

Russian Writers Confront the Myth:  
The Absence of the People's Brotherhood in Realist Literature

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## Abstract

This dissertation explores the way nineteenth-century Russian writers depict the lower classes, in particular the Russian peasants, in realist literature. In both the pre- and post-emancipation periods, Slavophiles, Westernizers, radicals, populists, pan-Slavists, and academic authors such as historians and ethnographers all explored the mentality of the Russian people, or *narod*, and their supposed exemplary moral character. Under the influence of this cultural myth about the lower-class Russian masses' morality and spirituality, critics of realist literature often claim that lower-class characters possess spiritual strength and collectively forge a Christian brotherhood. Close reading of realist literature, however, reveals that influential writers such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and Ivan Turgenev also depict the Russian peasants as morally flawed. By uncovering the way such writers subvert the myth of the people's brotherly union, this research compares the ambivalent portrait of Russian peasants in literature with their idealized image in academic writings. I argue that the realist writers questioned the unambiguously optimistic vision of the Russian people's unity and called for a universal endeavor to build a Christian brotherhood.

Demarcated from both nineteenth-century intelligentsia and contemporary academics, the realist writers in the age of radicalism were concerned that the spiritual brotherhood

of the Russian people was far from emerging. To demonstrate their ambivalent and pessimistic observations on the peasants' moral condition, I first explore the realist writers' portrayals of their communal life. In the first chapter, I demonstrate that although academic studies tend to regard peasant communes in Imperial Russia as models for realizing villagers' mutual love and egalitarian values, realist writers depict peasant characters' rage, violence, and conflicts in their seemingly collectivist communities. Second, while by traditional lines of inquiry, the Russian people are usually analyzed as humble souls who are willing to suffer for one another, realist writers deviate from this optimistic evaluation in their fiction and portray the peasants as self-destructive, unable to love each other, and even irrationally evil, as I will show in Chapter Two and Chapter Three. Third, realist writers' portrayals of peasant women and Old Believers, discussed in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, reinforce the impression that the lower-class people fail to realize mutual care and Christian love in their earthly world. In literature, peasant women are shown to be seductive and tragically evil, while sectarian characters are violent and deprived of faith. These peasant figures demonstrate an absence of mutual love and the fall of collective brotherhood in the fictional world of realist writers.

In several chapters, I also pay attention to realist writers' non-fictional statements in their journalistic or public writings, which may further contrast, complicate, or nuance the seemingly positive images of their peasant characters in literature. For instance, one of the important sources for Chapter One is Dostoevsky's commentary on the new postreform jury system in *A Writer's Diary*. The sources in Chapter Two, on the Russian people's alcoholism, include Tolstoy's post-conversion didactic writing. Realist writers'

biographical backgrounds, such as their personal involvement with peasant women or sectarians, are helpful for my analyses in Chapters Four and Five. By focusing on the spiritually troubled and disunited peasants in these writers' works, this study reveals realist writers' anxiety that in the lower-class people's world moral integrity is in peril and a Christian brotherhood is yet to be founded.

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## Introduction

Slavists who study culture, history, and literature are familiar with a myth of the Russian people, or the *narod*. In this study, I use the term *narod* to refer to the lower-class Russian people, especially the peasants, who seemed mysterious and interesting to gentry and intelligentsia from the 1830s to the end of the century;<sup>1</sup> *narod* also equally fascinates historians and ethnographers in our current scholarship. In both pre- and postreform decades, peasants in their families were bound by kinship and mutual interest. These peasant families were further connected by the traditional Russian commune, or *obshchina*, which made decisions on repartitions of land, conscriptions of soldiers, and distributions of resources based on the principle of “relative equality.”<sup>2</sup> Positioned in this traditional patriarchal culture of the peasant communities, the Russian *narod*, in both nineteenth-century and contemporary intelligentsia’s views, seems to possess moral characteristics such as humility, altruism, endurance, and spiritual belongingness to larger collectives. Although academic studies and intellectual explorations of Imperial history, Slavic culture, and various intellectual ideas dating back to the 1820s have converged on

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<sup>1</sup> However, the popularity of the concept of *narod*, related to the realist writers’ exploration of the myths about the people in this study, emerged in the 1860s, during the exploration by the radical intelligentsia of the rural population’s reality. It was a concept established to refer to the educated Russians’ imagined image of the people. See, for instance, Frierson, 32-33, for the definition of the concept of the *narod*.

<sup>2</sup> See Worobec, *Peasant Russia*, for her elaboration on the “relatively” fair and egalitarian distribution of material and responsibility among communal members.

the subject of the common people's spiritual depths, the current study unearths the ways realist writers confront the myth of the *narod* and deviate from the lofty belief in a Christian unity among the people, by focusing on these writers' depictions of the people's darkness and disintegration.

The intellectual explorations of the Russian people's spiritual character started with the Slavophile-Westernizer opposition in the 1830s, which first emerged in reaction to the critique of Petr Chaadaev (1794-1856) in his *Philosophical Letters* (1829) that "we [Russians] . . . have come into the world like illegitimate children, without a heritage, without any ties binding us to the men who came before us on this earth" (164). Chaadaev accused Russia of being alienated from the civilized West and at the same time deprived of her Russian heritage. The Hegelian thinker also expressed an ambivalent view on the common Russian people's role in Russian history, because they seemed to him to lack the rational mind for regulating their spiritual lives. Chaadaev claimed that the people's voice cannot be equated with the voice of God and only the empowerment of the institution of the Church—"a social organism whose role is to mediate between the congregation and God"—can unite the people and resurrect Russia (Walicki, 150). As he states in *Apology of a Madman* (1837), Russia should produce her national culture based on Peter's Westernizing legislation and her people should advance with the pro-Catholic Occident.

Despite Chaadaev's denial of the people as the chosen individuals bearing divine spiritual religiosity, his concerns that Russian history demonstrates no continuity or integrity of her spiritual national identity converged with the Slavophiles' conservatism

and inspired the Slavophiles' reinterpretation of the people.<sup>3</sup> In stark contrast to Chaadaev's ambivalent evaluation of the people, Slavophilism defends the value of the ancient Russian traditions and the pastoral peasant life. Leading Slavophiles Aleksei Khomiakov (1804-1860), Ivan Kireevsky (1806-1856), and Konstantin Aksakov (1817-1860) promoted collectivist notions of the peasantry in rural Russia as reflections of the Slavs' spiritual strength. They discovered the true spirit of Russianness inherent in the peasant communes, the Russian folklore, and "the Russian Orthodox way of life down to the last and final detail," as Nikolai Berdiaev puts it (60). These cultural components that surround the Russian peasants, in the eyes of the Slavophiles, have nurtured a holy and free unity of these people around an invisible Church, or *Sobor*, which can be "perceived only by the Church herself and by those whom grace calls to be her members," as Khomiakov states in "The Church is One" (32). Slavophiles define this spontaneous brotherhood of the people as *sobornost'*—an organic, living unity of mutual love (*vzaimnoi liubvi*). In particular, the peasant communes scattered across the territory of Russia as the people's independent micro-worlds contributed to their instinctual

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<sup>3</sup> Because Chaadaev reveals a Catholic vision of the Church as the organizing institution that unites the common people, while "the essence of mysticism is to strive after direct, individual contact with God, and thus to bypass the alienated, institutionalized forms of religion, we must treat Chaadaev as a determined opponent of mysticism" (Walicki, 150). However, Chaadaev's worship of Peter I and European civilization also reflects his rebellion against a deterministic and extreme left Hegelian interpretation of history. He believes that Russia has no historical continuity and cultural legacy, because the spiritual content of her life is missing in Russians' recognition of national identity. Deviating from a Hegelian rationalism and aiming for an anti-enlightenment mysticism in his explorations of individual and national life, Chaadaev's thought can be defined as "the religious Westernism of the mystical universalism" (*ibid.*, 159) and thus, can be aligned with the Slavophiles' conservative view of Russia's spiritual legacy.

What is more, future Slavophile Ivan Kireevsky and conservative critic Vladimir Odoevsky belonged to an early mysticism group—the Wisdom-Lovers (*Liubomudry*)—in the 1820s, and Chaadaev was in contact with this movement, directly commenting on their ideologies. Both these thinkers and Chaadaev viewed German romanticism and Russian mysticism as the starting point of their philosophies. Slavophilism, thus, may be interpreted as both a rebellion against and a continuation of Chaadaev's religious Westernism.

inclination for thrift, simplicity, spiritual beauty, and brotherly unity, as Khomiakov claims. Kireevsky agrees that only in the ancient, organic form of the egalitarian communes, “individual ambition was confined to the desire to be a correct expression of the general spirit of society” (202). These Slavophiles were concerned about the elite classes, overly attached to Hegelian rationalism and European materialism, as much as Chaadaev was, and attempted a salvation of Russia through the people’s traditional value and Russia’s indigenous culture.

These thinkers who joined the anti-enlightenment intellectual movement in early nineteenth-century Russia were not the only ones who corroborated the myth of the Russian people. This idea of the Russian peasants’ brotherhood was in part a continuation of the conviction of the German philosopher Johann G. Herder (1744-1803) concerning the Slavs’ spiritual strength. Herder’s philosophy reveals how interrelated and interacting cultural elements in the people’s life within their territory forge a national identity, no matter how closely attached their nation is to surrounding alien cultures. He argues that “the European peoples have been . . . intermingling with each other, and yet can still be discerned in their original character” (109). Each European nation for Herder is thus a spontaneous organism built upon its national legacy and in particular, its folk (*Volk*) culture. When it comes to the Slavs, Herder praises their humility, submission, and love of peace as precious cultural heritages and national virtues. He believes that they were even destined to be the prophets and leaders of Europe because “they never competed for dominion over the world and . . . preferred instead to pay tribute if this left them to pursue their quiet life on their land” (107). Since Herder advocates the Slavs “educat[ing]



all peoples to become one people” of the European continent (110), his philosophy lays a foundation for Slavophile thought: Slavophiles also hold the belief that the people’s brotherhood, or, *sobornost*, would enlighten both Russian and European elites as to how to build “the unity of all, the unity of humanity in God” (Bird, 15). Both Herder’s German Romanticism and the Slavophiles’ cultural nationalism celebrate the folks’ and the people’s everyday life, altruistic mindset, and moral impact on a universal scale.

Even the Slavophiles’ opponents, the radical Westernizers, propagated the myth of mutual love and spiritual brotherhood among the people. Just as the peasant fraternity and agricultural practice were the central issues of the Slavophiles’ discussion, they were the focal points of the radicals’ intellectual exploration. Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848) wrote his famous letter to Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852) to criticize the latter’s *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends* (1847), because he fundamentally disagreed with Gogol’s idealization of Tsar Nikolai I, autocracy, and serfdom. He expressed his rage at the novelist’s misunderstanding of the Russian people as blind followers of Orthodoxy and called for the middle class to have a civil respect for the masses. Aleksander Herzen (1812-1870), a revolutionary activist, invented a Russian style of agrarian Socialism in the 1850s, inspired by the function and the value of the Russian communes. His thought mixed the progressive advantage of the radical Westernization with the romantic ideas about egalitarian communes. Another example is the post-Slavophile school—*pochvennichestvo* (“return to the soil”), founded by the Dostoevskys in the early 1860s. Mikhail and Fyodor Dostoevsky attempted to distance their view from the utopian Slavophilism and incorporate the civic thought of the Westernizers into their

ideology. They discussed the issue of the peasant communes in order to reconcile West and East, the mind of the intelligentsia and the soul of the people.<sup>4</sup> After all, their back-to-the-soil ideology is intertwined with their romantic belief in the goodness of the indigenous people and the beauty of the Russian backwoods. Numerous other influential intellectual movements and actions of non-noble intelligentsia (*raznochintsy*) since the 1860s also demonstrate a connection between radical ideology and the peasant myth. For instance, led by Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-1889), intellectuals from various classes attempted to atone for the sinful serfdom of the past and work for the people's well-being in the future. In the 1870s, under the direct influence of German populist Baron von Haxthausen (1792-1866), they became radical *narodniki* (populists) and realized their plan of "going to the people." Russian populists were even overly protective of the people's interests and romanticized the popular masses as much as the Slavophiles did. These different radical groups of intelligentsia, in several decades of the late nineteenth century, passionately glorified the people and actively strived for their salvation, just as the Slavophiles did.

This common interest of the conservatives and the radicals demonstrates that the Russian people's depth and potential were central to the intellectual explorations by Russian thinkers from various ideological groups. Many researchers claim that conservative cultural nationalism and radical political nationalism, even the seemingly quite contrasting views of Slavophiles and Westernizers, converged (Rabow-Edling;

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<sup>4</sup> See Ivanits, chapter 1, Burry, chapter 3, and Hudspeth, chapter 2, for the *pochvenniki*'s function of bridging the upper and lower classes, western and Slavophile ideas, and the enlightened mind of the intelligentsia and the primitive souls of the people.

Engelstein). After all, Slavophiles and Westernizers emerged from the same intellectual group.<sup>5</sup> From the early 1830s, they already started unifying their strength into a search for Russia's humanist spiritual leadership in European civilization. Both groups of thinkers criticized the Russian literati's inorganic imitation of western civilization and denied European philosophy as the perfect cultural model for Russia.<sup>6</sup> These upper-class groups shared the ambition to strengthen Russia with the people's spiritual unity.

Different intellectual schools' unified focus on the people is apparently a result of their shared anxiety for Russia's destiny. The disagreement between Slavophiles and Westernizers was not really over the value of the indigenesness of the people and the foreignness of the West, but rather over which choice—indigenous culture or western values—would lead Russia to fulfillment of its national greatness. As Pål Kolstø notes, “Herzen famously described the relationship between his own Zapadnik [Westernizer] camp and the early Slavophiles as one held together by a common heart, a common commitment to a common cause, Russia” (“Power as Burden,” 573). This common cause is further identifiable in various other intellectual and radical schools mentioned above. For instance, the men of the 40s and the *pochvenniki* in the 1860s took a middle view of the people, attempting to seek a future path for Russia. As Belinsky states in his letter to

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<sup>5</sup> Engelstein points out that the Slavophiles were educated in the West, familiar with western knowledge, and in good contact with western intelligentsia. In particular, she argues in chapter 4 of her book that the conservative Slavophiles was never immune to the advantages of the age of modern science. Rather, they intended to “achieve a synthetic wholeness in which abstract reason would not conflict with the truths of revelation, the common folk and cultivated elite would meet on the grounds of an enlightened faith” (129).

<sup>6</sup> Rabow-Edling's monograph on the Slavophiles, for instance, challenges the narrative of the Westernizer-Slavophile dichotomy. In her view, the Slavophile ideas are not antagonist to the Westernizers' because Slavophilism should not be viewed only as a conservative and utopian vision. It is rather a highly social and political movement. In her 2005 article, she again explains how Russian nationalism, or national identity, is not a term that demonstrates a separation of Russia from Europe but a term meaning a reacquisition of the Europeans' respect.

Gogol, “[t]ake a close look at the Russian people, and you will see that by nature it is profoundly atheistic. . . . therein, perhaps, lies the vast scope of its historical destinies in the future” (137). The men of the 60s regarded the people as a backward population, because they were in favor of the development of science and knowledge in Russia’s future. In the 70s, populists chose to instead merge into the peasantry, since they believed in peasant “socialism” as a solution for the resurrection of Russia. As this intellectual history shows, the educated Russians were united by one common intellectual interest—to explore Russia’s future path of development, her leadership in Europe, and even her spiritual contribution to a universal humanity. Just as the German term *Volk* and the French *le peuple* did, whenever the concept of the *narod* was discussed by educated Russians, “they were also invariably engaged in a process of national self-definition” (Frierson, 33).

However, due to these intellectuals’ poor understanding of the *narod*, their works lacked objectivity and were far from productive. Current scholarship is critical about the methodologies, research, and activities of these nineteenth-century radicals (Chubarov; Frierson; Sirotkina), especially the populists whose “narrow intellectual paradigm becomes irrefutable doctrine,” as Andrew D. Kaufman puts it (184). The fanatic Populists’ conviction is that village communes are the cradles for Socialist egalitarianism and nurture the people’s instinct of inbred Socialism. These radicals and their follower-revolutionaries promoted a socialist reconstruction of society based on peasant communes. Their optimistic expectations of the common Russian peasants who had no sympathy for progressive or revolutionary thought proved to be too detached from reality

and it is no surprise to find their endeavors fruitless. As Tim McDaniel argues, the populists and the Nechaevists were imposing a myth upon the village commune and idealizing the people as socialist activists no less than the Slavophiles did (77).

The shortcomings of the romantic and conservative ideas of the Slavophiles are equally apparent. As Nikolas Gvosdev puts it, Slavophiles envisioned the moral life of the people in the Church, or *Sobor*, as the content of an egg, held and protected by its shell—the state, the former being alive and vital, and the latter dead and material (201); nonetheless, such a Slavophile interpretation of the Orthodox Church was not an objective observation of reality, but a subjective idealization of it, given that the Nikonian and Petrine Reforms continued to transform their Byzantine Church into a state department realizing the notion of absolutist Westernism (ibid., 190). To promote their ideology of *sobornost*’ in such a dark reality, the Slavophiles seldom addressed any contemporary religious issues such as the Old Belief and sectarian fragmentation, because the persecutions of Old Believers and sects could only disprove the Slavophiles’ romantic ideas about the sacred Russian Church. Along with the officials of the Imperial State, the Slavophiles also produced the myth of “peasant Tsarism,” or the peasants’ loyalty to the Tsar, as Daniel Field examines. Since most common peasants had no clue what the educated Russians meant by Orthodox Christians or Tsarist people, these terms that impressed one with the people as unified, submissive entity, as Field argues, only contributed to the “naïve monarchism” among the higher and ruling classes. In addition to these flaws, the Slavophiles did not present enough evidence to support their abstract ideal of the people’s unity derived from their communal life. Although some Slavophiles

did keep close contact with the peasants or observe the local agricultural environment, they did not conduct first-hand research on the people's communal life in reality. They allowed opponents such as the radical Populist Haxthausen to "discove[r] the *mir* or village commune for them, and they were generally content to let such men provide them with facts" (Treadgold, 74). Slavophile writings thus lack convincing evidence of the spiritual superiority of the large population of the Russian people across the country.

Even the less ideologically influenced nineteenth-century ethnographies, written by middle-way academics and based on scientific observations, may have their shortcomings. For instance, Alexandra Efimenko (1848-1918), best known for her *Investigations into the Life of the People* (1884) and her doctoral degree, goes into various aspects of lives in rural Russia in her research, but nonetheless "failed to capture the fluidity and variability of village life," as one critic observes (Ransel, xiii). I will explore in detail some of the incomplete portrayals of the people by this historian-ethnographer in my following chapters when they become relevant. Another academic author, Olga Semyonova Tianshanskaia (1863-1906), equally recognized for remaining neutral on the radical movements, failed to explore the prominence of kin structure in peasant society, among other flaws, in her rich piece *Village Life in Late Tsarist Russia* (1914).<sup>7</sup>

My brief review of these various intellectual perspectives on the Russian *narod* shows that the people's spiritual brotherhood is a vision or a theory produced by nineteenth-

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<sup>7</sup> See Ransel for a biography of Semyonova that demonstrates her neutral and apolitical ideology. Raised in a scientific family by her father, a geographer and statistician, she spent her entire life in her family estate in Ryazan, unmarried, where she "overheard" conversations of peasants from her perspective as an outsider, a Westernized, scientific researcher. Ransel concludes that Semyonova's research is different from the populists' in that it "[counters] naive views of the peasants as naturally cooperative, communitarian beings who will provide the foundation for a new order of social peace and harmony" (xxviii).

century intellectuals that can never be immune from subjectivity. With the decline of the popularity of the Slavophilism, intellectuals, historians, ethnographers had started to question the myth of the people's brotherhood. I will elaborate on both nineteenth-century intellectuals' and contemporary academic authors' critical observations on the romantic ideal of peasant unity later in this Introduction. At this point, it is enough to note that the vision of the people's spiritual union reflects the definition of "myth" in folkloric studies.

Numerous folklorists claim that in various oral and written narratives, although myth interprets certain natural phenomena as the only "rational" explanation available to people, as a "defective understanding of scientific causes," it can be created upon misapprehension, ignorance, and instinctive curiosity, lacking objectivity and rationality (Rogerson, 64). Myth is quite distant from other narrative genres like folktales or legends that have a fictional and aesthetic function, but are frequently "cited as authority in answer to ignorance, doubt, or disbelief" (Bascom, 9). Unlike folktales, legends, and other fictional narratives, myth further takes on a sacred function in delivering religious messages or expressing a salvific spirit. As folklorist William Bascom puts it in his definition of this specific type of narrative prose, myth reveals the narrators' and listeners' worship of the remote past, fear of the unknown world, and surrender to the holy sphere of nature. As a sacralized narrative believed to be truth, myth may properly serve the current study as a metaphor for the academic findings about the Russian people. Just like a myth, the spiritual condition of the people has been approached precisely as an unknown territory of knowledge, mysterious and exotic in the modern state. The people's

spiritual unity also seems to the educated classes to be sacred in a religious sense and salvific in national life, further echoing Bascom's description of myth. In addition, commonly recognized intellectual values and social functions of a myth do not necessarily qualify it to be accurate and factual, as another folklorist J. W. Rogerson argues, because usually the sources of the myth were "products of society, embodying common values and ideals" (66). In this view, even though scientific approaches to the people's morality and spirituality by Slavophiles, Westernizers, nineteenth-century radicals, and contemporary scholars may have contributed to the objectivity and rationality of the myth, their vision of the people's brotherhood is still an academic product by nature.

Since the West European Enlightenment era, ancient myth in folkloric narratives has constantly inspired adaptations and transpositions by poets, writers, painters, dramatists, and musicians. We should now turn to the field of art—Russian realist literature—which transposes and perhaps revises the myth by interrogating the intelligentsia's blind belief in the myth of the *narod*. In the following section, I will provide an introduction to the Russian writers' unique style and realist skills at portraying the lower-class characters. These features of their literary texts allow them to complicate the myth about the people, undermine the theory of the peasant brotherhood, and deviate from the belief of authors in other fields, even though their deliberate intention at first glance is to idealize the people and corroborate the myth.



## **Russian Realist Portrayals of the People**

To a degree, Russian literature of the nineteenth century seems to reflect this myth and celebrate the people's spiritual brotherhood. In parallel with the recognition of the Slavs' national (*natsional'noe*) identity by Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837), Gogol elevates the lower-class people's (*narodnoe*) identity by portraying the folkloric Slavic culture in Ukrainian rural areas. Gogol's *Dead Souls* (1842), as Belinsky claims, further discovers a "deep substantive principle" hidden under the surface of the social forms of Russian life, through its observations of the people's trivialities, "detail," and "nonsense" by Gogol the "acquirer" ("Chichikov's Adventures," 457). The writer intended to further depict a panorama of the common people's life in the second volume of his *Dead Souls*. In the following decade, Ivan Turgenev in his first edition of *Notes of a Hunter* (1852) depicts the way his narrator "hunts" for spiritual beauty in his interactions with the people. In the golden age of Russian realism, the Russian people's brotherly kingdom, wrapped in mysteries due to the eternal gulf between the upper classes and the people, continued to impress and fascinate Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and Nikolai Leskov.

Admittedly, if we consider the origins of Russian realist writing, we may rush to a conclusion that Russian writers must glorify the people and reinforce the myth of their spiritual unity. The Russian definition of realism emerged when the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) inspired Belinsky to explore the process by which an individual phenomenon is not only viewed as isolated and particular, but also interpreted in relation to its social historical context by a self-conscious, rational, and dialectic analysis. Hegelian historicism posits that individuals, people, and events are

shaped by the nation's internal historical force. The leading Hegelian critic thus directed Russian literati to not only observe reality to be given, but also analyze the individual and particular events contextually in a rational and relational way. Convinced by this system of the Hegelian connection between the individual and the universal, Belinsky also claimed that literature can address national issues and explore national identity by producing characters typical of the common people. As Edith Clowes, commenting on Belinsky's review "Russian Literature in 1845," points out, "Belinsky identified the 'national' increasingly with the life of the masses of ordinary people" (208). Individual characters were frequently created as stereotypes derived from the common masses or folk in Russian realist literature, also because Russian critics carried the torch of Herder's cultural nationalist idea. Like the Westernizers, Slavophile critics under the influence of Herder's cultural nationalism reconfirmed an artistic connection between the individual protagonist and the national character. The Slavophile Khomiakov, in this vein, claimed that the movement of literature should reflect the inner movement of national culture, similarly to Belinsky. These early thoughts on the function of literature demanded from realist writers their depictions of the people's psychology in depth as expressions of Russia's socio-historical conditions.

Nonetheless, in their early definitions of realism, neither Belinsky nor Khomiakov conclusively claimed that the national, Russian stereotype of the people must be portrayed in a positive manner. Belinsky directed Russian writers to the world of the people to address its national implications, but he particularly inspired them to highlight the peasants' dark reality and dismal living conditions. What Belinsky praised is Gogol's

and the Natural School's hyperbolic exaggeration of urban life in filth, people in poverty, and Russia in debauchery. Other literary critics and radical thinkers tended to follow his naturalistic viewpoint that demanded from Russian literature a democratic critique of Imperial Russia. For instance, Dmitri Pisarev (1840-1868) and Nikolai Dobroliubov (1836-1861) promoted the radical idea that literature should express a "didactic intent," engage in political polemics, and function as a social critique (Paperno, 8). Literary works by Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin (1826-1889) and Nikolai Nekrasov (1821-1878) were especially influenced by these critics' civic views on realist literature. By depicting a sordid panorama of Russia and the tragic destiny of her people in a dramatic, grotesque style, these writers expressed their revolutionary rage on behalf of the suffering body of the lower-class people in a dark Empire. Greatly influenced by the "naturalist" origin of realist literature, Russian writers consistently portrayed the current condition of the Russian people's life as dark and dismal.

At this critical point, major realist writers in this naturalist tradition started to shift the focus of their fiction from the dark socio-economic reality toward the mystery of the people's souls that may still retain the truth of Russianness, despite the adverse environment. This shift of focus may have convinced a few scholars and readers of realist literature that the writers showed a unified tendency to glorify the people, portray a peasant brotherhood, and reinforce the cultural myth of the people. Scholarly interpretation of the realist literature along this line of inquiry was quite widespread in the nineteenth century. Belinsky spoke highly of Dostoevsky's and Turgenev's early works and demonstrated that their portraits of the Russian people fulfilled all expectations of

realist literature. Belinsky believed that Dostoevsky's depiction of the misery of the urban petty clerk and the submissive soul of Varvara in *Poor Folk* (1845) qualified him as a member of the Natural School, well-versed in the political future of Russia. The critic also praised Turgenev, in his 1847 review, for how he "acquaints his readers with various aspects of provincial life, with people of diverse rank and condition" (69) in the writer's early sketches of *Notes of a Hunter*. Turgenev's portrayal of peasant Pyotr Karataev was regarded as a "masterly ... physiological sketch of the purely Russian character" (ibid.). Similarly to Belinsky's enthusiasm for Turgenev's literary depiction of the people, Herzen's ecstasy over Gogol's epic work on the peasant world also reflects a "radical" recognition of literary explorations of the people's depth. Herzen commented on *Dead Souls* that "Gogol could not name it otherwise . . . these are the dead souls, and we meet them at every turn" (458). These nineteenth-century critics' affirmative comments on the realist writers' portrayals of the people must have potentially promoted a myth that the souls of the *narod* remained spiritually unified in the fictional world, despite the dark reality of their lives in Imperial Russia.

Since these influential critics optimistically linked realist literature to the myth of the people in the nineteenth century, it is not surprising to find many contemporary commentaries following this traditional line of inquiry. For instance, this can be seen in Irmhild Christina Sperrle's exploration of the world of the Leskovian righteous people. As her monograph demonstrates, among the people, Leskov identifies "movement and transformation in 'an organic manner,' a transformation in which death and rebirth alternate and condition each other" (17). In this organic community, Leskov finds a unity

and ubiquitous mutual love of the people. Another example is Sarah Hudspith, who demonstrates that despite Dostoevsky's distance from Slavophilism during his enthusiasm about *pochvennost'*, the novelist "expresses the innate Russian desire for universal brotherhood" and reaffirms the rise of *sobornost'* among the fallen people (86). The peasant characters populating *A Writer's Diary* (1873-1881) in particular, as Robert Louis Jackson claims, are characterized by "a surface disfiguration and an inner organic form, *obraz*, or image" (*Close Encounters*, 214). When it comes to Dostoevsky's final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), most critics interpret it as a synthesis of commentaries on Russia's fate, the problems of humanity, and the beauty of the Russian people's souls: "in Alesha's psychological makeup are traits exactly analogous to Russia's as described in the *Diary*" (Wachtel, 143), or in other words, the novelist's exploration of the human soul through Alyosha's individual character is embedded in his explorations of Russia's history and the future in this realist novel. Following a canonic nineteenth-century understanding of realist literary portrayals of the people's souls, commentators such as Hudspith and Jackson reaffirm in the spiritual unity of the Russian people in realist works the writers' messages about Russia's salvation.

Even though realist writers to a degree idealized the people's mentality and romanticized the lower classes as if they were unified in a Christian brotherhood, we should note that these writers were influenced by the tradition of Russian messianism and their positive portrayals of the common masses may not be objective or realistic. The common people were not merely associated with Russia's future, but also burdened with a messianic role in the redemption of humanity on a universal scale, as many Slavic

thinkers stated.<sup>8</sup> Such is the Russian messianism, which first appeared in literature, though, also as an outcome of the widespread philosophy of Hegel and Kant, who understood art as a sensuous, intuitive reflection of the real, intended without utility or desire but aimed at the Absolute universal truth. Russian followers of such German Romanticism demanded a shift of literature's function away from its utilitarian purpose to the messianic exploration of religion, philosophy, and humanity. Pavel Annenkov (1813-1887), Aleksander Druzhinin (1824-1864), and Kireevsky criticized literary works that are overly loaded with political ideologies and demanded that realism should be independent of ideological interests. Nikolai Strakhov (1828-1896), who was in close contact with both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, required art to fulfill a moral function beside its aesthetic function. Writers under the influence of these critics, who believed in literature's revelation of the universal secret of humanity, aimed at the mysteries of the Russian people's morality and humanity's universal issues. In the view of Vladimir Solov'ev (1853-1900), an influential philosopher and theologian, the national literature should combine Russia's search for a world-leading messianic role with humanity's exploration of the mystic God-manhood. As a result, any unambiguously positive interpretation of the people's souls in realist literature might not be entirely convincing, given that realist writers could consciously or unconsciously obscure the facts of reality in their fiction to deliver their messianic message.

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<sup>8</sup> See Duncan, who investigates schools and thinkers like Slavophilism, Pan-Slavism, and Dostoevsky, Fedorov, Solovyov, and Berdiaev, who contributed to a consistent trend of Russian messianism in Russian history.

What is more, Slavophile and conservative writers were always open-minded to the Westernizers' views on Russia and were in part aware that the people's brutality could threaten Russia's future. Turgenev was close with Belinsky, Mikhail Bakunin and other "men of action." Dostoevsky also made his debut as a member of the Natural School and reconciled with the Westernizing view as a *pochvennik* again in the early 1860s. These two writers positioned their understanding of the Russian people between the extremist views of the conservatives and the radicals. Tolstoy, on the other hand, was officially excommunicated by the Orthodox Church as "an irreconcilable adversary of Christ . . . [hiding] his rebellion against God behind a *mask* of goodness," as Kolstø puts it ("The Demonized Double," 323). In the case of Leskov, when he converted from his ideological dependence on Tolstoy in the 1880s, he started to express his own belief system, still a non-Orthodox worldview, which celebrates some dissidents against Orthodoxy.<sup>9</sup> These writers' unique belief systems indicate that their diverse views of the people cannot be easily unified under a Slavophile umbrella.

Even Dostoevsky, who wrote enthusiastically about his faith in the people's potential for a Christian kingdom in *A Writer's Diary*, experienced anxiety about the spiritual disintegration in the peasant world. Dostoevsky's childhood memories had impressed on him a view of the Russian people's ambivalence: he was convinced that his father, Mikhail Andreevich, was murdered by a peasant, and he held it against all other peasants in Chermoshnia (which later becomes Chermashnia in *The Brothers Karamazov*—the

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<sup>9</sup> By the 1890s Leskov tries to distance his idea from that of Tolstoy, even in those stories that are most similar to Tolstoy's, although the two showed a confluence of world views in the 1880s. Leskov considered Tolstoy dogmatic, rejected Tolstoy's non-resistance philosophy, and disliked the zen-like Tolstoyan martyrdom. See Sperrle, chapter 2.

place Fyodor Pavlovich requires Ivan to visit and the son intends to depart for in part to be away from the murder scene) for their reticence about the murder. Linda Ivanits argues that even Dostoevsky's close contact with the people and his acknowledgment of their potential, during the former Petrashevsky member's imprisonment and communication with peasant inmates, did not blind him to their "moral abyss" and violent brutality; it was rather a period of suffering from his loss of faith (*Dostoevsky and the Russian People*, 19). After these years spent in Siberia with the convicts, admittedly, Dostoevsky edited the journals *Time* (*Vremia*) and *Epoch* (*Epokha*) with his brother Mikhail in the first half of the 1860s, in which he promoted the Russian land, or soil (*pochva*), as the shared root and unifying heritage of the Russian *narod*. However, Dostoevsky's post-Siberian enthusiasm about the commune, the folklore, and the people's potential for brotherly love was not enough to motivate him to consistently corroborate such an ideal of the people's united "Soil-rootedness" (*pochvennost'*) in part because, as Elizabeth Blake points out, "the ethnic and religious tensions exposed in the wake of the 1863 Polish uprising presented an immediate political challenge to Dostoevsky's vision of a harmonious fusion of disparate elements within Russian society" (14). In the 1870s, Dostoevsky was further among the minority of educated Russians who calmly observed the irreconcilable "contradiction between the imagined and the real folk" and he realized that the radically produced image of the *narod* "did not necessarily bear any resemblance to the reality of the village or the people who lived there" (Frierson, 32). In Dostoevsky's late fiction, his portrayal of the people's collective willpower is indeed ambivalent. In two major novels, *The Idiot* (1869) and *The Brothers Karamazov*, I



analyze the spiritual strength of the *narod* on the surface of these texts and explore the possibility that these novels also expose the novelist's doubts about the people's potential for spiritual unity.

Several recent critics note the subversions of the romantic myths about the people's depths and the absence of messianic messages in both minor and major realist writers' works. As Donald Fanger points out, already in the early nineteenth century, short stories by *raznochintsy* writers<sup>10</sup> are designed "to ennoble the peasant without idealizing him" (242). In the radical 1860s, as Cathy A. Frierson shows in *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia*, literary sketches by Nikolai Uspensky (Gleb Uspensky's cousin), Fyodor Reshetnikov, Ilya Selivanov, and Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin further de-romanticized the image of the Russian people. These authors deliberately chose the most dismal features of peasants and piled on details in their short, photographic pieces. She regards their sketches as the fruits of Chernyshevsky's and Dobroliubov's radical influence in that they "stripped the romanticized peasant of all his features as ideal and presented him instead as brute" (22).<sup>11</sup> Even the most influential realist writers seem to some critics to be able to subvert the myths about the people's moral dignity. For instance, Thomas Newlin reveals the egoistic desires for pleasure and power inherent in the seemingly good-natured peasants

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<sup>10</sup> *Raznochintsy* refers to people from various non-noble classes and here, means intelligentsia from uneducated families and lower classes. The most influential *raznochintsy* writers, however, were among the men of the 60s who were "caught up in the ferment of the sixties which penetrated even to the most backward and obscure areas of Russia" (Glickman, "An Alternative View," 693). Unlike early *raznochintsy* writers introduced in Fanger's article, however, the men of the 60s were less willing to idealize the peasant; yet, the *raznochintsy* writers living in the 70s and 80s again started to idealize and glorify the people's moral strength.

<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, these literary sketches by *raznochintsy* came under attack for being one-sided, uninformative, and untrue, around the end of the 1860s.

of Turgenev's *Notes of a Hunter*. He finds the physical desire of the seemingly holy and saintly peasant girl Lukeria to be the target of Turgenev's irony ("The Thermodynamics of Desire"). In a similar vein, Fanger touches on Anton Chekhov's view of the people as "spiritually deprived, gray, depressing" and their villages "in decline, emancipated from tradition" (257).<sup>12</sup> Among monographs, Nancy Ruttenburg's study on *Notes from the House of the Dead* (1862) questions Dostoevsky's claimed faith in the peasant inmates' moral depth and brotherly alliance. She demonstrates that the sketches' context—the *katorga* or prison—is a highly exceptional space, an ontologically ambiguous environment, and a precariously threatening world, "in which men are exposed and expose one another to extraordinary violence" without any potential for reconciliation or unity (112).<sup>13</sup> Another monograph on the Russian writer's ambivalent portrayal of the people, Julie W. De Sherbinin's research on the Chekhovian heroines, contributes to an interrogation of the peasant women's Marian prototypes and these heroines' dark souls. I will note her reading of Chekhov's iconoclastic illustrations of some peasant women in detail in Chapter Four.

While these breakthrough studies of minor and major realist writers' ambivalent portrayals of the people focus on individual pieces and single authors, my dissertation aims at a comprehensive study of major Russian prose writers' depiction of the people's

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<sup>12</sup> Fanger argues that near the turn of the century, Chekhov differs from Tolstoy in that in his works he simply demonstrated "what is" the real life of the peasants, instead of promoting a bright picture of the people as a "Christian example" (257).

<sup>13</sup> Also along this direction of inquiry, we see an article by Dwyer, who explores the writer's distinctive portrayals of Caucasian Muslims, Roman Catholic Poles, Jewish people, Tartars and steppe peoples in *katorga*. She criticizes the *katorga* as what destroys the peasant inmates' camaraderie. Her argument is that the novelist parodies the genre of the ode by structuring his novel with a multiplicity of classes and ethnicities. In her view, the narrator illustrates numerous small and large circles of violence, from the individual to the imperial, all of which only disunite the social body and undermine the Imperial belongingness of the Russian people.

purported spiritual brotherhood, by exploring the way they both longed for the Slavophile myth of the people's brotherhood and at the same time revealed an absence of such unity among the people. One pioneering study that also questions the vision of the peasant brotherhood is Frierson's aforementioned monograph, which features a broad scope of investigation, spans fiction and non-fiction, and examines both major and minor realist writers' portrayals of the Russian peasants. "Scientific" ethnographers and realist writers alike, as she demonstrates, were able to acknowledge and portray the communal peasant as but a moral figure of the past, or, "a failed image" in the postreform present (115). While her research examines numerous realist writers' literary portrayals of the people and interrogates the myths about the people's spirituality, the texts she analyzes frequently feature the most unambiguously negative image-making of the people—stereotypical characters such as the *baba* and the *kulak*. As she states, her research highlights "the distance between the sentimental images of A. N. Radishchev and N. M. Karamzin at the end of the eighteenth century and the harsh, even repulsive images of Tolstoy a century later"—those of the *baba* in *The Power of Darkness* and of the alcoholics in *The First Moonshiner* (20). At this critical point, my project should be demarcated from her research in that instead of such obviously darkened portraits of the people, I interrogate the most ambivalent literary portrayals. The texts included in my research may in part corroborate the myths about the Christian brotherhood, on the surface, while at the same time, convey the writers' unspoken messages about the peasant characters' corruption under the surface of their spiritual images.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In my final chapter, however, Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot* presents a different picture: at first glance,

My exploration of realist literature is, nonetheless, indebted to Frierson's project in that I also place literature in the larger context of other academic studies related to the Russian peasantry by both contemporary and nineteenth-century authors. These scholarly surveys to be compared with realist fiction, in my research, can be roughly divided into the following categories: historical studies, ethnographic reportings, linguistic analyses, theological philosophies, and ideological claims by politically biased thinkers such as Slavophiles or Westernizers. These categories of scholarship can overlap and their authors may be either nineteenth-century or contemporary scholars. As I stated above, academic surveys of the Russian peasant world, since Slavophilism and even Pan-Slavism became less influential in late nineteenth century, critics have consistently questioned the romantic myth of the people's spiritual brotherhood. In the following section, I will briefly review some academic revisions and subversive interrogations of the myth, in order to position my research in literature within this larger circle of intellectual observations.

### **Academic Studies Meet Realist Literature**

Although a faith in the people's superiority seems to be shared among Slavophiles and Westernizers, conservatives and radicals, a plethora of reviews and discussions that questioned the lofty image of the people emerged in academic writings. Starting in the 1850s, educated Russians had more access to the peasantry and the genres in which they

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the writer reveals his dark view on sectarian fragmentation. Despite the pessimistic tone of this novel, he also explores Rogozhin, the violent sectarian man, for his potential goodness, as I will argue. Nonetheless, with this opposition in Rogozhin's mentality, Dostoevsky accomplishes in creating ambivalent images of the Russian people that still may serve my argument in this research.

wrote—such as populist ethnographies and eyewitness accounts—helped them to address how the Russian people lived in equal poverty and slavery. For instance, the revolutionary and ethnographer Sergei Kravchinsky, known by his pseudonym Stepniak, claimed that the political authority of village communes was frequently possessed by kulaks (55). A stereotypical kulak in the latter half of the nineteenth century was the usurer in the commune and was “always likely to exceed its authority” (Stepniak, 132).

The ethnographer’s emphasis on this specific type of exploitative peasant reminds us that especially in postreform decades the Russian *narod* faced heterogeneous historical circumstances, the diversity of which cautions academics that one cannot easily summarize the Russian people’s mentality and personality. In *Peasant Russia: Family and Community in the Post-Emancipation Period*, Christine Worobec explores the pre-emancipation division of the Russian peasants among serfs, state peasants, and crown peasants (36-37). In part due to the differences between their tax obligations and legal statuses, their financial conditions featured great variety and inequality, even after the emancipations of all three categories of peasants in the 1860s: “glaring differences in obligations, land allotments, and land locations maintained disparities among former serfs and former crown and state peasants. In all respects ex-serfs were disadvantaged,” as Worobec notes, because they acquired insufficient arable and relied on their former estate owners (37). Moreover, since the autocratic state divided the entire population into hereditary estates (*soslovia*), the varieties of tax obligations, social securities, and cultural legacies among all the non-noble Russian people shaped some other classes beside *krest’ianstvo* (peasantry) into similarly inhibited and oppressed populations, for instance,

*meshchanstvo* (the petty townspeople) and *kupechestvo* (the merchantry). While the petty townspeople were taxable population, also subject to the *tiaglo* tax, the merchants faced less oppression, free of *tiaglo* obligation and corporal punishment. This diversity among the different classes of the Russian people in part explain both nineteenth-century and contemporary academics' attention to the inequality and conflicts among a seemingly homogeneous group of the "people."

For several reasons, the merchantry, despite their close contact with nobility and relative financial well-being,<sup>15</sup> is commonly categorized as companions of the peasants and a part of the *narod*. We should note the Muscovite cultural legacy that shaped the lives and mentality of both the Russian peasants and the merchants. Before the decrees of Peter I that ordered peasants and merchants to dress in a German style in the early eighteenth century, merchants, even wealthy ones, looked identical to peasants in their "semi-Asiatic," Muscovite caftan, long-flowing beard, *sarafan*, *rubakha*, and embroidery on their dresses. As their full beard shows, the merchants retained the religious devotion of all Orthodox men. Moreover, even in the first half of the nineteenth century, the merchants' familial patriarchal order and conservative world view still remained quite identical with those of the peasants. As Alfred J. Rieber notes, for example, the merchantry was a very secretive class in Imperial Russia, and a typical merchant led a conservative life that helped him pass down his heritage and monetary gain to the next generation. He argues that the merchantry was infamous for "sealing [children] off from

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<sup>15</sup> The merchants living in nineteenth-century Imperial Russia, allowed the right to have serfs like the nobility, seem to contrast with contemporary peasants in every aspect. Many cultural components of the Russian merchants' lives allow one to associate them with the peasantry and include them in the *narod*.

the outside world in the tightly knit, isolated life of the family” (329).<sup>16</sup> It is possible that merchants’ extreme vulnerability to the impact of wars and natural catastrophes motivated them to stay secretive and conservative, protecting the fortune that they amassed by either diligence or exploitation. Despite their everyday communication with and great respect for the aristocracy, merchants should be distanced from the progressive intelligentsia and grouped with the peasants, who were also reluctant to rebel. This vulnerability explains why many scholars consider such merchants in an unpredictable and rapidly changing society to be “a weak, dependent, and unstable entity” (West, “Historical Context,” 5). Although they often strove for ennoblement, they were otherwise never completely immune from financial difficulties: they had to purchase and renew their merchant identities to retain their current privileges annually. No wonder this patriarchal, superstitious, and passive *soslovie* should be characterized as part of the Russian people.

When we explore the academic fields that question the egalitarian and harmonious vision of such a diversified *narod*, first of all we should recognize numerous scientific commentaries on the value of the peasant commune. Liberal scholars constantly cast doubt on the presumption that village communes emerged as a result of the people’s voluntary and altruistic character. In the 1850s, pioneer historian Boris N. Chicherin

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<sup>16</sup> In part influenced by their worldview, centered on the tradition of the family, typical merchants also trusted their young lackeys or servitors (usually impoverished orphans who depended entirely on the merchant masters) for their loyalty, submission, and honesty, to a degree that they would let these surrogate sons inherit their property. As Rieber argues, “social origin meant little to the merchant in comparison with the advantages of having personally supervised the teaching and training of someone whose utter dependence on him was in many ways greater than that of his own son” (330). These servants’ mastery of business might not be comparable with the merchant sons’ foreign education; yet, they won the conservative merchants’ trust with their loyalty.

refuted the Slavophile view of communes as an organic product of ancient agricultural communes. Rather, he pointed out that it was governmental regulations that forced the people to share their tax obligation and bind their lives together. In her *Investigations into the Life of the People*, Efimenko also challenged the tenets of the ancient origin of agrarian communes. She noted that the modern communes in the northern part of the country were only established by the state and the noblemen and bear no connection to ancient Slavic culture (Petrovich). Even if satisfactory living conditions and a harmonious agricultural system were achieved in some peasant communes, in the late nineteenth century the intelligentsia were aware that communes in different parts of the continent developed at different paces and that any generalization of the peasants' communal life could be imprecise and subjective.<sup>17</sup>

In current scholarship, critics further question the idealized image of the Russian communes by exploring the people's living conditions in ordinary communes. As one author puts it, the Russian commune did not allow a self-governing community in the strict sense because "the peasants were to be subjected to the authority of the peace mediators (*mirovye posredniki*) . . . who had wide powers of both formal and ad hoc nature over the organs of peasant administration" (Emmons, 46).<sup>18</sup> Constant repartitions of land, or in other words, "compulsory rotation" of land held by the communal authorities, "deprived the individual farmer of any incentive" to work on his land (Paxton,

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<sup>17</sup> See Petrovich for other critics and authors, such as a civil servant named Lalosh and a historian, P. A. Sokolovsky, whose works elaborate on the gradual and uneven development of the communes across the country.

<sup>18</sup> According to this scholar, elders of the communities, *volost'* court, and district (*uezd*) authorities were also responsible for constituting the evildoing, authoritative administrations in peasant communities.



91).<sup>19</sup> Critics reach the agreement that the Russian peasants' state-sponsored communes did not function as bases of primitive socialism, but as power systems that produced equal misery.

Among these contemporary academic authors, Mary Matossian's ethnographic study depicts a dark but realistic picture of peasant households in detail. She examines the typical nineteenth-century farmsteads that were well equipped with barn, hayshed, kitchen, *bania*, and water, located in a gridiron-type layout of the village (2). Such a construction of each peasant household, or *dvor*, and the wider spacing of buildings in the village indicate that residents in the nineteenth century started to live less dependently on neighboring families and became less restrained by the traditional patriarchal order. She further points out that a large patriarchal *dvor* was by no means representative of Russian peasants' lives, and peasant families tended to split up after the 1861 emancipation (17). Thus, her research in particular attacks the Slavophile worship of the large extended families as traditional patriarchal households.<sup>20</sup> In addition, Matossian questions the notion of harmonious Russian family life, since the authority of either the patriarch

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<sup>19</sup> Also see Chubarov, 67. Similarly, Kingston-Mann surveys Russian statisticians in the nineteenth century who did some field research in local communes. These statisticians such as Chuprov, Orlov, Kablukov did not conclusively evaluate the peasants' economic situation in the pre-revolutionary era, and they were accused of being populist activists by the Imperial government. However, their field work was a neutral, non-political act, which tellingly demonstrated "mounting tax burdens and arrears in redemption payments that threatened the peasantry as a whole with economic disaster," as Kingston-Mann puts it (128).

<sup>20</sup> Reaffirming this observation, Worobec explores the common divisions of the patrimonial household prior to the death of the *bol'shak*, when the father and the son both agreed on his departure with a rightful share of the patrimony (*vydel*) or when the son left the family as a result of irreconcilable conflict between the two generations (*otdel*) (*Peasant Russia*, 79). Either type of breakup of peasant households, as Worobec states, was not unusual in the pre- and post-emancipation periods and particularly increased after 1861. Worobec analyzes various reasons for the more frequent phenomena of *vydely* and *otdely* after the reform, including the authoritative serfowners' controls, significant changes in military service after the Crimean War, migrant employment in urban areas, increasing generational struggles, and ineffective government regulation of family structure, among others.

(*batiushka*), whose power was reinforced by many masculine symbols (horse, axe, sexuality), or his old mother (*matushka*), demanded other family members' submission by force without ever being challenged (17-18). Her ethnographic report on the family authorities' ill treatment of their daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, and even the average peasants' brutality against their cattle and horses illustrates a violent, uncompassionate image of the Russian peasants in their daily family life.

To interrogate the Slavophile myths about the peasant *dvor* and family structure, Paul Friedrich takes a multi-disciplinary approach to observe the hierarchical family realities of the nineteenth-century peasantry. He underscores the informal sexual relationships between a patriarch and his son's wife, known as *snokhachestvo*, because these illicit relations tended to increase during the second half of the century and became a symbol of extreme patriarchy (*Language, Context, and the Imagination*). At the same time, Friedrich criticizes the matriarchal system that emerged among the Russian people, in which "the husband's mother tended to realize the stereotype of a distaff patriarch, sternly ordering about her isolated and often over-worked daughter-in-law" (ibid., 150). He further examines linguistic phenomena to demonstrate the inequality and disharmony among the peasants. For instance, the tension and conflict between a wife and her husband's sister, the *zolovka*, can be discerned from the root of the word—evil (*zlaia*); the unwelcoming attitude toward the bride, *nevestka*, is also linguistically manifest in the root of "unknown" (*nevestnaia*) which categorizes her as questionable or untrustworthy (ibid., 152-54). Friedrich's comments on the bride's dowry and the common wife-beating conventions echo another critic's opinions on such traditions as wives taking off their

husbands' boots (*razuvat'*) (Zabylynym, 117). These phenomena all demonstrate the expected submissiveness of the bride, the marital tension within the peasant household, and the hierarchical structure of the family. All in all, he concludes that the fatherly authority in the patriarchal peasant family, usually of the husbands and the males, is just like that of God and Tsar: completely irrational and beyond logical assumptions.<sup>21</sup>

As these examples show, both nineteenth-century ethnographers and contemporary historians attempt to buttress a subversive theory that the Russian peasants in their *dvor* were not necessarily spiritually united but hierarchically organized. When it comes to the 1861 Emancipation and the postreform living conditions in the communes, both nineteenth-century and contemporary surveys agree on one point: the Imperial State still possessed rights over the people's allotment of land and the people's attachment to their communities hardly changed. Unable to cut themselves off from the agrarian communes, the postreform peasants were trapped in their unproductive land and financial difficulties. Stepniak, writing a century earlier, claims that the peasants' miserable low income in post-emancipation years made them stand "one-third above the downright agrarian proletarian and two-thirds below the ordinary small resident owner" (46). A recent study by Francis M. Watters similarly underscores that the communal system aborted the possible development of agriculture and resulted in the peasants' extremely difficult economic conditions in postreform years.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See Friedrich, "Social Context and Semantic Feature," where he explains an interesting phenomenon in the folk speech of the Russian peasantry: the male, in most cases the husband, is equally addressed by *ty* under one category—the quasi-kinship *batiushka*, much like God and Tsar. As such, the male and the patriarchs enjoy the same hierarchical advantage of God and Tsar, which demonstrates that all these figures' "greatness passed a certain point" (285) to be addressed as *vy* anymore.

<sup>22</sup> Watters explores the two inseparable concerns of the peasants—repartition (economic benefit of the

The claim that the Russian peasants could hardly rely on their communes for their living and that the system of communal membership ruined their potential for prosperity is not solely based on these academic authors' observations of the people's financial difficulties and patriarchal order. Cultural and historical studies on the Russian peasants' psychology and personality also reveal the disintegration in peasant communities. For instance, Friedrich argues that individual peasants were deprived of any rights in relation to the central autocracy and their communities in Imperial Russia did not retain corporate functions in politics and government. His research makes it clear that peasants were more likely to act on an individual basis than in terms of classes (*Language, Context, and the Imagination*, 79). The only occasions when we see them more or less united as a class, surprisingly, were during their small-scale rebellions. Despite the frequently claimed submission and humility of the Russian people, a specific type of the peasants' "deliberate, conscious defiance," or *volnenie*, although on small and village scales (Kolchin, 305), was more than frequent, and in particular, "the year 1861 recorded the greatest number of disorders and conflicts since the Pugachev Rebellion" (Freeze, 170).<sup>23</sup> Even these disturbances, nevertheless, were "[i]n no case . . . organized movements," as another historian notes (Emmons, 55). Whether well organized or quite spontaneous, the *volnenie* phenomenon shows that the Russian peasants' "solidarity" in their villages was questionable and their "unity" only reflected their rebellion against the central state.

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peasants) and membership (liberal identity of the peasants) (140).

<sup>23</sup> Also see Paxton, for the escalation of peasant uprisings. This critic reports that "there were over 500 other uprisings in the years before emancipation and they increased in frequency, length and in seriousness in the 1840s and 1850s" (85). Also see Emmons, for her explanation of the reason why peasant unrest in the decades before 1861 emancipation was increasing. She points out that the people's prospect of emancipation, the rumors about liberation, along with the worsening conditions all resulted in their frequent rebellions.

These critics' and historians' messages leave the reader with an ambivalent impression of the Russian people's "brotherhood."

While the following chapters of the current study will attempt to incorporate more reviews from social and historical studies on the flaws in the peasants' brotherly commune, it is enough to state in the Introduction that various cultural facets of the Russian peasants' life reinforced hierarchical strata and a hostile environment in peasant society on a large scale. Among several of the most comprehensive studies on the Russian peasants, Frierson explores the internal conflicts and hierarchical oppression ubiquitous in the peasant world, as a result of the appearance of various new stereotypes of peasants such as gray peasants,<sup>24</sup> kulaks, and evil female peasants. These peasant figures, under her scrutiny, were cold-blooded individuals, susceptible to the temptation of materialism and Darwinism.<sup>25</sup> She analyzes a paradox that because these peasants were victims of the hierarchical chain and could hardly resist the oppression of powerful peasants, they could survive only by turning themselves into egoists, thus reinforcing the hierarchy and disharmony in their communities. Worobec's monograph is another comprehensive project that demonstrates most of the Russian people's righteous and altruistic manners as actions motivated by the surveillance of the community, rather than voluntary moral deeds. Friedrich's examination of the "asymmetrical usage" of *ty* and *vy*

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<sup>24</sup> Gray (*seryi*) peasants had become the widely accepted peasant prototype since the mid-1870s, according to Frierson. Unlike kulaks, gray peasants were the common and ubiquitous peasants, weak and deprived of the intellectual strength needed to survive in the changing world. They usually had to struggle with the postreform conditions by immorally exploiting other peasants and confronting the kulaks. Due to their lack of moral strength, they were hardly immune to alcoholism, crimes, and blasphemy of the traditional rural milieu of life.

<sup>25</sup> Friedrich, in *Language, Context, and the Imagination*, comments similarly on the rapid economic transformation in Russia by 1900 and one of its byproducts—"an increasingly prominent type of wealthy and avaricious peasant—the kulak" (80).

in conversations between peasants further echoes these larger narratives explored by Frierson and Worobec, demonstrating ubiquitous hypocrisy and hierarchy in rural Russia. He states that beside the simple difference of age, numerous other socio-economic factors divided the peasant community into hierarchical levels. In his view, patriarchy reached its acme and hierarchy of gentry had a great influence on the manners of peasants, “in most of the larger households of the urban lower classes and of the peasants of the central ‘industrial’ zones” (“Social Context and Semantic Feature,” 282). McDaniel’s study also interrogates the all-embracing Slavophile concept of the Russian idea, which glorifies the people’s primitive Christian unity and their blind worship of the Russian Tsar. He reduces the Russian idea to an intellectual product that ultimately profited a backward autocracy.

To summarize, through two centuries, ethnographers, populists, and contemporary critics from the perspectives of various disciplines have presented a less romantic picture of the peasant world and revised the myth of the peasants’ brotherly community. Stepniak notes the simple fact that in the late nineteenth century, mortality in rural Russia was even higher than that in the towns—a unique situation in Russia, different from other European regions (88). He argues that the development of the industrial revolution in imperial Russia had long enslaved numerous peasants to working in factories and dealing with an ambiguous new identity, and thus, the Slavophiles’ pastoral vision of the rural world had long been unrealistic.<sup>26</sup> In the field of art history, scholars identify a tendency

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<sup>26</sup> Stepniak analyzes the imperial government’s exploitation of the people at the convenience of industrial development. As the ethnographer summarizes, “the whole economical life of this colossal Empire—railways, banks, finances—so far as interior policy goes, is concerned with the manipulation of the agricultural produce” (32).

that “while many paintings of peasant life reflect the idea of the inherent worth of the peasantry, many show a more critical attitude” and even “the disruption of the peasants’ world,” in particular in the “ethnographic” paintings by the Itinerants (*Peredvizhniki*) (Hilton, 196; Frierson, 118). It seems that these academic explorations reach an agreement that in the late nineteenth-century dark countryside, “tensions could no longer be resolved by an appeal to tradition,” as one author puts it (Zelnik, 190), and misunderstandings of the peasant communities can never explain the reality of the rural population.

While numerous studies interrogate the myth of the people’s spiritual unity and communal utopia, little has been written on similar tendencies in realist literature. I intend to apply such a skeptical approach to the myth of brotherhood in realist literature, analyzing how major realist writers counter the “narrative” of the people’s spiritual brotherhood in diverse ways. To uncover realist writers’ tendency to challenge the philosophical, political, and cultural myth of the people, I analyze a selection of canonical works and relevant minor pieces. With five chapters, each devoted to a distinct feature of the people’s brotherhood, this study questions various aspects of the myth in the field of literature. The purpose is to reveal a common trend among these realist texts and the writers’ consistent pattern of deviation from the Slavophile myth.

However, this research does not equate realist literature and academic studies, since realist writers, in my view, subvert the myth of peasant brotherhood in an even more profound way through their explorations of the people’s spirituality. As we have seen in the above overview, both nineteenth-century and recent scholarly surveys demonstrate, to

a degree, the dark sides of the peasant communities, based on rich socio-economic detail in their works. Since the second half of the nineteenth-century, radical thinkers and liberal authors no longer protected the autocratic Imperial regime, and their dark portrayals of the people's postreform lives demonstrate their suspicion of the people's brotherhood. However, due to the ideological and political messages these authors intended to express in their writings, they placed more emphasis on the hypocrisy of the Imperial government and the socio-economic hardship of the people. What their academic studies do not explore is the spiritual darkness of the Russian people. Regardless of their critical views on certain aspects of the Slavophile myth and utopian vision of the peasant brotherhood, these authors usually conclude with an optimistic message of the Russian people's spiritual strength. Even if these academic studies acknowledge the disintegrated moral condition of the *narod*, the authors seem to blame the socio-economic environment for the people's fall into materialism, egotism, and conflicts. In stark contrast to such environmental explanations of immorality and humanity, realist writers, as this study attempts to show, reveal the people's darkness and disunity by relying on more than their observations of socio-economic reality. In their literary texts, they attempt to present both the peasant reality in detail, based on their critical observations of the postreform social environment, and the peasant spirituality in depth, derived from their psychological analyses of the human soul. To underscore the way realist literature portrays a more profound picture of reality than scholarly surveys can do, I start each chapter with academic authors' discussions of a specific issue related to the Russian people and follow with realist writers' discussions of the same subject.



## Plan of Chapters

Four writers appear most frequently in this research, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev, and Leskov. I consider them most important for my demonstration of the absence of the people's brotherhood in realist literature, because of the proximity of their ideologies to the Slavophile myth. Like Slavophile and conservative critics, these realist writers approach the people as a united class that is distanced from the gentry in a socio-economic sense and superior to them in their spiritual conditions. In particular, Dostoevsky's post-Siberian worship of the people and Leskov's vivid depictions of lower-class artisans reflect the popularity of the Slavophile myth and intellectual curiosity about the *narod*.

At the same time, although fictions by Ivan Goncharov and Chekhov also enrich the portraits of the Russian people in realist literature, and some of the chapters below analyze their depictions of *narod*, I refrain from going into too much detail on these writers' positions in the myth, for several reasons. To use Chekhov's fiction as an example, we may state that although his "interest in the peasant milieu can be traced to his earlier works" (Winner, 138), his "peasant cycle" is fleeting, in comparison to the consistent enthusiasm of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. His peasant stories written in the late 1890s and early 1900s (when Slavophilism and even Nikolai Danilevsky's pan-Slavism had lost their popularity among the intelligentsia), cannot override his statement that "he saw in classes only the vicious selfishness of the herd" (Rayfield, 186). Familiar with numerous professions in urban society, Chekhov identifies salvation and spirituality not

in classes but in separate personalities, as he claims, because the moral power and strength can be scattered and located all over the masses of different classes, be it the nobility, *raznochintsy*, or peasantry. Moreover, Chekhov's literary career is equally concerned with ethics and aesthetics, placing nature, landscape, and the setting in the center of his art, which also demarcates him from the most frequently explored writers in this dissertation. His moral message reveals his view on human society as an ephemeral phenomenon in nature, which further differentiates his ideal from the other writers' vision of the people as the salvific embodiments of Russian messianism and cultural nationalism.

The first chapter provides a new angle for examining realist literature as a critique of the Russian peasants' communal life. While Turgenev and Leskov portray righteous peasant characters, my discussion is focused on the hierarchy these novelists set up between the evildoers and the innocent peasants in their community. In his novel *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevsky also illustrates a hierarchical relation between the peasants in Mokroe and the desperate Dmitri. The peasantry as a whole stands up to sentence Dmitri; yet, as I will show, Dostoevsky likens their collective judgment to the Grand Inquisitor's authority. Much like the Inquisitor, the Mokroe people and the peasant jurors treat the sinner like an incorrigibly evil man and banish him from their community. The Russian people's spiritual experience in their communal world is cast under doubt in this chapter.

The second chapter explores flaws in the Russian people's national character by focusing on their drinking problems. Dostoevsky argues that the people's alcoholism

should not be interpreted as the outcome of their miserable life in a cycle of oppression.<sup>27</sup> Tolstoy expresses his similar anxiety that we should not only blame autocracy and modernity for the people's alcoholism, but also caution the people of their animalistic impulse to deaden their own conscience by drinking.<sup>28</sup> Much like the drunkards who stifle their conscience, Russian peasants who practice traditional rural rituals also seem to realist writers to muffle their inner voice of conscience and genuine feeling of love, as I will show in the third chapter. Goncharov's novel *Oblomov* (1859), for instance, shows the way the serfs' meticulous and faithful practice of traditional calendar rituals only exacerbates the Oblomovka residents' desire for material happiness and ruins their spiritual life. While nineteenth-century folklorists and Slavophiles regard the idyllic pastoral culture as superior to that of European capitalism for its influence on the people's spiritual experience and moral sense, realist writers expose the loss of spirituality of many peasant characters living in the rural idyll.

The fourth chapter focuses on realist writers' depictions of lower-class women as another focal point from which they deviate from the myth of brotherhood. Solov'ev supplements the Slavophile messianism with his ideal of the eternal Russian feminine, Sophia, whose image, both high and low, pure and impure, bridges an imperfect humanity and the holy Church. His philosophy resonates with the Russian literary

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<sup>27</sup> In *A Writer's Diary*, when Dostoevsky talks about drunken peasants, he regrets that he "couldn't help but explain many of the shameful and cruel things about the Russian people in too one-sided a manner" (1: 111). He cautions that one should not interpret the people's brutalities, such as alcoholism, solely relying on either the environment or the peasants' human hearts.

<sup>28</sup> See Tolstoy, "Why Do People Stupefy Themselves?" for the novelist's idea that the people are addicted to alcoholism and other immoral habits, "so as not to feel the pricking of conscience after committing some act contrary to conscience, or so as to bring themselves into a condition to commit some act which is contrary to conscience" (145).

tradition of mythologizing the beauty of suffering women. This chapter, by contrast, turns to some negative portrayals of peasant women that counter the myth. The final chapter analyzes another minority group among the Russian people—the Old Believers. Many ethnographers and historians argue that Old Belief was not on the fringes of Russian culture, but “a living and vital remnant of traditional Christianity,” and that moreover, its followers—the sectarian people—were an integral part of Orthodox culture (Robin, 182). Scholarship has long embraced the “multilayered interaction of ecclesiastical image and popular veneration,” official Orthodoxy and sectarian faiths (Levin, 44). However, in contrast to this vision of a religious unity among the people, Leskov’s *Cathedral Clergy* (1872) and Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*, to take two examples, offer a counterargument against these scholars’ claims and illustrate the tragic disunity among Old Believer characters.

In several chapters, I aim to demonstrate that although realist writers may have expressed their romantic longing for the peasant brotherhood in their pedagogical writings or public journals, they explode this myth in their fiction. I pay attention to realist writers’ claims in their journalistic or public writings, because these statements may contrast with the writers’ idealizing portrayals of the people in their literature. For instance, in the first chapter, Dostoevsky’s commentary on the new postreform jury system in *A Writer’s Diary* facilitates my argument that the novelist seldom had faith in the people’s ability to judge a sinner or make any spiritual connection with sinners. The sources in Chapter Two, moreover, include Tolstoy’s post-conversion didactic articles about the people’s alcoholism. In his public and journalistic writings, the novelist speaks

more critically and negatively of the people's drunkenness. In a similar vein, Turgenev's and Tolstoy's biographies, which provide information about their intimate relationships with peasant women, are useful in Chapter Four, since they help me to approach these realist writers' ambivalent views on women. By focusing on the spiritually troubled and disunited peasants in these writers' works, my study reveals realist writers' strong anxiety that in the panorama of the Russian people's world, moral integrity is still in peril, and a Christian brotherhood is yet to be founded.

## Chapter 1

### The Disharmonious Community of the People:

#### Righteous Peasants, Wicked Peasants, and Authoritative Peasants

The first chapter of this study explores the Russian peasants' community in fiction, by comparing it with the myth of the peasant commune (*obshchina* or *mir*) in academic studies and ethnographic pieces. The Russian commune, dominant in the peasants' culture, history, and daily life for centuries, greatly influences the intelligentsia's understanding of the people living in rural Russia. The communal structures were considered superior to western individualistic principles, especially by nineteenth-century intelligentsia, who recognized the moral value of the communal system in which "land was not owned individually but periodically redistributed on the basis of family need and size" (McDaniel, 31). On the other hand, as explored in the Introduction, academic writings and ethnographic reports acknowledge the negative socio-economic influence of the Russian commune on the people's life. As numerous scholars claim, during postreform decades, people still lived under the guardianship of the commune, were not detached from their community due to redemption payments and legal restrictions, and thus endured even greater hardship.

Nonetheless, the intelligentsia's critiques of the communes are quite different from realist writers' descriptions, because the former ones speculate that the people have the moral strength to overcome the socio-economic difficulties and unite with each other in their *mir*. It seems that the myth of the people's brotherhood is still present in these authors' depictions of the people's communal form of life. In contrast, realist writers were less convinced of the people's spiritual integrity and illustrated a more disharmonious peasant world. As I will discuss in the first half of this chapter, Ivan Turgenev and Nikolai Leskov set up a contrast between righteous characters and wicked peasants. They depict the community in rural Russia as a hierarchical space populated by both altruistic peasants and egoistic evildoers. The second half of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, which also nuances the harmonious image of a larger range of lower-class people. As I will show, Dostoevsky enlarges the concept of the people to include rich peasants, merchants, petty townspeople, military officers, clerks, and non-Russians only to expose these people's conflict, brutality, and authority in a hierarchical folk world.

### **Myth of the *Mir***

In this chapter, I use the terms "community" and "commune" interchangeably. The 1861 emancipation legislation did not formally recognize the traditional commune (*mir* or *obshchina*), and instead established the village community (*sel'skoe obshchestvo*) and its assembly (*skhod*). As Christine Worobec points out, the postreform peasants were too familiar with the traditional communal culture shaped by *mir*, by its household heads,

village assembly, and collectivist life patterns inherited from past generations, to accept the artificial *obshchestvo* and *skhod* superimposed on their lives (*Peasant Russia*, 18). Thus, the abstract postreform concept of *obshchestvo* was more distant from the real peasants' perceptions of their lives, while the informal social institutions of villagers in peasant communes—households and assemblies—as I will introduce below, proved to be consistently important for our understanding of peasants' community and culture.

Because I introduced some academic studies on the difficulties of communal life in the Introduction, in this section, I will focus on historians' and ethnographers' romantic idea that the Russian commune, despite the existing inequality and differentiations among its members, still provided the Russian people with a cultural heritage and nurtured their humility or altruism. Most ethnographers' and historians' evaluations of the commune start with a nostalgic depiction of the traditional peasant household, or *dvor*, which can be multi-generational and huge. In his influential 1888 ethnography, Sergei Stepniak speaks positively of the peasant family, especially its distribution of property. He recognizes the fair principles of any material division that cannot be influenced by kinship but “determined by the quantity of work each has given to the family” (79). Controlled by the head, *bol'shak*, of the family, usually the most experienced and respected senior male peasant, such a peasant family was hierarchical but conservative and unified. As one historian points out, even though it is hard to conclusively tell whether the durable family tie “realized a peasant ideal or whether it was a burden to [peasants],” it to a degree “offered refuge and continuity to survivors, young and old” and maintained all peasants' equal rights to survival (Czap, 362). The simple fact that a single peasant living by



himself was very rare and more laborers meant more allotments of land for the family may be enough to convince these critics of the patriarchal peasant family's function of unifying the people in their *mir*.

Established on connections between such durable peasant families, the Russian commune is believed to be highly functional in the peasants' lives and is never neglected in any academic writings. It is widely held that a peasant was expected to protect the interests of his *mir*, and in turn, as N. A. Minenko puts it, "mutual support and mutual obligations" in the communal circle helped each member struggle through daily difficulties (162). A Russian peasant—not only a laborer, a mower, a laundress, but also a dream-interpreter, a verse-leader, a matchmaker, and a midwife could contribute to the living tradition of the community as the custodians of patriarchal order and moral standards of all the villagers (Gromyko). These commentators interpret the peasant *mir* as providing life resources for the people, and at the same time, they view the people as contributing to their communal world.

Many scholars in recent publications underscore the financial difficulties of communal peasants on the one hand, and claim the strict patriarchal order and traditional values that solidified them on the other hand. For instance, although Worobec's study acknowledges that peasants lived in daily competition and quarrels, still emphasizes that they were inclined to "share resources with each other and [...] help out their poor neighbors, for they themselves might one day need the help of others" ("Masculinity," 90). The focal point of her survey remains the people's cooperation toward a better peasant economy. As Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby states in a recent study, peasants in

central Russia kept pregnancy and new births of babies secret since strangers might cause harm to the pregnant mother and the newborn child (32). Strangers and alien elements that should not be present in front of a mother and a child were called “the evil eye.” Although her comments on folkloric superstitions seem to demonstrate that village people were not open to outsiders, she surveys numerous ethnographers’ observations on the rich rituals of child delivery in village culture and reaches a positive conclusion that “the community, represented first by the midwife and then by the rest of the village present at the christening party, assumed responsibility for the child’s welfare” (37). Even a researcher such as Steven L. Hoch, who harshly critiques the exploitative institutions in peasant communes, does not deviate from the myth of a united communal world. He summarizes the way commune dominated the people’s lives because it had influence in distribution of *tiaglo* (field work), collection of taxes, divisions of families, and disputes in court, among many other crucial administrative matters. Nonetheless, after his critique of the communes’ all-encompassing control of the peasants’ lives, the author still concludes that “[w]hile communal life was certainly not harmonious, in most instances the *mir* had the serfs’ common well-being at heart” (303). These authors both address the negative characters of the communal system and praise the moral strength of the communal style of living, in order to qualify their studies as objective and convincing evaluations of the *mir*.

This style of academic writing is typical in nineteenth-century ethnographic works as well. Stepniak’s ethnography features a similar pattern of discussion, balanced between objectivity and idealization. He provides details into the people’s hardship and

disintegration, never oblivious of the conflicts between the poor people and the kulaks, or “*mir*-eaters” who “by good-luck or individual ability, have saved money and raised themselves above the common herd” (34). However, despite his awareness that “[d]ifferences in wealth always existed among our peasants,” Stepniak maintains that the dignified Russian peasants did not devote their lives to labor to amass wealth, but sanctified labor as “an all-sufficient ground for self-respect and for considerate treatment from his fellow-men” (169). His narrative again comments on the evil materialism of the people but finally idealizes the same people’s moral depth in general.

Such academic approaches to the function of the commune interpret its role in the people’s lives not only as an administrative ministry, but also as an invisible organic tradition. While the commune adjusted all peasant households’ income as a semi-formal administrative organ, “the informal structure had an important place in life of the commune,” as Boris Mironov argues (17). In an informal way, communes established extensive interactions among commune members, through peasants’ oral moral codes and villagers’ regular meetings. Peasants thus valued stories about exemplary villagers and witnesses of productive agrarian work. Minenko’s study on the life and holidays in Siberian villages, for instance, shows that Siberian people regarded hospitality as an ethic code and condemned theft as a forbidden sin. Just in the way she illustrates a morally united body of Siberian villagers, M. M. Gromyko highlights the informal code of behavior among Russian peasants, since it was the routine meetings and gatherings in Russian villages that facilitated “formation of individual reputations” (239). Stepniak’s ethnography further affirms the Russian peasants’ hospitality, “gregarious benevolence

embracing all men,” and “family attachment to most, or to very many of the members of his mir” (85). The myth of the people’s brotherhood is apparent in these depictions of the Russian peasants’ courtesy, respect, gratitude, and hospitality as their widely recognized codes of behaviors.

Scholars and historians also reveal their insights into the function of informal organizations among communal members, which further helps them to illustrate a positive picture of the people’s world. For instance, an informal organization, the peasants’ “church fraternities” (*tserkovnye bratstva*), emerged spontaneously among the people who conformed to communal order and believed in collective prosperity. The church fraternities had subsisted since the fifteenth century across different Slavic cultures, as D. K. Zelenin notes (385). Informal organizations on a regional and even local scale, moreover, also helped to solidify the Russian peasants, as many authors’ ethnographies and studies show. One example is the life story of the self-taught Siberian peasant A. N. Zyrianov. He contributed to informal fraternities among the Siberian peasants in the 1860s, by collecting artistic and creative works of the peasants, establishing a school for peasant children, and opening an unofficial library for his fellow villagers. His collections offered books to peasants to read and circulate throughout the district. As Minenko claims, “the circle of peasants who enjoyed a book was not limited to those who ‘could read and write,’” but widely penetrated the peasant world of friends, acquaintances, and relatives (176), forging a self-organized and organic unity of the local peasant “brothers.” These aspects of the people’s communal life, which obviously

counter the negative commentaries on the people's economic inequalities and financial conflicts, reinforce the scholarly myth about the people's brotherly union.

Because they produce a realistic picture of the peasant world and address the existing differences among its members, these academic and ethnographic discussions have been considered to be valuable and reliable sources. As Zelenin concludes, in agriculture practice and economic activity, peasants strived for an elimination of individualism. They blurred the boundary between capitalistic economy and "mutual responsibilities" (*vzaimnye obiazatel'stva*) because they felt "responsible to accomplish a series of joint works" (*obiazany prodelat' riad sovmestnykh rabot*) (362). Mironov further argues that the peasant "I" constantly "sought to immerse himself in the 'we' of the commune" (19). These authors point out that even in the 1860s and 1870s, the peasants' joint production in the agrarian field continued to narrow their circle of activities down to the local and rural society, and as Mironov puts it, "[e]thnographic sources reveal an amazing homogeneity in material culture, customs, and habits among the peasantry, especially within the confines of a single commune" (17). These authors believe that any distinction between the individual and the group in these communes was not tolerable and allowed. Apparently, they did not truly question the idealized vision of the peasants' psychological belongingness, generational continuity, and brotherly unity.

We should note that the contemporary scholars' and the nineteenth-century gentry's optimistic vision of the people's communal fraternity stems from the attraction of a "mysterious" image of the *narod*. As Tim McDaniel points out, the Russian gentry did not consistently live in their country estates in rural Russia, especially before 1861. The

noblemen's knowledge of the peasants' lives in rural Russia was limited, also due to the extremely weak social ties between different villages. He notes that each communal hinterland existed in isolation, undisturbed by modern transportation and urban life (42-43). Such backwardness and seclusion stimulated the gentry's curiosity about the "exotic" image of the people's communal world and may contribute to these authors' illustration of this world in a romantic style.

To understand the reason behind the nineteenth-century gentry's and the contemporary critics' romantic depictions of the communes, we should place their scholarship in the cultural context of Slavophilism and interpret it as a search for the Russian identity. As Susanna Rabow-Edling argues in her monograph, the Russian intelligentsia's exploration of the Russian communes, since the second quarter of the nineteenth century, had been motivated by their frustration with the nation-wide westernization and their own westernized identity. They searched for a spiritual Slavic soul, as opposed to their European Petrine identity, in the unique character of rural Russia and the uncontaminated worldview of the people. The Russian commune appeared to embody the spirit of the Russian idea and thus seemed superior to the elite. Landowners, government officials, and revolutionary populists idealized the commune in daily life in part due to their prideful belief that "the Western path can and should be avoided in the name of a harmonious and egalitarian Russian society" (McDaniel, 31). For these authors, the communal life of the people was both an ideal of romantic nostalgic flavor and a solution for practical economic difficulties. At the same time, the historians and the ethnographers did not build a myth of the Russian commune to show any hostility toward

Europe. As Rabow-Edling argues, the Slavophile and patriotic tone in the intelligentsia's works on the people's *obshchina* expresses the authors' ambition that Russia not only has a European cultural identity, but also is on a noble mission to solve Europe's moral issues, in particular with the indigenous people's spirit inherent in their human interactions, land redistribution, and social obligation to help other members in a traditional Russian commune (21-22). During and even decades after the Slavophile-Westernizer debate on the pride and position of Russia, the intelligentsia's passion for the Russian idea and their search for the Russian identity may still explain their promotion of the peasants' harmonious communal life.

Other explanations of some radical ethnographers' overall positive evaluation of the Russian people's communal life and spiritual integrity can be found in these authors' biographies and life experiences. A. N. Pypin, an important radical sponsor of ethnographic studies in Imperial Russia, argues that ethnographies should be "consonant with the emerging insistence on clear-eyed objectivity in approaching the peasant and his world" and candid in acknowledging the dark sides in the peasant society (Frierson, 27). His leadership directed the ethnographic image making of the peasants in the 1870s toward objectivity. What is more, in the post-Emancipation publication arena readers and editors of popular journals and newspapers also valued current information, quick responses to contemporary events, and fresh impressions about the countryside.<sup>29</sup> However, the scientific objectivity of the genre was also undermined by the ideological

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<sup>29</sup> See Frierson, 30. The critic argues that poverty-stricken ethnographers such as Uspensky, under the pressure of the postreform journalism, were expected to produce reportings from the countryside quickly and consistently.

and educational backgrounds of the authors. For instance, Stepniak devoted his career not only to ethnography about the Russian peasantry, but also to propagating the revolutionary and terrorist movement. The populist leader Petr Lavrov (1823-1890) spoke highly of Stepniak's monograph *Underground Russia: Revolutionary Profiles and Sketches from Life* (1883), in particular of his propaganda of the true substance of the Russian revolutionary movement among European readers. The expertise of the ethnographer in radical and populist thought caused him to see the Russian people's morality in a promising light. In a similar vein, ethnographic portrayals of the peasant commune by Gleb Uspensky (1843-1902), who was also in close contact with populists, are equally romantic due to the author's experience as a *narodnik* and his belief in radical ideology. Uspensky spent his adolescence reading Vissarion Belinsky, Aleksander Herzen, Nikolai Chernyshevsky, and Nikolai Dobroliubov. He was a law student, involved in student unrest, and a contributor to the democratic journals *The Contemporary* (*Sovremennik*) and *Notes of the Fatherland* (*Otechestvennye Zapiski*) in his youth. His adulthood was spent under the influence of the exiled Lavrov and his own eyewitness experience in Paris and London.<sup>30</sup> Uspensky's biography in part explains that his semi-fictional and semi-ethnographic writings may certainly provide abundant scientific information on rural culture—economics, machinery, animal behavior, and agriculture; yet, his educational background, ideological bent, and the contemporary publication environment also help explain his idealization of the people in his writings

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<sup>30</sup> After his European travel in 1877, Uspensky moved to the countryside, hoping that his struggle for existence can be carried out not in isolation but in the communal environment in the villages. He became more cynical about the capitalistic West and more optimistic about traditional Russia, having “turned to the village with an expectation of some kind of moral superiority in its reputed collectivism and hoped to find his own ‘moral healing’ there” (Frierson, 91).



(he claimed that the spiritual attachment of the peasants to their soil, if ever destroyed, was apparently due to the encroachment of capitalism and technology into the pastoral agricultural world) (Mondry). These authors' biographies to a degree explain the many contemporary intellectuals' approach to the Russian peasantry that is in part scientific and in part romantic.

As Stepniak's and Uspensky's examples show, no matter how objective and convincing the radicals' and the academics' writings can be, such authors did not address one key issue that is important to the current study—the condition of the Russian people's souls. To demonstrate the informative but “superficial” ethnographic style of these authors, we may use the publications of twelve letters “From the Country” by a former chemist and military officer Aleksander Engelgardt (1832-1893) as an example. Having appeared in *Notes of the Fatherland* from 1872 to 1884, Engelgardt's “From the Country” in particular address the Darwinian scientist's eyewitness observations in Batishchevo (his family estate in Dorogobuzhskii District, Smolensk Province) and his intimate contact with local people, after he was exiled to the countryside in 1871 under suspicion of radicalizing his students. Engelgardt's ethnographic reportings are less romantic, more objective than average populist writings, and succeed in exposing the difficulties, destitution, and immorality of the post-Emancipation Russian agricultural population.<sup>31</sup> However, the features of his Letters demonstrate both “his scientific bent

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<sup>31</sup> See Frierson's preface to Engelgardt's ethnography, in which she points out that Engelgardt is not a populist in the strict sense, although he dressed, farmed, and lived as peasants did. His “harsh criticism of peasant women, of kulaks, of the exploitative urges of the average peasant, and his refusal to attribute a superior, naturally communal morality to the peasantry” demarcate his complex and objective view from a populist's romantic idealization (12). He belonged to no political camp and his writing is certainly not consistent with typical populist appraisals of the people.

and his energetic optimism,” as his translator Frierson summarizes (79). Although we acknowledge the chemist’s scientific training, contribution to objective research, empiricism inherent in his exemplary ethnographic writing, we sense that the Letters do not explore the postreform people’s darkened spiritual condition. For instance, in the second Letter, Engelgardt candidly portrays a peasant girl’s disease and death from the absence of medical care. She passes away the day after carrying water, breaking flax, and feeding animals in coldness and pain, not at all pitied by surrounding peasants, but rather “cursed” by them, as they complain that “toward spring, when she could have worked, she died” (47). Engelgardt explains these villagers’ cold-bloodedness with a comment on the difficult socio-economic environment: constant financial pressures in their personal relationships dominate their worldviews and constrain their behaviors. Much like Uspensky, Engelgardt blames the postreform environment for various types of immoral behavior and exploitive relations among the peasants. Published as a medium for spreading scientific social knowledge about the peasantry to the elite class, populist literati, zemstvo activists, and legal scholars, in a journal run by Nikolai Nekrasov and Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, the Letters were created to be practical and informative, not concerning the people’s spiritual character. Thus, even the most qualified ethnographic authors who immersed their lives in the rural Russia they loved—academic populists—were not motivated to write on the spiritual condition of the Russian people.

Fiction by realist writers, unlike these works by their radical contemporaries, expresses a more profound view on the peasants’ communal life in that they address both the socio-economic reality and the spiritual conditions of the peasant souls, the latter of

which, in their views, cannot be confined to the official Orthodox belief system or its Christian interpretation of the people's hearts. When Stepniak makes his concluding remarks on the people's hardship, he claims that the Russian people's religious depth and Orthodox faith motivate their spiritual potential for love and unity. He speculates that the contrast between the enormity of the popular sufferings and the paucity of agrarian disturbance is indebted to religion, or, "a sort of safety-valve in the new evolution of religious thought which nowadays covers almost the whole field of the intellectual activity of the Russia laboring classes" (206). While the ethnographer assumes that the people religious beliefs appeased their discontent and rage, realist writers hardly base their interpretations of the human heart entirely on the channel of Orthodoxy or Christianity. In his later life, Dostoevsky rejected the superstition and blindness inherent in official Orthodoxy and turned to man's "active love" as what shows his Christian spirit.<sup>32</sup> Leskov and Tolstoy were even converted "Anti-Christ," either denouncing or denounced by Orthodox Church.<sup>33</sup> These writers who abandoned the theory of environment and rejected the blind worship of Christianity can illustrate the spiritual condition of the peasants in realistic detail.

### **The Hierarchical Peasant Community**

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<sup>32</sup> See Ivanits, *Dostoevsky and the Russian People*, chapter 6, in which she argues that *The Brothers Karamazov* distinguishes Father Zosima's active love from Orthodox saints' self-mortification. Since 1878, when he started serious work on the novel, Dostoevsky had adopted the genres of popular cosmology, allusions to Genesis, and Catholic theology as counterpoints to Zosima's teaching and Alyosha's love. Dostoevsky's development of religious issues is not confined by Orthodoxy but is stylized in an organic and dialogic way.

<sup>33</sup> Leskov never outright denounced the Orthodox Church; rather, his literature was approved by the Church officials. Nonetheless, throughout his life Leskov strived to illustrate the "righteous" Russian people—those who dare to divert from the dogmatic conformity to Christianity and attempt to live with their own code of virtue. See Sperrle, *The Organic Worldview of Nikolai Leskov*.

In this section, I explore the peasant world portrayed in sketches and novellas by Turgenev and Leskov. Both writers depict imperfect communities that do not unite the peasants but perpetuate their hierarchical disintegration. In *Notes of a Hunter* Turgenev portrays people who do not seem to love or care about the virtuous and holy ones. They live for an egoistic end, which the writer explores as a universal moral flaw of humanity. Leskov's novellas such as "Deathless Golovan" (1880) and "The Spook" (1885) lay out even more striking contrasts between the virtuous peasants and the superficial gossipers. The majority of the commoners in his fiction exploit absurd folk superstitions to condemn and isolate the righteous peasants.<sup>34</sup> Both writers illustrate Orel villages as disharmonious communities of hostile peasants.

To start with, Turgenev's portrayal of the Russian peasant world in *Notes of a Hunter* is ambivalent. Some critics follow the canonical understanding that in the sketches Turgenev celebrates the people's spirituality. For instance, Kevin Windle emphasizes the writer's feeling of nostalgia and patriotism. Thomas Newlin affirms a Slavophile vision of universal harmony inherent in the connection between man and nature in these sketches.<sup>35</sup> As Irene Masing-Delic claims, the sketches combine philosophical pursuits of the intelligentsia with the mythological strength of the people: "the author is best called a Russian who knows that his country must learn from the West ... but still fervently hopes that his people will make a significant contribution to world culture" ("Philosophy, Myth,

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<sup>34</sup> It is commonly held that the Leskovian characters must be virtuous in an "organic" sense, without adhering to dogmatic Christian beliefs. In Benjamin's words, a righteous character is "seldom ascetic, usually a simple, active man who becomes a saint apparently in the most natural way in the world" (86).

<sup>35</sup> Newlin points out the cultural meaning of hunting among early nineteenth-century aristocrats. The hunter's propensity for contact with the countryside landscape is typical among Slavophile writers in the mid-nineteenth century. His hunting speaks to the organic, ecological worldview of Tolstoy and the Slavophile Aksakovs.

and Art,” 448). While these scholars claim that Turgenev celebrates the aesthetics of the Russian countryside and the spirituality of the Russian people, they also find Turgenev critical of rural Russia, the country estates, and the Slavophile philosophy. Turgenev claimed to be a Westernizer and was in close contact with Vissarion Belinsky, Mikhail Bakunin, and other “men of action.”<sup>36</sup> Despite his compassion for the suffering people, his doubts about Slavophilism influenced his depiction of the countryside. For instance, as Jane T. Costlow notes, the epilogue of *A Nest of Gentry* (1859) functions as an expression of Turgenev’s hesitation between a satire and a celebration of the Russian idyll. The sketches may similarly demonstrate that Turgenev stands neutral when he portrays the peasant world. At the very least, what may have influenced the tone of the sketches is not politics, but his romantic involvement with Pauline Viardot and his sentimental emotions in this love affair. Turgenev left Russia in 1846 for Pauline, during the period of time when he was producing some of the early sketches; at the same time, his attitude toward serfdom, when he started with the sketches in the 1840s, was not unambiguously compassionate but “permeated with ambiguity” (Ripp, 23).

Instead of straightforwardly extolling the Russian people, Turgenev illustrates in his sketches the timeless values of beauty and suffering in humanity. As is well known, he started the project in Paris in 1847 and the peasant protagonists he described, who will be the main characters in his sketches, are not institutionalized serfs (field serfs attached to landowners’ private estates or farming population settled on state lands). He instead was

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<sup>36</sup> Turgenev, however, remarks that Westernizers “did not have anything that could be called a political program. They only interpreted more vigorously the same philosophical scheme that the Slavophiles employed” (Ripp, 55).

in favor of the portraits of distinctive individuals—house serfs, successful businessman serfs, overseers, and bailiffs (Hanne; Ivanits, “Three Instances”). The political issues of the time and the urgency of emancipation were obviously not the novelist’s central interest. The gap between the gentry and the institutionalized peasants is also de-emphasized in the sketches. The hunter narrator portrays the serf characters, their living conditions, and their life cycles as intact and undisturbed by his intrusion as an outsider (Hanne, 62). Almost no economic conflict between the two groups of protagonists coming from contrastingly different classes is underscored in the sketches: although the narrator “was revolted by his mother’s behavior toward her serfs, [he] did not interfere with it” (Yarmolinsky, 108). The sketches thus present an independent world of the peasants and illustrate an authentic picture of their intact life. This space of the people leading their undisturbed communal life was designed to be characterized by hierarchies and divisions that are common to any human society. As a matter of fact, when Turgenev started his work on the sketches, he still considered himself a poet and was struggling with unfavorable critiques of his plays. Despite Belinsky’s recognition of the first sketches in 1847, Turgenev was in a melancholy state in the following years when he continued to work on this project. He suffered from Belinsky’s 1848 death (Freeborn), his separation from Pauline in 1850, and his unhappy life with his controlling and pretentious mother in Turgenevo (Yarmolinsky, 113). In part due to his pessimism and feeling of powerlessness since his return to Russia, he intentionally wrote many of the sketches as sentimental rather than celebratory pieces. More importantly for our purposes, his pessimism finds expression in the tensions between individuals in the sketches. As

one critic puts it, the exposure of these conflicts among the people implies that for Turgenev, “not merely Russia, but the world as a whole can be divided into two general groups: the persecutors and those persecuted” (Aslanova, 51).

Critics examine various types of universal hierarchies that Turgenev explores in the sketches, among which, for instance, is the antagonism between the people’s society and the surrounding landscape. On the one hand, the hunter observes the universal truth of humanity’s dependence on nature by depicting the characters’ intimacy with land and nature, for example, in the sketches “Khor and Kalinych” and “The Tryst.” He seems to indicate that Kalinych lives in harmony with nature and Akulina synchronizes her spiritual experience with the rhythm of seasons. These peasant characters are ruled over by nature and natural laws in the remote countryside. On the other hand, as Costlow notes, the sketches also reveal the way the Russian peasants exert the violent power of their axe on the forest and landscape, and their “weapons” further “reflect the larger, hidden brutality of a system of human ownership of other humans” (“Who Holds the Axe?” 17). The tension between peasants and nature in these sketches is a reflection of hierarchy and opposition universal to all human societies.

It is thus not surprising that the first sketch, “Khor and Kalinych,” explores the opposition between two good-natured peasant individuals. Turgenev famously illustrates an “antagonism” between “a traditional authoritarianism and a traditional peasant quietism,” or a social, progressive Kalinych and a conservative, old-fashioned Khor, as Dale E. Peterson puts it (“The Origin and End of Turgenev’s *Sportsman’s Notebook*,” 353). Peterson defines this curious and fascinating contrast between Khor and Kalinych

as a “precarious balance of the meek and the mighty, of the Slavophile’s martyrs of quietude with the Westernizer’s rowdies of rebellion, in one compounded cultural whole” (ibid., 356). Rather than narrowing his project down to a gentry’s compassionate portrayal of the suffering peasantry, Turgenev seems to explore the powerful and the powerless that are present at various levels of the sketches as different forms of the universal tension in humanity.

Another sketch that reflects such a hierarchical reality is “The Living Relic,” set in a village featuring oppression and isolation of the holy and virtuous heroine. In this sketch, we see that Lukeria meets the hunter in Spasskoe, Orel province where Turgenev spent his childhood with his mother. This context only darkens the story, because Turgenev was one of those aristocrat-writers whose attachment to country life did not necessarily guarantee his worship of rural Russia. As Michael Hughes notes, many Slavophiles “were in reality almost as strongly oriented toward life on the country estate as they were to the city itself,” and cultural elements of the Russian countryside depicted in Turgenev’s sketches can certainly be considered “the evils of a system that subordinated human beings to personal servitude” (“The Russian Nobility and the Russian Countryside,” 124, 120). Costlow also points out that despite Turgenev’s correspondences with Sergei Aksakov, “at stake was the sense of the meaning of the Russian past—tragic for Turgenev, idyllic for Aksakov” (“History and Idyll in *A Nest of the Gentry*” 57). As we learn from the story, Lukeria begs the hunter to lift the burden on the peasants in the household of his mother, which implies that the Spasskoe people suffer from oppression and illustrates a dark picture of their socio-economic conditions. Thus, Turgenev is



sending his narrator-hunter back not to a place of romantic idyll, but to the place of dreadful memory of his mother's tyranny and the serfs' suffering.

Although it is usually argued that the good-natured peasant girl Lukeria embodies the suffering souls of the entire common folk (Frost; Windle), the text is further ambivalent in that it exposes the impurity of the people's hearts and the material mundanity of the peasant world. As we know, this sketch was one of the three last ones in his project. Two sketches, "The Living Relic" and "The Knocking," were specially added by Turgenev in the 1870s to restore a balance in his project between his love of the peasants' depth and his anxiety over their backwardness, as Peterson argues. He claims that Turgenev's two last sketches were aimed at a refutation of the conservative critic P. V. Annenkov's interpretation of his sketches as an anti-serfdom project and thus reflect Turgenev's "mature suspicion that the physical and cultural environment of inner Russia is a surprisingly complex coexistence of contradictory signs" ("The Completion of *A Sportsman's Sketches*," 58). In this sketch, Lukeria narrates a few conflicts between her unhappiness and others' happiness. We learn that regardless of her misery, her past lover Vasya has long ago married another young peasant woman, who has given birth to healthy children. It is also on rare occasions that Lukeria is visited by fellow peasants: a priest, children, and past acquaintances. The holy, isolated woman is portrayed as forgotten and alienated by the indifferent and ordinary people surrounding her. Even the so-called man of science and humanitarianism is brutal and violent to her (as the doctor demands, "don't you try to stop me, because they've pinned a medal on me for my contributions to science" (361)). Although the doctor is not a local villager, this scene is a

scathing critique of the modern medicine that reaches and pollutes the peasants' world with hypocrisy, authority, and a hierarchical human relationship. The contrast between the surrounding people, who are mostly absent and physically strong, and the suffering woman, who is mostly spiritual but miserably isolated, echoes the contrasts between Lukeria's depth and other people's superficiality, as well as between Lukeria's reunion with her real husband Christ and her distance from her earthly lover (Frost). Lukeria has to endure the pain and beg people not to "help" her anymore. No wonder she asks the hunter rhetorically—"[w]ho can help another?" and answers herself—"[p]eople must help themselves" (361). In this sketch, below the surface of idolization of the suffering soul, Turgenev seems to tacitly admit that on a village scale the people have turned indifferent to and detached from the holy meaning of life, preferring a materialistic and mundane understanding of it. While Turgenev iconizes Lukeria as a saint, she in turn speaks for her author to condemn the absence of brotherly bonds in her surrounding peasant world.

Leskov's righteous men also become the target of isolation in the fictional peasant community. Leskov is capable of aligning the righteous altruists and the wicked egoists in his fiction, in part because he develops the style of storytelling and portrays their conflict from an outsider's perspective. As Walter Benjamin notes, "people imagine the storyteller as someone who has come from afar. But they enjoy no less listening to the man who has stayed at home, making an honest living, and who knows the local tales and traditions" (84). Leskov's storytelling talent, thus, is to narrate "at home in distant places as well as distant times" (85). His style of the *skaz* fully makes use of the voice of the

folk to depict the world of the people both close and faraway, intimate and intact.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, Leskov's peasant characters narrate stories not as sacred legends but as fictional folktales. As folklorists put it, folktales are invented narratives, vividly described as real stories, and passed down orally from generation to generation. They appear in a pure, simple, and concise form for the purpose of the storytellers' entertainment and amusement (Bascom, 26). The peasant characters in Leskov's novella are indeed not only storytelling, but also narrating folktales, passing down narratives in a highly unserious way and at times for a dramatic effect. These villagers' storytelling in the form of folktales is a highly ambivalent behavior that helps the novelist reveal their ulterior incentive and mundane worldviews.

In "The Spook," for instance, a young boy from the gentry grows up among peasants who narrate an "old story" (*staraia skazka*) in Kromy; yet, their storytelling styles leave the reader with the impression that the righteous men in their town are treated as peripheral and inferior figures. For instance, Borka, a worker from Orel, is alienated by lower-class peasants in town because he was once an executioner. Borka's little daughter, a sinless child, is further condemned by many villagers to be someone "better ... not to have been born at all" (455). Even though Borka promises that he will never visit his daughter if she can be sheltered in any family, no Christian peasants accept the innocent child into their house. The girl is, like her father, "free to die by any fences or in any ditch they liked" (455), as the narrator-outsider puts it. Since the father and daughter wander as

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<sup>37</sup> Benjamin argues that the story of a good *skaz* narrator is within the realm of the folk characters. Leskov the storyteller "could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story" (108-109).

pilgrims, the peasants in this story seem to be Orthodox believers united only to discriminate against the peripheral figures.

The central figure of the piece, however, is Selivan the spook, called a *pugalo* his whole life because he was born with a weird mark on his face. The innocent Orel peasant works diligently in Kromy but is isolated by people who believe false rumors about the man's evildoings. In town, all the people insist that Selivan traps merchants, noblemen, and priests in a dilapidated inn where he lives and kills them inside for their money. That one should never approach the spook's inn becomes a "muzhik commandment" that all villagers obey. For many years living on the edge of the village, Selivan thus "avoided people and even seemed afraid of them; he never appeared in town, and nobody saw his wife at all" (458). As it turns out, nonetheless, the righteous man takes care of the executioner's daughter, who is disabled due to her early hardship in childhood as a wanderer. The townspeople have long been oblivious of and indifferent to the wanderers' whereabouts and the righteous man's self-sacrifice.

In his depiction of the village through the life stories of the righteous peasants, Leskov obviously shifts his focus from their virtue to the other peasants' cold-bloodedness. The author takes note, for instance, of the way the old peasant storyteller Ilya seems to always smile with his left eye when he tells his version of the folktale about Selivan. This ominous sign perhaps indicates the possession of the devil in this man. What is more, all the Annushkas—maids and peasant women in the household—constantly pile on the existent folktales about Selivan's demonic actions. They fuss around about murders, blood, dead bodies that they absolutely did not see but vividly

imagine, to badmouth the poverty-stricken peasant and blame him for all misfortunes. For decades, while Selivan is silent about his sacrifice for a wanderer, the common villagers exert their power, accusations, and even violence on the righteous figure. As the narrator notes, through the villagers' folktales, they absurdly interpret their brutality against Selivan as their victimization by the spook. Among surrounding superstitious people, peasant storytellers claim that Selivan is a monster and they had to fight against his "shapeshift" into a pig or a rooster. In such fairytale and folktale terms, these peasants create and describe the way a blacksmith has a battle with a pig and another mill hand attacks a rooster around Selivan's inn. The real stories, however, are probably about two young and strong peasants who kill Selivan's weak livestock and are chased away by Selivan. One such folktale tells that when Selivan "rolled out to the road one time as a new, freshly tarred cart wheel and lay in the sun to dry, his ruse was discovered and smart people smashed the wheel to bits, so that both the hub and the spokes flew in all directions" (463). Through this "bloody" picture Leskov depicts the brutality of the villagers and in particular their irrational outburst of rage against someone who is innocent. Their folktales help the villagers to justify their own ill treatment of others and, thus, further enable Leskov to darken the image of these peripheral figures.

In "Deathless Golovan," another novella that revolves around folktale narratives, Leskov similarly portrays the righteous peasants as isolated by irrational and uncompassionate villagers. While the title may leave us with the impression that Orel peasants worship Golovan for his holy and deathless virtue, especially given that he is modeled out of a real Orel man from the lower class, Nikolai Sergeevich Aleksandrov,

who miraculously cured around a hundred men and women during the 1848 cholera epidemic,<sup>38</sup> the fictional villagers' attitude does not reflect Leskov's celebration of the real-life figure Aleksandrov. Given Aleksandrov's huge workload in his station, the distance of his specialty from medical knowledge, his unusual comfort approaching cholera victims, and the mysterious unknown medicine he offers to the Orel people (Ashikhmina, 81-83), Leskov considers him a man of miracles (*chudesna*). In a similar way, Golovan serves and cures people during a plague in the novella. This legendary figure is righteous and spiritual in Leskov's view exactly because he seems "invisible" and ordinary among the Orel people, when the village is peaceful and secure. A righteous man belonging to the people should never be celebrated or famous. Nonetheless, the narrator seems disappointed by the villagers' indifference to the righteous hero's story. Regardless of Golovan's contribution to other people's survival during the plague, no villager is capable of reporting or narrating his life story. Their attitude toward this figure is decided not by respect for his "miracles," but rather judgmental suspicions of his unknown religious background: due to his isolation from all others, "it was not known what parish he belonged to... His cold hovel stood out so much on its own that no spiritual strategist could add it to his jurisdiction" (298). Although the gossipers start to call Golovan "deathless," this title is not out of respect but out of the villagers' "simplicity akin to foolishness" (276), as the narrator notes critically. When it comes to the peasant woman Pavla, Golovan's female companion, we also learn that no villager

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<sup>38</sup> The title of the story and the plot about the plague demonstrate that the novella is inspired by a real story about a legendary Orel man, the station master Aleksandrov. He was famous during the cholera that happened in numerous Orel villages in June and July 1848, which Leskov witnessed and survived (Ashikhmina).

knows her identity and life story. Uncertainties about who exactly she is, what her relationship with Golovan is, and how she ends up living with Golovan's family demonstrate these two peasants' isolation and obscurity among the others.

Much like the narrator in "The Spook," the narrator of "Deathless Golovan" also condemns the superstitious peasants' wrongful accusation against the righteous ones of some horrible sins they never commit. It turns out that Golovan looks after the miserable peasant woman Pavla, who is brutally abandoned by her evil husband and fellow peasants, just as Selivan takes care of the executioner's daughter. Although Golovan is a virgin who never has a sexual relationship with this woman, the rumors in town say that this woman is "Golovan's sin," insinuating that their relationship is illicit and carnal. The narrator is candid about the stubborn villagers' absurd judgments. He notes that "[w]hether she knew that her name was 'sin' I am not aware, but that was her name among the people, who stand firmly by the nicknames they invent" (285). The villagers' corruption of the righteous people's story is again at the center of the novella. In both novellas, Leskov sets up a contrast between the innocently virtuous peasants and the judgmentally brutal commoners to reveal a hierarchical peasant world that lacks mutual love.

### **The Disharmonious Peasant World in *The Brothers Karamazov***

While Turgenev and Leskov focus on the egoists and the gossipers in the rural areas in Orel, for Dostoevsky, lower-class people do not have to literally come from the countryside. Dostoevsky redefines the concept of *narod*, with the world of the peasantry

expanding to embrace coachmen, *meshchane*, merchants, clerks, *raznochintsy*, police inspectors, and even poverty-stricken gentry (Tvardovskaia). Among Dostoevsky's lower-class characters with ambiguous identities, the Rogozhins in *The Idiot*, for instance, completely deviate from the stereotypes of spiritual Russian peasants. The family name Rogozhin (*rogozha*) reminds the reader of bast and the image of uncivil, vulgar peasants. The Rogozhins seem to be both merchants in a literal sense and peasants in their mindset. However, the Rogozhin family is made of at least three equally materialistic men. Parfyon's conflict with his father over the diamonds he sends to Nastasya Filippovna escalates into a life-and-death battle. Parfyon's brother is no better, stealing the gold on the coffin of their father. His father goes even further to disgrace himself by begging for his diamonds back in front of a fallen woman. Dostoevsky portrays the way the Rogozhins' familial sphere turns into a dark house, where Parfyon is left to live his secretive life amassing money and wrapping his cash in a sturdy paper bundle. The money he acquires is also used for insultingly purchasing Nastasya Filippovna, who symbolizes a female Christ. What we see in this merchant family, thus, is these family members' lack of *terpenie* (patience, or humility), violent outbursts of rage, and materialistic understanding of life. The bizarrely immoral behaviors of the Rogozhins subvert the image of the Russian merchantry, famous for their traditional patriarchal understanding of family and their submissive non-rebellious style of life in socio-historical studies, as is explored in Introduction.

Just as he depicts the Rogozhins' ambivalent identities, Dostoevsky portrays the *narod* in *The Brothers Karamazov* by grouping together peasants, merchants, military



officers, and even impoverished nobility to interrogate the concept of the *narod*. In the changing social background in the postreform era, gentry living in poverty or former members of the gentry expelled for misconduct frequently engaged in manual labor. Army officers endured an extremely prolonged process of promotion before 1861 and continued to support their families by committing embezzlement and other misdemeanors.<sup>39</sup> In the novel, such a dark reality is reflected in the financial difficulties of Dmitri Karamazov and Captain Snegirev. In Dmitri's jury, former members of the gentry and *raznochintsy* are also perceived as a group of "peasants," as the narrator puts it. In Mokroe, the folk songs that fascinate Dmitri in particular portray merchants as desirable mates for peasant girls. As Valentina Tvardovskaia notes, in the novel, "boundaries between *meshchane* and the peasants from surrounding areas [are] merely provisional," and Dmitri's adventure in Mokroe clearly involves people from farmers, cooks, servants, janitors, watchmen, *meshchane*, and merchants, forging a picture of various lower classes (68).

Critics usually interpret the novel under the influence of the title's connotations of "brotherhood" and the novelist's Pushkin speech about universal harmony.<sup>40</sup> In Book

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<sup>39</sup> See Tvardovskaia for a thorough examination of mixed social classes in this novel that are almost equally financially troubled and thus reasonably regarded as the same "people." She argues, for instance, that "[t]here is nothing now to distinguish the landowner Maksimov (who ekes out a living by exchanging one master for another) and the retired captain Snegirev (who lives with his entire family in a simple peasant hut) from society's down-and-outs. Snegirev, forced into retirement after committing some misconduct while in the army, has fallen into extreme poverty along with his family. . . . A landless gentleman has to work for hire simply to exist" (57).

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, Murav's argument that Dostoevsky's Pushkin speech, Zosima's teaching, and Alyosha's words all bring into being some new communities. As the afterglow of the Pushkin speech, the novel may be interpreted as an ode about universal brotherhood. Also see Berman, who argues that Dostoevsky attempts to replace vertical, hierarchical human relation with horizontal, caring sibling love in this novel, represented by Zosima and Alyosha's "horizontal" relationships with surrounding others. These critics reaffirm Dostoevsky's optimistic messages about "brotherhood" in his novel.

Eight and Book Nine, Dmitri's adventure in a "folkloric underworld," in Bakhtin's term, or, at the "spiritual banquet of the folk," as Harriet Murav puts it (142), also seem to be a military officer's eyewitness experience of lower-class characters' emerging brotherly alliances. For instance, Eric Naiman identifies a semi-homosexual relationship between Kalganov and Maximov: their homosocial bond at least functions "as a channel for the heightening of the growing love—and passion—of Grushenka for Mitya" ("Kalganov," 405). Both peripheral figures and main characters seem to bond with each other spontaneously in the magical underworld.

Nonetheless, despite Murav's claim about the people's "banquet of spiritual unity" in this episode, we should never neglect the signs of these people's conflicting relations, which lurk under the surface of their fraternal unity. Naiman examines the inherent inequality between Maksimov and Kalganov, and as another critic points out, the hierarchy at this folkloric banquet among the people may even reflect the writer's vision of brotherhood: "Kalganov and Grushenka do not fully succeed in integrating Maksimov into their lives," which may be the signal of Dostoevsky's pessimism that "this new unity will not, in fact *cannot*, last" (Matzner-Gore, 429, 432).<sup>41</sup> Given the ambivalence of the people's underground, I will focus on these chapters of Dmitri's "reunion" with the people in the folkloric world to discuss whether this may testify to the people's brotherly ties or brutal conflict. First, as I will show, the group of people Dmitri meets during his adventure, despite its seemingly united force, is characterized by inner conflicts, chaos,

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<sup>41</sup> The failure of Maximov's circle in Mokroe may parallel, on a larger scale, the failure of Alyosha's teaching by the stone. As Matzner-Gore argues, "when the boys shout 'Hurrah Karamazov!' in unison, marking the height of their brotherly harmony, there are hints of inequality within the group that could destabilize it in the future" (433).

and disharmony. The unique folkloric underworld in Mokroe nurtures not only their love and caring for one another, but also their cold-bloodedness and brutality against others. Second, I will demonstrate that the capricious and brutal people play the role of authoritative jurors and judges who condemn the sinful one among them, without mercy on his human heart. I argue that much like Turgenev and Leskov, Dostoevsky presents a broken and disharmonious peasant world dominated by power, conflict, and hierarchy through Dmitri's adventure among the lower-classes.

In my view, Dmitri's travel to Mokroe and "banquet" with Mokroe people demonstrate the hierarchy inherent in the people's world, because he is once included in the peasant community but eventually abandoned by the same *narod*. Dmitri's close contact with these people makes him entirely different from Ivan, whose sole connection with the Russian *narod* is Smerdyakov. As Vladimir Kantor argues, Ivan's double is Smerdyakov, from "a different social stratum . . . *from the people*"; yet, this connection with the lackey only further distances Ivan from the soul of the people ("Whom Did the Devil Tempt," 94). By contrast, Dmitri is instinctually attracted by the restless underworld of the people. His boyhood and youth passed in disturbances and disorder, just as his wild personality in adulthood, perhaps provide him with the potential for adapting his own life into the people's chaotic underground. Maximov's dance that was anything but "well-bred, aristocratic" "roused no great admiration in anyone but Mitya" (371). The "merchandise" and commodities such as fruits, cigars, tea, coffee, sugar, gypsies, and folk songs greatly satisfy Dmitri's passion for celebration. As the narrator notes, "[i]f the peasants had asked him for money at that moment, he would have pulled

out his bills and given them away right and left” (369). In turn, the people also temporarily accept Dmitri as one of them and even take care of him as a beloved brother. After Dmitri’s failure to procure money from two rich peasants, in the endless forest where he wanders around an old merchant appears abruptly and gives him a ride back to town. At the bar where Dmitri arrives in blood, Petr Ilyich, the deeply disturbed and scared lower-class clerk, determines to “nurse” the blood-stained man and refrains from gossiping about his visit. When Dmitri attempts to catch Grushenka and her past lover, her maid Fenya, usually unreliable and unhelpful in the affair between Grushenka and Dmitri, suddenly seems “eager to be of the utmost service” (339). On his life-changing journey to Mokroe, Dmitri is further “saved” by the tender forgiveness of his coachman, Andrei, who genuinely promises him: “God will forgive you for your kind heart” (352).

Although it seems that Dmitri is included in the people in a celebratory folk banquet, which culminates in his spiritual marriage with Grushenka, the folk queen of Russianness, we should note that after the banquet in Mokroe, the people seem to suddenly exclude him from their unity. Basically the merchandise spree features a disordered style and a material form. The merchants know that Dmitri pays three thousand rubles for the peasants’ “coarseness and rudeness” (354) that is half a brotherly celebration and half an alcoholic spree. It is possible that the “union” of these people with Dmitri was to a degree materialistic and their growing friendship is superficial, derived from the commonest physical pleasure from sweets, wine, gypsies, and orgies. Right after the arrest of this man, moreover, the peasants and the merchants suddenly become oblivious of his expense of three thousand rubles on their commodities of poor quality and turn their back

to him, in a cold-blooded and merciless attitude. For instance, all the coachmen grumble about Dmitri's departure and refuse to drive him. A grumpy driver Mavriky Mavrikyevich dares to shout at the officer and warns him not to address him as his "old fellow." Dmitri especially recalls that the same man had a different attitude last night when treated to drinks in the tavern. The coachman agrees to transport him, but "got into the cart, sat down *heavily*, and, as though without noticing it, *squeezed* Mitya into the corner" (431; italics mine). The peasant is portrayed as violent and irritated, while Dmitri is reduced to a timid and mild figure. This episode is entirely different from his ride with Andrei—both a physical journey to Mokroe and a spiritual journey to forgiveness. Among the hundred people watching Dmitri taken away, "two or three voices" (431) respond to his farewell. For some unknown reason, the innkeeper Trifon Borisich seems to deliberately refuse to make any reply, "with both hands behind his back, and staring straight at Mitya with a stern and angry face" (431). These "good people," as Dmitri calls them upon his departure, seem to suddenly become hostile, aggressive, and superior to the suspect.

The internal hierarchy between the hostile peasants and the humiliated suspect should be further reconsidered in the postreform socio-historical background of Russian peasants serving as jurors and judges. In *A Writer's Diary*, we learn that Dostoevsky calls for the people's acknowledgment of their inherently evil nature: he requires the people to "tell the truth and call evil evil ... with the thought that we, too, are guilty," because this painful awareness of all the people's sin will punish them all, "purge us and make us better" (1:135). Here, he positively evaluates the people's punishment of the evil ones at

court for its spiritual influence on all the people surrounding the sinners. However, as I will show in the following, in the fictional world of *The Brothers Karamazov*, the people's capricious attitude toward the sinner implies that they are a collective body of brutal judges who condemn the sinner and banish him from their community. I attempt to set up a contrast between the novelist's optimism about the peasant jurors' verdict of guilty against the evildoers, in his *Diary*, and his disappointment at the peasant jurors' banishment of Dmitri, in his fiction. Even though these chapters on Dmitri's adventure and interrogation successfully depict his spiritual resurrection and humility among the folk, which is frequently noted by critics, this part of the novel also opens up the possibility that the people's underworld features authority, judgment, and hierarchy.

### **The Spiritual Peasant "Judges" in *A Writer's Diary***

To explore this contrast, I focus on Dostoevsky's semi-journalistic writing in this section and his nuanced fictional narrative in the next. At first glance, Dostoevsky blames the environment for some of the peasants' brutal actions in *A Writer's Diary*. In his entry "Environment," he distinguishes the environmental influence on the people from their inherent inclination for brutality. However, he obviously puts more effort into his identification of unexplainable evil impulses inherent in the peasants' souls. In doing so, he points out that "the Turks and the tormentors of Christianity over the Russians" (2:970) are the generators of evil, among whom "bestiality is elevated as a virtue" (2:969). When the boundary between brutality and virtue is blurred among the invaders, "bestiality is raised above everyone like an idol and people bow down to it, thinking

themselves virtuous precisely for doing so” (2:969). In his view, even those who are not necessarily born to be evil by nature become susceptible to evil, and the Russian *narod* may also be equally subject to demonic influences of invaders. Dostoevsky in particular claims that the peasant mind reacts to suffering, sin, and evil not only as socioeconomic difficulties. In his view, the people are afflicted and troubled by misery and evil in their peasant world in a most deeply spiritual way. As one critic points out, “while for Chernyshevsky and Tolstoy ‘the people’ comprised the common peasantry, obsessed by the thought of land and bread, Dostoevsky’s back-to-the-soil (*pochvennik*) doctrine viewed that same ‘people’ as the vehicle of a spiritual idea that made no allowance for any desire for earthly sufficiency” (Serdiuchenko, 72). It is thus possible that the people experience their suffering and face their tormentors in the deepest spiritual way that may influence the condition of their souls, in Dostoevsky’s view. The collective corruption of the people’s souls, tempted by the demonic ones’ evildoing, is apparent in *Notes from House of the Dead*, where Gorianchikov, the novelist’s semi-autobiographical narrator, discovers the way cold-blooded executioners and brutal peasant convicts can dominate the body and blood of their fellow convicts with corporal punishment and physical violence. The “bestial characteristics” of the executioners and the prisoner-muzhiks may tragically influence almost all convicts’ souls and encourage them to violently abuse others (Knapp, 328). The “embryo” of the demon is, as Gorianchikov observes, in every single peasant in this dark world of the prison. The examples of the Turks and the prisoners demonstrate that for Dostoevsky, even the most righteous lower-class people

cannot always resist the temptation of brutal evildoers, and numerous individuals may succumb to demonic idols in their spirit and soul.<sup>42</sup>

It thus becomes understandable that in *Diary*, Dostoevsky is capable of depicting some Russian peasants as not only polluted by the environment but also corrupted in their souls. In the entry “Environment,” he offers the example of a peasant muzhik who whips his wife in an animalistic and monstrous way, motivated not by his socioeconomic difficulties but also by his abusive nature.<sup>43</sup> His heinous action against his wife parallels his hanging chickens head down “just for his own pleasure” (1:141). The writer equates the peasant in that condition who “himself did not know why he was beating her” to a beast. Such wicked, violent muzhiks are usually “very large, heavy-set” and tend to marry thin, skinny women (1:142), as he notes, which is perhaps a sign of their instinctual inclination for violence against women. Their child, the writer further notes, also grows into a wild creature, usually a thief, who “sometimes knows nothing at all—neither where he lives, nor what nation he comes from; whether God exists, or the tsar” (1:310). Dostoevsky’s *Diary* makes it clear that from a hostile familial environment, the child genetically inherits his father’s dark soul and is born to be deprived of spirituality.

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<sup>42</sup> Although in his *Writer’s Diary*, Dostoevsky offered an image of the *narod* as the embodiment of his Christian ideal (Frierson, 48), we should note that the Siberian years of the writer, spent in hard labor with peasant convicts, may not have contributed to the writer’s future vision of the peasant as a Christ incarnate. Ivanits argues that the writer only associated peasants with the image of Christ later in the 1870s. In *Notes from the House of the Dead*, we cannot conclusively tell that the lower-class characters embody the truth of Christianity for Dostoevsky. Also see Frank’s biography of Dostoevsky that reports on the writer’s first years in Siberia, spent in horror and shock at the behavior of the convicts, instead of any spiritual conversion to his future Christian faith in the people. Dostoevsky, who based his understanding of the Russian people on reading French Social novels in 1830s, was astonished and traumatized by the real people’s immorality, manifested in their various sinful behaviors in prison and hard labor—prostitution, theft, physical violence, drunkenness, and a complete lack of compassion.

<sup>43</sup> However, in Frierson’s view, Dostoevsky “refused to concede that such cruelty was inherent; rather, it was imposed, and thus only a superficial layer over the *narod*’s fundamentally spiritual nature” (49).



In the *Diary*, Dostoevsky makes the following comment to praise the people's potential: "though the criminal and the barbarian do commit sins, they still pray to God, in the higher moments of their spiritual lives, that their sins and abominations may cease and that everything may derive from their beloved 'idea' once more" (2:1351). In this comment, although we can read Dostoevsky's solid belief in the Christian essence of the Russian people, we also sense his pessimism that the peasants now still suffer from their "unsatisfied longing for truth" (2:1348) without achieving their spiritual brotherhood. Dostoevsky summarizes the ambivalent spiritual condition of the peasantry that "[t]he people are continually seeking the truth, some outlet to it, and they cannot find it" (ibid.). By admitting that they "have not lost their longing for something new, for the truth" (ibid.), he also tacitly admits that until all the people find the truth—and some have not yet found it—they have sinned to the greatest degree.

In another entry, "Apropos of a New Play," Dostoevsky further analyzes the evil incarnate among peasants who consciously know that they are incorrigibly evil. A debauched peasant girl Matryosha, who conspires with a rapist in drugging Masha, her friend, "does these evil things not only unaware of any wrong but fully convinced that she is doing her former friend Masha a favor, a good deed for which the girl will later thank her" (1:243). Although Dostoevsky still pities Matryona, because she represents the postreform, victimized generation and "scarcely knows that she is debauched" (1:243), much like the child thief mentioned in "Environment," the novelist cannot condone Matryona's parents and conspirator. Masha's brother in particular, a peasant drunkard who "sells his sister without any pangs of conscience," in Dostoevsky's view, "realizes

that vice is vice and knows what virtue is; but he has consciously to love vice and to despise honor” (1:244). The young peasant has detached himself from the outside world, succumbed to the devil’s temptation, and completely abandoned his sense of goodness. With such comments on these two young peasants’ conspiracy, Dostoevsky underscores the peasant sinners’ voluntary fall into moral abyss.

Thus, the people, in Dostoevsky’s view, are conscious that they can be evil in spirit and commit grave blasphemy. The peasants in his *Diary* characterize criminals as simultaneously unfortunate and sinful. In the cases of the eight-year-old thief and Masha’s brother, both sinners have the peasants’ sympathy but they are considered “doubly unfortunate, but also doubly a criminal” (1:139). For Dostoevsky, these peasants’ understanding of the sinners’ unhappiness is profound in that regardless of the polluting “air” or “environment,” they candidly acknowledge that “they also share the guilt in every crime . . . that the environment depends completely on them” (1:138). In these *Diary* entries, Dostoevsky praises the Russian people for blaming themselves for their own sins and their own failures to realize goodness on earth.

Dostoevsky states that these peasants must candidly and severely judge the evil ones for their sin. Although the people are more likely to succeed in a humanitarian cause in court since they at least do not blame the “environment” as the defense attorney does, the writer still cautions the peasants about their “bookish humaneness,” which means they may show a compassionate attitude toward the sinners as “a merely imitative gesture that derives not from a genuine feeling but from a cultural script” (Schur, 589). In the above-

mentioned case, for instance, when the local peasants in *volost*' court<sup>44</sup> do not judge the abusive husband seriously, deciding that his suffering wife should "learn to live together" with this muzhik (the *volost*' court even forced their daughter to go back to the brutal man, although they quite "knew what awaited the child" (1:143)), the writer takes issue with the people's "mercy" and calls for the peasants' courage to "call evil by its name." He claims that to pardon out of our fears only means to irresponsibly "flee from our own pity and acquit everyone so as not to suffer ourselves" (1:135). In his *Diary*, it is clear that Dostoevsky is confident in the possibility that the Russian peasants can judge the sinners, purge themselves, and improve the environment.

Dostoevsky's claim in his *Diary* that Russian peasants are capable of resurrecting "Russian justice" in court should be contextualized in the tradition of the *volost*' court in all peasant communities. Peasant communes are famous for the customary judicial system, which consisted of only peasant judges from neighboring village communes. These peasants' judicial domain was extensive, from civil cases to criminal offences. As Stepniak notes, the ten peasants "sitting as judges are not bound to abide in their verdicts by the official code of law. They administer justice according to the customary laws and tradition of the local peasantry" (79). In other words, they had the right to judge according to their "original notions as to juridical questions" (*ibid.*), instead of strictly obeying the modern system of law. Dostoevsky seems to view the Russian peasants'

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<sup>44</sup> The *volost*' court emerged in 1861 Emancipation legislation as a peasant court dealing with civil cases according to customary law (*obychnoe pravo*). Peasants were expected to be the judges to their own petty cases.

instinctual sensitivity to justice and inborn capacity to judge in a way similar to the ethnographer's.

In his *Diary*, Dostoevsky's confidence in the peasant jurors' courage to punish the evil ones and have an impact on their fallen souls may further derive from his overall positive attitude toward the 1864 Legal Reform. As Gary Rosenshield notes in *Western Law, Russian Justice*, in the 1860s, the elite were optimistic about the new court system and its function of educating the people. The reputation of the Judicial Reform that made peasants into judges on most criminal cases demonstrated the intention of most members of the intelligentsia to draw the Russian *narod* into the area of formal legal codes and statutes (*zakon*, as opposed to the customary law, or *obychnoe pravo*, at *volost'* court).<sup>45</sup> Dostoevsky also occasionally spoke highly of the new civil jury system. Since the 70s, nevertheless, the writer had grown more skeptical about the westernized court and law that are "irrelevant" to the customary law among the peasants and the spiritual world of humanity. His conviction echoes the idea of Nikolai Zlatovratskii, the author of a short story, "Peasant Jurors" (1874-1875), that "there was no conjunction between the peasant's natural law and the city's formal law" (Frierson, 61).<sup>46</sup> Dostoevsky's articles on the Kroneberg case, in particular, criticize the way legal reforms only subordinated the

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<sup>45</sup> Also see Frierson, who points out that the legislation in 1864 demonstrates progressive reformers' attempt to cause "a major transformation of Russian society, a transformation that would develop conscious, engaged citizens who understood and respected the laws" (56). At the same time, she notes that there were ethnographers and eyewitnesses who objected to these reformers. These intelligentsia argued that peasants were immature individuals, irresponsible alcoholics, and thus incompetent "judges" (73).

<sup>46</sup> Zlatovratskii's biography is similar to those of his contemporary populist writers and ethnographers. His fiction, in particular the image of the communal peasant jurors in it, was based on the real examples of villages of Vladimir Province which he visited or where he lived (Frierson, 105). His ideology, nonetheless, is more Slavophile, or romantic, in that he focused less on the peasant milieu as a site of struggle with nature than the chemist Uspensky, but insisted on the traditional patriarchal commune as a moral agent that unites and stabilizes the people.

Russian people's unique values of good and evil to the civil, western system of the bar. However, Rosenshiel claims that Dostoevsky did not completely deny the value of peasant jurors. The novelist promoted the concept of "Russian justice" or "courtroom miracle" later in his articles on the Kornilova trial. In this infanticide case, Dostoevsky was an eyewitness to the way peasant jurors judged the sinner and found the juror hearing to be "the site for a communal religious experience [which] make[s] possible the moral regeneration of a Christian soul," as Rosenshiel puts it (*Western Law*, 28). Despite his scorn for the western legal terms superimposed on the morals of the Russian people, he spoke highly of the proceedings of the court in the Kornilova case as if it were almost equivalent to an Orthodox religious service that had a spiritual influence on the Russian population sitting in the court.

Now that I have reviewed Dostoevsky's vision of the Russian people as spiritual judges, as illustrated in his *Diary*, in the following section, I intend to make clear the contrast between his optimistic remarks in his *Diary* and his ambivalent portrayal of peasants in his fiction. As I have analyzed above, the peasants, a collective of "good people" in the eyes of Dmitri, abruptly turn into hostile superiors who disregard his pleading and insult his pride. In the following, moreover, I demonstrate that it is overly simplifying and optimistic to interpret Dmitri's case in the novel as an episode about the way peasant jurors stand firm against formal law, abstract legal eloquence, and brilliant rational arguments, in favor of the indigenous moral values. Such an evaluation of the peasant jurors' roles in Dostoevsky's fiction arbitrarily equates the realist writer's

opinion on peasant jurors with those of ethnographers of his time.<sup>47</sup> Instead, I discern a subversive image of the peasants in that these capricious “judges” play a role similar to that of the Grand Inquisitor, perhaps the most demonic, authoritarian, and inhumane figure in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Much like the Inquisitor who denies that sinners have the inner strength to overcome their evil impulses, or their “divine imprint,” as Murav puts it (129), the peasant “judges” punish and banish the sinner Dmitri in a no less authoritative way. The community in Mokroe and in court, in my view, fails to realize the expectation of the novelist in the *Diary* that peasants will save and bond with the evil souls among them in court.

### **The Authoritative Peasant “Inquisitors”**

It is usually claimed that a dialogue between the Grand Inquisitor in Book Five and Zosima in Book Six is at the core of the novel. The Inquisitor’s theory is that men are weak creatures who do not possess the moral strength to restrain their evil deeds. However, Christ demands the freedom of men to constantly choose between good and evil deeds, and this freedom seems to the Inquisitor to be unbearable and cruel. He thus renounces Jesus’ religion of freedom and instead, insists on sinners’ constant yearning for order, for an alliance of religious and temporal power. Nonetheless, if “[i]t is left to the Grand Inquisitor and his church to care for the vast majority of people who are unable to live with the anguish and uncertainty that Jesus’ way requires” (Marshall, 100), the

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<sup>47</sup> For instance, both a law scholar, I. G. Orshanskii, and a populist ethnographer, Aleksandra Efimenko, critiqued the jury system after the Judicial Reform and highlighted the superior morality inherent in the peasants’ adherence to their natural (*estestvennoe*) customary law, because only the native peasant law subordinated the individuals to their familial and communal milieu.

blasphemy inherent in his theory becomes clear: the Inquisitor has no faith in men's moral strength to make free choices and no respect for their potential for goodness. On the other hand, Zosima believes in sinners' inner strength to overcome their weakness and improve their morality. Many interpretations of the novel are thus based on this binary between the Inquisitor's "hierarchical, paternal love" for sinners and the "lateral, brotherly love of Christ" embodied in the souls of Zosima and his disciple Alyosha (Berman, 264).<sup>48</sup> As Murav claims, the novel sets up "[t]he contrast between the absolute closure of the demonic model of history and the open-endedness of Zosima's" (148). Scholarship focuses on Zosima's teachings on active love, Alyosha's kiss of the Russian earth, and Jesus' silence in front of the Inquisitor as the answers to the Inquisitor's vision of an atheist kingdom.

However, another parallel yet to be established is between the Inquisitor in relation to the sinner and the peasantry surrounding Dmitri. Some critics view Dmitri as a sinner who challenges the Inquisitor's authority. As Kate Holland notes, the amulet on Dmitri's neck opens up "two competing narratives of prosecution and defense"—the immoral depths to which Dmitri has sunk, and meanwhile, the possibility of his moral self in freedom (198). She claims that Dmitri, bringing Katerina Ivanovna's money with him, shows man's "constant temptation to escape and renounce his responsibilities" and at the same time, "passionate belief in an ideal" (344), which proves the Inquisitor wrong about

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<sup>48</sup> Berman calls the Inquisitor's authority a vertical judgment on men, because he treats the sinners as his inferiors. In a similar way, many scholars have argued that the Inquisitor's thesis maintains his own authoritative position as a father figure and insults men as imperfect sons. For instance, from the angle of surrogate fathers, Golstein asserts that Ivan and the Grand Inquisitor "act as if harshness and cruelty were substitutes for love and pity" (761). The Inquisitor's attitude toward men is built upon his "eagerness to judge, despise, and condemn" (ibid., 763).

the incorrigible evil nature of man. As another critic puts it, Dmitri's "sufficient strength to run away from the temptation of parricide" subverts the Inquisitor's theory (Rosen, 731-32). Moreover, the Grand Inquisitor is modeled on law-making figures of Dostoevsky's time, just as Dmitri's involvement with these peasants can be contextualized in the social background of the 1864 legal reform. As Elizabeth Blake argues, Dostoevsky may have already come up with the image of the Inquisitor during the Petrashevsky Circle members' interrogation in 1849. Later, in 1879, Dostoevsky was again struck by the stories of 600 prisoners in a dispatch from Odessa to Sakhalin, suffering from the severe punishment by the state and the inhumane execution of the law. Given these possible models of the Inquisitor, this character is not only an ecclesiastical character in a fifteenth-century legend, but also a political spokesman for the legal system, or as Blake puts it, he "remains true to the Roman idea by responding to the needs of his citizens less as a priest than as a statesman and therefore depends on all lawful means at his disposal, including capital punishment" (155). In this view, the Grand Inquisitor seems to be aligned with the peasant jurors, since they both offer legislative solutions. In addition, it is noteworthy that Dmitri's interactions with the people happen in Books Eight and Nine. Since these episodes follow Zosima's teaching in Books Six and Alyosha's epiphany in Book Seven, it is possible that Dmitri is to be aligned with Zosima and his disciple: they are ordinary men who similarly experience doubts, edifications, and epiphanies. As a result, the Grand Inquisitor who confronts Zosima or Alyosha and the peasant judges who confront Dmitri are very likely to be compared, given the authoritative positions and judicial power of both.



The peasants in these episodes, in my view, unite into a godly authority, as Dmitri observes. Through his adventure in the peasant world, Dmitri gradually senses an unexplainable feeling of respect and worship of the peasants in him. He suddenly regrets that he bumps into an old serf woman at Samsonov's. Without any proof, he spreads the words that he "parted friends" (342) with the impoverished lower-class clerk Captain Snegirev, despite his infamous violence against the captain in the past. At three odd times Dmitri remembers to tip the coachman Andrei money and punch out of pure affection and respect (just when he leaves the driver, when he enters the circle of Poles, and when the celebration is at its peak). When Dmitri begs forgiveness of this coachman, although the muzhik must have no knowledge of the conflict between Dmitri and the old Karamazov, he seems to Dmitri to somehow represent all people to forgive him for all evil actions he has done in the past, "here alone, on the road" (352). It is similarly odd that Dmitri asks forgiveness of the servant Fenya, who is not consistently helpful in Dmitri's affair with Grushenka and most of the time remains an irrelevant outsider. It seems that Dmitri starts to cherish the people's voice as a divine word on his personality and nature.

The folk world may also seem authoritative or divine to Dmitri, because in Books Eight and Nine he witnesses several "miracles." As Carol Flath argues, Dmitri's adventure in the peasantry functions as a joyful reunion of all people, resembles Alyosha's dream of Cana, and thus is also an episode full of miracles. She claims that Dmitri's money used in the revelry is Katerina's "loan," which no one believes to exist, just like the wine in Cana made by Christ's miracle. The Mokroe entertainment is "for the whole world," also like the feast in Cana. The bad money has brought joy and pleasure to

both Dmitri, who finds out Grigory is alive, and Grushenka, who becomes a virtuous maiden again. Based on these positive connotations of the adventure, Flath demonstrates a parallel between Dmitri's trip and Alyosha's miracle. The peasant world is indeed a place of miracles, if we further consider Dmitri's dream of the "babe" (*dityo*). This miraculous vision of suffering toddlers and peasant women enlightens him and motivates him to "sign whatever they liked" (429), even a confession. He also wakes up from this dream to notice a pillow put under his head by someone unknown. Again, he is touched and perhaps even converted by the miraculous "gift." The world of the people in these episodes on Dmitri's exhausting adventure and interrogation is portrayed as a holy and miraculous place.

Despite Dmitri's worship of the people and the people's miraculous world, however, the peasants take a condescending and patronizing attitude toward him. Besides their sudden change of attitude after his arrest, mentioned above, we should note that from the beginning the lower-class people have been playing the role of an indifferent authority or cold-blooded superior to Dmitri. The episodes on Dmitri's encounters with Samsonov and Lyagavy, both described in tremendous detail by the author, especially demonstrate the sinner's submission and inferior standing in front of two sadistic peasants. Samsonov continues to live in a small and suffocating bedroom in his large stone house, which is constructed by fake marble and covered in dust. Despite his success as an ambitious merchant, he remains a conservative and stubborn peasant in spirit. Lyagavy, as we learn, is also dressed like a peasant and publicly called a *muzhik* by others. As Tvardovskaia notes, Dostoevsky emphasizes Samsonov's peasant traits in that "[r]elations between the

head of the family and his household are patriarchal in the extreme,” and highlights Lyagavy’s peasant identity in that he “still holds the social position, and lives the life, of a peasant” (66). It is apparent that the writer creates these two characters not only as materialistic merchants, but also as powerful peasants and “executioners” of Dmitri.

In the house of Samsonov, the merchant arouses Dmitri’s feeling of awe and reverence. Although what the narrator describes is a “cold, spiteful and sarcastic man, liable to violent antipathies,” throughout this chapter Dmitri respects Samsonov as a “most worthy old man” who has great dignity (320). Samsonov’s dreary interiority in his stony house somehow “laid a weight of depression on the heart” (317) of the desperate man. Dmitri becomes “conscious of his insignificance in the presence of the dignified person” (318) and humbly bows down to him. After his failure to acquire money, Dmitri feels “no revengeful feeling for anyone, even for Samsonov” (325) who shows him nothing but antipathy, as the narrator notes. With this evidence the author exaggerates an apparent hierarchy between the two men, an inferior and an authority. In the second episode, Lyagavy baffles Dmitri because he is even impossible to reach. “To begin with, [Dmitri] was late, taking a short cut from Volovya station which turned out to be twelve miles instead of eight” (321), as the narrator states in a sarcastic tone. When he arrives, Lyagavy is reported to have travelled to a neighboring village with his priest and this absence drives Dmitri farther. After sunset, he reaches the priest, who, however, claims that he has just parted with Lyagavy. Dmitri *walks* two miles further (although the priest claims he will walk for only half a mile) to reach a peculiar village, “Sukhoy Possyolok,” which by its name sounds like a cold, dry, and obsolete place. All the obstacles in his

journey seem deliberately designed by the author and Dmitri's prolonged walk reminds us of the man in Ivan's anecdote who walks forever to reach eternity. The superior position of Lyagavy perhaps symbolizes the distant location of divinity.

More striking is Lyagavy's muteness and refusal to help, even when Dmitri finally finds the peasant. The wild Karamazov screams with rage in front of the muzhik, "on whom his whole fate depended, while he snored ... as though he'd dropped from another planet" (323). Although a peasant's drunkenness is commonplace, this kulak's immobility at this critical time and throughout the entire chapter seems out-of-place and grotesque, obviously by design of the author. While he was "snoring heavily," Dmitri "stood in perplexity" (322). This picture of an agitated man waiting for an answer in futility again overlaps with the vision of a remorseful sinner standing in front of a silent and divine judge. Lyagavy finally opens his eyes and notices the presence of Dmitri, but he maintains his "insulting composure" and "a sort of contemptuous condescension" (324). His smile at Dmitri's anxiety is especially insulting. In part due to his drunkenness, he is mistaken about who Dmitri is and refuses to understand his quest. In addition, Lyagavy's forester also "treated the matter contemptuously" (324) and absent-mindedly, even when the room where Lyagavy and Dmitri fell asleep was filled with charcoal fumes. People at Lyagavy's ignore the suffering man and reject him indifferently. Deprived of all his strength and pride, Dmitri leaves Lyagavy "as weak as a child" (325). Dostoevsky seems to imply that Dmitri is not only the weak son of God, but also the abandoned child of the cold-blooded peasants. His submission and humiliation before

these peasants demonstrate an apparent hierarchy between the superior, “divine” people and the inferior man in quest of salvation.

Thus, Dmitri’s desperate search for money in the two merchants’ residences reinforces the impression that the power of the peasant figures is somehow miraculous and divine. Although Dmitri knew of the unlikelihood that he would ever acquire such a sum from anyone, “he persisted in hoping that he would get that three thousand, that the money would somehow come to him, of itself, as though it might drop from heaven” (315-16). This monetary notion can be taken as a sign of Dmitri’s residual faith in God; yet, it may also imply that he unconsciously parallels “heaven” with the rich peasants, since he actually decides to visit them for the money. When Dmitri almost begs Samsonov to reverse his destiny, he waits for his answer as if he were “awaiting his fate with nervous impatience” (317). When Dmitri leaves the merchant, he also believes that “[e]verything was on the verge of ruin and my guardian angel saved me” (320), with this guardian being Samsonov. His pleading—“you must choose. It’s either I or the monster. It all lies in your hand—the fate of three lives, and the happiness of two” (319)—seems to indicate that Samsonov is a godly authority that may protect the good man and punish the bad one.

Besides the two merchants, the collective of the people in Mokroe—irrelevant peasants who watch Dmitri’s interrogation out of curiosity—also play the role of divine authorities who have the power to insult Dmitri, an inferior sinner. It is noteworthy that during Dmitri’s humiliating process of inspection, “[d]ressed in another man’s clothes he felt himself disgraced, even in the eyes of the peasants, and of Trifon Borisovich, whose

face appeared, for some reason, in the doorway, and vanished immediately” (410). This detail that Dmitri is overly conscious of Trifon’s presence underscores his uncomfortable feeling of being humiliated by the banal and vulgar innkeeper. Depleted of energy and afflicted by fatigue, the suspect finally realized that the prosecutors and other people in this insulting procedure “had a perfect right to despise him” (409). Facing the people’s indifference, Dmitri notes that he always has a dream “of being in such degrading positions” (ibid.). On a closer look, this dream portrays a trivial man who cannot escape from his brutal and divine authority:

it’s always the same . . . that someone is hunting me, someone I’m afraid of . . .  
that he’s hunting me in the dark, in the night . . . tracking me, and I hide  
somewhere from him, behind a door or cupboard, hide in a degrading way, and  
the worst of it is, he always knows where I am, but he pretends not to know  
where I am on purpose, to prolong my agony, to enjoy my terror. (399)

Dmitri cannot escape from this relentless and omnipotent “someone,” who detects his guilt, enjoys watching the sinner’s humiliation, and makes him suffer. Since Dmitri recalls this dream at this particular moment when he is watched, arrested, and undressed among the people, we may associate this “someone” in his dream with the Mokroe people around him in reality. Dmitri tacitly admits that for him, the people around him are like the divine incarnate in his dream while he is reduced to a “naked” and despicable criminal.

The peasants' sudden change of attitude from being compassionate to being cold toward the same man echoes the way the Inquisitor's citizens behave in the anti-Christ's kingdom. In front of Christ, the Inquisitor announces that "the very people who have today kissed Thy feet, tomorrow at the faintest sign from me will rush to heap up the embers of Thy fire" (217). They may retain their primitive faith in Christ; yet, as the adherents of the Inquisitor, they are too vulnerable and weak-minded to resist authority. In a similar vein, the people around Dmitri, despite their occasional compassion for the man, eventually banish the sinner and behave as the Inquisitor teaches.

In particular, the people become the modern "inquisitors" who abandon the weak sinner Dmitri without mercy for his potential goodness. In Mokroe, they put him separately in a little room in the hospital, "the one where Smerdyakov had been" (634). Their doubt and neglect of the possibility of Dmitri's innocence and goodness remind us of the Grand Inquisitor's thesis. In court, since the peasant jurors sentence Dmitri to hard labor, one may easily associate their candid judgment with Dostoevsky's expectation for the Russian people's harsh punishment of sinners in the *Diary*. By examining Dostoevsky's attitude toward the postreform jury system, Rosenshield concludes that the peasant jurors in the fictional work embody the writer's ideal of "Russian justice."<sup>49</sup> He claims that the jurors' decision, despite the harshness of the twenty-year sentence, may still be interpreted as positive in that Dmitri is expected to return to the community as a changed man. Nevertheless, the process of the trial shows that the peasant jurors also play

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<sup>49</sup> Rosenshield claims that the court, the legal system, and the judicial administration are equivalents of the modern Inquisitor. Nevertheless, he only associates the legal system and process in Dmitri's court, not the jurors, with the rationalism of Grand Inquisitor: "[t]he new church is the law court, at whose head stands the modern Grand Inquisitor, Fetyukovich" (*Western Law*, 181).

the role of authoritative, God-like “inquisitors.” On the day of his trial, Dmitri speaks with “a new note of humility, defeat and submission” (627) in front of this “authority” that does not believe in his goodness. While Dmitri’s defense attorney Fetyukovich argues that Dmitri does not deserve the harsh punishment because of the victim’s incorrigible evil nature, the people turn out to be less compassionate than the attorney, as they judge Dmitri as an evil sinner to be banished from their community.

Arguably, the people in Dmitri’s trial play the role of the Inquisitor in Ivan’s legend, who blasphemously denies the sinner’s chance of resurrection, because the sinner in part rebels against the jurors’ decision and searches for other means of redemption. The writer urges the peasants to “call evil evil” in his *Diary*. However, in his fiction he notes that it occurs to Dmitri that escaping from the punishment and going away on “another exile as bad, perhaps, as Siberia” (637) may be equally acceptable. Although Dmitri finally rejects this solution and obeys the people’s verdict, Alyosha has even less confidence in Siberia’s capacity to “regenerate another man ... by suffering” (636). He understands punishment as man’s spiritual cross that can be heavy “wherever you escape to,” regardless of its being in Siberia or not. Both agree to work on “the land,” live forever with his sin, and suffer outside the territory of the people’s judgment. The novelist further predicts a worst case scenario that Dmitri may even escape to America, which is a “jesuitical plan of escape” (Blake, 197) and a complete destruction of his Russian soul. Although Dmitri is able to reject this plan, leaving Russia for America symbolizes an abandonment of both the world of Father Zosima, or his spiritual worldview, and the



world of the Grand Inquisitor, or his rationalistic philosophy in this novel.<sup>50</sup> Thus, not only do the two characters react ambivalently to the twenty-year sentence passed down by the people, but Dostoevsky also is concerned about the worst-case scenario caused by the people's authoritative judgment on the sinner. His fictional commentary does not solidly reconfirm his conviction in the *Diary* that the peasant jurors will change the sinners and establish their brotherhood.

One may argue that in this novel, Dmitri seems to be able to eventually control the physical man in him and successfully re-enter a human brotherhood; yet, we should note that this spiritual transformation, as Dostoevsky portrays it, is not necessarily a direct result of Dmitri's being judged by the jurors from the people. His conversion has begun long before the Day of Judgment. The magical resurrection of his spiritual side, if I may summarize many scholars' observations, is indebted to the man himself being spiritual all the time. For instance, Victor Terras notes that Dmitri has always been "gifted" with an artist's intuition for beauty and virtue.<sup>51</sup> His artistic sensitivity to beauty, as Robert Louis Jackson further notes, is "an aesthetic awareness of himself as an 'image and likeness of God'," which delivers him toward his moral-spiritual salvation (*Close Encounters*, 170). Another theory is that Dmitri is capable of transforming himself because of his sacrifice for another, in particular Grushenka, in the scene in which she attempts to leave for her

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<sup>50</sup> See Rosenshield, *Western Law, Russian Justice*, in which the critic finds Dmitri central to a Dostoevskian moral choice between Father Zosima's and Ivan Karamazov's value systems. Dmitri's "nihilistic" trip to America serves to destroy all spiritual value inherent in different characters' worldviews.

<sup>51</sup> When Dmitri lets out his vengeful impulse and confronts his father, he forgets "the right volume, . . . the right tone," and speaks in "a series of unexpected dissonances" (Terras, 138). His sensitivity to vocal harmony and his talent in poetic language are muffled. After Dmitri's arrest and conversion, as Terras notes, the sinner has grasped the right language, "hit the right notes more often," and "found the best possible form of expression" (154).

past Polish lover: when citing Schiller's "Ode to Joy" in the early part of the novel, "Dmitri skips over the central verses that talk of the universal brotherhood. . . . [H]e cannot yet think about how all human beings will become brothers" (Cicovacki, 229). It is only Grushenka's selfless devotion to her old lover that inspires Dmitri to "restrain his own feeling and sacrifice himself for her happiness" (ibid., 232).

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the people's world and their judgment do not unambiguously lead to any spiritual transformation, and furthermore, it may not even influence the sinner in a different and better way than the Inquisitor's authority. Admittedly, Dmitri's dream of the babe and the peasant women motivates his spiritual and miraculous conversion. Nonetheless, such a positive image of peasants in his dream is not a direct reflection of his impression of the surrounding peasants. The causal link between his involvement with the people in the Mokroe underworld and his vision of their spirituality in his dream is missing in the text. Similarly, although Grushenka's companionship is to be evaluated positively, her righteousness and their spiritual marriage are further irrelevant to the image making of the jurors. Even though the *Diary* may lead us to assume that for Dostoevsky, peasants' verdicts on criminals may create a better community of mutual love, in contrast to the Inquisitor's despair over the sinners' moral weakness and authoritative denial of men's spiritual strength, in the novel, nothing is mentioned about Dmitri's spiritual resurrection during his exile to Siberia with the people or the couple's reconstruction of a new community within the people. We may state that in *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevsky uses the destiny of a sinner, Dmitri, to testify to the influence of two different godly authorities—the Inquisitor's and the

peasants'. Nonetheless, so far as we see in Dmitri's involvement with the people and abandonment by them, their "authority" and verdict do not directly lead to the sinner's transformation and the people's spiritual unity. Dostoevsky's fictional portrayal of the peasant jurors' brutality and authority in particular differs from his public claim about the people's purification of evil in his *Diary*.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrated an absence of spiritual brotherhood in the peasant characters' communal world. In Turgenev's and Leskov's novellas, the righteous people are dominated by the hostile egoists in the community. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the people's hostility and the jurors' brutality toward the sinner, much like the Grand Inquisitor's authority, do not necessarily edify the sinner, unite the people in Mokroe, or purge the souls of the people at court, but rather insult Dmitri's moral strength and potential for goodness.

My focus on Dmitri's sentence leaves many other aspects of the Russian people's image in this novel unattended. For instance, Dostoevsky also portrays the "shrieking" mother of Alyosha and Ivan, who, as Carol Apollonio argues, may have spread the seed of evil in her children. Her symptom of *klikushestvo* (shrieking), which was common among peasant women, pregnant women, or in a folkloric term, "possessed" women, may suggest "a demon at work" in her seemingly holy soul (154). As another critic notes, the mother's prayer in front of the icon of the Mother of God only exposes the contrast between her "supplicating and shrieking" and the iconic Mother's "suffer[ing] with

serenity” (Ollivier, 63). Another peripheral figure is the lackey Smerdyakov, born in an “unclean” space in the rural world—the bathhouse—and polluted by the urban ills in Moscow. Smerdyakov’s life in a threshold-related space of impurity testifies to the fact that “folk devils could appear as ordinary people,” as Faith Wigzell puts it (“Dostoevskii,” 35),<sup>52</sup> or that “eccentric behavior may not always stem from moral fervor,” as Margaret Ziolkowski claims (*Hagiography*, 140).<sup>53</sup> His name directly delivers the meanings of “death” (*smert*’) and “to stink” (*smerdit*’), both of which recall people’s blasphemous interpretations of Zosima’s dead body, and his epilepsy reminds the reader of folk beliefs in demonic possession. In the following chapters of this study, I focus on such specific aspects as the people’s personality, manner, gender, and folk religion to interrogate the myth of their spiritual brotherhood.

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<sup>52</sup> Also see Morson, “Verbal Pollution,” where he traces Smerdyakov’s marginal life along “gates, fences, crossroads, and thresholds” and finds it to defy all social categories (236).

<sup>53</sup> Ziolkowski explores in her book that Smerdyakov is a unique figure among Dostoevsky’s eccentric holy foolish characters, since he “possesses no ethical sense” (140).

## Chapter 2

### “It’s the Cause of It All”:

#### Peasants’ Alcoholism as A Symbol of Evil and Disunity

The first chapter explored the peasant world on a large scale as a hierarchical community that does not always nurture the peasants’ brotherly compassion for each other. The central issue of this chapter is a specific trait of the Russian peasants—their weakness for alcoholism, heatedly debated in recent and nineteenth-century academic writings. My analysis will reveal a divergence between academic research on peasant alcoholism and realist writers’ critical attitudes toward the drunkards’ souls.

This chapter starts with a brief introduction of the academic approaches to the nineteenth-century Russian peasants’ alcoholism. I point out that these authors put most blame on the Imperial government, gentry and merchantry classes for the people’s fall into alcoholic addiction. In the second and third sections, I will show that in realist literature, by contrast, alcoholism leads to peasant characters’ various evil actions and deprives them of sensitivity to moral issues. Lower-class drunkards in literature seem to collectively muffle the voice of their conscience and condone their own brutality, under the euphoric effect of the “demon-vodka.” In the last two sections of the current chapter, I explore the way Tolstoy and Dostoevsky further portray alcohol as a symbol of various

sins and catastrophes that exist on a large scale among the Russian people. Tolstoy's depiction of the people's alcoholism, in particular, is interwoven with his premonition of apocalyptic disaster in the people's world. For realist writers, the peasants' alcoholism is a trigger or at times a symbol of a series of immoralities inherent in the peasants' souls, all of which constitute a serious threat to their brotherly unity.

### **Peasant Alcoholism in the Socio-Economic Context**

In Russian folklore, drunkards were considered "unclean." Peasants who died from alcoholism were regarded as unclean (*nechistye*) souls that perished accidentally, unnaturally, and thus, ominously. When the Russian peasants intended to punish these unclean souls, or dead bodies of drunkards, throughout several centuries they held inhumane "funerals" for the dead ones, exhumed their relics from the earth, and scattered their ashes to the wind (Warner). It is widely known that the field demon *polevoi* embodies the Russian peasants' disgust at drunkards. As a pest that harasses drunkards, the *polevoi* is believed to suddenly creep upon the peasant lying drunk in the fields and strangle him.

These commonly held superstitions in relation to the danger of alcoholism, however, do not necessarily mean that the Russian peasants had the moral strength to resist the temptation of alcohol. Peasants living in rural Russia, for instance, were infamous for their celebratory drinking sprees. Although most of them were unable to afford drinking on a daily basis, vodka was prepared for all Christian rituals, festivals, and events in great quantities in the countryside. Major church holidays, the Feast of St. Nicholas, Christmas,

Easter, required them to drink during ceremonious festivals (Johnson). Such occasions as the peasant recruitment for the army, and village celebration of the harvest also invited people to drink. Moreover, family and commercial activities such as funerals, matchmaking, weddings, conclusions of contracts, sales of horses, hiring of shepherds, and elections of village heads led to even more excessive consumption of alcohol and were also obligatory for commune members (Segal, 140-41; Christian, 81-82). On these occasions eyewitnesses observed either the drunkards' euphoria (usually singing and cheering) or their quarrels (even physical aggression), or both. As William E. Johnson notes, "[r]ecorded accounts of outrages, debaucheries, assaults, fires, murders and frightful cruelties visited upon the innocent in connection with holiday debaucheries" (133). Among the Russian peasants, the cycle of drinking, drunkenness, and violence was seasonal and ceremonial.

Compared to such peasants' "ceremonial" drinking in the countryside, peasant workers' "modern" drinking patterns in the cities attract more scholars' attention. It was the taste of "modernization" and "westernization" in the age of Enlightenment that first diverted Russian townspeople from their traditional kvass and mead to the spirits. In the nineteenth century, compared with their peasant companions in the countryside, urban people—former peasants—consumed more alcohol on a daily basis. When the conventions and festivals disappeared from their life in the cities, they tended to "spend more on vodka when more cash became available through wage work," which David Christian analyzes as a type of elastic modern drinking pattern (91). Urban workers customarily consumed larger portions of vodka not only on holidays (as the peasants in

countryside still continued the ceremonial style of drinking associated with ritual days) but also on secondary holidays, ordinary Sundays, or even workdays. They started their workdays and labor by drinking. As Johnson reports, before an excise law was passed in 1886, employers of labor were allowed to give their workpeople vodka as remuneration (156). Craftsmen, tradesmen, and artisans also joined the workers as heavy drunkards and their drinking problems were even more aggressive than those of the peasants in countryside, including violent assaults, physical abuse of family members, and even murders. It is noteworthy that at the turn of the century, the peasant workers' intoxication led to higher rates of divorce, suicide, and accidental death. As Boris M. Segal notes in a study of accidents attributed to intoxication that occurred among railroad personnel, in 1902, 80.3 accidents occurred per 100 miles of track and in total, 11,000 employees were involved in accidents. Such statistics explains the reason that peasants' drinking problems are frequently interpreted in the context of modernization and urbanization.

In the dawn of the modern age the Russian people's alcoholism is interpreted by most critics as a trigger of the deterioration of the peasants' personality and the destruction of their morals on a national scale. The people's indulgence of alcoholism in the *kabaks*, which often consumed all their earnings, is considered to have engendered various types of other transgressions: besides physical and mental abuse of their families, critics comment on the way peasants "nurtured" drinking problems in their children and, as Stephen White notes, the way drunk men and women alike wasted their properties or even sold their children. White also claims that even sexual intercourse in full view of a laughing audience was not unusual among people in cities (7) and half of the inmates in



prisons were drunkards, guilty of crimes committed in a state of drunkenness.<sup>54</sup>

Academic authors have associated the Russian people's drinking problems with various brutal and immoral behaviors.

Apparently, academic studies succeed in connecting the Russian people's alcoholism with their national identity. Johnson examines all eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century Tsars' attitudes to alcoholism, among which Peter I and the half-witted Peter III especially showed no resistance to the temptation of vodka. "It is idle to think that such a condition [of alcoholism] among the ruling class would not be reflected in the lives of the people," as he claims (142). In a similar vein, critics agree that it was due to Ivan IV's interest in the Tatar *kabaks* (taverns) in the sixteenth century that *kabaks* emerged in Russia, worsening and prolonging the people's drinking patterns.<sup>55</sup> These commentaries associate Tsars with the people, cultural heritage with their alcoholism. Thus, it is not surprising to find that the people's weak characters, including their feeling of insecurity, dependence on authority, intolerance of being alone, and eruptions of rage, have all been interpreted by psychiatrists in relation to alcoholism (Segal 244, 274).

Nonetheless, to identify the reasons behind both urban and rural people's weakness to alcohol, eyewitnesses in the nineteenth century and historians in recent decades shift their attention from the people's spirituality and identity to the evils of the Imperial Romanov

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<sup>54</sup> White explores the high level of alcoholism among Russian women compared to women of other nationalities. Alcoholism was "especially marked among divorced and single women workers, and among prostitutes and the down and out" (7). Similar abhorrent manners of drinking had been reported by several foreign travelers whose reports span the three centuries of the Romanov Dynasty.

<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, Makinen and Reitan, who not only analyze the history of the term borrowed from the Tartars, but also criticize the Russians for spreading the *kabak* system to the Siberians, which caused more native Siberians to drink heavily and abandon their traditional beverages (167). Also see White and Christian.

“alcoholic empire.” This is understandable, given that after all, late Imperial Russia showed the highest rate of alcohol-related deaths per million of any European countries (White, 10). Debate over the evil governmental control of liquor retailing, for instance, had appeared early in 1858, indebted to a more relaxed censorship after the 1855 accession of Alexander II and during the intellectual discussion on serfdom (Christian, 260). In journals run by both progressive figures like Alexander Herzen and Nikolai Ogarev (1813-1877), and conservative editor Mikhail Katkov (1818-1887), critics publicly condemned state monopoly that produced and sold vodka. A survey of our recent scholarship demonstrates that historians attack Tsars and the Imperial government for “intoxicating” the Russian people for several centuries. To start with, many critics condemn the hypocrisy of the first government monopoly established in 1649, which for the first time in history outlawed people from buying vodka except through *kabaks*. The influence of the state-run *kabaks* was also reinforced by the infamous form of retailing—“tax-farming,” which emerged during the reign of Tsar Aleksei and granted the State the means to commission the retail sale of liquors to the highest bidder, who could enlarge financial gain through retailing “as widely as he wished or could and without much restraint as to methods used” (Johnson, 113).<sup>56</sup> Numerous critics consider such a traditional tax-farming system for vodka retailing to be a scam, since the Imperial State had many illegal ways of making profits (Christian; Makinen and Reitan). For instance, White explores the way bribed government officials allowed illicit sales, adulterated

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<sup>56</sup> Tax farms were commercial enterprises, funded by individual entrepreneurs but subject to the governmental tax-collecting institution. Also see Christian for the historical development of this fiscal institution of tax farms across European countries since the seventeenth century (31).

drinks, and inflated prices by exploiting the strict policing of monopoly (15). This regulation and farming system were, unfortunately, seldom altered by the Manifesto of Alexander I in 1819. When his reform proved a total failure in changing the “bidding” management of liquor sale in 1827, the old “farming” system started to rule the country again and produced one third of the total state revenues for the government before its final abolition in 1863 (Makinen and Reitan, 164). The 1863 reform of the “tax-farming” system launched by Alexander II, however, was also a disastrous attempt that only ended up cutting the retailing price of alcohol, increasing retailing shops in each village, and exacerbating the people’s drinking problem. The volume of sales in the following decades demonstrates that the reform was a failure.<sup>57</sup> As this brief review of the history shows, academic authors have numerous reasons to blame the State for the people’s prolonged addiction to alcohol.

Despite this dark picture of State control over the people’s alcohol consumption, these authors of social and historical studies express certain expectations of the alcoholic empire’s resurrection. For instance, Christine Worobec emphasizes the peasant commune’s function of preventing alcoholic household heads from squandering the property or defaulting his obligations, through its enforcement of customary law at the *volost’* court. In such post-emancipation cantonal court, as Worobec points out, “the most common complaint against a delinquent household head was his inability to fulfill communal obligations because of a drinking problem” and it was quite common for

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<sup>57</sup> See the last chapter of Christian’s research for a comprehensive review on the objective vices of the abolition of tax farming. On the one hand, the virtues of the new excise system and open free trade in place of tax farming were manifest in that the governmental corruption for the sake of revenues and the gentry’s exploitation of the people’s earnings were greatly weakened. On the other hand, less expensive alcohols and more illegal sales only led to “an orgy of drunkenness, especially in the Great Russian provinces” (378).

village authorities and judges to sentence defendants guilty of incessant drinking to lashes (*Peasant Russia*, 46-47). She claims that communal and customary constraints limited household heads' alcoholism and its further disintegration of their families. Many critics also speak highly of the common people's and the intelligentsia's effort to change the Russian drinking patterns. For instance, Johnson mentions some foreign studies on temperance activities that were translated into Russian early in the 1830s. Among them, the research by American scholar Robert Baird was published and spread among the Russian intelligentsia, by the order of Tsar Nicholas in 1840. In part stimulated by Russia's failure in the Crimean War and the clergy's debates about temperance in 1858, consumer protests among the people were popular in the postreform decades, especially in the 1870s and 1880s (Johnson, 152-53). These peasant uprisings against tax farmers and tavernkeepers, widespread and spontaneous across the country, showed, to a degree, the people's intention of moral self-improvement.<sup>58</sup>

What in particular reveals the historians' and ethnographers' optimistic vision of the people's temperance is their emphasis on the contribution of philanthropic and private temperance societies. Since the 1850s, in a wide range of areas, such as the provinces Kursk, Nizhny Novgorod, Ryazan, Saratov, and Astrakhan, temperance societies were run by intelligentsia, both Russian landowners and foreign doctors (Johnson, 152). Another critic, Patricia Herlihy, examines in detail the history of the Guardianship of Public Sobriety, established in 1895 by the Imperial State, which was supposed to reduce the people's alcohol consumption. The Guardianship fostered diverse popular theaters

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<sup>58</sup> Although, as Christian points out, the peasants' boycotts in the late 1850s were also in part motivated by the people's intolerance of high prices, not their pursuit of high morals (297).

and encouraged the masses to acquire certain autonomy over their liquor problem. Nonetheless, the influence of the Guardianship was extremely limited and ambivalent due to the establishment of the State Vodka Monopoly in 1905 by the same Imperial government that distributed and taxed alcohol. After all, White argues that alcohol duties accounted for up to 40 percent of income for the government revenue (4) and Johnson reports a 43 percent increase of the number of distilleries in the seven years after 1905 (126).<sup>59</sup> Since the function of the Guardianship was greatly undermined by the Monopoly, Herlihy shifts the focus of her study toward the minority of Russian peasants who pursued sobriety and voted in village assemblies to voluntarily close state liquor stores around the turn of the century (147). Other temperance societies that attract the attention of academics were the non-noble people's unofficial anti-alcoholic organizations. For instance, authors speak affirmatively of the way the Orthodox Church organized temperance societies. The well-known Alexander Nevskii Temperance Society founded in 1898 by a young priest, Father Alexander Vasilievich Rozhdestvenskii, hosted alcoholics, more than ninety percent of whom were peasants working in construction businesses. A friend of Tolstoy, Dr. Peter Semyonovich Alexiev, is also recognized by scholars for his visit to America, his promotion of American temperance solutions, and his book *Concerning Drunkenness* (1901), famously prefaced by Tolstoy's "Why Do People Stupefy Themselves." These activities, either distinct temperance societies or

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<sup>59</sup> The function of the Guardianship was undermined by the Vodka Monopoly of the State, which sold spirits to the people without relying on the third party—the retailers and "farmers." Thus, the most apparent consequence is that people kept drinking and consuming liquor, while the revenue (almost a billion roubles annually, toward the end of the Empire) went to fill the government treasury, exhausted by the Russo-Japanese War.

other temperance propaganda in connection with religious or philanthropic efforts, are frequently reported in academic studies of the Russian people's alcoholism.

To summarize, historians, ethnographers, and contemporary critics usually blame the State Monopoly, the tax-farmers, the ruling classes, and the environment for the people's widely increasing addiction to alcohol. First and foremost, the government is accused by most critics of protecting only the *kabaks*, the tax farmers, the distillers, and the trustees in order to increase its revenue. Officials of the Imperial State were also guilty of idealizing the health of the people destroyed by their alcohol.<sup>60</sup> Among the lower classes, tax farm managers—influential and powerful merchants—were also considered irresponsible evildoers who caused the Russian peasant drunkards' misery. They earned salaries comparable to those of provincial governors. In addition, Church clergy, infamous for their prolonged intemperance since the sixteenth century, were also found guilty of the people's drinking problem (White, 7). After all, it is the Russian religious practices and calendar rituals that had stimulated the people's consumption of alcohol in huge quantities since they emerged in the sixteenth century.<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, in many critics' views, the nobility that had been granted the privilege to distill, retail, and tax liquor from the late seventeenth century up to the 1863 reform was even more responsible for the

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<sup>60</sup> As White argues, the flaws in the figures and calculations of the Imperial State allow for an obviously idealizing understanding of the Russian people's sobriety. Russians' drinking was much less moderate and cultured compared to the Europeans', who mostly drank indoors and seldom got drunk, as Herzen notes. Official calculations did not consider such traits of the Russian people's uncivil drinking pattern and did not underscore the portion of hard liquor—especially vodka—in the people's drinking patterns, which is higher than the European average. Their government reports also included Jews and the Old Believers into their calculations, although those people drank sparingly (10).

<sup>61</sup> In his comprehensive study on the Russian people's alcoholism, Christian seems to blame the religious calendar for making alcohol an obligatory necessity rather than accusing the peasants of indulgence (23).

Russian people's addiction.<sup>62</sup> As Christian analyzes, there was an evil cycle that the revenues generated by vodka's commercial "exchange-value" travelled "from consumer to tavernkeeper to tax farmer to government and, finally, to the gentry distiller" (47), whose interest was protected by all nobility classes and the Imperial State. Last but not least, urbanization is regarded as the most prominent and decisive environmental trigger of the people's alcoholism. Per capita consumption of alcohol in Moscow, Petersburg, and port towns was higher than average in the mid-nineteenth century, as Makinen and Reitan note, and what is more, urbanizing circles such as the provinces around Moscow generated the most debauched areas that showed high average consumption (168). Critics stress the contrast between the urban people's drinking sprees on a daily basis and the traditional peasants' "ritualist" consumption during agricultural festivals (Segal; Christian), without going deeper to explore the spiritual darkness common to all these lower-class drunkards.

With this composition of their academic studies, these authors seem to deliver a quite optimistic message about the people's morals, which may be different from that which is dominant in realist writers' portrayals of the peasant drunkards. Since these socio-economic surveys contrast the irresponsible actions of the upper classes with the temperance activities among the people, they provide no analysis of the peasant drunkards' darkened souls. The realist writers explored below take a different focal point in their fiction. Their texts de-emphasize the irresponsibilities of the exploitative classes

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<sup>62</sup> Makinen and Reitan note that the provinces newly acquired in the seventeenth century, on the western and southern borders of Great Russia (provinces in White Russia, the Ukraine, and New Russia), had been privileged since then to distill and sell liquor. Gentries and municipalities were the main body of the retailers.

and the environmental factors in Imperial Russia. As I will show in the two following sections, in the case of Tolstoy's, Leskov's, and Dostoevsky's fictional works, the authors rather demonstrate the way the peasant drunkards commit all various types of transgressions—theft, materialism, egotism, division of family, and prostitution—because their hearts are darkened by their addiction and their voice of conscience is muffled, as Tolstoy puts it. Unlike the ethnographers and historians, all three realist writers demonstrate that the environmental factors are not decisive and the drunkards' moral loss is the issue.

### **“The Cause of It All”**

Tolstoy was an eyewitness of the Russian peasants' drinking patterns, given that since 1887 he had the experience of running the Union against Drunkenness, a temperance society that preceded the state temperance society by seven years. It enrolled around 1100 people at its peak in 1891. Although most peasants who pledged not to drink anymore were confused by their agreements with Tolstoy, which went against the rural culture of drinking at weddings, baptisms, births, and other rituals, Tolstoy was adamant and sincere in motivating them to change their habit. At the same time, he scorned the Guardianship of Public Sobriety established by the Ministry of Finance. He believed that this state control of the people's drinking manner was only a fiscal strategy to remedy the government's financial crises after the Russo-Japanese War. Both Tolstoy's temperance



activity and his fictional treatment of alcoholism have attracted the attention of authors of socio-economic studies.<sup>63</sup>

Tolstoy associated the lower-class people's drunkenness with various evil actions. This is especially obvious in the writer's last lengthy novel *Resurrection* (1899), in which alcoholism seems to be the cause of a series of tragedies, as I will show. If we trace the process of Maslova's fall, we can see the strong impact of alcoholism on her tragic life. The heroine is born to an itinerant gypsy and a serf-woman. She is fortunately educated and raised by two elderly noblewomen. The narrator finds her identity highly ambivalent. As a half servant and half young lady, Maslova seems to have lived in a way that Tolstoy would construe as moral, in which she "sewed, kept the house tidy, polished the metalwork of the ikons with chalk, roasted, ground and served the coffee, did light laundry work" (24). Her hard work and peaceful domestic life are interrupted, however, in part by a gentry man's seduction, and in part by the temptation of alcohol. As we know, even after giving birth to an illegitimate child, Maslova does not directly become a fallen woman, but rather continues working. She supports herself and struggles with employers' harassment at different workplaces. However, she abruptly turns herself from a serf girl "straight from the country" (26), as a procuress describes her, into an unregistered prostitute, after being entertained with sweet wine by the procuress. This detail corresponds to Tolstoy's point in his essay "The Ethics of Wine-Drinking and Tobacco-Smoking" that "of all the women who fall, fully one-half yield to the temptation under the influence of alcohol," obviously offered by the brothel owners and faculties on

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<sup>63</sup> For instance, see Herlihy's research where she notes that the novel *Resurrection* "criticized contemporary society from a religious viewpoint and included a condemnation of drunkenness" (115).

purpose (45). The procuress later convinces Maslova of the benefit of being a registered prostitute and persuades her to enter a brothel, after “having plied Maslova with drink” (27). The narrator portrays the way Maslova, along with other prostitutes, squanders their life in “tobacco and wine, and wine and tobacco” (28). Her typical day ends with wine and starts with seltzer water “to counteract the effects of too much drink” (ibid.). It is also indicative that Maslova enters the profession of prostitution when she comes out of her drunkard uncle’s family business. It seems that at every stage of her fall, Tolstoy highlights the presence of alcohol.

Alcoholism and prostitution are frequently interwoven themes in Tolstoy’s works. What happens in *Resurrection* echoes the plot of another short story on prostitution, “Francoise” (1892). In this adaptation of a story by Maupassant, Tolstoy aptly associates the lower-class people’s drinking problem with other immoral activities. Much like Maslova, Francoise is a laundress who turns into a prostitute. Tolstoy depicts her surrounding people’s fall with the scene of an orgy among a group of sailors and some former serf girls from the countryside, who have recently become prostitutes: “with bloodshot eyes [sailors] were shouting disconnected phrases not knowing what they said. They sang, shouted, beat with their fists on the table, or poured wine down their throats” (461). (This picture is typical of the way the Russian peasants enjoy their alcoholic celebration in rural areas, as mentioned above.) These men drink alcohol and return upstairs to their private rooms and walk down to drink again, alternating between the two activities for a whole night. It is clear that Tolstoy condemns the way alcoholism accompanies or reinforces depravity.

Besides these prose works, Tolstoy wrote at least two popular plays that directly address the evil actions of common peasants which derive from their drinking. In both *The First Moonshiner* (1886) and *The Cause of It All* (1910), Tolstoy deliberately used the pseudo-folk language and a moralistic tone to attract popular audiences, who, he believed, had no difficulty understanding his message in theater art (Swift). Since the mid-1880s, Tolstoy worked on a nonprofit publishing house with V. G. Chertkov, in order to disseminate his literature to a popular audience. *The First Moonshiner* was, in this project, staged for a group of factory workers in Petersburg in 1886. This social function of Tolstoy's theater proves the writer's intention to spread the idea that alcoholism is the source of the people's immoral acts and to motivate them to consciously control their evil addiction.

*The First Moonshiner*, in a humorous, didactic way, tells the story of how the once sinless peasants become morally corrupted due to their addiction to alcohol. The drama begins with the complaint of a farmhand demon who cannot bring any peasants back to hell because they are all altruistic and pure in spirit. In this opening scene, the farmhand demon deliberately steals a peasant's last piece of bread, in order to allure him to curse and steal. However, the peasant still reconciles with his loss and happily yields his food to a thief. Since the farmhand demon's "colleagues"—demons of noblemen, women, merchants, and intelligentsia—all easily arrest thousands of evil people, their chief demon threatens to punish the farmhand demon for failing to bring any peasants to hell. This pushes the farmhand demon to create alcohol out of crops and tempt the peasants to drink, so that they could start to sin.

It is thus not an accident that the same peasant, although selfless and generous in the beginning of the drama, becomes an egoistic devil after being drunk. He had been supporting the grandfather in the family, a virtuous old man who later burns the “devil’s drink” (179). Under the influence of alcohol, however, this peasant rejects the grandfather, claims that it is unfair that he has to take care of him alone, and takes away his inheritance. The farmhand adequately summarizes the transformation that happens to this peasant: “Before, he didn’t care about his last piece of bread, but now for a glass of booze he nearly slugged his wife” (181-82). The demon’s alcohol works just as he wanted it to work, changing a good peasant into one hardly immune to sin and immorality. In the closing scene of the play, the demons conclude: as long as “they’d keep on drinking booze, we’ll always have them in our hands” (185).

The other play, *The Cause of It All*, an unsuccessful and unfinished work, serves as the writer’s conclusive remark on the issue of peasant drunkenness. In comparison to “Why Do People Stupefy Themselves?” and his early play *The First Moonshiner*, *The Cause of It All* is less didactic and more dramatic. A tramp visits a village and Tolstoy uses his folk language to express the idea that “all of life’s cutastrophes [*sic*] come from liquor” (235). The wanderer does not seem to influence the villagers, however, with his words of wisdom, since the muzhiks in the neighborhood continue to condone each other’s drinking problems. The irony of the play also works on the tramp, when it turns out that he is a drunkard who steals peasants’ bread, sugar, and tea, when he travels from village to village, despite his noble claim that in alcohol there is “a power of anergy [*sic*] in it that it can completely ruin a man” (235). Tolstoy’s didactic message remains that a

peasant, who may otherwise never steal, idle around, hurt others, or beat his wife, can be easily changed by his alcoholism. As in Tolstoy's novel, article, and short story, in his dramas alcohol again serves as "the cause of it all."

### **An Unconscious Loss of Moral Compass**

To further explore Tolstoy's dramas in relation to other writers' pieces, I now turn to the point these writers attempted to make on alcohol's function of "stupefying" the Russian people. Tolstoy's essays, in which he claims that alcoholism muffles the voice of conscience, provide sources for us to further understand these drunkards in his fiction. Since Tolstoy believed that alcoholism produces "a weak will and a desire to stifle one's conscience" (Herlihy, 128), for him, a society built on Christian love must be free from drunkenness. Tolstoy analyzes alcoholism in his didactic writings, for instance, "Why Do People Stupefy Themselves?" and "The Ethics of Wine-Drinking and Tobacco-Smoking" (1891). In both articles, he not only directly associates alcoholism with a wide range of sinful behaviors but also defines a man's weakness in the face of tobacco, wine, vodka, and morphine as the person's intoxication of his own conscience. "Man knows the power of wine in drowning out the voice of conscience" and he still allows drunkenness to constantly deaden monitions of conscience in him ("Why Do People Stupefy Themselves?" 145). Tolstoy concludes that drinking gives man the courage to commit "nine-tenths of the total number of crimes that stain humanity" ("The Ethics," 45). Vodka is thus demonic not only for its connection to all crimes but also for its destruction of conscience.

In *The Cause of It All*, not only the tramp but also all other male peasants consider their alcoholism natural and beyond their control. The wanderer denies his responsibility for his alcoholism and passively views his misfortune in life (he once was a tradesman and was put into prison for theft) as something he cannot change by himself in a time when “an honest man just can’t make it” (236). Other male characters also condone their excessive drinking, despite their direct awareness of its being the cause of all misfortunes in their life. One of them, Mikhaila, defends another, Ignat, by saying money “is not just t’look at” (238) and one better have some fun with it. While the peasant wives in the play knead, bake, cook, spin, weave, take care of the livestock, bathe, dress, and feed their babies, the husbands ignore their responsibilities and insist that “[s]o we drink, there’s no harm in it” (235). The drama of this play is intensified by the tramp’s theft, when the villagers again condone a crime as a natural outcome of poverty and environment. They agree to release the tramp, calling him a “poor thing” who “[steals] whatever he can get his hands on when drunk” (244). However, such mercy of these people, especially Mikhaila’s forgiveness, is only portrayed as negative. One neighboring peasant abruptly makes the comment that letting the tramp go means letting all such people “get away wid [sic] doin’ that” (ibid.). Even the thief’s reaction at these peasants’ forgiveness of his alcoholism and crime proves their tolerance morally wrong. Instead of being inspired by his fellow peasants’ mercy, the thief suffers from it. The unrelieved man cries in a trembling voice and mutters that “[i]t would have been easier for me, had you beaten me like a dog” (245). It is likely that the peasants’ lax attitude toward alcoholism, which is the cause of theft and irresponsibility in this play, does not have the author’s support.

In *Resurrection*, we see that Maslova's drinking problem not only leads her toward prostitution, but also silences her voice of conscience that reminds her of her sin. The narrator is accurate about what motivates Maslova to drink. "She liked wine not only for its flavor but most of all because it made her forget all the misery she had suffered, and gave her abandon and confidence in her own worth, which she never felt except under the influence of drink. Without wine she felt depressed and ashamed" (27). In other words, Maslova needs to familiarize herself with her immoral position as if it were a moral condition, and conveniently, wine can help her to stay least conscious of her wrongdoing, fall, and decay. It is thus no wonder that Maslova in prison seems not at all ashamed of her situation but rather proud of it.

Tolstoy's depiction of Maslova's drunkenness and shamelessness serves not only as a critique of this individual woman, but also a caricature of all the lower-class Russian people around her. Immediately following the description of Maslova's manner in prison, the writer paints a panoramic picture of various urban ills among the lower-class Russian people—their thefts, prostitution, deceptions, and even murders. The people guilty of these crimes, much like Maslova, form a view that their situation is justifiable and respectable. The narrator in particular highlights the image of Maslova's customer, the merchant killed in a hotel, who is constantly drunk and abusive. (He violently beats Maslova on her head, and she feels horror every time she has to remember the victim.) What surrounds Maslova, as we see in the novel, is a circle of the lower classes, deprived of their moral discipline and satisfied with their immoral behavior. Her image in this

novel thus reflects the larger picture of an alcoholic empire and the larger body of “stupefied” people.

Furthermore, Tolstoy portrays the unconsciousness of an alcoholic in a literal sense, in his early novella “Albert” (1858), for instance. First of all, it should be noted that the impoverished musician Albert, the only character from a lower class, may not be the central figure of virtue in this piece by design. As Leskov notes, the novella almost repeats the stereotypical narratives in the *Prolog* (a series of ancient hagiographical works written in Church Slavonic), which typically tell the story of how well-off characters purify their souls by providing for an invalid or a person in poverty. Thus, in “Albert,” the Tolstoyan nobleman Delesov, not the musician who is sheltered and provided for, may be the central philanthropic figure.<sup>64</sup> In the beginning of the story, when Albert is comparatively sober, he plays his violin in the crowd and awakens his listeners to their nostalgic longing for their innocent past. Nonetheless, for the rest of the time the musician is asleep on the carriage, snoring on the sofa, or speaking deliriously like a mad man. Much like other drunken characters who have lost themselves in alcohol, Albert is infamous in town for his laziness, weakness, passivity, and comatose state. He finally resigns his only moral role in life—using his talent in music to bond with his audience—and reduces himself to a “dim-eyed” (1:466) wanderer.

The unconsciousness of Albert is further associated with a series of dark motifs such as immorality and death. Drunk to the point of coma, he has a vision of his imprisonment,

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<sup>64</sup> See Sperrle, *Organic Worldview of Nikolai Leskov*, for an argument that readers focus not on the peasant but on the Tolstoyan figure Delesov and the *Prolog* character Evlogii, who may paradoxically be “motivated not by love for the cripple but by the desire to be saved, a self-serving purpose” (98).



when arrested for thefts and embezzlement. We thus know that the drunkard is not immune from immoral behaviors and his dishonest life in the past overlaps with his alcoholic coma in the present. Moreover, the wanderer is unlike the mysterious musician, welcomed into the circle of people. He is frozen outside a lady's door and almost killed. In his drunkenness and a near-death condition, Albert must seem spiritually inferior to the author.

Tolstoy's fellow writers also contribute to the portrait of alcoholics among the people who have lost their consciousness. Much like Albert, Leskov's lower-class artisan in "Lefty" (*Skaz o tul'skom kosom Levshe i o stal'noi blokhe*) (1881), for instance, suffers from alcoholism that reduces the talented man literally to someone completely ignorant. This story, which aroused sensational reactions from contemporary audiences in the 1880s, is both praising and mocking of the Russian people, or, as Benjamin argues, is "midway between legend and farce" (92), because the Tula artisan contributes to his country with his talent and at the same time ruins himself by indulging his drinking. Lefty received his vodka from his sovereign, and "did not eat, but got by on that alone" (371) on his journey to Europe. He ignores the Tsar's words "[d]on't drink too little, don't drink too much, drink middlingly" (370). On his way back to his Russia, his unconsciousness eventually kills him, when no police or people in his homeland care about the drunken man. Although the artisan has the most urgent message (that Russian soldiers have been cleaning their guns in an incorrect way, which loosens their bullets) for Tsar Nicholas that may even change the fate of Russian soldiers in Crimean War, he appears too drunk to communicate and fails in this mission. Since the narrator regrets

Lefty's death and Russia's failure in the Crimean War, the drunkenness of the ordinary artisan and the tragedy of national history are associated and regarded as mutually influential.

In a less studied novella, "The Toupee Artist" (1883), Leskov shifts his focus from Tula artisans to the peasant women. Leskov uses the voice of an old nanny, Lyubov Onisimovna, to narrate the story that involves life histories of two alcoholic peasant women. As we know, the narrative is typical of Leskov's unique style, *skaz*, which fully utilizes the oral storytelling of the folk. Since the characters who grasp the folk language represent people in reality, their words can express even the imperfections and failures of the lower-class people. The unique situation of the two women is that they both actively degrade themselves into alcoholics. Lyubov, once a commoner and an actress, refuses to marry a repugnant member of the gentry and loves another, a make-up artist, and thus, is punished for this and becomes a *baba* working in a cattle yard. She lives with another old peasant woman, Drosida, who has long been an alcoholic. For this older woman, who is not dressed in calico all her life either, vodka helps her to forget her past and her fall. Drosida cautions Lyubov that vodka is "the poison of oblivion" (412) on the first day they meet. Lyubov cannot resist the temptation of drinking, nonetheless, years later when she is informed that her past lover, the make-up artist, returns to her village but is murdered brutally by a merchant on the day he arrives. Unable to endure the loss of her beloved, she voluntarily becomes an alcoholic, with Drosida's agreement. As the old woman teaches Lyubov to drink, she admits that "there's no help for it: take a sip—pour

it on the coal.... Grief is bitter, but this poison is bitterer still” (416). Her last comment on vodka indicates that evil is irreconcilable and drinking is no better.

### **An Iconic Symbol of Immorality**

While the above two sections focus on alcoholism as a trigger of the people’s evil behaviors and, essentially, a silencer of their inborn conscience, this section shows the way alcoholism becomes a motif in fiction that symbolizes the people’s various brutalities, immoralities, and spiritual disintegration. In the above example, Lyubov’s sudden loss of her lover—the direct reason for her alcoholic addiction—is important for us because it is a tragedy related to brutal conflicts among the Russian people. The make-up artist, unambiguously an iconic figure of the Leskovian righteous men in this story, is killed for his money by an impoverished innkeeper. People catch the murderer “all bloody with the money on him” and he is punished with forty-three knouts, followed by hard labor. In particular, the grotesque and graphic descriptions of the murderer’s punishment—liquor before the torture, backbone shattered by strokes, and death on his way to jail—darken the story. The writer further adds some more remarks on an abusive executioner from Tula, who screams after the punishment—“Give me somebody else to flog—I’ll kill all you Orel boys” (416). These digressions in vivid detail leave the reader with the impression that muzhiks have succumbed to various forms of vileness, insanity, and evil. Eventually, all these aspects of the Russian people’s brutal personality and violent conflicts are digested by the peasant women through drinking. We may state that

Leskov observes the peasants' country life polluted by crimes and the people's caring bond severed by violence through the heroine's alcoholism. This is one example of the way he explores the drinking problem not simply as a social or urban ill, but rather as a symbol of evil.

In another fictional work by Leskov, "The Enchanted Wanderer" (1873), the loss of moral compass due to alcoholism escalates into passive but dangerous fatalism that delivers an individual to his destruction. Ivan Severyanovich—the wanderer's name and patronymic—reminds us of any typical northern Russian male,<sup>65</sup> who is sensitive to nature, affectionate to children, romantic about his way of life, and compassionate especially toward horses (perhaps a symbol of the idea of freedom in the endless Russian earth). Flyagin (the serf-wanderer's last name) is thus recognized for these positive characteristics, which are not derived from any modern education but are embedded in his passionate soul (Gebel', 31). At the same time, Flyagin reminds the reader of *flyaga* (flask) and can be translated into "flaskman." With this name, Leskov perhaps indicates the character's passionate love of not only nature, people, and Russia but also alcohol. Flyagin speaks on behalf of Leskov that "passion for alcohol is rationalized as something independent of the self, a demon that cannot be denied" (McLean, 247);<sup>66</sup> yet, he does not resist his alcoholism and calls his spree the *vykhod* (going out), perhaps from misery and difficulties in reality. It is not surprising to see that throughout his wandering life,

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<sup>65</sup> See McLean, *Nikolai Leskov*, where he argues that Ivan is the name that neighboring people used as an appellative for "Russian" and Severyanovich the patronymic reminds the reader of Russia—the country of the north (243).

<sup>66</sup> McLean argues that Flyagin is "more excited by the spectacle of his own destruction, of the sensation he is creating by throwing away all that money, than he is by the gypsy girl" (249). Flyagin's alcoholic spree reflects not only his passion for the gypsy but also his acknowledgement of his self-destructive personality.

Flyagin's stupor accompanies his wrong decisions, suicidal actions, and passive fatalism. As Hugh McLean argues, this most stereotypical northern Russian's addiction to alcoholism may be a reflection of all ordinary serfs' suffering from this ancient national vice (243). His alcoholism and misfortune seem to symbolize numerous common Russian serfs' falls into irresponsibility, self-destructive escapism, and consequently, miserable living conditions.

Leskov is not the only writer who portrays alcoholism as "terrible and heartrending," as he states in "The Toupee Artist" (417). Dostoevsky in his public and fictional writings also explores the Russian people's vodka as a destructive and dangerous weapon. Dostoevsky had always been a social critic who alerted people of the pollution of their goodness by alcohol. In *A Writer's Diary*, he explains the way "demon-vodka" works. He describes a brutal peasant who "grossly overloaded his cart lashing his wretched nag, who gives him his living, across the eyes as she struggles in the mud" (1:328), in part because he is beaten all the time by his courier. The author draws a parallel between this violent coachman and an abusive husband, who may "set to beating [his wife] to force her to give him still more vodka" (1:329). What is common between the evil courier and the demon-vodka, according to the writer, is that each of them "coarsens and brutalizes a man, makes him callous, and turns him away from clear thinking, desensitizes him to the power of goodness" (ibid.). In the *Diary*, the writer is concerned about the effect of vodka that towers over the people's will and destroys their souls.

Dostoevsky portrays vodka as a symbol of evil in his fiction, for instance, in the semi-autobiographical and semi-ethnographic novel, *Notes from the House of the Dead* (1860).

Critics usually comment on the solidarity of the peasant convicts. As Elizabeth Blake notes, despite all the chaotic conflicts between Russian convicts and other ethnic minorities in the prison, they at least share the experience of frequent punishment by flogging, which can spiritually connect all these peasants with every individual's endurance of physical pain and compassion for a suffering other. As she puts it, corporeal punishment of the peasant convicts "unite[s] them in solidarity against the military authority" and "point[s] to a camaraderie among flogging victims" (49). Although such arguments have their merit, I argue that in at least one aspect, the peasants' alcoholism, the novel reveals a rupture of the peasant convicts' "solidarity." Russian prisons were populated by inmates who were drunkards and incarcerated for crimes committed in a state of drunkenness, as mentioned above. In the sketch on Christmas *Notes from the House of the Dead*, the narrator in particular reveals a sharp contrast between such peasants' civility, humility, mutual love before drinking and their brutality, vulgarity, conflicts in drunkenness.

Before the convicts start drinking, they show solemn dignity on this holy day. "Apart from their innate reverence for the great day, the convicts felt unconsciously that by the observance of Christmas they were, as it were, in touch with the whole of the world, that they were not altogether outcasts and lost men, not altogether cut off" (134). The Christmas morning when the convicts greet each other in the most civil way becomes a sublime moment of these people's spiritual brotherhood in this piece. One incident that makes the narrator realize this noble solidarity of the people is his acquaintance with a particular convict whom he hardly noticed in the past. Gorianchikov notes:

He had caught sight of me in the middle of the yard and shouted after me,  
“Alexandr Petrovich, Alexandr Petrovich!” He was running towards the kitchen  
in a hurry....  
“What is it?” I asked wondering, seeing that he was standing and gazing at me  
with open eyes, was smiling but not saying a word.  
“Why, it’s Christmas,” he muttered, and realizing that he could say nothing  
more, he left me and rushed into the kitchen.  
I may mention here that we had never had anything to do with one another and  
scarcely spoke from that time till I left the prison. (137)

The way the people greet others, even a nobleman, on the morning of Christmas leaves  
Goranchikov with the impression that they have connected with each other in a  
“friendship” that is more profound than individual friendship. The same civility, humility,  
and mutual respect go on to rule over the Christmas dinner of these solemnly religious  
peasants. The narrator notes that people from the middle and lower classes in the town  
send pastries they bake to the convicts. “When the offerings were piled up in heaps, the  
senior convicts were sent for, and they divided all equally among the wards. There was  
no scolding or quarrelling; it was honestly and equitably done” (138). The scene of  
Goranchikov receiving a kopeck from a little girl among the almsgiving people is even  
based on a sublime moment of Dostoevsky’s real life. When the gentry murderer  
Goranchikov and the “unfortunate” (*nechastnyi*) lower-class convicts are embraced by

the almsgiving people equally, this moment is portrayed as positive and spiritual, as Linda Ivanits notes (*Dostoevsky and the Russian People*, 25). Served with this food from charity, the dinner starts as a continuation of the Christmas morning, in a festival mood and a harmonious atmosphere.

When the peasants start drinking, however, their order, submission, and “friendship” are replaced by conflicts, chaos, and despair. One may forgive the convicts’ indulgence in drunkenness, given that they suffer from, as Gary Rosenshield puts it, “a chasm between [their] aspirations of freedom and the grim reality of their long prison sentences” (“Religious Portraiture,” 592). Indeed, Dostoevsky’s plan is to describe the lower-class inmates’ suffering, nostalgia, and belongingness to Russia. Nonetheless, we may still critically read the text against the grain, since the convicts’ drinking spree is portrayed as an ambivalent phenomenon that demonstrates both the people’s suffering and their brutality.<sup>67</sup> As Rosenshield notes, even though the multi-ethnic collective of the convicts shares their reverence for Christian rituals, the larger portion of the sketch and the more graphic description of the drunkenness subvert the prisoners’ Christianity into “carousing.”

For instance, when they become drunk, the people start to sing folk songs, which may facilitate such a reading against the grain, since the inmates’ chorus indicates their centrifugal “movements.” One peasant sings about the loss of freedom. One condemns

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<sup>67</sup> See Rosenshield, for his reading against the grain of sketches in the *House*. He argues that “against the intention of the author himself, the description of Easter, the day of Christian hope, of resurrection from the dead (the main message of the text), undercuts the more hopeful notes sounded at Christmas regarding the religious feelings of the Russian people” (“Religious Portraiture,” 593). However, Rosenshield concludes that Dostoevsky’s objective and “naturalistic” style still helps the novelist to idealize the Orthodox prisoners in a convincing way.



the prisoners' isolated and secretive life behind walls. Another peasant expresses his despair over the impossibility of ever returning to his country of birth and to the backwoods of Russia. The holiday bliss in the previous scene is replaced by a sensation of their loss of Russia in their lives. At this critical point, it should be noted that these folk songs are based on the novelist's collections of lyrics sung by real convicts surrounding him. Dostoevsky took notes of the humming, the verses, and folk language of his companions in prison and these valuable materials were well preserved till the end of his life. However, as Joseph Frank points out, the novelist's eyewitness accounts of the people's folk language and popular culture, especially those during the first years in Siberia, were not unambiguously positive, because the people's brutalities exposed to him for the first time the irrational needs of the human spirit, the distance between classes, the violence against others, and the brutishness of human nature.<sup>68</sup> As a result, it is hard to conclude whether Dostoevsky's collection of folk songs in the 1850s was intended to help him express faith in the people's morality or suspicion of their brutality. Moreover, the sudden interjections of folk songs in this novel may indicate the people's and even the country's disintegration, because their folk songs interrupt the odic narrative of the Empire. As critics point out, the lower-class people from all ethnic backgrounds and the political prisoners from the isolated gentry are connected through the experience of pain.<sup>69</sup> Their endurance of suffering implies the powerful dominance of a violent empire

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<sup>68</sup> Frank regards Dostoevsky's first years in camp as a period of moral horror, when he was exposed to prostitution, theft, savage beating, insulting oaths, menaces, threats, and the "constant irascibility of his fellow inmates" (93). Beside his realization of the lower-classes' hostility and the absence of their revolutionary instinct, most prominently, the writer suffered from shrinking fear of flogging, which revealed to him the ubiquitous brute power for one human being to violate another in any human society.

<sup>69</sup> See Rosenshield, "The Problem of Pain," where he argues that the novel offers "a devastating critique

and its nation-building project. This dominant national narrative, however, is nuanced by the inmates' folkloric oral chanting on their "misfortune" in this episode.<sup>70</sup> In other words, these folk singers, despite their prolonged suffering from corporal punishment and imprisonment, deviate from the odic narrative of the institution. While Dostoevsky expresses his contempt for the Empire's suffocating authority and the prison's unifying structure, he also inserts into this sketch folkloric narratives in melancholic tones to insinuate that the national power fails, the prisoners are estranged, and each individual remains in spiritual solitude.

One may regard the people's folk songs as ultimately double-edged, showing the people's rebellious escape from Russia's oppressive power and their sentimental belongingness to her; however, the sensitive nostalgia of the drunkards completely transforms itself into a brutal inclination for fighting and even a perverted penchant for disaster, as the narrator shows. In total drunkenness, these people seem to be looking for someone to fight against or even expect something "extraordinary" to happen, preferably disaster, rebellion, or provocative accidents. As is expected, their day concludes with an incident in which one peasant punches the face of another, both drunk. They were in a quarrel over some debts and one "suddenly and quite unexpectedly drove his huge fist with all his might into his friend's little face" (145). The narrator follows with a

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of the absolutist rightist state, for which the infliction of pain is a symbol," through the portrayals of flogging (54).

<sup>70</sup> See Dwyer. Because the shared trauma on the bodies of the prisoners proves their shared suffering from the oppressive disciplines imposed by the Empire, the novel seems to criticize the state's arbitrariness and praise the inmates' suffering. At the same time, however, the novelist also nuances the people's agency, which is violent, egoistic, and aggressive against surrounding inmates as well. The institutional violence of nation-building seems to become manifest in each inmate, as each individual's class-blind exercise of irrational violence.

comment: “[t]hat was the end of a whole day’s friendship” (ibid.). Obviously, his use of the words “friend” and “friendship” here is ironic, reminding the reader of the prisoners’ “friendship” in the beginning of this spiritualizing and purifying holiday. It is very likely that in the piece “Christmas,” the narrator traces the process by which the peasants’ holy unity in the morning disappears and disintegrates by the evening, with the drunkards left in an irrational spree and nostalgia for the beginning of the day.

Although one may insist that the violence and rebellion of the people only demonstrate their stifled feelings of misery and rage, and thus, may not be subject to judgment or critique, we must note that such a feeling of pain and loss does not seem to have an equally licentious effect on certain morally strong peasants. While most convicts succumb to their demon-vodka, some older peasants, Old Believers, and Circassian convicts stare at “the drunken crowd with curiosity and a certain disgust” (139). The picture that “[l]ittle by little, the convicts grew noisier. Quarrels began” (140) is not equally perceived by each individual peasant as acceptable and forgivable. On the other hand, while these nobler peasants critically view the Russian peasants’ violent drinking pattern, certain materialistic and egoistic ones even attempt to make money. A particular alcohol-seller, Gazin, slyly keeps himself sober and makes others drunk so that he could “[empty] the convicts’ pockets” (140). As their chorus reaches its climax, the people disintegrate into morally dissimilar groups.

Even if one insists that the narrator portrays the drunkards with compassion and condones their current lives in a moral abyss, we should note that after all, this sketch is a prelude to a later entry, “Akul’ka’s Husband,” in which Dostoevsky explores the Russian

drunkards' unexplainable and unforgivable evil nature. In this piece, the writer portrays an inhumane, monstrous peasant who is drunk all day long and beats his wife several hours a day. Given this connection between the early chapter and the later one, both related to alcoholism, the writer seems to the reader to summarize the immoral behaviors of drunkards in the earlier entry, in the evil image of Akulina's alcoholic husband in the later chapter.

We may call the domestic violence of the husband Shishkov an "iconic" symbol of evil, central to the entire novel. As Karla Oeler argues, although Gorianchikov makes mention of his wife-murder in his preface, we do not see him repenting this crime. Instead, Dostoevsky arranges for Shishkov to narrate his wife-murder in response to Gorianchikov's preface. Shishkov's narrative thus usurps the narrator's dominance in the novel and serves as the writer's vengeance against all such crimes. We may state that Dostoevsky explores one alcoholic's evil action as a symbol of all such people's immorality portrayed in the novel.

Shishkov's sin is almost the sole component of this sketch, untempered by the narrator and uncommented on by the writer. His monologue entirely usurps the existence of the narrator and is only briefly commented on by an equally vile peasant convict in the end. The hopeless darkness in his confession is also not at all altered by Akulina's holy image. As Ivanits summarizes, this abused woman's iconic image, or *obraz*, in this novel, is subject to disfiguration (*bezobrazie*) by the murderer (*Dostoevsky and the People*, 29). As Nancy Ruttenburg notes, the title *Akul'kin muzh* even reduces Akulina's name to "a

modifier of the noun ‘husband,’” erases her identity, and subordinates her existence to Shishkov’s presence in gender (75).

Critics agree that Dostoevsky portrays this untempered darkness of the drunkard’s soul as inexplicable, irrelevant to any environmental factors or socio-economic realities. As we know, Shishkov beats Akulina seemingly out of his jealousy, although her betrayal is absolutely not grounded on any facts or evidence. His cold-blooded behavior makes no sense for any nineteenth-century or contemporary reader. As one critic points out, from the perspective of listeners’ ethics, this piece “marks the limits of environmental explanations of crime,” since listeners feel that “the more Shishkov tells of his story, the more we are repelled and the less we know how to make his story cohere” (Schur, 587, 586). Ruttenburg also argues that the writer highlights Shishkov’s sin to be “owned by no one, confessed without remorse, and witnessed without understanding, a *ne to* that lies outside positive identification or accountability” (139). As Oeler puts it, “Akul’ka’s Husband” is a “black hole” behind Gorianchikov’s frequently sympathetic analysis of Russian peasants’ explainable, forgivable transgressions in the entire project of *Notes from the House of the Dead* (529). Shishkov’s soul is deliberately portrayed as unexplainable and purely evil, impossible for the sinner or anyone else to redeem.

The disturbances in the evil nature of Shishkov are, however, intertwined with his alcoholism. As we know, Akulina and Shishkov have shared a sublime moment of purity and virtue on the day of their wedding. When Shishkov found out that she is a virgin but suffered from slander, violence, and injustice, he “knelt down before her then, on the spot” (221) to ask for her forgiveness, and worshipped her suffering. However, the marriage

established on such a holy bond on the wedding day is soon polluted by demon-vodka. Although Shishkov should have known Akulina to be a virgin, after having heard an irrelevant rumor that a fellow peasant soldier got married so that he could pimp his own wife for booze, Shishkov somehow desires to get drunk and take revenge on his wife. It is not made clear whether he also feels tempted to pimp his own wife, or whether he hates himself, a drunkard, for perhaps having married a prostitute. Either way, his decision to punish her as a cheating wife is a result of his alcoholism and delusion. Although it is commonly known that wife beating is derived from the wives' infidelity,<sup>71</sup> as ethnographers and historians demonstrate, this connection is apparently denied by Dostoevsky in this sketch, and nothing besides Shishkov's drunkenness could explain his brutality. Both his alcoholic spree and his abusive manner have never stopped, despite Akulina's chasteness, and Shishkov confesses to her family that "I am no longer master of myself" (223).

The evil force of alcoholism thus easily darkens the limited spiritual "light" in Shishkov's nature and further destroys other spiritual bonding around him. As we know, Filka is no better an alcoholic peasant than Shishkov. He is the one who uses vodka for water, slanders Akulina's family, and exploits his fellow villagers for his own materialistic profit. When he leaves the village as a soldier and bows down to Akulina,

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<sup>71</sup> See, for instance, Semyonova, for her ethnographic report on the causal link between promiscuity, drunkenness, and wife beating. Although she acknowledges that wife beating may result from the husband's irrational demand for a wife to carry out all his orders, she also seems to blame the women's promiscuity for the men's drunkenness and violence. She points out such motivations that drive peasants to drink and beat their wives: discovery of a bride's loss of virginity on a wedding night or punishment for a soldier's wife pregnant with another man's child (21). By shifting her focus on drunkards' immorality toward women's sexual promiscuity, Semyonova's comment to a degree alleviates the husbands' guilt for violence.

nonetheless, he experiences a sublime epiphany. He calls Akulina his “soul” and in reply, Akulina bravely claims to Shishkov—“I love him now more than all the world” (224). The bow and the forgiveness exchanged between the sinner Filka and the martyr Akulina are spiritually enlightening. However, this moment of light is also destroyed by the alcoholic. Out of jealousy, Shishkov murders Akulina—cutting her throat with a knife. The very action of severing the vein of a suffering soul is graphic and symbolic, perhaps illustrating the drunkard’s evil power to destroy and disintegrate the spiritual ties between individuals in the peasant world. As the murder scene shows, Akulina struggles to get out of her husband’s arm and the murderer sets off running away from her in panic. Surrounded by motifs of separation and disunity, the alcoholic’s murderous act is portrayed as a destructive strength that breaks spiritual bonds.

Alcoholism becomes an even more abstract and philosophical symbol of immorality in *Crime and Punishment* (1866). First, the brute and drunk coachman Mikolka, in Raskolnikov’s dream, embodies the excessive alcoholism and national character of the Russian people. Mikolka appears among a group of peasants celebrating at one moment (“Everyone is drunk, everyone is singing songs” (55)) and beating animals in turn at another, in a marginalized half-village and half-city. They seem to release their rage by tormenting a poor mare with three different weapons. Mikolka especially asserts his power and agency over his horse, the only asset on which he can impose his will. (He repeats that the mare is his “goods” and he has the right to kill her.) Andrea Zink claims that Russians of all classes drink in the novel, from Mikolai the abusive coachman to Nikolai the Old Believer, from the low official Marmeladov to the new intellectual

Razumikhin. Thus, she finds alcoholism in this novel to be the icon of Russianness and the people's national character. On the one hand, Dostoevsky invokes alcoholism to illustrate Russians' childlike, untamed, and even selfless character, since at certain stages, "drunkenness, occasional drunkenness, goes hand in hand with sacrifice and love, salvation and redemption," while on the other hand, "the brutal, drunken peasants in Raskol'nikov's dream [are] a prerequisite for their harmless brothers, the average fantastic drunkards" (Zink, 71). In other words, the alcoholic character should be regarded as at least Janus-faced Russianness, and Mikolka embodies the undeniably evil side of the national character.

Despite Zink's analysis of the double-sided national character, I propose to read the people's alcoholism and mentality in *Crime and Punishment* more as unambiguously deprived of a moral compass, as we see in Mikolka's alcoholic spree. The reason is that Dostoevsky creates the central figure of the novel, Raskolnikov, in part as a higher version of Mikolka, both "drunk" in their mentalities. First, in the novel that was to be titled *The Drunkards*, the impoverished intellectual is portrayed as spiritually "drunk." He wanders around on the street, "without noticing where he was going, whispering and even talking aloud to himself, to the surprise of passers-by. Many took him for drunk" (40). The narrator reports that numerous times Raskolnikov has arrived home, "having absolutely no recollection of which way he had come, and he had already grown used to going around that way" (46). Raskolnikov's "alcoholism" is extremely dangerous, since its symptoms grow as his theory of the extraordinary man develops,<sup>72</sup> and these

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<sup>72</sup> Raskolnikov's premeditation about his superman ego lasts at least one and a half months before he



symptoms are particularly apparent at the moment of his murder. As Tolstoy notes in “The Ethics of Wine-Drinking and Tobacco-Smoking,” Dostoevsky portrays the criminal in the murder scene as if he were drunk and “acting like a machine,” his conscience muffled and compassion stifled (150). The dangerous rebellion of Raskolnikov apparently parallels the sin of Mikolka in that just as the peasant intends to kill his mare with an axe, Raskolnikov “repeats under the influence of madness and sickness the barbarity of his peasant forebears” (Zink, 68), murdering the pawnbroker and her sister with this very weapon. Admittedly, Raskolnikov uses the weapon which Mikolka did not use in the first place, and thus, the brutality of the intellectual atheist is more serious than that of the drunken peasant; however, by associating Mikolka and Raskolnikov as two immoral “drunkards,” it is clear that Dostoevsky expresses his anxiety that the common peasants’ drinking spree may spread the root of irreligious rebellion in their souls.

In this novel, the violent and immoral character of the Russian people’s alcoholism is also more emphasized because the house painter Nikolka’s destruction is related to his drunkenness. This character is usually regarded as a positive figure, since he steps forward to suffer and repent for a crime he did not commit. However, the narrator emphasizes several times that Nikolka is a merry person who is not conscious of what happens around him, absorbed in his happy wrestling with the other painter at the time of the murder. His excitement on the day of the murder indicates that he is most likely drunk. It seems that the novelist allows a causal link between Nikolka’s drunkenness on that

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finally decides to commit murder. His symptom of “alcoholism” is exacerbated by his disgust at Dunia’s marriage, compassion for a prostitute on the street, and rebellion against the unjust God. In this one and a half months, he has constantly been wandering around in the city as if he were a drunkard.

crucial day and his tragedy of becoming a murder suspect by accident. What is more, upon learning that he has become the suspect, he immediately walks into an inn, trades his silver cross for booze, ties his belt to a beam and tries to put the noose around his neck, as one witness claims. The commoner's suicidal mentality may be described by the author as negative commentary on "the irreconcilability of a drunk and worldly life with a true Christian existence" (Zink, 70). (In the last chapter of the present study I will again return to this character, exploring his Old Believer identity, to comment on the "execution" and destruction that await him.)

Although Tolstoy is more famous for his non-fictional claims about alcohol's effect on the people's moral voice, he also joins Leskov and Dostoevsky to enrich the symbolic meaning of alcoholism in fiction, somehow in a more graphic way. In *Resurrection*, alcohol escalates from being a symbol of unconsciousness into a weapon of destruction. As we know, the victim of the Maslova case is an alcoholic merchant, whose life is terminated precisely by the poison in his glass of brandy. Maslova innocently puts the white powder, "which she thought was a soporific" (58), into the merchant's brandy, but it turns out to be arsenic. In this way, the story associates soporific wine and a poisonous weapon in Maslova's fate. Even in court, Maslova still seems unconvinced of the real danger of the "soporific" wine. She keeps repeating: "I thought they were sleeping powders. I only gave them to send him to sleep. I never meant, I never thought anything else" (62). The case seems to highlight an ironic situation in which the soporific effect of wine is somehow transformed into a deathly weapon unbeknownst to the drunkard.

The document on the drunkard's corpse—a disgusting body—further associates alcohol with sin and evil in general. The graphic report on the merchant's ugly body demonstrates Tolstoy's grotesque style, which the writer usually uses to show the degradation of a human being capable of spiritual content into a physical body controlled by sinful desire. As Ani Kokobobo puts it, the doctor's autopsy reduces the drunkard to a pound of flesh, in which Tolstoy illustrates the man's evil and sin.<sup>73</sup> What is more, the murder of the merchant is modeled on a real story that Tolstoy heard from the jurist A. F. Koni, and the story of Maslova is based on the writer's own abandonment of a young chambermaid, Gasha, whom he seduced in his aunt's house. Thus, Tolstoy seems to frame these various common phenomena of vileness that happened in his real life and among real people in the image of this alcoholic merchant. No wonder the victim's autopsy report disgusts readers. His body should enable the writer to express an unambiguous contempt for all the urban people's degradation into animal existences. When the court listens to a doctor's report describing the poison in the merchant's stomach, the Tolstoyan character Nekhliudov also senses the universal presence of disgust and sin: "Katusha's life, the serum oozing from the nostrils of the dead body, the eyes protruding from their sockets and his own treatment of her—all seemed to belong to the same order of things, and he was surrounded and engulfed by things of this nature" (100). Tolstoy and his character both associate the motif of alcoholism with their own past sins and all other people's various immoral behaviors in a deeply spiritual sense.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> In her article "Corpses," Kokobobo describes the merchant's body "as a focal point for the grotesque in *Resurrection*; it spills out from every orifice, breaching boundaries between the inside and the outside and 'poison[ing] the air of the whole novel'" (169).

<sup>74</sup> This report on the alcoholic's corpse influences Nekhliudov spiritually, or as Kaufman puts it, "set[s]

### **An Apocalyptic Symbol of Spiritual Disunity**

It is noteworthy that before the murder, Maslova already knows Kartinkin, a hotel cleaner and a former peasant. During the murder, this seemingly trustworthy acquaintance steals the merchant's money and decides to blame it on Maslova. After the murder, Kartinkin joins Maslova in an empty room next to the merchant's, again to drink brandy. The two characters, a serf woman and a peasant, are connected to each other only by wine, crime, and their sentence of exile to Siberia. The case involving three heavy drunkards is closed with the merchant's death, Kartinkin's eight-year labor, and Maslova's degradation into a murderer. Alcohol seems to symbolize the disintegration of the common people on a large scale.

In most literary pieces by Tolstoy mentioned in this chapter, he explores a graphic image of alcoholism to illustrate a picture of the Russian people's disunity and conflict. The above-mentioned drama *The First Moonshiner* reveals his concern about a typical situation of *vydel*, or, division of a peasant household. The selfless peasant who once generously let the demon steal his bread turns into a drunkard who beats his wife and refuses to feed the older generation. The writer mentions fleetingly that he wants a relative, his uncle, to reimburse him for his past contribution to providing for their grandfather. This old peasant, who is against drinking alcohol in this village, seems to be the remaining vestige of the once simple and caring community. He represents a time when these peasants did not know of the existence of wine and he speaks about the

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off alarms in the court of higher justice in session inside Nekhliudov's struggling conscience" (221).

nostalgia for the decent time when they would work, meet, and talk about community affairs. The hatred toward this elder and the *vydel* from him thus demonstrate the disappearance of collective life and disunity of a family. In the last scene of the drama, following these peasants' debate over the issue of division, some of them end up beating each other in "a brawl" (183). The once peaceful village, where no one was sent to the demons' hell, turns into a battlefield of conflict, where "all become vicious like wolves" (ibid.).

The other drama, *The Cause of It All*, offers a pessimistic picture of a mundane peasant community that lacks mutual caring through the motif of alcohol, in a more nuanced way. As mentioned above, the thief calls himself a degenerate and seems to feel hatred toward these people's "goodness" (he throws their sugar and tea back to them). His departure to another village, as one may assume, could end up in the same way—pretending to be noble and sober, getting drunk, and stealing from the people. The wanderer is unchanged and untransformed in any spiritual way. The closing scene in the play thus shows an absence of profound human warmth, let alone collective moral epiphany. Every villager returns to their mundane talk about tea-making. Alcoholism and whatever evil it may cause—wife-beating, laziness, squandering money—are once interrogated upon the arrival of the tramp but again repeated as these people's routines in the end of the play.

The drunkards seem to further actively destroy their spiritual bonding with others, as we may discern in the novella "Albert," when the drunk musician is responsible for his fall and isolation. As we learn, the impoverished Albert does have some spiritual

influence on the people around him. Not only Delesov the sponsor, but also Zakhar' the serf fall in love with the violinist's charming smile and kindness. The master's and the serf's generous offering of food, clothes, and love demonstrate that the three living in the same house, despite their differences in classes and personalities, have made a connection. It is only unfortunate that Albert's drunkenness makes him look mad, unhealthy, and untrustworthy in the eyes of all the other people. For instance, Anna Ivanovna, a woman who once sponsors and admires the musician, cautions that one should not take Albert home and locks he drunkard outside her door. He is no longer cherished as a spiritual companion but considered a dangerous trouble-maker when drunk. In his alcoholic delusion he seems to recognize Petrov and Delesov. Both characters once respect his talent and his soul, but they are rejecting him and chasing him away in his dream. A dark vision of breakup, separation, and disunity keeps haunting the drunkard.

In addition, although the story features a framework of one Tolstoyan character providing for a lower-class artist, Tolstoy insinuates that when the innocent young musician is drunk, he stimulates impure erotic passion rather than brotherly caring in Delesov. Albert's performance of a romantic etude reminds the listeners of their first love, past romance, and first kiss. Given that Tolstoy has an ambivalent view on music and art, Albert's passionate performance, despite his audience's attraction to it, may also bear some negative connotations. Delesov immediately takes Albert back home from the ball. He enjoys scrutinizing the drunk musician in his bed, his clean clothes, white shirt, charming eyes, and the way he elegantly drinks champagne from a glass. At this moment, "Delesov felt himself growing fonder of the man, and experienced an incomprehensible

joy” (1:462). He boldly and abruptly asks Albert “Have you ever been in love?” (ibid.) in whispers near Albert’s ears. These out-of-place descriptions indicate that Delesov’s “joy” is not comradely but rather erotic. The drunkard Albert somehow motivates physical passion, which in Tolstoy’s view is always a “unity” in an evil sense that destroys a brotherly bond and a spiritual tie.

The common people’s alcoholism, as Tolstoy portrays it, always severs their innocent bond, even those of siblings, as we can see in “Francoise,” where a brother-sister relation is polluted by alcohol. At the moment when Duclos and Francoise recognize each other, the narrator illustrates a background picture of depravity in which “others shouted with drunken voices. The ringing of glasses, the beating of hands and heels, and the piercing screams of women, intermingled with the singing and the shouting” (2:465). The siblings’ “reunion” when they are reduced to customer and prostitute symbolizes a disappearance of brotherhood not only between them but also among the drunkards surrounding them. The story ends with Duclos screaming insanely that these prostitutes and the customers must all be siblings. In this short story, Tolstoy frames a broken picture of a literally fraternal connection in the background of the people’s alcoholic spree.

Last but not least, Tolstoy illustrates the power of alcoholic addiction to separate, sever, and smash the healthy body and the human heart in a broader urban context, in particular the urban center—a train station. As I will show in the following, in *Anna Karenina* (1873-1877), he interweaves the fate of the fallen heroine and the tragedy of a drunk watchman in the context of apocalyptic catastrophe to prevision a disastrous moral disunity of the urban people and the Russian souls. Anna is petrified by her visions and

dreams of a series of peasant drunkards, railway workers, and muzhiks, all reminding us of the dead watchman.<sup>75</sup> The connection between the fates of the two seemingly unrelated figures—Anna and the watchman—has been the subject of heated critical debate. In my view, the internal connection between Anna’s suicide and the drunkard’s mutilation in this text does not only show Anna’s suffering from her sexual transgression and adulterous sin, but also demonstrates her epiphany (and Tolstoy’s message) that immorality and disunity derive from the people’s “alcoholism”—the silencer of their conscience in the apocalyptic age.

Since the watchman’s accident and the peasant dreams are in part the milestones in Anna’s life as an adulteress, most critics interpret the watchman’s and the peasants’ symbolism solely in relation to Anna’s adultery and Tolstoy’s view on sensuality. For instance, Gary Saul Morson argues in several commentaries that the function of the peasant’s accident in this novel is to demonstrate Anna’s subjective, fatalistic understanding of life.<sup>76</sup> Gary Browning also associates Vronsky and Karenin, her two romantic partners, with the peasant symbol.<sup>77</sup> Many other critics consider the dream to

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<sup>75</sup> Peasant figures in the novel are all interrelated. They are milestones in Anna’s life. To raise a few examples: Anna has the dream featuring a muzhik bending down and murmuring something, long before her adultery. She sees a peasant worker checking the thermometer on the wall on her train back to Petersburg from Moscow. Later, when she stands outside the train on a platform right before meeting Vronsky, she senses there is a shadow of a watchman flying and passing her by. She witnesses a similar peasant worker sitting in her train and notices another one bending over the rails in front of her window, on the last day of her life.

<sup>76</sup> Morson argues that Anna subjectively and incorrectly interprets the presence of the muzhiks as a sign of her future. She stubbornly believes that an accident irrelevant to her is foretelling her tragic fate, and such obsession with omens “proceeds not only from fatalism but also from narcissism” (*The Moral Urgency of Anna Karenina*, 36). In Morson’s view, Anna dies not because of ill fate but from her own fatalism. She refuses to acknowledge objective surrounding circumstances and other possible choices in her life.

<sup>77</sup> Browning argues that the muzhik in Anna’s vision is a low version of Vronsky and Karenin. Given that Vronsky’s desire for Anna is illicit and Karenin’s intercourse with her is deprived of love or emotion, Tolstoy must portray these sexual relationships to demonstrate his grave concerns about numerous Russians’



reveal Anna's personality.<sup>78</sup> Through the peasant's tragedy and Anna's similar death on rails, Tolstoy obviously attempts to deliver a message about her character or pronounce a judgment on her.<sup>79</sup>

However convincing these arguments, Tolstoy's critiques of adultery, sexuality, and the self-destruction of the heroine are not the only angle for looking at the interwoven fates of Anna and the drunkard. After all, the dreams related to the muzhik, as the narrator clarifies, "had come to her repeatedly even before her liaison with Vronsky" (752). When Anna finally recognizes a peasant worker at the train station right before her suicide as the one in her dream, she refers to it as a dream that had visited her in the past. Her fear of the dream, the *muzhik*, and the murdered watchman does not seem entirely derived from her guilt over her affair.<sup>80</sup> As we know, Anna witnesses the appearance of peasant workers and drunkards only at train stations in Moscow and Petersburg, the two cities identified in academic studies to have the highest rate of alcohol consumption. The watchman who triggers her superstitious beliefs and constant fear is possibly killed by the train under the soporific influence of alcohol. At the same time, railway settings serve as

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breaches of traditional marriage and addiction to immoral debauchery.

<sup>78</sup> As Paperno convincingly demonstrates, Tolstoy trusts no writings, words, and reminiscences that people produce consciously; rather, under the influence of Schopenhauer, Tolstoy is convinced that dreams place the dreamer in a death-like situation ("Who, What Am I?"). Tolstoy perhaps creates the dreams of Anna as revelations of the dreamer's true self. Also in Eikhenbaum's view, the heroine's dream is prophetic, allegorical, and revealing of her inner world (159-60).

<sup>79</sup> See, for instance, Wasiolek (*Tolstoy's Major Fiction*) and Browning, for the argument that death and self-destruction associate Anna with the peasant. "What the horrible little man in her dream was doing over the iron is what her sinful life has done to her soul—battering and destroying it— . . . and that now she will follow the direction of her dream and have a train, a thing of iron, destroy her body," also as Nabokov notes, reaffirming the overlapping fates of Anna and the peasant (175).

<sup>80</sup> Anna claims to Vronsky, in Part Four, that her dreams foretell her death in childbirth. However, this interpretation is only subjective because she focuses her entire life on her current status as a pregnant adulteress in society. Given that the dreams emerge before her liaison, she could not have any idea that she would be pregnant in adultery. In this novel, the dreams do not solely imply a woman's shame at illicit sexuality.

signals of Tolstoy's prevision of apocalypse. Throughout his life, Tolstoy regarded railways as "the ills of the age brought about by the rapid onset of modernity" (Tapp, 345).<sup>81</sup> In *Anna Karenina* in particular, as Robert Louis Jackson argues, the train and the train station have become a "symbol of dislocation of life, as an embodiment of new forces ruthlessly destroying the old patterns of patriarchal existence" (*Close Encounters*, 91). As I will show below, the combination of these two motifs—alcoholism and apocalypse—may very possibly foreshadow a disintegration of the Russian peasants' brotherly unity in the nation's backwoods.

The watchman is mutilated as the victim of the ills of modernization and moreover, of his own absent-mindedness or perhaps drunkenness. It is noteworthy that the body is observed and discussed by some passers-by, whose social backgrounds are not clearly identified by Tolstoy. But from these people's emphasis on the fact that the peasant dies in an instantaneous way, we sense their shared fear of sudden disasters:

When they came out, the Vronskys' carriage had already driven off. The people coming out were still talking about what had happened.

"What a terrible death (*smert'-to uzhasnaia*)!" said some gentleman passing by.

'Cut in two pieces (*na dva kуска*), they say.'

"On the contrary, I think it's the easiest, it's instantaneous (*mgnovennaia*)," observed another. (65)

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<sup>81</sup> In the late 1850s, Tolstoy stated that railway journey is "inhumanly mechanical and murderously monotonous" (qtd. in Bethea, 78). In the 1900s, he maintained that modern transportation nurtures "animal instincts alienating everyone and exploiting intellectual faculties for their own satisfaction" (qtd. in Bond, 88).

Since the accident attracts all characters in this scene, even secondary characters like Oblonsky, and reveals their personal views on it, this episode is perhaps indicative of a widespread debate by Russians from all classes, men and women, located in the center of the national modern transportation, over the sudden destruction of the idyllic Russia past. Given that the muzhik's death is categorized as horrifying in the way he is severed into halves, the observers' and passers-bys' sensitivity to the graphic brutality in this episode may reflect their shared fear of a national "mutilation" and disintegration.

It is not enough, for our purposes, to only connect the drunkard with the apocalyptic destruction of the nation, because an even more profound moral message of Tolstoy about the Russian people is hidden in the parallel between the watchman cut in two pieces and the heroine mutilated under a train. Many pieces of evidences demonstrate that Anna's image overlaps with that of the peasant figures in the novel. It is well known that she is killed, dismembered, reduced to an ugly "mangled corpse (*bezobrazhennyi trup*)" (64), just like the watchman. Central to the peasant figure is his mutilation, and in a similar way, central to the heroine of the novel, is her split in herself.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, Anna shows a tendency to become more and more sensitive to the presence of muzhiks,<sup>83</sup> and she even occasionally resembles these peasants when she is alive. In her argument with

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<sup>82</sup> Such motifs of split surround Anna in many crucial moments. When she hallucinates and daydreams in a train, after her first meeting with Vronsky, she famously envisions two Annas. During her adultery and fall, she is reduced to a piece of "murdered body" (*telom ubitogo*), upon which Vronsky pounces and "cut this body into pieces (*rezat' na kuski*)" (149).

<sup>83</sup> The first watchman killed on the rails shocks her but is not witnessed by her; on her trainride back to Petersburg, also much earlier than her involvement with Vronsky, she remembers another peasant worker checking the thermometer on the wall, but she has some hallucinations that blur his figure; the shadow mentioned above is another watchman, passing by and unnoticed. By contrast, on the last day of her life, she witnesses a peasant worker sitting in her train, and she immediately recalls her dreams; noticing another one bending over the rails in front of her window, she suddenly recognizes him as the one in her dreams.

Vronsky, Anna mutters something unheard by Vronsky, as the muzhik in her dreams and the watchman on the rails do (“as he went out, he thought she said something, and his heart was suddenly shaken with compassion for her” (750)). As we know, the muzhik in her dreams appears in her bedroom—her internal and private world. He is perhaps planted in Anna’s female childbearing womb, trusted like no one else has been (Lonnqvist, 84-85). It is possible that Anna is the character in the novel who delivers to the reader Tolstoy’s real message about the symbolism of the peasant.

Although Morson may summarize the symbolic meaning of the muzhik as Anna’s fatalism and narcissism, we should note that her comments on the peasant and other drunkards, workers, and lower-class people who populate the apocalyptic space—the train station—seem to be much more philosophical than an adulteress’ words of delirium and prejudice. Given that the railway system, its apocalyptic symbolism aside, is a mechanism that reveals different characters’ profound understanding of the world,<sup>84</sup> it is possible that in viewing the drunkards at the train station she comments on the condition of the people in a broader sense, not simply in terms of her own fate.

What Anna observes, at this critical point, is the people’s spiritual drunkenness and egoistic disunity. The urban population seems to Anna to be spiritually drunk: she especially finds one drunk peasant worker, “with a lolling head being taken somewhere by a policeman” (762), “correct” about the path of life (“‘Sooner that one,’ she thought” (ibid.)). In other words, she regards his alcoholism as the true form of all surrounding people’s life under the surface of their deceptive goodness. Thus, she “undresses,” or

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<sup>84</sup> Using the backdrop of the train station, the narrator can reveal more about Anna that is personal. See Jahn, “The Image of the Railroad.”

reduces, everything and everyone to their bare ugliness and lowest forms, for instance, a woman passenger's naked "hideousness" (*bezobrazie*), a coachman's "dull, animal face (*s tupym zhivotnym litsom*)" (765), a beggar woman's misery, some ugly (*urodlivye*), impudent (*naglye*) people, and conversations about nasty (*gadkoe*) topics. In her view, the train station is occupied by a "noisy crowd of all these hideous people (*shumiashchei tolpe vsekh etikh bezobraznykh liudei*)" (767), who are by nature egoistic and hostile. Just before her suicide she remembers that "Yashvin says, 'He wants to leave me without a shirt, and I him.' That's the truth!" (761). This description of gambling situations, in which people interact with each other without courtesy and politeness but only with egotism and hostility, seems to Anna to perfectly summarize the relationship of all these vulgar people on the street: "Yes, it was what Yashvin said: the struggle (*bor'ba*) for existence and hatred (*nenavist'*)—the only thing that connects people" (762).

One may object that Anna's worldview, especially her harsh condemnation of the people, is subjective and skewed, not even close to the omnipotent author's viewpoint. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the narrator positively affirms the value of her comment. When the heroine completely denies the possibility of any people's life spent in mutual care and brotherly bonds, the narrator claims that she arrives at the glorious architecture of the train station and the piercing light "revealed to her the meaning of life and of people's relations" (763). The authorial voice of the narrator celebrates her comment as an epiphany: her contempt for the entire body of people "was not a supposition" but a revelation (*ibid.*). If the omnipotent narrator believes "she now saw her own and everyone else's life" (764), her rage against the people populating the train

station, the urban center of the novel, may be qualified to at least in part express Tolstoy's criticism.<sup>85</sup> Perhaps in the lit up view of the station, Anna condemns the centrifugal life of all degraded people in the exact way the author intends to condemn a disunited Russia populated by "half-dead-drunk" (762) former peasants.

Critics may still disagree and claim that Anna's condemnation of the vulgarity of the drunkards and the immorality of people is a self-centered expression or a vengeful voice (Gustafson, 123-37). Nonetheless, it should be noted that her harsh accusation of all Russians' immoral lives includes her self-critique, which resonates with Tolstoy's contempt for humanity's fall and immorality.<sup>86</sup> For instance, Anna uses the verb "get rid of" (*izbavit'sia*) to accuse all self-deceptive people who become oblivious of their guilt over their sins in life and still believe they are morally integrated. This verb is similarly used by Irtenev in *The Devil* (1889), for instance, who refuses to lie to himself that he can be spiritual and good, and his self-deprecation eventually drives him to drink alcohol all day long. In a parallel, Anna also considers it impossible to achieve any goodness in life, and she concludes that there is no other way to live than drinking one's life away on the street as the aforementioned peasant does. Anna's reliance on morphine, "a certain measure of escape from her troubles" (Basom, 133), is exactly such an example of the

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<sup>85</sup> Anna is equally critical of aristocrats who enjoy their lives without thinking about their moral role in the society. She observes a group of aristocrats travelling out of town and mocks them for still feeling good about their moral integrity, using the term—"won't get away (*izbavit'sia*) from yourselves."

<sup>86</sup> It is unfair to minimize Anna's criticism of others as part of her self-centered psychology because her view of her own life is the same. Anna regards all the activities in her life—reading, writing, teaching Hanna—as meaningless actions ("I restrain myself, wait, invent amusements for myself—the Englishman's family, writing, reading—but it's all only a deception" (704)). Her relationship with Vronsky seems to her to be valueless as well, when she "turned the bright light in which she saw everything upon her relations with him" (762). She calls the aristocrat-travelers self-deceptive, especially commenting that "the dog you're taking with you won't help you" (732), while Vronsky was once such a dog she takes with her (Mandelker).

escapism or oblivion that she criticizes. Thus, she condemns the hypocrisy of drunkenness, the oblivion of guilt, and the incorrigible evil of man without excluding herself from the critique, in a Tolstoyan way that speaks to the author's philosophy.

Another example is Anna's comment on the train, when she sits across from an aristocratic couple. She says to herself that "we're all created in order to suffer, and that we all know it and keep thinking up ways of deceiving ourselves" (766), as if reiterating Tolstoy's ideas in his *Confession*. Tolstoy's confessional narrative famously reveals his indictment against the people who "lick drops of honey only for the time being." In a similar way that the confessor accuses many of "licking the honey as best [they] can, especially in those places where there is the most honey on the bush" (50), Anna despises those who feel good about themselves. It is no wonder that at the train station, the literally drunk peasants and the spiritually "drunk" travelers are the target of critiques by Anna and also by Tolstoy.

In conclusion, Anna's observation of the people in the train station reveals the author's view on the mutilated drunkard, the apocalyptic city, and the fallen people. I first of all demonstrated that the overlapped lives of Anna and the muzhik, for the purposes of this research, facilitate Tolstoy's artistic design to deliver his own message about the Russian people's through Anna's words. As Anna's eyewitness accounts reveal, Tolstoy places into the background of the train station numerous former serfs and peasant workers, all of whom are spiritually "drunk." She expresses Tolstoy's contempt for these people who silence their conscience and tolerate their immoralities. For the purposes of this research, we may state that the peasant's mutilation foreshadows the apocalyptic

disintegration that happens to the Russian people, who are lost in their moral “drunkenness.”

## **Conclusion**

In “Lefty,” Leskov portrays the way the drunk artisan is left to die by his fellow Russians. Policemen are rude and suspicious of the artisan because of his drunkenness. Coachmen refuse to transport him because of the presence of policemen. When he is finally put in a carriage, he is transported uncovered and frozen, because “on such occasions cabbies hide the warm fox fur under them, so that the policemen will get their feet frozen quickly” (379). Throughout his long trip to the hospital, the drunkard is “taken care of” by coachmen who “pulled his ears so that he would come to his senses” (ibid.). Because Leskov is quite confident about his familiarity with the style of incorporating a universal message into his creation of one character, he claims that in place of “Lefty” the reader should expect to read “the Russian people” (Gebel’, 36). This story thus shows us a larger picture of the drunk people’s unconsciousness on their journey in Leskov’s view.

Such tragic stories about peasant drunkards in realist literature, as explored in this chapter, demonstrate the novelists’ concerns about the Russian people’s failure to resist the evils of addiction and their destruction of their brotherhood. While academic studies leave the readership with the impression that the Russian people were striving for sobriety, realist writers mostly express feelings of despair about peasant drunkards’ fate. Furthermore, realist writers deepen the symbolic meaning of alcoholism. They portray



drunkards as the embodiments of incorrigible and unexplainable evil in an apocalyptic vision of a national scale.

### Chapter 3

#### Village on the Edge of an Abyss:

#### The Darkness of Rural Idyll and the Disintegration of the People

The previous chapter focused on the Russian peasants' alcoholism as the catalyst of their immorality and disintegration. As this chapter will show, the peasants' active love and brotherly bond are further undermined by their performances of the idyllic rituals in rural Russia. Alexander Radishchev and Nikolai Karamzin first associated lower-class female figures with a sentimental vision of the Russian people and rural culture in their fiction, although their heroines "were as much, if not more, products of the influence of French sentimentalism as they were reflections of the Russian reality" (Frierson, 21). These writers' female characters feature the "rural purity" that encourages the nineteenth-century realist writers to further explore the untainted, unadulterated indigenous Russian culture as embodied in peasant figures. However, realist writers, as I will show in this chapter, subvert the moral value of the "living idyll" in rural Russia. I explore the way Lev Tolstoy, Ivan Goncharov, and Anton Chekhov portray the people's agricultural practice, traditional rituals, and idyllic country life as empty and mechanical performances. In their fictions, peasant characters' blind worship of the idyllic rural culture deprives them of conscious love and leads to their spiritual disunity.

Portrayals of the rural idyll by these realist writers are much more nuanced and ambivalent than those of ethnographers, historians, and other academic authors. Authors with a Slavophile bent like Sergei Aksakov, and folklorists with a patriotic attitude like Petr Kireevsky (1808-1856), contributed to the myth that mutual love and spiritual brotherhood of the Russian people emerged in the ancient culture and the countryside idyll. At the same time, radicals and ethnographers since the 1870s had more objectively explored the peasant realities, although they still envisioned the average Russian peasant as the man of the land. These radical authors were able to acknowledge the brutalities of certain ancient peasant traditions and the difficulties in these peasants' engagement in their agricultural occupations; yet, their eyewitness ethnographies and scientific studies still romanticize the people's bond to land and idealize a harmonious pastoral idyll, as the first section of the chapter demonstrates. This centuries-long cultural myth of the countryside idyll emerged in both conservative and radical illustrations of the peasants' bond to land, farming, agronomy, communal assemblies, manners, entertainment, and annual rituals, continuing to influence the academics' understanding of the Russian people's life cycle and mentality.

### **Intelligentsia and Academia on the Rural Idyll**

Ethnographers usually comment on the three most widely known rituals in the countryside—birth, death, and marriage—as symbols of the peasants' communal living. D. K. Zelenin depicts in detail the way a peasant woman gives birth (*rod*). His thick chapter on *rod* echoes Dal's dictionary entry explaining the rich meaning of the word.

For both authors, *rod* was a ceremonious and celebratory event in the family and village spheres. Both authors see in these complex rituals around new births of children the strength of extended peasant families and the harmony of large traditional villages.

Zelenin's depiction of the peasants' funeral rituals similarly highlights the Russian people's unity. At the funeral, the neighboring villagers improvised "cries" (*plachi*). As the ethnographer points out, peasants pleaded for "guardiancy" (*pokrovitel'stvo*) or "protection" (*zashchita*) for both the deceased family members and the living ones (355). Much like festival rituals about new births, the funeral rites demonstrate villagers' human warmth, bond of kinship, and communal involvement (*uchastiem vsei obshchiny*) (ibid., 322). Recent scholarship in English also speaks positively of the series of funeral *pominki*, the commemorations on the day of the *plachi* and on the ninth, twentieth, fortieth days after death, when the deceased has been gone for six and nine months, and in every year thereafter. Some of these *pominki* involved the family members and others the people of the entire community. In some areas, *pominki* even featured the tradition of giving away the belongings of the deceased—"food and items to the poor (both openly and secretly) in honor of the deceased for 40 days"—and thus, as Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby puts it, all these additional commemorative funeral rituals enforced the villagers' interdependence in their community (55).

Peasant marriage was by no means less ritualized or less ceremonious in rural Russia. It is clear that the whole process of the peasant wedding involved the entire community's participation, support, and supervision through these rituals. Scholars have studied the process of village weddings by surveying all these folk terms—*svakha* and *svat* (the

matchmaking), *osmotr* (a tour of the groom's household), *devichnik* (unbraiding of the bride's hair and a ritual bath). Zelenin underscores in particular the entertaining nature of wedding rituals to highlight their positive influence on villagers' communal life. He notes that nineteenth-century peasant weddings looked different from their ancient Slavic forms, because peasants' performances at weddings contained more buffoonery (*skomorokh*) or theatricality (*teatral'nost'*). In his view, these acting performances improvised by peasants, usually comical, dramatic, satirical, and related to contemporary social phenomena, were intended for entertainment in the public and communication among villagers (342). Although some complex rituals at weddings seemed artificial, deformed, and senseless even to peasants who faithfully followed those traditions, ethnographers usually comment on the way weddings served as communal programs and psychologically united the peasant class.

Other components of rural culture and annual calendar are similarly approached as events that strengthened the Russian peasants' communal unity. Among many critics, N. A. Minenko's ethnographic survey provides a detailed introduction to Siberian peasants' oral "contracts" on gift giving, on invitations to dinners, on manner of hospitality, and on seasonal "sitting" (a visit to neighbor villagers in autumn and winter). She also explores various forms of peasant parties and village recreations, especially those seasonal feasts that celebrated agricultural harvest. Dances, songs, conversations, and lengthy preparations for these parties (*kapustki*, *supriadki*, *kopotukhi*, *posidelki*, to name a few) served, in Minenko's words, as "active exchange of information, knowledge, rumors, and socially meaningful experience" (202). In addition, Minenko's close reading of the style

of peasant letters also reveals the spiritual messages Siberian peasants sent to each other. The epistolary culture in rural Russia, she claims, shows us “the most secret areas of peasant spiritual life [and] an elaborate culture of interpersonal relationships among village laborers” (178-79).

Although the list of such positive cultural phenomena can be endless, these critics do acknowledge that rural culture contains some superstitious beliefs and even dangerous cults. For instance, a centuries-long superstition existed among Russian peasants across different regions that those who died violently, accidentally, or prematurely were evil and “unclean” (*nechisty*). If their unclean corpses were buried in the earth, superstitious peasants assumed that catastrophes such as drought or frost, usually called the “rage of the earth” (*gnev zemli*) (Zelenin, 354), would occur to villagers who are alive. Their corpses were thus rejected by fellow peasants and excluded from their Christian burial ceremony. Out of fear, they would brutally exhume the “unclean” body or scatter the ashes into the wind (Warner). Russian and foreign reporters continued to document Russian peasants’ superstitious and inhumane treatments of the dead across different regions at all times, from Maxim the Greek in the sixteenth century, Samuel Collins (an English doctor) in the seventeenth century, E. V. Petukhov in the nineteenth century, through Zelenin at the end of the twentieth century.

It should be noted that while taking into consideration these inhumane actions and brutal rituals among the peasants, folklorists and historians still place more emphasis on the people’s communal ties. One critic comments that during *semik*, peasants also held a series of enthusiastic celebrations of their flourishing summer and “the dark side of

unnatural death [was] confronted with the joy of being alive and of new life awakening in the natural world” (Warner, 159). Such commentaries seem to emphasize that *Semik* and *Kostroma* (mock funerals in Ukraine similar to *semik*) at the same time embodied the people’s wish to increase the productivity of the land. It is possible that because annual festivals, celebrations, parties, and seasonal sittings usually served the peasants’ agricultural practice and showed their attachment to land, even brutal and primitive rituals overall seem to the intelligentsia to be authentic, Russian, and spiritual.

In academic surveys of all times, we can discern such a tendency that the germination of crops and centrism of agriculture reinforce the myths about the “rural idyll.” Sergei Stepniak asserts that “[i]n the peasants’ longing after land there is more of the love of a laborer for a certain kind of work which is congenial to him than of concrete attachment of an owner to a thing possessed” (148). His contemporaries such as Aleksandr Engelgardt and Gleb Uspensky also reaffirmed the Russian muzhiks’ spiritual belongingness to their land and instinctual collectivist mentality. In particular, Engelgardt applied a Darwinian analytical approach to explore the people’s communal and collectivist mentality in his ethnographic Letters “From the Country.”<sup>87</sup> These ethnographers made clear that peasants’ loyalty to their ploughshare was necessary for their survival in nature and in rural setting, and naturally nurtured their poetry of agricultural work or prevented the vice from destroying their moral character.<sup>88</sup> On the

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<sup>87</sup> The scientist aimed to highlight “the environmental factors that made cooperation an imperative rather than a gesture of unspoiled generosity,” placing the myths about the people’s moral instinct in the realm of reason (Frierson, 83).

<sup>88</sup> Frierson concludes that Uspenskii and Engeldardt emphasized the peasant’s mastery of their land as what motivated their communal mentality and altruistic spirituality: these ethnographers considered the Russian peasant as an “element” within the context of nature’s control over them, in “a chain of command

other hand, Olga Semyonova Tian-Shanskaia's eyewitness account based on her research of Ryazan peasants also demonstrates these individuals' worship of Moist Mother Earth to be rooted in their intuitive Christian and pagan faiths. She claims that peasants consider their surrounding environment, natural phenomena, and most of all, earth, to embody God and ultimate salvation for the people, as a more reachable and real idol than their Tsar.<sup>89</sup> As Zelenin's contemporary ethnography shows, the people's fear of natural catastrophes, devotion to agricultural production, and faith in life-generating rituals were both rational motivations and the mystical root of their agricultural mentality and idyllic culture (352-54).

If we trace this back toward the late eighteenth-century, we should be able to similarly identify an ambivalent portrayal and an overall idealization of the rural idyll among less radical nobility and more conservative writers. Beside Karamzin and Radishchev, we should mention eighteenth-century memoirist Andrei Bolotov (1738-1833), whom Thomas Newlin in several studies calls a "pastoral dreamer." This writer wrote about his life experiences on his family estate in Tula, when he was isolated from the outside world and immersed in the changes of the seasons. Bolotov was, nonetheless, aware of the distance between his vantage point of intellectual sophistication and the peasants' uncivil reality in squalid and prison-like huts (Newlin, "The Return of the

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extending from nature through him to his household in a system designed for survival on the land" (96). Also see, for instance, Stepniak, 78, for his summary of the magical purity of the Russian people during their slavery in three centuries, discussed by Uspensky.

<sup>89</sup> As Semyonova states, "[i]t is not God whom the orphan girl asks to resurrect her parents so that they can give her their blessing as she goes off to be married, but instead Moist Mother Earth to whom she appeals to raise her mother from the grave" (137). Semyonova emphasizes the peasants' mystical religious beliefs rooted in their proximity to Mother Earth, instead of their reliance on the distant Tsar and Christian God.



Russian Odysseus"). However, the ambivalence and dualism inherent in his nostalgia were cherished as a tradition in the early nineteenth century, when Russian noblemen further spread romantic ideas about pastoralism and their romantic depictions of the Russian idyll dominated literary writings. Beginning in the 1820s, writer Sergei Aksakov (1791-1859), the father of future Slavophiles, wrote fiction in the setting of country estates, although he permanently settled down in Moscow in 1826 and seldom visited his remote estate in Abramtseva. As Michael Hughes notes in "Russian Nobility and the Russian Countryside," like Bolotov, Aksakov did not merely idealize the rural idyll but also "displayed a rather ambivalent attitude towards the Russian countryside" (119).

These gentry's sentimental portrayals of the pastoral idyll were after all influential among the nobility and led to many landowners' growing interest in estate management. They ran their salons in these country estates and held political, intellectual debates. It is possible that the mixed feelings of these pastoralists laid a foundation for future ethnographers and populists who wrote on the Russian idyll in more objective detail but still a nostalgic tone. In addition, the development of folklore studies around the same period of time, from the 1830s to the 1840s, further encouraged romantic and idyllic illustration of the people's country life. An important figure who contributed to folklore studies, Ivan Kireevsky's brother Petr Kireevsky, was celebrated for his collections of folk songs (*byliny*) and his academic study of oral culture of the Russian peasantry. Since his first trip to the northern province of Novgorod in 1834, he realized that folklore could help the intelligentsia understand their national cultures. At the end of the 1830s, Kireevsky's first collection of peasant folk songs, in part a reaction to Pushkin's

collections created in Mikhailovskoe in the mid-1820s,<sup>90</sup> implemented the influence of Slavophilism and reinforced romantic patriotism. At the same time, Kireevsky was able to acknowledge the harsh conditions of life in the peasantry and was less inclined to idealize the world of the *narod* than the Slavophiles were. His evaluation of the peasant world, thus, is both objectively based on reality and patriotic about the Russian identity.<sup>91</sup> With such pastoral writings and folklore studies shaping knowledge about the popular peasant culture, the nineteenth-century and the contemporary authors' understanding of the Russian idyll remains romantic.

### **Subversive Sketches on Environment and Rituals**

As this chapter will show, realist writers are the ones who dare to challenge this idyllic tradition by grotesquely subverting the images of the idyllic peasantry and even blasphemously mocking the rituals of peasant culture. Although not set in the rural landscape but in a hostile prison, Dostoevsky's *Notes from House of the Dead* offers an ambivalent picture of the folkloric elements in the peasant convicts' past life. On the one hand, the narrator, Gorianchikov, portrays the convicts' prayers and other religious practices, which they continue during their imprisonment, with admiration and respect. On the other hand, some rituals and practices customary in village life, for instance, the

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<sup>90</sup> Belinsky criticized Pushkin's re-workings of traditional Russian tales as the recreation of a *littérateur*. "Kireevskii was by contrast determined from the start of his career to treat his material as something more than a source for literary work, believing instead that it could provide source material to help promote a greater understanding of Russia's past, as well as illuminating the character of the Russian *narod*" (Hughes, "Peter Kireevskii and the Development of Moscow Slavophilism," 97).

<sup>91</sup> Hughes argues about a contrast between commitment to the people's spirituality and concerns about their darkness, a "tension between public convictions and private beliefs" in all Slavophile writings as well as Petr Kireevsky's works ("Peter Kireevskii and the Development of Moscow Slavophilism," 103).

convicts' vulgar manners in the bathhouse, are described as "so ghastly that they engender a feeling of nausea," which leaves the reader with the impression of revulsion and filth rather than holiness and purity, as Linda Ivanits notes (*Dostoevsky and the Russian People*, 24). The sections below focus on such "grotesque" village practices and country landscape in literature, which cast doubt on the positive image of the rural idyll.

Turgenev is the writer to start with, in part because of his close relationship with Sergei Aksakov and his similarly mixed feelings toward the country estate. His inheritance of the Spasskoe estate in Orel province from his mother, as many critics point out, was not perceived with unambiguous feelings of gratitude or affection. Spasskoe is the place Turgenev travelled to to begin his long exile starting in May 1852, due to writing an obituary for Gogol. Although he may have, to a degree, exaggerated his solitude and pain in his letters to Pauline Viardot and was frequently visited by contemporary writers, poets, and Slavophiles, his experience in this country estate can be described as total boredom and isolation (Hughes, "The Russian Nobility and the Russian Countryside," 120). For a Westernizer like him, it was by no means productive to squander time in the countryside. His *Notes of a Hunter*, which is obviously influenced by his observation of peasant life in Spasskoe, may reveal certain imperfections of the rural idyll.

For instance, in "Bezhin Lug" Turgenev's hunter makes folk superstitions, especially *bylichki* (oral storytelling of ghost stories), the target of irony. The writer depicts a group of peasant boys who enjoyed *bylichki*, absorbed in their narratives and confined in their own fantastic world. They are impervious to other belief systems and as Ivanits notes,

their adherence to their superstitious peasant occult to a degree distances the narrator, who is “listening with the critical stance of an unbeliever” (“Three Instances,” 64). In no other sketches do we see the narrator so distanced from the peasant figures and so alienated by their actions. Moreover, *bylichka* is used by the writer to highlight the uncertainty of life and death in rural Russia. Although the young peasant characters are united in this idyllic night, their talk disturbs both the listeners and the storytellers. Their *bylichka* about the *rusalka*, for instance, demonstrates the universal fear of unfamiliar elements in the natural world. (The *rusalka* is considered violent and destructive for the peasants’ crops, because she is the spirit of water from an alien area.) Their stories about fellow peasants who die accidental and untimely deaths also highlight the unfamiliar evil components in the uncertain living conditions of remote rural Russia. In this conversation, their eyewitness accounts of mysterious deaths, accidental deaths, and even returns of dead souls further terrify the hunter. He does not have to share the peasant boys’ primitive Christian beliefs to experience the universal fear of uncertain fate (Ivanits, “Three Instances”). Through these characters’ similar disturbing feelings over the course of human life in uncertainty, the sketch ultimately reveals unpredictable catastrophes and destructive threats to the people’s life in the countryside, despite the picture of a friendly talk on an idyllic night in the sketch.

Turgenev’s sketches and novels also illustrate the country landscape—wood, forest, and valley—in an ambivalent way. As Jane Costlow shows, Turgenev notes the brutal actions of the Russian peasants against the forest and the peasants’ destructive impact on the rural idyll: “Ivan Turgenev’s landscapes are so intimately drawn, and so many of

them are lovely and vibrant with life, that we might not notice how insistently he reminds us of destruction,” especially the destruction of the forest landscape under the “ruthless axe” of the peasants (“Who Holds the Axe?” 10).

This idea about the ruthless axe of the peasants, in my view, also applies to Tolstoy’s portrayals of the relation between peasants and nature. In “Three Deaths” (1859), for instance, Tolstoy highlights the people’s violence and brutality, rather than their spirituality or their rural idyll, through a brief depiction of landscape and forest in the end of the story. Written as a reply to Turgenev’s “Death” in his 1852 edition of *Notes of A Hunter*, which Tolstoy construed as sanguine and naïve about the characters’ spirituality, “Three Deaths” was supposed to help Tolstoy express a more clearly moral message about the dynamics between the people and the forest. In response to Turgenev’s lax attitude, Tolstoy attempts to make fully clear his harsh judgments and cynical critiques of his characters.<sup>92</sup> Thus, despite his contemporary critics’ negative reviews, Tolstoy insists that the tree is the only moral “character” that dies perfectly and harmoniously in nature.<sup>93</sup> Thus, it is understandable that regardless of the peasants’ superior moral stance in contrast to the noble lady’s, Tolstoy still critically defamiliarizes the action of the peasant figure, Sergei, who cuts down a tree in the woods in an early morning when the forester does not notice: “Suddenly a strange sound, foreign to nature, resounded and died away at the outskirts of the forest. Again the sound was heard, and was rhythmically

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<sup>92</sup> Tolstoy finds Turgenev’s story unsatisfactory in that the narrator withholds his judgment and praises every individual character, even a gentry woman. Tolstoy’s narrative mode, different from Turgenev’s, is designed specifically to criticize, interrogate, and make characters ambivalent (Reyfman, 164).

<sup>93</sup> Tolstoy’s contemporaries, such as Apollon Grigor’ev, Alexandra Tolstaya, and Turgenev, all found it almost nihilistic and inhumane to compare a human character’s death experience with an oak’s. Nonetheless, Tolstoy insisted against their protests that only the tree dies honestly, beautifully, and perfectly (Reyfman, 163).

repeated at the foot of the trunk of one of the motionless tress. A tree-top began to tremble in an unwonted manner, its juicy leaves whispered something” (1:580). For Tolstoy in the 1850s, nature is essentially good and the violation of natural laws is sinful. Through defamiliarization, Tolstoy construes the villagers’ violation of the environmental ecology (Sergey’s axe represents the violence of other peasants as well, who encourage him to treat the forester to vodka) as an immoral action.

The focal point of the story, admittedly, may not lie in the defamiliarized deforestation, but in nature’s celebration of the tree’s death: “the branches of those that were living began to rustle slowly and majestically over the dead and prostrate tree” (1:581). In part, this majestic gesture toward the dead tree demonstrates the author’s respect for the dead driver as well, who welcomes the end of his life in a natural and altruistic attitude. Nonetheless, this gesture of the trees contrasts with the manners of peasant characters around the dying driver: Sergei only attempts to acquire the driver’s boots when he is alive; his effort to build a tombstone for the dead one reflects his feeling of shame and guilt; ultimately, he has to commit theft to memorialize the dead driver. A comparison of these ambivalent moments of the peasants’ lives with the harmony and purity inherent in the picture of the tree’s death demonstrates that, in this novella, despite the peasants’ profound understanding and peaceful acceptance of death, human lives are flawed by immoral behaviors and inferior to the ideal perfection of nature.

To further interrogate the “living idyll,” realist writers intensified their critiques of the ritualized rural culture, and Chekhov’s novellas demonstrate this point particularly well. As Donald Rayfield points out, Chekhov’s vision of life and his views on the peasantry

were growing darker near the end of the century. He departed for the coasts of Nice and Yalta in 1897 and completely left Melikhovo, where he built village schools, collected raw statistics for art and for science, and dispensed medicines among the peasants for six years. He suffered deteriorating health, disgust at the intelligentsia, and distance from his close friend, journalist Aleksey Suvorin, in the following years. It is thus not surprising to find his fictional villages such as Ukleevo, the setting of *In the Ravine* (1900), and Zhukovo, of his 1897 novella “Peasants,” to be places full of violence and destruction.<sup>94</sup> These two stories expose the peasants’ lost rural paradise and “the incursion of alien worlds into that of the peasant,” by painting a picture of poisoned fields, acidic rivers, industrial pollution, and moreover, peasants’ moral contamination (Rayfield, 190). *In the Ravine* in particular shows a collision of different characters as “symbols of ideas” and their conflict “is essentially that of the clash between natural labor and materialistic greed” (Winner, 155), holistic culture and industrial pollution.

One of the three most prominent village rituals mentioned above—peasant marriage—is portrayed in a subversive way by Chekhov in *In the Ravine*. In this work, the marriage bond of Anisim and Lipa is established on two families’ mutual understanding that the young couple is marrying for financial reasons. Given that the Tsybukins know Lipa has no dowry, it is expected that she should work hard as a new laborer in the household. Lipa also accepts her labor and duty as the nature of her new marital status, since she feels nothing but fear of her husband and her new family. In this

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<sup>94</sup> Rayfield argues that the Melikhovo peasants treated Chekhov brutally, committing numerous horrific crimes; nonetheless, the reality in Melikhovo “had to be steeped in intense gloom and distilled several times over to produce the fictional world of Chekhov’s peasant stories” (186).

narrative structure where “[b]eauty is seen in this story as useful labor” (Winner, 156), spiritual relations are replaced by material relations, and the natural, spiritual connotation of marriage is transformed into a meaningless performance of the thousand-year-old ritual.

All aspects of peasant marriage—the reasons for it, the everyday marital life, the village wedding—become the target of Chekhov’s satirical attack. The scene of Lipa’s wedding day serves, for the purposes of the current study, as a caricature of the sacred and spiritual rural traditions presented in ethnographic and pastoral writings. In Chekhov’s novella, no one present at the wedding seems to care about the marrying couple, since they mainly join the celebration for food. Ironically, the feast most of all satisfies the hungry, destitute priests. Numerous drunkards also participate for the alcohol. During this banquet, what becomes clear, ironically, is that the Tsybukins are hated by their fellow peasants. While they have become merchants through their illegal businesses, most of the peasant guests continue leading poor lives and envy the rich. As we learn, the ceremony features a number of performances, but at the climax of the performances, guests suddenly hear a woman outside shrieking. This unknown female voice curses the Tsybukins, who have “sucked her blood.” This interruption seems to be a rupture in the text that reveals the dark truth below the surface of the ceremony, which is material in form (celebrated by the entire village at the price of two thousand rubles) and empty in spirit. It is no longer a communal celebration, but almost a battlefield of fellow villagers.

In the same novella, besides wedding rituals, Chekhov also mocks the tradition of neighbor visits for its absence of any spiritual message and the people’s superficial



relationships. In "Peasants," Chekhov describes the way people living in poverty pay visits to their fellow villagers in a blasphemous way. On a holiday when neighbors and villagers follow a centuries-long rural tradition and meet outside the church, we see the young girl Sasha reading the Gospels with her mother Olga among a group of fellow peasants. They seem to worship the old and heavy testament in leather binding. They are absorbed by the book, with its odor of a monk, and read the Scriptures in a rhythmic chanting voice. The readers and neighbors alike are equally inspired. However, the narrator seems to indicate that poverty eliminates everything spiritual and meaningful in the people's rural life in Zhukovo village: they get drunk and curse at each other on the night of this holiday. Kiriak, the infamous drunkard, as usual attempts to abuse his wife Marya. We see the people falling into a chaotic drinking spree on the sacred day of their collective Gospel reading and neighbor visit ritual.

In particular, the holiday features a procession of the Virgin Maria's icon across the village. People wear their specifically prepared clothes to welcome the icon, flood toward it, call for the mercy of their sacred Matushka, and sing the chorus they know by heart. As the Russian tradition of icon painting, which had developed rapidly since Russia's conversion to Orthodoxy in 988, indicates, the icon encourages Russians to "contemplate," requires "spiritual concentration from the one who contemplates," and turns the contemplatives' long sufferings into miraculous triumphs over their enemies (Ollivier, 52). Maternal mythology has long impressed on the Russian people that, in particular, "Marian icons were capable of uniting disparate groups of believers, of inspiring the formation of 'one community through her person'" (Kaminer, 12). Chekhov's people in

Zhukovo, as one expects, shed tears under the icon and bless each other during this procession. Nonetheless, the narrator tells us that they soon return to their usual destitute, chaotic life. The moment when the Zhukovo people seem to believe in a triumph over the evil rich and the demonic vodka during their holiday ritual is merely a brief interlude. The Christian holiday turns out to be a temporary moment of the people's spiritual "unity" that is immediately replaced by a chaotic spree.

In the moment of another ritualized event with religious meaning, the Dormition fast, a caring tie seems to emerge between Motka and Sasha, two young and innocent girls, but soon proves a failure in spiritual bonding. At the end of the day, the two young girls sit beside the church and watch the sky. They seem to connect with each other emotionally and spiritually when they share their worship of the angels in the stars. However, as Julie de Sherbinin argues in her monograph on Chekhov, the two girls' mediation and joint reading of *The Last Judgment* during the village fast turn into a vengeful "intervention" of the holy text (81). After listening to Sasha's eloquent religious confession, Motka, who has no knowledge of the Bible, seeks vengeance against their evil *babka* by pouring some milk into her cup and ruining her fast. During the Dormition fast, a family sphere also becomes a battlefield, where people send each other to hell and no matriarch ascends to heaven.<sup>95</sup>

The Russian peasants' religious rituals are interrogated, not only in Chekhov's works but also in Tolstoy's. The culture of the peasant pilgrimage, usually considered a communal movement displaying the pilgrims' spiritual depth and piety, becomes the

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<sup>95</sup> See De Sherbinin for her interpretation of Motka's revenge as an inversion of the religious meaning of the Dormition fast for the Mother of God (*Chekhov and Russian Religious Culture*, 82).

target of Tolstoy's irony. His visit to the monastery of the famous elder Ambrose in Optina-Pustyn' motivated him to be critical about this cultural myth. He disliked the way Ambrose addressed each pilgrim's mundane questions and material concerns. While Dostoevsky's visit to the same elder reinforced his religious belief and inspired him to create Father Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Tolstoy's observations of the elder's communication with the peasants in Optina-Pustyn' only led him to further doubts about the seemingly spiritual pilgrimage of the Russian people (Ziolkowski, 75). Inspired by these doubts, Tolstoy worked on *Father Sergius* (1898), which critiques the way peasant men and women unite around the so-called saint, the former Stepan Kasatsky. In this anti-hagiographical novella multiple characters sense that these pilgrims are "most irreligious." Surrounded by pilgrims, Father Sergius feels nothing spiritual or compassionate for the people but is merely pleased by their respect. Also, Kasatsky knows that instead of loving or caring about each other, these people "unite" to seek blessings, guidance, and advice for some of the most selfish purposes. The merchant, Maria's father, dares to publicly claim that these wanderers have no pity, consider only themselves, and care most about their practical benefit. He chases them away, also for his own benefit. These psychological depictions of both the Father and his surrounding wanderers demonstrate Tolstoy's cynical attitudes toward the ancient culture of monasticism and pilgrimage. Although conventional understanding of peasant culture illustrates the settlement of wanderers around the monastery of their elder in a brotherly community, the "unity" of the peasants around Kasatsky rather proves the absence of their spiritual feeling.

Besides Turgenev's, Chekhov's, and Tolstoy's portrayals of the people's country life in short works, I further explore the ambivalent images of the rural idyll in three lengthy realist novels in the bulk of this chapter. Compared to the texts mentioned above, the works below demonstrate a rural space that seems to provide spiritual experiences, but in fact deprives people of them. First, my reading against the grain of the episode on Levin's spiritual awakening during his agricultural work in *Anna Karenina* shows the peasant mowers' failure to realize a brotherly unity on earth. Although Tolstoy consciously depicts Levin's and the peasant mowers' collective strength, in my view, their labor also seems to show their obedience to their natural existence and their renunciation of man's conscious spirituality, which cannot be construed by Tolstoy as morally positive. Second, I will analyze the way people who practice countryside rituals in *Resurrection* lose their spiritual sensitivity and surrender to their egoistic desires. In his last novel, Tolstoy's defamiliarization overtly critiques and even subverts the image of the rural idyll. Finally, I explore the complete loss of conscious spirituality on a larger scale among the people in *Oblomov*. By Goncharov's deliberate design, the Oblomovka serfs and residents, who sleep and daydream in a seemingly idyllic brotherhood, literally lose their conscious love and figuratively reach their spiritual death.

### **The Disunited Mowers in *Anna Karenina***

In the famous conversation in which peasant Fyodor introduces to Levin the soul of peasant Platon, many critics discern the atheist's spiritual awakening upon hearsay about

this peasant. At the same time, however, Fyodor also criticizes an evil peasant as the opposite type of Platon:

Levin got into a conversation about that land with Fyodor and asked whether Platon, a wealthy and good muzhik from the same village, might rent it next year.

‘The price is too dear, Platon wouldn’t make enough, Konstantin Dmitrich,’ said the muzhik, picking ears of rye from under his sweaty shirt.

‘Then how does Kirillov make it pay?’

‘Mityukha’ (so the muzhik scornfully called the innkeeper) ‘makes it pay right enough, Konstantin Dmitrich! He pushes till he gets his own. He takes no pity on a peasant. But Uncle Fokanych’ (so he called old Platon), ‘he won’t skin a man. He lends to you, he lets you off. So he comes out short. He’s a man, too.

‘But why should he let anyone off?’

‘Well, that’s how it is—people are different. One man just lives for his own needs, take Mityukha even, just stuffs his belly, but Fokanych—he’s an upright old man. He lives for the soul. He remembers God.’ (794)

Mityukha is financially well-off, thanks to his brutal treatment and economic oppression of fellow peasants. Tolstoy acknowledges the scarcity of spirituality in such peasants. Although the novelist famously portrays numerous positive peasant figures who populate the space where Levin hunts, travels, and mows, the community may still serve as an

ambivalent space populated by two opposite types of peasants—Platon and Mityukha, the spiritualist and the materialist.

In the following section, I attempt to read the peasant mowers' spontaneous unity in Part Three of *Anna Karenina* as one such ambivalent episode. In ethnographies and academia, we most often read about the moral integrity of the peasants that was nurtured and rooted in their agricultural practice and bond to land. In a similar way, Tolstoy also depicts the rural idyll in *Anna Karenina* as what influences the atheist Levin and unites the peasant mowers in a spiritually positive way, echoing the ideas of these ethnographers as well as the Slavophiles, whose concept of *sobornost*' embodies the Russian people's spontaneous brotherhood. Nonetheless, my reading against Tolstoy's conscious attempt to reinforce the idyllic myth about the people's brotherhood highlights the hidden message in his text that he may not be aware of. In my view, Tolstoy exposes a defect inherent in these peasants' seemingly brotherly love—their subordination to a larger impersonal power and their loss of conscious spiritual compassion.

The mowers' communal collaboration, on the surface, seems highly spiritual, for the apparent reason that it resurrects Levin's faith in spiritual life. Levin was once convinced that life has no meaning, like the author during his 1870s crisis. Both the character and the author eventually regain moral strength in part by joining the peasant laborers' collective. Given the strong impact of the mowers on Levin's conversion, Tolstoy scholars seldom doubt that the peasants' spontaneous unity in *Anna Karenina* is a genuinely spiritual brotherhood. What is more, many critics are convinced of these people's harmony by its emergence in the high grass and the "great rhythm of nature," to

use György Lukács' term. According to the predecessor and father of Slavophiles, Sergei Aksakov, the laws of nature regulate direct experience of nature, rather than intellectual knowledge, and thus, awaken man's true virtue and altruism (Newlin, "At the Bottom of the River"). Along this Slavophile understanding of the organic world, critics argue that "[t]he privileged moment in Tolstoy's fiction is the characters' encounter with the expanse of nature" (Gustafson, 213) and the mowers' close contact to the earth is no exception.

In particular, this convergence of Slavophilism and Tolstoyanism may be another important factor that leads to critics' conviction of the mowers' spontaneous, spiritual, and brotherly unity in the field. As the leading Slavophile Alexei Khomiakov argues, the conception of *sobornost* envisions "ideas of unity and freedom indissolubly joined together in *the moral law of mutual love*" (212). Slavophiles favor organic brotherly love in the earthly world over dogmatic Christian obedience to theological doctrines. A similar sense of unity is dominant in Tolstoy's depiction of his peasant mowers in this scene. He does not portray any single leader who instructs and leads the labor work. The laborers across different classes, men and women, young and old, adults and children, concentrate on mowing practice and synchronize their daily cycle. Among them, Levin also achieves "unity within oneself, with nature, and with all other people in the world" (Burry and Orr, 77). This overlap is hardly surprising, given Tolstoy's adherence to a Slavophile point of view in his later years. Despite his unique ideological system that Pal Kolstø calls a "universalism"—an understanding of human nature as unchangeable and independent of cultural, national, social variations—Tolstoy showed occasional sympathy for Slavophile

particularist thinkers' ideas applied to the Russian context.<sup>96</sup> He was close to Khomiakov's son in Yasnaya Polyana, reading his Slavophile writing in the 1900s. Around 1905, as Kolstø notes, Tolstoy commented on Slavophile ideas as "the uniqueness of Russian history and tradition and the 'peculiar traits' of the Russian national character" ("Power as Burden," 560). In *Anna Karenina*, as Alexander Burry and S. Ceilidh Orr argue, Tolstoy expresses his preference for the harmonious roundness symbolic of the Slavophile worldview over the linear progression characteristic of Pan-Slavism.

Despite Tolstoy's intention to associate the spirituality of Levin's peasants with Slavophile conceptions, the laborers' unity in their living idyll is ambivalent in many ways. To start with, much like Tolstoy, Levin's love of nature and rural life is not deeply rooted in his soul or spiritually inspiring throughout his life. In late 1860s, when Tolstoy deviated from Rousseau's idea about a necessary connection between nature and goodness, he started to blame man's natural will for his evil actions. In the novel, Levin also seems to show a certain distrust in nature. When he first returns to his land, he dislikes the peasants' superstitions about weather and climate because they seem to look for excuses in objective circumstances to avoid working. It is possible that Levin's

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<sup>96</sup> As Kolstø points out, Tolstoy could never accept the "lesser evil" inherent in the power of the state that the Slavophiles accepted. Throughout his career he "persistently protested against the use and abuse of state power in Russia" and explored the possibility of realizing Kingdom of God on earth ("Power as Burden," 565).

Yet, the writer had met with all leading Slavophiles early in the 1850s, around the time when he first read about the ideal of *sobornost'*. He reached an agreement with them in the following decades. In *The Cossacks* (1863), he writes on Olenin's intimacy with nature in a Slavophile style. For this, also see Newlin, "At the Bottom of the River," for an argument about the Tolstoyan character's contact with nature, exposure to ecological equilibrium, and spiritual conversion in nature.



activities in the remote land reflect less his intimacy with the natural world than his temporary withdrawal from social engagement.<sup>97</sup>

What is more, Levin fails to consistently live the peasants' life and absolutely overcome his aristocratic identity. During his close contact with the people, despite his best efforts to avoid further increasing the differences between him and the peasants, as he claims to Oblonsky, Levin keeps his own economic gain as a landowner and stays an active enforcer of the exploitation of hierarchical social relationships. His conservative views on masculinity, classes, and private property also demonstrate that he defends a hierarchical society.<sup>98</sup> These cannot be consistent with Tolstoy's ideology of ideal, perfect love, and, as the narrator tells us, not even condoned by Oblonsky and Veslovsky, who argue against Levin that "you feel [the unjust inequality], and yet you don't give him your property" (588). After this discussion, Levin also partially realizes the flaw in his "acting justly only in the negative sense" ("Can one be just only negatively?" he asked himself), which seems to Oblonsky to be self-comforting sophisms (589). Since Levin enjoys his unjust advantages just as Oblonsky enjoys them (although with more pleasure), inequality exists in his mowing collective and disproves a communal brotherhood of the mowers.

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<sup>97</sup> In Tkachev's view, what Tolstoy portrays in the rural idyll in *Anna Karenina* is a useless rejection of civic activity and a fruitless detachment from reality. Tkachev mocks Tolstoy's concept of "natural happiness" by tweaking it into a spontaneous but ridiculous love between a man like Levin and his cow. He argues that such a gentry man's resistance to social interactions and Tolstoy's "agricultural love" of rural idyll, even if genuine and consistent, do not bear merit in the contemporary rural world that is in need of progressive action. Also see Miller, "Tolstoy's Peaceable Kingdom," and Herman, who argues that for Levin to stay in "chastity" and "purity," he has no choice but to retreat to solitude and the rural milieu.

<sup>98</sup> See De Sherbinin, "The Dismantling of Hierarchy." This article explores the way Levin intends to merge into the peasantry, but only reaffirms his own privilege and his preference for a structured social hierarchy. Evidence can be found in Levin's comments on the merchant Riabinin's business, elite aristocratic education, and peasant schools.

Thus, if we compare Levin's activities with Tolstoy's moral standards, it turns out that the character seldom meets Tolstoy's expectation of the elimination of evil conflict inherent in the rural reality and the earthly world. As Irmhild Christina Sperrle argues in her monograph, Tolstoy's passivity and nonresistance to evil require one to pursue a state of love in "stillness." Such pure love is independent from inter-individual exchanges and is uncontaminated by any human circle. In other words, for Tolstoy, evil and egotism eternally exists in any inter-individual relationships. The absolute way to eliminate them is to stay indifferent to the practical, concrete conflicts and retain an "ideal, perfect love" as a "striving for ultimate unity"; otherwise, one lives in constant breakups, separations, and conflicts (97). As the aforementioned hearsay about Mityukha shows us, the inter-human communications and exchanges among the peasants still exist and may always disqualify the community in Tolstoy's novel as a brotherhood in equality and stillness.

Now that we have these reasons to read against the grain, I posit that the peasants' mowing collective in this novel is flawed in that what unites the mowers is their unconscious subordination to a certain larger impersonal force, not their conscious experience of love that Tolstoy construes as moral. Since the early 1870s, Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy that one has to ascend above one's natural will, which is evil, and find goodness in life by consciousness or "reason," had greatly influenced Tolstoy's work on *Anna Karenina*.<sup>99</sup> As Donna Tussing Orwin argues, Levin realizes that natural

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<sup>99</sup> Since 1869, when Tolstoy first read Schopenhauer, the writer had been impressed by the philosopher's pessimism that egotism is "[t]he chief and fundamental incentive in man" (qtd. in Janaway, 81). Schopenhauer's judgment that people's natural wills can only be evil in part subverted what Tolstoy believed in Rousseau and led to the writer's fear in the 1870s that life can never be good and meaningful (Jahn, "The Crisis in Tolstoy and in *Anna Karenina*"). As Orwin puts it, Tolstoy "spent the 1870s coming

wills are primitive and he seeks a higher goal (*tseľ*)—a conscious feeling of spirituality that “comes not from nature, but from . . . rational conscience” (*Tolstoy’s Art and Thought*, 160). Although Orwin seems to unambiguously praise Levin as a “representative of consciousness,” she fails to address several larger impersonal forces that may shape the behaviors of Levin and mowers. To start with, the mowers’ scythes are portrayed as symbols of impersonal strength. The old peasant who mows with Levin after breakfast is a carefree joke lover, and his sharp scythe especially seems to Levin to cut the grass automatically. When Levin moves, his scythe also moves as if automatically, “full of life and conscious of itself, and, as if by magic, without a thought of it (*kak by po volshebstvu, bez mysli o nei*), the work got rightly and neatly done on its own” (252). When this tool acquires strength and vitality, the mower seems to lose his consciousness and strength, become deprived of his knowledge of self, and work “without a thought of it.” Such moments of the scythes’ automatic movements appear most blissful (*blazhennye*) for Levin.<sup>100</sup> Tolstoy’s focus on the “life” of the scythes leaves the reader with the impression that the mowers experience a euphoric feeling of harmony when driven by an unfamiliar impersonal force, not their conscious effort, inner strength, and emotional devotion.

Although Burry and Orr argue that the peasants’ scythe is a positive Slavophile symbol, a “curved instrument that cuts in a circular, arc-like motion, a ‘curved semi-

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to grips with this powerful new influence, and the novel *Anna Karenina* may be understood as part of his struggle” (*Tolstoy’s Art and Thought*, 150).

<sup>100</sup> This may in part explain why not all readers find Tolstoy’s depiction of people in the mowing scene convincing, since the focus of the writer is not on the laborers’ suffering, hardship, and strength, but on their effortlessness. As Tkachev claims, “we do not see that this activity has demanded any great effort of will or any moral or intellectual energy,” and such an unsystematic, unplanned, pleasant way of passing the time on the field can only be portrayed by an aristocratic artist out of his imagination (255).

circle” (77), they acknowledge that this circular tool symbolizes roundness, oneness, and unity within nature. In my view, the force of nature may at the same time subdue the people’s activities as an impersonal force. When Levin joins the peasants to mow for the first time, in his eyes there are only the erect figure of a peasant and his surrounding grass. The young peasant Titus seems to belong perfectly to the natural landscape that frames his strong build. During the break, peasant children arrive with lunch. Their little figures, “coming towards the mowers from different directions, through the tall grass and along the road” (253), also seem to Levin to be an organic part of the landscape. From his perspective, the narrator traces the walk of the peasants from the ravine through the forest to the edge of the wood as he simultaneously describes the sunset. When Levin notices the peasants’ departure, he spontaneously appreciates the change these people have made to the landscape: the river was “invisible before but now shining like steel in its curves” (254). These people finish mowing, “stirring and getting up” to leave, and as the narrator describes, “below, where mist was rising ... they walked in the fresh, dewy shade” (255). Many other similar details, including the way the mowers throw their clothes in the grass, clean scythes using a piece of grass, and drink kvass made of river water, all seem to highlight a belongingness of the mowers to the landscape. The landscape, the rhythm of the day, the changes of weather and time are all portrayed as embracing the people’s movements.

The people, now described as belonging to a larger impersonal force, appear in the text as a collective without individuality. Admittedly, Levin seems to be interested in muzhiks such as Titus, Fyodor, Mikhailych, and Uncle Fokanych, who are given specific

names, as individuals. He is in part the spokesman of Slavophilism that celebrates individuals' free and moral choice to belong to the *sobor*.<sup>101</sup> Critics argue that in comparison with his brother Sergei, Konstantin Levin may have successfully dismissed the binary model for understanding the two cultures—urban and rural, educated society and *narod*, appreciating each individual from the people (Frierson, 51). However, a close examination of the text, at the same time, illustrates that Levin, although in a different way than his educated intellectual half-brother, still perceives the muzhiks' collective without distinguishing their individual faces. Nineteenth-century peasant women's clothing was almost the only medium that allowed them to express their individual personality and emotion. "The rich and colorful embroideries with which women adorned their clothing and linens supplement the themes and worldview of women's songs and tales," as Christine Worobec claims ("Victims or Actors," 189). It is likely that peasant women's folk songs and their colorful clothes in *Anna Karenina* also represent these individual laborers' emotional expression. Nonetheless, when Levin observes peasant women's clothes, he summarizes their colorful sewing and embroidering as "a motley (*pestraia*) line" (273). He further finds peasant women's singing to resemble a "thundercloud of merriment (*tucha s gromom vesel'ia*)" (275), merging into the sound of nature. More impressed by the women's multi-colored *pestrota*, "merry chatter of ringing voices" (273), and the sound of peasants' scythes colliding, Levin does not seem to consistently appreciate their individual voices and personal stories.

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<sup>101</sup> See Burry and Orr, for their affirmation of Levin's "focus on individuals and personal observation," which reflects his Slavophile perception of the peasants' spontaneous *sobornost'* (81).

While the peasants are portrayed as dependent on impersonal forces and deprived of individual voices, the narrator further reveals an absence of such “faceless” characters’ immediate compassion for their brothers and fellows, although Levin is not aware of this. In the end, when Levin expresses his attitude to soldiers going to the front for their brother Slavs, he consults the beekeeper Mikhailych, whose answer calls for our analysis: “What’s there for us to think? Aleksander Nikolaich, the emperor, has thought on us, and he’ll think on us in everything. He knows better” (807). In the answer of the peasant, we see the peasants’ unconscious obedience to the Tsar, which again reflects the Slavophile idea about the equal and united form of the state. As Konstantin Aksakov claims early in the 1850s, the Tsar—as an instrument of the people—has limitless power over the peasants. Although the peasants’ subordination to their Tsar fascinates Levin, one cannot accept such submissive conformism as the sign of a harmonious brotherhood that satisfies Tolstoy. Tolstoy always questions the use and abuse of state power in Russia. He believes the power of the tsar could be a violent force that mars the purity of the people’s brotherhood, as his theory of “contagion” (*zarazhenie*) indicates (Kolstø, “Power as Burden,” 564). By contrast, the old beekeeper is capable of no such critical view, “obviously neither understanding nor wishing to understand anything” (806). As Levin notes, Mikhailych, along with “the remaining eighty million ... not only don’t express their will, but don’t have the slightest notion what they should express their will about” (807). While for Tolstoy and Dolly,<sup>102</sup> any war, including the Russo-Turkish War, is injustice, and both Turks and non-Russian brother Slavs deserve one’s Christian

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<sup>102</sup> A Tolstoyan mother and a submissive wife, Dolly finds Levin’s and her own father’s indifference to the Russo-Turkish War unacceptable and cold-blooded.

compassion, in the answer of the beekeeper we also cannot sense any of his spiritual love for either the Turks or the Slavs. After this indifferent comment on the war and the blind extolment of the Tsar, he immediately shifts his attention to bread and crust for Grisha. The beekeeper's statement, which may represent the voice of the people's collective, is thus highly ambivalent in that it compromises conscious love for the suffering of others and leaves decision-making to the absolute, impersonal superior.

In addition, apiculture in rural Russia, which connects peasants like Mikhailych and noblemen like Levin, may also imply the people's disintegration. Tolstoy had experimented with beekeeping from 1863 to 1865. Beehives thus became a metaphor for human behavior and community for him. On the one hand, using his beehive allegory, Tolstoy teaches his followers to "[earn] one's daily bread through manual labor on the land" (Bartlett, 14). On the other hand, the time that Tolstoy spent in the apiary in the 1860s deepened his understanding of the bees' chaotic "society" and reminded him that human history's incessant conflicts can be likened to a beehive in constant chaos. He realized that, much like for the bees, it is natural for people to "collide, merge, divide, multiply, and 'swarm' (as he put it in his diaries) under constant pressure from external influences" (Newlin, "'Swarm Life,'" 375). This epiphany instilled in him a pessimistic idea that even "war, no matter how horrifying, was *natural* and ... what is 'natural' ... is not necessarily good and could not always be justified" (ibid., 383).<sup>103</sup> Apiculture obviously complicated Tolstoy's understanding of rural Russia and the people's history.

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<sup>103</sup> In the 1860s Tolstoy had already lost his confidence in nature as something absolutely good for human life and history, in part under the influence of his beekeeping experience. As Newlin demonstrates, in *War and Peace*, written during the time Tolstoy was devoted to beekeeping, bees' swarming style of life seems to be "more of a Pandora's box than a revelatory window into some kind of harmonic truth inscribed in nature" (384).

Although *Anna Karenina* was not as greatly influenced by his experience in beekeeping as his early works,<sup>104</sup> Tolstoy was hardly oblivious of his nuanced understanding of beehives ten years prior because he frequently depicted apiculture around Levin's rural estate through Levin and Mikhailych, both beekeepers. In the conversation quoted in the beginning of this section, Fyodor introduces us to two types of peasants and seems to reiterate Tolstoy's idea that continuing conflicts between these individuals are the natural forms of their community. Shortly after this conversation, Levin notices bees dancing in front of their beehives. They bump into each other (*tolkushchiesia*), repeat the same routes, and circle (*kruzhashchiesia*) to and from the lime tree and their hives. In a similar vein, Levin talks with another peasant beekeeper early in Part Three, who claims that almost all his bees have escaped in this foraging season. The loss of this old peasant is perhaps another ominous sign in the novel of the naturally centrifugal shape of the peasants' collective life. Given the novelist's conversion to his pessimism during his beekeeping experience in the 1860s, the presence of Mikhailych, Mityukha, and Platon, surrounded by the motifs of bees and beehives, makes the image of the people in the novel ambivalent.

To summarize, both the peasant figures and the Tolstoyan attached to the peasantry alike rely on a powerfully impersonal superior to solve moral dilemmas, and they lose their sense of immediate compassion for others.<sup>105</sup> However convincing Levin's spiritual conversion and idealizing Tolstoy's portrayal may be, the mowers come short of

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<sup>104</sup> Tolstoy's interest in beekeeping started when he first enjoyed bee watching at a spa in the Caucasus in 1852 (Bartlett). Because of Tolstoy's personal interest in beekeeping in the 1850s, Nekhliudov in *A Landowner's Morning* is portrayed as a professional beekeeper.

<sup>105</sup> Levin, who was once able to reject his conformist idea about marrying a peasant woman and acquiring a peasant identity, now easily gives up his own voice and is instantly convinced by the beekeeper.



Tolstoy's expectations for each individual's conscious compassion. Their solidarity thus cannot be regarded as a moral brotherhood by Tolstoy's own standards. In addition, under the surface of the idyllic apiculture, we sense an ambivalent beehive metaphor for people's community in eternal conflict and chaotic confrontation. What is inherent in the idyllic peace among the mowers, regardless of Tolstoy's artistic endeavor, is a natural state of chaos and disturbance.

### **Defamiliarized Country Life in *Resurrection***

The current section explores Tolstoy's last novel *Resurrection* and the novelist's critique of the rural idyll. Critics usually note the institutional flaw in the peasant society in this novel as the target of Tolstoy's irony. As we know, in part continuing the autobiographical tradition in Tolstoy's early novella "A Landowner's Morning" (1856) and "Lucerne" (1857), both of which Andrew D. Kaufman interprets as "about young men whose efforts at moral perfection are thwarted by social realities and personal egotism" (218), the system of private ownership of property seems to be responsible for the people's mistrust of the Tolstoyan's altruism and agricultural reform (Rowe). As Constance and Edward Garnett put it, a contrast between the peasants' loss of their land and the bureaucrats' success in politics is manifest in the people's "rural idyll" that has become "a particularly evil system ... a special doctrine by which [the community] is sanctioned and maintained" (517). These commentators almost reach an agreement that Tolstoy reveals the institutionalization of the agricultural culture as what ruptures the peasants' idyllic and brotherly peasantry.

However, *Resurrection* may also provide us with some of Tolstoy's insights into the people's deviation from altruism. The reason lies in his incentive to write this novel. Tolstoy stopped his work on *Resurrection* several times because of his doubts about the moral values of this artistic genre. He expressed his guilt over writing for the good-for-nothing intelligentsia and his disappointment at the common people's distance from this high-class genre to Nikolai Strakhov in 1895. When he finally picked up his work on this novel again in 1898, he was motivated by a religious sect, the *Dukhobors* (spirit-wrestlers), a group of peasants who rebelled against their social identity and refused to pay tax to the Imperial State.<sup>106</sup> Tolstoy wrote the novel to praise the exemplary actions of such peasants, rather than to argue for social reforms in contemporary Russia, or for the progressive intelligentsia.<sup>107</sup> Although he considers it unsuccessful in delivering his message to the common people, it is apparent that his incentive to write it derives from his desire to speak to readers from the common population, or perhaps even spreading the stories of religious spiritualists among other less spiritual and less "kenotic" people.

In the novel, Tolstoy's attempt to remind the common people of their lost idyllic peace and harmonious life in the countryside is apparent in a contrast he highlights between the peasant conflicts and the idyllic scenery. In Part Two of the novel, when Nekhliudov returns to his countryside estate and hears about how the peasants are abused

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<sup>106</sup> As McLean argues, this sect and their kenotic behavior are exactly what Tolstoy promoted in his series of treatises in 1880s and 1890s ("*Resurrection*").

<sup>107</sup> McLean points out that Tolstoy returned to his work on this novel because he needed money to support the sectarians' immigration. By the time Tolstoy finishes this novel, despite all his political messages about reforms and institutions already incorporated into the novel, he was no longer interested in them ("*Resurrection*").

by their bailiff, he sees an ambivalent picture of the idyllic rural landscape in front of him:

the thickly sprouting verdure with the larks soaring overhead; the woods with the trees—except for the tardy oak—all covered with young foliage; the meadows dotted with grazing cattle and horses; and the fields and the ploughmen in the distance—but no, no, it suddenly came back to him that something disagreeable had happened, and when he asks himself what it was he remembered the driver's story about the way his German bailiff had been managing his Kuzminskoye estate. (263-64)

Nekhliudov observes the beauty of the rural idyll but still suffers from his worries and concerns about what the peasant mentioned. This contrast between the Edenic picture of peasants in the field and the immoral actions of lower-class egoists in his estate exposes the peasants' internal conflict within the circle and against the background of the idyllic landscape.

The peasants' communal meetings in particular undermine the idyllic picture of the countryside. Before Nekhliudov meets with his peasants, he notices them gathering on the tennis court. "One by one they arrived, took off their caps as they bowed to one another, and placed themselves in a circle, leaning on their sticks" (268). When they start discussing the issue of acquisition of their own land, their ideas soon diverge. Although one may expect that the altruistic decision of the Tolstoyan will spiritually motivate the

peasants and unite them in farming, as it turns out, “no signs of pleasure were visible” (270) and people started bitter disputes. They seem less interested in farming their land in the future than in sorting out the existing conflicts and taking revenge on their bailiff. In a “tournament of words, with the participants not understanding too clearly what they were arguing about or why” (ibid.), Nekhliudov feels disturbance and agony. The core decision to make in this meeting is on the form of farming in the future, and the peasants disagree on whether the entire body of the commune should rent the land. At this critical point, people divide into two opposing parties: “the feeble and the poor payers” (271) on the one side, and the stronger ones from richer villages who want to be more independent from the slow payers, on the other. We hardly see any intention in these peasants to collaborate and assist each other, although they reluctantly reach an agreement under the pressure of the bailiff, “talking noisily, start[ing] down the hill in the direction of their villages” (ibid.). The way they disperse implies that the inner conflicts and materialistic inequality among the serfs are too serious to be easily solved by one contract. When Nekhliudov leaves the estate after the contract, his serfs are “puzzled and discontentedly shaking their heads” (ibid.) without any clues of the altruistic and spiritual content of this contract with their master. The way these peasants dispute, disagree, and dissipate in the scene of the communal meeting shows us a vision of chaotic conflicts instead of an image of collaborative villagers.

The tour Nekhliudov makes to another village after the first meeting reinforces the rural idyll that is destroyed and darkened. Nekhliudov first appreciates the unchanged beauty of the landscape:

A fresh spring breeze wafted the scent of newly turned soil through the little casement window. . . . From the river came the *tra-pa-tap, tra-pa-tap* of the wooden paddles with which the women beat the clothes they were washing, the sounds echoing over the glittering sunlit surface of the mill pool . . . long ago, when he was young and innocent, he had heard, above the rhythmical sound of the mill, the women's wooden paddles beating the wet clothes. (273)

What follows and complicates this pleasant view is the reality of peasant life. Tolstoy shows Nekhliudov talking to a number of impoverished peasants and observing their downtrodden life. He first meets a garrulous old peasant who shows him the food of poor peasants. Coming out of his shed, he talks to two young peasant boys who dispute who the poorest in the village is, Anisya or Marfa. From Maslova's aunt he further learns about the way such poor women beggars' toddlers die in this village (while evil women like Maslova's aunt make a living by breaking the law and selling alcohol). Finally he meets the beggar Anisya and spreads all his changes to the peasants flooding to him. The tour ends with his mediation between the evil bailiff and some peasant women. Nekhliudov again enters the natural beauty of the rural idyll in this village only to encounter these people's unhappiness, feeling "terribly sick at heart" (284).

Even though these contrasts between the idyllic landscape and the dark reality may still in part bear out Tolstoy's critique of the institution and the society, not the people, we should note that the writer further portrays the peasant characters as indifferent to the

fall of their idyll: they become too familiarized with their destitute life and even spiritual fall, showing no feeling of nostalgia or longing for beauty. Unlike peasants in Tolstoy's early fiction, the characters mentioned above "are accustomed to the process of perishing," to "the way children are allowed to die and women made to overwork, and the widespread undernourishment, especially of the aged," as Nekhliudov puts it (286). Knowing of many inequalities in their village, they "regard the situation as natural and proper" (ibid.). Familiarized with the notion that "it is natural for every man to look out for his own interest" (290-91), these peasants, deprived of compassion and altruism, become the target of Tolstoy's moral critique through his famous technique of defamiliarization.

Thanks to Victor Shklovsky, Tolstoy's resistance to habituation has been approached as a device in his fiction that defamiliarizes the ritualized and performative understanding of a wide range of concepts—"things, clothes, furniture, one's wife and the fear of war" (12), among which the novelist in particular "makes strange" the behaviors that he construes as immoral. In his didactic pieces such as "Why Do People Stupefy Themselves?" Tolstoy "vows not to lose life to a habitualized loss of consciousness," as Justin Weir puts it (192). In his essay "The First Step" (1892), for instance, Tolstoy clearly points out that the good-natured Russian peasants are not immune from this loss of consciousness. He narrates the way a peasant butcher slaughters livestock for a living and gradually loses the feelings of fear and pity. He "had also been 'afraid', but he was so no longer" (233), after working years in the environment of a

bloody slaughter-house in Tula. In the following, I focus on the defamiliarized rural rituals in *Resurrection* to reveal his scorn for the habitualized evil of the peasant culture.

In *Resurrection*, Tolstoy aptly utilizes his technique of grotesque defamiliarization. As Ani Kokobobo claims, in this dark novel that depicts an impoverished rural Russia, Tolstoy subverts his conventional depiction of harmonious nature in the countryside estate and is “morally obligated to renounce nature for social unnaturalness” (“Estranged and Degraded Worlds,” 4). The natural and pastoral landscape in Nekhliudov’s aunts’ estate is reduced to an impure and grotesque space, where even “[t]he natural progression of generations is obstructed, as virtually all children either do not live past infancy or seem at risk for illness or death” (ibid., 6). Kokobobo especially highlights the moment when village priests, common villagers, and peasant children show up for a communion in prison, because Tolstoy portrays this episode as not spiritualizing, but rather disturbing, in that the people and the children eat the flesh of God and drink the blood of their deity.<sup>108</sup> No one among these people seems to find the rituals strange; yet from Tolstoy’s perspective, the people’s continuation of the rites is grotesque, iconoclastic, and far from spiritual.

In my view, it is exactly a “holy” ritual—the midnight blessing and prayer at the village church on Easter night—that destroys a spiritual bond between two young people.

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<sup>108</sup> On this episode about the prisoners’ prayer, a counterargument is raised by Kaufman, who insists that the passage on Easter service in prison has a spiritual influence on the maturing Nekhliudov. “The writer’s message is clear: in order to rediscover the sort of love he experienced at the Easter service, Nekhliudov will have to see beyond all fake symbols, religious or otherwise, that have become substitutes for genuine human feeling and connection” (224).

However, Tolstoy’s ambivalent attitude toward the Easter communion in the novel is supported by his attacks on the official Orthodox Church for its hypocrisy and dogmatism. Kokobobo argues that Tolstoy’s depiction of the details during the communion “provoke[s] a grotesque effect by degrading the deity to the level of flesh” (“Estranged and Degraded Worlds,” 12). His excommunication in 1901 by the Holy Synod was also in part triggered by this iconoclastic portrayal of church priests in *Resurrection*.

As Tolstoy describes, there are always two competing beings in a person, one spiritual and one animalistic. The Nekhliudov who once loved Katiusha as his innocent childhood sister is a spiritual being. His reunion with Katiusha resurrects his spiritual being even after three years of army life that has changed him into an animal being. At the moment when he met Maslova again, he “experienced the same feelings which he had had for her before, the spiritual man in him raised his head once more and began to assert his rights” (80). Throughout the two days before Easter, Nekhliudov battles against his animalistic side, as if “a ceaseless struggle was waged within him” (ibid.). However, as I will show, the spiritual bond between the sibling-like young couple is cut off, not during the seduction, but exactly at the night when they both attend the midnight service.

Tolstoy describes the scene of the pious peasants’ Easter service in a defamiliarizing style. He gives details on the peasants’ position in the church, their clothes on such an occasion, and the formal hairstyle of the children, all of which are telling of the author’s satirical view on the rite:

the women, especially the old women, riveting their faded eyes upon one of the many ikons, each with lighted candles burning before it, made the sign of the cross, firmly pressing their bent fingers to the kerchief on their foreheads, to each shoulder and their stomachs, moving their lips all the while, and bowed or fell to their knees. The children imitated their elders and prayed earnestly whenever anyone was looking at them. The golden ikonostasis shone in the light of the tapers around the big candles decorated with golden spirals. (82)



The children, in his view, seem to imitate and perform what they are expected to do by adult villagers. The description of some disharmonious choir songs is equally ambivalent: “from the choir came the cheerful singing of amateur choristers with bellowing basses and the boys’ thin treble” (82). The mixture of low and high voices leaves the reader with a disharmonious impression. The villagers’ prayer, commonly considered spiritual or holy, reads like a depiction of ominous incantation. The writer further creates a visually grotesque effect by zooming into the bodies—the people’s fingers, foreheads, and stomachs. The peasant women’s eyes are described as “faded” and fixated on the icons. The amateur singers’ hair is “well oiled” like that of the children. This defamiliarized way of depicting the Easter night helps the writer to insinuate the prayers’ empty rituals and lack of spirituality.

Even when some good-natured peasants seem to establish a spiritual bond with other prayers, the narrator shifts his focus from mutual care or genuine love between these individuals. We learn from the narrator that Nekhliudov donates all the change in his pockets. An old peasant cook stops him to kiss him. His peasant wife hands him an egg. But when a younger peasant approaches to kiss him, all he feels is the peasant “tickling him with his curly beard” (84). Such a detail interrupts the narrative about a holy kiss, and in many other details in this scene, we see similar interruptions. When Maslova, with her genuinely blissful smile, kisses a beggar, she also seems to feel uneasy because of Nekhliudov’s presence. This distraction implies that she is overly conscious of his eyes on her back and cannot remain pure in spirit at this moment.

Even though all participants seem to sincerely bless each other in this scene, the narrator deliberately shifts his focus from some sublime moments toward the ambivalent details such as the empty reaction of Nekhliudov and the impure disturbance in Maslova. His depictions of the two characters' hesitation during their three kisses further functions to undermine the seemingly sacred ritual, since their awkwardness indicates their direct awareness of ulterior sensual attraction. Now that Nekhliudov becomes more and more conscious of Maslova's feminine beauty, especially "her slender form in the white dress with the tucked bodice" (84), he feels that "for her glittered the gold of the ikonostasis; for her burned all the candles in the candelabrum and the candle-stands; for her the joyful chant rang out" (83). While he stands before the iconostasis, he is attracted by a woman's physical charm. This distraction shows that his prayer, in a ritualized fashion, does not elevate him spiritually but tempts him to sin. As Nekhliudov always recalls, "all that dreadful business began only after that Easter night" (86). It seems that the two main protagonists join the prison communion and Easter prayer, in this critical episode of the novel, only to awaken to their physical attraction, which leaves the reader with the same impression of the spiritual emptiness of village life that we have seen in the "idyllic" landscape and peasant meeting.

Tolstoy explores numerous other cultural components in the countryside landscape, even if not defamiliarized, to shed light on the scarce spirituality of the people living in the rural idyll. The scented soap and the *gorelki* game, important to Nekhliudov's innocent memory about Maslova in his aunts' estate, imply his fall and her seduction. When he meets Maslova as an adult, the reappearance of the untouched soap, the towels,

and the scent of the countryside house “pointedly anticipates the seduction, especially as she herself is likened to the untouched, uncovered, pleasant soap she brings to him in his bedroom” (Rowe, 118). The *gorelki* game that isolates the two young people in the backwoods from the other players also indicates that no one will catch them and they expect “the loss of innocence in their relationship” (ibid.). W. W. Rowe states that *gorelki*, lilac in bloom, and the scent of backwoods are further connected to another incident of seduction—the steward’s arrangement of a barefoot peasant girl with earrings to be readied for the master Nekhliudov’s “enjoyment,” this time years after he has served as a gentry officer. At his aunts’ estate, the rural landscape and the country life are frequently pierced with the darkness of seduction and immorality.

### **Oblomovka on the Edge of an Abyss**

With similar graphic details of country life and the everyday reality of rural culture in his novel *Oblomov*, Goncharov presents an even darker picture and more dangerous disunity of the Russian people in their “idyllic” life. Critics seldom note the similar portrayals of the Russian people by Goncharov and by Tolstoy; yet, their lower-class characters share a “loss of consciousness.” While Tolstoy’s peasants seem to follow a larger impersonal authority or familiarize themselves with the performance of rituals, either way muffling their spiritual voice, Goncharov’s peasant characters go farther to completely deprive themselves of the ability to make conscious moral decisions, as this section will show. Numerous idyllic motifs in this novel reflect nothing but dead rituals and the meaningless life of the Oblomovka people.

To start with, scholars highlight “[t]he oppositional pair ‘static-dynamic’ [and] the opposition between a ‘dead’ and a ‘living’ world” (Love, 202) that demonstrates the novelist’s disappointment in the traditional country life.<sup>109</sup> Many critics approach the novel with this model of a “dichotomy of cyclical and linear images of time embodied in the two characters,” Oblomov and Stolz (Borowec, 565). The sense of idyllic time is also generated by the ambivalent serf woman, Agafya Matveevna (the folk heroine who contrasts with a progressive heroine Olga). She provides a comfortable environment and the folkloric rhythm of life for her carefree master. Her cooking, cleaning, and serving in the household contribute to the “circular non-progressive folkloric time” (Wigzell, “Dream and Fantasy” 109). With the contrast between idyllic and modern time, Goncharov condemns the former that destroys Oblomov’s ability to confront radical turbulences in the outside world.

Along with the folk heroine, other serfs who work assiduously for various annual cultural rituals contribute to the Oblomovka people’s delusion of idyll and fall into materialism. Sacred calendars, celebrations of holidays, rhythms of seasons, and religious festivals keep the people living and serving in Oblomovka busy throughout the year. These serfs are never tired of “endless repetition of familial and community observances of births, marriages, deaths, and seasonal holidays” (Singleton, 78). They are diligent cooks, grasping the best understanding of all the complex rituals such as what dishes to serve, who sits together at the table, what decorum is to be followed, and what customs serve their feast. However, their “performances” on the celebratory occasions of birth,

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<sup>109</sup> For related views on time, life cycles, mobility and immobility in Oblomovka, also see Borowec, Holmgren, Lounsbery, and Wigzell, “Dream and Fantasy,” among others.

marriage, and funerals, explored in ethnographic writings as the three most important life events, are reduced to their simplification and degradation of communal life into empty rituals. In numerous “gay and mournful subdivisions” of these three main rituals, “feast-days, dinner-parties, assemblies of relatives, greetings, congratulations,” the people focus on the regularity of the rituals “in full accordance with tradition” and carefully perform them with “ceremonial tears and smiles” (134). By paying attention to the right facial expressions and dramatic emotional outbursts, the Oblomovka people become oblivious to the spiritual meaning of these communal unions.

In addition, these serfs’ practice and worship of calendar rituals turn out to expose their egoism and disunity. Despite their seemingly hospitable manner, the Oblomovka residents are infamous for a stingy character. They feel nothing but hatred toward “depraved” guests who eat too much at their table. They curse these guests as desperate visitors and never allow them to visit again. Thus, their loyalty to the traditional rites does not necessarily mean any emotional connection or spiritual bonding among them.

Among other things, the poisonous effect of the traditional cuisine reduces the people’s spiritual experiences to superficial and physical experiences. The traditional Russian food served in Oblomovka, indispensable for all festivals marked in the idyllic calendar, demonstrates that the serfs actively change the Oblomovka residents from spiritual beings into “animalistic” beings. The serfs’ food preparation, a process that seems to illustrate their hardworking virtue, creates an ambivalent atmosphere ruled by the familiar rhythm of slicing vegetables. What accompanies this “idyllic” but empty rhythm is the sound of colliding needles, snapping threads, and someone scratching his

head on a quiet afternoon. These vocal effects reinforce the impression that the Oblomovka people live in futile “imitation of ritual” (Singleton, 89), and the atmosphere of a banal rural world.

Although one may maintain that Goncharov values the female serfs’ domestic skills and virtuous housewifery (for instance, Goncharov pays tribute to Agafya’s and Anisya’s homemaking (Holmgren)), it is apparent that by feeding Oblomov with ample amounts of food, Agafya turns into a mother figure who degrades him into an infant or invalid.<sup>110</sup> The adult man Oblomov shows basic need to eat and develop a feeling of dependence on a mother figure, like a toddler. Since Goncharov does not portray other serfs eating Agafya’s and Anisya’s food in detail, we can only speculate that their mentality may be similar to their master’s. Nonetheless, this speculation that food degrades the Oblomovka people has its merit because they may instinctually replace spiritual edification by knowledge with physical consumption of food. As Ronald LeBlanc argues, in Oblomov’s childhood, his biological mother frequently interrupts his education at the German school simply by making pancakes for the child and persuading him to taste them at home. LeBlanc claims that much like Oblomov’s mother, all the other inhabitants of Oblomovka, low and high, “educate” their children with food, intervene in their literacy, and reduce the term *vospitanie* (education) to its lower, corporeal version—*pitanie* (nourishment) (“Oblomov’s Consuming Passion”). Under such circumstances, people at Oblomovka are accustomed to feeling satisfied with material food and oblivious to

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<sup>110</sup> See Givens, “Wombs, Tombs, and Mother Lover,” in which he clarifies that Oblomov only sees Agafya’s elbows, neck, arms, shoulders, bosom (and Anisya’s nose), because these body parts provide “the mother’s anatomy from which nourishment and sensual pleasure is first derived” (99). For our purposes, it is enough to note that “food and sexual pleasure are bound up in the image of the mother’s breast” (ibid., 100) and that Oblomov is reduced by the serf woman into an innocent but empty-minded physical being.

spiritual food. Such a separation of physical nourishment from spiritual growth reminds us of what Francois Jullien posits as “the great dualism of the physical and the spiritual” (24). Jullien surveys Chinese philosophers’ and European thinkers’ ideas about a “mediation” that can “effectively link these two distinct levels,” physical feeding and mental maturation (ibid.). A violation of the nourishment of the soul is, for Jullien, a destruction of the vitality of the self. In particular, he states that any seemingly nutritious and “good” items can be a “trap for vitality, not only when it becomes routine but also when we become prisoners of the label” (31). Thus, the enormous pies baked by the Oblomovka serfs, a symbol of the seemingly “good” feeding in the estate, do not bear out its “folkloric sense of belonging to a greater and more meaningful whole,” but illustrate these people’s physical purposes in life (LeBlanc, 125).

At this point, we should note that while the annual calendar, the seasonal festivals, the Russian cuisine, and the countryside manners are responsible for the fall of the rural idyll, it is always the serfs and residents who actively destroy the spiritual content of their culture in rural life. Goncharov always finds man, not his environment, responsible for his own spiritual recession. The novelist places Oblomov in the center of Oblomovka: he resembles a hermit reigning over his monastic cell,<sup>111</sup> or, “he carries Oblomovka with him” (Lounsbery, 48). The man’s immobility has influenced the living idyll and his Oblomovism characterizes the environment of his estate, not the other way around. In a similar vein, the serfs and the residents, as mentioned above, are the “actors” on the stage

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<sup>111</sup> As Love argues, the gentry man’s “move away from outside life resembles a monk’s leaving of the world, his *ukhod*” (201).

of the rural idyll at all times, cooking the recipes and practicing the calendar rituals. They are guilty of “active” exacerbation of the emptiness of the rural idyll.

One of these peasants’ most dangerous “actions” that drag them into their spiritual abyss is their “daydreaming.” Critics frequently explore the way Oblomov’s daydreams undermine his spiritual sensitivity. As Faith Wigzell claims, “Il’ia derives archetypal images of the noble hero and beautiful heroine from these tales, but cannot connect them to the gluttony, sloth, superstition and complacency that surrounds him, and certainly not to the ideals of hard work, persistence” (“Dream and Fantasy,” 106). In other words, he confines his conscious understanding of goodness and ethics to his dreams without developing them in real life. After marrying Agafya Matveevna, who allows him to live in daydreams, he continues to be trapped in the world of folklore, imagination, fantasies in his adulthood and erases his conscious ethics. As Victoria Somoff argues, the hero arrives at “a state of consciousness within which all goals have already been achieved, such that there is no longer any need to either set or pursue them, whether in real life or fantasy” (152). In her view, Oblomov resists all conscious goals and in a sense “dies” in his sleep.<sup>112</sup> For our purposes, we should note that the master’s symptoms of “death in sleep” apply to his serfs as well. As one critic notes, the people’s idyllic calendar, the food consumption, and the prosaic routines “resembles the dream evocation of Oblomovka” (Holmgren, 80). In the famous chapter of Oblomov’s dream of his childhood Goncharov devotes pages to the people’s sleep after their rich dinner. Gardeners, coachmen, servants, and cooks all fall asleep, some “lying down on the

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<sup>112</sup> Oblomovism is not illustrated in this novel as a “stasis-action-stasis” circle, but as “unfailing and intensifying acts of resistance” to any goal setting (Somoff, 154).



benches, on the floor, and in the entry” (122). The way they randomly lie asleep everywhere in the house presents an ominous picture of dead bodies around in the house. It is striking that the writer describes the scene of these serfs’ sleep even with specific references to death: he notes that after the long dinner, “[d]ead stillness reigned in the house”; “[i]t was an overwhelming, irresistible sleep, a true semblance of death. There was no life anywhere”; and outside the house, the same sensation of stillness “reigned over the field and the village, as though everything were dead” (ibid.). These repetitions of the word “death” leaves us with the impression that in the narrator’s view, the Oblomovka inhabitants in their sleep are spiritually “dead.”

Although the young and innocent child Ilya searched for adventure during the quiet hour after dinner, the serfs around him cannot be more satisfied with their motionless sleep. None of the serfs, including Ilya’s closest nursemaid, wake up from sleep and join his adventurous pursuit of life, although “ups and downs” may exist in the idyllic landscape in Oblomovka: the energetic child, alone, “watched delightedly a spider sucking a fly and the poor victim struggling and buzzing in its clutches” (124). In this scene, Goncharov describes the way the young Ilya “killed both the victim and the torturer,” the sudden brutality of which may indicate that battles, struggles, and adventures in his future life and in this estate have disappeared since then.

These Oblomovka residents, who are indifferent to the adventures in the outside world, may even become aware of their degradation of ethical life into spiritual death. We learn that when Oblomovka residents are awake, if they are not cooking or eating, they let silence reign in their house and meetings. It is noteworthy that when they

occasionally talk, they surprisingly tend to focus on the news of fellow villagers' deaths. Their gossip about death reinforces the tranquil atmosphere in their house. In the middle of this idyllic tranquility, an old woman suddenly prophesies that a catastrophe brought by a comet will destroy people's lives on the earth. She has a similar sensation that they will all witness wars between countries and destruction of lives. These may indicate the timid Oblomovka people's fear of physical destruction at the end of time, and at the same time, these people's sensation that they are reaching their death. The narrator makes the comment that "old ladies have dark forebodings at times" (146), in part insinuating that people around the old woman perhaps survive in a folkloric time zone in a post-apocalyptic and post-traumatic world, in which spiritual life has long disappeared.

The blurred boundary between the Oblomovka people's life and death, in the comments of the old woman and the narrator, may also indicate that they have long lived since their spiritual death but regarded it as their norm of life. The narrator claims that these people never question their way of life and regard life to be boring, peaceful, and unchanging. Their future generations are also taught not to explore the spiritual meaning and the puzzling pieces of life (they refrain from educating their children: as they put it, "[w]hat was there to learn, what aims to pursue" (134)). Given their consistently passive view of life, their day and night become completely irrelevant to human life in its ethic shape. As the narrator claims, "life flowed on like a quiet river, and all that remained for them was to sit on the bank watching the inevitable events," as if they were not part of it (134). Life's real sense has disappeared in Oblomovka and will never be reborn, immersed in the space of their coffins and not distinguishable from deaths: "life went on

like a continual monotonous web, breaking off unnoticeably at the very edge of the grave” (135), as the narrator puts it.

The Oblomovka people’s “life in death” may again be approached from the perspective of Jullien’s idea about vital nourishment. He argues that when man’s physical survival, consciousness of body, and basic desire for food become his only goal in life, “[h]e focuses on his life and makes it his supreme and indeed his only value, for other values are reduced to naught by comparison” (36-37). In a similar way, Oblomovka people who “live to live” have long been deprived of “the ability to embrace life in all its variability” (Jullien, 37).

In conclusion, despite the peace on the surface, the Oblomovka people’s repetition of the idyllic rituals delivers them to a spiritual death. As the narrator describes, in the very beginning of Oblomov’s dream, one of the cottages in the village “dropped on the edge of the ravine and has been hanging there [...] with one-half of it in the air” (112). The writer perhaps uses this hut as a metaphor for the village that continues to enforce its folkloric calendar and survives physically in a precarious position. They have reached the “dizzying abyss” that Jullien describes, which traps in its bottom those men who are concentrated on nothing but physical nourishment and survival, or basically, just food. Much like their cottage on the edge of the cliff, figuratively, these people from Oblomovka live on the edge of the abyss opened beneath their feet.

## Conclusion

Russian realist writers portray the performances of peasant weddings, neighborhood visits, religious festivals, and Orthodox pilgrimages in an ambivalent way. In Chekhov's and Tolstoy's novellas, for instance, even scenes of Gospel reading and kenotic wandering become battlefields of violent peasants and insincere egotists. The peasant protagonists may further lose their brotherly compassion, as we learn in *Anna Karenina*, their pure love, as in *Resurrection*, or even their spiritual experience of life, as in *Oblomov*. Realist writers subvert the traditional image of the ancient rural rituals in their literature in a more radical way than historians and ethnographers do in their academic surveys. While nineteenth-century intelligentsia, in particular folklorists, Slavophiles, and ethnographers, only provide informative commentaries or nostalgic memoirs, realist writers' voices are less nostalgic than cynical, as they depict the scarcity of any human warmth or brotherly alliance in the people's traditional ritual practices.

## Chapter 4

“Nature, the Nightingales and the Cockchafers, Is That Bar”:

### The Seduction of the Peasant Women

The previous chapter explored the ambivalent image of the rural idyll in realist literature. This chapter will examine peasant women, who also play an ambivalent role in the people's brotherhood. Because of outmigration and industrialization, peasant women suffered more in the postreform decades. However, what realist writers attempt to portray in literature is not only the women's suffering, but also their sexual transgression. On the eve of modernity, the sexual desire of peasant women becomes a demonic power that destroys traditional norms, families, and communities. I will focus on female sexuality in realist literature as another threatening force in the world of the Russian people.

This chapter begins with a section on eyewitness accounts and academic studies of peasant women in postreform Russia. Most ethnographic and historical reports praise peasant women's submission to the patriarchal hierarchy and romanticize their contribution to peasant economy, although they in part acknowledge the reality of the women's sexual transgression and matriarchal authority in the age of outmigration. At this critical point, as the succeeding sections show, realist writers' subversive portrayal of the relations between the two sexes differs from that of ethnographers and scholars. I

especially focus on Chekhov, Leskov, Turgenev, and Tolstoy, who undermine the idealized image of peasant women. All four writers portray peasant women's seductive nature as a force of disintegration that is almost impossible to conquer.

### **Submission to the Patriarchal Unity**

Ethnographers have established the tradition of understanding women's roles in their marital life as related to their responsibility in the peasants' communal society. For instance, D. K. Zelenin notes that the complicated rituals and rites at peasant weddings were intended "to place the union of the couple under the recognition of the community" (*priznanie braka obshchinois*) (332). The bride's entry into marriage meant involvement with a new community, and was thus watched as a collective ceremony and village-wide event. The villagers celebrated her arrival to their neighborhood after a long journey with the groom (*svadebnyi poezd*) usually by baking a specific type of wedding bread—*karavai*. Both rituals were symbolic of the "collective, social nature" (*kollektivnyi, obshchestvennyi kharakter*) of the peasant woman's new identity (ibid., 339). As Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby recently notes, the bread, *karavai*, served at the climax of the ritualistic ceremony, must be broken into pieces by all participants as a gesture that symbolizes the destruction of the bride's maiden life and the increase of the peasant laborers' number (46). She also makes mention of the party of *devichnik*, in which maidens braided the bride's hair into the single braid of girlhood one last time, as an event symbolizing "the destruction or transfer of the bride's 'will' (*volia*)" (13).

This does not necessarily mean ethnographic and academic studies have been oblivious to peasant women's drudgery. During the second half of the century, large and traditional peasant households became divided into smaller ones. The result was that in each individual household, even women became responsible for heavy work in the field. From all parts of the country came reports that "women were fulfilling all the duties reserved for men in earlier times, such as the heavy fieldwork, road repairs, and tax collection" (Glickman, "Peasant Women and Their Work," 49). They also had to bring other remunerative income, by working as local healers (*znakharka*), if they inherited the wisdom and skill of their mothers or grandmothers. More frequently in the era of industrialization, female peasants' remunerative work in the countryside took the shape of *kustar'* (handicraftsman). Scholars have agreed that industrialization and modernization, although they were expected to reduce the emphasis on agricultural practice in the peasant world, turned out to demand more agricultural and domestic labor from peasant women.

When they comment on the way women contributed to peasant economy, ethnographers and historians seem sympathetic. They especially show compassion when they make mention of the fact that while men easily migrated to urban areas for other income, peasant women remained more or less attached to their land. Many rural regions reported their districts turning into "the woman's place" or "the woman's kingdom" (*bab'e tsarstvo*). Authors note that among various types of remunerative work, women sewed and knitted for whole days without moving. They worked continuously, sparing no effort, to satisfy the pace of work and make a minimum, usually, of three rubles a month.

Ethnographers were aware that spinning thread and knitting for whole days damaged women's physical health; this workload further threatened their mental health, as many women worked fourteen hours or more a day before Easter and other calendar rituals when everyone in the village wanted to earn extra money (Pallot). This hardship was even considered natural in the era of outmigration and *kustar'* when artisans and peasants, men and women alike, were driven by the commercial profit and Moscow standards to "lengthen their hours of labor to a frightful extent" (Stepniak, 158).<sup>113</sup> These authors certainly appreciate and sympathize with women's participation in *kustar'*. They objectively evaluate the tragic contrast between women's and men's lives in the time of outmigration: women's *kustar'* was never paid as much as male peasants' *remesla* (trades, professions) such as blacksmithy, carpentry, and stonecutting. Their skilled production also commanded less respect and did not help change their inferiority in the countryside. They were easily blocked from new technologies, concepts, and social movements near the end of the century. As Judith Pallot summarizes, responsibilities of men and women, turning more and more symmetrical in terms of amount of work, "did not, of course, mean that the level of exploitation to which each gender was subjected by emergent capitalism was the same" (171).

These commentaries fit into the larger picture of the patriarchal order in the peasant world. Patriarchy in nineteenth-century rural Russia was a system of hierarchy that existed at various levels of the peasants' life. It was first established in the family sphere,

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<sup>113</sup> Stepniak, discussing *kustar'*, notes that when millions of people—men, women, and small children—worked in professions such as weavers, lace-makers, rope-twisters, fur-dressers, locksmiths, mat-makers to make both ends meet, "there are few in which the working time is less than sixteen hours a day" (159).



a basic unit of patriarchy where “men held power over women, elders over youth, adults over children and mothers-in-law over daughters-in-law” (Smith, 94). This system elevated the male head of the household—a *bol'shak*—to “absolute authority over household affairs and family members,” in Christine Worobec’s definition (*Peasant Russia*, 218). Under such circumstances, wife-beating and even assaults on young wives were tacitly allowed. The difference between sexes and the patriarchal system are fundamental to the mentality and worldview of peasants, as the ethnographer Olga Semyonova Tian-Shanskaia notes, because peasant boys and girls were taught to sense the sexual differentiation in their early childhood, through the experience of attending betrothals and weddings: they perceived daily life within a patriarchal model in which “[t]he father is master of the house and the mother the mistress,” the former having command over the latter (44). A wife reached her power only as a mother-in-law and the tensions between her and the young daughter-in-law again reflected the ubiquitous irreconcilable patriarchal relations in family households. The patriarchy certainly extended beyond individual households, when the heads were gathering together in the assembly of the *mir*, a communal committee that made decisions on behalf of the entire commune. Elected from the household heads, communal authorities on a village scale reinforced male dominance and female conformity. Worobec explores numerous *volost’* court decisions in the post-emancipation period and concludes that they “do not suggest any fundamental change in women’s positions within the Russian peasant family” and more often it was the wronged wives who lost their legal battles (*Peasant Russia*, 195-96). The warranted right and power of the commune, as a result, perpetuated the patriarchal

order in a misogynist society that conferred a God-given authority onto men. In peasant society, family and *mir* were the two most influential patriarchal institutions, which naturalized unequal treatment of Russian women.

Nonetheless, the patriarchal order condemned by these researchers does not entirely undermine the myth of the peasant brotherhood, as their writings show, because they praise the female peasants' submission and contribution to the patriarchal peasantry as a sign of spiritual strength that solidified the peasants' unity. The submission of women to the unity of the family becomes a cultural myth and it remains so even in the context of outmigration. For instance, Rose Glickman comments on the women's extra work as healers in peasant village and claims that this model "compensated for the absence of . . . the support or concern of the commune" and illustrated a spontaneous, organic peasant community ("The Peasant Woman as Healer," 162). Similarly, although Brenda Meehan-Waters acknowledges that a huge number of miserable peasant women entered monasteries for shelter and security, she places the emphasis not on the masculine society's alienation of these women, but on the women's contribution to a "more democratic, self-supporting, and communal" rural society (130). Even though ethnographic investigations have identified a number of cases in which peasant women rebelled against their family oppression and appealed to the township court, they never conclude whether the peasant women were widely dissatisfied in the country, or if such women's appeals in court were exceptional incidents (Farnsworth, 103). The peasant women's hardship in the patriarchal world does not prevent authors from extolling their collective worldview and contribution to a united communal peasantry.

At the same time, Russian peasant women did not always unite people or contribute to the peasants' fraternal alliance. When peasant women almost dominated their village in the time of outmigration, their power started to grow. In a typical women's kingdom, or, *bab'e tsarstvo*, some older peasant women assumed important roles at village assemblies, replaced males as village elders, and became less restricted by patriarchy.<sup>114</sup> Some peasant women occupied higher hierarchical positions in their community and became almost freed from any moral codes. In particular, peasant widows were able "to resist the patriarchy or even to exert power," as Rodney D. Bohac puts it (112). For most younger peasant women who could not rebel against the ubiquitous discrimination against *kustar'* in favor of male peasants' *remeslo*, a more possible way to rebel against patriarchal division was naturally sexual transgression. Although wifely infidelity was still less frequently seen and more harshly punished than the ever-contentious sexual transgressions of husbands, infidelity was widespread among peasant wives (Engel, "The Woman's Side," 74).

Although most commentaries address this most common "revenge" of the peasant women, their authors left no clear and critical comments. Semyonova comments on the way Ryazan women abused their husbands and refused to take remunerative work. Her research is a report on peasant women's premarital intercourse, extramarital romantic relationships, abortions, and infanticides—a series of sins related to their sexuality. However, her commentaries fail to exceed their informational function or provide a

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<sup>114</sup> For women's role as elders and authorities, see Engel, "The Woman's Side" and Worobec, "Victims or Actors." Powerful peasant women worked as *svakha* (matchmakers), managers of household, and even judges of people's moral improprieties.

psychological analysis of the peasant women's moral standards.<sup>115</sup> As her translator notes, her depiction of such female control does not demonstrate her awareness of these women's subversive impact or "transcend the language and attitudes of her day" (Ransel, xxv). Most ethnographic authors agree that if any power or agency in behaving promiscuously ever existed among peasant women, it was limited to a small number of well-off middle-aged wives. The young women's agency in inheriting land, participating in the communal assemblies, and transgression was extremely limited (Pallot, 184). Promiscuity, on the other hand, could still cause older widows and spinsters to be marginalized or banished as "unproductive members";<sup>116</sup> promiscuous young peasant girls were more commonly ostracized by the collectives of eligible maidens from their *posidelki*—young people's gatherings for recreation on winter evenings. As Worobec points out, it remained "taboo for young people at spring and summer round dances (*khovorody*) to caress one another in public" ("Victims or Actors," 194). A bride's virginity, demonstrated by her bloodied nightshirt (*kalina*), was still publicly displayed by the "guardians" of the village—the married senior peasant women. Although critics may acknowledge peasant women's sinful behaviors, they sympathize with women as suffering souls, highlight patriarchal oppressions in common villages, and de-emphasize their sexual transgressions.

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<sup>115</sup> See Semyonova, 51-61, for the ethnographer's thorough observation on round dances, various evening parties (*ulitsa, poriadok, vecherinki*), the phenomenon of illegitimate births, and the term "wayward women." The ethnographer finds the reasons for the peasant men's and women's relaxed morals in the context of outmigration, without exploring the women's psychology and mentality.

<sup>116</sup> For the alienation of senior peasant women in the patriarchal villages, see Engel, "Transformation Versus Tradition." Also see Worobec, "Victims or Actors."

Since peasant women's sexual liberty is the focus of realist literature that will be explored in this chapter, I will briefly introduce gender theorists' and feminist scholars' views that are relevant to the problem of Russian peasant women. Feminists' condemnation of a masculine view of women's bodies in general may be relevant. Sarah R. Richardson, for instance, argues for a gender-ideological bias in science, because "biological objects and concepts may take on a gendered valence as they circulate between popular and scientific realms" (910). She elaborates on "[t]he still very contemporary view that the double X makes females unpredictable, mysterious, chimeric, and conservative" (927). The seemingly scientific discovery of the double X, in her view, provides for derogatory interpretations of feminine stereotypes—the unstable, capricious, unreliable species. Russian peasants' stereotypical views on women and their sexual bodies fit well into this "scientific" model for discriminating against the female X.

Hélène Cixous further explores a series of phallocentrist models of antagonism, between the intelligible and the palpable, culture and nature, activity and passivity. Cixous claims that the human race continues to exist because of the male's attempt "to gain Imaginary profit, to win Imaginary victory" (79) out of his desire for the "strangeness" in the female body. The masculine desire continues to reinforce a hierarchical model of masculinity-femininity and a prejudice against all women. In the Slavic context, as Dorothy Atkinson claims, since Kievan Rus' the term "woman" (*zhenshchina*) had been polluted by a homonymic confusion with the word "wife" (*zhena*). Woman did not exist outside a marital bond with a man. Among different Slavic tribes, the critic notes, pagan customs supported "interclan raiding to capture women for bribes" (6). The female body's

mysterious cyclical functioning and its contribution to reproduction left these peasant tribes with “a feeling that women had powers that made them at least potentially dangerous” (9). This “fear” of female sex and the female body continued through medieval Russia. Their body started to be associated with sin, under the influence of both the Mongols and the Christian church.

The peasants’ misunderstanding of femininity as “strangeness” was in part encouraged by beliefs from Russian folklore. As mentioned in the previous chapter, ethnographers and academic studies criticize a folkloric prejudice that associates women’s body with “unclean water.” Folklore claims that a *rusalka* living in water in alien (*chuzhie*) regions may dry up the people’s land and prevent the germination of crops.<sup>117</sup> A similar example from folklore is the epic song from *bylina* that usually narrates the historical heroism of men and demonstrates a masculine centrism. (Such epic songs feature heroes who are always male, larger-than-life figures that defended *Rus*’.) In contrast, the iconic image of mother in *Domostroi* is far from spiritual and caring. She is minimized as a spiritually inferior being who merely provides *material* comforts for her household. As Worobec points out, the Russian people’s folkloric norms associate women with “the images of two diametrically opposed figures: the tender, merciful, devoted Virgin Mary, on the one hand, and the temptress Eve, on the other” (“Victims or Actors,” 192). The superstitious Russian peasants treated women as half demonic

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<sup>117</sup> The Russian peasants were thus afraid of the feminized figure of *rusalka*, which exactly embodies the spirit of distant lakes, rivers from the forests, and water from unfamiliar area. They were considered to be unknown, unclean, and undesirable. Across different regions and at all times, the Russian peasants adhered to a ritual called *rusalka* week. Peasant girls were supposed to role-play *rusalki* and the villagers casted these role-played water spirits into a rye field, as if they conducted the nymphs’ funeral.

temptresses and irresponsible creatures, based on their gendered view of sexually active women as the unknown female X and the “strange” other.

Thus, folklore and superstitions further portray women’s sex, body, and sexuality as strange and dangerous. Ancient folklore approached women’s sexuality as a demonic force associated with the image of hellfire and, as Atkinson puts it, “the only good woman was the desexualized female: the elderly saint, or the virgin” (14). In nineteenth-century rural Russia, this distinction between young and old women again illustrates the discrimination against sexually active bodies of young women. In villages across regions of European Russia, while postmenopausal women were worshipped as benefactors of harvest, menstruating women were viewed in awe for their reproductive capacities, adverse effect on crops, and demonic fornication with the devil.<sup>118</sup>

In this gendering and superstitious age, the entire Russian society was masculine and even radicals discriminated against female sexuality for its flavor of “strangeness.” The belief system of Orthodox Christianity had also adopted a masculine perspective and reinforced a binary system for centuries, in particular as we can see within the traditions of hagiography, kenoticism, and heroism. As Faith Wigzell notes, hagiography was composed by monks, whose misogynistic belief system had been intended to mythologize

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<sup>118</sup> Menstruating women were broadly regarded as the unknown body to be feared in Ukrainian culture, Middle-Eastern religions, and Christian beliefs. Russian peasants especially feared women’s inheritance of Eve’s negative traits and treated them as second-class citizens (Worobec, “Temptress or Virgin?”). Russian peasants would seldom assign a holy profession like midwife to young maidens or menstruating women, but always to old, motherly women, and those who led a “categorically moral life” (*bezuprechnuiu npravstvennuiu zhizni*), as Zelenin’s ethnography shows (319). In the same vein, the Russian people treated two types of *znakharka* entirely differently. While the older ones were usually respected as elders, young, menstruating, unmarried healers were feared as greedy, lay, untrustworthy charlatans. In literature, this happens in “The Life of a Peasant Martyress.” Leskov portrays the respected and humanitarian natural healer Sila Krylushkin, who provides a shelter for a couple of “possessed” women and restores their sanity. In contrast, a female peasant sorcerer is a negative figure, who fails to rescue Nastya and treats her as the “possessed” (See Worobec, *Possessed*, 126-27).

the deeds of saintly men, and even though female saints existed in history, they were less universally venerated (“Nikolai Leskov”). In the late nineteenth-century, when urban factories began to replace craft businesses, domestic *kustar*’ became less popular among peasant women and more of them desired to work directly in urban areas. In cities, former peasant women were more independent, their freedom no longer at all mediated by men and patriarchy in rural Russia, and they readily became prostitutes, selling their alien and “strange” sexual body. These peasant women’s sexuality was the victim of both the overwhelming power of the state, which issued yellow tickets to these women, and academic surveys by the intelligentsia, who were never truly on the women’s side. As Barbara Alpern Engel argues, intellectuals, professionals, lawyers, and physicians gathered “not for women, whose bodies became part of the terrain over which educated society struggled for power” (“Transformation Versus Tradition,” 142, 143), but for further alienation of these victims.

For our purposes, it should be noted, nevertheless, that all of these academic attempts at the estranged female sex sympathize with the women, instead of exploring the influence of their sexuality on their spirituality and the people’s morality. These commentaries are aimed at an interrogation of masculine centrism. For instance, an ethnographic study by Alexandra Efimenko, *Investigations into the Life of the People*, in particular focuses on the peasant women’s suffering and the society’s brutality.<sup>119</sup>

The reason for academics’ hostility to male-centrism and compassion for Russian women may be found in a larger context of the Slavic culture and philosophical thought

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<sup>119</sup> For Efimenko’s approach to the peasant women’s moral issues, see Glickman, “Peasant Women and Their Work.”



that elevate women's virginity and purity. As Jenny Kaminer summarizes, this myth of the boundlessly caring women emerged from Slavic folklore, Orthodox tradition, and hagiographic teaching, among other fields. To start with, pre-Christian pagan beliefs spread among the Russian people a worship of a divinity known as Moist Mother Earth (*mat' syra zemlia*), which incarnates the Russian earth that is supposed to be feminine and nourishing.<sup>120</sup> In the context of Orthodox Christianity, as the scholar points out, the Byzantine icon of the Mother of God was adopted in medieval Russia and became the Russian divinity—*Bogoroditsa*, which embodies the spirit of *umilenie*, or loving-kindness and tenderness (9). Early in the nineteenth century, the Slavophile leader Alexei Khomiakov promoted his idea of a Slavic *sobornost'* and highlighted a harmonizing spirit in Russian women. He believed that women could potentially secure the patriarchal family because their devotion to motherhood destabilized differences between men and women and reduced her feminine sexuality (Kaminer, 12). Among theological thinkers, Vladimir Solov'ev, the predecessor of Russian Symbolists who pursued the ideal of the eternal feminine, further envisioned moral purity in women's imperfectly lower forms and sexualized bodies. Russian women's sexuality and immorality in the dark Imperial society, in Solov'ev's view, constituted the Janus-faced image of the eternal feminine that always retained their purity and glory. Nikolai Berdyaev, the Silver Age philosopher, also praised women for transforming the family space of banality, conflicts, and vice into

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<sup>120</sup> Such a cult of the Goddess of earth implies the feminine divinity's union with the sky and perpetuation of the cycle of life, and at the same time, the feminine archetype in Russian culture also comes to be beloved for her generative and harmonizing power.

sanctuaries in the modern era. For both philosophers, women are hardly impure but remain goddesses who save the fallen and sinful Russian world.

Through this cultural myth, nineteenth-century and contemporary commentators illustrate a “communal” harmony of the peasantry around the image of women—the boundless divinity incarnate—despite their acknowledgement of the gender inequality among the peasants and physical transgression of the women. For instance, Zelenin describes how the peasant communes witnessed quite a lot of liberal and intimate male-female contacts, dating, and mating, but he first of all stresses the “collective nature” of such events, for instance, the concept “*krug*” (circle) inherent to the spirit of *khovorod* (366, 368). M. M. Gromyko makes a similar comment on the circle dance, portraying it as a “forum for an appeal to public opinion” and peer opinions, instead of the young people’s desire to “mate” (227-28).

While the grave influence of the peasant women’s liberated sexual power remains unaddressed in most academic studies, realist writers, as I will show in the following sections, fill this gap. As Worobec claims, it is possible that peasant women as adulterers were in fact consciously playing the sexual role masculine society expected them to play, in part to take their revenge on the patriarchal world in self-destructive ways. This danger is apparent in realist fiction: Turgenev’s and Tolstoy’s lower-class heroines in particular are “transformed” from feminized victims to vengeful transgressors, whose revengeful and immoral sexuality threatens to put the peasants’ spiritual union in danger.

## Nuanced Critiques of Female Sexuality

It is in part true, as Julie de Sherbinin claims in her monograph on Chekhov, that this writer from the youngest generation of realists is more revolutionary than his predecessors in deforming the holy image of peasant women and the spiritual unity of the people. Even in “Akulka’s Husband,” Dostoevsky uses Akulka’s bow to express his residual hope for the peasants’ moral awakening. In *Fathers and Sons* (1862), Turgenev uses the peasant girl Fenechka, a “caged bird,” to illustrate the spirit of the domestic idyll and family union: her room as a “generic center of pastoral in the novel” charges Pavel Petrovich with affection and tranquility (Valentino, 479). In contrast, Chekhov should be recognized for his scathing critiques of women’s degradation into sexual devils. In the panorama of the Russian countryside polluted by materialism and sexual transgressions, as explored by de Sherbinin, we encounter a few peasant women living near the dawn of the darkest industrial era, who profane their female bodies, their Christian marriages, and the familial unions. As she argues, Chekhov’s “Peasant Women” (1891) and “Peasants” entirely subvert the virtuous image of peasant women, because these heroines deviate from the traditional stereotypes of virginal, good-natured, moralistic Marias. In “Peasant Women,” the dull-witted Sofia has nothing to do with divinity. Prostitute Varvara clashes with the image of Saint Martyr Varvara, and Mashenka wrestles with the prototype of Christian Mary by stubbornly exerting her senseless, passionate free will. In “Peasants,” motherhood is “degraded to a state of abject physicality,” as de Sherbinin puts it (78). In *the Ravine* further features Aksinya, the peasant wife sexually involved with a libertine from the gentry, ever since she replaced her decision-making father-in-law and became

the “head” of the Tsybukins. Her sexual image is symbolic of a materialistic “wither Russia.”

However, the predecessors of Chekhov were able to portray women’s sexuality in a critical, although less straightforward, way. One should first consider Leskov’s contribution to the portraits of lower-class Russian women. It is noteworthy that the first novella in which Leskov succeeded in creating a vivid portrait of an individual peasant, male or female, was “The Life of a Peasant Martyress” (1863). In his early works before this novella, as Valentina Gebel’ argues, the writer tended to simply summarize the peasant mass in the background without revealing their individuality (*lichnost’*) (16). The first mature peasant character in Leskov’s career is the transgressive and sexualized peasant wife Nastya Prokudina, who deliberately seeks romantic involvement with a charming peasant Stepan when her husband is outmigrated to Ukraine. It is thus not surprising that in his most famous work, “Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District” (1864), the focal point is the heroine’s female sexuality. Because the novella was written after Leskov read with great interest Alexander Ostrovsky’s *The Storm* (1859), critics usually explore the evil environment of the merchant world in this novella as the “Dark Kingdom,” as Nikolai Dobroliubov put it. However, Katerina Izmailova is apparently created as the opposite type of the submissive and self-conflicted Katerina in Ostrovsky’s drama (Gebel’, 20). Once a poor lower-class girl and a submissive wife, Izmailova was compassionate and good-natured. Nonetheless, her sexual transgressions suddenly seem to change her nature, reshaping her personality. Her adultery with her lover transforms her into an aggressive and violent devil who commits four homicides for her liaison. As

Hugh McLean points out, the novella plays out the Shakespearian plot in the context of a specific type of human evil that is “directly linked to [Katerina’s] female sexuality” (147). Sexuality is completely a bearer of demonic impulses, transforming an innocent country girl into a homicidal maniac.

Despite the gruesome plots in Leskov’s novellas, I consider his critique of the lower-class sensual women to be more nuanced than Chekhov’s, because his narrator seems extremely compassionate when he tells the stories of these adulteresses. In the case of Nastya Prokudina, for instance, the narrator describes the symptoms of her “possession,” or *klikushestvo*, which is a term for menstruating peasant women who shriek, as defined by folklore. This folkloric superstition encourages the villagers to condemn the adulteress and curse her demonic nature. Yet, in his description, we never see the narrator using such folkloric terms as the “possessed” or the “shrieker” (*klikusha*) to refer to Nastya. Instead, he depicts her living conditions in as much detail as he can, in order to “scientifically” contextualize and elaborate on such symptoms of “possession” within her environment—the dangerous communal world. A contemporary of Leskov, the progressive ethnographer Ivan Gavrilovich Pryzhov, particularly admired the novelist for his intellectual, humanitarian, and pathological approach in analyzing the mental breakdown and the psychological disorder of the peasant woman in this novella.<sup>121</sup>

Although Leskov certainly considers Nastya pitiable in the polluted community, he does not condone transgressions and crimes committed by such peasant wives, but

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<sup>121</sup> Pryzhov attempted to counter religious superstitions and improve peasant women’s living standards. He enthusiastically spread the medical term “hysteria” to replace the folkloric superstition about *klikushestvo*. This progressive intellectual especially addressed Leskov’s contribution in his “clinical” approach to Nastya’s “possession.” See Worobec, *Possessed*, chapter 3.

attempts to underscore her image as an embodiment of various types of evil. Nastya's adultery is an outcome of the evil actions of her violent brother. He becomes the "lord," or *bol'shak*, of her family after the death of their father, which was common according to the patriarchal order in the peasant world. Thus, the peasant girl is left to obey her brother, who turns out to be a typical kulak. This stereotype, as mentioned in earlier chapters, symbolizes the destruction of the rural idyll and the triumph of materialist psychology. Moreover, Nastya's marriage is penetrated with evil elements. Her sexual intercourse with her half-wit husband is almost "enforced" by the entire village, when all the peasants celebrate her wedding as joint festival and gossip about her behavior at night. Nastya's misery, furthermore, is ignored by the hypocritical Orthodoxy clergy. As McLean notes, the civil authorities in the community are portrayed as "heedless of human values and needs" (*Nikolai Leskov*, 120). They dismiss the poor peasant woman's pleading and tolerate the villagers' evildoing. In this way, Leskov seems to use Nastya's evil transgression to make a "polemical argument" that *Rus'* becomes "an uncaring mother, who responds to tears with brutality," as Wigzell puts it ("Nikolai Leskov," 108, 112).<sup>122</sup> He associates this individual peasant woman's sexuality with mass immorality at various social levels in rural Russia.

The large circle of evil people around the peasant wife also demonstrates that Leskov is able to portray the way peasant women's sexual transgressions may have a destructive impact on the family sphere and the community space where they live. Despite the tragic fate of Nastya Prokudina, her sexuality and romantic involvement with Stepan definitely

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<sup>122</sup> Russianness in Leskov's works is masculine, as this critic shows. All his righteous people are male figures, or at most certain unique female figures who are dematernalized and defeminized.

trigger a series of tragedies and disunities, including the death of Stepan in exile, the death of her child, and the destruction of a humanist doctor's shelter. Katerina Izmailova's sexuality, however, is an even better example of the Leskovian heroine's destructive power. Her adulterous life involves numerous motifs of disintegration and destruction. She breaks up with her husband by murdering him. She also poisons her father-in-law and her nephew. These murder scenes perhaps serve as the most brutal eliminations of kinship bonds in realist literature. She finally takes revenge on her rival, another exiled woman, in a no less violent way by simultaneously committing homicide and suicide. Both Nastya's and Katerina's sexual transgressions lead to a series of scandals, deaths, battles, and disunities at different levels of the community.

Turgenev's fiction also investigates peasant women's sexuality in a nuanced way, by concealing his critical view on the women in a project that seems to reproach the masculine and hierarchical society. At first glance, Turgenev's *Notes of a Hunter* highlights patriarchal divisions between male and female peasants. Unlike the powerful misogynist Khor, for instance, most of the female family members in the households seem to be suffering souls who sacrifice themselves for the family. Among these female serfs in the sketches, the predatory type of Turgenevian heroine is, as critics note, almost nowhere to be found.<sup>123</sup> Even those from the lower nobility withdraw from rational thinking and endure inner pain.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Kagan-Kans separates the women in Turgenev's works into two categories: the predatory mature women with outward grace and the virginal young girls who show a "total absence of any frivolous passion" (45). The latter type occupies the sketches, according to critics. For instance, as Seeley claims, even the wild Matrena may be considered a passive character, since she "refuses to let him make further sacrifices" (104).

<sup>124</sup> For instance, in "The District Doctor," a female patient from the lower nobility is dismissed by her

However, Turgenev may be capable of interrogating the myth of the peasant women's purity and exploring their sexuality because he had been a victim of the serf girls' seductive charm. When he spent his youth in Spasskoe, one such gentle serf girl, Avdotya Ivanova, even became his mistress. Avdotya was flattered that she could be favored by Turgenev and she gave birth to his child in 1842. This romantic involvement may in part demonstrate Turgenev's admiration of the Russian serfs' gentle souls and tender personalities. Yet, we should also note that the peasant woman was hardly his "true love" or spiritual mate, but remained the object of his "passion." Turgenev's mother believed that this fling was nothing to be embarrassed about, since it was "merely a physical passion" (Troyat, 17). Her judgment has its merit, since as we learn, Turgenev's long-term spiritual love was devoted to Pauline Viardot. In comparison to his worship of this woman, his passion for the serf girl was indeed more likely superficial and sensual.

Thus, just as Leskov's humanitarian narrative may blur his critique of peasant adulteresses, Turgenev's compassionate portrayal of the peasant women may obscure his critiques of them. In *Notes of a Hunter*, the narrator addresses, at the very least, several examples of serf women who turn a peasant family or a brotherly unity into a battlefield. In the first sketch, besides the aforementioned striking patriarchal division in the sketch, we should note the narrator's ambivalent portrayals of these women. Khor's wife, who stands in awe of her husband and obeys his commands, is hardly a profound woman. She mistreats all the younger wives in the family. In a similar vein, although most readers

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doctor Trifon. In "My Neighbor Radilov," again, a male protagonist dominates the lives of two ladies from poorer nobility. In "Tat'iana Borisovna and Her Nephew," the old woman is entirely manipulated by her nephew. These female protagonists, despite their noble origins, experience prejudice and exploitation in a masculine society.



find Khor infamous for his prejudice against these wives, we should not neglect the reason these women are despised by the righteous peasant “from the depth of his soul,” as the narrator puts it (26). Although the story does not provide much detail, we know that Khor regards these young and old wives as half-wit helpers and their conflicts as senseless trifles. They feel jealous of each other and fight for material gain or vain pride on a daily basis. Their “wars,” which Khor refuses to enter or mediate, possibly derive from superficial competitions for money and popularity.

“The Tryst” even more clearly illustrates a peasant woman’s ambivalent sexuality, despite our usual interpretation of the sketch as a positive depiction of a submissive serf girl. As many critics point out, the hunter’s masculine perspective sexualizes Akulina, and he uses her sorrow to produce his own melancholy persona.<sup>125</sup> He begins this sketch with the depiction of surrounding natural landscape that features certain phallic symbols, such as the aspen towering by itself amid low brushwood (Hoisington, “The Enigmatic Hunter”). Through his masculine lens, the hunter observes Akulina’s thick fair hair, delicate skin, high eyebrows, and long lashes. This observation of her physiological traits is extremely eroticized and the hunter especially favors the way her “whole body shook convulsively, the nape of her neck rising and falling” (273). At the same time, Akulina is in part to be blamed, because she has sinned and reduced herself to a consumed sexual body. As we know from the conversation between Akulina and her lover Victor, the two are involved sexually and she may even be pregnant. She expects the worst situation, to be humiliated, abused, and even banished from her community, given that the people

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<sup>125</sup> As Ripp argues, the hunter’s “sympathy and concern ... turn out to be elements in the personality he is desperately constructing for himself” (67).

following the rigid moral code in rural Russia especially punished such unmarried girls who lost their virginity. The sketch underscores her sexual image rather than her spiritual strength. Although a typical Turgenevian heroine, the submissive and tender type, is supposed to show her “stoic reconciliation” with her misery (Smyrniv, 78), Akulina attracts the attention of the narrator not as a spiritual warrior whom he respects, but only as a sexual slave whom he “feminizes.”

It is important to note that Akulina’s sexuality and sensual fall are portrayed as not only tragic but also destructive, if reconsidered in the withering landscape and framed in the sentimental narrative. Near the end of the sketch, the hunter reveals that the vigor of nature suddenly declines, rays turn pale, and sunlight becomes chill. The cornflower collected for the memory of Akulina also withers. The chilly weather seems only appropriate since Akulina is also “so melancholy and full of childish bewilderment at her own grief” (267). As Eva Kagan-Kans notes, Akulina is an extreme version of the submissive and backward type of Turgenevian girl, since she features almost “statue-like stillness and ... ‘dreadful isolation’” (45). Although it is hard to tell whether her peers’ *posidelka* will punish her and whether old-fashioned elders will condemn her offspring, we sense in the tone of the sketch that she expects brutal isolation and a tragic breakup.

A more destructive female figure in the sketches, nonetheless, is the infamous serf girl Matrena, a rare type of peasant woman in the sketch. She is almost the only female character in the sketches who can manipulate and hurt a good-natured peasant using her sexuality. Unlike Lermontov’s Bela, Matrena is a wild woman who subverts the

submissive stereotype.<sup>126</sup> She uses Karataev's genuine love and eventually abandons him. In Karataev's view, Matrena is a wild beast who does not mourn and an uncompassionate traitor whose tears are fake. (The same judgment on women being traitors appears in "Kasian of Fair Springs." In the scene in which two women are following a coffin to a funeral, their sorrow and tenderness do not convince the hunter's coachman, in whose opinion, again, "[w]omen's tears are only water" (137).) As Karataev remembers Matrena's irresponsible departure, he bursts into tears and strikes the table with his fist. His one-sided endurance of pain, resulting from the serious misfortune that Matrena brings him, demonstrates that their relationship deviates from the patriarchal order of most male-female relations. Here, the male peasant suffers from the female's irresponsibility, which cuts off a spiritually nurturing bond between two souls.

Sexuality further motivates the peasant women's immoral actions and reinforces their destructive power against the peasants' spiritual unity, in another sketch, "Death." This piece reveals Turgenev's admiration for several peasant men's noble attitude toward death. A male peasant student, also considered a *raznochinets* (Reyfan, 160), is praised by the narrator for his "keen interest in many facets of life" (Smyrniv, 77) despite his approaching death. An older peasant man, Vasilii Dmitrich, is also a positive figure, respected for his noble loyalty to his Russian homeland. He insists on driving home and dying in his family sphere. Since the narrator also explores the death of an old woman from the gentry, it is believed that the remarkable honesty and selfless attitude toward death is "a specifically Russian feature, equally characteristic of Russian peasants,

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<sup>126</sup> Matrena's story may be a parallel to Lermontov's "Bela." Also see McLean, who points out the parallel between Turgenev's sketches "The End of Chertopkhanov" and "Bela" (*Nikolai Leskov*, 253).

Russian *raznochintsy*, and Russian nobility” (Reyfman, 162). While the narrator notes the spiritual value of almost all the Russians’ back-to-earth national spirit, he seems to exclude only one group of Russians, the sexually active peasant women. When he comments on them, although fleetingly in this sketch, he underscores the failures of human connections around them. The peasant student’s beloved, Dasha, for instance, once a poor and innocent serf, has become a seductive lady, as the narrator reports. Any spiritual unity with Dasha, a “fallen,” spiteful temptress, seems to the narrator to be entirely unrealistic. In the other episode, Vasilii Dmitrich refuses to enter a hospital, where, as the narrator notes in a brief comment, an ugly, handicapped female peasant helper is in charge of the patients’ bedroom. Unlike Raskolnikov’s famous idealization of disabled lower-class girls, what we see in Turgenev’s portrayal is a disabled woman who beats her patients and her coworkers. These contrasts imply that females’ sexuality or the female sex exist to create conflicts. All these sketches, like Leskov’s novellas, seem to identify in the sexual bodies and the sexuality of peasant women a certain unexplainable and ominous evil power that threatens to disintegrate the peasant world.

### **The Inherent Evil of Female Sexuality**

As this section will further show, Turgenev steps beyond the aforementioned connection between female sexuality and tragic disunity. In his late sketch “The Living Relic,” on the surface, the writer continues to idolize the heroine. In a nuanced way, as I will show, he questions peasant women’s virginity, innocence, and purity. It has already been pointed out by Thomas Newlin that all the hunter’s sketches are about hunting, and thus,

are connected internally by the hunter's and perhaps all of humanity's predatory desire in a literal sense. Newlin argues that Lukeria in "The Living Relic" is isolated and immobile, but her desire to narrate is even stronger, more unusual, and further demarcates her from other submissively innocent peasant girls in the sketches. He claims that this woman "traps" her listeners with zen-like patience, aiming at her target listener—the narrator, and exercising her desire to talk, just like any hunter. Along Newlin's line of inquiry, I will further explore Lukeria's sexual desire as something that is inherent in her body and tragically evil. I argue that through her case, Turgenev implies that peasant women's evil sexuality can be corrected only in an extremely brutal way—defeminization: the peasant girl seems holy, only because she is deprived of her feminine body and desexualized. This demonstrates that her sexuality is necessarily inevitable and replaces spiritual connection with physical relations.

Before we start, we should note that Lukeria cannot be unambiguously holy and ascetic, since the purpose of this specific sketch, written in 1874, was to correct the wrong impression that the project of the hunter's sketches was specifically designed to glorify the Russian serfs. Turgenev was aware that his sketches had been misinterpreted as a project about the people's depth and strength. It was exactly his personal intention to make the sketches neutral about the Russian people's virtue that motivated him to add three more in the 1870s. Thus, despite Lukeria's martyrdom, the author must have incorporated her into the sketches as an ambivalent figure.

The ambivalence of the holy and virginal image of Lukeria can be discerned in her attitude toward her current condition. As we know, she does not want to be compared

with real saints and when she dies, does not dare to say that the sound of bells comes from heaven. Although Lukeria is recognized as a humble martyr, her reluctance to proclaim her sainthood may also reveal her awareness that she never suffers for heaven and God, as the real saints did: she considers herself “chained” in the bathhouse against her will. For instance, when she reproaches the hunter as an idler, despite her pity for the swallows he shoots, she also cannot help feeling an inner pain and crazed jealousy for the healthy man’s vitality and mobility. Besides her jealousy, Lukeria’s attentive observation of the animals’ free life in nature also reinforces the impression that she hates her disability and desires freedom from her chains and access to the beautiful world. Her envy toward the vital lives surrounding her, in my view, demonstrates that Lukeria does not embody a Schopenhauerian withdrawal from passion and life, which Turgenev worshiped as a productive moral code:<sup>127</sup> on the surface, she is undergoing a virginal salvation through fusion with the cosmos, denial of life, and endurance of misery, all of which are typical of Arthur Schopenhauer’s philosophy (Ledkovsky; Hughes); yet, at the same time, she is reluctant to pursue this cosmic fusion and withdrawal from life.

Turgenev’s depiction of Lukeria’s subconscious—her dreams—also seems to indicate that she is reluctant to suffer and retains a certain residual desire for worldly pleasure. In Lukeria’s dream of pilgrimage, the wanderers surrounding her march slowly and reluctantly. Curiously, none of them show any religious longings. Lukeria, among these people, also feels nothing spiritual and shows a particular interest in a peculiar tall woman—a symbol of her death. The young girl begs to die, to quit her pilgrimage, and to

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<sup>127</sup> As Kagan-Kans has argued, “Turgenev’s Luker’ja is frequently identified as the exemplar of Schopenhauerian resignation” (80).

forsake her martyrdom. In another dream, she has a vision of an immediate liberation of her body from her current disease. Her dog—a symbol of the disease—is left behind and what she welcomes is that she will be promised by Christ to “lead the singing and play the songs of paradise” (364). As we know, the right to lead round dances (*khovorody*) signifies recognition of a girl’s beauty. It is possible that an attractive body and romantic relationship are still what she longs for. Another simpler dream—she sees herself being beautiful and young again, but wakes up to realize that she is still permanently in “chains”—also demonstrates her residual desire for pleasure and reluctance to suffer.

At certain places, Turgenev even straightforwardly describes Lukeria’s mundane passion. She impulsively fetches the hunter’s gift—a well-made handkerchief, and such sensitivity to physical pleasure and feminine products hardly qualifies her to be an ascetic or asexual saint. After all, her entire conversation with the hunter is completely focused on her past popularity and sexual body: she greets the hunter by reminding him of her past, “I used to be the leader of the choir” (409); when the narrator is about to leave, again, she abruptly reminds him of her long and beautiful hair in the past. The memory of dances, songs, and hair, as well as the constant demand that the hunter recall her charm in the past, indicates a narcissistic pride of beauty, youth, and popularity. Far from being an innocent holy fool, she is conscious of romantic pleasure, erotic passion, and feminine sexuality.

Lukeria’s sexual desire should not be too surprising given Turgenev’s consistent skill at combining opposites—the virginal girl and the predatory woman—in one character. As Kagan-Kans points out, “it is not always possible to draw a clear-cut distinction” between

the virginal young girls and the attractive mature women (46). The suffering soul Lukeria can simultaneously be the leading dancer, a “demonic” Eve, and thus, a predatory woman. As Turgenev envisions, these mature and attractive heroines’ pursuits of passionate desire “turn into destructive properties,” sometimes even their deaths (Kagan-Kans, 55).<sup>128</sup> In the case of Lukeria, we see her falling from balcony, in part because she believes she heard her lover calling her, or in other words, her sensual desire leads her to her ill fortune. Her story obviously features the most typical Turgenevian plot about passionate types of women, whose misfortune and punishment by fate are caused by their sensual passion.

Lukeria’s dream, the one frequently interpreted as a vision of her holy “wedding” with Christ (Frost), in this view, may indicate rather that her current misery is caused by her past sensuality. We should note that in her dream, she is working in the field with a sickle in her hands. Tired of her work, she desires to meet Vasya, and at this moment, she puts her sickle on her head as a garland and imagines it to be the moon. This bizzare dream leaves us certain hints. First, she experiences a feeling of exhaustion: she remembers that she had “[grown] very tired from the heat, and the moon blinded [her], and a languor settled on [her]” (363). Thus, the moon gradually controls her. If the moon is a symbol of femininity, it may indicate her sexual desire. She further equates her sickle with the moon, and putting it on her head, she recalls that “at once I glowed with light from head to foot and lit up all the field around me” (364). We may interpret her magical

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<sup>128</sup> Another critic, Ledkovsky, from the angle of the Schopenhauerian sentiment in Turgenev, also points out that for Turgenev, passion is “a magnetic power which seeks to subdue the partner and frequently proves to be destructive” (55).



feeling at this moment as a euphemism for her sexual pleasure, which she acquires by forsaking her responsibility as a laborer and reaching her “moon” by joining Vasya. Even if one does not go so far as to argue that she is severely punished for leaving agricultural practice unattended and satisfying sexual desire, at the very least, Lukeria does not work diligently but is distracted by the moon, or her female sex.

The punishment, apparently, is her suffering that deprives her body precisely of its femininity and sexuality. As mentioned above, Lukeria is most sensitive to her now deformed body. In particular, she takes pains to acknowledge that Vasya has married another beautiful young woman who bears him children, and such envy indicates her awareness of her own defeminization. The male hunter’s reaction to Lukeria’s exterior appearance, in many ways, is also a spontaneous repulsion upon seeing a defeminized body. Although her bronze face makes her look like an iconic figure, it does not arouse the hunter’s religious admiration, but stimulates his instinctual feeling of horror; her smile and her song are also repeatedly described by the hunter with the word “dreadful” (*uzhas, uzhasno*); her body, the sensual object in the eyes of many young men in the past, disgusts the hunter (when he walks into the shack, he notices the half-dead mummy lying in the dark but somehow avoids approaching her and quickly realizes that he wants to go away). In the eyes of both protagonists, the woman has lost her feminine shape. As we know, the hunter finds the suffering soul through his walk in a Freudian landscape that bears certain erotic connotations: he meets her in Spasskoe, the place Turgenev spent his peaceful and verdant childhood (Hughes, 120), after a comfortable shower of rain; the showered land motivates the hunter’s ecstatic feeling; to reach where Lukeria stays, the

narrator wanders along a narrow path, on the two sides of which he sees untidy straw; finally he enters a gloomy shack that stocks bee hives and smells like mint. These motifs—childhood, wet earth, the snake-like path, untidy grass, and a dark tiny space—perhaps can be associated with the female body and womb. Thus, we may state that Lukeria's female sex still exists, but fades into the background, and the witnesses and readers are oblivious of its existence. We are told that Lukeria cries in front of the hunter and Vasya. Since she is "dry," the only fluid she offers the two men is her tears. Thus, we may also assume that her dehydrated and defeminized body can no longer provide a "passionate shower" even on rare occasions when a man reaches her private space—her womb. The motif of "water," so frequently related to women in Russian folklore, is absent in her life. The only explanation for her "dehydration" is that Lukeria's imprisonment "castrates" her and makes her dysfunctional as a woman.

Lukeria's castration, in my view, only reveals pessimism on Turgenev's part. The writer shows that what lurks beneath the surface of her holy character is her sexual nature, which she never manages to overcome. Her "sainthood" is a punishment enforced on her, rather than a holiness that she achieves. Turgenev's sketch ultimately reveals that the woman cannot purify herself of her sexuality and remains tragically imperfect in a moral sense, while the only way she is made holy and pure is through defeminization in chains.

While Turgenev's sketch reveals the essentially inevitable evil inherent in women's bodies, Tolstoy's fiction, as I will show below, further demonstrates the outcome of the seductive power of such sexual creatures. Unlike his early works of the 1850s and 60s, Tolstoy's late novellas blame the female protagonists more for the heroes' spiritual

failures.<sup>129</sup> Their seductive power to destroy and darken another's soul finds expression in the merchant's daughter Maria in *Father Sergius* and the peasant wife Stepanida in *The Devil*, both of whom are from the lower classes, like Lukeria. Their sexuality and its evil impact on those surrounding them, in Tolstoy's view, are similar to the natural laws in the universe that man will never manage to resist. These stories, thus, illustrate the way the lower-class seductresses doom other individuals to sin, pollute their souls, and break spiritual bonds, in a most natural and irresistible way.

### **God Fastened Outside and Nature as that Bar**

Tolstoy writes misogynist stories not because he despises women, but rather because he is afraid of the degradation of men's and women's spiritual life. The young Tolstoy's first sexual intercourse is said to have happened between the innocent fourteen-year-old boy and an experienced Kazan prostitute, "after which he had stood by the bed and wept," most likely out of repulsion, disappointment, and fear of the spiritual emptiness of such a carnal relationship (McLean, "Senile Reflections," 278). As an adult, Tolstoy struggled with men's and women's breaches of traditional marriage. This in part explains why since the 1860s, as the intelligentsia heatedly debated the "woman question," Tolstoy had been indifferent to women's education and social advancement. He stubbornly insisted on women's traditional roles, which made him infamous for his anti-feminism. Tolstoy's concern should also be demarcated from other conservative anti-feminists who feared radical nihilism in women. In one interview, Tolstoy "summed it all up by saying that if

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<sup>129</sup> As Gustafson argues, unlike Pierre, Irtenev is "totally possessed" by his lover, who is the cause of all his passions (*Resident and Stranger*, 347).

the husband wanted his wife to wash his shirts, she had to do it—for thus it had been for a thousand years” (Stites, 45). He only supported the traditional virtues and familial union preached by *Domostroi* since the sixteenth century. What the moralist reproaches in feminism, the woman question, and women’s independence from marriage is the larger danger of materialism, de-spiritualization, and disunity among both men and women.

These concerns of Tolstoy demonstrate that the target of his misogynist attack includes all women tempted by transgression and immorality, even lower-class or peasant women. In fact, Tolstoy may have considered peasant women even more sensual and immoral than those from the upper classes. His weakness for seductive peasant women is widely known. In 1862, as Sofia Behrs read his diary, she reported: “‘In love as never before!’ he writes. With that fat, pale peasant woman—how frightful!” (9). Sofia here refers to Tolstoy’s affair in 1857, before his marriage, with Aksinya Bazykina, “who appealed so strongly to his sensual nature that, unlike his former casual affairs he soon drifted into more or less permanent relations with her” (Leon, 106). Tolstoy was later attracted to another woman from the people, Domna, the serf cook at Yasnaya Polyana. Both women are models for Stepanida in *The Devil*.<sup>130</sup> It is no wonder that we learn from Pozdnyshev in *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1890) that seduction is a disease of all women across different classes: “The coquette knows this [seduction] consciously; every innocent girl knows this unconsciously, just as animals know it” (78). He groups society ladies’ “hysteria” and peasant women’s “possession” together as demonic captivity.

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<sup>130</sup> Aksinya’s husband was largely absent and Tolstoy’s affair with her lasted for years. They usually had trysts in the forest. She also gave birth to a son, although Tolstoy may not be the father. Domna’s husband was recruited into the army and Tolstoy was free to follow her around. He even attempted to have a “tryst” with her in the distant edge of a garden.

It is noteworthy that to portray lower-class women as sexual beings, Tolstoy also uses the motif of water, as Turgenev does in “The Living Relic.” In *Father Sergius*, when the narrator mentions an exchange of eyes across the window, we see Kasatsky’s recognition of Makovkina as a sister.<sup>131</sup> It is only when she “stepped into the puddle that the dripping from the roof had formed at the threshold” (253) that Kasatsky sensed her female sexuality. The woman was hardly a spiritual sister when she “stood in the middle of the room, moisture dripping from her to the floor” (254). The sound of water in Makovkina’s boots and stockings is enough to help Kasatsky picture her bare body and sexual image. When it comes to the peasant wife in *The Devil*, we also see the way water-related motifs around Stepanida remind the Tolstoyan character that she is a sexual creature. When Irtenev notices Stepanida walking to the well, he imagines her “making of the well an excuse” to meet him (216). Much like the well under construction, her sexually seductive image has not yet fully seized Irtenev; yet, the narrator claims that her sexual image will totally occupy Irtenev’s mind when the well is dug up, no worker is around, and the water reaches the ground. In contrast, his wife, the society lady Liza, who is never portrayed as sexual or attractive, is not surrounded by water motifs. The narrator introduces Irtenev’s courtship, his proposal, and his engagement in a dry and informative style. (Irtenev’s choice of Liza is rational, motivated by her moderate looks and inheritance, good nature, and ultimately, the right timing. Liza meets Irtenev’s need “to marry honourably, for love” (199) as a self-disciplinary Tolstoyan.) A contrast between the “pale, yellow, long, and

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<sup>131</sup> Makovkina may be regarded as a spiritual woman for many reasons. Obviously, she enters the convent and saves herself. It is also noteworthy that in the Muscovite era, many widows pursued a holy life and wives divorced by their husbands entered the convents. Some even became religious advisors (see Worobec, “Accommodation and Resistance,” 26). Makovkina’s divorcée identity reinforces the impression that she may be fit this category of Muscovite “holy divorcées.”

weak” society lady (211) and the round, bare-handed, wet, and strong peasant woman is clear in the novella.

Water and related motifs around Stepanida are even more ominous than those in “The Living Relic,” because they not only remind us that the peasant woman is a female “X,” but also highlight her seductive image, which is absent in Lukeria. As Rouhier-Willoughby notes, in Russian folklore, water is dangerous and “might trap the soul on this earth, which might result in unquiet or restless dead or in another death” (50). Water can symbolize the presence of unclean elements, the seduction of women, and the danger of destruction. In the novella, we learn that Stepanida has always successfully seduced Irtenev when she appears around water. In the beginning, when Irtenev walks into a hut to drink water, he suddenly realizes that he wants to meet with women in such a secretive and convenient place. Thirst for water stimulates his desire for women. When Stepanida works in Irtenev’s house, the sight of her “carrying a pail, barefoot and with sleeves turned up high ... adjusting her kerchief with a wet hand” (210) also disturbs Irtenev. Seeing her around water, Irtenev intends to escape from her and resist her “wet” seduction by walking on tiptoe across the damp water on his floor. In contrast, when Stepanida is portrayed without any motifs of water beside her, she seems less seductive and Irtenev is able to stay indifferent to her presence. When Irtenev returns to town from his trip he recognizes Stepanida on the street, still in her smart outfit and red kerchief, but no water is around. He is calm enough to ask how Stepanida’s husband and family were doing when he is away, not quite disturbed by her presence. At this moment, what

occupies his mind is a moral reflection: he imagines that the baby in her arms could be his child. His rational thinking encourages him to overcome his desire.

It is exactly after two days of pouring rain that Irtenev finally fails to resist Stepanida's temptation. When he sits in the shed and notices the leak in the thatch, the rain dripping from the straw of the thatch seems to imply to him that he desires another rendezvous with Stepanida and it must happen in this shed when it rains. On this rainy day, Irtenev breaks the ice and talks to her, further encouraged by Stepanida's flirtation that also plays with the motif of the rain—"Where are you off to in such weather?" (225). Irtenev eventually surrenders to Stepanida's seduction after returning from Crimea, on the day when he sees her lifting a full water tub. "[G]lancing at a peasant and a peasant woman who were crossing the street in front of him carrying a full water tub" (230), Irtenev quickly realizes that his integrity is to be destroyed and that "there was no salvation" (231). From this moment, no matter how hard he tries, he never stops looking for Stepanida's figure and staring at her. The tub, overflowing with water, symbolizes the woman's seductive power over him.

Although Tolstoy obviously portrays the water and the couple's meeting around it as ominous signs of immorality, he also finds this sensual relationship to be only natural, necessary, and tragically irresistible. In fact, Irtenev's rational and legal marriage seems only unnecessary, unnatural, and artificial. Liza spends her whole life "falling in love" with all types of men at various social gatherings. Her mother is a typical superficial mother, like those who "pimp" daughters in high society. In an ironic way, both Liza and her mother remind the reader of the daughters and mothers who seem to Pozdnyshov to

have polluted the authentic male-female bonds. Even Irtenev's devotion to this legal marriage, including his joining and contributing to the bureaucratic *zemstvo*, is ambivalent in that such hypocritical social activities are always the targets of Tolstoy's critiques. By contrast, Irtenev's relationship with Stepanida is portrayed as a product of nature and cannot be avoided. Tolstoy depicts the peasant wife's seductive body as a part of nature: the first time when Irtenev meets Stepanida, he finds her not in the bathhouse, where the evil spirit is thought to reside, but instead, "in that hazel and maple thicket, bathed in bright sunlight" (199), as if she were a part of the landscape. Irtenev remembers her image as "clean, fresh, not bad-looking, and simple, without any pretension" (197), surrounded by the wood. Their relationship, based on equal terms without one party pressing the other, also reinforces the impression that everything is organic and natural. Their meetings are even triggered by natural phenomena, as the above example shows, when both Stepanida and Irtenev react to the rainy weather. While the water and the rain may indicate the seductive nature of their relationship, they also seem to imply that since their desire for each other derives from the essence of water, they are only obeying natural laws. After all, Russian peasants consider the thirst for water and the shortage of it undesirable or even dangerous. Drought (*zasukha*), dry land (*sush'*), and thirst (*sukhoi*) were always feared by the Russian peasants as ominous signs of death or catastrophe. "In Russian folk tradition the anthropomorphized figure of death is depicted as both hungry and thirsty" (Warner, 167). Nonetheless, these negative connotations of thirst and drought do not necessarily mean that Tolstoy finds the natural "water" inherent in Irtenev's relationship with Stepanida to be positive or moral. For the post-conversion Tolstoy in



the 1880s, men's and women's natural wills are evil.<sup>132</sup> Stepanida and Irtenev can only be interpreted as immoral anti-heroes since they follow their natural wills and destroy their souls. Thus, the irony in this novella is that the seductive woman traps a Tolstoyan character through his natural will, which he knows to be immoral; yet, the seduction is portrayed as the call of nature which he cannot possibly resist. Tolstoy seems to express a pessimistic idea that peasant women enslave men with their natural wills and more tragically, that their immoral actions are unavoidable.

In *Father Sergius*, Tolstoy further reveals the inevitability and necessity by which the lower-class temptress lures a Tolstoyan into immorality and sins. Tolstoy is always aware that asceticism is far from natural, since the effort to resist physical desire only makes one more aware of body and desire (Walsh and Alessi, 8). In this novella, Kasatsky chops off his finger to resist Makovkina's temptation, fasts on a daily basis, and prays all the time; yet none of these truly elevates him.<sup>133</sup> Every action he takes ironically proves his efforts powerless and women's seduction powerful. Kasatsky surrenders to the merchant daughter's body because he almost consciously realizes what Tolstoy implies about his asceticism. Right before his fall, he prays in the woods. A cockchafer creeps up the back of his neck and he brushes it off. He is stung by the bug, and later on, we find that in a similar way, "as [Maria] passed by him he felt he'd been stung" (268). This parallel

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<sup>132</sup> Tolstoy in the 1860s appreciated Rousseau's idea that the human body is part of nature and is connected to it through its senses, while since the 1870s, he had been convinced by Schopenhauer that natural wills only counter moral senses. See Orwin, *Tolstoy's Art and Thought*, for Tolstoy's idea that the principle of natural life demonstrates the conflict between shade and light, and from this conflict "derives that principle of any moral value" (149). Orwin argues that for Tolstoy, a moral man needs to put himself "on a firmer footing... on natural man's complete freedom from natural law" (152).

<sup>133</sup> Kasatsky's attempt to burn his fingers "is ironic for being a cliché of hagiography" and is the novella's "narrative threshold" that the protagonist must cross (Kopper, 163). The ascetic style of life is a target of parody in *Father Sergius*.

reveals that Kasatsky starts to perceive nature and sensuality together. Thus, he despairs of the possibility of resisting Maria's sexual seduction and realizes that her seduction is tragically defined by nature.<sup>134</sup> He asks, "does he exist? What if I am knocking at a door fastened from outside? The bar is on the door for all to see. Nature, the nightingales and the cockchafer, is that bar" (ibid.). On the beautiful day in May, their intercourse subverts the purity of the Edenic landscape (nature, forest, bushes, flowers, nightingales)<sup>135</sup> and Tolstoy portrays their sensual fall and physical desire as tragically decided by the authoritative call of nature.

Maria's seductive image should be examined in relation to the materialistic and physical worldview of the entire merchant class. In Chapter One, I mentioned the merchantry's "patriarchal attitudes, religious piety, and social isolation," which they shared with artisans, petty traders, and the peasantry (Rieber, 331). Since the merchantry was vulnerable to sudden changes and economic crisis in society, a typically conservative merchant "might hope to amass sufficient capital to secure him against all but the greatest catastrophes" (Rieber, 331-32). This materialistic desire for amassing money and constant attention to protecting property escalate to the degree that, as I will explore in the following chapter, in *The Idiot*, Rogozhin, his father, and his brother stuff their pockets with cash and their house with treasures. It is noteworthy that Rogozhin the egoistic materialist not only amasses money, but also follows his sexual desire in his

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<sup>134</sup> Kasatsky once frightens a sparrow away. This detail, according to Ziolkowski, shows "the close rapport between saintly men and dumb creatures" (72) and the apparent disharmony between a self-conscious man and the natural world. Kasatsky may be intuitive in perceiving the presence of evil in nature.

<sup>135</sup> Kasatsky's tryst with Maria is a parody of Edenic innocence of man and woman. See Jackson who explores the way Maria "touches [Kasatsky] physically, but not in a way that engages his full nature" ("*Father Sergius and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall*," 475).

pursuit of Nastasya Filippovna, just as Maria does in Kasatsky's cell. Her sole interest in life seems to be in the sexual pleasure she may acquire from men, which is just another form of dark and evil materialism unique to Russian merchants, or the financially well-off muzhik-Rogozhins. Maria's sensuality should be approached as one of the merchantry's various types of physical desire.

Maria's seduction causes a "unity" in spiritual emptiness and even a violent crime. Kasatsky and the merchant daughter share nothing spiritual, unlike Kasatsky and Makovkina, who build up a sibling bond. As he wakes up in the dawn and heads for his axe, his hidden desire to kill Maria also implies the possibility of further brutality and sin. (This intention to murder his lover is perhaps modeled from the hagiography of Iakov the Faster, who killed his temptress and repented for a decade in a cave.) Maria's sexuality, thus, completely subverts the conservative image of the merchantry and dooms the would-be spiritual man.

The outcome of female sexuality in *The Devil* is similar—a dark and unspiritual "reunion" of Irtenev and the peasant wife. Irtenev twice has the vision that he touches the peasant woman in total darkness. The physical "bonding" between Irtenev and Stepanida, as he expects, is unfortunately realized and leads to a brutal breakup in which Irtenev has to either murder the peasant woman or commit suicide. As John M. Kopper argues, Tolstoy's purpose in providing two different plots is not for the reader to discuss who should be punished and who should not, but instead, is for the reader to realize that either way, violent destruction must inevitably happen to the two protagonists.<sup>136</sup> In both stories,

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<sup>136</sup> Kopper argues that Tolstoy's ambiguity about who should be murdered is deliberate, because the

Tolstoy illustrates the cutting off of spiritual bonds and the absence of brotherly love due to the presence of the lower-class temptresses.

Last but not least, Tolstoy reproaches not only the sensual couples but also all the rural peasant characters, who condone sexual promiscuity and experience no spiritual feeling in their lives. If we bring Stepanida's marriage into the picture, we see the dissolution of a husband-wife bond, replaced by liberal sexual relations (Stepanida's husband enjoys his spree in Moscow). In the other family of Irtenev and Liza, at one point, we also learn from Liza's mother that although "fever [...] comes of dampness" (211), dry heat equally destroys one's body. On the surface, the comment means that both damp and dry climates threaten health. But since Irtenev is uncomfortable and annoyed when he hears these words, it is possible that what she says reminds him of his struggle with sexuality. If in these words, water means sex and dehydration means asceticism, the mother-in-law acknowledges that passion is unhealthy, and so is asceticism. Including her mother, the whole village around Irtenev finds indulgence, transgression, and seduction acceptable, healthy, and natural (Kopper): people envy Stepanida's material gain; another peasant woman encourages her to seduce their master; she always looks satisfied and carefree, perhaps even in part tolerated by her father-in-law although she has affairs with old Danila, a young clerk, and Irtenev, among others, either for pleasure or for money. Through Stepanida's debauchery, Tolstoy reveals a polluted peasant community where at the familial and communal levels, people prefer physical connections over spiritual ones.

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writer finds either ending to be enough to deliver his message. It is the very action of transgression, no matter what—murder or suicide—that is the point of the story.

The community is familiar with the presence of peasant temptresses, perhaps due to the environment of outmigration that gradually transformed peasant women into seducers. Stepanida's husband is one of the peasant workers who join outmigration. Left alone in the countryside, she proves to be a strong and useful laborer who can contribute to the agricultural practice and financial standing of her household. As a result, it is not surprising that she enjoys a good reputation and some freedom to transgress. It seems that this cultural context of outmigration grants women some liberty and transforms the hard worker into a seductress, also because throughout the novella, Irtenev is distracted by Stepanida's physical build and the outfit unique to her peasant identity. Stepanida's body resembles that of Katerina Izmailova, the most sexualized and demonic heroine depicted by Leskov.<sup>137</sup> Her physical strength and "strong body, swayed by her agile strides" (210), look more attractive than Liza's weak body in particular. Her moves in her folk dances, "broad, energetic, ruddy, and merry" (215), also eroticize her image. She further seduces Irtenev with her "scent of something fresh and strong, ... full breast lifting the bib of her apron" (199), her bare feet, "arms and shoulders, the pleasing folds of her shirt and the handsome skirt tucked up high above her white calves" (210), all of which were common among peasant women. Irtenev also clearly remembers her embroidered apron, another common item sewed by nineteenth-century peasant women according to personal taste. In particular, every time Stepanida carries a heavy sack of grass on her back, she distracts Irtenev. Staring at her body carrying grass and disappearing into the woods, he felt that "[n]ever had she seemed so attractive, and never had he been so completely in her control"

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<sup>137</sup> Katerina is agile and strong enough to bury dead bodies and wrestle with both men and women.

(223). Given that “[t]he most possible place for them to meet was in the forest, where peasant women went with sacks to collect grass for their cows” (222), Stepanida’s contribution to agricultural practice ironically leads to her seduction of Irtenev. In addition, Stepanida’s presence as a cleaner at Irtenev’s, as the countryside household celebrates Trinity Sunday and resurrection, also distracts him. All of this sensual and dangerous power in her, as we may summarize, is in part derived from her identity as a peasant woman and agricultural responsibility in the modern age. We may speculate that Tolstoy’s grave concern is that the peasant woman’s image is subverted in the era of outmigration and threatens the spirituality of the rural world.

In conclusion, the peasant women’s irresistibly seductive power triggers their community’s fall and disharmony, as Tolstoy’s novellas show. The novelist always depicts the sexual image of the lower-class women as if they coincided with natural forces. Water, the well, and rain draw Irtenev to Stepanida. The sting of a cockchafer pushes Kasatsky forward to Maria. In both cases, nature, water, and women are evil but are at the same time too natural and necessary to be resisted. What is more, Tolstoy considers peasant women’s sexual seduction not only a natural phenomenon, but also a cultural necessity. In the case of Stepanida, her seductive beauty stems from her peasant identity. While critics claim that a Tolstoyan character like Kasatsky is in an “unceasing process of self-transformation” (Gustafson, *Resident and Stranger*, 419), based on my analysis, Tolstoy is even less optimistic, since peasant women seduce in a most natural way, inevitably ruining the morals in remote Russia, and there seems to be no salvation.

## Conclusion

Both Turgenev and Tolstoy characterize peasant women as sexual beings, and highlight their sexuality to portray the breakdown of the people's spiritual brotherhood. These realist depictions call for further effort to place the peasant women in a European tradition of artistic portrayals of women. As Bram Dijkstra demonstrates in a comprehensive study on European art in the late nineteenth century, females in European paintings and sculptures appear to be primitive creatures following their basic natural instinct. Numerous French, British, and German artists' pieces show women closely attached to trees, lightly flying in twilight, delivered by moving fluid, or vulnerably prostrate in woods. These pieces confirm women's "self-directed arboreal ecstasies" (Dijkstra, 99), or, autoerotic sexual desire and physical pleasure. European art near the turn of the century features such liberated and passionate nymphs driven by the natural elements of air or water around them, as well as their own physical potential for fertilization, and thus, reminds us of the image of the women explored in this chapter. In realist writers' depictions, we sense female peasant characters' sexuality that is defined by the law of nature.

This chapter does not elaborate on other aspects of peasant women's immorality, but to mention a few, we may start with Leskov's heroines as "bad mothers." Both Nastya Prokudina and Katerina Izmailova show a very limited sense of maternity. As Wigzell puts it, "the maternal aspects of Mother Russia are played down, while actual female characters are either not seen in a maternal role or as mothers lack caring nurturing qualities" ("Nikolai Leskov," 118). Peasant women are also portrayed as materialistic and

egoistic, on the background of a polluted and modernized rural world. In *Master and Man* (1895), for instance, Tolstoy mentions fleetingly how a rich peasant's household expects a "rupture," since one of the sons wants a family division (*razdel*). A decisive reason for this *razdel*, as the narrator notes, is the peasant wives' inferior morality. The case of Aksinya in Chekhov's novella *In the Ravine* is similar, since she rebels against the older generation's inheritance customs and takes over the entire family's business. When it comes to women's homicidal and infanticidal behaviors, Aksinya's flinging boiled water onto a toddler is one example, and the female serf in Chekhov's "Sleepy" (1888) also comes to mind. The serf girl's drudgeries include preparing meals, baking bread, cleaning the room, and coaxing a toddler to sleep night after night. Constant exploitation of her physical strength eventually influences her mental health and drives her to murder the toddler to appease her rage. The peasant women's sinful sexuality, explored in this chapter, perhaps requires further effort to associate it with a series of their other immoral and brutal acts in a disharmonious postreform peasantry.



## Chapter 5

“Can’t You Cut Pages with a Garden Knife?”:

### The Old Believers’ Darkness

The previous chapter analyzed the peasant women and their sexuality. This chapter will explore another minority group within the Russian people: the Old Believers. As most ethnographers and historians argue, the Old Believers’ fidelity to Muscovite religious customs under the pressure of the Nikonian modernization of the Church demonstrates these people’s stoic endurance. These critics claim that the Old Believers were capable of spiritual depths and brotherly unity with the Orthodox Church, instead of their separation from or rebellion against the official belief system. As Leonid Heretz puts it, the sects “were even more passive in the face of oppression than the Russian peasantry” and very few outbursts, peasant wars, and uprisings were reported in sectarian villages (99). These academic surveys show that the Old Believers did not destroy the brotherly unity of the Russian people.

While these historical studies along with numerous ethnographic accounts emphasize the inner strength of the Old Believers in a hostile environment and de-emphasize the dangerous impact of their violent rituals on the majority of the people, realist writers portray the disunifying effect of sectarian beliefs. For instance, Grigory in *The Brothers*

*Karamazov* who at first glance plays a positive role of a caring father figure, is also, according to Vladimir Golstein, a fanatic flagellant and a dogmatic literalist. Although he raises the abandoned Smerdyakov as a pious believer and a surrogate father, his function in the Karamazov circle is ambivalent. He triggers Smerdyakov's vengeful rebellion, disunites the Karamazov family, and shows "no possibility of change or growth in his world" ("Accidental Families," 765). As I will show, characters related to Old Belief culture are portrayed in fiction as precisely this type of literalist who severs caring ties and bonding relationships.

I will begin with an overview of academic studies of the Old Believers in both nineteenth-century and contemporary scholarship to show that many authors have strived for a revision of the negative views of the Old Believers and a more positive reevaluation of them. In the following section, in contrast, I will show how, in realist literary portrayals, sectarian characters dismantle the Russian peasants' Christian brotherhood. This chapter in particular focuses on Leskov's *The Cathedral Clergy* (1872) and Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* as the novels that show the realist writers' ambivalent views of the Old Belief. Like academic authors, these two writers acknowledge the spirituality of characters surrounded by Old Believer motifs. Their sectarian characters have altruistic virtues, compassion for others, and even faith in spiritual resurrection. However, at the same time, they are portrayed as either distanced from immediate social life or secluded from their spiritual brothers. It seems unlikely that these sectarian characters will ever actively build up a peasant brotherhood.

### **Academic Studies of Old Believers: From Fragmentation to Belongingness**

The Old Believers' separation from the Orthodox Church was a prolonged process in the political history of Imperial Russia. Since the Nikonian reforms in 1666, they had protested the modernized, westernized state and the Orthodox clergy as the political enemy of the people. In this binary opposition between the Russian past and the Russian present,<sup>138</sup> the stubbornly backward Old Belief “partakes of a newly defined messianic time” (Humphrey, 218), envisioning the common people as the corpses of an apocalyptic massacre by the visage of the Antichrist—Nikon, the modern state, and the autocratic authority. They called the soul tax since the Petrine Reforms a stamp on the common people's eternal slavery.<sup>139</sup> The ideological hostility continued through the 1860s. In the radicalized late nineteenth century, the state was still persecuting the Old Believers, Orthodox priests still forbade Old Believers' children to join state schools in some areas, and the Old Believers continued to call Orthodoxy “the ministrations of the heretical Nikonians” (92).

A critical view of popular culture and Imperial history, however, reveals some of the errors inherent in this binary model for understanding official religion and non-official beliefs. According to Boris Uspensky and Yuri Lotman, throughout Christian history and across European nations, such binary terms as *dvoeverie* (double-belief) reinforce the

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<sup>138</sup> The Old Believers condemned Peter's reforms, for instance his alterations of Russian clothes and beards. Avvakum even criticized the Nikonian icon painting for its realistic and sensuous style. As Heretz argues, “the Old Believer Schism represents the basic Russian negative response to modernization” (42).

<sup>139</sup> See Cherniavski for the way Old Believers considered Peter to be the Antichrist who perpetuated all evil social movements in the empire.

inferiority of the pagan believers, persecuted as heretical and dangerous. For our purposes, it should be noted that in such a European context, radical reformers and clergy on behalf of the modern state, since the late seventeenth-century Nikonian Church reforms, alienated popular beliefs and demarcated official Orthodoxy from folk religions. Numerous skewed observations on the Old Belief by clergy, state officials, and historians have reinforced the narrative of the schism between mainstream Orthodoxy and Old Belief. As Heretz points out, even well-intentioned historians who respected folk Christianity and popular rituals may have unconsciously “dehumanized the people much more thoroughly than did the condescending and repressive attitude” (21) toward peasant religious practices, by emphasizing the differences between their traditional rituals and the Orthodox belief system.

Sensing the flaws in political commentaries on the Old Belief, contemporary critics aim to dismiss binary terms and identify a shared heritage among sectarians and Orthodox people. From the tenth century through the seventeenth-century Nikonian Reform, as these authors point out, Orthodox religious rituals and everyday popular customs had constantly connected with each other. For instance, the Old Believers’ songs, sermons, preaching, and prayers reflect the “proto-Slavic ritual of going to ‘another world’” and share with Orthodox prayers the same origin and spirit (Veletskiaia, 60). Marriage rituals in Orthodoxy and those of the Old Believers also overlapped for centuries, as Irina Paert argues. Heretz further claims that even the fanatic sect *Khlystovshchina* was made up of arduous followers of the Orthodox belief system who conducted the same traditional Orthodox rituals in a more primitive and literal way. In his

view, fanatic belief systems express the same Orthodox belief in their unique popular language.<sup>140</sup> By challenging the binary narrative and identifying a common heritage among all Russian people, these critics deny the existence of a “counter-society” among the Old Believers and argue that these “heretics” were united with the Orthodox state.

Such a standpoint is hardly new. The first generation of Old Believers wrote hagiographies that followed Orthodox tradition. Monks such as Avvakum and Epifanii, in their autobiographies, both placed great emphasis on their martyrdom in order to show that they “carried on the authentic Christian tradition,” as Robert O. Crummey argues (142). In the radicalized late nineteenth-century Russia, ethnographers and writers who came from the sectarian people also wrote about their proximity to Orthodoxy. For instance, a literate peasant named Nikolai Chukmaldin defended the brotherly union of different religions, especially the Old Believers and Orthodox peasants. He reported on how the Old Believers and Orthodox believers joined each other to read both the radical creed and the Christian Gospels in Siberian villages (Minenko, 174). Sergei Stepniak reports on the sects living near the famous Vyg monastery on the river Vyg in the late seventeenth century.<sup>141</sup> They traded copper-made products such as icons, crosses, and sacred utensils. In his view, “production of these articles was carried on on the ordinary Russian co-operative principle, enriching both the monastery and the individual workers, who had their share in the profits” (287), and moreover, the sectarians’ popular schools

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<sup>140</sup> Heretz argues that “the Old Believers found themselves in the truly tragic position of being fanatical adherents to the body of Orthodox dogma and canon” (63). They ultimately served the traditional Muscovite Orthodoxy, from which the official Church deviated.

<sup>141</sup> The Vyg community was founded around 1694 in northern Russia, well known for being the center of the priestless Old Belief movement. The leaders were the brothers Andrei and Semen Denisov. Along with other writers such as Avvakum and Avraamii, these Old Believer artists and authors produced their own liturgical texts that in their views, defended the traditions and values of pre-Nikonian Orthodoxy.

were open to both Old Believers and State peasants. The author depicts the Old Believers' communal brotherhood as embracing Orthodox peasants.

The harmonious image of a unified Orthodoxy and Old Belief almost becomes a myth. As Stepniak claims in his ethnography, the Old Believers' assimilation of Nikonian Christianity in the seventeenth century happened naturally and effortlessly:

The Rascol is usually represented as a stormy and widespread outburst of popular discontent at the sight of Nikonian "innovations." It was not so in reality.... The fact is that the Nikonian mass-book, with all its bold "innovations," was at first universally accepted. It was certainly exceedingly distasteful to almost the whole body of church-goers, but they did not move a finger to protest against it, and quietly submitted to orders coming from Moscow, as was their wont. (249-250)

He depicts a universal acceptance of Nikonian Christian norms among Old Believers. In the following centuries, as he further claims, the wanderers, or runners (*beguny*), once considered dangerous and rebellious, "have put up with the Czar's habit of crossing himself with three fingers, smoking tobacco, and wearing a German overcoat" (281). When he comments on the fanatic behavior of the Castrates, he also highlights the possibility of these Old Believers' belongingness to the civil world, or the possibility of a "gradual triumph of reason over the darkest regions of superstition" (270). Similarly, many other progressive thinkers tended to view Old Believer practices and morals in the

least negative light. For instance, August Von Haxthausen romanticized the fanatic rituals of the *khlysty*. His followers Pavel Melnikov and Afanasii Shchapov condoned the Old Believers' debauchery and praised their liberalism (Etkind, 573). When these authors talked about nineteenth-century sectarian peasants, they "projected their fantasies of primitive Christians ... onto their own folk" (ibid., 588). This tendency is further apparent in writings by a neopopulist Novosibirsk School in the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods, established by Nikolai Pokrovskii and his colleagues. These historians again reinforced the myth that "the lines of demarcation between the Old believers and the rest of the population were amorphous and, at times, invisible" (Crummey, 188).<sup>142</sup> Most recent academic surveys also recognize the Old Believers' asceticism, work ethic, and sober, frugal family life (West, "A Note on Old Belief"), grouping the Old Believer merchants' self-help, collectivism, and solidarity with the general lower-class Russian people's Christian morals. Populist writings and contemporary academic studies corroborate the myth of the union between Orthodoxy and Old Belief.

The academic myth may have stemmed from the absence of objective sources. Crummey confesses that even his recent monograph *Old Believers in a Changing World* may not qualify as an objective reflection of the Old Believers' life since it relies so much on their own writings. Eighteenth-century historical reviews by the Old Believers, especially those by the most prominent Vyg fathers and Old Believer leaders such as Semen Denisov and Ivan Filippov, have merit "not so much in the acuity of their

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<sup>142</sup> Although these neopopulist Soviet scholars were in part following a binary tradition that interprets Old Belief as a "movement of resistance of peasants, Cossacks, and the urban poor to the imperial government and the official church," they emphasized various practices and distinct beliefs among all Old Believers and Orthodox peasants that cannot be considered rebellions against Orthodoxy (187).

historical analysis as in the religious messages their historical works conveyed,” or in other words, lack a scientific approach to historical reality, as Crummey concludes in his book (134). While such sources written by sectarian people “leave out the messier problems and less desirable forms of behavior,” Church officials’ reports on the Old Belief are also not to be trusted, since these authors exaggerated the Old Believers’ promiscuity and condemned them for having “canonically ‘lived in sin’” (ibid., 100, 101). These controversial portrayals of the Old Believer communities by sectarians and Church officials always undermine the objectivity of related research.

Another reason behind the myth of the Old Believers’ belongingness to the Orthodox world is these sectarians’ stubborn and primitive worship of the Tsar. Nineteenth-century intelligentsia believed in a myth that the people would insist that “the autocracy has no share whatever in bringing on them the calamities from which they suffer, and that the Czar is as much dissatisfied as the peasants themselves with the present order of things” (Stepniak, 71). Perhaps because of the people’s passivity and loyalty to the Tsars, radical thinkers assumed that the Old Believers could never completely reject the autocratic state. As Stepniak argues, although Peter the Great was regarded as the Antichrist by old ritualists, many Old Believers were convinced that Peter’s father Tsar Alexis was the supreme authority, only seized by Nikonian heretics. To those Pre-Nikonian Russian Tsars, the Old Believers adhered even more loyally. Their fanatic rituals and even their mass suicides seem to the radical thinkers to reflect their attachment to the Russian Tsars and escape from the destruction of the modernized Nikonian West. As American scholar Michael Cherniavsky puts it, “for both Nikonians and Avvakumians, the final and



supreme authority in matters of faith, of ritual, of the Church was the tsar” (12). These authors agree that anti-Tsarism and anarchism are principles of the radical intelligentsia, while Tsarism always motivates Old Believers’ submission to the official state.

### **Realist Literature about the Old Believers: From Belongingness to Fragmentation**

The above introduction is focused on academic authors’ and ethnographers’ efforts to unite the Old Believers and Orthodox Russia. Some nineteenth-century realist writers shared their point of view. Pavel Melnikov-Pechersky, once a historian, folklorist, traveler, and bureaucratic officer supervised by the imperial government, had written on the Old Believers’ life since the late 1850s. His depiction of the Old Believers is based on his eyewitness experience in the middle Volga region. As Jane Costlow notes, Pechersky’s epic-length novel *In the Forests* (1871-75) offers a “cosmic, syncretic geography” that allows two competing myths—Muscovite *Rus’* and Orthodox tradition—to interweave (*Heart-Pine Russia*, 60). At the very least, we learn from this work that “Old Believer elders forbid observation of folk rituals they regard as non-Christian” and would replace them with Christian custom (*ibid.*, 63). Pechersky’s portrayal of an organic bond between sectarian people and Orthodox clergy<sup>143</sup> motivated his successor’s works. Leskov also portrays the way Orthodox rites meet non-Orthodox virtues in his 1873 novella “The Sealed Angel.” He depicts how a “bewildered Old Believer does recognize

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<sup>143</sup> Mel’nikov-Pechersky only showed this inclination starting in the late 1850s. Early on, he usually reported on the disruptive forces and fanatic activities of the Old Believers. See Hoisington, “Melnikov-Pechersky.”

the indomitability and fearlessness of [the Orthodox monk] Pamva's attitude" (Ziolkowski, *Hagiography and Modern Russian Literature*, 175).

However, these two most famous writers who envisioned a unity of sectarian and Orthodox people were both influenced by state officials and restrained by governmental responsibilities. Pechersky was considered an ambivalent figure in the middle Volga areas because he was both a bureaucratic supervisor and an unofficial ethnographer. Leskov was also involved with an imperial mission to indoctrinate Old Believers and convert them to the official faith. As Hugh McLean notes, these two writers' works were usually considered even by contemporaries to be "dictated by ideological rather than artistic considerations" (*Nikolai Leskov*, 178). Their middle-way position between Old Believers and Christian clergy may result in their idealization of the Old Believers' compatibility and conformism.

Thus, we see many fictional writings revealing the way Old Belief and Orthodoxy were totally different from and hostile toward each other. For instance, in Leskov's "At the End of the World" (1875), while the Orthodoxy missionaries are ignorant about non-Orthodox believers and promote official Christianity among the sects, a Siberian heathen is superior to the spurious Christian clergy (Edgerton, 528; Rock, 130-31). In this way, Leskov highlights the gap, rather than a bond, between the center and the periphery, the official belief system and the local religion. Another example from Leskov's works is the righteous man in *Deathless Golovan*. Leskov may have modeled Golovan from the *molokans*, a sect that emerged in seventeenth-century Russia and separated from Spiritual Christians (*dukhovnye khristian*). *Molokans* deliberately drank milk on fast days as a

gesture of rebellion,<sup>144</sup> and in Leskov's novella Golovan is a milk provider in an Orel town. Moreover, Golovan is a virgin, which reminds us of the sectarian leader Selivanov, who attempted to become a eunuch through "baptism by fire," or castration. Nevertheless, the sectarian character in Leskov's novella does not have the charisma of the pretender Selivanov, who was beloved as a prophet and rumored to be the resurrected Peter the Third. He is falsely accused of sexual transgression with a peasant woman he rescues. In this view, Leskov seems to invoke the history of the *molokans* and the legend of Selivanov to show the sectarian people living in the here and now who are unfortunately isolated, obscure, and attacked by villagers around him.

Dostoevsky's fiction further illustrates sectarian characters' ambivalent nature and questions the Old Believers' potential for spirituality. Nikolka, a member of the runners (*beguny*) in *Crime and Punishment*, is both spiritual and fanatic. On the one hand, the Old Believer is sacrificing himself for Raskolnikov's crime, as William J. Comer claims, with the "willingness to accept suffering, just or unjust, since persecution in the world ruled by Antichrist and his minions would make martyrs of them" (85). Andrea Zink also praises the painter for his morality that "originates neither in reason nor calculation," but in his innocently childlike Russianness (70). On the other hand, Nikolka looks pale, weak, and mentally unstable for unclear reasons. His self-sacrifice is not portrayed as a positive epiphany as is that of Dmitri Karamazov. Even his confession of the crime that he did not commit is, unlike Dmitri's, not unambiguously positive: the narrator reports that Nikolka

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<sup>144</sup> See Clay, "The Woman Clothed in the Sun." "The Molokans received their name because they ignored the extrabiblical fasting rules of the Orthodox Church and drank milk (*moloko*) and ate other dairy products on the days during which such foods were forbidden. Although they preferred the term Spiritual Christians, they also used the term *Molokan*, which could signify not only their liberation from Orthodox tradition but also their commitment to the pure spiritual milk of God's word" (110).

reads his confession “as if he had prepared the answer beforehand,” and such predetermined submission leaves Porfiry Petrovich with the impression that the man is “not using his own words” (352). At the very least, his suspicious look and staggering steps indicate that the Runner may be likened with another peasant, the coachman Mikolka (in Raskolnikov’s dream), who is inhumanely violent (Peace, “Motive and Symbol”). The two characters share names, drunkenness, and peasant identity. It is possible that the mysterious Old Believer is doubled by a violently abusive peasant “murderer.”

Grigory in *The Brothers Karamazov* is another highly ambivalent Old Believer, as mentioned briefly in the beginning of the chapter. On the surface, we know him as a generous surrogate father of Smerdyakov. Grigory’s image as a compassionate old man may have its merit, given that this novel is, unlike Dostoevsky’s other novels, focused on clashing oppositions, centered on the reconciliation between God and man and the mediations between generations, as Michael Holquist argues (173-77). However, Grigory’s relationship with Smerdyakov cannot be easily categorized as such a spiritual connection. Grigory’s worship of flagellants results in his brutal treatment of his adopted son, as he forces him to read the Scripture, forbidding him to question it, and whipping him whenever he needs to. His authoritative control over Smerdyakov and his lack of love for him indicate that he may be a double of other abusive father figures in the novel—the Grand Inquisitor, Ivan Karamazov, and Father Ferapont, according to Vladimir Golstein. These surrogate fathers replace compassion and love with judgment and contempt and thus, Grigory is hardly an unambiguously positive figure who

establishes a familial bond. On the contrary, he destroys it, severing the caring ties between him and Smerdyakov. Robin Feuer Miller also finds that Grigory's stoic and inhumane treatment of his surrogate son (the old man judges Smerdyakov by announcing "You're not a human being You grew from the mildew in the bathhouse") spreads the evil seeds that take root in Smerdyakov's soul: the "passing spiteful remark to a child [that] can lodge in the child's heart with disastrous results," of which Zosima warns (43). At the very least, we know the old man once had a son of six fingers, which perhaps indicates his genetically demonic nature. These analyses bring into question the old flagellant's potential for uniting a brotherhood, despite his efforts to raise the abandoned Karamazovs.

Characters such as Nikolka the Runner and Grigory the Flagellant seem to Dostoevsky to be fanatically dangerous, because both desire apocalyptic destruction, not harmonious brotherhood. Nikolka the Runner confesses that he has committed a crime and awaits his judgment. His self-sacrifice can be interpreted in relation to numerous Old Believers' desire for mortification and their expectation of the Day of Judgment. What he attempts to fulfill, thus, is not simply suffering for another Christian brother but also joining a fanatic project of mass suicide. Admittedly, one may object that in this novel, Dostoevsky does not conclusively specify either Nikolka's brotherly love for the real murderer or his abnormal inclination for catastrophes. Nevertheless, in the case of Grigory, the novelist makes even clearer that the sectarian is a self-confined, isolated figure who has no desire for caring relationships with other individuals. Much like many other cruel father figures in the novel, Grigory is tempted to control family members,

especially his surrogate son, with his dark desire for punishment and apocalyptic expectation of Judgment. As Golstein claims, Grigory's "existence outside of time concords with his apocalyptic outlook (when time shall be no more) and with the finality of his judgements" (765). Both Nikolka and Grigory, positioned among other lower-class Russian people, are portrayed as followers of their radical penchant for execution, mass suicide, or collective destruction.

In such realist literature that explores the sectarian people and the great split, the seventeenth-century Old Believer leader and martyr, Archpriest Avvakum Petrovich (1620?-1682), who defended the traditional Muscovite religion and condemned the Nikonian Church reform, occupies an important position. Since Avvakum shows the spirituality, morality, and depth that surpass those of official believers, this figure has become an iconic sectarian on whose autobiography realist writers model their characters and depict conflict between Old Believers and Orthodox people, as Margaret Ziolkowski claims in her study of the hagiographic tradition in Russian literature (106-107).

Thus, Russian writers who are inspired by Avvakum's life story reported in his autobiography *Life of the Archpriest Avvakum, Written by Himself* (*Zhitie protopopa Avvakuma im samim napisannoe*, 1672-1675), must also be indebted to the ancient tradition of hagiography (*zhitie*)—a genre of Medieval biographies or narratives about the lives of saints. Since the Old Believer Fathers regarded themselves as the last bastion of true Christianity, they were prolific authors who contributed to hagiographies, as Crummey notes (87). Among many, *The Tale of Boiarynia Morozova*, Avvakum's biography, and other narrative works by the monk Avraamii are well-known examples.

By narrating stories of non-Orthodox saints' sufferings for the true faith, these sectarian hagiographic authors revealed their spiritual accomplishment (*podvig*) through this ancient genre. In the nineteenth century, the main sources of hagiographies available were the *Prolog* and the *Reading Menaea*, both of which can be dated to the twelfth century, and were meant to be read aloud for didactic purposes. The nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia were obsessed with medieval hagiography, for numerous reasons: Nikolai Karamzin and Nikolai Novikov worked on the former's *History of the Russian State* (1818-1829) to encourage patriotism; Walter Scott's popular romanticism in the 1820s inspired the Russian intelligentsia's interest in the Medieval history and culture; Slavophile writing such as Konstantin Aksakov's study in history further romanticizes the history of Old *Rus'*. As Ziolkowski summarizes, "the combination of nationalism with a romantic idealization of the past" motivated the nineteenth-century intelligentsia's "backward" glance at the ancient hagiographic tradition (11). Given that hagiography had been subjected to redactions and extensive revisions since the twelfth century to meet the standards of the nineteenth-century intellectual style, the genre retains its didactic nature in the early nineteenth century.

For our purposes, however, it should be noted that realist writers are not satisfied with unambiguously celebrating the nostalgic Muscovite past as the Slavophiles and the historians did. Unlike radical Nikolai Chernyshevsky and terrorist Vera Figner (of the People's Will), the realist writers I explore wrote about their contemporary Avvakumians who nonetheless fail to spiritually connect with others. In *Father Sergius*, for instance, Tolstoy's portrayal of Kasatsky's failure to overcome his sensual desire is a

contravention of Avvakum's great action (Walsh and Alessi, 10). Avvakum famously wrote in his autobiography that once he placed his fingers in a candle flame to overcome the temptation of a debauched female confessor. This detail in his autobiography is modeled on a story of Iakov the Faster also reported in hagiography. Kasatsky has this typical hagiographic episode, which represents many hagiographic topoi,<sup>145</sup> in mind, just as Avvakum did, when he confronts the seductress; yet, he still cannot succeed in asceticism. Although this contrast between Kasatsky and Avvakum or Iakov the Faster may be intended to reveal Kasatsky's ordinary human side, the distance between the contemporary man's struggle and the saint's topoi or the sectarian leader's success at least indicates that martyrdom—which is almost the sole focal point in Old Believer hagiography<sup>146</sup>—does not necessarily influence the common people in a spiritual way, in Tolstoy's view. Tolstoy does not narrow Avvakumian characters' complexity down to positive features such as martyrdom and revolutionary spirit. As I will show in the following section, in Leskov's *The Cathedral Clergy* we find numerous such episodes that subvert the value of the Avvakumian spirit and hagiographic tradition, when it is illustrated against the background of the modern world and among common people.

### **The Old Tale in *The Cathedral Clergy***

In *The Cathedral Clergy* Leskov is willing and able to show the dark side of the Old Town, a peripheral village populated by Old Believers. The writer had been interested in

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<sup>145</sup> Topoi are narratives that describe commonplace, typical, and conventionalized stages of saints' life.

<sup>146</sup> See Crummey, *Old Believers in a Changing World*, 90-96, where he argues that martyrdom is the commonest trait of Old Believer hagiography while the miraculous motifs always play a comparatively minor role in the Old Believers' biographical writing.



the sects since he was young, and in 1863, he took an assignment as a school investigator in Riga and Pskov Old Believers' communities, travelling in these regions at government expense as Pechersky did. This was when the Orthodox schools excluded children from sectarian villages and the Old Believers also refused to send their children for official education. Leskov observed the Old Believers as an eyewitness and expanded his knowledge of them through this trip (McLean, *Nikolai Leskov*, 93). However, Leskov's attitude toward the Old Believers was ambivalent, unlike Pechersky's. He was disappointed by these backward people's intellectual level and the sectarian families' stubborn resistance to exposing their children to so-called indoctrination (ibid.). After closely observing the Old Believer community in 1863, the novelist "no longer wished to hold up the Old Believers as a model of Russian piety and national character," as Faith Wigzell claims ("The *staraya skazka*," 325). Deeply disturbed by the schism in his country, he published his report and furthermore, managed to rehash his research results in newspaper articles and other media several times later in life. Leskov's biography tells us that although he was once convinced that the Old Believers preserved the spirit of the ancient Russian *byt* (life), the Muscovite tradition, and the *staraia skazka* (old tale), "he gradually came to see them as bigoted and fanatical," as Wigzell puts it ("The *staraya skazka*," 324).

As this section will show, Leskov's disappointment with the Old Believers after his trip in the Riga and Pskov regions finds its expression in the ambivalent portraits of central and peripheral characters related to the Old Belief in *The Cathedral Clergy*. In particular, Tuberozov's spiritual strength, however profound and purely Russian, does

not seem to Leskov to have a positive and unifying influence on the Old Town people. The Muscovite spirit and traditional values inherent in his teaching, or in other sectarian characters' lives, are portrayed as trivial, uninfluential, and irrelevant to the contemporary Old Town life in the age of radicalism. This ambivalence may imply Leskov's pessimism about the possibility of any brotherly unity among the Orthodox and sectarian people.

The central figure in this novel, Father Tuberozov, is created as a follower of the Avvakumian spirit. As a result of Leskov's adherence to Tolstoyanism and his critical opinions on modern Orthodoxy, he explored the *Prolog*, studied early Christian culture and daily life in the early Christian era,<sup>147</sup> and enriched his fiction with such knowledge. As Irmhild Christina Sperrle points out, "[t]he figure of Avvakum, who was to be Tuberozov's 'mentor and inspiration,' was very prominent" (*The Organic Worldview*, 135) in the early draft of *The Cathedral Clergy*.<sup>148</sup> Many critics clarify these parallels between the two figures: Avvakum and Tuberozov are similarly involved with temperance movements; they both endure assaults from the local dignitaries on their lives; they both struggle to overcome weaknesses such as sensuality, vanity, and addiction to alcohol;<sup>149</sup> both the legendary martyr Avvakum and the Father in Leskov's novel question the power of the State over the Church. (Although the Father is sent to the Old Town as an Orthodox elder, he protests the Orthodox bureaucracy and the

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<sup>147</sup> In the 1880s, Leskov's expertise motivated him to write nine adaptations of *Prolog*. In these stories, Leskov's attack on the official Orthodox Church became more and more direct and overt. See Ziolkowski, *Hagiography and Modern Russian Literature*, 94.

<sup>148</sup> However, Sperrle ultimately denies the image of Avvakum in the final version of *Savely*, based on her reading that Leskov favors flexible belief over any specific belief systems, even non-Christian ones.

<sup>149</sup> Tuberozov has a weakness for smoking, drinking, sex, and even good clothes.

hypocritical political officials.) Even the apocalyptic mood of the novel reminds us of the Old Believers' apocalyptic fanaticism, as Wigzell claims ("The *staraya skazka*").

Another character related to the sects is the righteous man Konstantin Pizonsky. This character appears first in a short story, "Kotin the He-Cow and Platonida," which belongs to the Old Town series and depicts characters on the same background of the remote, peripheral town. In the short story, he is the illicit son of a sectarian woman and an Orthodox sexton, a man of ambivalent identity. In his hermaphrodite identity, however, Walter Benjamin discerns Pizonsky's spiritual strength and calls him a "symbol of God incarnate" (104). In his final edition of the lengthy novel *The Cathedral Clergy* Leskov continued to portray this heretic image of this character: Pizonsky raises two infant girls in the short story, and in *The Cathedral Clergy*, he takes care of one orphaned boy. The novelist insists on the peripheral identity and the non-Orthodox spirituality of Pizonsky in his works, in part reaffirming his folk virtue and the popular psyche.

Although these two characters are not directly associated with the Old Belief, and the Father even belongs to the Orthodox clergy, Leskov's emphasis on their proximity to the sectarian population and the non-Orthodox motifs at least indicates that he attempts to incorporate his commentary on the nature of the Old Belief into his novel. In the 1870s Leskov announced that he remained a devout son of the Orthodox Church. From his novel *The Cathedral Clergy*, nonetheless, we can tell that the novelist was searching for a more righteous and less dogmatic alternative to the official church. Tuberozov is portrayed as embodying morality and virtue in freedom without following the Orthodox doctrines. (Leskov eventually withdrew from official Orthodoxy and followed

Tolstoyanism in the 1880s.) In Savely's diary, we do not read sermons, prayers, dogmas, confessions, and preaching on God. Similarly spiritual and non-orthodox motifs also surround Pizonsky, another righteous man central to this novel.<sup>150</sup> Even Tuberozov worships the old man for showing him that when Orthodox clergymen neglect their true path the Old Believers "abide by their heresy" (32).

Nevertheless, we cannot conclusively characterize these non-Orthodox figures as completely positive characters because, at the very least, Leskov provides evidence in the novel of Tuberozov's failure to unite the people in the Old Town. As mentioned above, Leskov was enthusiastic about Old Believers' spiritual depth in the beginning of his government trip in the Riga and Pskov areas, but was disappointed by the sects' stubbornness, seclusion, barbarity, and hatred toward the Orthodox Church. Based on many such biographical details, Wigzell concludes that portraying an Avvakumian figure, Tuberozov, does not necessarily mean that Leskov is satisfied with this character. As we know, although the Father makes peace with the Old Believers and the conflict between Old Belief and Orthodoxy somehow slides out of the novel,<sup>151</sup> we should not be oblivious of the fact that Savely never fulfills his Christian mission or unites the people. His middle-way position in the Old Town is at least responsible for people's distrust in him. On the one hand, the Avvakumian Father is intimate with the leaders of sects in the hotbed of Old Belief. He appreciates the Old Believers' kindness and allows his clergy's

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<sup>150</sup> See Wigzell, who argues that "Leskov lost hope in the official Church as a potential agent for a national spiritual regeneration, thus ceasing to believe in good priests and spiritual leaders such as Father Savely Tuberozov. He continued, however, to hold up non-clerical characters such as Pizonsky as embodiments of true righteousness" ("Leskov's *Soboryane*," 904).

<sup>151</sup> See McLean, *Nikolai Leskov*, and Sperrle. Both agree that the writer obviously shifts the focus of his novel from Old Believers' separation from Orthodox people toward the demonic influence of nihilism on the Old Town life.

friendship with them. The Old Believers enjoy Tuberozov's protection of them against the police power of the official Church. On the other hand, the Father's mission is still to indoctrinate and convert the Old Believers, on behalf of the political authority and the Church. The Orthodox clergy presses him and forbids him to meet publicly with sect leaders. Vacillating between his two roles—the proponent of religious liberty and the mouthpiece of official faith—Savely is treated indifferently by the people in this provincial area. Tuberozov's story in an early edition in the Old Town series is entitled "Awaiting the Movement of the Waters," which seems to indicate the suffering people's pious expectation of an angel; yet, it also sounds like their condition remains unchanged and unimproved. It is possible that Tuberozov cannot cause any movement of the people's spiritual lives.

In particular, the Father's diary both bears the virtue of the Old Belief and at the same time is the target of Leskov's irony. In the diary, we can identify numerous parallels between the Father and the Old Believer martyr Avvakum (Wigzell). Moreover, the genre of the diary—a hagiography—obviously indicates the novelist's intention to highlight the Father's sectarian spirit. As the translator of the novel Margaret Winchell notes, although Savely "is depicted as a flesh-and-blood man of mid-nineteenth-century Russia, his life story also has a whiff of old Russian hagiography about it" (28). However, as Wigzell argues, Tuberozov's diary "lacks the crude vitality of Avvakum's, in the same way that the man lacks the stubborn strength of his predecessor" ("The *staraya skazka*," 335). At the very least, Leskov's description of Tuberozov's diary reveals the flaws in such a hagiographic style of writing. Although the narrator claims that Tuberozov's diary

“brought to life for the old archpriest a whole world of memories” (27), he accomplished this only within his own bedroom. The metaphor Leskov uses to describe the diary is “a glass beehive (*stekliannyi ulei*) where the bees are building their wonderful honeycombs, with wax for the illumination of God’s holy visage and honey for the delight of humankind” (21). The reader is supposed to peep into this secretive chronicle: his light sandals and quiet footsteps must not disturb the fragility, tranquility, and unearthliness of the glass house. It seems that the holy virtue preserved in the diary is distant from the outsiders. Leskov also underscores the Father’s reading of the diary in solitude. He fastened the door, begged his wife to stay outside, and “saddled his proud Roman nose” (27) with reading spectacles when he opened his chronicle. (His wife Natalya Nikolayevna does not know of the existence of the diary or fully understand his spiritual world. It is no wonder that Marfa Andreyevna finds a person like Tuberozov, with such grief and pain, to have to be eventually left in solitude.<sup>152</sup>) Although this chronicle resurrects and memorializes old *Rus*’, the Father’s “soft whispering (*tikhii shepot*) . . . clearly audible in the dead of night (*v glukhoi tishi polunochi*)” (27) may not reach the deaf (*glukhoi*) ears in the Old Town night. His chronicle, as the most lengthy narrative of old Russia’s virtue in this novel, only seems to reveal “a world that remains unseen and unknown (*nevedomyi i nezrimyi*) to all who view [Tuberozov] both up close and from afar” (21).

It is thus not surprising that placed in the real world of the Old Town, the diary seems almost useless and negative. It is noteworthy that Tuberozov turns to his chronicle that

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<sup>152</sup> In Marfa Andreyevna’s words, “if you should be persecuted, be glad, for if you were a flatterer or a fool, then instead of persecuting you, they would praise you and hold you up as an example to others” (48).

night because he is disappointed by the action of Varnava, a nihilist in the Old Town. This man has no faith in human souls and mocks the idea of after-death paradise. To prove his point he exhumes bodies from the earth and collects human bones for experiments. The Father cannot stop Varnava's inhumane actions and out of anxiety, he paces around for an hour, "back and forth with uneven steps" (26) that rush toward different corners and bump into walls. He seems to be trapped in his tiny room and precisely at such a moment, he closes the door and enters the spiritual world in his diary. Although one may expect that his return to the world in the chronicle inspires him in his salvation of the Old Town, after a long digression on the chronicle, the writer sends the reader back to the Old Town in the present only to find that Varnava's mentor, a wicked nihilist and government official named Termosesov, arrives in town with other radicals. Their purpose is to "renew" the history of the Old Town and banish Tuberozov.<sup>153</sup> Thus, when the Father reads his diary in the first half of the novel, the narrator is delaying the urgent conflicts in the latter half. Both the Father and the reader are trapped in the lengthy narrative of the chronicle and the fantastic world of hagiography. While Akhilla the deacon tells Natalya Nikolayevna to mark her calendar for the coming events that may change the history of the Old Town, the Father escapes into the nostalgic world of his chronicle. In this view, his hagiographic writing is less a productive antidote to the malaise in the Old Town than a fairy tale that serves his temporary escapism.

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<sup>153</sup> Termosesov produces a scandal to chase Savely out of the Old Town. Late in the novel, the Father is absent and is exiled, despite his prolonged desire to reunite with the Old Town people. As Sperrle summarizes, "[d]espite Tuberozov's 'sacrifice' in *Cathedral Folk*, nothing much changed in reality. Life went on in Old Town and in fact renewed itself without Tuberozov" (*The Organic Worldview*, 148). In Sperrle's view, Tuberozov's failure is due to the fact that his old-fashioned martyrdom and outdated path of suffering do not embody the writer's "heretical" Christianity and "organic" worldview.

This diary, a hagiographic digression on the beauty of the past, ruptures the narrative in the novel by a deliberate and unique design of Leskov. As mentioned above, hagiography gained popularity throughout the nineteenth century because the intelligentsia were interested in the highly romanticized vision of medieval Russia. They intended to spread Russia's cultural legacy and spiritual greatness among contemporaries both in their own country and in European nations. Realist writers' backward glance at this ancient genre, nonetheless, is less romantic than those of other intellectuals and undermines the medieval saints' glory in various ways. As is widely known, Dostoevsky borrows the genre of hagiography and the legacy of elders to portray his saintly figures, Tikhon and Zosima, modeled on the lives of Tikhon of Zadonsk and Ambrose of Optina Pustyn'. However, as Ziolkowski argues in her 2001 article, the writer deviates from the tradition of the hagiographic genre and kenotic trend: while kenotic models in hagiographic topoi feature extraordinary Christ-like humility and total withdrawal from worldly activities,<sup>154</sup> Dostoevsky's saints and Fathers, especially Zosima, show "overtly nationalistic interests" and messianic ambitions (38). The inserted *vita* of Zosima is not a narrative digression on the past but rather a vision of the immediate future of contemporary Russia. In a similar vein, Turgenev is also capable of incorporating a kenotic saintly personality into his sketch "The Living Relic," in a unique way. In this highly ambivalent story, as explored in previous chapters, Turgenev shows the saintly martyr being isolated in a contemporary setting. His purpose is to rehash the legend of hagiographic warriors in the hierarchical social and gender reality of the 1870s. While

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<sup>154</sup> A typical topoi usually features such life milestones—ascetic behaviors, struggles with temptations, and repentance for sins.



these two writers both situate their saints or hagiographic heroes in the context of postreform Russia, Leskov inserts a *vita*—the diary of Father Savely—into his novel, in contrast, to break any connections between the saintly nature of hagiography and the immediate reality in the Old Town.

Despite the apprenticeship, Leskov's hagiographic adaptation is also different from his mentor Tolstoy's. Tolstoy is equally well versed in hagiography and had even been familiar with the tradition and virtue of non-Orthodox sainthood since his early childhood in Yasnaya Polyana.<sup>155</sup> Nonetheless, Tolstoy's literature contains many deliberately nuanced and parodic adaptations of hagiographic motifs. The aforementioned borrowing from Avvakum's *Life in Father Sergius* shows the writer's mistrust of the system of monasticism, the power of miracle, and the tradition of hagiography. Tolstoy's writings that are critical of the traditions of Old Belief, Avvakumianism, and hagiography, as a result, can be interpreted as his ridicule of the religious bankruptcy of any systematic beliefs, even if not Orthodox but sectarian. It is Tolstoy's attempt to separate faith from ritual that motivates him to write adaptations or anti-hagiographies of Avvakumian martyrs. The situation in Leskov's writing is thus again different. Tuberozov's diary demonstrates that Leskov does not straightforwardly criticize the hagiographic tradition or the ancient popular belief systems as Tolstoy does. He rather interrogates the motifs of the Muscovite culture in a more nuanced way, by recognizing its spirituality and depths

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<sup>155</sup> Tolstoy's aunt Aleksandra Osten-Saken impressed the young Tolstoy with her acquaintances with wanderers, holy fools, monks, nuns, and other holy visitors at Yasnaya Polyana. Her reading of the saints' *Prologue* also had an impact on Tolstoy's fictional writings as well as religious research.

while criticizing its weakness and obscurity in the social life of the contemporary common people.

Much like Savely's diary, other sectarian characters' fantastic "fairytales" about their old *Rus'* are portrayed in a similar way as both spiritual and, at the same time, unproductive, when confronting nihilistic sabotage. In Part Two, Savely requires the dwarf, a mouthpiece of the Old Muscovite tradition, to tell the story of Marfa Andreyevna in front of the guests. Again, we see a lengthy digression on the *staraia skazka* about Muscovite ancestors' virtue, Russianness, and wisdom. When the dwarf finishes, Tuberozov and other listeners return to the present. They notice a troika approaching their house from the dust. As we know, in this troika sits Termosesov, the leading nihilist who later produces the scandal of the Father and destroys the peace of the Old Town. It is not by accident that the author arranges for the dwarf's old tale to be followed by the arrival of Termosesov and other nihilists. He seems to indicate that the Old Town is already populated by fearless materialists and nihilists, who cannot be conquered by "fairytales." To a degree, Leskov was disappointed at the outdated Slavophilism and even his *staraia skazka* in the radical 1860s (Wigzell, "Leskov's *Soboryane*"). It is possible that the novelist questions the value of the antique motifs around the townspeople and reveals their naivety, superstition, and susceptibility to evil.

Even the two righteous characters—Tuberozov and Pizonsky—confess that the old virtue of the Muscovite past among them may be functionless. Tuberozov twice admits he wishes to die with the *staraia skazka*. Upon seeing the dwarf, the Father says, "[w]hen I see you, Nikola, it's as if I see before me a charming old fairy tale, one I should like to

have with me when I die” (136). After listening to the dwarf’s narrative, the Father again praises him—“how I would like to die in peace (*kak by ia zhelal umeret’ v mire*) with my (*s moeiu*) old tales” (156)). But he also has a sensation that the old tale will not save his people and his town (“But I fear—fancy this—that it won’t” (ibid.)). To his sentimental comment the dwarf also replies that “those good old fairy tales have died before we have (*skazka-to dobraia, prezhde nas pomerla*)” (136).

This Avvakumian hagiography and the sectarian fairytale, explored above, are not the only narrative ruptures that prove to be irrelevant to the people’s contemporary life. As we know, the Old Believers in history highly valued the spiritual virtue of heroes in Muscovite *Rus’*. They can be Muscovite saints, Pre-Nikonian Tsars, political traditionalists, and Christ incarnates. The Old Believers worshiped their current leaders as supernatural incarnations of such ancient heroes in the past and godly figures, the visions of whom are unbounded by natural laws and time. We may state that they seem to worship timeless phantoms and anachronistic images of heroes in the present, in their contemporary war against the ruling Antichrist. At the same time, Leskov may have found such a backward glance of the sects problematic because he cherished the *continuity* of history as the essential prerequisite for morality and love. As Sperrle shows in her monograph, the novelist’s worldview differed from Tolstoy’s in that Tolstoy attacked the idea of renewal, displacement, and historical progression. In contrast, Leskov held a more organic view on the continuation of history, tradition, and morality. He intended to restore the past in the present only if one may utilize the past in an inspiring way. The sectarian characters in *The Cathedral Clergy*, just like the Old

Believers with a backward glance at history, fail to realize what the novelist promotes—revitalization of the virtue of the past in the present. In this novel, many other non-Orthodox characters associated with the Old Belief interrupt the narrative, the storyline, and the historical continuation of the Old Town.

To start with, Leskov deliberately portrays sectarian characters as phantoms, since they simply live unrealistically long. For example, the old lady Marfa Andreyevna lives from the age of Elizabeth through the 1860s.<sup>156</sup> The dwarf Nikolai Afanasevich, her slave, should be in his nineties when we see him as the storyteller of the *staraia skazka* in the above-mentioned scene. Deacon Akhilla is also portrayed as vital, child-like, and carefree, despite the fact that he should be in his fifties. Although the novel had been thoroughly proofread by editors before its several publications, no one, including Leskov, was ever motivated to correct these obvious anachronisms.<sup>157</sup> It is possible that Leskov has deliberately used these unrealistic details to insinuate the anachronistic or timeless existence of these characters. As a matter of fact, sectarian characters in Leskov's other works also seem to be legendary and supernatural. In his short story "Deathless Golovan," rumors in the village say that Golovan is an Old Believer or at least has a sectarian heritage. He is regarded as a "deathless" figure in his town, thanks to his miraculous treatments of the plague without ever being infected. In *The Cathedral Clergy*, the righteous men again do not die and appear "larger than life to those around him" (Ziolkowski, *Hagiography and Modern Russian Literature*, 180).

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<sup>156</sup> The narrator notes the anachronism without any hesitation or doubt: "She passed away after outliving five monarchs: Elizabeth, Peter, Catherine, Paul, and Alexander. And she danced with two of them at noblemen's balls" (60). The anachronism in this novel was deliberate, by design of the author.

<sup>157</sup> There are numerous other examples of Leskov's anachronisms that were tolerated by contemporary editors. See McLean and Eekman.

It is noteworthy that characters in the novel never seem to notice the presence of any anachronisms or archaic traditions of Muscovite *Rus'*. People around Marfa Andreyevna seem to have no idea about her age. Only the narrator notes her age and the reader is informed of her “deathless” existence. In a similar vein, the hagiographic tradition appears in the novel as unknown to the characters. Tuberozov has no idea about the hagiographic style in which he is writing his diary. He also cannot comprehend that the vision he has is Avvakum penetrating time. These motifs related to the past and the Old Belief remain external to characters’ conscious knowledge and their Old Town world. We may state that the Muscovite traditions and the Old Belief, despite the narrator’s recognition of their spiritual values, are artificial productions in the novel created by the writer and never become a part of the characters’ lives. Since the Muscovite tradition is presented in the novel as an anachronistic component of the people’s world, without ever being noticed by the characters, they are not backward, as Wigzell claims, but in my view, completely irrelevant to the people and detached from their lives in the Old Town in the 1860s.

This disconnection between the sectarian virtue and the Old Town life is reinforced by Leskov’s lengthy descriptions of sectarian characters that frame them in static, timeless pictures. These timeless “images” of Old Believers seem to illustrate that these characters fail to connect with others in their society, despite their virtues and depths. One such example is Pizonsky’s appearance for the first time in this novel in his field. The narrator scrutinizes the seminarian Pizonsky, framed in this landscape:

A summer evening in Old Town. The sun had gone down long ago. The part of town situated on the high riverbank, with the cathedral's pointed cupolas towering overhead, was illuminated by pale glimmerings of moonlight (*utonulo v teploi mgle*), while the quiet section on the other side of the river lay wrapped in warm mist. From time to time solitary figures crossed the floating bridge that connected the two parts of Old Town. . . . On an island formed by the branches of the Turitsa River, where one could spot the bluish vegetable patch that belonged to a certain Konstantin Pizonsky, an ancient (*prestarelogo*) eccentric with a crooked nose and a smattering of seminary training (22).

Valentina Gebel' speaks positively of a "harmony" between Pizonsky and his surrounding landscape, arguing that the extended scenery of nature around the character completes and enriches Pizonsky's image.<sup>158</sup> Nonetheless, we should note that this picturesque landscape is observed by Natalya Nikolayevna, Tuberozov's wife, who sits on the windowsill. It seems that her window frames Pizonsky's figure in a painting and the painting hangs on her wall. Before she realizes the beauty of this picture, she was sleeping and dreaming of precisely the same scenery. Reality and fantasy seem to interweave, and the spiritual beauty of Pizonsky may in fact belong to a parallel world, not the immediate reality of the Old Town. Much like Natalya Nikolayevna, Tuberozov also observes Pizonsky in his field as if he were in a painting or were a vision:

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<sup>158</sup> Gebel' speaks of the prototype of Pizonsky in "Kotin Doilets and Platonida," another short piece from the Old Town series, whose harmony with the surrounding nature, passion, and events demonstrates an organic unity (180-81).

I gazed out at the vegetable patch of the semidestitute Pizonsky, which lay in full view before my window (*raskrytiu pered oknom moim*).... the newly ploughed, almost blue-black earth was basking (*nezhitsia*) in the morning sun with exceptional beauty and ... scrawny black birds in brilliant feather were walking along the furrows and fortifying their hungry bodies with fresh worms. Old Pizonsky himself, his bald pate gleaming in the sunshine, stood on the steps beside his seed frame, which was elevated on posts, and holding a cup of seeds in one hand, was burying the grains with the other, forming them pinch by pinch into the shape of a cross. . . . For me, this was all just like a vision (*tochno viden'e*). (34)

Impressed by the beauty of the philanthropist's soul ("Hallelujah, my lord!' I sang to myself in response, filled with rapture (*ot vostorga*) and moved (*umilenno*) to tears" (35)), Tuberozov calls this scenery a vision (*viden'e*). The image that characterizes Pizonsky is portrayed in the novel as an antique on the wall, an episode in a dream, or a vision, which always ruptures of the narration of the story.

It is noteworthy that the Father's "vision" of the beautiful soul of Pizonsky is never recognized in a similarly positive way by the crowd of Old Town people. After this epiphany, he intends to tell all the people in his town about the greatness of Pizonsky in public on the Feast Day of the Transfiguration. In front of all the villagers in the Orthodox town, he makes the comment that the sectarian "performed that greatest act of

human charity” because he was able “to warm the defenseless bodies of little children and to plant in their souls the seeds of good (*nasazhdat’ v dushi ikh semena dobra*)” (ibid.). Nevertheless, as Tuberozov starts this speech, Pizonsky disappears from the church, as if he evaporated in the crowd. Although Pizonsky leaves out of humility and modesty, it is possible that much like Tuberozov’s diary in a glass house, the holy virtue of the sectarian is too fragile to be revealed and too sensitive to be disturbed. Noticing his departure, the Father suddenly feels a “sharp pain piercing [his] soul, along with a shortness of breath” (36). Such a feeling of loss indicates his despair at his failure to spread his religious message to the Old Town residents. As we learn from the narrator, Tuberozov’s enthusiasm about the sectarian results in no spiritual regeneration among the people, but invites hypocritical criticism from dogmatic Church officials. It is possible that Leskov uses the static pictures of Pizonsky to indicate that beautiful and virtuous sectarians are uninfluential and unnoticed in the radical world of the Old Town.

Another digression on the deacon Akhilla and the eccentric Pizonsky bathing in the river functions in a similar way. As in the episode of Pizonsky’s first appearance in the novel, the narrator places Tuberozov beside the same windowsill where his wife used to sit, also taking a nap. Pizonsky in the river is again framed by Tuberozov’s window, as if he were featured in a painting hanging on his wall. Even the narrator defines this Edenic landscape as a “genre painting (*peizazh i zhanr*) [that] embodied the simplicity of Old Town life” (86). He calls upon the reader to appreciate the beauty of this scene on “stage” (“Let us watch this scene (*posmotrim na etu stsenu*)” (85)). Pizonsky also serves as the



mouthpiece of the narrator, seeing the scenery around him as a painting, a vision, a utopian world:

it's like we are sitting in Paradise (*sidim kak v raiu*). We're naked ourselves, and we behold beauty: we see woods, we see hills, we see churches, waters, vegetation. Broods of ducklings are cheeping over there by the bank; a whole school of little fish are playing over yonder. What power hath the Lord! (88-89)

As Sperrle claims, the bath scene is “a fantastic picture that has lost all ties to the outside world” (*The Organic Worldview*, 123). In this timeless description of a paradise, these characters resemble legendary heroes and fantastic phantoms. The deacon is a “horseman,” an “epic hero” bathed in mist and sunlight. The district doctor is the “statue of the Commander in Pushkin’s play *The Stone Guest*” (84). These metaphors are out of place, but may be intended to portray the characters as supernatural figures distant and detached from reality.

The bath scene is indeed an ambivalent moment in the entire novel, because it serves as a turning point of the Old Town history: despite the celebrated beauty of the scenery in this lengthy digression, what we read following this episode is a series of misfortunes of the righteous characters associated with the Old Belief. This above description of the tranquility in the river not only reveals the portraits of the righteous people, but also introduces the images of the radical nihilists, since the two parties of characters are “heading from different directions toward one point” (84). Before Leskov “paints” the

portraits of Akhilla and Pizonsky, he already makes mention of the police official Porokhontsev and his cohort. The author mythologizes the radicals as well, claiming that Porokhontsev appears, at first glance, as “Old Town’s guardian spirit (*domovoi*),” “materializing out of (*vyplyla iz*) the dispersing mist, ... like an apparition (*kak privedenie*)” (82). While the supernatural image of the radicals may be explained as a sign of their strength and power (they soon assume authority and rule the Old Town), the Edenic vision of the Old Believers only indicates their detachment from reality.

The sectarian characters’ static portraits may also echo Leskov’s emphasis on Tuberozov’s childless family. Many critics claim that Tuberozov’s refusal to adopt children is a sign of his endurance. As an Avvakumian martyr, the Father may consider “the original grief ... pleasurable in itself” (McLean, *Nikolai Leskov*, 197). Nevertheless, we should note the Father’s disappointment at his own infertility. In his diary, he calls his wife’s false alert of pregnancy a “deception” or “April first.”<sup>159</sup> He equally mocks his own expectation of children or delusion of his family tree. As Wizgell puts it, Tuberozov should be evaluated as “an ineffectual latter-day Avvakum who would leave no descendants of any kind” (“Nikolai Leskov,” 116). The Father’s desire for a familial and generational bond cannot be satisfied, which perhaps indicates that the sterile couple’s house is another ambivalent static picture in this novel. Regardless of his spiritual potential and virtue, Tuberozov cannot establish a familial bond with offspring or pass down his legacy to young generations.

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<sup>159</sup> When Pizonsky’s son runs outside the window, Natalya Nikolayevna has the vision in her dream that a “running, laughing child was about to tumble into her lap” and she calls her vision “an illusion” (22).

With this emphasis on the Father's infertility, which prevents him from establishing a familial bond, Leskov implies all the other righteous people's "infertility." Marfa Andreyevna, at times playing the role of Leskov's mouthpiece, reminds Tuberozov that even the righteous people's "valor" will hardly solve conflicts in history. She claims that the people who have the courage and the virtue "just stood there like a snipe in a swamp," "keep lurching back and forth," and remain in "endless dilly-dallying" (47), without making progressions. The old lady depicts a gloomy vision of Russian history in eternal conflicts, due to the spiritual people's obscurity.

Thus, Leskov associates the righteous sectarian characters with numerous archaic motifs of the heroic Russian past—hagiography, Avvakum, Cossack folklore, fourteenth-century hermits, Boris and Gleb;<sup>160</sup> however, these motifs are portrayed as hardly an organic part of life in the decades of radicalism and barely capable of saving the Old Town from its fall. Leskov's portrayal of the Old Believers' virtue, as a result, differs from the idealizing depictions of hagiography and Old Belief by nineteenth-century intelligentsia. As Crummey notes in his chapter on the Vyg community leader and hagiographer Andrei Borisov, for instance, such a conservative Old Believer strived to defend the Old Faith in the language of Rousseau, the Enlightenment, and educated Russians, "far from living in a world of changelessness and isolation" (156). By contrast, the Leskovian characters associated with the Old Belief, their storytelling, diaries, and

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<sup>160</sup> Wigzell points out that the innocent and faithful deacon Akhilla is "cast in the heroic mould of the Russian bogatyr", with elements taken from the image of the ideal Cossack in Cossack folklore" ("Leskov's *Soboryane*," 905). She also claims that the less important righteous man in this novel, Father Zakhary, "owes ... to the meek hermits who endured sickness and isolation in the Russian forests of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries" (ibid., 904), which again brings into the novel the heroic past of old Russia. These characters symbolize Kievan princes, Boris and Gleb, holy fools, and other legendary Russian figures of humility.

teaching are portrayed as out of place and irrelevant to the disturbances in the here and now. Although critics usually argue that Leskov denies permanent truth and exclusive vision of truth, but depicts reality in an objective way, from many different angles,<sup>161</sup> one aspect of Leskov's "cubist" text in this novel<sup>162</sup>—the spirituality of sectarians and Muscovite Russia—does not qualify as an organic, productive, and vital component of the novel.

### **Two Extremes of the Sectarian Bond in *The Idiot***

This chapter continues to explore the sectarian characters' spiritual potential that is simultaneously recognized and criticized, in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. Dostoevsky's attitude toward the Old Believers is ambiguous, because he made little mention of them in his non-fiction writing. We know that he once called for a reunion of Old Believers and Orthodox believers in a commentary on peasant philosopher K. E. Golubov. This sectarian commoner's idea that "true freedom could be won only through adhering to the teachings of the Orthodox faith" (Frank, *The Mantle of the Prophet*, 345) was welcomed by Dostoevsky. Besides his recognition of Golubov's vision of harmony between Orthodoxy and Old Belief, Dostoevsky seldom mentioned the Old Believers' strength, even in his *Diary* in relation to his ideal of the Russian people's brotherhood. In his

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<sup>161</sup> See Sperrle, "Narrative Structure," where she calls this Leskovian style a unique "polyphony" or "cubism." Leskov portrays diverging outlooks of reality in his microcosm of Russia by using a *skaz*-narrator, a chronicler, or a compiler of multiple characters' experiences. In this way, Leskov depicts various religious belief systems. Also see Eekman, "The Genesis of Leskov's 'Soborjane'." He identifies numerous ideological elements in the novel, including radical sects and political biases.

<sup>162</sup> See Sperrle, "Narrative Structure in Nikolai Leskov's 'Cathedral Folk.'" Sperrle describes the novel's unusual form as "polyphonic" and "cubist." She explores the function of the trifling incidents, the intersecting story lines, and the raw material of anecdotal episodes in this novel. They contribute to the writer's portrayal of the Old Town reality through a collection of secondhand descriptions, multi-layered observations, and separate "genre scenes."

fiction, similarly, the Old Believers are not unambiguous exemplars of Christian piety. As Gary Rosenshield puts it, the sectarians in *The House of the Dead* are portrayed as unattractive and proud, since their “religion, combining fanaticism with pride, is based more on the letter (*bukva*) than on the spirit” (“Religious Portraiture,” 594).

However, the most full-fledged character associated with the Old Belief is Rogozhin in *The Idiot*, whom scholars have identified with the Castrates and other sects. The house of the Rogozhins is located among residences and shops of the Castrates, which demonstrates their “close physical and spiritual proximity” to this sect through three generations, as Comer argues. Old Rogozhin, a successful merchant, wants to be considered a strict Old Believer (although he never stops visiting the Orthodox Church). Rogozhin may have inherited the Old Believer’s heritage, by continuing to live in his father’s house and even choosing the old man’s room as his bedroom. The family name “Rogozhin” also suggests his connection with the Rogozhskoe Cemetery in Moscow—a center of active priestly Old Believers, the Rogozhniki, since the late eighteenth century. Authorities of this Old Believer charitable sanctuary were usually lay merchants.<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, both Comer and Irene Masing-Delic emphasize the role played by Rogozhin’s knife as a “castrating knife” and liken his murderous act to the procedure of castration or the desire to purge the body. Thus, Rogozhin is associated with “a movement indigenous to the Russian people” (Comer, 87) and represents “the most extraordinary sects” (Masing-Delic, “The ‘Castrator,’” 99).

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<sup>163</sup> See Crummey, *Old Believers in a Changing World*, 109-110. The priestly Old Believers of the Rogozhskoe community followed the traditional Orthodox structure of bishops and priests and retained all sacraments of Orthodoxy. On the outskirts of Moscow, they set up blockades, hospitals, and private cemeteries to serve the sick and bury the poor, and the official Church had good reasons to believe they were converting the treated needy people to Old Belief.

Because of Rogozhin's violent and self-destructive personality, these critics claim that he shows scarce spirituality. Although Rogozhin's native religious instinct is rooted in the soil of Russia as "the only way out for those Russians caught up in the truly fanatical movements of atheism and Jesuitism," his murder ultimately demonstrates "the notable dangers of fanaticism, extremism and violence" inherent in the Old Beliefs (Comer, 87, 95). As Masing-Delic argues, the popular psyche of these people will only invite catastrophe, "marked by the *obosoblenie* (standing apart) that Dostoevsky feared as a threat to universality and *sobornost* '" ("The 'Castrator,'" 100-101). In this dark vision of apocalypse and disunity in the novel, Rogozhin has always been interpreted as the enforcer of evil violence and passion.

Another character associated with the Old Belief, Nastasya Filippovna, is also viewed as failing in any spiritual missions, because she is brutally destroyed by Rogozhin. The patronymic Filippovna may be associated with Filipp, the founder of the *Filippovtsy*. This sect was hostile to "the soul's imprisonment in the material world" (Heretz, 84) and propagated self-immolation. It is thus no wonder that Nastasya Filippovna detests the filth in her physical body and desires destruction by Rogozhin. At one stage, moreover, Nastasya Filippovna whips an officer. Since the flagellants usually called themselves the "orphans" and separated themselves from the fallen physical world by worshipping their female leader on their *korabl'* (ship), this heroine who whips a spiritually degraded man around her resembles such a female flagellant leader. Despite these motifs of spirituality that surround her, Dostoevsky again seems to deny her potential for resurrection.<sup>164</sup> He

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<sup>164</sup> Critics have noted that her name Nastasya, or Anastasia, means "resurrection" in Greek. Her family

portrays Nastasya Filippovna's death in a dark and static picture that lacks any signs of rebirth. Although Rogozhin and Nastasya Filippovna are not actually Old Believers, Dostoevsky's deliberate effort to associate both characters with sects underscores his message about the Old Believers' spirituality.

The double destructions of the two characters certainly darken the novel and demonstrate Dostoevsky's pessimism about their spirituality, as many critics argue. As Rosenshield states, Rogozhin and Nastasya Filippovna suffer either seclusion in a merchant house or imprisonment in a spoiled Eden, both confined in a predetermined destruction as the victim of their partner's sadism.<sup>165</sup> Nastasya Filippovna's decision to marry Rogozhin reflects her self-destructive mentality; Rogozhin may also foresee his murder of the woman, just as she predicts. Thus, Rogozhin's love for Nastasya Filippovna is frequently considered to be a vengeful (*miatezhnaia*) passion, as opposed to Myshkin's humble (*pokornoe*) compassion (Gatina; Johnson). As Anna Berman states, Myshkin's fraternal caring should be demarcated from Rogozhin's sensual passion. Based on the Old Believers' apocalyptic mentality and masochistic self-mortification, critics most frequently approach the couple's presence in the novel as the embodiments of disintegration and destruction.<sup>166</sup>

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name Barashkov means "lamb" in Russian. She in part embodies the image of Christ and should therefore show the potential for resurrection.

<sup>165</sup> Rosenshield argues that both characters "seem actively to court, and even rush toward, death. They derive a masochistic pleasure in the prospect not only of an end but of an early end: The waiting before the sentence seems far more unbearable to them than the sentence itself" ("Chaos, Apocalypse, the Laws of Nature," 883). Also see Curle, who points out that Nastasya Filippovna "foresaw that marriage with [Rogozhin] would be her death warrant" (95).

<sup>166</sup> "The seal of the age, death, the pale horse of the Apocalypse, is imprinted on every face," especially on Rogozhin's face pale as paper, and on Nastasya Filippovna's "bare foot, as though carved from white marble" (Rosenhield, "Chaos, Apocalypse, the Laws of Nature," 883). As Comer puts it, the sectarian man and woman simultaneously reach their bridal bed and death bed in the final scene of the novel.

While I agree that the novel illustrates the doomed fate and self-destructive pursuits of two characters associated with the sects, I will attempt to revise this unambiguous and reductive view of their relationship. Because Old Believers to a degree showed the longing for life, enlightenment, and mutual salvation, their positive spiritual strength must constantly counter these sectarians' dark desire for death and apocalypse. If the image of the Rogozhins' house is to be flipped to this positive side, it is a charitable institution—a hospital and a cemetery, just like the Rogozhskoe community on the outskirts of Moscow that sheltered the sick and memorialized the dead. The Christ trapped in the Rogozhins' house, much like Nastasya Filippovna's corpse, may in fact be lying in a holy sanctuary for future resurrection. In my view, Dostoevsky acknowledges the Old Believers' potential for both—a bonding brotherhood and predetermined destruction—and the tension between these two contrasting connotations of the sectarian couple's life is precisely the issue he tackles in his novel.<sup>167</sup>

To start with, I will demonstrate the spiritual connection between the two sectarian characters—one of the two extremes in the couple's intense dynamics in the novel. As numerous critics have examined, Rogozhin always has the potential for spirituality. Tat'iana Kasatkina argues that his house reminds us of a fifteenth-century Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Moscow.<sup>168</sup> Its exterior shape of a church and the green

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<sup>167</sup> Some optimistic interpretations of the sectarian couple can be found in Kasatkina's research. In her article on the Holbein painting's potential for resurrecting faith in its beholders, she argues that "within his novel, Dostoevsky accentuates oncoming death. But in the oncoming death of all three main characters shimmers a scarcely discernible glint of resurrection that extends, in a variety of ways, beyond the novel's boundaries" (90). Also see Burry, who finds the ending of the novel to be far from finalized. The three characters seem to expect a possible cycle of resurrection after the death of Nastasya Filippovna.

<sup>168</sup> Kasatkina argues that Rogozhin's house impresses Myshkin with the feeling of *deja vu* because it was Myshkin's ancestor (the one identified in Karamzin's *History*) who was building the Church of the



(frequently used as the color of Mother Earth in Dostoevsky's novels) curtain in his room seem to place the characters within the otherworld and a place of resurrection ("History in a Name"). The Rogozhin house, furthermore, functions as "a shrine for a dead Christ," where the dead body is cherished for the residual hope for a coming resurrection, as Richard Peace argues.<sup>169</sup> Kasatkina also affirms that Rogozhin's Holbein painting of Christ indicates his spiritual potential ("After Seeing the Original"). Old Believers were obsessed with Christ's Second Coming in a literal way, despite Christ's physical destruction. The Holbein painting functions in this way, inspiring Rogozhin's faith in the invisible and spiritual, in spite of the obvious absence of resurrection in Jesus' body in the painting.<sup>170</sup> As another critic points out, this graphic revelation of Christ, unlike verbal representation, leads in two opposite directions—disbelief and faith—and "contains both types of silences, that of a murderous nature and of Christ, whose dead, silent body offers the promise of resurrection" (Spektor, 572). Many other critics acknowledge Rogozhin's occasional compassion and predict his spiritual

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Dormition in the fifteenth century, which soon collapsed. Rogozhin is, according to her theory, about to "complete the construction that Myshkin's ancestor left unfinished. And he will bring the prince to contemplate the work when it is done" ("History in a Name," 152).

<sup>169</sup> At the same time, more critics, for instance, Masing-Delic, find this painting implicative of Rogozhin's literal and profane interpretation of Christ's death.

<sup>170</sup> The painting, according to Kasatkina's 2011 article, can inspire one to believe *in spite of* the obvious. And such belief in what seems invisible and absent is the type of faith that Dostoevsky promotes in this novel.

rehabilitation.<sup>171</sup> Rogozhin's merchant identity, in addition, makes him a companion of the Russian people in Myshkin's anecdotes<sup>172</sup> and possibly a man of faith.

What is lacking in these criticisms, however, is the solid proof of Rogozhin's desire for spiritual resurrection. The Castrator's active efforts in his spiritual transformation, in my view, can be discerned from his attitude toward his relationship with Nastasya Filippovna. First, we should note that Rogozhin is afraid of physical death and its finalizing power. Even though Donna Tussing Orwin is correct that Rogozhin "lives a full 'unmediated' life" ("The Return to Nature," 96), we should note that as Ippolit claims, Rogozhin "himself might not be so far from [his] 'ultimate conviction' as it seemed" (406). From the very beginning of the novel, Rogozhin appears satisfied, vital, and at the same time tortured, devitalized, "to the point of suffering (*do stradaniia*)" (1), much like Ippolit. Since Ippolit is one of the characters condemned to death, Rogozhin may be a double of such figures, sharing their fear of death.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> For instance, Rogozhin promises to leave Nastasya Filippovna to the prince (Gatina). Also, his two burning eyes penetrating others' souls indicate that he is concerned with something spiritual (Young). Knapp finds the narrator's silence and brevity in his final words on Myshkin's maternal compassion to imply that "Myshkin could be sowing in Rogozhin's heart seeds of his future repentance, which could bear fruit as Rogozhin learns patience in prison camp in Siberia" (331).

<sup>172</sup> Rogozhin identifies with both the Christ-seller soldier (by wearing his cross) and the peasant murderer (by joking with Myshkin about murder for a watch). Also see Peace for Rogozhin's self-identification as one of the people.

<sup>173</sup> Critics usually highlight opposing characters in *The Idiot*, such as Rogozhin and Nastasya Filippovna, Rogozhin and Myshkin, Nastasya Filippovna and Aglaya. Nevertheless, Dostoevsky is famous for portraying characters as doubles who share certain features in common. (The Karamazov brothers' demonic personalities are generic. Ivan Karamazov is doubled by his illegitimate brother Smerdyakov. Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov are also doubles. Both worship Schillerism, admire beauty, and attempt to transgress.)

It is only natural that in *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky also portrays doubling protagonists. Ippolit, a sick and dying young man, is apparently a double of the condemned man. When he decides to read his confession, "he could not have turned more pale if a death sentence had been read to him" (384). Rogozhin is in part associated with the condemned Ippolit. As Burry claims, "[t]he predictions by several characters that Rogozhin will murder Nastasya Filippovna reinforce the novel's pervasive atmosphere of condemnation to death, as do Ippolit's references to his consumption as a death sentence" (257).

More direct connections between Rogozhin and the condemned men, moreover, can be found in the way Dostoevsky describes a prisoner about to be executed, in Myshkin's monologue in front of the Epanchin daughters: "[a]t the foot of the stairway he was very pale, but when he went up and stood on the scaffold, he suddenly turned white as paper, absolutely white as a sheet of writing paper (*belaia pishchaia bumaga*)" (65). The prisoner suffers from the natural laws of mortality.<sup>174</sup> In a similar way, the novel opens with a depiction of Rogozhin's "deathly pallor (*mertvaia blednost'*)" (1), somehow grouping him with the men to be executed. (It is not by accident that Dostoevsky also portrays Nikolka the Runner in *Crime and Punishment* as a man featuring "deathly pallor on his face, as though he were being led out to execution" (351).)

Although one may argue that, because almost all characters are portrayed as pale in Dostoevsky's fiction, Rogozhin's pallor is not enough to connect him to the larger theme of humanity's fear of mortality. It should be further noted, however, that Rogozhin's portrait resembles those of the prisoners in other aspects. Rogozhin is introduced in the opening of the novel to be "about twenty-seven years old," featuring a robust build (*krepkoe slozhenie*)" (1) similar to the political prisoner, "dying at the age of twenty-seven, *healthy and strong*" (60; italics mine). In France, Myshkin witnesses an execution of another pale and strong prisoner. In the picture he suggests Adelaida paint, the condemned figure is again "a strong and manly (*sil'nyi i muzhestvennyi*) fellow" (64).<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> As Leatherbarrow argues, when the prince writes on General Epanchin's white paper, he is writing "on to the unfortunate convict's face his own feelings as a man condemned not by law, but by nature" (7).

<sup>175</sup> This strong prisoner is "a great villain (*bol'shoi zlodei*)" (64), and his vicious personality echoes that of Rogozhin.

With these parallels, Dostoevsky may have modeled Rogozhin on the portraits of the prisoners, as someone afflicted by the horror of mortality.

Rogozhin not only doubles these prisoners who are about to be executed, but is also associated with a central “condemned” figure in the novel—the Christ in Holbein’s painting. It is noteworthy that Myshkin urges Adelaida to paint a face that he claims that he has seen in a petrifying painting in Basel. If this painting hangs in Basel, it is obvious that Myshkin here can only be referring to Hans Holbein’s *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb*, which Dostoevsky carefully examined in Basel. Thus, Adelaida is about to paint a condemned man who is a villain and whose face resembles that of Holbein’s Christ. Rogozhin and Christ, two seemingly distant figures, may be connected through this painting. At the very least, Rogozhin worships Holbein’s painting, because this piece is a coffin-like symbol that features a “lack of opening,” in which “[t]he sacred is entrapped by the profane” (Cicovacki, 198). Since a Castrate, a member of the Old Believers, should be sensitive to death, apocalypse, and the approaching Day of Judgment, Rogozhin perhaps sees his own fate in the physical body in this painting, shudders at the finalizing power of physical destruction, and experiences precisely the same torment by death.

This parallel between Rogozhin and the condemned figures, including Holbein’s Christ, sheds light on Rogozhin’s stance on the possibility of spiritual regeneration. Although one may argue that Rogozhin is deprived of the ability to pursue resurrection and spirituality, since he shares Ippolit’s weakness in the face of the tarantula and his

indifference to the icon beside a candle,<sup>176</sup> the Christ in Holbein painting is at the same time the central icon in the novel that may still counter the force of nature and illuminate Rogozhin's soul (Kasatkina). Right after viewing this painting, Rogozhin asks Myshkin, "do you believe in God or not" (218). Although he immediately confesses that he is under the influence of the Holbein painting's power to deprive him of faith ("Lose it [faith] he does," as Rogozhin admits), he obviously has been troubled by the answer he read out of the painting for a long time and may desire to seek an alternative to it from Myshkin. This intention may be reaffirmed by Rogozhin's attempt to demarcate his views from Ippolit's. When Ippolit visits with his piece on atheism—"Necessary Explanation," Rogozhin is not particularly welcoming. (Ippolit recalls: "he quite simply led me out of his gloomy house on the pretext of politely seeing me off" (407).) Rogozhin treats Ippolit even more indifferently when the latter claims that they co-authored his nihilistic article: "[t]o this [Rogozhin] responded with a very sullen and sour grimace" (ibid.). Rogozhin's indifference may have many reasons. He does not approve Ippolit's desperate protest against the finalizing power, the injustice, and the brutality of death in public. However, one possible explanation is that Rogozhin disagrees with Ippolit's nihilistic ideas about physical death in the latter's "ultimate conviction." Although critics have found Rogozhin's violence of quietism in this episode to echo Ippolit's "absence of spirituality" (Spektor, 558), it makes more sense to argue the opposite. Unlike Ippolit, he still expects that there may be spiritual resurrection after physical death.

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<sup>176</sup> See Ollivier, who argues that Ippolit's dream overlaps with Rogozhin's visit, during which both characters choose to believe in the tarantula instead of the icon beside it. Both "neither contemplate the icon nor pray before it and it has no effect on them" (59).

Any condemned men—the political prisoner, the crucified Christ, or Rogozhin—may hope for spiritual resurrection, as Dostoevsky’s biography tells us. Dostoevsky was once a condemned and “resurrected” man at the age of twenty eight. He claimed that he felt hope, strength, and faith in spirituality when he was changed into white tunics and sentenced to death. In his letter to his brother Mikhail, he wrote about a vital feeling, precisely at the peak of his fear of the execution, that he wanted to love and embrace life. “It is a consolation; I experienced it today, saying goodbye in the face of death to those who were dear to me.”<sup>177</sup> Dostoevsky would hardly finalize any condemned figures, even Rogozhin, or degrade them into two-dimensional nihilists or disbelievers.

Now that we have evidence to interpret Rogozhin as a potential believer, for our purposes, we should now turn to his courtship of Nastasya Filippovna, which, in my view, further encourages the condemned man to pursue life and resurrection. To start with, his involvement with Nastasya Filippovna somehow is interwoven with his sensation of death and destruction. After seeing Nastasya Filippovna for the first time in his life, he goes home “like a cursed man (*okaiannyi*),” as the narrator puts it (13). (Rogozhin claims—“why didn’t I die right then! If I went at all, it was only because I thought, ‘Anyway I won’t come back alive’” (13)). As Alexander Burry argues, Rogozhin’s conflicts with his father over the issue of Nastasya Filippovna “set off a cycle of destructive drinking sprees followed by recovery periods” and echo many other traumatic narratives of the condemned men (265). After his fight with his father Rogozhin spends a

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<sup>177</sup> As quoted in Coulson, 58. In this letter, Dostoevsky reflected on how much time and life he had wasted. He suddenly realized in a consolation that life is beauty, happiness, and gift.

couple of months in fever and delirium. When he is reminded that “the deceased would have hounded [him] into the next world,” he turns paler (*blednee*), just like a dead man.

If Nastasya Filippovna treats Rogozhin indifferently, he further resembles the condemned men in their hopeless situations. For instance, Rogozhin could not fall asleep after meeting the haughty woman for the first time. When he rushes around to gather the money for “purchasing” her, he does not sleep for forty-eight hours. After beating her, he stays up all night to ask for her forgiveness. These episodes echo similar scenes of the condemned men’s insomnia: in Myshkin’s suggested narrative for Adelaida’s painting the prisoner wakes up at five in the morning; Dostoevsky reported that he woke up at four or five in Petropavlovsky Fortress in the months before his sham execution;<sup>178</sup> when Ippolit reads his “Explanation,” his listeners “did not sleep all night” (405); most passengers on the train in the opening scene, trapped in the apocalyptic transportation, are also sleepy, devitalized, and death-like. The motif of insomnia connects Rogozhin with the condemned man. Rogozhin’s image also coincides with that of a man sentenced to death when Nastasya Filippovna decisively rejects him. When he heard the rumor that she had an affair with another man, “his lips even turned pale (*pobledneli*) and trembled” (12). When she was to marry Ganya, Rogozhin “turned so pale that his lips even became blue (*posineli*)” (112). In the same episode:

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<sup>178</sup> Dostoevsky wrote in his letter that “I sleep about five hours out of the twenty-four, and wake up four or five times every night. . . . Sometimes I don’t get to sleep until one or two o’clock in the morning, which makes those five hours of darkness very difficult to bear” (Coulson, 52).

“So it’s true!” he said quietly and as if to himself, with a completely lost look . . . . He even gasped for air (*zadykhalsia*), he even had difficulty speaking. He was advancing mechanically (*mashinal’no*) into the drawing room. (ibid.)

When Rogozhin visits Nastasya Filippovna with the money that may alter her decision to marry, the narrator portrays him with similar motifs:

He turned pale and stopped for a moment; one could surmise that his heart was pounding terribly (*bilos’ uzhasno*). Timidly and like a lost man (*robko i poterianno*) he gazed at Nastasya Filippovna for several seconds, not taking his eyes off her. Suddenly, as if he had lost all reason (*poteriyav ves’ rassudok*) and nearly staggering (*chut’ ne shataias’*) he went up to the table. (159)

Rogozhin experiences difficulty breathing, speaking, and staggers, the symptoms of which are shared by the man about to die in Adelaida’s painting:

he’d begin to listen [to the priest] and after three words lose all understanding. . . . Finally, he started up the stairway; his legs were bound (*pereviazany*), so he could only take small steps. . . . Probably his legs went weak and numb (*slabeli i dereveneli*), and he felt nauseous (*toshnota*)—as if something was pressing his throat. (65)



Rogozhin loses consciousness, barely steps forward, and cannot make a sound, much like the prisoner to be executed. When Nastasya Filippovna was about to announce her decision, or his sentence, he “stood without saying a word, his arms hanging down, as if awaiting his sentence” (160). The writer clearly establishes this parallel when he describes the way that Rogozhin asks for Nastasya Filippovna’s final decision, “like a lost man, as if addressing some sort of divinity, but with the boldness of a man condemned to death (*prigovorennogo k kazni*), who has nothing more to lose. In *deathly* anguish (*V smertnoi toske*) he waited for the answer” (114; italics mine).

As a result, Nastasya Filippovna somehow becomes the condemned Rogozhin’s salvation. Rogozhin needed to amass money for his “purchase” of Nastasya Filippovna and this “one thing remained constantly in view for him, in his memory and in his heart, every minute, every moment. For this *one thing* he had spent the whole time. . . in boundless anguish and anxiety” (158). His focus on this “one thing” reminds us of the “constant thought” that afflicts the political prisoner: “he said that nothing was more oppressive for him at that moment than the *constant* thought: ‘What if I were not to die! What if life were given back to me—what infinity!’” (61; italics mine). This parallel may also indicate that Nastasya Filippovna’s acceptance of Rogozhin returns his life to him.

As we know, while the other philistines in his gang voyeuristically stare at her magnificent apartment and insultingly mock her promiscuity, Rogozhin alone seems to appreciate her priceless paintings, statues, and furniture without scorn, as if he had entered the palace of a queen. (“On Rogozhin himself Nastasya Filippovna’s drawing room made the opposite impression from that of all his companions” (159).) He gazes at

her “as the door curtain was raised” in her palatial drawing room (ibid.), looks at her from below in the Bolshoi Theater, and sends her huge diamonds as a tribute for a goddess.<sup>179</sup> Addressed by Rogozhin as his “joy (*radost*)” and “queen (*koroleva*),” Nastasya Filippovna seems to almost become an embodiment of “divinity (*bozhestvu kakomu-to*)” (171) in the eyes of Rogozhin.

Given Nastasya Filippovna’s unlimited power over Rogozhin, I would argue that the marital union madly desired by the condemned man seems to him to be his chance at spiritual resurrection. When Rogozhin competed with Ganya, he “caught himself and gave a sudden start under the flashing eyes (*pod zasverkavshim vzgliadom*) of Nastasya Filippovna” (114-15). When she burned his money, “Rogozhin himself had turned into one fixed gaze. He could not turn it from (*otorvat’sia ne mog ot*) Nastasya Filippovna, he was reveling (*upivalsia*), he was in seventh heaven (*na sed’mom nebe*)” (173). These phrases such as “could not turn away from” or “seventh heaven” seem to be out of place in the context of a scandal. However, the exaggerated depictions and verbal choices echo those used by narrator to describe the condemned man and his struggle with the divinity. Myshkin’s political prisoner (the one who is later released) gazes at a church in the distance and senses his regeneration:

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<sup>179</sup> As we know, in the first plans of the novel, Dostoevsky intended to create the hero Idiot as a villain who resembles Rogozhin. “[T]he heroine sees him as despicable and as he fears to be,” as Wasiolek puts it in his commentaries on Dostoevsky’s *Notebooks for the “The Idiot”* (90). It seems that the hierarchical relationship between them does not change much from the early plans: Rogozhin loathes himself for being an evil moneylender, worships Nastasya Filippovna as “no match for [him] (*ne tebe cheta*)” (12), and desires a union with a princess from the high circle.

There was a church nearby, and the top of the cathedral with its gilded dome shone in the bright sun (*sverkala na iarkom solntse*). He remembered gazing with terrible fixity at that dome and the rays shining from it (*otorvat'sia ne mog ot lucei*): it seemed to him that those rays were his new nature (*ego novaia priroda*) and in three minutes he would somehow merge with them (*sol'etsia s nimi*). (61)

Both the sun on the church and the eyes of the woman shine (*sverkat'*) from above and attract the condemned figures—the political prisoner and the desperate Rogozhin. Rogozhin also stares at this woman in the same way that the dying man gazes at the light of the other world. Upon Nastasya Filippovna's rejection of another man and his regaining of a chance at marrying her, Rogozhin revels “in seventh heaven” because he acquires his “new self” and envisions his spiritual life.

The connection between the two sectarians, moreover, reflects not merely the endeavor of Rogozhin but also the reciprocation of Nastasya Filippovna. Admittedly, to the knowledge of the couple, it is this woman's self-deprecation that drives her toward Rogozhin, whose knife is, as they both put it, even more horrifying than the river she can jump into and commit suicide. On the surface, her inclination to marry Rogozhin is a result of her reluctance to destroy a saintly man—Myshkin—and her desire to punish herself by joining a sinful man—Rogozhin, as mentioned above. However, besides this dark motivation, we should note her entirely voluntary decision to marry Rogozhin: she chooses Rogozhin on her own, in order to escape from Myshkin's compassion. As

Murray Krieger argues, Myshkin's refusal to acknowledge Nastasya Filippovna's sin constantly demands her purity and virginity, which she cannot possess. Because his demand exacerbates her self-deprecation and further contributes to her misery, she senses that marriage with Myshkin would be unhappy.<sup>180</sup> Thus, she voluntarily rejoins Rogozhin after abandoning Myshkin for Rogozhin's recognition of her as who she is and his provision of a spiritual shelter for her. It is possible that she regards Rogozhin not entirely as a dangerous man who will violate her life but also as someone she needs.

Nastasya Filippovna obviously has the power to purge other people's souls, even if unwittingly, which may further confirm the possibility that she approaches Rogozhin with spiritual and brotherly intentions. Scholarship usually neglects Nastasya Filippovna's spiritual influence on other people.<sup>181</sup> However, when she burns Ganya's money she touches his soul. As the writer describes, "She stood right by the fireplace and waited, not tearing her burning (*ognennogo*), intent gaze from [Ganya]" (172). Her purpose is to "look at [Ganya's] soul for the last time" (171) and her action motivates him to resist his materialistic desire ("something new had arisen in his soul; it was as if he had sworn to endure the torture" (172)). When she appears in the crowd on her wedding day, her eyes also have a positive influence on the crowd. They "flashed at the crowd like burning coal; it was this gaze that the crowd could not bear; indignation turned into

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<sup>180</sup> Also see Spektor, who argues that Myshkin's "insistence that 'she's not like that' creates an irresolvable tension in her that persists as long as she is alive" (564). Also see Stepanian, who argues that unlike a Christ figure, who "treats sin as sin," Myshkin's excessive compassion "send[s] Nastasya Filippovna into a dead-end struggle between self-flagellation and self-assertion" (178).

<sup>181</sup> For instance, Johnson focuses on Myshkin as Rogozhin's religious mentor and Nastasya Filippovna as his evil temptress. Also see Masing-Delic, who admits the heroine's effort to "civilize" Rogozhin, but claims the female flagellant only encourages Rogozhin's self-mortification, which ultimately takes the form of violent castration. She argues that Nastasya Filippovna's "propensity for flagellation" (112) and dangerous literalism stimulates Rogozhin's fixation on "the purity of the body, as well as on what can be done to it" and such "irrational self-punishment in the Russian mentality... invites catastrophe" (112).

enthusiastic shouts” (593). People’s low profanity turns into a spontaneous exclamation. Her eyes like coal further remind us of Ippolit’s burning lamp. Ippolit mentions that “a little lamp (*lampadku*) is always lighted (*zazhigaiut*) before the icon at night . . . you can see everything, and close to the lamp you can even read” (409). It accompanies his reading and shines on the icon. For Dostoevsky, fire in light may serve a reader’s spiritual resurrection. (In 1849, he experienced this enlightening power of fire in a candle, when he sat in his death cell. He called the fire his happiness and asked his brother to send him a Bible (Coulson, 53).) Like the lamps that light up Ippolit’s last days and Dostoevsky’s death cell, Nastasya Filippovna’s fire may direct one to icon, Bible, faith, and spirituality.

As if she were his light or lamp, Nastasya Filippovna instructs Rogozhin to read. She offers Rogozhin a list of books. “You ought to edify (*obrazil*) yourself at least somehow, at least read Solovyov’s *Russian History*” (214). Her intention to *obrazit* Rogozhin, in my view, is hardly less spiritual than Myshkin’s effort to draw Rogozhin’s *obraz* (face) to light.<sup>182</sup> As Harriet Murav notes, since *obraz* is related to icon, the tradition of icon-painting, and man’s divine image modeled after God, it refers to the sacred image of man that Dostoevsky believes the Russian people will be able to restore in their spiritual lives (130-32). Nastasya Filippovna’s attempt to “edify” Rogozhin exactly implies such endeavor to resurrect the *obraz* of man in Rogozhin’s *rozha* (mug). Given that Rogozhin is not indifferent to knowledge,<sup>183</sup> Nastasya Filippovna is at one point “convinced that

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<sup>182</sup> See Johnson for Myshkin’s function in this novel as a character who pulls another’s face (*obraz*) in darkness back to light.

<sup>183</sup> In his first conversation with Myshkin, for example, he is interested in what the prince has studied with his professor abroad.

there are virtues in [Rogozhin] as well” (211). Her recognition makes Rogozhin feel alive again, as he later confesses to Myshkin. The reading activity to a degree demonstrates their equal relationship and spiritual communication.

Many other symbols and motifs illustrate Nastasya Filippovna’s image as light and lamp that may alter Rogozhin’s isolation and darkness. As we know, the Old Believer’s house of the Rogozhins features a physiognomy that strangely resembles Rogozhin’s personality. “Your house has the physiognomy of your whole family and of your whole Rogozhin life” (207), as Myshkin notes. The house is “sturdily built (*prochno*), with thick walls (*tolstymi stenami*) and extremely few windows; the ground-floor windows sometimes have grilles (*s reshetkami*) .... everything is somehow inhospitable (*negostepriimno*) and dry (*sukho*), everything seems to hide and conceal itself” (204). Perhaps Rogozhin “sit[s] in such gloom” (207) in this house and awaits illumination. The bundle of a hundred thousand rubles is also a symbol of Rogozhin’s personality. Just like the “strange object (*strannyi predmet*) . . . wrapped firmly and closely (*kreple i plotno zavernutaia*) in *The Stock Market Gazette*, and tied very tightly on all sides (*tugo-natugo so vsekh storon*) and twice crisscross with the kind of string used for tying sugar loaves” (159-60), Rogozhin is stubbornly introverted and his body is penetrated by material or physical desire.<sup>184</sup> At the same time, Nastasya Filippovna intrudes into Rogozhin’s house, burns his bundle of money, and peels off its hard cover. (Shuddering at the dark and sturdy furniture of old Rogozhin, she announces that she will renovate the house or even move him out to a new house when they marry, although the presence of Rogozhin’s old

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<sup>184</sup> Much like the packet that wraps money inside, Rogozhin stuffs money inside his pockets (he even intends to wrap the prince in expensive clothes and stuff his pockets with money).

mother seems to entice her to stay.) In a symbolic way, she perhaps peels off Rogozhin's protection and reveals his soul. In their relationship, one desires spiritual regeneration and the other facilitates enlightenment and revelation.

Last but not least, the two characters' romantic bond may exceed an erotic courtship and function as a spiritual connection, also in keeping with their sectarian identities. In history, women were famously selected as the successors of Avvakum.<sup>185</sup> As mentioned above, the *khlysty* also elected women as the leaders of each *korabl'* populated by fellow believers. A flagellant woman thus was naturally expected by Old Believers to resurrect and purge others. At the same time, as a child raised by a stoic Old Believer in this house, Rogozhin may be consciously aware that women can transform others spiritually and build up religious brotherhood. When he first learns of Nastasya Filippovna, she is introduced as "a princess . . . called Nastasya Filippovna, family name Barashkov" (12-13). He is attracted by her high status as a queen figure, her family name that implies the resurrection of Christ, and her patronymic that marks her sectarian identity. For the Old Believer's son who falls in love instantly without knowing her scandal and sexuality, she may potentially represent the esteemed flagellant, the elected woman who resurrects the orphaned believers' souls.

Nastasya Filippovna's association with the flagellant on the Old Believers' *korabl'* may further explain her battle against Rogozhin's erotic desire. One may claim that

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<sup>185</sup> Many women followed the call of martyrdom, traditional Orthodox beliefs, and Schism. They risked state persecution and their own lives when they rebelled against the state's ecclesiastical reform. For instance, Boyarina and Evdokiia Morozova, Matrena and Sten'ka Razin rose against the state to support the spirit of Archpriest Avvakum (Worobec, "Accommodation and Resistance," 28). Especially valuing female martyrs who were inferior in other religious beliefs, the Old Belief emerged as "an unheralded emancipatory and egalitarian social practice" (Humphrey, 218).

Nastasya Filippovna's dark hair, clothes, and eyes are premonitions of men's passionate destruction. Nonetheless, compared to most fallen women in nineteenth-century literature, she is not portrayed as a victim of masculine and voyeuristic narrative. Her image "does not feel or arouse desire" and is almost desexualized (Dalton, 91).<sup>186</sup> What is more, she is hardly a woman of flesh and may never have consummated a carnal relationship with Rogozhin.<sup>187</sup> Instead of seducing Rogozhin, she cautions him that he should not "carry everything to the point of passion" (212). Convinced that Rogozhin is "not a lackey after all" (*ibid.*), she continues to encourage him: "You have strong passion, Parfyon Semyonovich, such passions as would have sent you flying to Siberia, to hard labor, if you weren't so intelligent, because you are very intelligent" (214). As Peace notes, this sexless relationship motivates Rogozhin's repentance and suffering, especially when he kneels before Nastasya Filippovna all night long without violating her. What the two accomplish, at the very least, is a "castration" of Rogozhin's desire.

Rogozhin's pursuit of Nastasya Filippovna does not necessarily reflect his conscious effort to become a spiritual man, and Nastasya Filippovna's intention to improve Rogozhin is even less deliberate, as both are aware of his brutality and her self-deprecation; yet, they may have unwittingly strived for a caring bond and a spiritual marriage within the short period of time they spend together. Now that the evidence of a bonding relationship becomes clear, I turn to the other extreme of the sectarian couple's relationship—their predetermined disunity. Despite Dostoevsky's optimistic message

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<sup>186</sup> Also see Straus, who claims that Nastasya Filippovna is portrayed as a sexless corpse that is neither fetishized nor gendered. She is different from most sexualized and eroticized heroines in Russian literature.

<sup>187</sup> Nastasya Filippovna claims that there is no sexual intercourse between them. As Peace notes, "Rogozhin is strongly identified with the sect of the Castrates; so the notion that he represents sensual passion in the novel is, to say the least, bizarre" (85).



about the sectarian man and woman, the symbols of their spiritual bonding at the same time serve to underscore the failure and destruction of their relationship.

For instance, Nastasya Filippovna is recognized by Rogozhin's mother as his life partner. This scene is a moment of familial unity of three characters all related to the Old Believers. At the same time, however, this episode serves as a premonition of the murder. In the old woman's room, furniture is covered with white clothes and she sits between two doors. The layout reminds the reader of the layout of the room where Nastasya Filippovna's body lies. Another example is Nastasya Filippovna's image of light, which at the end of the novel nonetheless reveals the failure of their spiritual marriage. In the gloomy house, her corpse is surrounded by flowers, ribbons, and scattered diamonds on the ground. In total darkness without a lit candle, the prince has to step closer and closer to figure out the shape of Nastasya Filippovna covered with white oilcloths. It seems that her enlightening image is shattered into broken pieces and overwhelmed by darkness. The murderous weapon—Rogozhin's castrating knife that marks his sectarian identity—is another such double-edged motif in the novel. When the prince questions him about his knife, he asks Myshkin—"[c]an't you cut pages with a garden knife?" in reply. His annoyance at Myshkin's constant suspicion about the knife implies its ambivalent status as both a tool of reading and a violent weapon. On the one hand, as the knife of Eden placed between pages, it has served his task of reading, and thus, his penchant for education. As such, it implies that a life-generating bond between the couple has emerged.<sup>188</sup> On the other hand, the spiritual maturation and the organic relationship can

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<sup>188</sup> In her monograph on the Russian people, Ivanits notes that the knife is for reading, and thus may

be brutally interrupted by the same knife, a garden knife not for reading and a castrating knife that harms the body. The knife for edification is transformed into a weapon for castration and murder in the final scene of the novel.

Another motif that demonstrates such simultaneously regenerating and life-denying tension between the two sectarians is Rogozhin's cards. We know that Rogozhin plays cards with Nastasya Filippovna to cheer her up when they start a normal life in Petersburg. What is bizarre is that "Rogozhin himself always brought the cards in his pocket, a new deck every day, and then took them away with him" (601). One possible explanation of the implication of Rogozhin's cards can be based on Dostoevsky's roulette addiction.<sup>189</sup> The writer was pinning hopes on amassing money every time he sat down to gamble, although against his expectations these games only "reduced [his family] from poverty to destitution" (Coulson, 161).<sup>190</sup> As Peter J. Vernezze claims, the writer's gambling desire should be interpreted in relation to his fascination with irrationality. Since Rogozhin is one of the least rational protagonists, his behavior may thus be compared with his author's roulette gambling.<sup>191</sup> Just as Dostoevsky's addiction

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"serve to evoke Nastasya Filippovna's lost Eden" (103), a childhood surrounded by books.

<sup>189</sup> A few months before Dostoevsky started his work on *The Idiot*, he suffered from his intense gambling mania in Baden, having lost all his wife's pricy belongings and money he borrowed from contemporary intellectuals. His wife finally took him out of Baden to Geneva, as he was in a mental state of agitation. (Dalton).

For alternative explanation of the cards, we may also consider Blake's argument that various games of chance in Dostoevsky's fiction are associated with Catholic characters of western, Polish nationalities and thus, "the importation of dangerous Catholic political contaminants into his homeland" (82). In this view, Dostoevsky may portray Rogozhin's poker game in order to reveal Myshkin's failure in his Orthodox mission. His card games with Nastasya Filippovna do not last long before he finally disappoints the Orthodox prince, murders their beloved woman, and destroys their fallen Russia.

<sup>190</sup> As Dostoevsky wrote in his letters, "I went with the idea of winning something back, to increase our means if only by a trifle. I was so sure of a modest win. At first I lost a little, but when I began to lose...I lost still more ... lost everything, down to the last copeck" (Coulson, 159).

<sup>191</sup> Despite being the son of an Old Believer who amasses money, Rogozhin does not at all inherit his father's or his brother's calculating personality. Instead, squandering money and taking unplanned actions,

delivered him to his poverty at the end of each game (Frank, *The Miraculous Years*, 172), the couple's cards rupture their bonding at the end of each day. No matter how much progress they have made and how likely their spiritual brotherhood may seem, the two sectarian characters' spiritual union may fail at any moment. These symbols such as the doors, the light, the knife, and the poker imply that between the two sectarians, enlightenment fails to spread the seed of mutual caring and spiritual strength, ultimately pushing them toward destruction and disunity.

In this novel, the ambivalent "marriage" of the two sectarians further echoes the unstable bond between a barbarian Castrate and an Orthodox prince.<sup>192</sup> Myshkin and Rogozhin alternate between trust and distrust of each other. In Part Two, when Rogozhin opened his door, he "froze on the spot . . . as if he found something impossible and almost miraculous (*chudesnoe*) in the prince's visit" (205). At this moment, he is excited enough by Myshkin's sudden visit to even start believing in a miracle (*chudo*).<sup>193</sup> Nevertheless, when the prince expresses his expectation that Nastasya Filippovna may marry Rogozhin out of her respect for him, Rogozhin loses his trust of the prince. "His conviction [that he cannot establish any nonphysical relationship with Nastasya Filippovna] was already firmly established" (215).<sup>194</sup> What follows is that Rogozhin's hatred toward the prince drives him to follow Myshkin and assault him. If a spiritual

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he seems to be the mouthpiece of the irrational gambler.

<sup>192</sup> Also see Ivanits, who points out Dostoevsky's deliberate alignment of Myshkin and sectarian people in this novel (*Dostoevsky and the Russian People*, 91).

<sup>193</sup> As Kasatkina points out, words like "miraculous," "miracle," and "eccentric" in the first half of the novel have positive connotations and usually depict complete beauty (Kasatkina, "'Idiot' and 'Eccentric'"). In the beginning of this scene, Myshkin also recognizes Rogozhin as "not only a passionate soul; he's a fighter after all" (231).

<sup>194</sup> Krieger argues that Myshkin's meekness and respect for others destroy other characters' potential for transformation. "What is so destructive in him is the sense others must get from his infinite meekness that they are being judged" (48).

bond between the two protagonists ever emerges in this novel, it remains a temporary connection without developing into a durable bond.

This sudden emergence and disappearance of the brotherhood is symbolized by the ascent and descent of the two characters in Rogozhin's house. We see Rogozhin and Myshkin moving up and down along the stairways in this house. When they are located on the second floor, Myshkin narrates anecdotes about the people's faith and they discuss religion in front of the Holbein painting, which, according to Kasatkina, may inspire the viewers' belief in miracle and resurrection. The brothers also receive Rogozhin's mother's blessing and exchange crosses on the second floor ("[Myshkin] turned and went down the stairs. 'Lev Nikolaevich!' Parfyon cried from above, when the prince had reached the first landing. . . . The prince thought a little, went back up, and showed him the cross" (221)). Standing on the higher level of the house, they succeed in a temporary spiritual communication. However, on the lower floor Rogozhin questions man's spiritual life and his religious faith. ("'Lose it [faith] he does,' Rogozhin suddenly agreed unexpectedly. They had already reached the front door" (218).) It seems that Rogozhin's route in space features ups and downs that imply the disturbances in his spiritual condition. His temporary bonding with the Orthodox prince also fails to establish a durable brotherhood for him.

## **Conclusion**

The images of the sectarian characters in realist literature correspond to the image of the Old Believers in history. Since the mid-seventeenth century, the Old Believers had

continuously resisted modernity and struggled with a modernized Russia. Throughout the ages, they regarded Peter the Great and Patriarch Nikon as their archenemies. Their hatred toward materialism and westernization resulted in a prolonged political confrontation between the official Church and secular beliefs. The apocalyptic revelation that the Old Believers expected, thus, seemed to be postponed for centuries in the modernized post-Nikonian Imperial Russia. Their spiritual belief in a brotherly unity rooted in the tradition of old *Rus* ' seems infertile and fruitless in the Nikonian state.

As this chapter shows, such endurance, spirituality, and virtues of the sectarian people seemed to Leskov too fantastic and timeless to be productive. In *The Cathedral Clergy*, Leskovian characters who advocate an Avvakumian spirit and the Old Belief remain isolated from the outside world and the surrounding people. They fail to correct their contemporaries' radicalism or to unite with other virtuous people. In *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky traces a more complicated process by which Rogozhin and Nastasya Filippovna—two sectarian incarnates—may have experienced the spiritual need for a caring bond, but their fraternal connection is doomed to be aborted. The Castrate also intends to bond with an Orthodox character; yet, they finally “reunite” in an abyss—his dark house where his murder destroys the beautiful and suffering woman they both love. Such optimistic and pessimistic messages about the Old Believers alternate and dominate this novel. Numerous such ambivalent motifs seems to be already highlighted when the narrator portrays the way the day seems to light up, although with difficulty (*nasilu rassvelo*), in the opening scene of the novel. In the realist literature explored in this

chapter, we see two extremes of the sectarian characters' mentality—their spiritual exploration of a brotherly unity and their incapacity to retain a bonding relationship.

## Conclusion

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky associates Ivan Kramskoy's famous painting *The Contemplator* (1878) with the image of Smerdyakov. The novelist explores the mysterious and Janus-faced image of the contemplator, who "may suddenly, after hoarding impressions for many years, [abandon] everything and go off to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage for his soul's salvation, or perhaps he will suddenly set fire to his native village, and perhaps do both" (114). Smerdyakov, as the narrator claims, shares the ambivalence of the contemplator, since his personality vacillates between divinity and profanity, as Lee D. Johnson puts it.<sup>195</sup> Johnson interprets the unique condition of the human heart of Smerdyakov in relation to the contemplator's ambivalent soul in which "inner light struggles to come to the surface, to change him completely," yet, "his logical mind inexorably moves forward with his plans to assert his own godlike status through an act of parricide, which for him is inevitably linked with a form of philosophical deicide, and ultimately, with suicide" (83). Another critic, Vladimir Kantor, places Smerdyakov in the socio-economic context of the post-reform peasantry, and argues that the lackey's minimal education and newly acquired liberal status qualify him to be "a representative

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<sup>195</sup> Smerdyakov reveals a divine being in himself which, however, triggers him to rebel against God. The signs of Smerdyakov's divine image may include the folk songs he sings with a guitar, the epileptic disease he suffers from, and his similarities with some Skoptsy.

not simply of the people but of its most advanced and ever-growing subset”—the destroyers of the Russian peasants’ traditional values and Christian truth (“Whom Did the Devil Tempt,” 92).

The mystery of the contemplative Smerdyakov perhaps embraces most of the traits of the lower-class people explored in the current study—the drunkards, the Oblomovka serfs, the peasant women, and the Old Believers. Lost in his own thought and unconscious of the surrounding world, Smerdyakov reminds us of the stupefied drunkards. His conversion from complete devotion to religious pilgrimage to destructive action against his village may be viewed as a radical version of the peasants’ transformation from actors of idyllic rural culture into performers of dogmatic rituals. The contemplator’s nihilistic desire to destroy also resembles the peasant women’s vengeful impulses. His interest in launching his own business, amassing a huge amount of money, and “hoarding impressions” during his contemplation further echoes the penchant of the Rogozhins and the Old Believers. Just as Smerdyakov is never reached by Alyosha, Rogozhin is never rescued by Myshkin.<sup>196</sup> The Old Believer attempts to “hoard” physical evidence of belief in the way one amasses material fortune.

Critics usually pay attention to the misery of Smerdyakov, blaming the cold-blooded fathers and distanced brothers for the failure of the Karamazov brotherhood in this novel. As Anna Berman argues, Smerdyakov is judged to deserve no entry into the brotherhood, abandoned by his brothers—Ivan, Dmitri, and even Alyosha—“as the linchpin of the

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<sup>196</sup> For other parallels between Smerdyakov and the Old Believers, see Masing-Delic, *Exotic Moscow under Western Eyes*, 115. Just as Myshkin fails to reach Rogozhin, Alyosha abandons Smerdyakov. Smerdyakov’s adoption by Grigory the flagellant and his physiological traits of a eunuch further reinforce the impression that he may embody the heritage of sectarianism.



novel, the overlooked brother in a world based on forming lateral bonds” (128). Although I agree with the conventional understanding that the contemplator is the abandoned man and the rupture of the brotherhood, in this study, I also attempt to show the failures of the Smerdyakovs from within—the way the peasants violently disintegrate their brotherly unity.

Thus, my research is more focused on the destructive actions of Kramskoy’s contemplator and the suicidal impulses of the Smerdyakovs. As he admits in the crucial chapter “Smerdyakov with a Guitar,” his feeling toward the entire world in which he lives is pure hatred: “I am ready to burst with rage. I hate all Russia” (194). After his prolonged contemplation that perhaps started even in his childhood since his first exposure to the Old Testament, he decides to murder the father figure, destroy his familial heritage, and create fraternal conflicts.

By portraying such a peasant contemplator, Dostoevsky perhaps reveals his pessimism about the people’s faith. This pessimistic message is clearly articulated by Smerdyakov:

no one, from the highest person to the lowest peasant, sir, can shove mountains into the sea—except perhaps some one man in the world, or, at most, two, and they most likely are saving their souls in secret somewhere in the Egyptian desert, so you wouldn’t find them... (117)

As such, Smerdyakov summarizes the faith of the Russian masses in the Karamazov family circle. His comment that even if there are saints among the Russians, they are secluded and never to be found, delights Fyodor Pavlovich, who exclaims that “[t]he whole Russian man speaks here!” (ibid.). With Smerdyakov’s simultaneously affirmative and negative comment on the Russian people’s spirituality, Ivan also agrees, claiming that “it’s characteristic of the people’ faith” (117). Even Alyosha affirms that Smerdyakov’s comment that only two truly spiritual men live in the remote desert is a “purely Russian” idea. The contemplator, speaking on behalf of all the Karamazovs, claims that the scarce spiritual potential will hardly reach the masses of the Russian people, awaken them to their faith in God, or establish their spiritual unity.

For our purposes, Smerdyakov’s worldview may serve as a conclusive remark on the realist writers’ depictions of the Russian people, because it subverts the optimism about the Russian peasants’ spiritual depths and the myth of “folk Tsarism.” Most peasants’ acceptance of such ambiguous nineteenth-century terms as *narod* and Orthodox Christianity at most suggests that they “vaguely identified with other peasants in distant villages ... isolated and powerless as themselves” (Field, 15). Their tolerance of these terms that they did not clearly understand encouraged the intelligentsia’s belief in a myth that the Russian people form a submissive and patient entity. Thus, peasant Tsarism and peasant subordination to autocracy were merely “naïve monarchism,” a theory or a vision produced by Imperial officials, populists, and intelligentsia. In realist literature, which never necessitates that every single peasant is religious or spiritual in his soul, the

tragedies of the Smerdyakovs and the contemplators demonstrate that the people's brotherhood is no more than a myth.

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