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***The Idiot:* A Tragedy of Unforgiveness**

In characterizing *The Idiot* as a tragedy of unforgiveness, I am offering a new perspective on Nastasya Filippovna and the choices she faces throughout the novel, many of which hinge on Nastasya's ability to forgive her wrongdoers or herself or both. In her article on forgiveness for *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Kathryn Norlock writes "Forgiveness is a response to wrongdoing characterized by forswearing or overcoming the fullness of blame that one could otherwise justifiably hold against a wrongdoer".¹ While some philosophers view forgiveness primarily as an internal process "characterized by a change of heart or a choice to revise one's dispositions, beliefs, or attitudes toward the offender",² others see it primarily as a social practice "characterized by effecting of a morally significant consequence such as the release or relief of an offender".³ In the case of Nastasya Filippovna, forgiveness is primarily an internal process, one that requires that she overcome, on moral grounds, "the intense negative reactive attitudes – the vindictive passions of resentment, anger, hatred, and the desire for revenge – that are quite naturally occasioned when one has been wronged by another responsible agent".⁴

The Idiot's main action pivots around Nastasya Filippovna, whose guardian, Afanasy Totsky, abused her when she was younger and now wants to marry elsewhere. As the narrator makes clear, Nastasya Filippovna hates not only Totsky, but herself. The question posed throughout Part One is what will she do? Will she follow Totsky's script and marry Ganya Ivolgin? Or will she act as

1 Kathryn J. NORLOCK, "Forgiveness", in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2020), www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/forgiveness/v-1

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 Jeffrie G. MURPHY, *Punishment and the Moral Emotions: Essays in Law, Morality, and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 6. Dostoevsky's novel engages two burning questions of the time – who is to blame? and what is to be done? – the titles of two widely read novels: Alexander Herzen's *Who Is To Blame?* (1846) and Nicholas Chernyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done?* (1863).

Totsky fears and respond with resentment, anger, hatred, and the desire for revenge? The arrival of Parfen Rogozhin and Prince Myshkin, two more contenders for her hand, foreground the question of whether she can forgive and be forgiven. Even if she cannot forgive the man who wronged her, can she forgive herself? Will she act from the goodness of her heart or react to the wrongs done her? While the novel's drama of unforgiveness centers around Nastasya Filippovna,⁵ who vacillates between self-hatred and the desire to be redeemed, it touches most other characters, as the theme of forgiveness pervades the novel. Throughout *The Idiot*, forgiveness is positively associated with kindness, understanding, repentance, and resurrection and negatively associated with anger, hatred, and revenge. As the virtue of forgiveness clashes with the vindictive passions in the novel, Dostoevsky makes the ability to forgive and to accept forgiveness a matter of life and death.

Nastasya Filippovna's future depends on her ability to overcome her self-hatred. When looking at Nastasya Filippovna's portrait, the Prince perspicuously observes: "Это гордое лицо, ужасно гордое, и вот не знаю, добра ли она? Ах, кабы добра! Всё было бы спасено!" / "It's a proud face, terribly proud, but here's what I don't know, is it kind? Ah, if only it's kind! Everything would be saved!" (Pt 1, Ch 3 – ПСС 8; 32). In a typical Dostoevskian move, our author plays with a word's dual meaning to suggest the novel's metaphysical dimension: the Russian word for 'kind' also denotes the moral quality 'good'.⁶ In a sense, the entire novel's outcome, as well as Nastasya Filippovna's fate, depends not only on whether or not she is kind/good, but also on whether she can accept and act from that part of herself. At her name day party later that day, Nastasya Filippovna declares that for the past five years she has lost herself in "spite" (злоба) towards Totsky even while asking herself if he's worth such "malice" (злость). The words she uses for 'spite' and 'malice' both derive from the same root as 'evil' (зло), further emphasizing the metaphysical dimension of Dostoevsky's social drama.⁷ From beginning to end,

5 Here I follow Sarah J. YOUNG, who argues that whether Nastasya Filippovna is on stage or off, her script affects the novel's action: see Sarah J. Young, *Dostoevsky's "The Idiot" and the Ethical Foundations of Narrative: Reading, Narrating, Scripting* (London: Anthem Press, 2004). Lynn ПАТУК also argues for Nastasya Filippovna's centrality in her forthcoming book, *Dostoevsky's Provocateurs*.

6 The famous opening of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* does the same. The underground man's second sentence – "Я злой человек" – suggests the concept of evil, along with its more common meaning 'spiteful'.

7 Dostoevsky keeps the concepts of good and evil alive throughout the novel by deploying words with those root meanings. Some of his characters ascribe dispositions toward kindness/goodness or spitefulness/evil to others. Prince Myshkin and Mme Epanchina, for ex-

Dostoevsky raises the specter of good and evil while portraying moral emotions in social settings.

On the social level, the novel's main action centers on two love triangles: Prince Myshkin and Rogozhin compete over Nastasya Filippovna's future and Aglaya Epanchina and Nastasya Filippovna compete over the Prince's. The competition between the men pits compassion against passion: Myshkin is moved by Nastasya's suffering, Rogozhin by her beauty. Myshkin sees through Nastasya's experience-hardened exterior to the insecure, trustful child within. Rogozhin, blinded by her physical beauty, desires to possess her. Despite his self-confessed double thoughts, the innately virtuous Myshkin is kind and compassionate; he strives to understand rather than judge; he pities and forgives.⁸ Rogozhin, more disposed toward vindictive passions such as resentment, anger, and the desire for revenge, displays negative character traits such as possessiveness and jealousy. The Prince is trustful, Rogozhin distrustful. Nastasya Filippovna vacillates between these two men, as she vacillates between her self-images.⁹ Will she choose the Prince or Rogozhin – forgiveness, ac-

ample, are both likened to children and judged kind/good. In Part One, Mme Epanchina, a moral compass for readers, calls the Prince the “добрейший молодой человек” / “kindest young man,” to which he responds “Иногда недобрый” / “Sometimes unkind” (Pt 1, Ch 5 – ПСС 8; 49). In Part Two, Ippolit calls both Mme Epanchina “добрая” and the Prince “добрый”. In Part Three, when it is clear that the Prince loves Aglaya, Mme Epanchina twice calls her own daughter “злая” / “spiteful” (Pt 3, Ch 1 – ПСС 8; 271), adding “О, господи, как она будет несчастна!” / “O Lord, how unhappy she's going to be!” (Pt 3, Ch 1 – ПСС 8; 273). As Aglaya reads the poem about the “рыцарь бедный” / “Poor Knight”, Prince Myshkin wondered “как можно было соединить такое истинное, прекрасное чувство с такою злобною насмешкой?” / “how was it possible to unite such a true, beautiful emotion with such obvious and spiteful mockery?” (Pt 2, Ch 7 – ПСС 8; 209). In Part Two, Rogozhin tells the Prince that if Nastasya Filippovna marries him, it will be out of malice/evil (зло) (Pt 2, Ch 3 – ПСС 8; 180). In Part Three, the Prince suffers because Rogozhin still feels anger/malice (злоба) towards him (Pt 3, Ch 3 – ПСС 8; 302); he also explains to Aglaya that Nastasya mocked Rogozhin “со злобы” / “out of spite” (Pt 3, Ch 8 – ПСС 8; 362). While listening to General Ivolgin's story of being Napoleon's pageboy, the Prince praises Ivolgin for reminding Napoleon of “доброе чувство” / “a good emotion” amid his “злых мыслей” / “evil thoughts” (Pt 4, Ch 4 – ПСС 8; 417). Readers are thus forewarned when, in their fateful meeting, Aglaya and Nastasya Filippovna look at one another with mutual “злоба” / anger/spite (Pt 4, Ch 8 – ПСС 8; 470). All translations are my own (D. M.).

8 Robin Feuer MILLER, *Dostoevsky and “The Idiot”: Author, Narrator, and Reader* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 230. Miller points out that Myshkin forgives and pities instead of judging, thereby modeling ethical behavior for the implied author's audience.

9 Yuri Corrigan perspicuously argues that Rogozhin, Nastasya, and Myshkin form part of a

ceptance, and resurrection or unforgiveness, self-hatred, and death? While the Prince and Rogozhin have nearly antithetical dispositions, Aglaya and Nastasya Filippovna are divided selves, which complicates their competition. Both are proud and spiteful as well as childlike and trusting. They hide their tender emotions by lashing out and mocking or humiliating others. They bring different expectations to their fateful meeting. Nastasya Filippovna, who has idealized Aglaya, expects forgiveness, gratitude, and resurrection; Aglaya, who is driven by jealousy, seeks to humiliate and triumph over her rival. Instead of seeing Nastasya as an equal moral agent, a woman betrayed by her guardian, Aglaya sees her as a fallen woman and a presumptuous rival. She thus asserts her own need for domination and revenge. By withholding acceptance and forgiveness, Aglaya destroys dreams and ruins lives, including her own.

Aglaya's and Nastasya Filippovna's emotional conflict may climax in this confrontation scene, but throughout Dostoevsky's *Idiot* emotions run amok. Pity, compassion, love, anguish, remorse, and humility clash with pride, egoism, vanity, aversion, spite, malice, resentment, jealousy, hatred, shame, guilt, passion, and the desire for revenge. Everyday emotions are intensified and dramatized. As personal dramas become public events, scandals abound. Amid the turbulence, the narrator loses control.¹⁰ Secondary characters take over the script for long stretches: their stories divert reader attention from the main plot even as they double, parody, or amplify its action. Nonetheless, the ultimate action lies in the moral realm: in a world replete with vindictive passions, the moral virtues make small, heroic stands, but are overcome. Like the Gospel seeds of *The Brothers Karamazov* epigraph, moral virtues can only take root and flourish if they find good soil. In *The Idiot*, where egoism abounds and abuse and injustice scar, unkindness and unforgiveness kill.

triumvirate representing an externalized personality: Rogozhin as tyrannical watchman (a pair of haunting eyes), Nastasya as suffering prisoner, and Myshkin as helpless liberator. In more traditional romantic vocabulary, he notes, these can be labeled mind, soul, and consciousness. Yuri CORRIGAN, *Dostoevsky and the Riddle of the Self* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017), pp. 74-76.

¹⁰ For particularly good studies of the narrator in *The Idiot*, see Robin Feuer MILLER (1981), Sarah YOUNG (2004), and Malcolm V. JONES, *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin: Readings in Dostoyevsky's Fantastic Realism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Name Day Surprises

The novel opens in the early hours of November 27, which, readers later learn, is Nastasya Filippovna's name day. Although she does not appear in person for another eight chapters, Nastasya Filippovna hovers at the edge of the action. She is first introduced as a subject of conversation between Prince Myshkin and Parfen Rogozhin. A few chapters later, the narrator provides a brief biography for her: Nastasya Filippovna's guardian, Afanasy Totsky, "человек чрезвычайного эгоизма" / "a man of incredible egoism" (Pt 1, Ch 4 – ПСС 8; 34), had seen her potential beauty, isolated her, had her educated, and then made her his mistress. When Totsky decides to marry someone else, Nastasya Filippovna unexpectedly creates trouble, and he changes his mind to avoid scandal. Five years later, Totsky and General Epanchin devise a plan for Nastasya Filippovna to marry Ganya Ivolgin, thereby clearing the way for Totsky to marry Alexandra Epanchina. As the narrator reports Totsky's perceptions that Nastasya has ceased to value herself and feels "безчеловечное отвращение" / "an inhuman aversion for him" (Pt 1, Ch 4 – ПСС 8; 38), he observes that Totsky admits his guilt but remains unrepentant. This short biography of Nastasya Filippovna is tainted by Totsky, the narrator's source.¹¹ In Totsky's version, Nastasya Filippovna is transformed overnight after he announces his decision to marry – she goes from being "нечто робкое, пансионски неопределенное, иногда очаровательное по своей оригинальной резвости и наивности, иногда грустное и задумчивое, удивленное, недоверчивое, плачущее и беспокойное" / "shy, as unsure as a boarding school girl, sometimes captivating in her original playfulness and naivete, sometimes sad and thoughtful, astonished, mistrustful, weeping and anxious" (Pt 1, Ch 4 – ПСС 8; 36) to a new woman with an unexpected grasp of legal and societal affairs. Although Dostoevsky's narrator exposes Totsky as an egoist, his seeming acceptance of Totsky's perspective compromises the very moral drama that he lays out: egoism and unrepentance versus pride, anguish, and a dream of resurrection.

Nastasya Filippovna does not get to voice her story for another twelve chapters, when she rejects the Prince's offer of marriage:

Разве я сама о тебе не мечтала? Это ты прав, давно мечтала, еще в деревне у него, пять лет прожила онда-одинехонька; думаешь-думаешь, бывало-то, мечтаешь-мечтаешь, – и вот всё такого, как ты, воображала, доброго, честного, хорошего и такого же глупенького, что вдруг да и скажет: 'Вы не ви-

11 See MILLER, p. 101.

новаты, Настасья Филипповна, а я вас обожаю!’ Да так, бывало, размечтаешься, что с ума сойдешь... А тут приедет вот этот [Тоцкий]: месяца по два гостил в году, опозорит, разобидит, распалит, развратит, уедет, – так тысячу раз в пруд хотела кинуться, да подла была, души не хватало, ну, а теперь... Rogozhin, готов? / Do you think that I didn’t dream about you? You are right, I did, when I was still in the countryside on his estate, where I lived five years all by myself. I would think and think, daydream and daydream – I always imagined that someone like you would suddenly come and say: ‘You’re not to blame, Nastasya Filippovna, I adore you!’ That’s how it was, you can go mad dreaming like that... And then that one [Totsky] would come: one or two months a year – he would disgrace, offend, inflame, debauch, and depart, – I wanted to throw myself into the pond a thousand times, but I was contemptible, I didn’t have the courage, and now... Rogozhin, are you ready? (Pt 1, Ch 16 – *ПСС* 8; 144)

Nastasya Filippovna’s version differs radically from Totsky’s. He does not understand the change in her because he could not imagine her feelings. She felt disgraced and shamed but also inflamed. She dreamed of redemption yet contemplated suicide. Myshkin offers the first, Rogozhin the second. Nastasya represents her decision to run away with Rogozhin as a release from prison (“Я десять лет в тюрьме просидела” / “I’ve spent ten years in prison” – Pt. 1, Ch 16 – *ПСС* 8; 143), yet she knows, at some level, that she is only throwing herself into another one.

Nastasya Filippovna first appears in Chapter Eight, when she unexpectedly visits the Ivolgins. Her intentions are unclear. Scandal hovers: everyone is out of place, and no one acts as expected. Embarrassed by his family’s fallen circumstances, Ganya is on edge. When his alcoholic father General Ivolgin unexpectedly shows up, Nastasya encourages the old man’s storytelling then humiliates him and his family. Rogozhin arrives with a rowdy entourage and tries to buy Ganya off. Varya Ivolgina insults Nastasya Filippovna. Ganya prepares to strike his sister but is stopped by the Prince, whom he then strikes.

The scene ends as unexpectedly as it began. After Ganya slaps him, the Prince declares that Ganya will be ashamed. To readers’ surprise, Rogozhin agrees, declaring that Ganya will repent of his action and be ashamed for offending “такую... овцу” / “such a... lamb” (Pt 1, Ch 10 – *ПСС* 8; 99).¹² Finally, the Prince admonishes Nastasya Filippovna for her behavior, and she unexpect-

¹² By having Rogozhin refer to Myshkin as a “lamb”, Dostoevsky not only ties him to images of a sacrificial Christ but also to Nastasya Filippovna, whose surname Barashkova derives from the word for “lamb”.

edly apologizes to Mme Ivolgin saying “Я ведь и в самом деле не такая, он угадал” / “I’m not really like that, he guessed correctly” (Pt 1, Ch 10 – *ПСС* 8; 100). Nastasya Filippovna’s surprise entrance is thus matched by the unforeseen contrition and apology she expresses as she departs.

Nastasya Filippovna’s apologetic words give readers pause. We have heard her story and witnessed her behavior, but her sudden repentance changes her script and our perceptions of her. The narrator reinforces her statement on the dissonance between her face and her laughter:

Обыкновенно бледное и задумчивое лицо ее, так всё время не гармонировавшее с давешним как бы напускным ее смехом, было очевидно взволновано теперь новым чувством; и, однако, все-таки ей как будто не хотелось его выказывать, и насмешка словно усиливалась остаться в лице ее / Her usually pale and thoughtful face, which had not harmonized at all with her earlier somehow forced laughter, was evidently disturbed by a new emotion at that moment; however, she nonetheless somehow did not want to show it, so the mockery was forced as if to remain on her face (Pt 1, Ch 10 – *ПСС* 8; 99).

By noting the dissonance between Nastasya’s new emotion and her feigned mockery, the narrator strengthens our perception of a woman who has developed a hard surface to protect a vulnerable interior. Although the narrator accepts Totsky’s version of Nastasya’s history, this seeming eye-witness account provides a haunting glimpse into Nastasya’s divided self. At this point, we may remember that she makes acceptance by the Ivolgin women a condition for marrying Ganya (Pt 1, Ch 4 – *ПСС* 8; 42). Orphaned early in life, first losing her parents to a fire and then her sister to illness, betrayed by her guardian, Nastasya Filippovna longs to belong. Her visit to the Ivolgins may have been a scouting expedition to see whether or not she would be accepted.

In declaring herself not only wrong but sorry, Nastasya humbles herself, takes responsibility for her action, and reveals an inner goodness. Her apology also prepares us for the moment at her name day party, when, after the Prince proposes and before she throws Rogozhin’s 100,000 rubles into the fire¹³ for Ganya to fetch if he dares, she tearfully confesses that she had always dreamed of someone who would recognize her goodness (Pt 1, Ch 16 – *ПСС* 8; 144). As Part One ends, Nastasya Filippovna’s dream is more than realized: she finds an ac-

13 As Yuri Corrigan notes, “The description of the package resonates directly with Myshkin’s portrayal of Nastasia several pages earlier as having ‘emerged pure from such hell’ (8; 138); both descriptions evoke the notion of an inviolate interior self preserved despite intense traumatic experience”. CORRIGAN, p. 71.

tual prince who believes in her goodness, declares her innocence, and offers to marry her. But the scars of her social humiliation and exclusion run deep. Nastasya's self-hatred not only ruins her dream of resurrection but drives her to sacrifice herself: in a moment of self-hatred, she scornfully calls herself Totsky's "наложница" / "concubine," generously declares that the Prince needs Aglaya Epanchina, not her, and recklessly runs away with Rogozhin, the merchant's son. Her initial choice of Rogozhin over Myshkin, repeated multiple times behind the scenes, haunts Parts Two and Three and prepares Part Four's finale.

Nastasya Filippovna's unexpected repentance and apology are followed by Ganya Ivolgin's. Although Myshkin predictably forgives Ganya, Dostoevsky's narrator emphasizes the apology's unexpectedness by noting the Prince's surprise that Ganya was capable of asking for forgiveness (Pt 1, Ch 11 – *ITCC* 8; 102). The situational rhyme – two unexpected acts of repentance and apology – calls attention to a surprising similarity between Nastasya and Ganya: each is fallen and hopes to be resurrected by acceptance from valued others. Nastasya Filippovna is a 'fallen woman'; Ganya Ivolgin's whole family has fallen. Their proposed marriage offers Nastasya the possibility of limited social acceptance and Ganya the possibility of financial gain and social advancement. Both are pawns in the older men's game.

Part One reveals a further similarity between Nastasya Filippovna and Ganya Ivolgin: both are involved in love triangles involving Aglaya Epanchina. Ganya courts Nastasya but hopes to be accepted by Aglaya. Likewise, Myshkin proposes to Nastasya, but loves Aglaya. In both cases, Nastasya is the proposed bride, Aglaya the hoped-for bride. Ganya pursues Nastasya for the money and Aglaya for the social status; Myshkin proposes to Nastasya out of compassion and to Aglaya out of love. This minor love triangle complicates the novel's larger rivalries and casts further light on Dostoevsky's characters.

Although both Nastasya and Ganya ask for forgiveness, Prince Myshkin evaluates their dispositions very differently: he sees Nastasya as a good person who has been treated badly but Ganya as a selfish, calculating person. Moreover, Myshkin not only expects Nastasya to apologize, he pushes her to do so, whereas he did not think Ganya capable of it. Myshkin sees that Nastasya suffers because she desires the connection to others that has been denied her by Totsky's betrayal. He guesses that she is not "такая" / "like that," that is, she is not actually condescending and vindictive, and she accordingly changes her demeanor as well as her behavior (Pt 1 Ch 8 – *ITCC* 8; 101).¹⁴ On the other hand,

14 Kolya Ivolgin marvels at the Prince's perspicacity, thereby highlighting the Prince's powers of observation in Part One.

Myshkin has learned from Aglaya that Ganya is a calculating person: he wants to give up Nastasya, but only if Aglaya assures him that she will welcome his courtship. The widespread perception of Ganya's avarice that moved Rogozhin to buy him off is underscored by Ganya's own family's belief that he wants to marry Nastasya for money rather than love.¹⁵ Nonetheless, his family loves and believes in him (his sister Varya forgives him even though he refuses to ask her forgiveness), and it turns out that Ganya has enough honor to withstand the temptation of cash at Nastasya's name day party, partially redeeming himself in readers' eyes.

Dostoevsky also stresses an enormous difference between Nastasya and Ganya by having both Myshkin and the narrator comment on Ganya's unoriginality while having both Totsky and the narrator comment on Nastasya's originality. Moreover, at the beginning of Part Three, the narrator thematizes the topic by giving a long discourse on unoriginality before characterizing the Epanchin family, particularly Mme Epanchina, as "original". Since Mme Epanchina identifies most strongly with her youngest daughter Aglaya, Dostoevsky uses his narrator to set up Nastasya and Aglaya as rivals in both originality and love.

Originality as Outsiderness

Myshkin is the first to brand Ganya "unoriginal": after Ganya apologizes, expresses confidence that Nastasya will marry him despite the scene in his apartment, and confesses that his greatest fear is to be considered ridiculous (Pt 1, Ch 11 – ПСС 8; 103), the Prince comments "Вы, по-моему, просто самый обыкновенный человек, какой только может быть, разве только что слабый очень и нисколько не оригинальный" / "In my opinion, you are the most ordinary man there could be, or perhaps only very weak and somewhat unoriginal" (ПСС 8; 103). Ganya takes offense and parries that money will make him highly original – a claim that ironically confirms his lack of originality. In his extended discourse, the narrator not only claims that lack of originality and reverence for good behavior (благообразие) are the primary qualifications for service and capital acquisition in Russia, he also identifies the rank of

15 Kolya confesses to Prince Myshkin that for the sake of Nastasya's beauty he would forgive Ganya, if only he were marrying for love. And his sister Varya advises Ganya that the humiliation of Nastasya laughing at him was not worth 75,000 rubles. Ganya also deceives himself: Nastasya tells Rogozhin she will not marry Ganya, yet Ganya assures the Prince that she was only indulging "бабы мщение" / "female revenge" and would surely accept him (Pt 1, Ch 10 – ПСС 8; 97).

general as the “height of happiness” (блаженство)¹⁶ for the service gentry (Pt 3, Ch 1 – *ИСС* 8; 268-269).¹⁷ This comment retrospectively links Ganya, who fears ridicule, to Totsky, who worships decorum (Pt 1, Ch 4 – *ИСС* 8; 37), as men who revere and benefit from the status quo. In thematizing unoriginality and drawing attention to its beneficiaries, Dostoevsky also highlights the struggles of those outside its purview, the originals.

Worship of the patriarchal status quo further divides Ganya, who aspires to it, from Nastasya, who has been betrayed by it. Furthermore, while Ganya fails to see that his worship of money marks him as unoriginal, Nastasya Filippovna’s disregard for money highlights her originality. While Ganya is willing to marry a woman whom he does not love for the sake of 75,000 rubles, Nastasya throws 100,000 rubles into the fire in order to humiliate her avaricious suitor.

Despite her romanticism, idealism, and desire to be resurrected, Nastasya Filippovna is a realist, who does not believe that society will accept her even if she were to marry the Prince. Totsky identifies her romanticism in what he perceives as her embrace of anguish, and readers see it in her dream of a savior. This glimpse into Nastasya’s dream prepares readers for her idealism in Part Four when she projects angelic qualities onto Aglaya, from whom she hopes for acceptance and even gratitude. Yet Nastasya’s scorn and strength derive from the knowledge that she will never be accepted by society. In Part One, she acts as a wildcard to protest the double standard of the status quo. Totsky seduces her, yet she pays the price. He is accepted in society; she is excluded. Unlike the *Dame aux Camélias*¹⁸ to whom Totsky refers in the story of his most shameful act (Pt 1, Ch 14 – *ИСС* 8; 127), Nastasya will not meekly follow others’ scripts.¹⁹ Unlike Myshkin, who accepts the slap intended for Varya Ivolgina,²⁰ she refuses to accept the destiny written into her last name Barashkova and become a sacrificial lamb (баран) for the sake of social stability. She may choose to sacrifice herself – but not for the men who have betrayed her. Her self-sacrifice is half self-hatred, half love for the sacrificial prince who pities her.

16 The narrator further remarks that the only person who cannot attain the rank of general in Russia is someone who is “original,” that is, “беспокойный” / “anxious” (Pt 3, Ch 1 – *ИСС* 8; 270).

17 See Miller on the incoherence and contradictoriness of the narrator’s essay on originality. MILLER, pp. 128-130.

18 The *Dame aux Camélias* is a semi-autobiographical novel based on the love affair of Alexander Dumas fils (1824-1895) with a virtuous courtesan who sacrifices herself for him.

19 See Sarah YOUNG for a reading of the novel in which Nastasya Filippovna scripts the novel’s action.

20 After which Rogozhin calls him “такую... овцу” (Pt 1, Ch 10 – *ИСС* 8; 99).

The Drama of Unforgiveness in Part One

Dostoevsky highlights the drama of unforgiveness in the name day party scene. To encourage Nastasya Filippovna to choose redemption, Prince Myshkin tells her that she is not responsible for her fall and diagnoses her desire to run away with Rogozhin as a symptom of shame: “Я ничто, а вы страдали и из такого ада чистая вышли, а это много. К чему же вы стыдитесь да с Рогожиным ехать хотите?” / “I’m nothing, but you have suffered and have come out of such a hell pure, and that’s a lot. Why are you so ashamed and want to go with Rogozhin?” (Pt I, Ch 15 – *ИСС* 8; 138). The Prince not only links Nastasya’s shame with her desire for self-destruction, he spells out the consequences of unforgiveness:

Вы сейчас загубить себя хотели, безвозвратно, потому что вы никогда не простили бы себе потом этого: а вы ни в чем не виноваты. Быть не может, чтобы ваша жизнь совсем уже погибла. Что ж такое, что к вам Рогожин пришел, а Гаврила Ардалионович вас обмануть хотел? Зачем вы беспрестанно про это упоминаете? [...] Вы горды, Настасья Филипповна, но, может быть, вы уже до того несчастны, что и действительно виновною себя считаете. / Just now you wanted to destroy yourself, irrevocably, because you would never forgive yourself for it later: but you are not guilty. It is not possible that your life is already destroyed. What of it if Rogozhin came to you and Gavril Ardalionovich wanted to deceive you? Why do you continually remind yourself of that? [...] You are proud, Nastasya Filippovna, but perhaps you are already so unhappy, that you really do consider yourself guilty (Pt I, Ch 16 – *ИСС* 8; 142).

At the height of the Prince’s perspicacity in the novel, he voices the belief that Nastasya Filippovna’s self-destructive impulse derives from her sense of pride, shame, and guilt, but he adds that she exacerbates these emotions by her unwillingness to forgive herself.

In this speech, the Prince identifies the link between pride, shame, and guilt. All three are critical to a person’s self-image: pride and shame focus on an individual’s identity, whereas guilt focuses on individual’s actions. Nastasya feels shame that she has not lived up to a moral ideal and guilt because she has defiled that ideal. Myshkin also recognizes that Nastasya blames herself for the actions of Totsky, Rogozhin, and Ganya. She believes that it must be who she is or what she has done that causes them to treat her the way they do. For all her seeming worldliness, she is an isolated young woman locked in a self-constructed prison of shame, guilt, and pride. Her self-division leads her to forego her dream of resurrection and seek revenge.

Nastasya Filippovna's initial response to Totsky's decision to marry elsewhere was rage. After five years, she has tired of leading an angry life, is willing to entertain marriage to Ganya, and says she will announce her decision at her name day party. Rogozhin's and Myshkin's arrivals provide alternatives. Once she chooses to run away with Rogozhin, Ptitsyn diagnoses her decision as a form of suicidal revenge:

Знаете, Афанасий Иванович [Тоцкому], это, как говорят, у японцев в этом роде бывает [...] обиженный там будто бы идет к обидчику и говорит ему: 'Ты меня обидел, за это я пришел распороть в твоих глазах свой живот,' и с этими словами действительно распарывает в глазах обидчика свой живот и чувствует, должно быть, чрезвычайное удовлетворение, точно и в самом деле отместил. / You know, Afanasy Ivanovich [to Totsky], they say that among the Japanese there's something of this sort [...] they say the offended there goes to the offender and says to him: 'You offended me, and for that, I've come to rip open my stomach in front of your eyes,' and with these words he actually rips open his stomach in front of his offender's eyes and must feel an extraordinary satisfaction, as though he actually got revenge (Pt 1, Ch 16 – ПСС 8; 148).

In his view, Nastasya seeks to restore her honor not by destroying those who dishonor her (Totsky, Ganya, Epanchin) but by destroying herself in front of them. Instead of mourning her self-destruction, however, the egoist Totsky admires her and declares that "она сама есть самое лучшее мое оправдание" / "she herself is the best justification for his actions", "нешлифованный алмаз" / "an uncut diamond" (Pt 1, Ch 16 – ПСС 8; 149). Neither man sees that her action also has a self-sacrificial aspect – she wants to save Prince Myshkin from sharing her fate. Despite her recent experiences, Nastasya Filippovna is still a product of her reading, a vengeful but self-sacrificing *Dame aux Camélias*.

Compassion, Love, and Forgiveness: Marie's Story and Aglaya's Unlearned Lesson

Myshkin's story of Marie, his longest narrative in the novel, has received much scholarly attention. Robin Feuer Miller and Sarah Young deserve special appreciation for their close readings, particularly for showing how Dostoevsky thematizes storytelling by highlighting the Prince's skill and effectiveness as a

narrator.²¹ In discussing the analogy between the Prince's story of Marie, the Gospel story of Mary Magdalene, and the story of Nastasya, they observe that the Prince acts as a teacher for his audiences – the village children and the Epanchin women, partially by presenting his own emotions to them and partially by targeting those of his audience. He succeeds with the village children, who initially adopt their parents' attitude and persecute Marie but eventually follow Myshkin's example and come to love and pity her. His Epanchin audience, as we will see, is more divided. Significantly, both Young and Miller point to problems in Myshkin's story of Marie that serve to undermine its efficacy: Young argues that Myshkin's belief in Nastasya's innocence problematically denies the greatest source of her suffering – her sense of responsibility for her action,²² and Miller points out that there is a lie at the heart of his story – the Prince allows the village children to believe he loves Marie, whereas he pities her.²³

When the Epanchins laugh upon hearing that Myshkin had kissed Marie, he quickly tries to dissuade them from adopting the children's belief: “Нет, не смейтесь, – поспешил остановить князь усмешку своих слушательниц, – тут вовсе не было любви. Если бы вы знали, какое это было несчастное создание, то вам бы самим стало ее очень жаль, как и мне”. / “No, don't laugh, – the prince hastened to stop his listeners' smirks, – here there was no love at all. If only you knew how unhappy this creature was, then you yourselves would have pitied her very much, as I did” (Pt 1, Ch 6 – *ИСС* 8; 58). In telling his story to the Epanchins, Myshkin stresses that what he felt was not love, but compassion. As he finishes his story, he links the Epanchins to the Swiss children by characterizing them as a sympathetic, receptive audience. By admitting that he had allowed the children to misinterpret the kiss, Myshkin hopes to prevent the Epanchins from doing the same. He has learned that compassion can be read as love.

As soon as he finishes his story, Myshkin unexpectedly changes topic and reads the Epanchin women's faces as he had promised to do earlier: he guesses Adelaida's kindness and cheer, Alexandra's kindness and secret sorrow, and Mme Epanchina's childlike nature. Mme Epanchina praises Myshkin for his perspicacity, noting that while they had been testing him, he had proved them fools. Miller observes, however, that Aglaya responds as a resistant reader: disregarding what Myshkin has said about her mother and siblings, she wants to know the purpose behind his statements.²⁴ This may be because she has been

21 MILLER, pp. 173-174; YOUNG, pp. 75-88.

22 YOUNG, p. 90.

23 MILLER, p. 172.

24 MILLER, p. 173.

excluded – he reads the others’ faces, but not hers. When pressed, he says that she is beautiful, and beauty is an enigma. When pressed further, Myshkin says that Aglaya is almost as beautiful as Nastasya Filippovna, though her face is entirely different. At this point the conversation shifts focus to Nastasya Filippovna and her portrait, but Dostoevsky uses the Prince’s comment to establish Aglaya and Nastasya as rival beauties. He also uses the Prince’s few moments alone with Nastasya’s portrait to have him read her face as a study in contrasts – “Как будто необъятная гордость и признание” / “unbounded pride and contempt”, almost hatred mixed with “что-то доверчивое, что-то удивительно простодушное” / “something trustful, something incredibly ingenuous” [*prostodushnoe*], a contrast that awakens his compassion” (Pt I, Ch 6 – ПСС 8; 68). In response, he kisses the portrait.

As Miller points out, Prince Myshkin’s story of Marie has an obvious Biblical parallel, with Myshkin playing the Christ role to Marie’s Mary Magdalene. His story thus allows Myshkin to represent himself to the Epanchins as “a positively good man” returning to Russia, someone who can tell them how to live.²⁵ Miller notes the obvious irony of Myshkin using parabolic, indirect narration in a story that praises openness: Myshkin boasts that one can tell children everything, yet he conceals his real motive – compassion – from them.²⁶ By having the children fabricate a fiction that confuses compassion with romantic love, Dostoevsky prepares us for Aglaya’s future misreading of Nastasya Filippovna. Myshkin attracts Aglaya by his storytelling and singles her out as his ideal listener. Unfortunately for both, she has not listened deeply enough. When Aglaya devises her own script, she confuses compassion and love.

While Myshkin exploits the Biblical parallel between the stories of Marie and Mary Magdalene, Dostoevsky sets up an obvious parallel between Marie and Nastasya. As young girls, both are maltreated by their guardians. Once fallen, both Marie and Nastasya are judged harshly by their communities, suffer deeply, and arouse the Prince’s compassion. Unlike Marie, who is meek, runs away with her seducer, and accepts responsibility for her sin, Nastasya is a divided self, who vacillates between feelings of guilt and a sense of outraged justice at her betrayal. Unlike Marie, who accepts forgiveness from the children and dies happy, Nastasya seeks but does not accept the Prince’s forgiveness. Nor does she forgive herself.

In drawing the parallel between Marie and Mary Magdalene, Dostoevsky clearly draws on the Western interpretation of Mary Magdalene as a fallen

25 MILLER, p. 170.

26 MILLER, p. 173.

woman. It must be noted, however, that the Eastern Church generally considers Mary Magdalene to be a wealthy holy woman who supported Christ and his disciples and focuses on her role as the first person to whom Christ appeared after the resurrection (*noli me tangere*).²⁷ Either or both readings enrich Dostoevsky's story. Whether we see Mary Magdalene as a repentant sinner or a slandered woman, the analogy with Marie holds. If we see Nastasya Filippovna as a divided self, which Dostoevsky's narrator ensures that we do, then we can see an analogy between her self-divisions and the differing interpretations of Mary Magdalene, with Myshkin supporting the view of Nastasya as wronged innocent.

In drawing parallels between the stories of Marie and Nastasya as fallen women, Dostoevsky draws attention to the double standard: neither young woman initiates her seduction – both are seduced, abandoned, and blamed for their fall. Marie follows the standard Christian script by accepting responsibility and meekly accepting community censure. Here too, Dostoevsky and Myshkin highlight the community's unchristian response. The Swiss preacher in particular heaps scorn and blame on Marie, thereby disregarding Christ's example of loving forgiveness. The children, on the other hand, follow Myshkin's and Christ's example: they love and care for Marie, and, as Myshkin notes, “через них она забыла свою черную беду, как бы прощение от них приняла, потому что до самого конца считала себя великою преступницею” / “Through them, I assure you, she died almost happy. Through them, she forgot her deep misfortune, as though she were accepting forgiveness from them, because until the very end she considered herself a great criminal” (Pt I, Ch 6 – ПСС 8; 62-63). Marie's is almost a medieval morality tale – her contrition and humility make her easy to forgive.

Nastasya Filippovna complicates community and reader response by refusing to meekly accept the role of fallen woman. She may lose her virginity to Totsky, but she does not lose her innocence until he decides to abandon her: she then responds with outrage and desire for revenge. This sequence is repeated in her meeting with Aglaya.

27 See Ganna Bograd: Ганна БОГРАД, *Произведения изобразительного искусства в творчестве Ф. М. Достоевского* (New York: Slovo-Word, 1998), с. 33-34; 93-94. Bograd notes that in Pavlovsk, where Dostoevsky may have first conceived his novel, there is a church of Mary Magdalene, in which hung two paintings – life-size copies of Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* and *Christ and Mary Magdalene* by an unknown artist. The Eastern Orthodox view of Mary Magdalene as the first witness to Christ's return is documented in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and John; in Luke's Gospel, she is identified as a woman from whom demons have been cast out. Some scholars have also speculated that Mary was the beloved apostle, whom Church Fathers, following Luke, have tried to discredit.

The Fateful Meeting

Dostoevsky's narrator intensifies readers' anxiety about the meeting between Aglaya and Nastasya by focusing on Myshkin's postictal apprehensions. These in turn are heightened by Myshkin's reading of Nastasya's letters to Aglaya (Pt 3, Ch 10 – *ПСС* 8; 377-380). Nastasya clearly idealizes Aglaya and dreams of acceptance. She offers to sacrifice herself for Aglaya and the Prince, yet she also expects Aglaya to understand and praise her sacrifice. Myshkin, who now has more experience with Aglaya's willfulness and naiveté, rightly fears the outcome.

While Myshkin wants to protect Aglaya from Nastasya, Aglaya wants to protect him from Nastasya. Aglaya thus devises her own script, in which she defends Myshkin from what she sees as Nastasya's possessive scheming. Aglaya does not want to accept Nastasya's self-sacrifice for Myshkin's happiness because she wants to be Myshkin's sole source of happiness, his sole protector and defender. Like Nastasya's, Aglaya's love for the prince is possessive. Unfortunately for Myshkin, both women's egos get in the way of their love.

Aglaya tries to assert her control of factors beyond her control by summoning Nastasya to meet with her. Given earlier failed attempts in the novel to control Nastasya, Myshkin and readers are apprehensive about the outcome. And we are right. Nastasya Filippovna's letters reveal the major emotional tensions that imperil the meeting. Myshkin believes that the existence of the letters themselves resembles a “кошмар” / “nightmare” (Pt 3, Ch 10 – *ПСС* 8; 378) but also a “мечта” / “dream,” a conscious, wished-for, “безумная мечта” / “crazy dream”:

Но мечта эта была уже осуществлена, и всего удивительнее для него было то, что, пока он читал эти письма, он сам почти верил в возможность и даже в оправдание этой мечты / Yet that dream had already been realized, and what was most surprising of all for him, was that, while he read the letters, he himself almost believed in the possibility and even in the justification of that dream (Pt 3, Ch 10 – *ПСС* 8; 378).

Nastasya clearly dreams of acceptance, even love. Because Myshkin had earlier regarded Aglaya as an ideal audience, he understands that expectation. Nastasya calls Aglaya “совершенство” / “perfection” and says that she loves her, but adds:

Хоть любовь и равняет людей, но, не беспокойтесь, я вас к себе не приравнивала, даже в самой затаенной мысли моей / Even though love equal-

izes people, don't worry, I do not equal myself to you, even in my most secret thoughts (Pt 3, Ch 10 – ПСС 8; 379).

Later she reveals these secret thoughts: “Знаете, мне кажется, вы даже должны любить меня” / “You know, it seems to me that you should even love me” (*Ibid.*). She explains: “Для меня вы то же, что и для него: светлый дух” / “For me, you are the same as for him: a holy spirit” (*Ibid.*). Nastasya goes further, however, as she claims “ангел не может ненавидеть, не может и не любить” / “an angel cannot hate, cannot not love” (*Ibid.*). Nastasya justifies her dream by insisting on her Myshkin-inspired ideal image of Aglaya, but she projects even more unreal expectations on her rival: “Вы один можете любить без эгоизма, вы один можете любить не для себя самой, а для того, кого вы любите” / “You alone can love without egoism, you alone can love not for yourself but for the one you love.” Nonetheless, Nastasya warns her rival: “О, как горько было бы мне узнать, что вы чувствуете из-за меня стыд или гнев! Тут ваша погибель: вы разом сравняетесь со мной... / “Oh, how bitter it would be for me to learn that you feel shame or anger because of me! Here's your ruin: if you once equal yourself to me...” (*Ibid.*). By continually insisting that she is nothing and Aglaya everything, Nastasya sets the bar too high for any human being. Aglaya, as readers have seen, is all too human.

Nastasya Filippovna's extreme idealization of Aglaya unsettles both Myshkin and Dostoevsky's readers, but her evident obsession with Aglaya is equally disquieting. Nastasya's passion for Aglaya is clearly possessive: “Что вам за дело до моей страсти к вам? Вы теперь уже моя, я буду всю жизнь около вас... Я скоро умру” / “What difference does my passion for you make for you? You are already mine, I will be near you my whole life... I will die shortly” (Pt 3, Ch 10 – ПСС 8; 380). This claim joins passion and possessiveness – two emotions that we have seen conjoined in Rogozhin's claim on Nastasya. Whereas compassion, like Prince Myshkin's, allows others to be equal moral agents, passion deprives the other of both agency and equal worth. Those who feel passion see the other as an object to possess. In passion, love and hate are separated by a razor's edge: Nastasya declares of Rogozhin, “но ведь я знаю, что он до того меня любит, что уже не мог не возненавидеть меня” / “in fact I know that he loves me to the point where he cannot not hate me” (*Ibid.*). This double negative echoes her earlier statement to Aglaya – “an angel [...] cannot not love,” thereby creating a connection between her extreme feelings for both Rogozhin and Aglaya. More ominously, Nastasya continues her letter, “Ваша свадьба и моя свадьба – вместе: так мы с ним назначили” / “Your wedding and my wedding – together; that's what we have planned” (*Ibid.*). By “we,” Na-

stasya means herself and Rogozhin. This is another part of Nastasya's dream – two weddings and her funeral.

Nastasya's last letter reveals her self-division – just as she vacillates between hating Totsky and herself, here she vacillates about whether she is or is not abasing herself by writing to Aglaya. She concludes: “А стало быть, я вовсе и не унижаю себя” / “And perhaps I am not abasing myself at all” (*Ibid.*). Here and elsewhere Nastasya wavers between self-assertion and self-abnegation. In claiming that there was “много, много было такого же бреда в этих письмах” / “a lot, a lot of such delirium in these letters” (Pt 3, Ch 10 – *ПСС* 8; 381), the narrator adopts the language of Myshkin, who repeatedly calls Nastasya “помешанная” – an adjective that derives from a verb that can mean ‘to disturb’ or ‘to agitate’, ‘to mix up’ or ‘to confuse’. By choosing this word, as opposed to the adjective ‘безумная’, literally ‘without a mind’, figuratively ‘mad, crazy, senseless’, Myshkin diagnoses her madness as a form of fatal confusion.²⁸

Although Nastasya uses the language of self-abasement, Myshkin and readers hear her pride and desire for control. Since she sees herself as the obstacle to Myshkin's and Aglaya's union, Nastasya believes she controls their happiness and asks: “Почему я вас хочу соединить: для вас или для себя? Для себя, разумеется, тут все разрешения мои, я так сказала себе давно...” / “Why do I want to unite you [Aglaya and Myshkin]: for you or for myself? For myself, it goes without saying, here all the solutions are mine, I told myself that long ago...” (Pt 3, Ch 10 – *ПСС* 8; 380). Even as she plans to remove herself from the scene, she wants recognition for her magnanimity.

In Nastasya Filippovna's desperate bid for control, readers can detect her sense of helplessness: having had no control over her fall, she tries to control the aftermath. Although less apparent, Aglaya also suffers from a sense of limited agency, as she is extremely aware of her sheltered upbringing. Faced with an undefined threat from without, she tries to control it. Just as earlier she had been more interested in knowing the purpose behind Myshkin telling the story of Marie than its message, here she keeps asking why Nastasya is writing to her. Just as Aglaya earlier disregarded Myshkin's avowal that he did not love Marie but pitied her, she now disregards his assurances that he does not love but pities Nastasya (Pt 3, Ch 8 – *ПСС* 8; 362). As he tries to arouse Aglaya's compassion, Myshkin evokes the Gospels and his story of Marie:

²⁸ Yuri Corrigan identifies this confusion as a confusion between Nastasya's childhood trauma and the Prince's. CORRIGAN, p. 72.

Эта несчастная женщина глубоко убеждена, что она самое павшее, самое порочное существо из всех на свете. О, не позорьте ее, не бросайте камня. Она слишком замучила себя самым сознанием своего незаслуженного позора! / That unfortunate woman is deeply convinced that she is the most fallen, most sinful being of all on the planet. Oh, don't shame her, don't throw stones. She has tormented herself too much with the very consciousness of her undeserved shame! (Pt 3, Ch 8 – *ПСС* 8; 361).

As earlier, Aglaya ignores his overt message. Like the Swiss children, Aglaya has fabricated and believes her own story.

Instead of reading the letters as Nastasya's plea for acceptance and love, Aglaya reads only the threat and draws her own conclusion: "Неужели вы не видите, что не в меня она влюблена, а вас, вас одного она любит!" / "Can it be that you don't see that it's not me she loves, but you, you alone she loves!" (Pt 3, Ch 8 – *ПСС* 8; 363). Myshkin tries to reassure her that though he would give his life to make Nastasya happy, he cannot love her. Aglaya responds angrily that he should sacrifice himself, "это же так к вам идет!" / "it would suit you!" She reveals her own jealousy: "Вы должны, вы обязаны воскресить ее, вы должны уехать с ней опять, чтоб умирать и успокаивать ее сердце. Да ведь вы же ее и любите!" / "You must, you are obligated to resurrect her, you must go away with her again, in order to calm and quiet her heart. Yes in fact you love her!" (*Ibid.*). Blinded by her own jealousy, Aglaya cannot hear Myshkin's assurances that such an action would be fatal for both Nastasya and himself – that Nastasya would never forgive him his love for Aglaya: "Вы говорите, она любит меня, но разве это любовь? Неужели может быть такая любовь, после того, что я уже вытерпел! Нет, тут другое, а не любовь!" / "You say that she loves me, but can that be love? How could there be such a love, after all that I endured! No here's something different, not love!" (*Ibid.*). Myshkin knows that love entails wishing for and acting in the beloved's best interest. What he senses in Nastasya is closer to passion and possessiveness, a desire for love as opposed to love itself. He already understands that what he can offer Nastasya will never be enough.

Completely ignoring Myshkin's earlier counsel that she pity rather than blame Nastasya, Aglaya lashes out at her rival. Instead of receiving her with acceptance, gratitude, forgiveness, even love, the angel of Nastasya's dreams speaks with hatred and blames her not only for harming Myshkin but for her own fall and subsequent life choices. Aglaya's jealousy makes her a bad reader: she does not heed the warning in Nastasya's letter and treats her as a rival. Nastasya thus retreats from her position of magnanimity – she came ready to cede

her claim to Myshkin. Unlike Marie, Nastasya does not believe she deserves Aglaya's scorn. Humiliated and angered by Aglaya's accusations, she asserts herself and destroys Aglaya's triumphalist script by reasserting her prior claim. By choosing to take the prince on terms that she cannot accept (that he loves Aglaya and not her), Nastasya destroys herself and others.²⁹

Forgiveness and Resurrection: The Hedgehog

Although tragedies of unforgiveness dominate the novel, Dostoevsky provides momentary relief from the gothic uncertainty of Part Four with the hedgehog incident. While Mme Epanchina is in Petersburg visiting Princess Belokonskaya, Aglaya and Myshkin play two games: the board game chess and the card game "fool" (Аурак). In medieval literature, playing chess, a game with rules that allowed couples to get to know one another as they competed, often served as a metaphor for courtship or love. Aglaya knows the rules; Myshkin does not. His ignorance of chess matches his ignorance of courtship: it thus underscores the gaps in his education, but it also means that Aglaya beats him easily. When they switch to fool, however, he defeats her five times in a row, even though she cheats. The goal in fool is to get rid of all one's cards before the other player(s), so the last person with cards in hand is the fool. While chess is a game of strategy and skill, fool is a game of chance. Aglaya clearly shines in a structured environment where she knows the rules, whereas Myshkin adapts more easily to circumstances as they arise. Aglaya likes being in control, whereas Myshkin adapts easily to less structured environments. Most significantly, Aglaya cannot handle defeat. After being made a fool five times, she speaks harshly to Myshkin and angrily leaves the room. Myshkin is crushed. He was playing games; she was playing for higher stakes.

Shortly thereafter, Aglaya persuades Kolya to sell her his hedgehog and deliver it to Myshkin as a "знак глубочайшего ее уважения" / "sign of her deepest respect" (Pt 4, Ch 5 – ПСС 8; 424). While other characters are baffled,³⁰

29 David Stromberg convincingly argues that Myshkin abandons Aglaya in a manner similar to the way Nastasya abandons him (and that she was abandoned). David STROMBERG, *ID-IOT LOVE and the Elements of Intimacy: Literature, Philosophy, and Psychoanalysis* (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2020), pp. 81-129.

30 At this point, Dostoevsky's narrator teases readers, using the hedgehog as a semiotic riddle. Both Kolya and Mme Epanchina, two of the novel's most sympathetic characters, ask what it signifies. General Epanchin unexpectedly supplies a double answer: "просто еж, и только, – разве означает, кроме того, дружество, забвение обид и примирение" /

Myshkin understands it as a sign of friendship and reconciliation but also as a metaphor for Aglaya herself – a young woman with a prickly exterior and a soft underside.³¹ Delivered with a note by the sympathetic Kolya, the hedgehog tells Myshkin that Aglaya regrets her prickliness.

Dostoevsky emphasizes the hedgehog's figurative meanings by having his narrator report its effect on Myshkin: “князь точно из мертвых воскрес” / “the prince as if resurrected from the dead” (Pt 4, Ch 5 – *ИСС* 8; 424). These strong words are not only thematic, they demonstrate one possible effect of forgiveness. Given its religious connotations, the use of the verb ‘resurrected’ in this secular context marks Aglaya's symbolic role for Myshkin: she served as a bright memory in the dark month he spent with Nastasya. His fall from her favor crushes him. Her forgiveness revives him psychologically, morally, and spiritually.³²

In addition to evoking the novel's thematics of fall and redemption, the verb ‘resurrected’ in this scene echoes its earlier uses in Part One: both Totsky's diagnosis that Nastasya longs to be resurrected (Pt 1, Ch 4 – *ИСС* 8; 41) and Ganya's note to Aglaya claiming that her pity, compassion, encouragement will resurrect him (Pt 1, Ch 7 – *ИСС* 8; 72).³³ These uses of the verb ‘resurrected’ remind readers that both Nastasya and Ganya are fallen. By Part Four, we are aware that Ganya, who is ‘ordinary’, can regain his lost social position by working his way up through the ranks, yet Nastasya Filippovna, who is ‘extraordinary’, can do little or nothing to regain her lost virtue or social position.

In the same chapter as the hedgehog scene, Dostoevsky the author activates the religious connotations of the verb ‘resurrected’. In a confessional conversation with Myshkin, Ippolit despairingly cries that it is not worth being resurrected for the sake of people like Osterman (an eighteenth-century German-born Russian statesman) (Pt 4, Ch 5 – *ИСС* 8; 433). Two chapters later, speaking passionately in the Epanchin drawing room, Prince Myshkin declares

“it's a hedgehog, and nothing more, – besides that, it perhaps signifies friendship, a forgetting of offenses, and reconciliation” (Pt 4, Ch 5 – *ИСС* 8; 424). By including this incident in the novel, Dostoevsky underscores the human need to interpret the world. His narrator heightens reader curiosity about the hedgehog's meaning but also states that Epanchin has guessed correctly. The hedgehog is both itself and a message – something that can be said of almost everything in the novel. Yet since General Epanchin is not a very perceptive character, the narrator encourages readers to consider alternative meanings for the hedgehog.

31 My thanks to Elina Yuffa for this observation.

32 This rare scene of forgiveness also prepares readers for the next time Aglaya forgives him – another moment of happiness (Pt 4, Ch 5 – *ИСС* 8; 429).

33 On receiving the note, Aglaya says that Ganya is lying, she had only once pitied him (Pt 1, Ch 7 – *ИСС* 8; 72). Like the Swiss children and Aglaya, Ganya confuses pity and love.

that the Russian Christ will resurrect all humanity (Pt 4, Ch 7 – *ITCC* 8; 453). In choosing the word “resurrect”, both Ippolit and Prince Myshkin mix religion and politics. As he decries the foreign-born Osterman, Ippolit contrasts him with the martyred Russian guardsman Stepan Glebov, who reputedly died with equanimity despite fifteen hours of impalement by Peter the Great for being the lover of Eudoxia, Peter’s first wife. In juxtaposing the martyred Russian Glebov with Osterman, who helped Peter with both foreign policy and domestic reforms,³⁴ Ippolit voices a preference for Russian virtue over Western progress. Dostoevsky also uses Ippolit’s despairing rant to remind readers of the novel’s love triangles and the plight of women. Peter cloistered Eudoxia in order to remarry, yet he rages jealously when he learns that she has taken a lover. Peter may be Russia’s great westernizing tsar, but in impaling Glebov he demonstrates his possessive, exclusive, punitive Russian passion. In a move that complicates the novel’s Russia versus the West binary, Dostoevsky indirectly associates Russia’s great westernizing tsar with the jealous, possessive, passion-filled native Russian Rogozhin, who first attempts to kill his rival Myshkin but then kills his lover Nastasya Filippovna.

Myshkin further complicates the issue of Russian rivalry with the West by linking Russian passion with spiritual thirst (Pt 4, Ch 7 – *ITCC* 8; 452-453)³⁵ and claiming that the Russian Christ will save all humankind. On this reading, the passion fueling both Peter and Rogozhin is displaced: instead of finding spiritual guidance in the kenotic Russian Christ, they seek fulfillment in secular quests, which Myshkin associates with the sword-bearing Christ of the West. Moreover, Myshkin deepens readers’ understanding of Russian passion by associating it with extreme conversions, such as becoming a Jesuit or an atheist, thereby demonstrating how spiritual thirst can lead one astray. He also contrasts Russian passion with Christ’s compassion, thereby evoking another of the novel’s themes.

34 Osterman concluded the Peace of Nystad with Sweden and an important commercial treaty with Persia as well as helping Peter with domestic reforms such as the Table of Ranks.

35 Myshkin notes how Christ affects Russians: “Покажите ему в будущем обновление всего человечества и воскресение его, может быть, одною только русскою мыслью, русским богом и Христом, и увидите, какой исполин могучий и правдивый, мудрый и кроткий вырастет пред изумленным миром, изумленным и испуганным, потому что они представить себе нас не могут, судя по себе, без варварства”. / “Show him the future renewal of all humanity and its resurrection, perhaps, from only a single Russian idea, the Russian God and Christ, and you will see what a stalwart (*ispolin*) powerful and righteous, wise and meek, will grow in front of the astonished world, astonished and frightened, because they expect only the sword from us, the sword and violence, because they cannot imagine us, judging by themselves, without barbarism” (Pt 4, Ch 7 – *ITCC* 8; 453).

At novel's end, Nastasya Filippovna crushes Aglaya, thereby winning a momentary victory. Nonetheless, Myshkin's compassion³⁶ cannot and does not sate her desire for love. Unlike the Swiss children and Aglaya before her, Nastasya does not mistake compassion for love. Nevertheless, she hopes that by depriving Aglaya of Myshkin's love, she can draw it back to herself. She learns that it is too late.

Forgiveness and Revenge: The Emperor and the Pope

While the hedgehog story stresses the power of love and forgiveness to resurrect, Nastasya Filippovna's story of an emperor and a pope links forgiveness with revenge. After Rogozhin beats her black and blue in Part Two, Nastasya Filippovna refuses to forgive and marry him. He fasts and holds vigil for three days, refusing to leave until she relents. Before taking pity on him, she asks whether he knows the story of an unnamed emperor (Henry IV) who knelt before the palace of an unnamed pope (Gregory VII) for three days, barefoot, not eating or drinking, until the pope forgave him. She then reads him an unnamed poem (Heinrich Heine's *Henry*) which makes it clear that while Henry outwardly asks forgiveness, inwardly he vows revenge (Pt 2, Ch 3 – *ITCC* 8; 176).

Nastasya consciously employs the famous story to draw an analogy between her relationship with Rogozhin and the pope's relationship with the emperor. Like Henry IV and Gregory VII, Rogozhin and Nastasya Filippovna are engaged in a power struggle: while the emperor and pope fight over state versus church power,³⁷ Rogozhin and Nastasya Filippovna fight over her autonomy. Nastasya's story indicates her belief that Rogozhin will forget the fact that he beat her and remember only that she refused to forgive him. It also suggests that she believes he is asking forgiveness not because he repents of his action, but because he rues the result. By acknowledging the story's truth, Rogozhin accepts her interpretation. Nastasya then forgives Rogozhin but shortly there-

36 The narrator's report that Myshkin loves Nastasya Filippovna like a sick child (Pt 4, Ch 10–*ITCC* 8; 489) demonstrates his compassion for her and his link with the kenotic Christ. But this report also reminds readers that confusing compassion and love can have tragic consequences.

37 Ostensibly Henry and Gregory fought over who had the right to appoint clergy to high posts in the church, but the real battle was state versus church. While Henry IV was still a child, Gregory VII had seized the power to appoint popes and created the College of Cardinals to take over that task. Later Gregory asserted that the pope had the sole universal power, including the power to depose the emperor.

after runs away to Petersburg asserting “я всё ещё сама себе госпожа” / “I’m still mistress of myself” (Pt 2, Ch 3 – *ITCC* 8; 177), thereby signaling that she is not ready to cede her autonomy and accept his revenge.

Rogozhin tells Nastasya’s story to Prince Myshkin, so readers get it second-hand, just as we got Nastasya’s biographical sketch second-hand from Tot-sky. In both cases, the storyteller’s bias colors his account. Because he is disposed to interpret her words and actions negatively, Rogozhin reads Nastasya’s lack of malice not as her compassion for his suffering but as her lack of respect for him. Even when repeating Nastasya’s statement that she used to think him a lackey but now knows that he is not, Rogozhin fails to see that she admires him for his steadfastness. Dostoevsky thus shows readers how Rogozhin’s egocentric worldview leads him to misinterpret Nastasya Filippovna’s words. Moreover, his lack of compassion blinds him to Nastasya Filippovna’s compassion.

With this story, Dostoevsky offers history-savvy readers a preview of further action. After Henry IV’s famous walk to Canossa (the subject of the poem), Gregory VII pardons him; three years later, he excommunicates him again. Henry IV consequently names Clement III as his own pope and successfully invades Rome. Henry’s son (Henry V), however, supports the actual papacy and makes his father renounce his anti-pope. Years later, in order to regain power and rejoin the church, Henry IV abandons his final anti-pope (Gregory VIII) and renounces some rights of investiture. Behind his characters’ backs, Dostoevsky uses Nastasya’s analogue story and her message for Rogozhin to forecast their stormy relationship.

The story of the emperor and the pope also exposes a psychological truth: asking forgiveness can be humiliating. Humiliation can breed vengefulness. Nastasya Filippovna undergoes a change of feeling and forgives Rogozhin for beating her, even though she recognizes that he may never forgive her for humiliating him. Rogozhin, on the other hand, is single-minded and inflexible. Like his father, he can neither forgive nor understand forgiveness. He will never forgive Nastasya Filippovna for forcing him to beg forgiveness.

Unforgiveness in a Minor Key

In Part Four, the narrator apologetically devotes unforeseen narrative space to the secondary character Ardalion Ivolgin, the fallen general whose story serves as an analogue to Nastasya Filippovna’s. Unlike Nastasya, an orphan who is wronged by her guardian, Ivolgin is a family man responsible for his own fall. Like Nastasya, Ivolgin keenly feels his lost position and longs to recover it. As

their analogous stories show, society's double standard dictates that a fallen woman can never be fully accepted, even though a fallen general can.

An alcoholic and inveterate liar, Ivolgin quarrels with his friend Lebedev after stealing and then returning Lebedev's wallet with 400 rubles in it. Ivolgin purloins the wallet so that he has money to visit his mistress, but restores it following Lebedev's hyperbolic defense of Ivolgin's innocence. Nonetheless, Lebedev tortures the General for a few days by pretending not to find it, justifying his action to Myshkin by saying that he wants to shame the General into returning to his family. Myshkin reprimands Lebedev for humiliating his friend, observing that Ivolgin was asking for forgiveness and counting on Lebedev's friendship. When Ivolgin returns home this time, he is uncharacteristically irritable and unrepentant, even to his wife, who loves him and has always forgiven him (Pt 4, Ch 3 – *ITCC* 8; 401). Three days later, he explodes at Ippolit and Ganya, runs out into street, and has a stroke, with Kolya at his side.

In this secondary story, Dostoevsky demonstrates the importance of love, friendship, and forgiveness. Lebedev immediately blames himself, telling Ivolgin's wife, Nina Alexandrovna, that he was solely responsible for his friend's stroke (Pt 4, Ch 6 – *ITCC* 8; 441). Though Lebedev exaggerates his own importance, readers know that by withholding forgiveness and humiliating Ivolgin, he has contributed to his friend's death. Although Ivolgin never recovers, he is restored to his family. Seeing the sincerity of Lebedev's sorrow, Nina Alexandrovna reassures Lebedev that God will forgive him (*Ibid.*). Her compassion has such a huge impact on Lebedev that he refuses to leave her side for the rest of the evening; it also reminds readers of the power of compassion, a virtue that Lebedev did not exercise. Compassion implies suffering with someone. A man of little honor, Lebedev enjoys the opportunity to feel superior to his socially superior friend and prolongs his humiliation to fatal effect. In short, he does not look beyond himself.

Forgiveness Involves the Ability to See Beyond Self

Forgiveness entails an inner change of feeling that allows individuals to overcome the 'fullness of blame' that arises naturally when a person is deliberately wronged. The more harm a person endures, the harder it is to forgive the offender, and the longer it takes. That change of feeling comes with a change in perspective: without dismissing or dwelling on the injury to one's property, body, or pride, the offended person looks beyond self and injury to consider the offender's position or the context or both. The more repentant the offend-

er, the easier to forgive. Faced with an unrepentant offender, the offended person must consider the lasting harm to their own psyche caused by holding on to blame or vindictive emotions.

In Dostoevsky's novel, Prince Myshkin finds it easiest to forgive. Since Myshkin has a generous disposition and sees any issue from multiple perspectives, his ego is not a stumbling block. Myshkin forgives quickly: even when others scheme against him (like Lebedev), he does not believe that they want to harm him. Rogozhin, on the other hand, does not forgive. Rogozhin is not only single-minded and vindictive, he views others instrumentally or suspiciously. Moreover, Rogozhin is so locked in himself, that he is incapable of understanding another's perspective. He tells Myshkin that as long as Myshkin is in front of him, he believes him, but as soon as he is out of sight, he suspects him of treachery (Pt 2, Ch 3 – *ITCC* 8; 174). He projects his own fears and personality traits onto others.

Aglaya Epanchina and Nastasya Filippovna are in the middle: both have the capacity to forgive, and sometimes do, but they are hindered by their pride. As a pampered youngest daughter, Aglaya finds it hard to acknowledge her own wrongdoing. Aglaya forgives her family members and Myshkin fairly quickly, because they are immediately sorry for any perceived harm. Nastasya has the hardest task because none of her offenders repents. While she eventually forgives Rogozhin for beating her, Nastasya Filippovna never forgives Totsky or herself for her loss of virtue.

As the hedgehog incident shows, forgiveness can be redemptive. By the time the verb 'resurrected' makes its final appearance in Part Four, it has accrued religious force.³⁸ As the narrator notes Myshkin's belief that Nastasya Filippovna can be resurrected (Pt 4, Ch 10 – *ITCC* 8; 489), we understand that he means she can be brought back from her state of spiritual death. This last use of the verb 'resurrected' also reminds readers of its first: the narrator reporting Totsky's diagnosis that Nastasya wants to be resurrected (Pt 1, Ch 4 – *ITCC* 8; 41). In circling back to the question of Nastasya's resurrection, the novel reminds readers of her spiritual death and raises the question of what, if anything, can bring her back to life. The novel suggests that forgiveness has that power: if Nastasya could forgive herself, she could heal her self-division. But Myshkin's prediction that Nastasya's initial decision to run away with Rogozhin might prevent her from ever forgiving herself obtains: "Вы сейчас загубить себя хотели,

38 See also Deborah A. MARTINSEN, *Surprised by Shame: Dostoevsky's Liars and Narratives of Exposure* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2003), pp. 65-70, 88, for a discussion of Ivolgin's story of Corporal Kolpakov – his putative death and restoration to the ranks – a comic analogue to the novel's theme.

безвозвратно, потому что вы никогда не простили бы себе потом этого” / “Just now you wanted to destroy yourself, irrevocably, because you would never forgive yourself for it later” (Pt 1, Ch 16 – ПСС 8; 142). Because Nastasya Filippovna is unable to forgive herself in Part One, she relinquishes the dream of resurrection represented by Myshkin and, in Part Four, returns to Rogozhin, who can never forgive her.

As always in Dostoevsky, the capacity to look beyond the self, to consider another agent’s perspective, and to look at the larger socio-political context is critical for seeing self as agent not victim, actor not reactor. Unforgiveness locks one into the prison house of pride and ego. By choosing not to forgive others or themselves, Nastasya Filippovna, Parfen Rogozhin, and Aglaya Epanchina harm one another, themselves, and Prince Myshkin. Dostoevsky’s *Idiot* thus demonstrates that the capacity to forgive and to accept forgiveness can be a matter of life and death.

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