nekhliudov’s old friend from school, and now a public prosecutor in St. Petersburg, experiences a rebirth of conscience in the wake of his interactions with Nekhliudov. The two friends’ first meeting in years quickly sets them at odds. Nekhliudov pleads the plain facts of Maslova’s innocence and the court’s mishandling of her trial while Selenin defends the confounding technicalities of legal procedure, which hinder the liberation of a prisoner who is obviously innocent. When Selenin expresses belief in the dogmas of the Church, Nekhliudov considers him forever lost. As he walks away, Nekhliudov has the “feeling that this man, once so near and dear to him, had as a result of this brief conversation suddenly become strange, remote and incomprehensible, if not actually hostile” (362).

The narrator then gives a history of Selenin as a young and energetic idealist gone astray through bad experiences and poor choices in career, marriage, and religion.
Selenin’s life is akin to Nekhliudov’s before the trial that woke him up and gave rise to his idea of serving others. Nekhliudov does not see Selenin again before he leaves St. Petersburg, and expects nothing from him. However, while on the road with the prison convoy, Nekhliudov receives a letter from none other than his old friend, who has broken free of the complacence that made him an instrument of the punishment machine: “Our last conversation made a deep impression on me. You were right about Maslova. I went over the case carefully and saw that a shocking injustice had been done her…I succeeded in influencing the decision and am now sending you a copy of the mitigation of sentence…” (542).

Nekhliudov’s work for others inspires Selenin to similar activity. Dead as he was in Nekhliudov’s eyes, and in the narrator’s elegiac description, the letter signifies nothing less than Selenin’s own resurrection. Good works prove able to influence and connect everything, just as they do in Zosima’s ocean in The Brothers Karamazov. Selenin’s small role in Resurrection underscores one of its most hopeful messages. Nekhliudov’s turn outward, the novel suggests, will continue to effect positive change in a centrifugal manner: in St. Petersburg, Siberia and a potentially infinite number of other places long after he has gone.

Resurrection’s End

How strange, then, is the ending of the novel, in which Nekhliudov, no longer useful to Maslova and the other prisoners in the convoy, sits alone poring over the Bible, trying to decipher its lessons. McLean remarks on this oddity:
Though Tolstoi has had little to say about Nekhliudov’s religion, he is given a religious send-off. We know only that in his youth he had been a seeker like Selenin, already free from the “superstitions of the official church,” and that he believes that God has written the law of love in people’s hearts. Therefore, the novel’s sudden fadeout in a long series of Gospel quotations seems scarcely justified. That at any rate was the judgment of Anton Chekhov. Though he liked the book, calling it “a remarkable work of art,” he objected that “The novel has no ending…to write so much and then suddenly make a Gospel text responsible for it all smacks a bit too much of the seminary.” (110)

Having worked tirelessly for other people for most of the novel, both strangers and acquaintances alike, Nekhliudov’s unexpected seclusion is shocking after his engaged work as an advocate. It is as though Tolstoi wants his hero to be resolved with the simplicity of a biblical lesson, but Nekhliudov is too complex. He has learned so much through his work for Maslova, through his fight with bureaucracy and high society, and, in general, through action. Isolation is utterly out of step with his character at this point.

Nekhliudov is drawn further into the corruption of society as he strives to be better than it. In fact, his acceptance of responsibility for Maslova, his identification as a sinner, and his subsequent “resurrection” suggest that he achieves this superiority. He becomes a beacon of Tolstoian morality in a dark world of power and punishment. The evidence for this is abundant. In his lone outrage at the crooked courts, his disgust with the duels and affairs of high society, and even in his restraint from smoking, Nekhliudov becomes increasingly clearheaded in stark contrast to the foggy equivocations of those around him. To interpret Nekhliudov’s task as internal rather than external, as many critics do, is to give the full weight of the novel to the author’s runaway sermonizing in the final pages. Truly, it is paradoxical at best for Tolstoi to conclude that Nekhliudov
would suddenly isolate himself, renouncing the world of the prisoners and their families, for whom he has done so much good.

Critics’ focus on the internal hero – the assessment of Nekhliudov by the model of Tolstoi’s previous heroes - leads to the judgment of Nekhliudov by his final, authorially imposed isolation. These conclusions completely miss Nekhliudov the advocate, who is thoroughly engaged in the lives of the prisoners for most of the novel and undoubtedly matters in *Resurrection’s* outer world. It is not Nekhliudov’s self-examination that sets Lidia Shustova free, secures Maslova’s transfer to a better group in the convoy, or causes Selenin to fight again for truth and justice. Much of the substance of the novel, which counters the tone of the first and last pages, is passed over if the reader adopts the narrator’s viewpoint.

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33 Hamburger draws a direct line between *Resurrection’s* Nekhliudov and Tolstoi’s earlier heroes, precisely because of what she sees as a separation of their moral interiority from the outer world, an analysis that appears to be heavily swayed by *Resurrection’s* ending, in which Tolstoi renders Nekhliudov a useless and lonely outsider with nothing left except the biblical sharpening of his moral self (70). Orwin also finds the novel’s meaning in Nekhliudov’s internal state at the very end, stating that “in fact, Nekhliudov functions throughout the novel as a case study and object lesson in the psychology of spiritual revival. His education culminates only in the Gospel readings of the last pages” (“Riddle” 480). Moreover, “[Nekhliudov’s] very education distances him from the world of the novel and makes him into that outsider who must begin a ‘new life’ armed only with the understanding of the old one that he has derived from his experiences” (Orwin, “Riddle,” 481). I would contend that the isolating effect of this Gospel education is exactly what plays so falsely for Nekhliudov. In fact, it sweeps away his other education – his external life experiences – which make up the bulk of the novel and inform his novel way of being as a Tolstoian hero.

Gustafson also emphasizes Nekhliudov’s inner change as the core of the novel: “Through life the sinner [Nekhliudov] learns that in order for his soul to keep on growing, he must participate in the redemption of this unjust world, not by expiating some past act of his, nor by judging the unjust world around him, nor by justifying this unjust world through a belief in some mythological past redemption, but by clearing himself of his judgments so that he can right now help to create human relatedness” (175).
Clearly, Nekhliudov’s shift from the internal hero to the external hero is as unexpected for critics as it was for Tolstoi. John Bayley poses the same problem another way:

Nekhliudov is not a noticer, and that is one of the troubles in *Resurrection*. Little of Tolstoi’s detail and perception seems to pass naturally through the hero, as they pass through Pierre and Levin. He is the kind of character who in Tolstoi is observed and not observing – a Tolstoian object not a Tolstoian subject – and hence his place in the center of the book is distinctly awkward. (248)

Like others, Bayley privileges the author’s voice at the end, when the familiar interiority of the Pierre and Levin type reappears in expected harmony with Tolstoi, and thus retroactively evaluates Nekhliudov “in the center of the book” as “awkward.”

The disconnect Bayley’s observes between author and hero is indeed significant, but it is only a “trouble” if one evaluates the success of the hero based on how closely he resembles the author. What Bayley frames as problems are really just differences from Tolstoi’s previous works. If one does not consider Nekhliudov’s Alesha Karamazov-like evolution as a character with an idea, her looks as though he has veered off the author’s course. Thus for Bayley, Nekhliudov fails to notice what Tolstoi wants him to notice; the author’s perception does not pass through to him; and because he does not identically match the authorial “I,” he is an object, not a subject. I would invert this analysis. The real trouble is not the center of the novel, but the awkwardness of the author’s ending, when Tolstoi tries to rein in a hero who has enjoyed relative freedom to interact with and embody his idea in his own way. The critical complication for understanding *Resurrection* is that, unlike many Dostoevskian characters who develop similarly, Nekhliudov begins in alignment with the author’s viewpoint, and thus it is easy to assume
that it should stay that way. Instead, Nekhliudov makes the ideas of late Tolstoism his own, and in doing so changes their nature, but not their values. In Nekhliudov’s relatively free development, the inner self-perfection of Tolstoism is made into an ethic of external action.

The end of *Resurrection* is a case of the author’s characteristic monologism nearly swallowing the hero. Tolstoi tries, retroactively, to fit him back into the role of an isolated and lonely hero, which he only played briefly in the beginning. Fortunately, Nekhliudov’s own voice can be heard despite the author’s moral thundering and the reappearance of the old Tolstoian heroic model. Without the ending, a very different image of Nekhliudov emerges: the hero who was isolated by his own vice and meaningless existence before he became an advocate, at which point he started to connect with people (and the people) for the first time.

Through the same kind of positive, external effect that Karataev delivers in *War and Peace*, Nekhliudov gains that very nurturing community he was once lacking. Because of his good works, he can count Maslova, Simonson, the Shustovs, the Menshovs, and many others among his friends. Moreover, Tolstoi shows these friends to be of a better quality than the idle and debauched socialites and careerists who made up Nekhliudov’s social circle before. In the end, Nekhliudov’s answer is not isolation, but reconnection with the world beyond the falsities of high society. His primary work as an advocate is a way of drawing others back into the world.

Nekhliudov’s arc from selfish isolation to engagement with a better community even calls into question the value of the traditional nuclear family, which Tolstoi so
famously reveres in earlier works, such as Anna Karenina. In Resurrection, Nekhliudov’s relatives are morally suspect: the portrait of his mother in a low-cut gown is “absolutely disgraceful and disgusting,” “revolting and profane”; one of his aunts is part of the society that approves of affairs such as his seduction and abandonment of Maslova; and his sister tries to talk him out of his principled stands with Maslova and against private property (137). Nekhliudov’s family (and perhaps all aristocratic families, by implication) enables the complacence of the rich and privileged against which Nekhliudov and Resurrection fight so determinedly. Nekhliudov forces the reader to question who is more isolated: a person like Levin, who reconnects with society through marriage and family, or Nekhliudov, who finds his calling through good works in the world?

In fact, Nekhliudov is isolated in the end, but not by his own doing. It is the author’s overreaching hand that turns his hero abruptly toward the inner and the abstract, undermining Nekhliudov’s advocacy and effectively dismissing the community he has created. Nekhliudov suddenly finds himself on the well-trodden territory of Tolstoi’s earlier heroes, having lost the path of practical but principled engagement in the world that made him something new for the author.

How does Tolstoi so inexplicably lose the thread of his hero? The ending must be further explored, especially as Tolstoi said that he “wrote the whole novel Resurrection so that people would read the last chapter. If in my artistic works there is any worth, then it is only that they serve as an advertisement for the thoughts which appear there” (Zverev and Tunimanov 552). Tolstoi wanted this chapter to be not only the summation
of that novel, but of all his works. Even if we recognize Tolstoi’s law of universal brotherhood and compassion as a recurring theme, it is not enough for the author, who demands that the complexities of his fiction all point to the same “truth.” *Resurrection* thus suffers from Tolstoi’s desire for universalization and unity taken to an extreme. In a May 1, 1904 letter to Koni, Tolstoi admitted his idealistic objective to universalize the penal system away: “No matter how much I might wish it, I personally cannot rid myself of the idea that as soon as the highest religious moral law – Kant’s categorical imperative – is acknowledged, then legal courts are annihilated by its requirements.” In spite of Nekhliudov’s unique qualities, Tolstoi cannot resist the urge to universalize him into oblivion.

Perhaps this explains why Tolstoi struggled mightily with his hero, as well as with the novel as a whole. As Galagan notes, at the end of 1895, Tolstoi was still unsatisfied with the novel, writing again that “he was convinced that it is all bad, that the center of gravity is not where it should be” (245). The imbalance Tolstoi detected in the novel, I believe, is due to the power struggle between author and hero, the unduly quick spiritual resolution of the hero, and the author’s overcompensation for that resolution after the hero has forged his own path. As late as 1898, in the third version of *Resurrection*, Tolstoi was making fundamental changes to the hero and the structure of the novel. He writes of his evolving hero: “The deeper he goes into this world, the more the center of gravity of his interests moves from Maslova to the general issue and to all of these suffering and corrupt people”\(^{34}\) (*PSS* 33, 159). The hero’s shift from the spiritual to the

\(^{34}\) My translation.
social, from the internal to the external, is still felt in the unevenness of Tolstoi’s final version.

As it stands, the hero fulfills his quest for personal renewal through advocacy before he is bizarrely tasked with finding his place in the world a second time, but now as a preacher or a peasant. The earliness of Nekhliudov’s spiritual success partly accounts for why the novel meanders after Nekhliudov leaves St. Petersburg and needlessly follows Maslova on the road. The hero finds his own path apart from the early design of the author, gaining renown as a champion of the oppressed, before Tolstoi suddenly pulls him off stage and replaces him with the Gospel of Matthew.

Galagan explains the ending as a leftover from the original plan for the novel, which Tolstoi centered on the individual’s search for the truth before making it a matter of concern to society in general:

The novel’s ending, on the one hand, contradicts the whole course of the narrative, but, on the other hand, it is inevitable. In its very conception there was the possibility of such an ending. Such an end could have even flowed logically from the original plan, and only the further reinterpretation of the conflict made it logically impossible. The ending of Resurrection does not answer the questions posed by the previous narrative, and therefore violates the artistic integrity of the novel. Tolstoi felt this – hence the idea of the continuation of Resurrection. (261).

Though largely in agreement with Galagan, I would add that the ending of Resurrection is unconvincing because the author could not let go of the inward-gazing, world-accepting Levin and Pierre type, even as he changed his plans to make the novel and hero more socially and externally oriented. Tolstoi’s original idea (Nekhliudov’s spiritual transformation through Maslova) never really goes away. Instead, it gets overtaken by the idea of the social cause, which is never fully implemented, as Nekhliudov’s travel
with the convoy (an outgrowth of the original idea) cuts it down prematurely. Thus the ending is more confused and conflicted than Galagan describes.

This confusion can be seen in the way Tolstoi incongruously primes his hero for the conversion moment he does not need. Tolstoi brings in a round of old tropes that do not fit the character, starting with the old man Nekhliudov meets on the ferry, an unnamed vagabond who dispenses wisdom like Platon Karataev and the peasant Levin meets at the end of *Anna Karenina*. The old man’s namelessness recalls Pierre’s dehumanization in *War and Peace*, and Karataev’s dog, and he sounds as if he could be speaking to Pierre: “Many faiths there be, but the Spirit is one. In you, an’ in me, an’ in ‘im. That means, if every man of us believes in the Spirit within ‘im, us’ll all be united. Let everyone be ‘imself, and us’ll all be as one” (535). Through suffering he has emptied his soul, which has enabled him to become more Christlike. He says he has been persecuted “like they persecuted Christ” (535). “Renounced everything, I ‘ave: got no name, no home, no country – no nothing. I am just me” (535).

The problem with the old man is that his wisdom has the overtones of acceptance, the internal, and the abstract, while Nekhliudov has found new life through rejection, the external, and the practical. The old man relates to characters like Pierre, not Nekhliudov - the prisoner, but not the advocate. A short time later, when Nekhliudov sees him in the halting station, the old man refers to the government and its jailers as the “Antichrist” and “servants of the Antichrist,” a conversation that presages the hero’s awkward embrace of the Bible and religious abstraction as the novel ends (560).
In addition to the well-intentioned but ill-conceived spiritual guidance of the old man, Tolstoi undercuts Nekhliudov’s arc with the death of Kryltsov, the sickly and angelic prisoner with whom the hero becomes acquainted on the road. Nekhliudov unexpectedly finds Kryltsov’s body in the mortuary.

“Why had he suffered? Why had he lived? Does he understand now what it’s all for?,” thought Nekhliudov, and it seemed to him that there was no answer, that there was nothing but death, and he felt faint. Without a word of farewell to the Englishman, Nekhliudov asked the warder to show him the way to the courtyard, and, feeling the absolute necessity of being alone to think over all he had seen and heard that evening, he drove back to the hotel. (561)

Nekhliudov’s isolation on the road, where he can do ever less as an advocate, begets further isolation. Having once resembled Alesha Karamazov, who also finds that the best path to brotherhood is work in the world, Tolstoi’s hero now rapidly withdraws from the world.

His turn back inward is almost complete as he paces his hotel room alone after seeing Kryltsov’s body.

The Katiusha business was over and done with. She did not need him, and it made him feel sad as well as mortified. But this was not what troubled him now. The other business on which he had embarked was not only unfinished but worried him more than ever, and required all his energy. (561)

The “other business on which he had embarked” would seem to be his advocacy and revolt against the penal system and its underpinning power structure. But now the real injustices he has seen up close, done to real people he knows, and perpetrated by real, corrupt people (for example, Tolstoi based the character of Toporov on Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the procurator of the Holy Synod, which would eventually excommunicate him) take on the highly abstract character of biblical evil in the world.
Nekhliudov thinks of the “hundreds and thousands of degraded human beings locked up in noisome prisons by indifferent generals, prosecuting attorneys and superintendents,” and then, stunningly, opens the Bible and starts reading, thinking about how “they say one can find an answer to everything here” (562). What he has done for Maslova, the Menshovs, Lidia Shustova and others seems to have vanished from his mind. He is back to looking for abstract solutions to abstract problems - that is, back to the start. Clearly, Tolstoi is trying to universalize the moral of the novel and give it a grand, biblical foundation, but by doing so he simply unravels the character’s development and muddles the meaning that Nekhliudov finds on his own as an advocate.

Ironically, even when Nekhliudov is holding the Bible, from which Tolstoi derives most of his laws, he first has trouble understanding what he is reading. “What a pity it’s all so incoherent,” he thinks, “for one feels there is something right about it” (563). In the end, he decides to combat evil through five commandments from Matthew and two major ideas: that one should treat others with compassion, and that everyone is a sinner, and thus one does not have the right to judge another. Tolstoi’s striving for a universal solution to evil overtakes his articulate and sometimes profound critique of the penal system and the network of power relations that support it. The result is that Nekhliudov’s work as an advocate ends, almost as if it never existed, as he bizarrely sets out on a spiritual journey at the end of the novel, regardless of the fact he has already done so:

‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. But we seek ‘all these things’ and obviously fail to attain them. ‘This, then, must be my life’s work. One task is completed and another is ready to my hand. That night an entirely new life began for
Nekhliudov, not so much because he had entered into new conditions of life but because everything that happened to him from that time on was endowed with an entirely different meaning for him. How this new chapter of his life will end, the future will show. (567)

There is an egoism about the old, internal Tolstoian hero – his self-discovery, the truths he finds and must teach the world - that seems simply at odds with the model of selflessness that Nekhliudov develops before the end. Orwin refers to the vanity of Nekhliudov as the vanity of the “rational man”:

The sacrifice [of the pleasures of the animal self] is easier for the rational man because he naturally values the general – that which his reason tells him holds true for all – over the particular. By the same token, he looks to the opinion of others in establishing his own self-esteem. This gives rise to the vanity and self-consciousness which so plague him. (‘Riddle’ 476)

Tolstoi was certainly aware of the egoism of the internal truth-seeker, as well as his own. Still, Nekhliudov’s revived obsession with his inner self in Resurrection’s finale indicates that Tolstoi failed to recognize his best answer to the problem: Nekhliudov’s advocacy and good works. There is a hint of this heroic model in the last lines of “Father Sergius,” whose main character is led astray by egoism even as a monk: “In Siberia he has settled down as the hired man of a well-to-do peasant, in which capacity he works in the kitchen-garden, teaches children, and attends to the sick” (271). Nevertheless, in the action of the story, Tolstoi never shows the Kasatskii of good works. Only with Nekhliudov does Tolstoi see his internal, truth-seeking hero beginning to evolve outward and embody the principles of selfless compassion he claims as his life-guiding philosophy.

If there is any doubt whether Nekhliudov’s new life will contain any remnants of his past social crusade and his work in the world as an advocate, or if it will be a complete lapse to the Pierre/Levin paradigm, it is erased by the revelation that six months
after finishing *Resurrection*, Tolstoi said that he wanted to write “the peasant life of Nekhliudov” (Tolstoi, *Resurrection* 9). Instead, Nekhliudov represents an awakening of the aristocratic conscience. Like Ivan Il’ich, when he opens his eyes he finds himself on the side of money, power, and oppression. Ivan Il’ich, of course, never really gets a chance to take action with this new perspective beyond a reevaluation of his own life. The external damage is irreversible. As Lukács writes, Ivan Il’ich is “the complete bureaucrat, a paragon of a judge, who strips his cases of all humanity with consummate bureaucratic skill and who has turned himself into a perfectly functioning cog in the great tsarist machinery of oppression” (89). If Nekhliudov is not initially as guilty as Ivan Il’ich of being a “cog” in the “machinery of oppression,” he is nevertheless on the same side as he. Fortunately for Nekhliudov, while Ivan Il’ich has only the hope of saving himself, the young prince is given the chance to do more. He has both the ability and the opportunity to redirect his energy to help other people actively. In Nekhliudov, Tolstoi finally creates an aristocratic hero who finds a purpose for his privilege.

**Tolstoi’s Advocacy and Community Activity**

It is odd that Tolstoi might have misunderstood Nekhliudov’s qualities as an advocate and force of practical good works since the author shared them himself. Tolstoi took up philanthropic work with his peasants as early as 1847, after quitting his studies at the university in Kazan. In 1855, Tolstoi wrote in his diary of his aspirations to found a new religion, “the religion of Christ, but purged of beliefs and mysticism, a practical religion, not promising future bliss but giving bliss on earth” (Christian 101). In terms of
his fictional heroes, Nekhliudov is the closest Tolstoi came to creating a model for the practical religion of good works.

Aside from religious ideas, and the literary sources of his previous heroes, going back to the Nekhliudov character from the autobiographical trilogy in the 1850s, Tolstoi’s personal efforts in famine relief work anticipate Nekhliudov’s ethic. In the summer of 1873 Samara was suffering from lack of food, and so Tolstoi wrote an open letter to a Moscow newspaper about the crisis, which resulted in the donation of almost two million rubles and 375 tons of grain. In 1891, when Resurrection was in its early development, Tolstoi witnessed firsthand the devastation of the famine among the peasantry near his estate in Tula province, and quickly set to work. He wrote essays published at home and abroad, “in which he excoriated the educated classes for their indifference to the plight of all those millions of peasants who barely managed to subsist even in normal circumstances” (Bartlett 336). Like Nekhliudov, Tolstoi made repeated attempts to rouse the lethargic privileged classes to specific and practical action, while simultaneously including an attack on socioeconomic disparity in “normal circumstances.” Because of these essays, donations began pouring in from around the world. Still, full of proto-Nekhliudovian sentiment, “Tolstoi was adamant that just throwing money at such a deep-rooted problem was no remedy: what was needed above all was practical action” (Bartlett 337).

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35 The early Nekhliudov is a friend of Irteniev in Boyhood and Youth, and appears in other early stories as well. McLean proposes that the name “Nekhliudov” comes from nekhudoi (“not thin”), just as Tolstoi recalls tolstyi (“fat”), and is therefore an “autobiographical signal” similar to “Levin” in Anna Karenina (100). The name “Dmitrii” may also refer to Tolstoi’s older brother Dmitrii, who died of tuberculosis in 1856 (McLean 100).
Tolstoi used this money (and his own) to set up soup kitchens in the villages, and to provide essential resources to the peasants. Though he did personally work a long period away from home on the famine relief effort, Tolstoi did not accomplish all of this without help. Many were inspired to follow his lead. Some sent money, and some donated their time and hard work. Those contributing to the effort included prominent figures, such as Chekhov, but also Tolstoi’s family members. While running Iasnaia Poliana and raising several young children, Sonia coordinated donations and sewed clothes; Tolstoi’s son Lev worked to aid Samara; his daughters Tania and Masha helped to run soup kitchens, among other tasks. As Bartlett notes, “the Tolstois’ famine-relief work proved to be infectious; soon they were joined by friends and relatives who wanted to help, and then by foreign volunteers” (339). Tolstoi’s sincere dedication to the cause grew the community around him, resembling the centrifugal effect of Nekhliudov’s efforts in *Resurrection*.

Of course, Nekhliudov does not reach the level of success Tolstoi did in 1891 and 1892. Tolstoi’s operations were providing free food to 4,000 peasants a day in January, 1892; by the next fall, “donations of over 100,000 roubles, plus two ships from America with a cargo of flour, grain and potatoes, had helped with the setting up of 212 emergency soup kitchens in four districts” (Bartlett 340). Nekhliudov’s good works entail a much greater fight with the government and the poriadok of society than Tolstoi’s charitable activities (though the government did not appreciate, and heavily censored, Tolstoi’s essays). Nevertheless, Nekhliudov plants the seed of social
transformation through his advocacy, and even begins to see it bear fruit in the turnaround of his friend Selenin.

The parallels between Nekhliudov’s work for prisoners and Tolstoi’s famine relief in 1891-1892 are especially meaningful in that “along with teaching at the Iasnaia Poliana school, and his work on the ABC books, Tolstoi later declared that this had been one of the happiest times of his life” (Bartlett 340). In addition to the useful and fulfilling work he had done for other people, Tolstoi’s cause had brought his fractured family close together again, if only for a time. At the peak of his activity, Nekhliudov’s cause also provides him with the purpose he desires, as well as the kind of unthinking happiness that Levin experiences only for a short time as he mows the fields. Both Tolstoi’s soup kitchens and Nekhliudov’s advocacy are manifestations of the author’s simplest law of compassion.

Tolstoi famously wrote Resurrection to help raise money for the Dukhobors, a Christian sect with whom he shared unorthodox values such as pacifism. The Russian government persecuted the Dukhobors for their refusal to serve in the military, but the tsar eventually allowed them to leave the country, and they were able to relocate to Canada with financial help from Tolstoi.

On a smaller scale, Tolstoi was known literally to do work for his neighbors, as Kennan notes during his 1886 visit: “Count Tolstoi himself had spent the morning in spreading manure over the land of a poor widow who lived near his estate, and would have devoted the afternoon to the same occupation, but for my [unexpected] visit” (“A Visit”). Aside from the image of a wealthy Russian nobleman, who also happens to be
Russia’s most famous writer, working in the fields down the road, there is nothing especially remarkable in the everyday helping of one’s neighbor, but for Tolstoi it was a matter of principle. “I believe,” he said of working for the widow, “that it is every man’s duty to labor for others who need assistance, and to work at least part of every day with his hands” (Kennan, “A Visit”).

Some of Tolstoi’s other good works and activist efforts included securing the transfer of a conscientious objector to a non-combat role in 1885 and joining a protest against the mistreatment of Jews in 1890. Later, in 1903, he protested the Jewish pogroms in Kishiniev and published stories to aid the victims. Tolstoi made visits to a shelter for the poor in 1881 and a textile factory in 1889, afterward writing about the conditions he observed. He also wrote against the flogging of peasants in 1895, and advocated vegetarianism, having visited a Tula slaughterhouse in 1891. When the Russian government parted the Molokans, a religious sect, from their children in 1897, Tolstoi successfully campaigned for their return.

Most importantly for the present chapter, Tolstoi personally advocated for prisoners, playing the role that would become Nekhliudov’s calling. He wrote a letter to a prominent relative, A. A. Tolstaia, in 1879, asking her to use her influence in St. Petersburg to free three imprisoned Old Believers. In March, 1881, Tolstoi wrote a letter to Tsar Aleksandr III, asking him to pardon the assassins of his father, Aleksandr II. The plea was an appeal to Tolstoi’s idea of Christian or universal law, which of course forbids the taking of human life, but it was unsuccessful. In 1901 he helped to free Maksim Gor’kii, who had been arrested in St. Petersburg. Of course, Tolstoi’s advocacy for
prisoners was Tolstoism in action, as one of Resurrection’s major conclusions is that all people are sinners, and as such no one person has the right to judge or punish another. This is Tolstoi’s advocacy taken to its logical extreme and universalized. No one, according to Tolstoi, should be in prison at all.

Before Resurrection, Tolstoi’s public activity as a philanthropist and an advocate are less visible in his autobiographical characters, but Nekhliudov brings this major aspect of Tolstoi’s life to the philosophical foreground. There was clearly a divide in his own life between his desire to be imprisoned and his desire to work for others, between the internal, self-sacrificing (and even selfish?) focus of the martyr and the external, essentially altruistic good works of the advocate and philanthropist. In spite of the new, external focus of Resurrection’s hero, which seems to originate from Tolstoi the advocate, as late as May of 1899 he continued to think of his writing in terms of the old, internal Levin and Pierre paradigm. In a May 5, 1899 letter to Chertkov, he wrote that, as a writer, “the main thing is the inner life expressed in scenes.” Tolstoi’s insistence on the primacy of the inner life helps to explain its late and otherwise confounding return for Nekhliudov in Resurrection, the novel of the hero’s engagement with Tolstoian “outer” life.

Tolstoi’s Attack on the Penal System

Critics tend to read Tolstoi’s prisons as the sites of spiritual change rather than real world places, which is accurate for the majority of his works. For Tolstoi, confinement can serve as the catalyst for transformation of the soul (e.g. Pierre in War
and Peace, Aksenov in “God Sees the Truth, But Waits”); it can offer a new perspective on the lives of other people in unfamiliar environments, as in “Prisoner of the Caucasus”; it can even have no effect on a person who already knows the “truth,” which resides in the soul (e.g. the released murderer Pozdnyshev in The Kreutzer Sonata).

Medzhibovskaya goes so far as to use this last example, as well as the character of Stepan Pelageiushkin in “The False Coupon” (written 1902-1904, published 1912), to argue that “aside from its immorality and cruelty, the institution of punishment remains irrelevant to the writer and his characters because it changes precious little of what is cardinal in the inner resolve for ethical life” (149). For those who see only the writer of the soul, Tolstoi is so focused on the idea that everything is within oneself that he uses prison to prove that no external conditions can reach the inner human being.

Medzhilovskaya argues,

It is significant that Tolstoi situates prison…not within the punitive network of conditions and relations that delimit life, but places it exactly in the way Arendt and Frankl do, as a prerequisite for an active and loving attitude towards the world for as long as one is alive. Tolstoi accepts (just like Kierkegaard, Cioran, and other existentialists) that we serve our time by living our life, irrespective of place. (150)

While Tolstoi’s use of prison can be metaphorical, his prison is not just another place to live. It is worth exploring why it is precisely prison that serves as the best catalyst for the enlightenment or renewal of the soul.

In Tolstoi’s conception of prison, the soul is pitted against the institutions of the modern era of discipline and punishment that lay claim to it, even if he does not put it in quite such terms. This opposition casts the hero into a struggle to resolve the “truth” within him with external reality. As I have shown, many critics follow a path to the
resolution the author seems to favor: that what is most important is the truth within. But 
prison’s prominence in Tolstoi’s “totality of objects” (to use Hegel’s idea via Lukács) – its proximity and effect on the hero in a number of his works – suggests it can not be so easily cast off as a superfluous externality. Tolstoi portrays real phenomena of power at work outside of the hero, and exposes the institutions that perpetuate these power relations. To acquiesce to the viewpoint of “everything is within,” even when it appears to dominate Tolstoi’s narrative, endangers a fuller picture of Tolstoi’s works. This is especially true of Resurrection, which is evidence that the more Tolstoi tried to imagine the soul as isolated, self-sufficient, and outside of society, the more he actually found it to be engaged.

Resurrection’s novelty lies in the hero’s engagement with the world in accordance with Tolstoian ideals, found through his attack on the penal system. This focus on engagement, which reaches its pinnacle in Nekhliudov’s advocacy, should not be misconstrued as the complete abandonment of the internal for the external. Lukács, for example, follows just such a line of critique, essentially writing the hero out of Resurrection in view of the system it exposes. If for many critics, Tolstoi’s last novel reinforces the idea that “everything is within,” for Lukács, it shows precisely the opposite.

The social formations, institutions and the like are much more ‘finished,’ lifeless, inhuman and machinelike in Tolstoi than they ever were in either Balzac or Stendhal. The essential reason for this conception springs from the very fountainhead of Tolstoi’s genius: that he regards society from the viewpoint of the exploited peasantry. (Lukács 86)
I would contend that the machinelike nature of “the system” in Tolstoi’s works comes specifically from the concept of prison and his perception of Foucauldian power relations (i.e. the poriadok) rather than from a viewpoint aligned with Marxism. Lukács’ version of the system has a rather strange makeup:

[Tolstoi shows] how the fate of a great many people immediately depend entirely on such personal matters of chance, on such arbitrary personal interests of some member of the ruling class. But the sum of all these arbitrary happenings and actions constitutes a clear and coherent system; through all these chances and accidents the main purpose of the dehumanized machinery emerges – it is the protection, by any and every means, even the most brutal, of the private property owned by the ruling class. (92).

For Lukács, the system Tolstoi depicts is somehow “clear and coherent,” but also arbitrary and dependent on chance. However, the arbitrariness of the court members is neither the main problem, nor does it constitute the workings of a system. In fact, it is important to distinguish the system from the people trapped within it. The system, as Tolstoi portrays it in both War and Peace and Resurrection, is organized precisely by the inhuman poriadok. Thus the capriciousness and hypocrisy of the people ostensibly in charge of the system raise the question of who is really at the helm (answer: no one, except Foucault’s invisible, interchangeable power). The deeper issue, then, is how the madness of institutions such as the penal system continues - that is, how the poriadok is sustained, and how it can be dismantled. Another problem with Lukács’ interpretation is not so much that it targets the external, but that in doing so it erases Nekhliudov’s role and the belief in people he represents. Though the exploitation of the peasantry is indeed a major concern in the novel, Nekhliudov’s thoughts and actions as a nobleman remain at its center.
In Tolstoi’s thinking, to do good work in the world is a personal duty, not a political cause or a matter of social organization. Accordingly, for all of its social consciousness, *Resurrection* remains focused on the individual: How can one live more compassionately and better benefit mankind?

Lukács maintains that “Tolstoi’s characters, even if they belong to the upper classes, regard these [state and social] institutions as a ‘finished’ objectivized world in itself…No one of any high intellectual or moral quality could regard the Tsarist state as something in which he had a part” (87). But the institutions of the Tsarist state, however powerful they may be, do not constitute the entire world in *Resurrection*. Nekhliudov represents the human element of society, which must recognize its complicity in the systematic dehumanization of other people and take action.

Lukács presents the system as totally external to the people, but for Tolstoi, there remains hope in the fact that the system uses people. Even if individuals are coerced into evil action by the mysterious *poriadok*, they have the potential for resurrection within them, just as Nekhliudov shows. Lukács disagrees, observing that “the pores of society in which human beings could act with some measure of independence have been gradually stopped up…The world Tolstoi sees and depicts is to an increasing degree a world in which decent people can no longer find any opportunity for action” (92). This

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36 As biographer Aylmer Maude writes, “Tolstoi had no adequate sense of being a responsible member of a complex community with the opinions and wishes of which it is necessary to reckon. On the contrary, his tendency was to recognize with extraordinary vividness a personal duty revealed by the working of his own conscience and intellect, apart from any systematic study of the social state of which he was a member” (Vol. I, 60).
view entirely misses the point of the hero, who exposes the vulnerability of the system precisely through the independence of his action.

Moreover, if Nekhliudov can change, so can his friend Selenin, and others after him. This is the optimism of *Resurrection*, and the proof that the institutions of power are not as “finished” and “lifeless” as Lukács sees them. In a sense, even the penal system is human, which is a hopeful attribute for Tolstoi. Simple acts of compassion, *Resurrection* suggests, could potentially initiate its destruction from within. It could start with the jury member who realizes he has no right to judge, or the guard who would treat a prisoner like a human being rather than an unwanted animal, offering him a drink and a rest along the road instead of prodding him on to his death.

Tolstoi attacks tsarist institutions in *Resurrection*, but the hero’s role – the place he finds between spiritual and social change – gives the reader a look at Tolstoism personified, and makes the novel more than eccentric socialist agitation. Even if one is not familiar with Tolstoi’s attitude toward revolutionaries before reading *Resurrection*, Nekhliudov and the narrator’s shared disdain for the prisoner Novodvorov is instructive enough. A vain, power-hungry, opportunistic, narrow-minded, self-interested, and generally amoral person, Novodvorov is nonetheless the only revolutionary alternative to Nekhliudov presented in the novel. By the measure of its leader, socialist revolution, and the violence it considers necessary and justified, is not a viable option. Tolstoi rejects revolution without Tolstoian morality, and the substitution of one violent and corrupt government for another.
While Lukács’ “everything is external” point of view overlooks *Resurrection*’s most important point in regard to Nekhliudov, it also ignores these critiques of the revolutionaries. Kaufman notes that capitalism is under fire in *Resurrection* (for example, when the workers are said to be doing “useless work” in building a house for a man who exploits them) (230), but also that the revolutionaries Nekhliudov meets in prison “are also asking questions, but their answers are often wrong, and their motivations confused” (228). *Resurrection* has its own messages, and does not concede rhetorical territory to any un-Tolstoian ideas the revolutionaries might have, even as it advocates for them as human beings. Though there is a compelling case to be made for *Resurrection* as a precursor to socialist realism, the novel is Tolstoian at its core, and thus the cause remains secondary to the hero who engages in the cause. Consequently, the major problem for Tolstoi as the writer of *Resurrection* is the push and pull between the hero and the cause - between Nekhliudov’s internal being and the external, corrupt world, which calls him to act.

In *Resurrection*, Tolstoi portrays prison more realistically, and with greater physical presence, than he ever did before. This is especially true in Part Three, when Nekhliudov bears witness to the prisoners’ deadly march to Siberia and a halting station (*etapnaia tiur'ma*) along the way. A few excerpts from the narrator’s account of one of these prisons give a glimpse of Tolstoi’s almost journalistic attention to detail in Part Three:

…when Nekhliudov came nearer and the door opened, the din grew louder and was converted into a noisy exchange of shouting, abuse and laughter. He heard the ringing sound of chains, and smelt the familiar foul stench of human excrement and disinfectant…(493)
...As he entered the building, which had a huge stinking tub (known in prisons as the ‘close-stool’) in the vestibule, the first thing Nekhliudov saw was a woman sitting on the edge of the tub...(493)

...The building, originally intended for a hundred and fifty and now housing four hundred and fifty, was so crowded that the prisoners, unable to get into the cells, had overflowed into the passage...(493)

...Nekhliudov looked in at the door [of the family cell]. Every inch of the room was crowded with men and women, some on, some underneath the sleeping-benches. The air was full of steam from wet clothes that were drying, and there was an incessant chatter of women’s voices. The next door opened into the unmarried men’s cell. This was still more crowded...(494)

Bayley attributes the exposé-like description to Tolstoi’s seriousness about the horrible scenes of life, which “made the idea of their imaginative transformation into art repellent to him” (251). Since Tolstoi is nevertheless determined to write about everything, Bayley states, “the horrors in Resurrection are those of an eye-witness report or a white paper” (252). Finally, Bayley distinguishes Tolstoi’s “instinctive knowledge” (about life, prison, and so on) from that of Dostoevskii (in Dead House) and Herzen (Memoirs), who have “involuntary” and “expert” knowledge: “The source of Tolstoi’s knowledge was in himself, and this knowledge finds its natural outlet through his characters” (251-252).

While I do not dispute the seriousness with which Tolstoi considered such scenes, I detect in Bayley’s analysis a continuation of the “everything is within you” concept from Tolstoi’s previous heroes. Here the idea extends to the author, perpetuating the myth that “everything is within Tolstoi.” In fact, the authenticity of Resurrection’s journalistic scenes inside Russian prisons probably comes from several sources, with Kennan’s Siberia and the Exile System perhaps the most apparent in Part Three. The
passages above recall Kennan’s emphasis on the poor quality of air in an *etapnaia* 
*tiur'ma*:

[There is a] strong peculiar odor that is characteristic of Siberian prisons… I can ask you to imagine cellar air, every atom of which has been half a dozen times through human lungs and is heavy with carbonic acid; to imagine that air still further vitiated by foul, pungent, slightly ammoniacal exhalations from long unwashed human bodies; to imagine that it has a suggestion of damp, decaying wood and more than a suggestion of human excrement – and still you will have no adequate idea of it. ( *Siberia* 175)

Details such as monstrous overcrowding and the ubiquitous bin for human waste (besides the planks for sleeping on, it is the only item in each cell) made a strong impression on Kennan. At one point he encounters 160 people sleeping in a 35 by 25 foot cell, with “air space for 35, or at most 40 men” ( *Siberia* 30). Every cell, by his count, has three or four times the number of prisoners it should. Of course, Kennan’s report is also in harmony with Dostoevskii’s *Dead House*, but through details such as the foul air, the overcrowding, the outbreak of disease, and even the dust clouds kicked up by the convoy on the road, Nekhludov and Maslova’s experience in Part Three even more closely mirrors what Kennan describes.

Kennan met Tolstoi on two different occasions, including a stop in June of 1886 on his way back from observing the penal system in Siberia, which he wrote about in an 1887 issue of *The Century* (Sekirin 9). For his part, when the two discussed the penal system and the conditions of the prisoners in Siberia (Kennan brought with him a fresh account of a hunger strike), the American writer felt that he was not telling Tolstoi anything new. “He was evidently familiar with the whole subject,” Kennan writes, “and
had with regard to it well-settled views which were not to be shaken by a few additional
facts not differing essentially from those that he had previously considered” (“A Visit”).

Nevertheless, Tolstoi eventually read Kennan’s book, and wrote a letter thanking
him for it in August of 1890. His work on Resurrection over the next decade suggests
that for him the topic was not exhausted. In fact, one can see Tolstoi turning it over in his
mind during Kennan’s 1886 visit.

“I have no doubt,” he said, “that the courage and fortitude of these people
[political prisoners in Siberia] are heroic, but their methods are irrational, and I
cannot sympathize with them. They resorted to violence, knowing that they
rendered themselves liable to violence in return, and they are suffering the natural
consequences of their mistaken action. I cannot imagine,” he continued, “any
darker conception of hell than the state of some of those unfortunate people in
Siberia, whose hearts are full of bitterness and hatred, and who, at the same time,
are absolutely powerless even to return evil for evil. If,” he added after a
moment’s pause, “they had only changed their views a little, - if they had adopted
the course which seems to me to only right one to pursue in dealing with evil, -
what might not such people have done for Russia! Mine is the true revolutionary
method.” (“A Visit”)

The revolutionary method Tolstoi refers to is his famous concept of non-resistance to
evil. He goes on to discuss this method with Kennan mostly in terms of refusal;
particularly, refusal to serve in the military, refusal to pay taxes that would support an
army, and so on. Still, Tolstoi’s hypothetical musing – if the revolutionary were to adopt
his course instead of violence – is interesting in light of Nekhliudov’s role as the
embodiment of activist Tolstoism in Resurrection. Clearly, Tolstoi did not yet have
everything resolved regarding the penal system and his stated lack of sympathy for
political prisoners.

Indeed, a decade later, Nekhliudov fails to get very far with the refusals and
passivity that Tolstoi discussed with Kennan in 1886. The external conditions of the
penal system facing the hero of *Resurrection* soon outweigh the troubles within him as the matter of greatest urgency, and he is called to action in the “true revolutionary method” of Tolstoi. As a Tolstoian revolutionary, Nekhliudov might be read as a literary answer to the common criticism of the author’s “impracticable” philosophy, a charge that Tolstoi countered in his meeting with Kennan:

> Then why do you say that I am impracticable when I hope and work for the realization of a social state, which you yourself admit is desirable? If we are ever to reach that desirable state somebody must make a beginning, must he not? Somebody must take a step in that direction and show that it is possible to live so?...The question is not what is easy, but what is right. There is nothing sacred or necessarily immutable about the present organization of society and the existing traits of human character. They are the results of man’s activity, and by man’s activity they can be changed. I believe that they ought to be changed, and I am doing what I can to change them. (“A Visit”)

When Nekhliudov embodies the idea of good works, he puts Tolstoism into practice in the world, targeted at the specific problem of prison. He becomes the example that even Tolstoi, ever aware of his own inconsistencies and moral failings, could not become. He takes the step that shows it is possible to “live so,” and that the seemingly unassailable *poriadok* can be challenged and changed, even if it must be one person at a time, as in the case of Selenin.

In staging Nekhliudov’s Tolstoian revolution, the author no longer fixates on one prisoner, as in works of the past, but considers prisoners as an entire class of people oppressed by another. Tolstoi divides the innocent from the guilty with such clearly drawn lines that there is less need for the hero to spend time navigating his own soul – he simply needs to get on the right side. Nekhliudov does just this when he becomes an advocate for Maslova and the others. He is then able to act, and the development in his
character, and in his soul, follows from action. Maslova herself does not significantly change in prison, other than to come to an acceptance of her fate. She begins as an abused angel and ends essentially the same, but with a softer and more open heart for having found Simonson’s love. In this manner, Resurrection shifts Tolstoi’s focus from the soul of the prisoner, who is presumed innocent, to the rampant cruelty and injustice of the penal system.
Chapter 3: Chekhov’s Dead Zone

On April 21st, 1890, Anton Chekhov left the material comforts and social entanglements of Moscow on a personal mission to explore the colonized Russian prison island of Sakhalin. Scholars have debated the precise motivation for this journey, which occurred when Chekhov was a 30-year-old practicing physician and a well-known, up-and-coming writer. Though biographical accounts convey a sense of impulsiveness about Chekhov’s trip to Sakhalin (probably due to the lack of consensus about exactly why he went), it was actually prefaced by months of research and preparation. Nevertheless, Chekhov left his friends and family a bit puzzled at the time and scholars guessing long after.

For some critics, such as Robert Payne, Chekhov’s decision remains inscrutable. Was it the result of a journalistic desire to expose the injustices of the penal system? His brother Mikhail said that a reading of the penal code and the discrepancies between its goals and implementation, set Chekhov on his way to Sakhalin (Ryfa 11). Was he also trying to silence the politically-minded critics who hounded him relentlessly, and publicly, for his supposed indifference to the social issues of the day? Many critics follow a narrative similar to that of Andrew Durkin, who supports the idea that the

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37 In this chapter, I have quoted from some of Chekhov’s shorter stories without pagination, as they have been published in many different collections and are sufficiently short to make page numbers of limited use.
purpose of the trip, just like the purpose of many of Chekhov’s stories, was “to eliminate falsehood, making it possible for the reader to approximate the truth more closely” (“Narrative” 130).

Alternatively, could it be that Chekhov was using a research trip to distance himself from personal relationships and tragedies, such as the recent death of his brother Nikolai? Did he find his art (and life) stagnating, and was he simply looking for a new and interesting experience? Payne notes that Chekhov gave various reasons at different times to different people, and so it is possible that some, all, or none is true (Chekhov Island xiv).

While most scholars take a cautious approach to the question similar to Payne’s, Simon Karlinsky insists that this mystery of Chekhov’s motivation is one of the “myths” about Chekhov and Sakhalin that we have created for ourselves (Chekhov Letters 152). For Karlinsky, literary scholars have ignored the importance Chekhov placed upon medicine and biology, and the entire answer can be found in his letter to Suvorin from March 9th, 1890. Chekhov writes, “My plans are neither Humboldtian nor even Kennanian. I want to write at least one or two hundred pages to pay off some of my debt to medicine, toward which, as you know, I’ve behaved like a pig” (Letters 158).

Karlinsky is convinced that Chekhov’s sole purpose was to conduct a medical-statistical survey on the island that would serve as a dissertation.

Part of the difficulty with Karlinsky’s argument is that it requires the dismissal of a great amount of evidence to the contrary, including statements surrounding the passage he cites. The preceding lines read as follows: “We are both mistaken about Sakhalin, but
you are probably more mistaken than I am. I am going there absolutely secure in the thought that my journey will not make any valuable contributions to literature or science: I have neither the knowledge, time nor pretensions for that” (*Letters* 158).

Chekhov seems to be joking, but this does not preclude the possibility that he really cannot say exactly why he is going. Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that the famously hard-working and time-managing Chekhov would undertake such a huge endeavor for no reason other than to tie up loose academic ends. Furthermore, immediately after he mentions the dissertation, he muses, “I may not be able to write anything at all, but the journey still retains its charm for me” (*Letters* 158). Thus Chekhov is just as quick to put forth or dismiss the dissertation motive as any other. It certainly gives him an ostensible purpose to go to Sakhalin, but he vacillates and dodges the question of why as if there is something undecided or hidden in all of this. The broader argument presented by Payne seems more plausible. We cannot say exactly what the original “charm” of the venture was for Chekhov, and perhaps he could not articulate it himself.

Whatever the precise reasoning for Chekhov’s trip to the prison island, my aim in this chapter is to show that the writer’s physical and intellectual encounter with Sakhalin was a profoundly formative one. Too often Chekhov’s experience in Sakhalin goes unmentioned in critical analysis of his work or is treated as a kind of biographical oddity or footnote, though it may have been as influential on his thinking as the mock execution and exile were for Dostoevskii. This is not to equate Dostoevskii’s imprisonment with Chekhov’s field research on the subject, but it seems impossible to discuss Dostoevskii
without prison, and yet rare to look at Chekhov’s relationship to it. In fact, as Luba and Michael Terpak note in their translation of *The Island of Sakhalin*, when an editor once asked for an autobiography, Chekhov’s version begins as follows: “I was born in Taganrog in 1860. I graduated from the gymnasium. I got an M.D. from Moscow University. I received the Pushkin Prize. I began to write in 1879. I took a trip to Sakhalin in 1890. I took a trip to Europe, where I drank excellent wine and ate oysters…” (375). Sakhalin occupies a conspicuous place on Chekhov’s own list of events and accomplishments, just after “I began to write.” Clearly, he considered his trip to the prison island to be one of the most remarkable events of his life.

So why is there not more critical discussion and a stronger association between Chekhov and prison? Perhaps Chekhov’s critics unintentionally follow his lead in distancing the author from the story. As Chekhov would undoubtedly appreciate, one can talk at length about the themes and ideas of his short stories without knowing the exact position of the writer. Another possible reason is that *The Island of Sakhalin* is by no one’s account his greatest artistic achievement. Is it a travelogue, a piece of exposé journalism, a document of scientific research, or something else entirely? As Juras Ryfa notes, the critics of *Sakhalin* generally fall into one of two groups: those who favor the literary aspect of the book (such as Atchity, Finke, Conrad), and those who privilege its science (Tulloch, Shubin, Trautmann, Popkin) (66). Ryfa argues that all facets of the book combined prove *Sakhalin* to be the “inception of an innovative literary genre” (7).

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38 Donald Rayfield, in *Understanding Chekhov* (1999, University of Wisconsin Press), is the critic who perhaps most closely ties *Sakhalin* with Chekhov’s later works.
Still, readers’ disagreement shows how difficult it is to determine the defining element of the work, its genre, and the author’s success in writing it. Unfortunately, all of these questions seem to have pushed Chekhov’s prison experience to the side of his biography, and *Sakhalin* to the fringe of his major body of work, despite the fact that it was written during what Aleksandr Chudakov considered the writer’s famous shift to “objective” narration from 1888 to 1894. The analysis of this chapter will work to re-establish the Sakhalin trip of 1890 as part of the foundation of Chekhov’s art, as a bridge between the stories of the 1880s and the 1890s, and as raw material for his later stories and plays.

Even though Chekhov’s reputation for authorial “objectivity” suggests that his biography is somehow apart from his writing (in contrast with Dostoevskii and Tolstoi, for example), I will try to show how Chekhov was deeply concerned with prison themes before and after his formational trip to Sakhalin, and make a case for Chekhov as another great Russian “prison writer” of the nineteenth century. Prison becomes a key inspiration and source for some aspects of Chekhov’s heroes and literary moods. As in previous chapters, my interest is more literary than biographical, and my chief method will be a close reading of selected texts, which I have tried to anchor and enhance through both primary and secondary sources.

In looking at prison’s role in Chekhov’s works, I have not addressed the entire list of his prison-related texts. Instead, I have chosen to focus on *The Island of Sakhalin* and a handful of shorter works (“A Malefactor,” “The Bet,” “Gusev,” “In Exile,” *Ward No. 6*), which together illustrate the author’s relationship to prison, and its importance to his
art, which up to now has been marginal to studies of Chekhov. I have tried to stay close to actual prisons in my selection of works, with the goal of assessing the early influence of prison on Chekhov’s thinking and fiction. The many metaphorical prisons and prisoners of his subsequent works, such as *Uncle Vania, The Three Sisters*, and “The Lady with the Lapdog,” are referenced, but a full analysis is largely outside of the scope of this chapter. My hope is that the reader of these later works will keep in mind the role prison played in their development.

In striving to provide a new angle on Chekhov through prison – including both the reality of Sakhalin and the concept of imprisonment – I will argue that Chekhov views and constructs prison as a kind of “dead zone” in his works. Derived from the cold brutality of Sakhalin, Chekhov’s prison is a place where people exist but do not live. All fragments of life found in prison belong to another world, or are ghostly traces of a time forever past. This chapter’s analysis of the role of prison in Chekhov’s works will center on the dead zone as a chronotope created out of the conditions of prison. This chronotope becomes remarkably versatile for the writer even outside of Sakhalin, when he begins to extend it to prison-like settings. For some characters, this means that life itself is governed by the chronotope of the dead zone. In my analysis of prison themes across several texts, I will try to show how this chronotope is responsible in part for the artistic cohesion and philosophical depth of many of Chekhov’s works.

Of course, the “deadness” of Chekhov’s prison links him with Dostoevskii, whose *Notes from the Dead House* was published thirty years before his trip to Sakhalin, but the differences between the two works are significant. Chekhov, as I will show, takes
Dostoevskii’s prison “deadness” further, in the existential sense of being without life or purpose. At the same time, Chekhov’s understandably bleak view of the prison world leads to revelations in later works about life on the “mainland.”

**Before Sakhalin**

“A Malefactor” (1885)

Five years prior to his Siberian travels, Chekhov explicitly engaged the topic of the penal system in an 1885 story called “A Malefactor” (“Zloumyshlennik”). The title refers to Denis Grigor’ev, a peasant who unscrews a nut from railroad tracks to use as a fishing weight and comes under official investigation for his crime. The magistrate who interrogates him tries to explain that removing nuts from the railroad is dangerous and could result in a fatal accident, but Denis genuinely cannot understand what he did wrong – all peasants do this, he says. Of course, what is common sense to Denis is a serious violation of the law for the magistrate, who responds,

> Listen. Article 1081 of the Penal Code lays down that every willful damage of the railway line committed when it can expose the traffic on that line to danger, and the guilty party knows that an accident must be caused by it…(Do you understand? Knows! And you could not help knowing what this unscrewing would lead to…) is liable to penal servitude.

39 With this comparison in mind, it is worth noting that Chekhov’s most substantial reference to *Dead House* in *Sakhalin* focuses on the critique of prison conditions offered by Dostoevskii’s novel rather than any metaphysical aspect. Perhaps he thought of *Dead House* primarily as an exposé, for he reports that “the ‘House of the Dead’ no longer exists. Among intellectuals working in office positions on Sakhalin I met intelligent, good and honorable people whose presence is sufficient to guarantee that the past cannot come back again. They no longer roll convicts in barrels and a prisoner can no longer be beaten to death or driven to suicide without shocking the local community and without its being discussed along the Amur and all over Siberia” (313). This statement is somewhat contradicted by Chekhov’s accounts of brutal floggings and executions, but the point that he does not seem to be in dialogue with Dostoevskii on a metaphysical level remains.
To the magistrate the case is clear, and Denis must go to prison. Baffled by this reasoning, in which the law describes a reality at odds with his perception of the world, Denis replies, “To prison…If there was something to go for, I’d go; but just to go for nothing! What for? I haven’t stolen anything, I believe, and I’ve not been fighting…” As he is taken away, Chekhov gives the otherwise powerless Denis the last lines of the story. “You ought to judge sensibly,” he tells the magistrate, “not at random…Flog if you like, but flog someone who deserves it, flog with a conscience.”

With “A Malefactor,” Chekhov finds in the penal system instances of what will become a major overall theme of his artistic works: the distances and barriers between people, and their failure to communicate. In “A Malefactor,” the law provides part of the barrier between the two main characters by casting them in opposing roles: zloumyshlennik and magistrate. Zloumyshlennik is a term that is not actually used by the magistrate in the story, but is perhaps more suggestive because of this fact. It would not be applied to someone in everyday conversation without a legal context, and thus the title of the story itself seems to fall under the magistrate’s jurisdiction, serving to condemn Denis, if ironically.

While the context of the penal system reduces Denis to a “malefactor,” it also provides the magistrate with an inhuman role to play. He is a compassionless instrument of the law, no matter how unjust or absurd its application. This does not make the magistrate blameless in his ruthlessness, however, as Chekhov provides both characters with paths to mutual understanding. Denis simply does not understand that taking a nut from the railroad is a problem, and the magistrate is able to explain the issue, but the law,
and especially their perception of the law, blocks their meeting on common ground as human beings. The penal system, “A Malefactor” suggests, is more concerned with the exercise and reinforcement of its power than with providing a solution to a simple problem, or even a reasonable degree of justice. As a zealot of the law, the magistrate excises “Article 1081” of all traces of human compassion (the requirement of “willful damage” and the guilty party’s knowledge of the consequences), amending it in the middle of his recitation to rewrite its qualifying statements as a presumption of guilt (“And you could not help knowing”). Amazingly, human administration of the penal system actually makes it less human. Thus Chekhov portrays the penal system as an obstacle to our mutual understanding. Denis, who simply does what all peasants do, and the magistrate, who refuses to abide even the slightest infraction against the all-powerful law, clearly live by different “codes.”

Additionally, the gap of understanding between peasant and magistrate in “A Malefactor” illustrates Russia’s Foucauldian transition between the pre-modern and modern systems of punishment. Again, the severity of Denis’ punishment – and it should be noted that there was no accident resulting from his actions – reflects the modern penal system’s priority in exercising power rather than enacting justice. Furthermore, the way the magistrate hides his humanity under the mask of the law illustrates, on a small scale, the kind of distance that has spread between the punisher and the punished in the modern system. The distance created by the penal code enables faceless punishment – an institution that compels violence while allowing its human agents, such as the magistrate, to disavow personal responsibility for the suffering of another human being.
In contrast with the magistrate, Denis’ understanding of punishment is pre-modern, in the Foucauldian sense. This is logical, as he is a peasant in nineteenth-century Russia and thus not far removed from serfdom (abolished only in 1861), another notorious pre-modern institution of power. Thus Denis expects a feudal paradigm of punishment: the tsar or master has the peasant flogged for some misdeed done against him (the “spectacle” for Foucault). The breakdown of this formula is what causes Denis such confusion. He does not know who exactly is punishing him, just as he does not know against precisely whom he has committed a crime. For Denis, no harm was done. This results in his absurd plea for the magistrate to “flog with a conscience.” Denis is not being flogged for the sake of the tsar or the magistrate, but for the sake of the law – because he is on the losing side of the power relationship. Indeed, no one is flogging him, so it is impossible to do so “with a conscience.” For Denis, at least the cruel, old system had a logical chain of actors and actions.

Setting Foucault aside, “A Malefactor” provides a pre-Sakhalin idea of Chekhov’s prison. In this early version, the penal system appears as just another obstacle to communication and human connection, exacerbating the class, educational, and cultural divides that prevent Denis and the magistrate from interacting on a level of common humanity.

“The Bet” (1889)

“The Bet,” written in 1889, four years after “A Malefactor,” and a year before Chekhov’s trip to Sakhalin, indicates a darkly serious turn in the writer’s ruminations on
prison. While the general role of the penal system in “A Malefactor” is to highlight the broader theme of how people fail to understand one another and create obstacles to communication, in “The Bet” prison becomes a central theme in its own right. Much of “The Bet” anticipates The Island of Sakhalin. In both works, the concept of prison opens up the most urgent existential questions for Chekhov, leading to the chronotope of the dead zone, which becomes part of the foundation of his literary world.

“The Bet” begins with a conversation at a party about which sentence is worse: death or life imprisonment. As the guests debate, an older banker bets that his rival in this argument, a twenty-five-year-old lawyer who says that any kind of life is better than death, could not last five years in prison. The lawyer boasts that he can do 15, and the banker agrees to pay him two million rubles for this feat.

As this “ridiculous bet” (in the narrator’s words) becomes reality, Chekhov plays with the reader’s expectations. The lawyer agrees to be locked up in a single room on the banker’s estate, where the solitude alone would drive a person mad. How could this bet not end quickly? Most readers surely underestimate the lawyer’s commitment to the bet, which turns out to be grave and obsessive. The story even begins to take on the character of a strange fable or thought experiment.

If the injustice of “A Malefactor” seems only too believable, the events of “The Bet” appear quite impossible. Chekhov’s “trick,” however, is that there is no trick, and the 15 years play out in grim realism. “The Bet” reminds the reader that people endure prison for such impossible terms all the time. Chekhov tries to make us feel it. In fact, the lawyer uses much of this cruel time admirably, requesting, reading and studying as
many books as he can. We know his thoughts from a final letter he writes to the banker in the days before his impending release. He feels he has gained wisdom and experienced the world through books.

Still, the question that led to the bet remains: Is life in prison, deprived of nearly all freedom, still better than death? Chekhov leaves us to decipher the answer from two sources: the possibly insane thoughts expressed in the lawyer’s letter, and the lawyer’s shocking final act, which is to abscond just prior to the completion of his 15 years, and thus purposefully lose the bet. In the letter, after initially praising the capacity of books to enable him to travel the world from his prison cell, the lawyer writes,

And I despise your books, despise all worldly blessings and wisdom. Everything is void, frail, visionary and delusive as a mirage. Though you be proud and wise and beautiful, yet will death wipe you from the face of the earth like the mice underground; and your posterity, your history and the immortality of your men of genius will be as frozen slag, burnt down together with the terrestrial globe…You are mad, and gone the wrong way. You take falsehood for truth and ugliness for beauty. You would marvel if suddenly apple and orange trees should bear frogs and lizards instead of fruit, and if roses should begin to breathe the odor of a sweating horse. So do I marvel at you, who have bartered heaven for earth. I do not want to understand you…That I may show you in deed my contempt for that by which you live, I waive the two million of which I once dreamed as of paradise, and which I now despise. (II)

The letter’s main idea, if one can call it that, is that things are not as they seem, and perhaps all turned upside down: You think you are alive, but you are just not dead yet; your truth is a lie, your beauty is ugliness; the paradise I imagined is actually hell.

This revelation of inverses suggests that the lawyer’s life in prison turned out to be a form of death. He views both history and posterity as “frozen,” and neither is his present alive. This puts the lawyer, as it will the prisoners of Sakhalin, in a Chekhovian dead zone. Existence itself, the lawyer learns, does not equate to life, as he originally
argued. In other words, freedom is the crucial ingredient of life. This is why the lawyer leaves just before his time is up. His intentional loss of the bet is an expression of freedom that allows him to experience life once again. That the lawyer acts out of spite does not tarnish the meaning of his act. On the contrary, the irrationality of his self-harm actually reinforces his freedom as a human being, much in the style of Dostoevskii’s Underground Man.

“The Bet” strips the concept of imprisonment of all the expected variables (crime, justice, guilt, other prisoners, physical conditions), some of which are seen in “A Malefactor,” and instead focuses entirely on the nature and consequence of unfreedom. “The Bet” shows that Chekhov’s view of prison, before he set off for Sakhalin, was influenced above all by the high value he placed on personal freedom. Chekhov’s carceral space is a dead zone, and his carceral time - a dead present.

*Journey to Sakhalin*40

Though he had already begun examining the nature of prison in his short stories of the mid-to-late 1880s, Chekhov gained his credibility as a prison writer by traveling to Sakhalin in 1890. An island located off the far eastern coast of Siberia, to the north of Japan, Sakhalin made its first impression on the writer as a place of otherworldliness. “Everything here…is native to the place, not Russian,” he writes (*Sakhalin* 2). “This seems to be the end of the world, and there is nowhere else to go” (5). While the Russian mainland is geographically close, Chekhov describes it as a world apart for the

40 A complete edition of *The Island of Sakhalin* was first published in 1895, but most of it had appeared previously in installments in *Russian Thought* from 1893 to 1894.
inhabitants of the island. Prisoners and ex-prisoners “speak of Ussuriiskii Krai and the Amur, both of them nearby, as the promised land. You sail on a boat for three or four days, and then you come upon freedom, warmth, harvest” (221). Unfortunately for most of the island’s population, even the Siberian shore remains a distant fantasy, and those three or four days by boat might as well be a trip to another planet.

This feeling of foreignness, and of an overwhelmingly vast distance between the Russian and the lost homeland, colors Chekhov’s view of prison in a way that distinguishes it uniquely from both Dostoevskii’s and Tolstoi’s perspectives. In Dostoevskii’s fiction, as I have tried to show in Chapter One, prison is all around us and even within us, pervading our cities, towns, rooms, and minds. It is an inescapable condition of modern life. For Tolstoi, as discussed in Chapter Two, prison is part of an outside, unnatural order we impose upon ourselves. Sinners all, we punish one another with an authority that is not ours, failing to grasp that the meaning of life is encompassed in human brotherhood. Chekhov’s point of view, coming largely from his experience at “the end of the world” on Sakhalin, places prison not only morally outside of human society, as Tolstoi sees it, but physically and temporally outside it as well. Chekhov’s prison is external to life itself, and thus signifies an existential dead zone.

This is not to claim that Chekhov originally intended to portray prison as a dead zone of humanity, but rather that it evolved that way, from his early stories, to Sakhalin, and into his later works. In fact, it is fairly clear from the book and his letters that Chekhov first meant to depict his journey to Sakhalin as a Dantean descent into hell.
Few scholars fail to note this aspect of Sakhalin, and for good reason. As Chekhov first arrives on the island by ship, he describes fires burning everywhere. There are deadly swarms of insects, and everything is “covered with smoke, as in hell” (16). Penal servitude is an outright “hell” - the same word he uses to describe Sakhalin to Suvorin shortly after his return from the island in December 1890 (PSSP, Letters v. 4, 139).

However, as Chekhov (the hero/narrator of Sakhalin) begins to explore Sakhalin, the hell he describes becomes more complex and interesting, taking on unexpected dimensions. It becomes a markedly foreign place. As one convict states, “It is lonesome here, your worship. It is much better at home in Russia” (29). Indeed, by all reports, Sakhalin is Not Russia. Chekhov writes that the huts and houses have no tradition, “no grandmother, no grandfather, no old paintings, no inherited furniture…there is no beautiful icon corner,” “nothing from the past” (37). All of this, he concludes, is “due to the fact that we are no longer in Russia” (37).

Indeed, according to Chekhov, Sakhalin does not share a history with Russia, and so it has tried to create one of its own. Chekhov writes,

It is interesting to learn that in Sakhalin they name settlements after the governors of Siberia, prison guards and assistant surgeons, but completely forget such explorers as Nevel’skoi, the sea captain Korsakov, Boshniak, Poliakov and many others whose memory has earned greater respect and regard than, for example, a jailer like Derbin, who was murdered for his cruelty. (77)

Chekhov presents Sakhalin as a self-isolating other world, defined against its opposite in Russia, which is full of tradition, family, and history. The author in turn treats the island

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as though it really were outside of the empire. He seems primarily interested in the
strangeness of Sakhalin as an autonomous entity rather than as a Russian colony.

However, it should be acknowledged that throughout Sakhalin Chekhov
occasionally offers the kind of commentary on Russian society that his critics had long
demanded. For example, he describes the poor conditions of peasants on the island, and
remarks upon governmental mismanagement: “This [unnecessary] tunnel is an excellent
eexample of the Russian inclination to expend one’s last resources on all kinds of
evasions, while the most urgent necessities are ignored” (98). In terms of the colonial
Russians’ relationship with the native population, Chekhov notes that the official Russian
translator for the Giliak and Ainu languages does not know a single word of Giliak or
Ainu.

There are still bolder statements about the “stupidity and unscrupulous behavior
of all the minor officials” and how “the rich drink tea, while the poor work and the guards
openly dupe their superiors” (108). Chekhov also blames much of the wretched state of
the penal system on “the backwardness of our criminal code. It does not answer the
numerous questions which arise daily and present a broad field for arbitrary
interpretations and illegal actions” (113). Like Tolstoi, Chekhov truly loathes the penal
system for its arbitrariness. However, while Tolstoi does not even entertain the
possibility of reform, Chekhov suggests that there are concrete steps that could be taken
(with the criminal code, for example) to improve the system. Such is, at least, the
assessment of Chekhov the social critic in the book’s most overtly political passages.
At the same time, Chekhov’s overall portrayal of Sakhalin is not satiric, nor does it highlight the criminal code or the power of the Tolstoian/Foucauldian poriadok. In fact, for much of the book the author seems uncertain about which angle best captures Sakhalin. One gets the sense that the motifs of otherworldliness, foreignness, and hellishness were deemed insufficient (they are, in fact, somewhat one-dimensional), and so Chekhov continues looking for a better lens.

This search next leads to the observation of the prison island as a wholly unnatural habitat for living creatures, and ill-suited to human beings in particular. A great admirer of Darwin, Chekhov describes the strange environment as full of displaced people absurdly trying to adapt to a place that has no real culture and no real history. The only possible evolutionary step is backwards, away from life and humanity - to vanish into the dead zone.

Nowhere are past times so quickly forgotten as on Sakhalin, and this is because of the extraordinary turnover in the convict population, which changes basically every five years, and partly because of a lack of accurate archives in the local offices. What transpired twenty or twenty-five years ago is considered to belong to a dark antiquity, already forgotten, lost to history (310).

The island has been colonized only in name. Life, with its past, present, and future – its continuity – has not thrived in the dead surroundings.

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42 Conflation of the island and the actual prisons that exist on it is difficult to avoid, particularly as Chekhov paints everything on Sakhalin in uniformly dark tones. He depicts only the slightest degree of freedom on the island, regardless of whether one is laboring in chains, waiting out a lifelong exile, or sitting behind a government desk. Arrival on the island as a prisoner (or as part of a prisoner’s family) is portrayed as essentially permanent, with the only subsequent moments of freedom being dangerous and inevitably unsuccessful escape attempts from the island. The government workers are largely described as stuck unimaginably far from home, and are not much better off in the overall picture. I will therefore follow Chekhov’s lead and consider the island to be a prison space itself.
The evolutionary work of Sakhalin strips some of the most recognizable elements of human civilization from its inhabitants, and the island becomes a land of lost and forgotten souls, where the days fade from memory as quickly as they appear. “I recall that I asked [a settler guard] whether it was Wednesday or Thursday,” the author writes. “He answered: ‘I can’t remember, your worship’” (137). Sakhalinian time, which lacks the manmade delineations of days and weeks, reflects the “unnaturalness” of the environment. Names of people, too, have begun to lose their meaning. Chekhov encounters bizarre and “lost” names as he compiles his census (one of the ostensible reasons for his trip):

When I asked an Orthodox Russian peasant his name, he answered, “Karl.” He was not being facetious. He was a vagrant who had borrowed his name from a German…One convict was called Napoleon. There was a female vagrant Praskovia, although her real name was Mariia…There were many curious surnames: Shkandyba [Limper], Zheludok [Stomach], Bezbozhnyi [Godless] and Zevaka [Yawner]…The most common name among the vagrants is Ivan, and the most common surname is Nepomniashchii [Unremembering]. Here are some of the vagrants’ names: Mustafa Nepomniashchii, Vasilii Bezotechestva [Countryless], Franz Nepomniashchii, Ivan Nepomniashchii 20 Years, Iakov Besprozvaniia [Nameless], Vagrant Ivan 35 Years [Referring to his sentence] and Chelovek Neizvestnogo Zvaniia [Man with an Unknown Name]. (31)

Chekhov meets Russians who have inexplicably taken foreign names or other Russian names, and Russians who have adopted what are essentially anti-names. For Chekhov, this confusion and loss of identity is not an outlying phenomenon, but rather characteristic of Sakhalin. It is all part of the “natural” state of the prison island, which Chekhov presents as inherently unnatural and alien to human life. The people of Sakhalin have no nationality, no culture, and no identity.
This foreign/unnatural/lost hell is not limited to days and names, but extends to the conditions of everyday existence as well. Chekhov notes that “there is no possibility of a normal household here” (38). What one might call “family life” on Sakhalin is founded on illegal marriage and held together largely by prostitution and gambling. “It is a beastly existence, it is nihilistic, a negation of proprietary rights, privacy, comfort and restful sleep,” the writer concludes (54). The “negation of restful sleep” recalls Chekhov’s 1888 story “Sleepy” (Spat’ khochetsia), in which sleep-deprived thirteen-year-old Var’ka strangles the baby in her care. The idea that life on Sakhalin can be equated to such an unstable state – of never having restful sleep – points again to the island as an unnatural space for human beings.

The everyday sleeplessness of Sakhalin complicates the hellish and otherworldly island’s already somewhat muddled characterization, which is probably a significant reason why Sakhalin is not Chekhov’s strongest artistic work. Critics have a difficult time deciding exactly what kind of work Sakhalin is because the author himself seems uncommitted to a particular portrayal of the island, particularly in the first part of the book. Nonetheless, a dominant theme emerges out of the ideas of the hellish, the foreign, the otherworldly, and the unnatural: the prison dead zone.

The Dead Zone

The common thread throughout the fragmented characterization of Sakhalin is that no one on the prison island really lives as they should. In fact, no one really lives at all, in any but the narrowest sense. While the fact that there are no grandparents around
(and no icons or links to old traditions) indicates that this place has no past, Chekhov’s observation that there are “absolutely no young people” in a given town on Sakhalin also suggests that there is no future. Like the imprisoned lawyer in “The Bet,” who lives without human contact, ticking off years in a way that simultaneously separates him from the past and eliminates his future, the isolation of the prison population leaves only a dead present remaining. By the end of Sakhalin, this temporal and spatial dead zone will come to define Chekhov’s idea of prison, and his prison chronotope, setting up a philosophical perspective and an artistic device that the author will use to great effect in his later fiction.

Other critics have remarked upon the deadness, or emptiness, of life that faces Chekhov’s heroes. In Tvorchestvo iz nichego, Lev Shestov describes the Chekhovian hero as one forced to create from the void. Valentine Bill, on the other hand, argues that there is no void, but rather “an agglomeration of obstacles…which [slow] an individual’s growth, which [threaten] to paralyze him, and [diminish] the priceless gift of being alive” (12). I would argue that Chekhov’s imprisoned characters fall somewhere in between the two concepts. Reducing life to a state of mere existence, prison may act as a void, bringing into sharper focus the underlying nothingness of the universe. At the same time, it may be just one of the many obstacles that threaten to paralyze the individual. Either way, it is important to note that Chekhov’s personae do not react to the “void” or

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43 Bill’s study looks at Chekhov chiefly as a writer and proponent of freedom, and thus offers an alternative approach to many of the same issues I discuss regarding Chekhov and imprisonment. Occasional comparison with Bill’s ideas throughout this chapter, I hope, will distinguish my “prison” perspective from his “freedom” perspective. See Bill, Valentine T. Chekhov: The Silent Voice of Freedom. New York: Philosophical Library, 1987.
the “agglomeration of obstacles” in a uniform way. The range of perspectives and outcomes among Chekhov’s imprisoned characters suggests that above all they are faced with choice: Will the void imprison or liberate you? Does the obstacle demand submission or defiance?

Regardless of perspective, the deadness of Sakhalin infects everyone on the island. There is a point when Chekhov is describing a road running along the shore, and he seems to realize that, in his attempt to capture a piece of life on Sakhalin, he is actually writing a kind of elegy for the living. “All this [description of nature] may be very beautiful in its own way, but my prejudices were by now so deep-seated that I regarded not only the people but also the plants with sorrow, because they were growing up in this terrible place rather than elsewhere” (99). He then discusses the women and children of Sakhalin, who are primarily characterized by their utter inactivity. Like the sorrowful plants, Sakhalin’s children grow up on the prison island for no purpose, because there is no escape and no future. They should be playing, crying, or running about, but their idleness signifies a complete absence of life.

It turns out that the women of Sakhalin, whom Chekhov expects to find busy with children and domestic activities, are not exempt from the dead zone either, and occupy themselves with essentially nothing that the author can categorize as life. Most women are forced to become “cohabitants” with a male settler for the sake of survival. According to Chekhov, men talk of their “cohabitants” as though they are “working horses” and encourage prostitution so they can contribute income to the household like “beneficial domestic animal[s]” (237, 240). Their “human dignity,…femininity and
modesty… are never taken into account” (237). Unsurprisingly, Chekhov does not even consider the possibility of love on the island. Love is the stuff of life, and in the dead zone its closest approximation is a shallow, businesslike relationship with a man who is not abusive. Sadly, even cohabitation with a stranger is preferable to the arrival of one’s family on the island, an arrangement that Chekhov portrays as inevitably doomed, especially for the women involved.

Chekhov never strays far from this almost unrelentingly bleak narrative. His research and observations determine the funereal tone that distinguishes his account from those of previous visitors to Sakhalin, some of whom wrote favorably of the colony’s conditions with the aim of pleasing the authorities. The truth of Chekhov’s account, as he sees it, is supported precisely by its darkness. For example, he is dubious of another writer’s report on Sakhalin, in which there is singing and dancing near a prison. Chekhov refutes this claim.

I neither saw nor heard anything of the sort and cannot imagine girls singing and dancing around a prison. Even if I had heard of a distant song mingling with the clanging of chains and the shouting of the guards, I would have regarded the singing as an act of malice, for a kind and merciful man does not sing near a prison. (223)

Singing and dancing belong the realm of the living, and cannot occur in the dead zone except perhaps in a corrupted form, as “an act of malice.”

Chekhov hears no sounds of life on Sakhalin, either outside or within the prison walls. Even “the crimes of almost all of [the convicts] are terribly dull, ordinary, without interest” (102). Perhaps this is because they occurred far away on the mainland, in another time, in the living world. Prison stories provide no sense of life on Sakhalin,
putting Chekhov’s portrayal in contrast with the works of later writers of prison literature, such as Shalamov, Tertz, and Adamova-Sliozberg. For these authors, who wrote as prisoners, literature and storytelling provided a vital connection with life. Chekhov recognizes no such potential for salvation in Sakhalin.

Indeed, while many of the most celebrated works of Russian prison literature search for and find signs of life in the most desolate places, Chekhov’s prison may be the most lifeless. The sense of living death on Sakhalin is more pervasive and insurmountable than even in Dostoevskii’s Dead House, in which suffering could actually be seen as a sign of life. There is no such idea in Sakhalin, which has much suffering, but no true counterweight. Chekhov’s prison offers no escape into the life of the mind, as in Tertz; no determination to be a living witness, as for Adamova-Sliozberg; and no re-forging of the soul through suffering, as in Crime and Punishment. The purposeless suffering of Sakhalin’s prison is outside of life altogether.

The Dead Refrain

Aside from the many tales and descriptions of needless human misery on Sakhalin, Chekhov gives the island its “deadness” through a literary technique that relies on his role as scientist and census-taker. Sakhalin’s combination of travel notes, anecdotes, lyrical descriptions and scientific observations have given critics much to discuss in terms of genre, but the specific effects of Chekhov’s amalgamation have been analyzed less closely. Ryfa approaches the subject, drawing attention to the merging of the literary and scientific discursive elements, but interprets it only as a part of the hell
motif (184). Without discounting this interpretation, I propose that this merging also enhances the dead atmosphere of the depiction of Sakhalin. Chekhov regularly employs statistics throughout the narrative to undercut the few traces of life he finds. The use of numbers to summarize abruptly the inhabitants of a given region becomes a familiar, recurrent elegy, a kind of dead refrain in prose.

There is no doubt that Chekhov knew what made a good story when he started to write *Sakhalin* at the beginning of the 1890s. After all, he had just completed one of his best, “Gusev” (1890), which would soon be followed by additional outstanding literary works. So why in *Sakhalin* does the author frequently interrupt his generally interesting account of the hellish, dead island to deliver dry statistical updates? In a typical example, Chekhov vividly recounts his rain-soaked travels to an area of Sakhalin: “Here and there the will-o’-the-wisps gleamed and flickered; entire pools and tremendous rotting trees were lit with phosphorescent colors and my boots were covered with moving sparks which shimmered like the glowworms on a midsummer night,” yet he ends the chapter with the following paragraph about the town in which he just arrived: “Voskresenskoe is twice as large as Uskovo. Inhabitants, 183: 175 male and 8 female. There are 7 free families but not one legally married. There are few children in the settlement and only one little girl. It has 97 homesteaders and 77 co-owners” (129).

The juxtaposition of lyrical prose and census data accounts for some of the confusion of genre that has bothered critics. Certainly, Chekhov could have chosen to separate more clearly his narrative from his statistics. This juxtaposition continually serves the purpose of grounding and then burying the life that Chekhov cannot help but
give to the prison island through his prose. For instance, in the “gleaming” and “flickering” description above, Sakhalin sounds almost enchanted. Throughout the book, Chekhov makes it very clear that there is nothing enchanting about this potentially exotic place. The dead refrain reminds the reader that, for all of Chekhov’s poetic impressions, there are real people on the prison island waiting out their only existence as numbers that happens to fall under one column or another. Aside from a couple of the main demographic points about the incredibly low population of women and children, which are made early on in the book, the census of the dead refrain holds nothing of statistical interest for Chekhov’s reader.

What remains is the deadening effect of the author’s regular intrusion of data on the tone of his narration. Having established the lifelessness of the island, his census adds an absurd aspect to it – like taking a census of hell or a cemetery. This is not to say that Chekhov’s use of statistics is always in service to literary effect in Sakhalin. As critical studies reflect, Chekhov does not appear to have a cohesive idea behind the whole book and, furthermore, he obviously expended great effort in his census taking. His numbers are most impactful in their role as the dead refrain. This is particularly evident when he places the data at the end of a chapter or makes it an abrupt endpoint to a personal account or anecdote. Chekhov counters the effects of a poetic or humanizing passage with lifeless statistics like a textual tombstone for the living dead.

Another example of the dead refrain will illustrate this effect further. Chekhov enters his room after conversations with a card-playing prisoner and a friendly jailer.

It seemed as though the walls and ceiling were covered with black crepe, which stirred as if blown by a wind. From the rapid and disorderly movements of
portions of the crepe you could guess the composition of this boiling, seething mass. You could hear rustling and a loud whispering, as if the insects were hurrying off somewhere and carrying on a conversation.

There are 101 settlers in Lower Armudan: 76 male and 25 female. There are 47 homesteaders with 23 co-owners. Four families are married; 15 live as cohabitants. There are only two free women. There are no inhabitants between 15 and 20 years of age. The people live in dire poverty… (121)

The narrative, which begins to read like a short story, complete with an inveterate gambler and a hospitable jailer, is suddenly disrupted by statistics. The description of the insect-filled room is horrifying (it is not even a cell, but a garret in the jail), but artful in a way that could make it seem almost fictional. Without warning the numbers eliminate the nightmarish quality of the narration with a stark reminder of the number of people who actually live in such rooms.

Chekhov’s statistics evoke death not only in the lack of women, children, and young people that is so evident in nearly every refrain, but also in descriptions of the native population. “Undoubtedly the number of Sakhalin Giliaks is constantly decreasing, and this judgment can be made simply by eye-count,” the author concludes (146). In fact, he does give some data on the Giliak population. There were 3,270 Giliaks on Sakhalin in 1856, but that number decreased to 1,500 only 15 years later, and then to 320 in 1889. Chekhov does not have the data to say precisely why the native population shrinks so drastically, though he does reference atrocities committed by the Russian colonists (201). However, this is only part of the larger point, which is that humanity itself does not belong on this island. He notes that even free Russian settlements, such as one that started with 25 families in 1868, have disappeared quickly.
due to crop failures and general destitution (194). Chekhov portrays the prison island as an inherently dead place for Russians and natives alike.

**The Space and Time of Chekhov’s Dead Zone**

Over the course of *Sakhalin*, the Dante motif proves to be not entirely compatible with the dead zone that emerges from *Sakhalin*, which is not the same as hell. As Ryfa notes, “in Dante’s cosmogony, punishment is determined by the degree of the crime: the more aggravated the crime the more severe the punishment. In other words, punishment perfectly fits crime” (191). One of the problems with the Dante theme, then, is that Chekhov’s offenders are scarcely distinguished by their crimes. In fact, due to the numbers within the dead refrain, the prisoners and exiles are portrayed more as a collective mass of sufferers than as individuals. At this point, in my opinion, Ryfa takes a wrong turn, arguing that “in Chekhov’s hell, the redemption of the most inveterate criminals is still possible because of the positive manifestations of human nature” (191). There is hardly such an optimistic note in *Sakhalin*. Instead, the dead zone is characterized by a state of living death and the indiscriminate destruction of human lives, regardless of who these prisoners are or what they have done. Chekhov depicts something other than hell on the island, in spite of the intentional development of the theme. As the echoes of Dante become less frequent, the dead zone develops not so much from literary allusion as the author’s scientifically-minded observations on Sakhalin.
Chekhov’s dead zone is immeasurably distant from the Russian mainland, where there is life, but to where the dead (prisoners) will never return. The longer he stays on Sakhalin, the further the writer seems to be from his home. He describes walking out on a Sakhalinian street alone:

It was a perfectly quiet, starry night. A watchman was knocking somewhere, and close by, a brook babbled. I stood for a long time and looked at the sky and then at the huts, and it seemed that it was due to some magic that I was 10,000 versts from home, somewhere in Palevo, at the end of the earth where no one can remember the days of the week, and where they really do not have to remember because it makes no difference whether it is Wednesday or Thursday… (137)

Chekhov perceives the extreme distance of the island to be related to a vanishing measure of time. This same pull of spatial distance on the perception of time is something that will be felt by Chekhov’s heroes in later stories, particularly by Dr. Ragin of Ward No.6, who lives out in the provinces, far away from what he considers civilization, and Gurov of “The Lady with the Lapdog,” whose trip to Yalta becomes a visit to another world.

In addition to its incredible distance, the Sakhalinian prison dead zone is characterized by a creeping, shrinking physical space – a feeling of the cell walls closing in. For example, when Chekhov describes the mines of Sakhalin, one first gets the impression that he takes the narrative underground to channel Dante and the infernal nature of the island. However, he also shows how the prisoner’s physical space becomes more and more limited, even at such a distance from life on the mainland. “Work in the Dué mines is also difficult,” Chekhov writes, “because for many long years without interruption the only things the convict sees are the mine, the road to the prison, and the sea. His whole life is confined to this narrow coastline between the marshy shore and the sea” (108).
Here there is no free expanse for the soul to roam, as the Siberian steppe offers Raskol’nikov in *Crime and Punishment*. In Chekhov’s prison, distance from Russia corresponds to a contraction of local space. For the prisoner working in the mine, one’s “whole life” would seem to be restricted to the narrow coastline. However, since there is no life in the dead zone, the coastline where life would occur is actually marked by lifeless existence, as in the following encounter, which is placed at the end of the chapter on the mines to great effect.

The morning was raw, gloomy, cold. The sea roared turbulently. I recall that on the road from the old mine to the new we stopped for a minute near an old Caucasian who lay on the sand in a dead faint (в глубоком обмороке). Two of his countrymen held his hands; they kept looking around helplessly and disconcertedly. The old man was pale, his hands icy, his pulse slow. We spoke to them and went our way without giving him any medical aid. When I mentioned to the physician who was with me that it would not harm to give the old man at least some valerian drops, he said that the Voevodsk prison assistant surgeon had no medicine whatsoever. (111)

Just as the space of the old prisoner’s “whole life” has been reduced from his home in the Caucasus to this strip of road between the shore and the sea, between the prison and the mines, so has the motion of his life been reduced to a dead faint and an icy, slow pulse. The constrictive spaces of prison prefigure what Donald Rayfield calls the “closed boxes” in which Chekhov’s later characters live, and “from which escape is not easy…The claustrophobic closed box gives the plays their utterly convincing collisions of characters and their claustrophobia; and the stories use the same device to provoke clashes, for which other writers would use more elaborate settings” (xiv). Dostoevskii’s prison experience provides similar cellular spaces for the “collisions of characters,” as I argue in Chapter One.
While the dead zone sees the prisoners constantly losing the space around them and the ground beneath them, the temporal aspect of Chekhov’s prison also signifies an existence that has long outrun the course of life. In one settlement, “Forced idleness has slowly become a habit and they spend their time waiting for good sea weather, become fatigued, have no desire to sleep, do nothing, and are probably no longer capable of doing anything except shuffling cards” (120). The idleness Chekhov describes amounts to an entirely dead existence. Without a desire or inclination to do anything, the prisoners and exiles simply watch their time gradually expire.

This idleness can also be seen as imprisonment in time. Valentine Bill describes Chekhov’s characters as “swept along in the endless stream of existence and integrated into the universal process of life moving ever forward, a life in which every living being is in a constant state of change and in which nothing endures but time, in which there is nothing to feel and nowhere to go but forward – in time” (117). Unfortunately, in the dead zone essentially nothing changes. The stream of time flows only for nature, leaving the individual behind to a finite and static existence. This revelation of prison time is all too applicable to the “prisoners” of time in Chekhov’s later works. Missed opportunities, missed connections, and a general sense of life gone by serve to wall off the world for characters in “About Love,” Uncle Vania, and The Cherry Orchard. To these temporal walls, we can also add the reminiscences of Chekhov’s characters, which Bill maintains are not a source of gain, of enrichment, of growth, they do not induce corrective actions to right past mistakes and combat crippling shortcomings. They are merely wistful signs of nostalgic resignation, pensive and helpless moments of regret. They do not augment, but reduce the place held by an individual in the dimension of time. They bear tragic evidence of the tyranny of time. (127)
Chekhov’s tyranny of time – or what I would call his prison of time – is most apparent on Sakhalin.

It is worth noting again how not only prison, but also the island as a whole, is subject to Chekhov’s idea of carceral space and time. Just like prisoners, those in the settlements are greatly restricted in space and have lost the movement of their lives. They, too, have forgotten the days (like the guard who cannot remember whether it is Wednesday or Thursday) and have no reason to count them, as their time is made up of idleness and prison routine. Chekhov considers one typical Sakhalinian settlement and concludes that it “has no great importance and resembles an unimportant village where all life has come to a standstill” (138). In other words, the villagers exist in the dead space and dead present of prison.

Though ostensibly a free man, even a young prison warden is marked by temporal and spatial restrictions.

Quite deliberately this young man rises early, at four or five o’clock in the morning. Then he drinks some tea and visits the prison – and then, what is there to do? He paces within the labyrinth, gazing at the oakum-packed wooden walls, then he paces some more, and pours out tea, and he hears nothing but his own footsteps and the wailing wind. (138)

The warden follows a Foucauldian routine of strict discipline in time and space. It is not surprising that he feels like a prisoner, just like the rest of the inhabitants of Sakhalin. Chekhov’s prison is made up of idle time – dead time – and isolated, alienating space. The warden is just one example of Chekhov’s concept of prison time and space coloring his idea of human psychology and behavior. Many of his later fictional characters will feel the same trappings of dead time and space, from *Uncle Vania* to *The Three Sisters* to
The character of Vania in particular shows how routine and estate can imprison a “free” man. The tragedy of his lost life resembles the dead existence found on Sakhalin.

More broadly, Chekhov finds in the captivity and idleness of prison a potential underlying meaninglessness in human life that can extend back to the mainland. On Sakhalin Chekhov encountered existence outside of the temporal structures we often use to give our lives an overarching meaning: past, future, and afterlife. Without these, all that is left is to make meaning in the present. Even Chekhov’s perception of his own time may have changed on Sakhalin. As Rayfield notes, by the end of the expedition, the writer’s “tuberculosis became much more virulent, and he returned aware that he would not see middle age” (95). In the dead existence of prisoners, Chekhov further observes the elimination of this last vessel for meaning – the present - through the negation of freedom. Thus by way of prison, Chekhov shows that the transformation of life into death is simply a matter of subtracting one’s freedom in the present. This concept is applicable well beyond the walls of prison, as is shown by Chekhov’s many later characters who are caged by time and space, particularly in his theatrical works.

Critics have found personal freedom to be one of the key themes of Chekhov’s works, and I believe the writer’s viewpoint was greatly shaped through the experience of visiting Sakhalin and his portrayal of the prison dead zone, which for him becomes a highly influential chronotope. Bill’s analysis of Chekhov’s works is based around the idea that the writer elevates the individual and, specifically, the freedom of the average individual (74). It could be that Chekhov’s high valuation of freedom, which made his
personal list of the “holiest of holies” in an 1889 letter, is directly linked to his fascination with imprisonment and the penal system (Chekhov, *PSSP, Letters*, v. 3, 11). For Chekhov, the closest the prisoner comes to life is through the will to escape – a nearly “pure” expression of the desire for freedom: “The main reason why a criminal finds salvation in escape rather than in repentance and work lies in his unending awareness of life. Unless he is a philosopher who can live anywhere and under any conditions, he simply cannot prevent himself from desiring to escape and he is not obligated to do so” (*Sakhalin* 343).

In reading *Sakhalin*, and in viewing it as a source for Chekhov’s later works, it is important to recognize that the prisoner’s “awareness of life” refers to a life that is distant from him or her in both time and space. The only real escape from prison on Sakhalin would be to leave the island entirely and arrive on the mainland, which is portrayed as impossible. “A person sentenced to penal servitude in Siberia is removed from a normal human environment without any hope of ever returning; he is dead to the society in which he was born and bred. So the convicts say, ‘The dead never return from the grave’” (344). Life is not waiting outside the cell window, but back in Russia, in another world and time.

This idea returns in Chekhov’s 1895 story “The Murder,” in which the peasant Iakov is serving 20 years on Sakhalin for the murder of his brother. Iakov discovers a new faith in God, but it quickly transforms into a desire for life, which means escape and freedom: “[Iakov’s] heart ached with yearning for home, and he longed to live, to go back home to tell them there of his new faith and to save from ruin if only one man, and
to live without suffering if only for one day” (Chekhov, “The Murder”). Bill sees desire as the only way for the Chekhovian character to “augment” his or her growth in the “tyranny of time” (130). However, while desire can be viewed positively in this sense, in the dead zone desire appears mostly as a vestige of life lost. The prisoners who so greatly desire life that they flee, knowing well that they will be recaptured, are exceptions proving the rule of a dead existence. Thus Iakov’s longing for freedom shows that life in him is not completely extinguished, but at the same time, it only serves to torture him.

Chekhov’s prisoner is dead but “aware” of the space of life on the distant mainland. Similarly, in terms of time, life is located in the irretrievable past. There is no future on Sakhalin, and the present is unfree and thus dead. The past holds the only life the prisoner can imagine. As a result of the hopeless circumstances of prison time and space, of existing with the awareness of an unreachable, remote life, the prisoner is left only the irrational, but understandable, notion of escape. This idea manifests in later works in moments such as Uncle Vania’s shot, which highlights his imprisonment on the estate and the loss of his life to the past.

**Prison and Nature’s Hostility**

One of the elements of Chekhov’s prison that differentiates it from the prisons of Dostoevskii and Tolstoi is the role of nature. In the works of the latter two authors, nature plays a secondary role to the spiritual and psychological suffering caused by unfreedom, which is of primary concern in novels such as *Dead House* and *Resurrection*. Nature most often appears as the extreme cold or even heat (for example, in the long, hot
march of *Resurrection*) that one must survive in Siberia. Soviet prison literature makes even more of the survival theme, perhaps most famously in the brutally frigid temperatures of Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.

However, in *Sakhalin*, nature plays a somewhat different role. Of course, the weather on the island is often gloomy and bitterly cold, but in *Sakhalin* these are symptoms of nature’s relationship with mankind, which Chekhov depicts as alternately indifferent and hostile. The prison of Sakhalin is a dead zone for humanity in part because it is indisputably ruled by nature – an idea that has major implications for Chekhov’s later fiction. Ralph Lindheim observes that

[*Chekhov’s*] inhospitable world can ravage its inhabitants, and a number of works suggest or actually show the process by which many lose their identity as human beings and become associated with or are transformed into objects (“In Exile” and “The Man in the Case”), animals (“Anna on the Neck,” “In the Cart”), pagan idols or the walking dead (“Ionych” and “At Home”). (64)

With the exception of 1887’s “At Home,” all of the stories Lindheim points to were written in the 1890s, in the decade after Chekhov’s trip to Sakhalin. Lindheim takes the paradigm of “the total impotence of human beings in a senseless, alien, external world” up through *The Cherry Orchard*, but does not trace it back to prison and Sakhalin, where it certainly has its roots.

Indeed, according to Chekhov, the new arrivals on Sakhalin are greeted by a “sensation of piercing dampness and shivering fits over many weeks,” or what he calls “febris sachalinensis” (“Sakhalin fever”) (216). Chekhov the doctor provides a diagnosis for the sudden sickness of existence on Sakhalin, which then transforms through his literary portrayal into a general condition of living death. While the illness takes hold,
nature asserts itself in *Sakhalin*, pushing back on the would-be colonized space with its harsh and unsparing climate, threatening to swallow up the wasted humanity it surrounds. As the jailer provides the cell, so does nature provides just enough space to die on Sakhalin.

In Chekhov’s portrayal, the natural forces of the island affect people in a way that mimics prison’s effect on the prisoner (or is it prison that mimics nature?): “Life in prison wards enslaves and eventually degenerates the convict. The instincts of a settled householder, of good management, of family life are stifled in him by habits acquired through a gregarious existence. He loses his health, grows old, becomes morally weak” (211). The same degenerative effects Chekhov attributes to prison in this passage he also attributes to nature in much of the rest of the book. The brutal climate, the lack of space, and the dead land all erode the life of a person trapped on the island, just as they do for the person held in captivity. Through Chekhov’s experience on Sakhalin, he reveals nature’s harsh, warden-like indifference and spontaneous cruelty.

Chekhov contributes both poetic and scientific evidence to this theme in *Sakhalin*. During his investigation into the agricultural potential of the island, the author comes across what looks to be a rich plain, which he thinks could sustain a million people. Unfortunately, there are no such resources here. “That is the way it should be, but the frozen currents of the Okhotsk Sea and the ice floes floating on the eastern shore even in June attest with incontrovertible clarity to the fact that when nature created Sakhalin man and his welfare was the last thing in her mind” (115). “Under existing conditions,” he continues, “when we consider only the immediate future, the riches of Tym’ [the river
near the plain] are almost an illusion. It offers disappointingly little to the penal colony” (117).

Nature is inhospitable to the people of Sakhalin. In fact, there really are no people “of Sakhalin” – even the native population - as Chekhov’s descriptions of the interactions between human beings and nature constantly remind the reader. On the shore of Nyskii Bay,

The vegetation is meager and malformed. The bay is separated from the sea by a long, narrow, sandy tongue of land created by dunes, and beyond this slip of land the morose, angry sea has spread itself boundlessly for thousands of versts. When a little boy has been reading Mayne Reid and his blanket falls off during the night, he starts shivering, and it is then that he dreams of such a sea. It is a nightmare! The surface is leaden, over it there hangs a monotonous gray sky, and the savage waves batter the wild treeless shore. (118)

The barren plains by the Tym’ and the meager vegetation of Nyskii Bay do not denote the paucity of Sakhalin’s natural resources as much as they underscore the idea that Sakhalin is not meant for mankind. At a given time, nature is either indifferent, providing nothing to the inhabitants of Sakhalin, or it is hostile and nightmarish.

In any case, the dominant opposition of nature in *Sakhalin* puts mankind in the role of an alien in a hostile land. The anger of the sea that Chekhov describes is directed toward the unwelcome human occupants of the island or toward even its own existence. In an example of the latter, Chekhov remarks, “The sea looks cold and troubled. It seethes with fury, and the high gray waves smash down on the sand as though shouting in despair, ‘God why did you create us?’” (188).

Nature is repeatedly described as “gray” in *Sakhalin*, a color that links it with prison and reflects its role in the imprisonment of people on the island. After *Sakhalin,*
the gray of the imprisoning universe reappears significantly in Chekhov’s works, especially in “The Lady with the Lapdog.” The gray fence outside of Anna Sergeevna’s prison-like home suggests her captivity, and her gray dress, along with Gurov’s graying appearance in the end, makes the reader question whether the freedom they desire is indeed attainable.

As in many of Chekhov’s other works, details like the gray of nature, which at first appear specific to Sakhalin, begin to take on universal significance the further one reads. The irrelevance of the prisoners’ voiceless, dead existence next to nature’s imposing eternality suggests a similar relationship between mankind itself and the vast and powerful universe. Chekhov considers himself in this position in Sakhalin:

To the left through the fog you can see the headlands of Sakhalin, to the right more cliffs…and not a single living soul around you, not a bird, not a fly. You ask yourself for whom do these waves roar, who hears them during the night, what are they calling for, and for whom they will roar when you have gone away. Here on these coasts you are gripped not by thoughts but by meditations. It is terrible, but at the same time I want to stand there forever and gaze at the monotonous waves and listen to their thunderous roar. (188)

The author ties nature’s eternal indifference to man to the past- and future-less dead time of prison. Mankind is nature’s prisoner in time and space. The left is shrouded in fog, the right is walled off – there is nowhere to go. There is no “living soul” around, reflecting mankind’s isolation. Questions about the purpose of nature and the universe cannot be answered for certain other than to say that the waves do not roar for us.

Finally, in the last two sentences of the passage Chekhov describes a feeling of captivity in time, in the midst of nature’s eternity. The contemplation of prison leads to broader and deeper ideas on the nature of humanity and its place in the universe. In Chekhov’s
works, the imprisonment of the individual by society reveals the collective imprisonment of mankind in nature.

Chekhov’s ideas concerning mankind in a prison of nature/universe return repeatedly in his post-Sakhalin works. His heroes gain an unusually long view of their lives. This perspective approaches, so to speak, that of the universe itself, looking down on the insignificance of an individual human life from afar. For example, in Uncle Vania, Dr. Astrov’s continuous ruminations on the distant future help to shape his worldview (in Act II, Elena says of Astrov, “He plants a tree and his mind travels a thousand years into the future”), as do Dr. Ragin’s in Ward No. 6. The Three Sisters’ Vershinin dreams that life on earth will be unimaginably beautiful in two or three hundred years. Bill finds Chekhov’s portrayal of the future to be a source of optimism – a “counterpoint to the tyranny of time” (132). In fact, the future operates more often as a delusion of the imprisoned. This yearning for tomorrow is no different from a prisoner’s dream of (impossible) escape.

The perspective of universal time, which for Chekhov is clearly in focus throughout Sakhalin, has two major implications, and the writer explores both of them in his works. Trapped on the Sakhalinian shore next to the roaring waves and towering cliffs of indifferent or hostile nature, the relative brevity and powerlessness of an individual human life (and, to extrapolate, humanity as a whole) can be crushing, as it is for Dr. Ragin. At the same time, insignificance in the universal scheme can be liberating in the present. One’s irrelevance to others offers greater freedom to define oneself, as is the case with Gurov.
Thus while coming from essentially the same viewpoint, of human existence as a drop in the ocean of the universe, Dr. Ragin loses all sight of the present to the point of his own obliteration, while Gurov is empowered to live only the present day for himself. These are just two examples of how the relationship Chekhov saw between humanity, prison, and nature on Sakhalin became foundational in his worldview and artistic works.

**After Sakhalin**

The influence of Chekhov’s 1890 journey to Sakhalin on his literary development is seen in several works of the early 1890s, and then later throughout his career. Ryfa sees Chekhov’s time on Sakhalin as transformational, inasmuch as a “sense of melancholic doom began to permeate his writing” (47). Indeed, in “Gusev” (1890), Chekhov’s first post-Sakhalin short story, the writer’s experience on the prison island enters his fictional work, giving great depth to its themes. I will build from Ryfa and look at what is behind the “melancholic doom.” Most importantly, beginning with “Gusev,” Chekhov’s exploration of the human condition begins to resemble his exploration of the prisoner’s condition, a process he had started in “The Bet,” but which became foundational to his artistic work after the journey to Sakhalin. The dead zone extends beyond prison, and beyond the island. In a sense following Dostoevskii’s path, Chekhov’s engagement with both the reality and the idea of prison marks a turning point in his literary development.
“Gusev” (1890)

“Gusev” takes place on the seas off eastern Siberia, in a ship that resembles a prison. “It is stifling, you do not have the energy to breathe and you are thirsty, but the water is warm and revolting…The ship does not stop rolling” (“Gusev” 49). Everyone is captive to the ship, like the prisoners to the island in *Sakhalin*, and the material conditions create a similarly unending discomfort. Nearly everyone on the ship is sick or irritated in some way. Meanwhile, Gusev, a private on the ship, has visions of his family back home in Russia. These visions recall the prisoner’s “awareness of life” in *Sakhalin*, in which life is located in a distant time and space. The reader of the later *Sakhalin*, who has access to the raw material that serves Chekhov’s themes connecting life and prison, knows this potentially meaningful life to be unreachable for the prisoner. Though he is not literally a prisoner, over the course of the story Gusev is revealed to be a captive of the ship, of nature, and of life itself.

The themes of *Sakhalin* converge early in “Gusev” as one of the soldiers on the ship dies in a rather absurd manner.

Suddenly something strange happens to the soldier playing cards. He calls hearts diamonds, muddles up the score, and drops the cards; then he looks round at them all with a frightened, inane smile. “Just a minute, fellows…” he says, then lies down on the floor. No one knows what to do. They call out to him, but he does not respond. (50)

Just like the dead zone of *Sakhalin*, which is marked by the absurdity of existence without life, the ship is uncovered as a place of meaningless contradictions. For the soldier, hearts are diamonds, the score is confused, and he is both frightened and smiling. His last words, “Just a minute, fellows” (*Я сейчас, братьцы*), are an indication for the
others to wait a moment, but he dies immediately, in line with the literal meaning of сейчас (“now”). All of these details suggest the absurdity of the soldier’s condition. Faced with inevitable death, as are all of the passengers of the ship, the soldier might as well see hearts as diamonds. The score is meaningless because the outcome is the same for everyone.

Indeed, the soldier, the crew, and the passengers of the ship belong to a prison-like dead zone. In “Gusev,” Chekhov’s carceral space has the same shrinking, caging effect it does in Sakhalin. The dead zone is reduced to the size of one lonely ship. Out on the sea, the passengers are surrounded by vast, eternal nature, where their being appears infinitely fragile and insignificant. The sudden and absurd death of the soldier reinforces this theme. Distracted with card games and keeping score, no one pays attention to the waves crashing all around them and no one expects him to die, least of all the soldier himself. Still, the soldier’s death does not really matter to anyone. This bleak perspective on the (meaningless) role of human life in the universe comes directly from the prison of Sakhalin.

Of all the people on the ship, Gusev shows the greatest awareness of the dead zone – of the fact that they are all imprisoned in a dead present, doomed sooner or later to be swallowed up by nature. Accordingly, Gusev is the first to recognize that the soldier is actually dead, even though he dies in front of everyone.

The counterpoint to Gusev’s growing existential awareness is Pavel Ivanych, a passenger who insists that Gusev and everyone else are “ignorant,” while he himself sees everything and is “protest personified” (51). Regarding his supposed reputation as
“unbearable,” Pavel Ivanych insists, “I’m proud to have such a reputation. I served in the Far East for three years and will stay in people’s memories for a hundred years” (52). Pavel Ivanych’s boasting sounds deeply ironic in the dead zone. The more fame and influence he claims, the more he is exposed as lacking both. Unlike Gusev, Pavel Ivanych is utterly unaware of his insignificance. There is no “protesting” all-powerful nature in the dead zone of prison and life. In this sense, the dying soldier’s last words could be interpreted as a protest rebuffed.

Neither does Pavel Ivanych have any power in his name or reputation. Contrary to his assertion, he will certainly not be remembered in a hundred years – his surname is never even mentioned in the story, which instead bears the name of his “ignorant” rival, Gusev. Nothing underscores Pavel Ivanych’s ordinariness quite like his claims to superiority over everyone else: “When I compare myself to you, I feel sorry for you…you poor wretches” (52). Pavel Ivanych does not understand that his brief life means nothing to the eternity of the surrounding ocean, and that in death and prison everyone is equally insignificant.

Gusev begins to intuit these lessons of the dead zone. As he starts to fall asleep, “Time passes quickly. The day passes imperceptibly, darkness descends imperceptibly…The steamship is no longer standing still but has resumed its journey” (52). Shortly after, Gusev is described as oblivious to time: “An hour goes by, then another, and another; evening descends, then night, but he does not notice and carries on sitting there, thinking about the frost” (53). In fact, Gusev’s perception of time is not lost, but has simply changed. As the days and nights go unnoticed, Gusev gains nature’s
“eternal” or “universal” perspective of time, which Ragin and Gurov later acquire in *Ward No. 6* and “The Lady with the Lapdog.” The temporal markers of Gusev’s own brief life (the hours, the days, the setting sun) lose their meaning accordingly.

Gusev’s trajectory, which takes him toward an eternal sense of time and an awareness of his insignificance in the dead zone, is underscored by the death of Pavel Ivanych. Strikingly, when the man who had previously declared himself “protest personified” suddenly dies, Gusev fails to notice. This moment shows the extent to which Gusev has disengaged from the present, and how foolish Pavel Ivanych had been to mistake his present for eternity.

It sounds as if someone has come into the sick bay; voices are heard but after about five minutes everything goes quiet.

“May the kingdom of Heaven be his, God rest his soul,” says the soldier with his arm in a sling. “That man was troubled!”


“He died. They’ve just taken him up.”

“Oh, right,” mumbles Gusev with a yawn. “God rest his soul.”

“What do you think, Gusev?” asks the soldier with the sling after a pause.

“Will he go to heaven or not?”

“Who do you mean?”

“Pavel Ivanych.”

“Of course…he suffered for such a long time…” (53)

As it turns out, Pavel Ivanych’s name is not remembered even in the minutes after his death. Gusev has to be reminded twice that someone died. It is not even clear until the soldier says Pavel Ivanych’s name that Gusev understands exactly who died. As Gusev approaches the eternal he loses sight of the insignificant human present. He is no longer concerned with the ordinary comings and goings of individuals like Pavel Ivanych, who dies unknown, captive on the ship in the middle of the ocean like a prisoner dying silently in his cell.
After Pavel Ivanych’s death, the distance between Gusev and the present continues to grow. Still, he has difficulty acknowledging this distance in regard to his own life, even as it starts to disappear from his thoughts. He has a third vision of Russia, but his family is no longer involved, only Russia as a vaguely imagined “home.” Gusev worries that that he will die and that they will not find out at home. In this way, he mistakes his dead existence for life, not unlike Pavel Ivanych. Everyone on the ship is already dead and forgotten, like the prisoners and exiles serving life on Sakhalin.

In spite of an understandable resistance to the fact of his own oblivion, Gusev’s perspective continues to align more and more with that of eternal nature, which would erase him from view. Chekhov illuminates this transition in a scene that converges the viewpoints of Gusev and the narrator:

[Gusev] and the soldier quietly make their way up to the bow of the ship, then stand by the rail, looking silently up above and then down below. Up above is deep sky, clear stars, and silence, exactly like at home in the village, but down below there is darkness and disorder. For no fathomable reason the huge waves are making a lot of noise. Whichever wave you look at, each one tries to go higher than all the others, chasing after and pounding the one before it; a third, just as ferocious and wild, will fall upon it noisily, with its white mane shimmering. (55)

As Gusev takes measure of heaven and earth, he finds clarity, peace and a resemblance to home in the vast universe. His silent observation also links him with the night sky, and thus the perspective of nature. Gusev can hardly discern the earth, perhaps because he now looks down on it from such a great distance, and only sees “darkness and disorder.” The noise of the waves, fighting vainly on top of the measureless ocean, is analogous to the irrelevance of humanity’s strivings and self-abuse in the grand cosmic scheme. Gusev’s new perspective shifts from the waves to the ocean.
Accordingly, the narrator then transitions to a discussion of the ocean’s (i.e. nature’s) indifference to humanity. “The sea has neither reason nor pity. Had the steamship been smaller and not made of solid iron, the waves would have crushed it without the slightest feeling of remorse, devouring all the people without even bothering to sort saints from sinners” (55). The steamship of mankind, the narrator argues, is also indifferent and yet hostile to nature, “unperturbed by space and loneliness, [fearing] neither the darkness nor the wind; it simply does not care” (55). Gusev’s place in this rivalry, however, is determined by his acceptance of nature’s dominance. In fact, his newfound perspective is derived from his increasing awareness of humanity’s “space and loneliness.” In light of Gusev’s journey, it would be more accurate to say that mankind is unaware of its space and loneliness rather than “unperturbed” (не боится) by it. Directly after the paragraph that directly pits mankind against nature, Gusev’s position is confirmed. “Where are we now?” he asks. “I don’t know,” answers the soldier. “In the ocean, I suppose” (55).

Through a new understanding of his existence, aided by his time in Chekhov’s prison-like dead zone, Gusev finds himself shed of his ego- and human-centric notion of the world. In contrast, Pavel Ivanych dies with these prejudices intact, thinking that somehow his name will outlast the time nature has given him. Gusev feels the flow of the current, and accepts before his death that he is already “in the ocean.” The revelation is a positive one: from his new viewpoint, Gusev may be insignificant in the vast time and space of nature, but as he fades from importance in the universe, he realizes a greater connection to it. Prior to his death, Gusev has already found that his home is not
necessarily in a distant space (Russia), in a past time (with his family), but in a sense, everywhere. He is at home “in the ocean.”

One indication of Gusev’s increasing connectedness to nature toward the end of the story is his acceptance of death. His cool reaction to Pavel Ivanych’s burial at sea is telling.

“They’re going to throw Pavel Ivanych into the sea now…” says the soldier with the sling. “Into a bag first and then overboard.”
“Yes. That’s what they do.” («Да. Порядок такой.»)
“But it’s better to lie in the earth at home. At least your mother can come to the grave and cry.”
“Of course.” («Известно»).

Like the great sea that will receive Pavel Ivanych’s body, Gusev is indifferent to this burial, which the soldier views as a tragedy. Gusev accepts Pavel Ivanych’s fate as in line with the order (порядок) of things (i.e. nature). Though he may have begun the story as a passenger on the ship of humanity, “unperturbed by space and loneliness,” Gusev’s indifference to, and acceptance of, these little human tragedies (including his own death) links him with the surrounding ocean.

Acceptance of death as part of the natural order, and of nature/the universe as his home, gives Gusev a fearlessness the other passengers lack. Looking out into the darkness of the night, and of their uncertain future, one of the soldiers worriedly notes that they will not see land for another seven days.

“There is nothing to be frightened of,” [Gusev] says. “It’s just scary, like being stuck in a dark forest, but suppose they let down a boat on to the water right now and an officer ordered me to go fishing sixty miles away, I would go. Or say a Christian fell overboard right now – I’d go after him. I wouldn’t rescue a foreigner or a Chinese, but I’d save a Christian.”
“Are you afraid of dying?”

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“I am. It’s my family I feel sorry for...Everything will collapse without me, and my father and his old lady will end up begging, I know it…” (56)

This is part of Gusev’s last dialogue in the story, and at first it seems a bit confusing. One could point to his sudden prejudice against non-Christians and his supposed fear of death (after he just said the opposite) as evidence that he has not the gained the new perspective or alignment with nature for which I have argued. However, these contradictions do not disrupt the overall momentum of the story. Instead, they are a Chekhovian marker of Gusev’s inherent humanness to the end. Contradictions add to his believability as a real character, and at the same time allow Chekhov to avoid creating a didactic conversion tale in the vein of Tolstoi. Chekhov transforms Gusev not through epiphanies or a rationalizing inner monologue, but through action, tone, and convergence or juxtaposition with the narrator’s musings.

The intrusion of his humanness makes Gusev’s transformation imperfect. As he lies sick and dying, “he is tormented as before with a vague desire for something, but he cannot work out what it is that he wants” (56). Gusev feels his change more than he knows or can articulate it. He moves beneath the surface, both figuratively and literally, as his transformation is not complete until he dies two days later, and is dropped into the sea. As the sailors sew Gusev’s body in sailcloth, “he starts to look like a carrot or a radish” (56). The image reinforces Gusev’s connection with nature, and at the same time reflects the expansiveness of his transformation: he is both of the earth (the carrot) and of the sea (the sailcloth).

As he sinks into the water, Gusev becomes part of the unity of nature, to which he had previously felt a connection, but which is now confirmed as his “home.”
narrator’s lyrical description places him within the great scheme of the universe. First, “on his journey («на пути») he meets a shoal of little pilot fish” (57). A shark bites into Gusev’s body, and what remains goes to the fish. The narrator then draws a line from the ocean to the sky, which unveils a whole universal network once hidden from view:

But meanwhile up above, clouds are clustering together over where the sun is rising; one cloud is like a triumphal arch, another like a lion, and a third like scissors…A broad green strip of light emerges from behind the clouds and stretches out to the middle of the sky; a little later a violet one joins it, then a gold one, then a pink one…The sky turns a delicate lilac color. The ocean frowns at first as it looks at this magnificent, mesmerizing sky, but it too then takes on those tender, radiant, passionate colors that are difficult to describe in human terms. (57)

Chekhov reveals the interconnectedness of nature, which Gusev perceived earlier as he looked up at the night sky and thought of home. Like the “passionate colors” of the sky, Gusev’s feeling for his place in the universe is “difficult to describe in human terms.” Instead, Chekhov shows his hero integrating into the whole marvelous spectacle of nature. From the body to the shark, from the shark to the fish, from the sea to the clouds, from the clouds to the sun, the universe lights up in the wake of Gusev’s death, spreading color and light across the sky and back down to the ocean. The role of mankind may be insignificant in itself, but it is still a color on the spectrum of the universe, and “Gusev” shows there is something meaningful in that. Remarkably, writing his first story since ascending from the “hell” of Sakhalin, Chekhov uses the dead zone of prison to probe the darkness of one man’s doomed existence and finds an abundance of color and light.
“In Exile” (1892)

“In Exile” is the first of two prison-related works Chekhov wrote in 1892, the other being the much longer povest’ Ward No. 6. Unlike Ward No. 6, in which literal and metaphorical prisons converge in the Russian provinces, “In Exile” takes place in Siberia, among new and old exiles from the “mainland.” More specifically, “In Exile” takes place on the threshold of the dead zone, where the newly exiled are faced with the kind of lifeless existence Chekhov witnessed on Sakhalin and contemplated in “Gusev.” While “Gusev” shows the hero gradually coming to accept his annihilation, in contrast with Pavel Ivanych’s short-lived and absurd protest, “In Exile” considers how people might endure the dead condition of exile or imprisonment over a long period of time. Of course, there are larger implications. With “In Exile,” Chekhov once again uses a short story derived from his prison experience to pose questions about the nature of being.

The continuation of themes from “Gusev” and the trip to Sakhalin is evident from the beginning of “In Exile.” Chekhov centers the story on Semen, an old exile and ferryman on a river in Siberia. Nicknamed “Tolkovyi” (“Sensible,” “Intelligent”), Semen resembles Charon, the old boatman of Greek mythology who ferries the dead to Hades over the river Styx. Semen transports the recently “departed” (from Russia and from life) to the dead zone of prison and exile. Along with Semen’s occupation, the setting of the story on the threshold of a Siberian “Hades” recalls Sakhalin’s infernal theme: “In the darkness [the ferrymen’s boat] looked as though the men were sitting on some antediluvian animal with long paws, and were moving on it through a cold, desolate land,
the land of which one sometimes dreams in nightmares.” Unfortunately for the exiles, there will be no return across the river, nor any dream from which to wake up.

The character best adapted to these conditions is Semen, who has an air of immortality about him that seems to come from the eternal landscape he inhabits. When there are urgent shouts on the river, Semen responds, “All right, you have plenty of time,” speaking “in the tone of a man convinced that there was no necessity in this world to hurry – that it would lead to nothing, anyway.” The timeless Semen represents one side of the chief conflict of “In Exile,” which, like “Gusev,” centers on whether the denizens of the dead zone can and should accept their dead existence. On the side of acceptance is the ferryman, who talks like a Gusev grown old and bitter. Semen’s favorite saying, “You’ll get used to it” («Привыкнешь»), suggests a far-sighted view of time similar to Gusev’s, though this perspective does not appear as comforting in the context of “In Exile.”

Semen’s indifference is opposed by two exiles of different generations, both of whom consider Semen’s attitude overly pessimistic. The first is a young Tatar, a newly exiled man who is excited at the possible arrival of his mother and wife in Siberia were his father to die. Semen advises the Tatar to keep his mother and wife away, as it will only aggravate his desires.

“And what do you want your wife and mother for?” asked Tolkovyi [Semen]. “That’s mere foolishness, my lad. It's the devil confounding you, damn his soul! Don't you listen to him, the cursed one. Don't let him have his way. He is at you about the women, but you spit him; say, 'I don't want them!' He is on at you about freedom, but you stand up to him and say: 'I don't want it!' I want nothing, neither father nor mother, nor wife, nor freedom, nor post, nor paddock; I want nothing, damn their souls!”
Semen associates desire with life. Thus, for Semen, desire has no place in the dead zone, where it hinders one on the path to acceptance of a life lost. Instead, Semen offers mantras like “I don’t want it” (не желаю) and “I want nothing” (ничего не надо) for the sake of acceptance and survival.

The young Tatar rejects this way of thinking. “Better one day of happiness than nothing,” he insists. He strikes upon a theme born of Chekhov’s prisons (see also the lawyer in “The Bet”) that appears repeatedly in Chekhov’s fiction: how one’s imprisonment, either literal or figurative, increases and intensifies one’s desires, particularly for that which is impossible to attain.

For example, as Uncle Vania serves out, on the estate, the kind of mysterious sentence that life keeps handing down in Chekhov’s works, he increasingly desires the time and life that have passed him by. By the end of “The Lady with the Lapdog,” Gurov and Anna Sergeevna’s temporary escape (i.e. their affair) from the dead zones of their captive lives is transformed into a desire for a public life together, though this arrangement is likely to be unhappy, if it is even possible.

Nearly all of the wants and dreams of the Prozorov family in The Three Sisters lie in Moscow, which is the impossibly distant mainland to the Prozorovs’ provincial exile from life. Indeed, like the prisoners of Sakhalin, the sisters and their brother, Andrei, all view life as something left behind in the past time and space of Moscow. They make survival-oriented, rather than life/desire-oriented, decisions (such as Irina’s acceptance of Tuzenbakh’s proposal, though she does not love him; Masha’s return to her loveless relationship, which she could not escape even through an affair; Andrei’s continuation of
an unhappy marriage; and Ol’ga’s unwanted promotion to headmistress), not unlike the
dead inhabitants of Sakhalin. Finally, as the Prozorovs realize their time for life – for
Moscow - is vanishing, so does their space diminish, creeping inward like the prison
walls and cold shores of Sakhalin. Banished from the mainland, by the third act Ol’ga
and Irina are forced by Natasha to share a room like provincial cellmates. The play ends
with the departure of the soldiers who make up most of their small town. “The town will
be empty,” Irina says (Three Sisters, IV). This is not the emptiness of Crime and
Punishment’s Siberian steppe, which offers relief to the trapped Raskol’nikov, but rather
the emptiness of Chekhov’s prison dead zone: the vast desolation that surrounds a whole
island, reducing it to a speck of dirt in the universe; or the void of the ocean surrounding
Gusev’s lonely ship, preventing it from ever reaching land.

Looking at similar examples in Chekhov’s later works, it can be said that the
problem of acceptance of the dead zone versus the desire for life cannot be easily
resolved. This is certainly the case for the three main characters of “In Exile.” Semen is
no Platon Karataev in War and Peace, who shows Pierre a path back to the world through
a boundless acceptance of life. Chekhov’s ferryman promotes a brand of acceptance that
is too defeated, too deathly, and too cynical to be comforting. It is furthermore
unreasonably ascetic (“…I have brought myself to such a pass that I can sleep naked on
the ground and eat grass. And I wish no one a better life.”) and extremely fragile (“…if
anyone gives way to the devil [i.e. desire for family, home, and freedom] and listens to
him, if but once, he is lost, there is no salvation for him: he is sunk in the bog to the
crown of his head and will never get out”). Semen argues for a difficult “solution” to
imprisonment that may have helped the lawyer of “The Bet”: the emptying, rather than the suppression, of one’s desires.

Though Semen’s argument may be flawed, the Tatar’s insistence on the worth of one happy day in a lifetime of imprisonment appears desperate and naïve. Like Gusev, the Tatar has a pensive moment gazing at the night sky: “There were as many stars at home, and the same blackness all round, but something was lacking. At home in the Simbirsk province the stars were quite different, and so was the sky.” There is a notable difference between the Tatar’s thoughts and those of Gusev at this parallel moment of contemplation in the dead zone. The Tatar sees a distinction between the sky of home and the sky of exile. This suggests his unwillingness to accept exile as his new home and permanent condition, as Semen advises. For Gusev, the “deep sky, clear stars, and silence” are “exactly like at home in the village,” reflecting his expanding, more universal perspective, and his acceptance of his dead state (“Gusev” 55). Chekhov puts the Tatar and Gusev in similar conditions of imprisonment, but they choose diverging paths. Of course, in true Chekhovian style, neither choice provides a clear answer for how one is to live in such a state - only different sides of the question. Gusev’s journey to acceptance concludes with his (bodily) death. At the end of “In Exile,” the Tatar remains stubbornly resistant, refusing to enter the hut of the sleeping ferrymen, who have rather symbolically left the door open for him. Still, the Tatar is heard weeping.

The third main character of “In Exile” is Vasilii Sergeich, an exiled Russian gentleman who arrived 15 years before the Tatar, but has the same determination to resist the dead zone. When Vasilii Sergeich begins to long for the money he once had, Semen
warns him against “the devil” of desire, just as he warns the Tatar. “Now you want money,” says Semen, “but in a very little while you’ll be wanting something else, and then more and more. If you want to be happy…the chief thing is not to want anything.”

The ferryman makes the same Charon-like demand of both exiles: pay the fee of your life’s desires to cross the river and enter the land of the dead. In Greek mythology, the dead whose relatives failed to put coins in their mouths to pay the ferryman would be left wandering the shore for one hundred years. Thus it is significant that, in the present time of the story, Semen finds Vasilii Sergeich on the shore. After 15 years, Vasilii Sergeich has gotten old and yet still refuses to pay the fee. Semen tells the Tatar the story of Vasilii Sergeich as a warning. Indeed, just as Semen predicted, Vasilii Sergeich’s monetary desires sprouted others. He wanted love, and after three years his wife (who had followed him to Siberia) left with a lover. He wanted family, but in exile his young daughter quickly becomes old and ill.

Vasilii Sergeich’s story is an excellent example of how Chekhov employs the observations and ideas of Sakhalin’s prison in his fiction. In Sakhalin, there is an eerie absence of youth on the island. Of course, a small population of young people exists, as his census proves, but Chekhov the writer creates the impression that there can be no life-giving generational renewal in such a dead place. When he brings this notion to “In Exile” as a dead zone of literary space, everything wilts and decays within. Thus one can explain the premature aging and mysterious illness of Vasilii Sergeich’s daughter through both scientific and metaphysical means. She has consumption, and lives in the Siberian climate, which is described (like Sakhalin’s) as damp and cold. At the same time, as a
child growing up in exile, she is a pure example of how existence in the dead zone rots the living soul regardless of one’s criminality.

With “In Exile,” Chekhov improves upon the blending of the scientific, the artistic, and the philosophical that is not wholly successful in *Sakhalin*. Semen’s thoughts on Vasilii Sergeich’s plan to keep his daughter in Siberia reveal a combination of these elements at work in the dead zone, and the difficulty of separating them. The ferryman recounts his thinking to the Tatar: “‘Wait a bit, the wench is young, her blood is dancing, she wants to live, and there is no life here.’ And she did begin to pine, my lad…She faded and faded, and now she can hardly crawl about. Consumption.” Thus the daughter’s condition is both physical and spiritual. Through the dying daughter, we see the father’s unwillingness to pay the ferryman’s fee of desire, which would require her to leave the dead zone and return to the living “mainland.”

Vasilii Sergeich is unwilling to give up the life his daughter represents, and maintains a grip on his destructive optimism to the end. “Yes, brother Semen, even in Siberia people can live!” Vasilii Sergeich exclaims when his wife first arrives, borrowing a phrase from Nekrasov’s “Russian Women.” Of course, Semen mocks him for his hopeful fantasy of a Siberia populated by Decembrist wives. Unfortunately for Vasilii Sergeich, the consequences of Chekhov’s dead zone – the broken family, the dying daughter – support Semen’s derision. People cannot live in the dead zone.

Against the backdrop of cold nature, and in contrast with the dead and desire-free ferrymen, Vasilii Sergeich and the Tatar stand out as two instances of the same folly. In their desire for life, they do not accept their imprisonment, and they suffer for it. Upon
hearing the story of Vasilii Sergeich, the Tatar is unswayed, arguing with Semen, “You say, want nothing. But ‘nothing’ is bad! His wife lived with him three years – that was a gift from God. ‘Nothing’ is bad, but three years is good. How not understand?” This is the same reasoning (that any kind or amount of life is worth living) that causes the lawyer to imprison himself in “The Bet,” during which his intense yearning for freedom develops into a hatred of everything he cannot have. “In Exile” echoes “The Bet” in another way as well: the lawyer’s prison term is 15 years - the same amount of time Vasilii Sergeich has been torturing himself with desire in exile. Despite Semen’s admonitions, the end of the story finds both Vasilii Sergeich and the Tatar continuing in their doubtful pursuit of life. Vasilii Sergeich literally wanders the shore. His determination to keep seeking new doctors for his daughter shows that he has still not paid the ferryman’s fee.

Having had enough of Semen’s mockery, the Tatar makes a final case against the death the ferryman represents:

[Vasilii Sergeich] is a good soul, excellent, and you are a beast, bad! The gentleman is alive, but you are a dead carcass…God created man to be alive, and to have joy and grief and sorrow; but you want nothing, so you are not alive, you are stone, clay! A stone wants nothing and you want nothing. You are a stone, and God does not love you, but He loves the gentleman!

The Tatar’s impassioned speech is greeted by the laughter of the ferrymen, who have clearly accepted the fact that the condition of imprisonment, and thus the condition of the dead zone, exists outside any of God’s plans for “man to be alive.”
Ward No. 6 (1892)

Ward No. 6 offers perhaps Chekhov’s most sophisticated use of the dead zone chronotope in a work that features an actual prison – or in this case, an insane asylum that functions exactly like a prison, which was typical of the time. In his analysis of Ward No. 6 as potentially a response to Dostoevskii, Andrew Durkin argues that we should not look at Chekhov’s povest’ as simply an exercise in philosophical polemics, but rather that we should approach the philosophy as a function of character (“Reponse” 50). I propose that we also approach the philosophy as reflective of the dead zone in which the story takes place. In Ward No. 6, Chekhov’s prison experience begins to seep more and more into his portrayal of life on the outside. This is not surprising, given that already in Sakhalin the writer was thinking about life in terms of prison. “Sakhalin is a place of intolerable suffering,” he wrote, “the sort of suffering only man, whether free or confined, is capable of” (PSSP, Letters, v. 4, 32). I will try to show how in Ward No. 6 Chekhov brings prison back to the provinces, building an artistic and philosophical bridge to the many metaphorical prisons of his subsequent works.

The protagonist of Ward No. 6, Dr. Ragin, oversees a group of mentally disturbed patients who are locked up in the ward. Characteristically of the dead zone, Ward No. 6 features a juxtaposition of nature and humanity that underscores the eternality of the former and the ephemerality of the latter.

In the hospital yard there stands a small lodge surrounded by a perfect forest of burdocks, nettles, and wild hemp. Its roof is rusty, the chimney is tumbling down, the steps at the front door are rotting away and overgrown with grass, and there are only traces left of the stucco. The front of the lodge faces the hospital; at the back it looks out into the open country, from which it is separated by the gray hospital fence with nails on it. These nails, with their points upwards, and the
fence, and the lodge itself, have that peculiar, desolate, God-forsaken look which is only found in our hospital and prison buildings. (Ward No. 6, I)

Significantly, the lodge, which houses the prison-like mental ward, is placed between the hospital and the open country, between civilization and the wilderness of nature. A man-made structure in a grave state of decay, the ward occupies the same dead zone as the prison settings of Sakhalin and “In Exile.” It is impossibly far from the “mainland” of the hospital, in the sense that the patients of the ward will never escape their prison. The ward is much closer to the nature that rusts its roof, rots its steps, and will ultimately bring about its death. The gray hospital fence that surrounds the ward (and appears again outside of Anna Sergeevna’s house in “The Lady with the Lapdog”) recalls Chekhov’s impression of Sakhalin, which he describes as predominantly gray and damp. Finally, of course, the narrator directly links the ward to the “God-forsaken look” of prison buildings.

The ward has an abusive guard-like “porter” by the name of Nikita. Nikita is the sole embodiment of prison order in Ward No. 6, and thus his characterization gives an insight into Chekhov’s view of the power behind the penal system.

[Nikita is] of imposing deportment and his fists are vigorous. He belongs to the class of simple-hearted, practical, and dull-witted people, prompt in carrying out orders, who like discipline better than anything in the world, and so are convinced that it is their duty to beat people. He showers blows on the face, on the chest, on the back, on whatever comes first, and is convinced that there would be no order in the place if he did not. (I)

This passage illustrates a key distinction between Chekhov’s prison and those of Dostoevskii and Tolstoi. Nikita’s version of order is crude, violent, and volatile. There is no system to it, and thus Foucault’s theories of modern punishment are more difficult
to apply to Chekhov than to Dostoevskii or Tolstoi. Dostoevskii’s prison is pervasive and often works unseen. Tolstoi’s prison is based on a mysterious *poriadok*, which undermines the order of brotherhood. The “order” of the penal system in Chekhov’s works is much more arbitrary, like the indiscriminate blows of Nikita’s fists.

Indeed, Chekhov focuses less on the system and more on the human tragedy of prison. Imprisonment comes unexpectedly, like an affliction or a misfortune. There are hints of this idea in earlier works, such as “A Malefactor” and “Gusev,” but it is most fully developed in *Ward No. 6*, in which imprisonment functions like a contagion. For Gromov, one of the patient-prisoners of *Ward No. 6*, a prison term is part of a “whole series of calamities (несчастия),” which “suddenly showered on the Gromov family” (II). The chain of events that leads to Gromov’s lock-up in the ward begins 12 to 15 years before the present day of the story – another repetition of the same 15-year period of incarceration in “The Bet” and “In Exile.” Chekhov’s confluence of disease and imprisonment dominates the Gromov family history. Gromov’s brother dies from consumption, his father succumbs to typhoid while in prison for fraud, and Gromov himself develops a mental illness, the chief symptom of which is an overwhelming, paranoid fear of impending imprisonment.

Close contact to prisoners puts one at risk of catching the disease of deprivation in *Ward No. 6*. As a free man, Gromov senses the contagiousness of convicts being led by soldiers through the streets: “It suddenly seemed to him for some reason that he, too, might be put into fetters and led through the mud to prison like that” (III). Gromov cannot sleep, as though feverish: “…but was it not easy to commit a crime by accident,
unconsciously, and was not false witness always possible, and, indeed, miscarriage of justice?" (III). Gromov’s unfortunate fate – whether transmitted to him by his father, the passing convicts, or something else - suggests that one might be locked up just as easily as one might fall ill or be injured in an accident. The arbitrariness of imprisonment is one way that Chekhov brings the dead zone back from the island to the mainland – back from the particular suffering of prison life to the general condition of life.

In addition, Chekhov makes the dead zone a condition of life by building the theme of eternal nature versus ephemeral humanity into the landscape of provincial Russia. From the opening scene, nature is already reclaiming the crumbling ward, but this process is shown throughout the povest’. A fire burns down a factory, causing the proprietor, Moseika, to go mad and be committed to the ward. Even more dangerous are the courts, which appear as institutional hosts of nature’s destructive indifference. The desolate shores of Sakhalin and the cold, hungry waves of “Gusev” are replaced in Ward No. 6 by the merciless wheels of the penal machine. As Gromov obsesses over the fragility of his freedom, the narrator, in a rare commentary on the “system” for Chekhov, describes an institution that consumes without conscience.

A judicial mistake is very possible, given how legal proceedings are conducted nowadays, and there is nothing to be wondered at in it. People who have an official, professional relation to other men’s sufferings – for instance, judges, police officers, doctors – in the course of time, through habit, grow so callous that they cannot, even if they wish it, take any but a formal attitude to their clients; in this respect they are not different from the peasant who slaughters sheep and calves in the backyard, and does not notice the blood. (III)

The slaughterers of the penal system in Ward No. 6 display the same mixture of indifference and hostility that characterizes nature in Sakhalin and “Gusev.” Injustice
done to one person – and indeed, to the entire community of prisoners - is too insignificant to stop the judicial wheels from turning, just as the minor tragedies of *Sakhalin* and “Gusev” unfold against a frigid backdrop of nature, both silent and threatening.

Part of this threat to mankind’s significance, as Chekhov consistently reminds us, is that nature is eternal. In *Ward No. 6*, the courts inherit nature’s tendency to obliterate through time.

With this formal, soulless attitude to human personality the judge needs but one thing – time – in order to deprive an innocent man of all rights of property, and to condemn him to penal servitude. Only the time spent on performing certain formalities for which the judge is paid his salary, and then – it is all over. (III)

Thus both nature and the penal system are portrayed as inevitable destroyers of the human being, guilty or innocent. Chekhov aligns prison with nature in its unforgiving opposition to mankind. This scheme is illustrated by the narrator’s description of Gromov’s distress at the possibility of his arrest: “It might be compared with the story of a hermit who tried to cut a dwelling-place for himself in a virgin forest; the more zealously he worked with his axe, the thicker the forest grew” (III). The narrator uses an anecdote that sets a doomed man against overwhelming nature to present an image of Gromov versus the penal system. Chekhov’s prison takes on an elemental power.

Gromov senses his doom, and cannot wait out the eternal time of prison or nature, and so he finds himself in the ward, having lost his mind trying to pretend that he is not a murderer (and he really is not). The prison-like ward slowly kills Gromov, and “within a year [he] was completely forgotten in the town, and his books, heaped up by his landlady in a sledge in the shed, were pulled to pieces by boys” (III). Dead to the town, which
tears up the last evidence of his life (Gromov is an avid reader), Gromov enters the dead zone of prison to endure the remainder of his existence fighting madness.

As with Chekhov’s other prisons, the dead zone chronotope of the ward renders meaningless all would-be elements of life within. One patient (and “patient” in this povest’ may be read as “prisoner”) obsesses over an order he was awarded on the outside, which only underscores its unimportance on the inside. Another is regularly beaten to the point that he no longer responds to the blows. His suffering is utterly routine and uninteresting, contrasting starkly with the Dostoevskian variant. The only committed man allowed to leave the ward and venture into town is unfailingly stripped of all his possessions upon each return. Chekhov takes pains to show how nothing of life retains any meaning in the dead zone.

The hero of Ward No. 6, Andrei Ragin, is a doctor who dreamed of the priesthood, but in the dead zone both medical and spiritual remedies elude him. God is noticeably absent in Ward No. 6, recalling the unfortunate situation of the Tatar in “In Exile,” whose invocations of God sound less like belief than expressions of loneliness. Despite his ecclesiastical ambitions, the closest Ragin comes to “faith” in Ward No. 6 is an increasing acceptance of the universe as it is. This has quite negative consequences, however. There is no “Gusev”-like grandeur, no universal harmony to be revealed in the way Ragin allows the hideous world of Ward No. 6 to consume him. Instead, Ragin represents a different perspective on the meaning of unconditional acceptance, which in “Gusev” is rather Tolstoian in tone.

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Though Gusev’s ship and Ragin’s little town have much in common as places located far from the “mainland,” the two heroes occupy significantly different positions in regards to their power to affect the world around them. As the head of the ward, and an important personage in the small town, Ragin is in a far better position than Gusev, who is sailing out his last days on an ill-fated ship. Nevertheless, as Ragin develops a sense of nature’s universal time, just as Gusev does, he fails to use his power as a doctor to help anyone, including himself. His brand of acceptance, which he fashions as a form of Stoicism, is gradually revealed to be a tragically naïve kind of passive resistance to evil. Ragin simply watches as disorder and madness overtake his small world and eventually his life.

Viewing himself, and humanity with him, as essentially nothing to the infinite universe, Ragin sees no reason to act. For example, as he takes on his duty to clean up the poorly run hospital, he first thinks of closing it, but decides it would be useless: “one must wait for it to wither away of itself” (V). The doctor sacrifices even the daily tasks of the hospital to all-destroying eternity. “He was absolutely unable to give orders, to forbid things, and to insist. It seemed as though he had taken a vow never to raise his voice and never to make use of the imperative” (V). Perhaps most strikingly, Ragin’s expanded view of time renders his own profession obsolete. “…Indeed, why hinder people’s dying if death is the normal and legitimate end of everyone?” he thinks (V).

Chekhov’s povest’ is overflowing with Ragin’s philosophical musings to the point of repetition. There are also numerous signs of the doctor’s relationship with time. He gives up his regimented eating and drinking schedule, thus abandoning even the smallest
attempt to give his time meaning. He paces in his room while the clock strikes one hour after another, like a prisoner in a cell. As he reads, he gets a feeling “as though time were standing still and brooding with the doctor over the book” (VII). In fact, there are far too many telling passages and details to recount here, but they continually reinforce Ragin’s increasing passivity and acceptance of mankind’s obliteration in universal time. The doctor perhaps best articulates the foundation of his philosophy as he contemplates human mortality.

What is the good of the brain centers and convolutions, what is the good of sight, speech, self-consciousness, genius, if it is all destined to depart into the soil, and in the end to grow cold together with the earth’s crust, and then for millions of years to fly with the earth round the sun with no meaning and no object? (VII)

Unhappy as he may be, Ragin accepts all as lost to the god of time, which he knows will eventually erase all traces of human existence. Unfortunately, the doctor’s deference to eternity allows the brutal and arbitrary order of those like Nikita and the usurping assistant Sergei Sergeich to reign in the present.

In just a short period of time (precisely the kind of time Ragin considers unimportant), Sergei Sergeich successfully overthrows the doctor and has him committed to the ward he once oversaw. In his sociological analysis of *Ward No. 6*, Damir Mirkovic sees Ragin as a victim of societal “labeling,” which marks him a deviant (in this case, “mentally ill”) for violating its prescribed norm with his strange behavior (68). While this is certainly true, the labeling also provides Ragin with a test to see if can truly transcend the trappings of the present by the force of his stoic philosophy. Perhaps this is why Ragin offers so little resistance to the disastrous chain of events that lead to his imprisonment and death in the ward. Before he begins to experience time as a prisoner,
the doctor is assured in his idea that eternity makes one individual fate the same as any another.

Once locked inside, Ragin loses faith in his ideas and dies of a stroke. In light of this ending, how should we judge Ragin’s philosophy, and Ward No. 6 more generally? The narrative centerpiece of the story is the philosophical discourse of Ragin and Gromov. The debates of the two men acquire additional meaning in the chronotope of the dead zone. The penal system becomes as if permanent, an element of nature opposing mankind, largely because that is how Ragin perceives it. “So long as prisons and madhouses exist someone must be shut up in them,” he says. At the same time, the free and the imprisoned are all accidents of indifferent nature, as Ragin tells Gromov: “There is neither morality nor logic in my being a doctor and your being a mental patient, there is nothing but idle chance.” Chance determines those who sit in prison and those who run the prison, with the former simply unlucky enough to catch the disease of unfreedom. Moreover, since the lives of the free and the imprisoned are equally fleeting and insignificant in Ragin’s universal view of time (he tries to convince Gromov that it is the same on the outside as on the inside), his philosophy renders everyone a potential prisoner. Ironically, the first victim of this equalizing of mankind in the context of eternity is Ragin himself.

The extension of the prison dead zone into the general condition of life in Ward No. 6 leads to a couple of overall conclusions. First, the ephemeral present is not meaningless, as Ragin argues, but precisely the opposite. It is the only time in which Ragin can make meaning, and when he abandons it he begins to lose his mind. When the
doctors and councilmen meet Ragin to assess his state of mind, their questions are aimed at his perception of time: What is the date? What is the day of the week? How many days are in a year? Chekhov does not reveal Ragin’s answers. Still, after he is committed to the ward, the doctor seems to realize that there is a difference between freedom and imprisonment in the present, but it is too late. Even if Ragin’s fate is partly self-made, Ward No. 6 implies that if anyone can be imprisoned, stricken by chance, it is all the more reason to appreciate the relative freedom of the current moment.

Secondly, Ward No. 6 shows the danger of ascribing the force and permanence of nature to the manmade institution of prison. The more Ragin accepts the world as static and unchangeable, and the more he thinks it useless to resist imprisonment, the more powerful and lasting prison becomes. Still, one might contend that Ragin resigns himself to the terrible present because he believes that a better future is coming, as this statement to Gromov seems to suggest: “Wait till in the distant future prisons and madhouses no longer exist, and there will be neither bars on the windows nor hospital gowns. Of course, that time will come sooner or later” (IX). Ryfa calls this sentiment Chekhov’s “wishful thinking…although undermined by a rather pessimistic ending” and “the underlying idea of The Island of Sakhalin” (137).

This interpretation fails to take into account the way the dead zone alters the temporal perspective of Chekhov’s hero. Does Ragin really envision a better future, free of prisons? Several critics (Ryfa, Bill, and Kataev, for example) promote the view that Chekhov’s future is a hopeful one. As Kataev writes, “the only weapons [Ragin and Gromov] have against a hostile world are words and hopes for the future” (If Only 149).
The problem with the optimistic interpretation of the future in Chekhov’s works is that when it arrives, the future nearly always disappoints. The titular Three Sisters have little to look forward to in the end, as do the fading aristocrats of The Cherry Orchard (even the rich Lopakhin sees lonely days ahead) and essentially everyone in Uncle Vania, including the young Sonia. With such a consistently bleak outlook for the near future, it is difficult to believe in the all too distant and abstract futures of Ragin or Astrov.

To interpret Ragin’s words differently, the doctor may be suggesting that prisons and madhouses, like mankind and everything else that is fleeting from the universal perspective of time, will be annihilated by nature’s eternity (i.e. the distant future). This meaning accords better with Ragin’s philosophy, which acknowledges only human immortality and meaninglessness, with nothing in between. Furthermore, it is this “eternal” or “universal” viewpoint that is the most significant idea to come from Chekhov’s experience on Sakhalin, where he depicts a futureless existence. Whether it offers peace, as it does in “Gusev,” or causes paralysis, as it does in Ragin, the universal viewpoint born of the dead zone certainly does not look toward a bright future, only to the eventual oblivion of everything.

Ragin’s philosophy bears out the idea of futurelessness from Sakhalin. He is absolutely sure that he will have no future once the “enchanted circle” of prison binds him:

When you are told that you have something such as diseased kidneys or an enlarged heart, and you begin being treated for it, or you are told you are mad or a criminal – that is, in fact, when people suddenly turn their attention to you – you may be sure you have got into an enchanted circle from which you will not escape. You will try to escape and make things worse. You had better give in, for no human efforts can save you. That’s how it seems to me. (XVI)
In *Sakhalin* Chekhov shows that freedom (and thus life) in the dead zone, however temporary, lies in the attempt to escape. Ragin’s rejection of escape betrays his unbelief in the future, and is tantamount to an acceptance of death.

As a patient-prisoner in the ward, Ragin finally seems to understand that he has underestimated the meaning that freedom, or even the illusion of freedom, gives to life. “Why, he had been sitting here, had walked about and sat down again; he could get up and look out of the window and walk from corner to corner again, and then what? Sit like that all the time, like a post, and think? No, that was scarcely possible.” This is essentially how Ragin lived on the outside (sitting, walking around his room, thinking), but now his illusion of freedom has vanished. As he looks outside, Ragin is “suddenly overcome with desire; he clutched at the grating with both hands and shook it with all his might.” Just before the end, desire returns to Ragin, that Chekhovian sign of life that proves that the present actually does hold meaning for him, and that he actually does value freedom over unfreedom. All fates are not the same for Ragin, who finds he cannot sustain nature’s eternally indifferent perspective. Dying from a stroke, the doctor reconsiders his desire for immortality. “And what if it really existed? But he did not want immortality – and he thought of it only for one instant.” Ragin recants his philosophy of living by the clock of universal time. The doctor’s thoughts on immortality, which occupied him for decades, are overturned in an instant.

The fact that the world crushes Gromov and Ragin – two utterly insignificant lives cast far out in the Russian provinces – underscores the indiscriminate hostility of nature toward mankind, the same phenomenon Chekhov observed on Sakhalin. As the
dead zone expands into the provinces, imprisonment spreads to the free like a disease, begging a closer examination of the illness.
Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have tried to show how Dostoevskii, Tolstoi, and Chekhov are all, in their own way, prison writers, and thus the roots of Russian prison literature are deeply intertwined with those of Russian literature itself. Out of their often harrowing experiences with the penal system came artistic innovation and new ways of illuminating ever-important questions about the meaning of freedom and imprisonment. It is not surprising, then, that the prison worlds of the nineteenth-century realists reemerged repeatedly in twentieth-century works, both underground and official. In this conclusion, I will look at what Soviet prison writers made of their literary heritage. While a comprehensive analysis of these intergenerational links is outside the scope of this dissertation, I will suggest possible approaches to uncovering the prison worlds of Dostoevskii, Tolstoi, and Chekhov that lie beneath the prison literature of the twentieth century.

The Return of Prison in Soviet Literature

During the years of Stalinist repression, which reached its terrible peak in the late 1930s, the topic of prison returned in Soviet literature, performing a couple of key functions. First, to write about prison meant to bear witness to the Great Terror and the
crimes being committed in the name of protecting the communist (Stalinist) state. Secondly, prison served to connect a new group of writers directly to their literary ancestors, allowing the former to continue the moral and political work of literature - Russia’s “second government,” as Gertsen famously called it. Though Solzhenitsyn dismissed what he considered to be the relative softness of the tsarist penal system in comparison with the Soviet Gulag, the ideologically opposed governments of pre- and post-revolutionary Russia used their penal systems in similarly repressive manners. Kennan, Petr Kropotkin, and others exposed the abusive and sometimes outright arbitrary power of the tsarist system, which essentially permitted even petty authorities in small villages to exile people they simply did not like. Twentieth-century prison writers, like their predecessors, provided an alternative to the official narrative (which became its own genre when the literary doctrine of Socialist Realism was established in the 1930s).

Of the Russian realist works, the presence of Dostoevskii’s Notes from the Dead House is felt most in these witness narratives, though Tolstoi and Chekhov contributed their own literary witnesses with Resurrection and Sakhalin, respectively. As in Dostoevskii’s novel, the first-person, autobiographical or semi-autobiographical accounts of Soviet prison literature place the reader in the position of the imprisoned and the suffering. Through the witness, personal tragedies become collective tragedies – which is also to say that they bring out into the light the punishment that the modern penal system tries to hide. Of course, Soviet censorship eventually became even more severe than that of the tsarist period, and most of these works were circulated only via samizdat or

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It was not until the Thaw and Khrushchev’s “destalinization” in the late 1950s and 1960s that the wider public first heard the voices of some of its most powerful witnesses. Nevertheless, the role of writer-as-witness during the Soviet era signifies both a continuation of and a new chapter in the story of Russian prison literature.

Among those writers redefined by prison in life and literature is Anna Akhmatova, the famous Silver Age poet, whom the Soviet authorities forced underground for decades, having executed her husband (the poet Nikolai Gumilev) in 1921. Akhmatova’s son Lev was also arrested numerous times in the 1930s, as were some of her closest friends. Eventually Akhmatova produced *Requiem*, a cycle of poems composed over several years that places her in the central role as the mother of a vanished family who waits eternally outside the prison for word of her loved ones. Published in the West in the 1960s, and finally in Russia in 1987, *Requiem* forever remade Akhmatova as both an individual and historical witness to the suffering prisons spread beyond their walls.

Akhmatova’s role as narrator in *Requiem* is just one example of the mother-witness, an innovation of Soviet prison writers that takes the reader beyond of the male perspectives that dominated the nineteenth-century. Like *Requiem*, Lidiia Chukovskiaia’s novella *Sof’ia Petrovna* was written during the purges and centers on a heroine whose son has been imprisoned. Evgeniia Ginzburg (*Journey into the Whirlwind*) and Ol’ga Adamova-Sliozberg (“My Journey”) depict the Soviet penal system from the viewpoints of women on the inside. Both Ginzburg and Adamova–Sliozberg highlight their roles as
mothers, through which they adapt to their new surroundings and create accidental families.

**Dostoevskii and Solzhenitsyn**

Perhaps the most direct descendant of Dostoevskii’s *Dead House* in Soviet prison literature is Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, a novel that was personally approved by Khrushchev and became an instant sensation upon its publication in the Soviet Union in 1962. Both novels are written from the perspective of a semi-autobiographical prisoner in Siberia, and both were groundbreaking in that they exposed their readers to the brutal conditions of prison camps otherwise hidden from public view. Nevertheless, while *Ivan Denisovich* continues the prisoner-witness mode of *Dead House* in general, Solzhenitsyn’s work uses it to new artistic effect. While *Dead House* surrounds its characters with walls and oppressive space, *Ivan Denisovich* presents a prison of time.

A comparison of the two novels begins with the titles, which signal two distinct perspectives on prison. Time (i.e. Ivan Denisovich’s *day*) dominates the prison experience in Solzhenitsyn’s portrayal, while space (the dead *house*) is felt more strongly in Dostoevskii’s novel.\(^{45}\) Whereas the narrative of *Dead House* is walled off by carceral space on both ends (in the beginning when the boundaries and some of their dimensions

\(^{45}\) For the close reading of the spaces of *Dead House* that this section references, see Chapter One, “Siberian Prison and the Origin of Dostoevskian Space”
are described, and in the end, when Gorianchikov walks out of the gates into freedom),

Solzhenitsyn’s *Ivan Denisovich* is framed by time:

At five o’clock that morning reveille was sounded, as usual, by the blows of a hammer on a length of rail hanging up near the staff quarters. The intermittent sounds barely penetrated the windowpanes on which the frost lay two fingers thick, and they ended almost as soon as they’d begun. It was cold outside, and the campguard was reluctant to go on beating out the reveille for long. The clanging ceased, but everything outside still looked like the middle of the night when Ivan Denisovich Shukhov got up to go to the bucket. (Solzhenitsyn, *Ivan Denisovich* 3)

Time dominates Solzhenitsyn’s opening, which, in comparison with *Dead House*, shows how the author can create a different atmosphere out of a similar prison chronotope by focusing on either time or space. Dostoevskii’s narrator uses spatial barriers to lock the reader in with the prisoner, but Solzhenitsyn favors time, jolting his hero awake at five o’clock with an alarm. The clock then begins to tick on Ivan Denisovich’s day. The hammer keeps a hostile time, banging intermittently and invading the comparatively safe space of Ivan Denisovich’s barracks. Unlike Gorianchikov’s barracks, which are an overcrowded space that must be endured, Solzhenitsyn emphasizes the barracks’ relative warmth (though of course he is never *really* warm) as a refuge from the elements.

In fact, Ivan Denisovich wants to spend as much time in this space as possible, as it also represents a small measure of freedom: his time before the daily work routine begins. Though he oversleeps on this day, which increases the reader’s awareness of time, he otherwise “always got up at once, for the next ninety minutes, until they assembled for work, belonged to him, not to the authorities” (4). The hammer blows from outside signify not only the time on the clock, but also the authorities’ timetable, which imprisons Ivan Denisovich and – to draw from Foucault - regiments his
movements and behavior. This timetable also prescribes a daily period that will be spent in the deadly Siberian cold, for which Ivan Denisovich must prepare, and thus the hammer blows also suggest an elemental threat to his survival. The frosty windowpanes, as boundaries of this relatively warm space, are a shaky defense against the threat of time – that is, the Foucauldian timetable that will keep him in the cold. Indeed, *Ivan Denisovich* is primarily about survival and, outside of his daily ninety minutes of freedom, time is the greatest danger to Ivan Denisovich’s life.

The danger of prison time lurks throughout the novel in different forms. The timetable almost continuously threatens to freeze or starve Ivan Denisovich, who is ever aware of how long he must endure to the next warm space or ration of food. The hero’s awareness of prison time in turn affects the reader, who feels the sense of urgency that permeates the novel. Here Foucault’s timetable and Bakhtin’s chronotope intersect. The regiment of the timetable and the corresponding threats of cold and hunger force Ivan Denisovich to be hyperaware of time, and thus the novel’s time, to use Bakhtin’s words, “takes on flesh.” In this way, the duration of time feels longer to the reader when Ivan Denisovich is hungry or cold. When he is outside, all of Ivan Denisovich’s actions are done with the goal of getting back inside, somewhere out of the cold, or next to a fire. For example, when his group is sent out for the day, they work as quickly as possible to wall up a building and get the stove working, just so they can survive. In terms of the chronotope, the space is again dictated by the threat of time. They literally build a space to fend off time spent in the cold.
Clearly, Solzhenitsyn and Dostoevskii perceive prison differently, or at least recreate it differently in their novels. The dominant element of the space-time relationship is determined by what the author wants to portray as the most harrowing part of the prison experience. By the end of each novel, the chronotope has influenced the reader’s impression of prison to a great degree. The space of *Dead House* is extremely well defined, but the duration of events and the specifics of when they occur (a conversation at lunch, a trip to the infirmary, time on the job site next to the river, the play) are less clear. In Solzhenitsyn’s novel, time is always present, and the way the timetable regulates the lives of the prisoners could hardly be more in focus: There is reveille exactly at five o’clock, followed by ninety minutes of the prisoners’ time, morning work, a break at one o’clock, work until dusk, a meal, inspection in the barracks and so on. *Ivan Denisovich* is not as specific in its depiction of carceral space. Solzhenitsyn, it seems, does not need to supply so many physical walls because the Foucauldian timetable in Siberian conditions provides the same function of confinement. The lack of well-defined space in *Ivan Denisovich* even gives the impression that a prisoner could run away, but time, in the forms of cold and hunger, would kill him before he could truly escape. In this way, time is Solzhenitsyn’s ever present and most daunting “wall.”

Solzhenitsyn plays with the sense of time throughout the novel (for example, in an extended work scene in the severe cold that feels like an entire day to the reader, but is suddenly stopped for lunch), but saves his greatest temporal trick for the final pages. Having survived another day, Ivan Denisovich finally lies down and reveals that, for him,
it has been “almost a happy day.” With this stunning thought, Ivan Denisovich reminds us that this torturous account has lasted not even twenty-four hours. For the reader it feels much longer – almost as if s/he had read about the life of Ivan Denisovich rather than the day. Thus time runs more slowly in Solzhenitsyn’s prison chronotope, bringing the reader closer to the real experience through artificial means. The walls of time, and time’s threat to Ivan Denisovich’s survival, are highlighted by the very last sentences of the novel: “There were three thousand six hundred and fifty-three days like that in his stretch. From the first clang of the rail to the last clang of the rail. Three thousand six hundred and fifty-three days. The three extra days were for leap years” (Ivan Denisovich 167). Having inherited an essentially spatial Dostoevskian foundation, Solzhenitsyn changes the viewpoint for the Soviet era, when prison terms were known to extend arbitrarily from 10 to 20 to 25 years. Time is the chief instrument of Ivan Denisovich’s punishment.

Chekhov and Shalamov

The Dostoevskii-Solzhenitsyn lineage of Russian prison literature is paralleled by the relationship between the writing of Chekhov and Varlam Shalamov. Shalamov’s Kolyma Tales (written from the 1950s to the 1970s, but not published in the Soviet Union until 1989) resemble Chekhov’s works in their depiction of prison as a distant and alien “dead zone.” As in Chekhov’s prison works, the relationship between space and time in Kolyma Tales is also somewhat more hidden and difficult to define than in Dead House or Ivan Denisovich.
To get a sense of Shalamov’s carceral space, it is best to take the collection of short stories as a whole. For Shalamov, and for others who endured Kolyma, like Adamova-Sliozberg, the distance between the camps and the Soviet “mainland” is so great that prison denotes a separate world. This remoteness, reinforced by the brutal conditions of northeastern Siberia, renders the physical walls of Dostoevskii even more unnecessary for Shalamov than they are for Solzhenitsyn. In fact, Shalamov rarely confines the space explicitly. Prisoners go here and there, to a forest or a construction site or a card game, and their movements in space would seem to be relatively free but for Kolyma’s distance and the imprisoning effects of time woven into the narrative. Overall, Shalamov’s prison chronotope presents captivity in vastness, a lifeless present without past or future – a depiction much like that of Chekhov’s dead zone.

Death is the shortest measure of time in *Kolyma Tales*. It is always imminent, and when it occurs, the deceased zek’s belongings are quickly divided amongst the others with little ceremony, as though he had never existed. Like Chekhov, Shalamov portrays the past as unreachable and irrelevant in prison, and thus it vanishes quickly into oblivion. Life and death are forever detached by time and space. “Life” is what happened in the distant past, in the space of the living world, on the “mainland.” Shalamov’s Chekhov-like prison chronotope is exemplified by the way the prisoners of “Dry Rations” talk about Moscow, their native city, as if it were lost forever. For them, Moscow is not just a distant place, but also one existing only in the past. It is the stuff of fairy tales, or a forgotten dream. Within the space of Kolyma the prisoner is no longer
part of the world of Moscow and the mainland, and “lives” only in the narrowest sense of present time and space.

Though Shalamov’s dead zone resembles Chekhov’s in many ways, one of the more remarkable innovations of *Kolyma Tales* is the physical manifestation of the dead zone’s effects. The narrator of “The Lawyer’s Plot,” for example, describes the prisoners as “men of indeterminate age – like all those who had gone through the hell of Kolyma” (162). The vast, isolated dead zone has a strange aging affect on the characters, making them appear and act immeasurably older than they are.

The physical effects of Shalamov’s dead zone are most evident in “Dry Rations,” which begins from a simple premise: four prisoners, including the narrator, have been selected to clear a road in an isolated area of the forest. Unfortunately, the men quickly realize that the “ten-day” rations they have been given are woefully insufficient, and they are forced to realign their priorities from work to survival. Faced with looming starvation and death, the men age dramatically. The narrator, who is thirty years old, talks as though he has long outlived his life:

“We, the four of us, were quite prepared for a trip into the future – either into the sky or into the earth” (56); “We understood that death was no worse than life, and we feared neither” (57); “We considered ourselves virtual saints, since we had redeemed all our sins by our years in camp” (57); “We knew that it was in our power to end this life the very next day and now and again we made that decision, but each time life’s trivia would interfere with our plans” (57).

Prematurely aged and marred by prison time, the convicts of “Dry Rations” begin to resemble the other would-be living creatures held captive in the dead zone: “[the shorter twisted trees] have kept up such an intense struggle for existence for so long that their tortured, gnarled wood is worthless” (62). These “trees in the north die lying down – like
people” and “could not be used even as firewood; so well did they resist the ax, they would have exhausted any worker. Thus did they take vengeance for their broken northern lives” (62).

Drained of all strength, the prisoners become like the gnarled trees - worthless even as raw material. Consequently, they perform at ten percent of the expected rate as they clear the forest road and are ordered back to the hated gold mines. One of the four hangs himself in a tree that night, after which another takes an ax to his hand, mirroring the loneliness and deformity of the captive landscape. The dead zone of “Dry Rations” and Kolyma Tales as a whole is vast and timeless in the most negative sense, adding a ghoulish physicality to the metaphysical bleakness of Chekhov’s prison chronotope.

**Tolstoi’s Prisons in the Soviet Era**

The influence of Dostoevskii and Chekhov is apparent in several landmark works of Soviet prison literature, but what did Tolstoi’s prisons mean for the following generations of writers? The question is complicated, and certainly worthy of a dedicated study, but, in general, Soviet writers seem to have connected with Tolstoian prisons in a couple of major ways. The prison of inner transformation is adopted by Andrei Siniavskii in *A Voice from the Chorus* (1973), which sees the author experiencing a Pierre Bezukhov-like revelation of inner freedom made possible by his captivity. With *Resurrection*, which includes Nekhliudov’s Kennan-like account of inhumane prison conditions, Tolstoi makes a journalistic contribution to Russian prison literature similar to those who preceded him, such as Dostoevskii. Beyond its qualities as an exposé, perhaps
Resurrection’s influence for Soviet dissident writers lies in the moral authority with which it is written. Solzhenitsyn, for example, placed himself in the Tolstoi-like position of author-moralist through his treatment of prison in works such as Gulag Archipelago.

Though dissident writers made a claim to the moral authority of the author of Resurrection, the novel itself may have been more influential in the Soviet era due to its didactic form. Some Soviet critics, such as Bakhtin, suggested Resurrection as a good model for the socialist realist novel (Kaufman 212). Tolstoi’s last novel, after all, does trace the development of a positive hero. Nekhliudov begins as a passive member of the exploiter class and develops into a conscious champion of the lower classes, thus providing the socialist realist author with a relatively simple formula for the delivery of ideology through art. Though Tolstoi is careful to distinguish Nekhliudov from the socialist revolutionaries of the time, negative examples of the latter are featured in only a small part of the novel, and could be easily dismissed by Soviet ideologues. Overall, Tolstoi’s impact on Soviet prison literature is more difficult to unpack than that of Dostoevskii and Chekhov, as the iconoclastic author of Resurrection unintentionally provided the Soviet regime with literary paradigm that was well suited to their propagandistic needs.

The close ties between Dostoevskii’s and Solzhenitsyn’s treatment of carceral time and space, as well as the Chekhov’s and Shalamov’s observations of the living dead, point to the role nineteenth-century Russian writers played in the creation of an alternative Soviet literature. The witnesses of Stalinist atrocities established a literary and political link to the past through the theme of prison. While an important literary
development in its own time, the nineteenth-century realists’ engagement with prison reappeared in new ways, and with new meaning, in the Soviet context.
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