

**‘Reading, Narrating, Scripting: Psycho-Poetic Strategies in
Dostoevskii’s *Idiot*’**

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Abstract

The thesis examines the role played by the characters in the structuring of Dostoevskii's novel *Idiot*. Taking into account the author's lack of a fixed plan for the novel, it assumes a future as yet uncreated and susceptible to being influenced and shaped by the characters. It identifies the concept of 'scripting', incorporating the strategies used by the protagonists to orchestrate their own lives and those of others, and thus to take control of the text, and the impulses behind these strategies. Both aspects are used to explore two connected issues; self-other interactions, connected primarily to the strategies employed, and the questions of faith and doubt faced by the characters, which are grounded in the same impulses as scripting. The concept of presentness links both areas. By looking in detail at the hero's and heroine's ideas and actions, how they affect each other and the other protagonists, the thesis examines how they steer the direction of the narrative and their primary motivation in doing so. Widening the focus to explore the implications of this analysis on the ethical and narrational planes, the thesis draws together the strands of scripting, presentness, self-other interactivity and problems of faith and doubt in order to discuss the nature of the ethical and narrational ideals posited by the novel, and the role these themes play in creating a sense of unity in the text, despite its unusual structuring.

For Andy Young (1967-2000),

brother, friend, inspiration.

Preface

This thesis began with the questions, what makes *Idiot* such a difficult but compelling novel? and, how does such a fragmented and apparently disorganized text achieve unity? It does not conform to the rules of its genre, but still ranks as one of Dostoevskii's greatest works. In attempting to find a solution to these and the many other problems the novel presents, I focused on the most prominent and unusual aspects of the narrative: the six-month gap between Parts I and II, the aimless central section after the action moves to Pavlovsk, and the symmetry provided by the two appearances of the Holbein painting 'Christ in the Tomb' and Prince Myshkin's two epileptic seizures. By examining how the novel develops and changes in the light of these features, I came to the conclusion that it is the protagonists' consciousnesses and interactions which are responsible for the structuring of the text. A long-standing conviction that character is of vital importance to the foundations of narrative fiction as a philosophical genre, encouraged me to look further, to define how the strategies at work in the novel are connected to the interactions of the protagonists.

The influence of Robin Feuer Miller's seminal study of the shifting pattern of narrative voices in *Idiot*, and Gary Saul Morson's work on processual nature of the novel, were central to the formulation of my own ideas. Post-Soviet criticism of Dostoevskii, much of which discusses the import of Orthodoxy for the author's thought and artistic conception, has also provided inspiration. Although I do not follow this line, it has

persuaded me of the seriousness of Dostoevskii's ethical and religious concerns; the thesis however shifts the focus away from the tendency to base interpretations purely on religion to frame these concerns within the context of narrative.

A huge debt of gratitude is owed to Malcolm Jones, who read numerous drafts of my work with great attention to both detail and the wider picture, and whose advice, guidance and belief in the project were a constant source of encouragement. His kindness and concern have also been much appreciated over the last very difficult 18 months. I could not have wished for a better supervisor. Thanks must also go to the entire staff of the University of Nottingham's Department of Slavonic Studies for creating such a friendly and supportive atmosphere, but in particular to Lesley Milne, Nick Luker and Irina Shlumakova for help both professional and personal. John Elsworth and Ruth Coates provided invaluable guidance during my MA, and if any one person encouraged me to explore the depths of Dostoevskii's world, it was Irina Kirillova during my undergraduate days at Cambridge.

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Catherine and Genevieve Young-Southward, and John and Helena Bowles deserve special thanks, and of course, my parents, Jean and Wilson, who never wavered in their support, both emotional and material, and whose strength and courage in the most traumatic of circumstances has been the source of my own determination to finish, cannot be thanked enough.

With apologies to the rainforests.

Sarah J. Young

Nottingham, June 2001

Abbreviations

<i>PSS</i>	Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevskii, <i>Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 30 tomakh</i> , ed. by V. G. Bazanov and others (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972-90)
<i>CASS</i>	<i>Canadian-American Slavic Studies</i>
<i>IDS</i>	<i>International Dostoevsky Society</i>
<i>SEEJ</i>	<i>Slavic and East European Journal</i>
<i>SEER</i>	<i>Slavonic and East European Review</i>
Izd.	Izdatel'stvo
n. pub.	no publisher

Note on transliteration

All proper names and other Russian words have been transliterated using the Library of Congress system.

The true world is that of becoming, the
apparent world that of the fixed and constant.

– **Martin Heidegger**, *Nietzsche*

Introduction

I. 'A TERRIBLE ROGUE OR A MYSTERIOUS IDEAL': THE HERO AND OTHER PROBLEMS OF *Idiot*

Idiot is the strangest and least understood of Dostoevskii's major fictional works, and the fallacy of Allan Tate's claim that, 'of the three [sic] great novels of Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* has perhaps the simplest structure',¹ is evident in the fact that over 130 years after the novel was published, it continues to vex and divide critics. Aside from having no easily-definable plot and a messy, ad hoc structure, it appears to lack several features of the quintessential Dostoevskian novel. For example, there are no fully-developed or recognizable doubles in *Idiot*, a fact which led John Jones to leave the novel out of his study on the author.² More prominently, the direct explication of a social system leading to slavery (the 'anthill theory'), so central to the other novels, is entirely absent from *Idiot*. Moreover, as Busch points out, it is also the only novel where the positive hero (Myshkin) is indisputably at the centre of the work, the morally neutral

¹ 'The Hovering Fly', in *Collected Essays* (Denver, CO: Allen Swallow, 1959), p. 146.

² *Dostoevsky* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

character who can be pulled both ways (Ippolit) is not the central figure, and the most negative character (Rogozhin) is not an ideological hero.³

Furthermore, despite the author's stated intention of producing a novel about a 'положительно прекрасный человек',⁴ concentrating on the hero's innocence and his Christ-like attributes of humility and compassion, *Idiot* is the only one of the major novels to end with few hints of spiritual regeneration or the possibility of new life. Although debate still rages about the authenticity (in both narratological and psychological terms) of Raskol'nikov's and Stepan Trofimovich's conversions in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* and *Besy* respectively, the very fact that there is no such episode in *Idiot* indicates that for all its hopeful beginnings and the potential of Prince Myshkin to affect others for the better, the novel ends on a much darker note. As Panichas states, 'it is the least protective or comforting of his major novels. No utterly redemptive figure here appears to cushion spiritual contradictions, ambiguities, doubts, ambivalences, shocks'.⁵

The question of how to interpret the character of Prince Myshkin is perhaps the main difficulty facing the reader, as it is in the figure of the hero that the 'meaning' of the novel lies. In spite of the novel's horrific denouement, and the apparent failure of Dostoevskii's positive hero to realize the ideal and prevent the suffering of others, many critics take the

³ 'The Myshkin – Ippolit – Rogozhin Triad', *CASS*, 3 (1983), 372-83 (see Abbreviations).

⁴ Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh*, ed. by V. G. Bazanov and others (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972-90), XXVIII/ii, 330, 332. Henceforth all references in the text are to this edition of Dostoevskii's works.

⁵ *The Burden of Vision: Dostoevsky's Spiritual Art* (Lake Bluff, IL: Gateway, 1985), p. 51.

statement about the ‘положительно прекрасный человек’, as well as the author’s notebook entry for the novel, ‘КНЯЗЬ ХРИСТОС’ (IX, 246, 249), as the starting point for their investigations; Stepanian states, ‘ключевым моментом при написании каждого из романов является момент нахождения главной идеи, всязывающей «миры иные» с посюсторонним – например, «КНЯЗЬ ХРИСТОС» в «Идиоте»’.⁶ Dostoevsky’s comparison of his hero with Christ in both sources has played an enormous role in the orientation of research on *Idiot* towards religious interpretations of the hero, resulting in differently nuanced critical evaluations.

Guardini has produced one of the most positive interpretations of the Prince, comparing him to the Redeemer, particularly in his relationship with Nastas’ia Filippovna, who is seen in this light as a Mary Magdalene figure, and writing, ‘in the Prince’s existence, God is present [...] He does not speak of God, but he radiates with Him’.⁷ Myshkin is seen from this angle as a man with a message for mankind, displaying Christ-like virtues and a sense of God in-dwelling. While Guardini focuses on the purity and potential of Myshkin as a symbol of Christ, Ermilova’s equally benevolent

⁶ ‘K ponimaniiu “realizma v vysshem smysle”’, in *Dostoevskii i miravaia kul’tura*, 9 (Moscow: Klassika plius, 1997), pp. 28-35 (p. 33); see also, amongst others, Michel Bouttier, ‘L’Idiot, figure du Christ’, in *Dostoievski*, ed. by Jacques Catteau and Jacques Rolland (Paris: Editions Verdier, 1983), pp. 181-90; Erik Egeberg, ‘F. M. Dostoevskii v poiskakh polozhitel’no prekrasnogo cheloveka. Selo Stepanchikovo i Idiot’, in *Evangel’skii tekst v russkoi literature XVIII-XX vekov*, 2, ed. by V. N. Zakharov and others (Petrozavodsk: Izd. Petrozavodskogo universiteta, 1998), pp. 385-390; and V. A. Tunimanov, ‘Roman o prekrasnom cheloveke’, in *Idiot. Roman v 4-x ch.* (Moscow [n. pub.] 1971), pp. 625-647.

⁷ ‘Dostoevsky’s Idiot: A Symbol of Christ’, trans. by F. X. Quinn, *Cross Currents*, 6 (1956), 359-82 (pp. 369-77).

interpretation of *Idiot*, which analyses the figure of Myshkin in relation to the influence of John's Gospel on Dostoevskii's thinking as a whole, denies that the hero has any negative or ambivalent character traits.⁸

Reservations about this approach have been expressed by Egeberg, amongst others, on the grounds that it is too one-sided and ignores the Prince's weaknesses, and because the comment 'Князь Христос' reflects Dostoevskii's intentions, not what he actually achieved in the finished product.⁹ This is not to suggest that there are no similarities between Myshkin and the image of Christ as it is presented in the Gospels, or that Dostoevskii's fictional work as a whole does not warrant religious interpretations. The overt Christian themes of *Idiot* – interwoven in the motifs of execution, Christ, the fallen woman, and the Apocalypse – invite such analysis. Lepakhin's detailed examination of the textual and thematic parallels between the Gospels and Prince Myshkin indicates the strength of this idea and the applicability of this approach to Dostoevskii's fictional works.¹⁰ More recently, the post-Soviet era has brought an upsurge in interest in the religious aspects of Dostoevskii's work, most of which concentrates on the links between the author and Orthodox thought, leading

⁸ *Taina kniazia Myshkina. O romane Dostoevskogo 'Idiot'* (Ivanovo: Ivanovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1993), p. 107.

⁹ Erik Egeberg, 'How Should We Then Read *The Idiot*?', in *Celebrating Creativity: Essays in Honour of Jostein Børtnes*, ed. by Knut Andreas Grimstad & Ingunn Lunde (Bergen: University of Bergen Press, 1997), pp. 163-69 (pp. 164-66).

¹⁰ 'Khristianskie motivy v romane Dostoevskogo *Idiot*', *Dissertationes Slavicae*, 16 (1984), 65-92.

to interpretations based on concepts such as hesychasm and *iurodstvo*, as well as biblical archetypes and motifs, including many on *Idiot*.¹¹

A number of critics have also examined Prince Myshkin in relation to the comments Dostoevskii made on the death of his first wife in the famous diary fragment, 'Masha lezhit na stole' (XX, 172-75). The author's reflections on the ideal of annihilation of the ego in order to love the other selflessly, as Christ loved, are frequently introduced into discussions about the hero's meekness and humility.¹² Kotel'nikov has also connected Myshkin and the ideas expressed in 'Masha lezhit na stole' to the theological concept of kenosis or 'emptying out'.¹³ Taken from Philippians, where Christ 'made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men' (2. 7), kenosis seems to be particularly applicable to Prince Myshkin, as Webster has shown.¹⁴

¹¹ See, for example, works too numerous to cite by V. N. Zakharov, I. A. Esaulov, E. A. Kunil'skii, T. A. Kasatkina, and V. V. Ivanov; a selection of these authors' works is listed in the bibliography.

¹² See, for example, A. Toichkina, 'Problema ideala v tvorchestve Dostoevskogo 1860-x godov (roman *Idiot*)', in *Dostoevskii i mirovaia kul'tura*, 11, ed. by Karen Stepanian and others (St Petersburg: Serebrianyi vek, 1998), pp. 29-34 (pp. 30-31); Tat'iana Kasatkina, *Kharakterologiiia Dostoevskogo: tipologiiia emotsional'no-tsennostnykh orientatsii* (Moscow: Nasilenie, 1996), pp. 204-8; R. N. Poddubnaia, 'Siuzhet Khrista v romanakh Dostoevskogo', in *F. M. Dostoevskii i natsional'naia kul'tura*, 2 (Cheliabinsk: Cheliabinskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1996), pp. 29-65 (pp. 34-5); Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-71* (London: Robson, 1995), p. 317; Liza Knapp's *The Annihilation of Inertia: Dostoevsky and Metaphysics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996) relates Dostoevskii's oeuvre as a whole to this passage. See pp. 189-90, 242-44 below for my contribution to this debate.

¹³ 'Kenozis kak tvorcheskii motiv u Dostoevskogo', in *Dostoevskii: materialy i issledovaniia*, 13, ed. by N. F. Budanova and others (St Petersburg: Nauka, 1996), pp. 194-200 (pp. 196-97)

¹⁴ 'The Exemplary Kenotic Holiness of Prince Myshkin in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 28. 3 (1984), 189-216; see also A. E. Kunil'skii, 'O khristianskom kontekste v romane F. M. Dostoevskogo *Idiot*', in *Evangel'skii tekst*, 2, pp. 391-408 (p. 398).

Murav, moreover, points out in her classic study that kenosis is an aspect of *iurodstvo*, to which the hero has also been linked.¹⁵

Unlike the unreservedly positive interpretations of Guardini and Ermilova, this line of investigation encourages a more balanced approach, allowing examination of the hero's weaknesses and failures. From this it is possible to judge how far he succeeds in emulating Christ's act of kenosis and achieving the ideal of annihilating the ego for the sake of the other, and to what extent he can be described as a 'положительно прекрасный человек'. The general consensus has been that Myshkin does not live up to these ideals, leading to the assertion that 'the Prince is a failure as Christ was a failure'.¹⁶ However, some critics go further, arguing that not only does the hero fail to improve the lives of those around him, but he in fact makes matters worse; in this analysis his innocence is the source of the woes of all the main characters in the denouement.¹⁷ Owing to his imperfections, the Prince is not a Christ-figure, but a much more ambivalent creation.

The Holbein painting 'Christ in the Tomb', the artistic image which lies at the heart of the novel and is the focus of many of its themes, also

¹⁵ *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky's Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 13.

¹⁶ Donald M. Fiene, 'Pushkin's "Poor Knight": The Key to Perceiving Dostoevsky's *Idiot* as Allegory', *IDS Bulletin*, 8 (1978), 10-21 (p. 21); see also T. L. Novikova, 'Agiograficheskie motivy v romane F. M. Dostoevskogo *Idiot*', in *Russkaia literatura XIX veka i khristianstvo*, ed. V. B. Kataev and others (Moscow: Izd. Moskovskogo universiteta, 1997), pp. 328-336 (p. 335).

¹⁷ See, for example, Marina Woronzoff-Dashkoff, 'The Sympathetic Vision: Ethical and Aesthetic Patterns in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1995), pp. 20-1; or B. O. Korman, 'Problema avtora v khudozhestvennoi proze F. M. Dostoevskogo', *Slavica* (Prague), 49. 4 (1980), 388-396 (p. 391).

exemplifies the problematic nature of interpreting Myshkin as a Christ figure.¹⁸ If he is intended to be seen as a humanized Christ, then the terrible consequences for peoples' faith of the loss of Christ's divinity, depicted with naturalistic realism in the painting and expressed so forcefully by Ippolit (VIII, pp. 338-39), equally applies to the Prince and negates the possibility of the ideal.¹⁹ Børtnes also sees the Christian motifs evident in the Prince, such as *iurodstvo*, as part of a 'process of desymbolization', deconstructing the analogy of the hero with Christ and exposing the difference between the two figures, rather than their similarity.²⁰

The contrast of Myshkin's good intentions and gentle humility with his failure to save anyone and the suggestion that he contributes to the catastrophe of the denouement, as well as the implications of the Holbein painting in the light of the links between the image of the hero and Christ, has led some to judge him more harshly as an abject failure, a malign influence who tries to impose a false ideal on to the other protagonists, thus causing their destruction.²¹ The most negative interpretation of *Idiot* and its hero is that of Robert Lord, who claims that 'beneath a cloak of simulated

¹⁸ For critical analyses of the painting itself, see chapter 2, note 72 (pp. 220).

¹⁹ See L. Muller, 'Obraz Khrista v romane Dostoevskogo *Idiot*', in *Evangel'skii tekst*, 2, pp. 374-384 (pp. 378-80); I. A. Kirillova, 'Khristos v zhizni i tvorchestve Dostoevskogo', in *Dostoevskii: materialy i issledovaniia*, 14 (St Petersburg: Nauka, 1997), pp. 18-25 (pp. 24-25); and Toichkina, pp. 30-31.

²⁰ 'Dostoevskij's *Idiot* or the Poetics of Emptiness', *Scando-Slavica*, 40 (1994), 5-14 (pp. 10-13).

²¹ See Murray Krieger, 'Dostoevsky's *Idiot*: The Curse of Saintliness', in *Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by René Wellek (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1962), pp. 39-52 (p. 42); Dennis Slattery, *Dostoevsky's Fantastic Prince: A Phenomenological Approach* (New York: Lang, 1983); and Simon Lesser, 'Saint and Sinner - Dostoevsky's *Idiot* (with a reply by R. Noland)', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 21 (Autumn, 1975), 387-404.

innocence he makes the most of his talent for scheming', and describes Myshkin as 'an open sore, a paranoiac introvert'.²² Although this interpretation may be something of an exaggeration, it originates, as is well known, in the same source as the epithet 'Князь Христос', cited repeatedly by critics as proof of the author's Christological design: the notebooks for *Idiot*. Lord sees echoes in the finished text of the earlier proud, vengeful 'Idiot' sketched out by Dostoevskii in the initial stages of his work on the novel, and insists that this is the 'true' character of the hero.

The fact that Lord at one extreme and Ermilova at the other use the same source for their diametrically opposing interpretations highlights a number of problems common to both approaches. It is difficult to justify the assumption that a single phrase or line of development in the preparatory work for a novel could hold the key to that entire piece of work, particularly as in this case that preparation clearly involves many changes of direction by the author, both in the character of Myshkin and in the course of action Dostoevskii envisages. The gap between the notebooks and the novel is too large to take any statement as definitive on either side. We have no proof that 'Князь Христос' was anything more than a passing thought amidst a sea of contradictory notes, but more importantly we have no way of knowing whether the phrase had any effect on the subsequent development of Dostoevskii's design. Similarly, the distance from the completed text of the evidence that Lord produces to support his theory of a

²² *Dostoevsky: Essays and Perspectives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 83, 88.

malign 'Idiot' also serves to undermine his side of the argument. By the time the novel opens, Dostoevskii has moved so far away from his initial conception of a proud, cruel hero that any remaining connections between Myshkin and his earlier versions are insufficient to convince us that his 'true' nature lies in the latter. The notebooks are an interesting source for examining how Dostoevskii wrote *Idiot*, and Robin Feuer Miller and Gary Saul Morson, among others, have made effective use of them.²³ Ultimately, however, they are outside the text, and as such one must be careful not to give them precedence over the novel itself as evidence of the author's apparent 'intention'.²⁴

Furthermore, Lord's negative analysis may be contradicted by aspects of the hero's character and actions in the finished version, for example his concern for the downtrodden, humiliated and abused, his gentle and compassionate nature, and vision of a higher reality. However, the same can be said of interpretations connecting Myshkin to the image of Christ, which disregard the 'dark side' of the hero, in both the finished text and in his malign antecedents in the notebooks, and the negative effect his actions have on the characters around him. The fact that researchers have identified in Myshkin features in common with some of Dostoevskii's most ambivalent characters, such as Stavrogin and Versilov, as well as with his most positive creations, Alesha Karamazov and Starets Zosima, also

²³ Robin Feuer Miller, *Dostoevsky and 'The Idiot': Author, Narrator, and Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981) pp. 46-89; Gary Saul Morson, 'Tempics and *The Idiot*', in *Celebrating Creativity*, pp. 108-34; narratological aspects of their analysis are discussed below, pp. 12-13.

²⁴ See Allan Rodway, *The Truths of Fiction* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p 123.

indicates that he is more enigmatic than such one-sided interpretations allow.²⁵

Herein lies one of the main problems of interpreting *Idiot*. In seeking to align Dostoevskii's achievements in the novel with (some of) his stated intentions about the hero, the critics on both sides of this debate in fact highlight the very fact their research denies: that Myshkin is an intensely complex construction who defies categorization. The existence of opposing interpretations in itself suggests that Myshkin is impossible to define, and that the novel gives us contradictory signals about him; as Kunil'skii states, he is multi-sided and has no single meaning.²⁶ Furthermore, by focusing on one aspect of Myshkin or the other, neither faction addresses the central issue of how he changes in the course of the novel, or how this affects the other characters or the direction of the text. Those who argue that Myshkin is a negative character see him as basically static and unchanging throughout the narrative, while those who claim he is a saintly or Christ-like figure cannot maintain a coherent position if they then examine the spiritual decline of the hero apparent in the second half of the novel. There can be no spiritual improvement or movement towards the light if the hero is within the light from the beginning, and in fact it

²⁵ On links to Dostoevskii's negative and ambivalent characters, see Frank F. Seeley, 'The Mystery of Prince Myshkin', in *Actualité de Dostoevskij*, ed. by Nina Kauchtschischwili (Genova: La Quercia Edizioni, 1982), pp. 35-44 (p. 35), and Janet Tucker, 'Dostoevsky's *Idiot*: Defining Myshkin', *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, (1997), 23-40. Richard Peace, *Dostoyevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), points to the connection of Myshkin to Zosima's ideas (p. 274).

²⁶ 'Printsip "snizheniia" v poetike F. M. Dostoevskogo: Roman *Idiot*', in *Zhanr i kompozitsiia literatury* (Petrozavodsk: Izd. Petrozavodskogo universiteta, 1983), pp. 28-52 (p. 31).

becomes obvious from the text that a move in the opposite direction, away from the light, occurs. Therefore both extremes of criticism of Myshkin necessarily deny that any change occurs within him during the course of the novel.

There are, of course, more balanced interpretations which examine the contradictory elements in the image of Myshkin presented in the novel, with several critics highlighting the dualistic aspects of the Prince's nature.²⁷ My own position within this debate will become clear in chapters 2 and 3. When considering analyses of the novel based on the contradictory impulses of the hero, Dalton's psychoanalytic study deserves special mention.²⁸ Her examination focuses on the tension between Myshkin's conscious and unconscious drives, and is particularly insightful in its analysis of the emotional impact of the novel on its readers and the narrative's flirtation with the loss of form as a result of this tension. One should also note that Bakhtin's classic study of dialogue and polyphony in Dostoevskii's fiction is also of course based on internal and external dualism, although the theorist in fact pays scant attention to *Idiot*, and does not resolve the many outstanding questions about the nature of the hero or the narrative.²⁹

²⁷ See, for example, Roger B. Anderson, *Dostoevsky: Myths of Duality* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1986), pp. 66-93; Howard H. Keller, 'Prince Myshkin: Success or Failure', *Journal of Russian Studies*, 24 (1972), 17-23; Malcolm V. Jones, 'K ponimaniiu obraza kniazia Myshkina', in *Dostoevskii: materialy i issledovaniia*, 2, ed. by G. M. Fridlender (Leningrad: Nauka, 1976), pp. 106-12; and Seeley, 'Myshkin'.

²⁸ *Unconscious Structure in 'The Idiot': A Study in Literature and Psychoanalysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).

²⁹ *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1972) (3rd edition).

While our understanding of the character of Prince Myshkin may be central to any interpretation of *Idiot*, it is not the only factor in our analysis. Bakhtin's work has been instrumental in encouraging critics to move beyond simple character interpretation to examine the narrative structuring of Dostoevskii's texts, and in particular the presence of different narrative voices. Robin Feuer Miller's outstanding study of the novel, *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, identifies four narrative voices: a comic voice, reflecting or parodying the novel of manners, a Gothic voice which intensifies the novel's atmosphere of confusion and terror, a sympathetic, omniscient narrator, and a ironic, detached voice reporting gossip.³⁰ She examines the shifts between these voices and argues convincingly that the changing presentation of Myshkin in the novel is linked to the alteration of the narrator's viewpoint.³¹ Furthermore, in her account of Dostoevskii's use of 'enigma and explanation' in the presentation of the hero, Miller offers a narratological interpretation of Myshkin which is extremely persuasive.³² Her analysis on these points is central to the present research.

Gary Saul Morson's theoretical examination of the novel offers a different approach. Examining the processual way in which the novel was written, without a pre-conceived plan, the effect of this on the structuring of the text, and the theme of process in the novel, he proposes a reading which

³⁰ Miller, *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, p. 8.; Lord, *Essays and Perspectives*, p. 86; Frank, *The Miraculous Years*, pp. 327, 337; and Ia. O. Zundelovich, 'Svoeobrazie povestvovaniia v romane *Idiot*', in *Romany Dostoevskogo: Stat'i* (Tashkent [n. pub.] 1963), pp. 62-105 (pp. 62-65) also examine the changing pattern of narrative voices.

³¹ *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, pp. 90-164; Murav takes much the same line, although from a different perspective, *Holy Foolishness*, pp. 84-88.

³² *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, p. 89 and passim.

takes account of Dostoevskii's ideas about the openness of time.³³ Although Morson's conception of *Idiot's* un-novelistic temporality is in many ways convincing, and plays a significant role in the present interpretation, it fails to consider fully the negative implications of openness and process: the loss of form. My own account of the novel will attempt to address this problem.

The latest addition to the ranks of works on *Idiot* is by Bruce French.³⁴ which, owing to its very recent publication date, I have been unable to incorporate fully into the current research, despite its undoubted relevance. French focuses on subject-to-subject and subject-to-object relations, and explains many features of the narrative through the concept of 'storiness', which 'refers to the vision of life that forms as a result of seeing people and the world as objects', and 'tends towards fixidity, rigidity, predictability, causality, predetermination, inflexibility'.³⁵ He sees Myshkin and the narrator as displaying the opposite tendency, and emphasizes their flexibility, openness and refusal to enter into monologizing explanations as part of their moral freedom.³⁶ However, like Morson, French fails to address the problem of the loss of form, and like the many one-sided interpretations of Myshkin cited above, he does not take into account the change in the hero, although his analysis of the behaviour of the characters is perceptive. Furthermore, despite his

³³ 'Tempics', pp. 121-23, 130-32.

³⁴ *Dostoevsky's 'Idiot': Dialogue and the Spiritually Good Life* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001).

³⁵ French, pp. ix-x.

³⁶ French, pp. xi, 22, 46-50 and passim.

concentration on openness as a spiritually positive attribute, French's failure to include Morson's recent work on temporality in the novel leaves a large gap in his research. Nevertheless, in their insights into its narrative strategies, these interpretations give a much fuller picture of the strangeness of the novel, and Miller and Dalton in particular successfully connect the presentation of Prince Myshkin to the dynamics of the narrative.



In seeking a theoretical basis that addresses the major problems presented by the narrative of *Idiot*, I shall attempt to reconcile the two strands of interpretation outlined above, and concentrate on the role of character in the text, examining primarily how the protagonists act, react, and interact, and how this influences the movement of the novel as a whole. There are valid reasons for suggesting this approach. In 1839, before his literary career had begun, Dostoevskii wrote to his brother Mikhail, 'человек есть тайна. Его надо разгадать, и ежели будешь её разгадывать всю жизнь, то не говори, что потерял время. Я занимаюсь этой тайной, ибо хочу быть человеком' (XXVIII.i, 63). The author's early interest in human nature led to his using his fiction as a testing ground for his characters,³⁷ and it is clear from the same letter to his brother that Dostoevskii saw character as an essential component of literary production from an early age: 'учить характеры могу из писателей' (XXVIII.i, 63). This accounts for the vibrant, fascinating qualities of many of the heroes Dostoevskii created, such as the Underground Man, Stavrogin, and Mitia

³⁷ See, for example, Bakhtin, *Problemy*, p. 118.

Karamazov, and the fact that much of the action of his novels is based on or arises from the frequently violent ideological clashes of the wills and ideas of these heroes.

Furthermore, it is plain from the notebooks to the novels that the author spent far more time working out the personalities and interactions of his heroes than any other aspect of the text. This is particularly true of *Idiot*, where, beginning with an idea, Dostoevskii worked on multiple detailed and constantly changing plans, which all focus on the figure of the 'Idiot', and on the relationship of the hero to his idea and to the other protagonists.³⁸ Bakhtin also noted the centrality of character, particularly in the genesis of the novels, as he saw Dostoevskii beginning in his notebooks not with plot or structure, but with specific voices and the ideas the characters embody: 'Достоевский начинает не с идеи, а с идей-героев диалога'.³⁹ The plot at this stage indeed seems almost incidental to Dostoevskii's design, and it is significant that having discovered the character of the hero, who strongly resembles Prince Myshkin in the final version, the author began writing the published version of the novel with minimal additional preparation; once the personality of the hero and his ideological basis had been worked out, the plot arose in the process of writing rather than being fixed and pre-determined. Although of course there are many plot elements mentioned in the notebooks, some of which

³⁸ Miller, *Author Narrator, and Reader*, p.38. See also A. S. Dolinin, ed., *F. M. Dostoevskogo. Pisma*, tt. I-IV (Moscow and Leningrad: Akademiia, 1928-59), III, 330.

³⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'K pererabotke knigi o Dostoevskom', in *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* (Moscow: Iskusstva, 1979), pp. 308-27 (p. 322).

survive to the final version, the gap between the notebooks and the finished novel in terms of the story and overall design is sufficient to show us that Dostoevskii considered the establishment of his heroes to be of paramount importance, with plotting, structuring, and the position of the narrator taking second place, and arising directly out of the characters' actions and interactions.

Moreover, if we ignore the role of character and the importance of the protagonists' interactions in Dostoevskii's artistic conception, we are left with very little to interpret. As Carroll states, 'The characters themselves provide the loci of coherence in the novels: no other structurings of reality recover from the demolition into chaos to which they are subjected'.⁴⁰ Morson and Emerson's comments on the form of Dostoevskii's novels illustrate this problem: they state that for Bakhtin, the Dostoevskian plot is merely, 'a way of setting optimally favourable situations for intense dialogues with unforeseen outcomes [...] However intriguing (or banal) Dostoevsky's plots may be, they are the wrong place to look for the central moments of his works', but go on to claim that 'a polyphonic work has a plot without a structure'.⁴¹

Certainly both plot and structure are extremely problematic concepts in relation to the Dostoevskian novel, being almost impossible to define in the way one would expect of a traditional nineteenth century

⁴⁰ *Break-Out from the Crystal Palace, the anarcho-psychological critique: Stirner, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 146.

⁴¹ Gary Saul Morson & Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 247, 254.

example of the genre. If we examine the structure of Dostoevskii's novels, we see that they do not conform to the Jamesian notion of a preconceived plan of a beginning, middle and end, but are instead controlled by entirely different means. The structure of *Besy* is built entirely around Stavrogin; the opening section of the novel mixes stories about Stavrogin's past with expectations of what he will do in the near future, and gathers pace until his arrival in the 'real time' of the novel, when all the other protagonists are sucked into the vortex of his influence before being thrown out the other side after his disappearance, to face the reverberations not just of his actions but primarily of the influence of his personality on them. The structural centre of *Podrostok* is, in contrast, a letter, not as an object but as an obsessive focus of attention for all the characters; everything in the novel revolves around the whereabouts and potential contents of the document, the attempts of various parties, for differing reasons, to obtain it, and the implications of its contents for the future of the protagonists. It provides the subtext and motivation for all the main characters' actions and words. In *Idiot* the structural dominant differs again, as there are two centres, Myshkin and Nastas'ia Filippovna. The Prince alone does not dominate the narrative, despite his constant presence; it is his relationship with the heroine, who represents the absent centre of the text, which gives the novel in very basic terms its plot, but also provides its tension and dynamics and, as with the letter in *Podrostok*, acts as a subtext to the interplay between all the characters.

As soon as we focus on the role of character or the preoccupations of the characters in *Idiot*, we are in many ways reprieved from the mire of

indefinability and obscurity which features largely in other aspects of Dostoevskii's novels; accepting the centrality of character in Dostoevskii's conception of structure resolves many of the problems connected with interpreting the novel. For example, Morson and Emerson call Robert Belknap's *The Structure of 'The Brothers Karamazov'* a monologic work, stating, 'to detect a structure is to read a work essentially synchronically: the plots, symbols and resonances are already in place and may properly be contemplated at a single moment', and dismissing such repetitions and resonances in the text as the result of the characters' obsessions and therefore not part of any possible 'structure'.⁴² However, if one accepts in general that character is central, the ideas and obsessions of different protagonists immediately become vital to a more flexible understanding of the concept of structure not as a single, fixed plan, but rather as a network of dominant organizing principles (linguistic, thematic etc), that hold the narrative together and allow it to be seen and considered as a whole.⁴³

Thus in *Idiot*, as well as in Dostoevskii's other novels, it is precisely because the repetitions are the result of the characters' ideas and obsessions that they are indeed indicators of a structure that arises directly from within the characters. The protagonists' actions and words, and their dialogic interactivity, are therefore the starting point for our examination of common patterns of behaviour, in order to discover precisely how they

⁴² *Prosaics*, p.250.

⁴³ Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition: the Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form*, trans. by Valentina Zavarin and Susan Wittig (London: University of California Press, 1973), p. xiv.

influence the movement of the narrative. One of the major problems of traditional character analysis, even when it examines protagonists in relation to the themes and motifs of the novel, is that it addresses the characters in isolation and stasis, and does not in general focus on their interactions, in spite of the fact that this aspect is central to Bakhtin's reading of Dostoevskian dialogue.⁴⁴ The current thesis aims to redress some of this balance, and examine the protagonists within the context of the narrative structuring of *Idiot*.



For Bakhtin, 'сосуществование и взаимодействие' are central features of Dostoevskii's artistic conception.⁴⁵ The idea exists not in the individual consciousness, but is 'интериндивидуальна и интерсубъективна', and 'сфера ее бытия не индивидуальное сознание, а диалогическое общение между сознаниями'.⁴⁶ It is through this dialogic interaction that the hero in Dostoevskii comes into being. However, this notion does not sit easily with the fact that the novels are full of conflict both within and between the characters, leading some critics to question Bakhtin's analysis.⁴⁷ Although this significant gap in Bakhtin's examination of Dostoevskii's poetics in no way invalidates the theory in general, it suggests a different approach focusing on the inharmonious aspects of

⁴⁴ Malcolm Jones makes this point in *Dostoyevsky After Bakhtin: Readings in Dostoyevsky's Fantastic Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 16-17.

⁴⁵ *Problemy*, p. 47.

⁴⁶ *Problemy*, p. 147.

⁴⁷ For example, Emerson, 'Problems of Baxtin's Poetics', *SEEJ*, 32.4 (1988), 503-25, (pp. 514-15).

interpersonal relations in the novels, and how they differ from and distort the ideal of peaceful co-existence and interaction of characters and their ideas. The present thesis will therefore investigate the activities of the protagonists which bring them into conflict with others, their frequently aggressive attempts to control and finalize each other, and examine the image of Myshkin in presenting an alternative model of inter-human relations, in order to establish the role the characters play in structuring the narrative. The following section of the introduction, will discuss the ways in which the protagonists use their words and actions to gain control over others and over their own lives, and the effect of this on the narrative, as well as suggesting some narratological-psychological reasons for these features; the strategies the characters use and the impulses behind them are bound up in a concept I call 'scripting'.

Chapter 1 then goes on to examine the narratological significance of Nastas'ia Filippovna in the light of these strategies. Although she has been much discussed as a character, little has been said about her role in the structuring of the novel. However, as she is the main focus of the hero's thoughts, she is extremely important; if we are to understand Myshkin's role in the novel, we must first recognize the effect that the heroine has on him. Furthermore, as she rebels against others' controlling influence and tendency to finalize her, she seeks to control others and, metaphorically, the shape of the entire narrative; the chapter examines the effect this has on actions of the other characters and on the movement and tenor of the novel.

Chapter 2 analyses Prince Myshkin from the point of view of his vision of a higher reality and how he translates this into an active (and

interactive) aesthetic-ethical ideal of self-other relations, which has the potential to overcome dualism, through the key processes of reading, narrating and scripting. It examines how the hero's ideal influences his relations with Nastas'ia Filippovna and other characters, in particular with regard to the changes he undergoes in the course of the novel, and how this affects the narrative.

While chapter 2 concentrates primarily on the ideal, how it is established and what it signifies, in relation to Myshkin's interactions with other characters, chapter 3 focuses on the significance of the loss of the ideal in the hero, and its absence in others, for the form of the narrative. The first part of the chapter examines the problems of dualism and the ethical dilemmas raised by the self-other oppositions prevalent in the novel through the prism of the Epistle of James. This section investigates the principal sources of division between and within men, which give rise to the conflicts in the novel and the characters' struggle for control. It also exposes the weaknesses of some of the protagonists, which prevent them from achieving the goals of their scripts.

The second half of the final chapter explores the narratological and psychological significance of these oppositions and conflicts. Focusing particularly on Myshkin and Ippolit, and bringing in the narrator, it examines the breakdown of self-other relations and how this affects the dynamics of the novel, using Bakhtin's essay 'Avtor i geroi v esteticheskoi deiatel'nosti', in which the implications of both ideal and non-ideal

dialogue are much clearer than in *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, as the basis for analysis.⁴⁸

Through examining the novel within this framework, the thesis aims to demonstrate how interactivity is central to the structuring of the novel, how it conforms to Bakhtin's ideal of harmonious co-existence, and how it differs from the ideal; the nature of Prince Myshkin's ideal in thematic and narratological terms; why the structure of the novel is so strange, but why it also remains a coherent whole; why the characters of Nastas'ia Filippovna and Ippolit are so central and, conversely, why others, such as Gania who at first seem to be important turn out to be no more than bystanders in the main drama of the novel. I call this area of analysis 'psycho-poetic', on the grounds that it places character and interactivity at the foundation of narrative, and because it examines the impulses of the protagonists and their interactions in terms of narrative.

Before I begin my analysis, two caveats are necessary. Firstly, in spite of the focus of the current study on character, it does not address psychoanalytic themes. Dalton's Freudian examination of the novel offers many valuable insights, but ultimately psychoanalytic interpretations of Dostoevskii are contraindicated on two grounds. In the first place, Freudian theories, in identifying a repressed source of neurosis, posit a pre-determined, unchanging essence directing man's behaviour, and are thus incompatible with the Bakhtinian notion of selfhood, derived from Dostoevskii, as an interactive event in time. Secondly, and perhaps more

⁴⁸ In *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, pp. 7-180.

importantly, Freud's antipathy to all aspects of religion, which caused him to characterize faith simply as guilt-inspired neurosis, is fundamentally opposed to Dostoevskii's deep concern with the possibility of attaining faith and the impossibility of its expression. Moreover, as my analysis focuses primarily on interpersonal relations rather than the characters' individual psychology, any emotional-psychological baggage they have is relevant only insofar as it affects their interactions with other protagonists.

Nor will I be using post-structuralist theories, in spite of the fact that at time my focus on the characters' narrative impulses suggests that they are textual phenomena. The post-structuralist deconstruction of meaning and delight in the absence of meaning are at base incompatible with the striving for meaning, coherence and wholeness which characterizes Dostoevskii's works; the clear ethical foundations of his novels, illustrated in the dilemmas and paradoxes faced by the protagonists in their striving for faith, is diametrically opposed to the 'free play' of deconstruction.⁴⁹ For this reason, the concept of the 'death' of the author is unhelpful in the current analysis; in any case, as Thaden states, Bakhtin feels that Dostoevskii retains control over his text and his intentions can be defined.⁵⁰ The general decentring of the 'I' in relation to characters in Dostoevskii's narratives is also problematic.⁵¹ Bakhtin defines the characters in

⁴⁹ See Barbara Z. Thaden, 'Bakhtin, Dostoevsky and the Status of the "I"', *Dostoevsky Studies*, 8 (1987), 199-207 (pp. 200-1); the article gives a convincing argument against Kristeva's reading of Bakhtin.

⁵⁰ 'Status of the "I"', p. 204; see Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, selected and trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 142-148.

⁵¹ See Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1983), pp. 30-39.

Dostoevskii as free, speaking subjects whose 'I' is incomplete not because of the decentring or deconstruction of the ego, but because it requires communion with a 'Thou' for completeness.⁵² The experience of reading a novel by Dostoevskii tells us that his heroes are more than predicates or attributes;⁵³ they are vibrant creations whose ideas play a crucial role in the structuring of the text. The post-structuralist view of character is, in the final analysis, limiting and inappropriate in a novel where, as we shall see, the protagonists expend an enormous amount of energy and time defining the status of their 'I' and are determined to become authors themselves.

II. PSYCHO-POETIC STRATEGIES: SCRIPTING AS A SELF-AUTHORING IMPULSE

... a paper person in someone else's script.
– John Fowles, *Daniel Martin*

I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters.
– Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*

As Dostoevskian dialogue exists on the level of the encounter of two or more consciousnesses, one must identify the primary modes of action and interaction at work in *Idiot*, in order to establish the forces impacting on the narrative. There are two basic, interwoven factors defining the protagonists' behaviour in the novel: self-other relations are characterized by conflict and

⁵² Thaden, 'Status of the "I"', p.204.

⁵³ On this view of character, see Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Cape, 1975), pp. 190-91.

attempts to control the other, and literary self-presentation is used to define the characters and their relationships. Conflict is evident in the major scandal scenes, for example at the Ivolgins' and Nastas'ia Filippovna's birthday party in Part I, with the heroine and Rogozhin sowing the seeds of confusion and disorder in order to turn the situation to their own advantage. Control also involves the tendency to finalize or objectify others, denying them selfhood, and attempts to influence others through words and actions, persuading them to participate in the event of coming into being according to the terms laid down by their interlocutors. The literary means employed by the protagonists to achieve this also take various forms, from role-playing and the introduction of literary comparisons for both self and other, to the use of inserted narratives.

These different aspects of self-other relations can be brought together single, flexible framework which I term 'Scripting'. Scripting defines the strategies used by the characters in their self-presentations and interactions, and suggests the origins of these impulses within the context of narrative, in order to highlight the effects the characters have on each other, and the consequent effect of this on the movement of the narrative.

The literary impulse is most apparent in the inserted narratives and stories told by the protagonists; indeed, whenever characters move to the foreground, their self-presentation almost always has some literary connection, whether from high or low culture, a poem, a newspaper article or the New Testament. For example, Myshkin's narratives at the Epanchins' in Part I, the stories at Nastas'ia Filippovna's birthday party, Keller's article, the reading of 'Zhil na svete rytsar' bednyi', and General

Ivolgin's tales all relate to literary production and pre-existing literary texts in some way.

Given the predominance of literary models, it is not surprising that reading is a major activity in the novel which has a strong effect on the characters. Myshkin, Kolia, Radomskii and General Ivolgin are all known to read newspapers, while her references to the Mazurin murder case indicate that Nastas'ia Filippovna does as well. Rogozhin learns of the same case indirectly through the heroine; thus the shape of the novel's ending is in many ways a direct result of the characters' reading. However, there are many other examples: one of the few things we know for certain about the missing six months between Parts I and II is that Myshkin and Rogozhin spent a lot of time reading Pushkin together (VIII, 457-8). Nastas'ia Filippovna furthermore encourages Rogozhin to read poetry and Solov'ev's *Istoriia*, and it is in this book that Rogozhin keeps the knife with which he will eventually murder her; she is also reading *Madame Bovary* before her death. Ippolit reads his confession, and Kolia is forced to read Keller's article. Krylov's fables and characters from Gogol' are mentioned (VIII, 117, 393); Aglaia has read not only Pushkin, but also Paul de Kock and other books unsuitable for a young lady (VIII, 358); letters are exchanged and read, and not only by their original addressees; the list is so long that the novel could barely exist if not for the characters' reading.

The tendency for literary characters to identify with other literary figures and situations (either specifically or generally) is not an uncommon theme in the novel; it is overtly behind both Evgeni Onegin's and Tat'iana's actions in Pushkin's novel in verse. In *Idiot*, however,

comparisons of characters to other literary figures is, as Catteau states, indicative of 'an original approach to literary composition: the comparison was not presented directly by the novelist, as if to give the reader a clue, but was a myth created by the other characters in the novel'.⁵⁴ Aglaia relates Myshkin to the 'poor knight' of Pushkin's poem and (through that poem's origins) back to *Don Quixote*, and Nastas'ia likens Rogozhin's penance on his knees to a Heine poem, while an onlooker compares the heroine herself to Cleopatra from Pushkin's 'Egipetskie nochi'. Other characters evoke literary sources as part of promoting their own image. Totskii mentions the Dumas *fils* novel *La Dame aux camélias* in relation to his story of his own worst action (although his tale has more similarity to *Geroi nashego vremeni*).⁵⁵ General Ivolgin makes use of newspaper articles, as in the story of the lapdog, as well as a multiplicity of literary sources, including Dumas *père* and Gogol'.⁵⁶ Meerson also examines the story of Private Kolpakov as a parody of the biblical story of Christ's Passion.⁵⁷ Myshkin's stories introduce additional literary themes and comparisons; his descriptions of executions recall not only Dostoevskii's own experience but also Hugo's *Le Dernier jour d'un condamné*, while the tale of Marie

⁵⁴ Jacques Catteau, *Dostoyevsky and the Process of Literary Creation*, trans. by Audrey Littlewood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 199; A. Kovacs also notes this feature in 'Sootnoshenie prostranstvenno-vremennoi i povestvovatel'noi struktur v romane *Idiot* F. M. Dostoevskogo (k printsip razgranicheniia pozitsii avtora i rasskazchik v romane)', *Slavica* (Debrecen), 15 (1977), 37-53 (pp. 37-8).

⁵⁵ See Olga Matich, 'What's to be done about poor Nastja: Nastas'ja Filippovna's Literary Prototypes', *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*, 19 (1987), 47-64 (p. 51).

⁵⁶ Deborah Martinsen, 'The Cover-Up: General Ivolgin and Private Kolpakov', *SEEJ*, 39. 2 (1995), 184-99 (p. 189).

⁵⁷ 'Ivolgin and Holbein: Non-Christ Risen vs Christ Non-Risen', *SEEJ*, 39. 2 (1995), 200-13.

contains echoes of both the gospel story of the woman taken in adultery and Rousseau, in its pastoral Swiss setting and focus on children and education.⁵⁸

There are very few instances of the narrator introducing literary comparisons, aside from naming Gogolian characters in his comments on ‘обыкновенные люди’ (VIII, 383). It is rather the characters who are responsible for the introduction and working out of the theme of their relationships to previous literary figures; they are aware of the importance of literature in structuring their lives and as part of their self-consciousness, and relate both themselves and each other to literary types and situations. Literary identification and comparisons are constant features of the characters’ evaluations of themselves and each other.

However, the use of literary comparisons by the protagonists is not simply descriptive; it also has an active role in the configuration of the characters and their actions, as it provides a model for behaviour as well as an explanation for character traits. This is due to the fact that an ‘objectifiable system of expectations [...] arises for each work’, which

awakens memories of that which was already read, brings the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and with its beginning arouses expectations for the ‘middle and end,’ which can then be maintained intact or altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically in the course

⁵⁸ On the influence of Hugo, see A. L. Bem, ‘Pered litsom smerti’, in *O Dostojevskem: sbornik stati a materialu*, ed. by Julius Dolansky and Radegast Parolek (Prague: Edice Slovanske Knihovni, 1972), pp. 150-82, and for the connections to Rousseau see, for example, I. A. Slizina, ‘Literaturnie i esteticheskie istochniki obraza Myshkina v romane F. M. Dostoevskogo *Idiot*’, *Russkaia Literatura 1870-1890 gg.*, Sbornik 19 (Sverdlovsk [n. pub], 1987), pp. 95-109 (pp. 98-101).

of the reading according to specific rules of the genre or type of text.⁵⁹

As the characters in *Idiot* are constantly involved in literary identification and interpretation, they also define the expectations of their behaviour, both for the reader and for the other protagonists. This feature also has important interactive aspects; in consciously taking on literary roles, the characters are also allocating complementary roles to others, who participate by playing the parts they have been assigned and following the patterns of behaviour suggested by the processes of literary identification at work in the novel. By introducing literary analogies, the characters contextualize their own lives within narrative, and participate in constructing the world of the novel.

Furthermore, narrative, like any other form of verbal interaction, is of necessity dialogic. As Genette points out, in the same way that every narrative needs both a narrator and a reader, or narratee, so each incidence of an inserted or intradiegetic narrative also requires a narrator, and a narratee, to whom the inserted narrative is addressed, within the text.⁶⁰ Thus, faced with so many inserted narratives and other potential texts for reading, the characters in the novel are repeatedly required to become both narrators and readers or listeners, both in their private reading and preparations for their own inserted texts, and in their reading and interpretation of others' narratives.

⁵⁹ Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. by Timothy Bahti (Brighton: Harvester, 1982) (first pub. 1967), pp. 22-3

⁶⁰ Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 259-260.

The characters also use literary interpretation to fill in the gaps in the narrative. When we are confronted with gaps or silences in a text, we have to fill them in according to our best knowledge of the characters, the genre and so on. Iser relates the problem of perceiving the other in interpersonal relationships to the position of the reader within the text:

we react as if we knew how our partners experienced us; we continually form views of their views, and then act as if our views of their views were realities. Contact therefore depends upon our continually filling in a central gap in our experience. Thus, dyadic and dynamic interaction comes about only because we are unable to experience how we experience one another, which in turn proves to be a propellant to interaction. Out of this fact arises the basic need for interpretation, which regulates the whole process of interaction.⁶¹

He connects the two forms of interpretation thus:

it is the very lack of ascertainability and defined intention that brings about the text-reader interaction [...] it is the *gaps*, the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader, that give rise to communication in the reading process; the lack of a common situation and a common frame of reference correspond to the 'nothing' [of social interpretation], which brings about the interaction between persons.⁶²

The gaps and constant difficulties in establishing motivation in *Idiot*, particularly with regard to Nastas'ia Filippovna and her prolonged absence in the middle of the novel, are problems that have to be addressed not only by the reader, but also by the characters themselves. Todorov suggests that,

⁶¹ Wolfgang Iser, 'Interaction between Text and Reader', in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, ed. by Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 106-119 (p. 108).

⁶² Iser, p. 109.

Based on the information he receives, every character must construct the facts and the characters around him; thus, he parallels exactly the reader who is constructing the imaginary universe from his own information (the text, and his sense of what is probable); thus reading becomes (inevitably) one of the themes of the book.⁶³

The predominance of literary models for the protagonists in *Idiot*, proposed both by themselves and each other, suggests that the characters use these literary and cultural intertexts in two ways, as they both highlight the gaps and provide the means of interpreting them. The characters of *Idiot* thus become readers of their own text; by provoking, examining and reacting to each other, as part of the battle for the dominant script, they not only participate in the movement and structuring of the narrative, but also provide a paradigm for how the novel might be read; it is in their attempts to understand and react to each other, through their attempts to make sense of the gaps they perceive, that we can see how the protagonists influence the direction of the narrative. Furthermore, through the use of gaps and their reading, scripting becomes a strategy for the characters to persuade others to see them as they see themselves, or rather as they wish to be seen.

Therefore the conception of Rogozhin as a Gothic murderer and Myshkin as a chivalrous defender of women both relate to Nastas'ia Filippovna's needs and imagination, and both men act out the roles she has given them with some enthusiasm. It is this interactive dynamic that gives the relationship between the characters in *Idiot* its unique quality and provides the basis for the protagonists' control of the text. Thus Nastas'ia

⁶³ 'Reading as Construction', in *The Reader in the Text*, pp. 67-82 (p. 78).

sees the Prince as the knight of her dreams come to rescue her, but she also states early on that he should marry Aglaia (VIII, 143), and he tries to act according to both ideas. Aglaia, meanwhile, sees Myshkin both as a Quixotic knight, following his quest to save his inappropriate ideal of pure beauty (her rival), as well as pursuing in him her own plan of finding an improbable and unsuitable husband – a part he seems equally willing to adopt, as his inappropriate behaviour at the Epanchins' soirée shows. Thus Myshkin is caught between the contradictory views of himself both within and between the two women, and it is from this conflict that a dynamic tension arises, which pulls Myshkin, and therefore the action of the novel, to which he is central, along.

This is the basis of *scripting*. The characters use literary foundations to define their own roles, frequently improvising according to changes in situation.⁶⁴ They either invite or coerce others into accepting supporting roles in their own dramas, thus enabling them to influence the direction of the narrative through their interaction, by making others read and interpret their narratives and literary comparisons. Scripting in this sense has little to do with the every-day scripts described in theories of metafiction, as these merely relate to routine, externally ascribed roles which characters, unlike 'real' people, cannot escape.⁶⁵ The freedom and lack of authorial finalization identified by Bakhtin in relation to Dostoevskian characters

⁶⁴ See Diana L. Burgin, 'The Reprieve of Nastasja: A Reading of a Dreamer's Authored Life', *SEER*, 29 (1985), 258-78 (p. 259-262) on the heroine's key role in this feature.

⁶⁵ Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 120; it is also therefore unlike French's concept of 'storiness' (see p. 13 above), which is similarly linked to everydayness.

allows them to change and develop both according to their own programmes and as a result of their interaction with others. Therefore far from being indicative of the every-day (which in any case rarely features in the Dostoevskian novel), scripting on the contrary relates to an escape from the routine and a bid for narrative self-determination and self-contextualization within the supposedly meaningful plots of the novelistic world.

Scripting is not simply the improvisation of a literary role by a single character in a novel. In *Anna Karenina*, for example, as Morson states, the origin of the heroine's literary self-perception is equally the origin of her downfall:

As her friend Liza Merkalova observes, Anna imagines that she is 'a real heroine out of a [romantic] novel'. For Anna, everything seems to fit a melodramatic plot centering on a grand passion; there are neither accidents nor choices. That is why she so often seems to resemble Greta Garbo *playing* Anna Karenina. She lives in a story whose shape is already given and for which not just anyone could have been destined. The Garbo film, in fact, captures quite well the story of Anna *as she tells it to herself*. But Tolstoi has told a different story – not of a fated heroine, but of a woman who imagines that she is one.⁶⁶

In *Idiot*, although Nastas'ia Filippovna's self-perception as a ruined and therefore doomed woman is central to the novel, one important feature, relating to the position of the other, makes the portrayal of her character, and the whole concept of what is happening between the characters in *Idiot*, different from Tolstoi's novel. Even though they take up similar

⁶⁶ *Narrative and Freedom: the Shadows of Time* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 71-72, author's emphasis.

melodramatic roles, Anna is interested only in how she sees herself, while Nastas'ia's primary concern is the response of the other to the roles she plays, which gives her own role confirmation and a kind of 'reality'; if she can persuade others to participate in the role she has chosen, its enactment gives it the concreteness of being.

Furthermore, many of the main characters base their actions and words on literary or cultural intertexts. Gania's ambition to become a Rothschild, Aglaia's nihilist leanings, and the image of General Ivolgin as a musketeer or Napoleon's pageboy all require the consent and active participation of the other in order to succeed, and all have difficulty in achieving their aims, because they are unable to persuade others to co-operate in their view of reality.

This is because scripting is a two-way process; it cannot work for the characters unless they can persuade someone else to give their script a concrete reality through participating in its realization. In *Interpersonal Perception*, Laing and others comment:

I may not actually be able to see myself as others see me, but I am constantly supposing them to be seeing me in particular ways, and am constantly acting in the light of the actual or supposed attitudes, opinions, needs, and so on the other has in respect of me.⁶⁷

In effect, the characters in *Idiot* both conform to this process, by acting in the light of the other's attitude, either real or supposed, but also attempt to turn this process on its head, acting to make the other's perception of them

⁶⁷ R. D. Laing, H. Phillipson, A. R. Lee, *Interpersonal Perception: A Theory and a Method of Research* (London: Tavistock; New York: Springer, 1966), p.4, also cited in Iser, 'Interaction between Text and Reader' (p. 107); see pp. 30 above.

align with their own. Bakhtin's concept of the 'loophole' is also useful here: *'в человеке всегда есть что-то, что только сам он может открыть в свободном акте самосознания и слова, что не поддается овнешняющему заочному определению'*.⁶⁸ Dostoevskii's heroes, according to Bakhtin, *'борются с такими определениями их личности в устах других людей'*,⁶⁹ seeking constantly to destroy the framework of the other's words about them. Asserting one's script and persuading others to accept it therefore plays an important part in defending one's loophole and retaining one's consciousness of self in all its indeterminacy and unfinalizability. Characters who submit to external definition and allow others' scripts to be imposed on them without input or a compatible script of their own are in danger of losing the final word about themselves. Avoiding this problem in particular is Nastas'ia Filippovna's main motivation, although it also relevant to discussions of Aglaia and General Ivolgin, as well as to Ippolit and the entire episode with 'Pavlishchev's son'.⁷⁰

Persuading another to accept a script and undertake the role offered to them also brings into question the issue of control, owing to the tensions arising from the characters' competing scripts and the threats they pose to each others' loopholes. Malcolm Jones sees Dostoevskii's mature, third-person, polyphonic narratives as exemplifying 'what might happen when

⁶⁸ *Problemy*, pp. 98-99.

⁶⁹ *Problemy*, p. 59.

⁷⁰ On Nastas'ia Filippovna's response to this problem, see chapter 1; other characters are discussed in chapter 3.

people attempt mutually to objectify and classify each other, seek to impose two or more incompatible images on another person at the same time, and deploy emotionally disturbing strategies on each other'.⁷¹ Jones' concept of 'Driving other people crazy' involves a number of strategies used by Dostoevskii's characters to provoke or influence those around them by sending them contradictory signals,⁷² and is thus an important element in the production and assertion of scripts. In their attempts to define and realize their scripts, characters have to exert control over others, and over the narrative in general, for two reasons: firstly, in order to make sure one's fellow protagonists play the role laid down for them, rather than improvising, misreading or taking matters into their own hands; and secondly, because any script in the novel is bound to clash with numerous others that are also competing and trying to persuade (or force) others to accept the alternative roles they offer. The protagonist who can assert most control over the other characters is therefore the one whose script is likely to dominate, and who will gain most control over the direction of the narrative.

There are many examples of characters attempting to control each other in the novel. Aglaia's actions are frequently based on the belief that her family is trying to control her, and as a result she strives to turn the tables in order to control her family's image of her; she also tries to control Myshkin's behaviour. Lebedev tries to take charge of Myshkin's life,

⁷¹ *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin*, p. 77.

⁷² *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin*, pp. 84-90.

particularly after his two epileptic fits, while Gania wishes to control his family and free himself from the control of the Epanchin family and his own poverty. The most sustained example of this feature is Nastas'ia Filippovna's actions in relation others, which will be examined in detail in chapter 1.

The characters in *Idiot* do not indulge in simple identification with literary figures and situations, but rather take on one or more roles and try to force others to accept and interact with them. As the whole concept of persuading someone to accept their role in one's script involves active interplay between characters, the more dramatic a person's behaviour is (for example, Nastas'ia Filippovna's scandalous behaviour at her birthday party), the more dramatic will be the responses to it (leading in this case among other things to Myshkin's proposal, Rogozhin paying 100,000 rubles for her, and Gania resisting the temptation to rescue the money from the fire).

The heroine's theatricality as she stage-manages the crowd scenes in Part I highlight the importance of dramatic effect to the scripting process. Repeated references to the style and delivery of the characters' narratives, either by the narrator, as in the case of Aglaia's reading of 'Rytsar' bednyi' (VIII, 208-9), or by the presenter of the narrative, such as when Ippolit reads his 'Neobkhodimoe ob'iasnenie' (VIII, 321-44), indicate heightened awareness of the necessity of attracting and maintaining the attention of the listener. As the characters are constantly involved in the process of reading and narrating, Robin Feuer Miller's analysis of Dostoevskii's desire to make the right effect on his reader is equally applicable to the protagonists

within the text.⁷³ The pages of *Idiot* are a battlefield, where the need to make the strongest impact on others is constant, and anyone who is not up to the task or lowers his guard at any point is liable to get left behind.

For many of the characters, the story-telling moment is a time for conscious self-promotion through deliberately literary means; witness Totskii and the General's contributions to the story-telling game at the end of Part I, and Ferdyshchenko's perceptive observation of the General, 'и уже по одному виду его превосходительства можно заключить, с каким особенным литературным удовольствием он обработал свой анекдотик' (VIII, 125). For many characters, story-telling represents the best opportunity to make an impression on others, whether it is truthful or not.

While none of this is to imply that these characters are metatextually aware (although the question is an interesting one), it highlights the importance of literature, and the narrative impulse, in the structuring of their lives as self-conscious beings. They all believe that their lives have some sort of story, wider meaning or reference to a larger plot, in which they of course hope to be central (particularly those who are not at the forefront of the narrative as given). Some characters are even mystified when a fellow being fails to exhibit this impulse: witness Gania's inability to understand why Ptitsyn has no desire to be a Rothschild (VIII, 387), which arises from his lack of ambition to be original or to make a story out of his life.

⁷³ *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, pp. 18-32.

Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, based on two minor characters from *Hamlet*, addresses one of the central problems of interpreting life as story: whose story is to be told?: 'while we are the central characters in our own lives, we simultaneously play minor roles in larger stories that baffle and confuse us: there is a larger pattern behind our lives, but we lack the vision to see it'.⁷⁴ The numerous parallel plots in *Idiot*, of which we are vaguely aware, but never see more than a glimpse, such as Gania's machinations and Rogozhin's relationship with Ippolit, testify to the fact that many characters, whilst only bit-players in the main drama of the fates of Myshkin and Nastas'ia Filippovna, also have other on-going plots of their own. We centre primarily on Myshkin's consciousness, and secondarily on the fate of Nastas'ia Filippovna, because this is the Prince's foremost concern, so the other stories (which may, for all we know, be of equal interest) are played out in the margins of the page, and we only hear of their existence when they intersect with Myshkin's consciousness or impinge on his actions or relationships. The characters' insistence on integrating their lives into the wider context of narrative results in several plot lines competing for attention with the main story.

This combination of multiple, often unidentified plots, and the centring of the narrative on Myshkin (with Nastas'ia as its missing centre), gives rise to certain structural and stylistic peculiarities in the novel, which

⁷⁴ Peter J. Rabinowitz, "What's Hecuba to us?" The Audience's Experience of Literary Borrowing', in *The Reader in the Text*, pp. 241-263 (p. 257). Similarly, in the film *Shakespeare in Love*, a character actor, when asked about the new play he is appearing in, *Romeo and Juliet*, begins, 'Well, it's about this nurse...' My thanks to Malcolm Jones for this example.

have frequently been seen as defects.⁷⁵ The tension which arises from the fight for control between the characters' different scripts is, I would propose, responsible for holding the entire novel together. However, it is this very same struggle for control that paradoxically leads to the narrative seeming entirely unstructured, and teetering on the edge of disintegration into artistic failure. As Dalton states,

in *The Diary of a Writer*, in a passage dealing with the Russian character, Dostoevsky speaks of 'an urge for the extreme, for the fainting sensation of approaching an abyss, and half-leaning over it – to peep into the bottomless pit, and, in some very rare cases, to throw oneself into it head-forward as in a frenzy'. In all of Dostoevsky's work there is this perilous flirtation with the abyss.⁷⁶

This is true not only of the moral and thematic bases of Dostoevskii's novels, but even more so of their form; because the characters are fighting for control, the narrative is structured on the conflicts and contradictory positions of the protagonists. Parts II and III of *Idiot* in particular appear aimless and untidy, with little to do with the main plot as we have identified it by the end of Part I (Myshkin's quest to save Nastas'ia Filippovna), but in fact the crowd scenes and their repercussions which dominate the middle sections of the novel are strategically vital to the whole conception of the characters' attempts to control the narrative, as it is here that many of the protagonists' scripts are put into the market place for general consumption. Others' views of Myshkin and Nastas'ia Filippovna, as well the different characters' scripts for themselves, compete both for the attention of all the

⁷⁵ See, for example, Frank, *The Miraculous Years*, p.289.

⁷⁶ *Unconscious Structure*, p.59.

protagonists, although they are primarily directed at Prince Myshkin, and for significance within the novel. The forceful assertion by the characters of their scripts, and the tensions between competing scripts, are in large part responsible for the directions in which the novel moves.

The overt desire of the characters in *Idiot* to tell stories, to fill their lives with consciously literary embellishments, and integrate their own and others' existence into a plot with a wider significance, indicates the essential role of narrative as such, not merely for these fictional figures, but as a basic human impulse. Wright calls narrative 'a product of human consciousness imposing order on to experience'.⁷⁷ The use of narrative is an essential component of scripting, visible from the opening pages of the novel in Rogozhin's story about Nastas'ia Filippovna and, particularly, in Myshkin's constant story-telling at the Epanchins'; the narrative element of the characters' scripts highlights the desire for meaning and context as a human impulse.

The links between faith and narrative are highlighted in Michael Edwards' *Towards a Christian Poetics*, which examines the implications of the biblical Fall for both language and literature.⁷⁸ Before the Fall, a perfect correspondence existed between words and things, with God's act of creation also being an act of language.⁷⁹ The serpent's lie which leads to the Fall introduces into language ambiguity and the loss of that original

⁷⁷ T. R. Wright, *Theology and Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 87.

⁷⁸ (London: Macmillan, 1984).

⁷⁹ Edwards, p. 151.

harmony.⁸⁰ The results of the Fall are thus twofold. Firstly, the Fall itself brings with it the desire to recreate, the urge to glimpse the world that has been lost, through acts of narration; ‘a narrated world [...] represents a desirable otherness [...] we tell stories because we desire a world within a story [...] Story offers an otherness, of unity and purposive sequence. It also offers, in particular, beginnings and ends [...] the specific of story is that it appeals to the desire for a new beginning’.⁸¹ The overt literary character of the Book of Revelation, in which at least forty verses refer to books and reading, suggests an important role for narrating in the process of re-creation.⁸² Secondly, the flaw between words and meanings introduced by the serpent in the Garden of Eden has a number of implications. The primary result of ‘fallen discourse’, to use Malcolm Jones’ term, was the Tower of Babel, where a multiplicity of languages was introduced, ‘...that they may not understand one another’s speech’.⁸³ That Dostoevskii found the creation of Babel significant is evinced by his use of the image both directly, in Stepan Trofimovich’s allegorical poem in *Besy* (X, 10), and obliquely, in Raskol’nikov’s dream of the trichinae at the end of *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* (VI, 419-20). Furthermore, the Fall establishes the re-creative potential of language, which is in itself a primary force in literature; ‘explored, language becomes a domain of suggestions, fragments

⁸⁰ Edwards, p. 10.

⁸¹ Edwards, p. 73.

⁸² See Walter L. Reed, *Dialogues of the Word: The Bible as Literature According to Bakhtin* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 141.

⁸³ Genesis 11. 7 (all quotations from the Bible are taken from the Authorized Version unless otherwise stated); see Jones, *Dostoyevsky After Bakhtin*, p. 184.

of a novel reality emerging with fragments of a novel speech'.⁸⁴ The recreation of reality is an attempt to restore the original correlation of words and meanings in order to take man to a higher plane of existence.

We should perhaps not overemphasize the consciously religious aspect of the impulse to create a story out of life, although all the main characters address the issue of faith in their own ways: Myshkin's outburst against Catholicism, his four stories of faith, and his references to Christ in his execution narratives all suggest an interest in the subject. The fact that Myshkin, Rogozhin and Ippolit are drawn to the Holbein painting of the dead Christ, and the connections of Rogozhin's family to old believers and their relationship with the *skoptsy*,⁸⁵ also point to a strong religious influence in their lives. Furthermore, Nastas'ia Filippovna's idea for a portrait of Christ, and even Aglaia's anti-faith in her desire to become a nihilist (implying atheism, which, as Myshkin states, has for Russians a large element of belief itself (VIII, 452)) again testify to the need of the protagonists to define the story of the world and their position in it, a problem which all perceive in terms of religious faith. Furthermore, despite the absence of overt forms of worship in *Idiot* – and in Dostoevskii's fictional oeuvre as a whole – religious faith, particularly in the form of Lebedev's interpretation of the Apocalypse and related aspects of Revelation and the move to a 'new life', remains an important theme in

⁸⁴ Edwards, p. 11.

⁸⁵ See Richard Peace, *Dostoevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 85-94, or William Comer, 'Rogozhin and the Castrates: Russian Religious Traditions in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*', *SEEJ*, 40.1 (1996), 85-99.

Idiot, and it would therefore be inappropriate to ignore this aspect of the novel.⁸⁶

The fact that the fall of many of the characters is instrumental in inducing the narrative impulse is evident in the major role played by shame in narration and the search for a story for one's own life in *Idiot*. The figures in the novel who devote most effort to defining their scripts (and trying to get others to accept them) are the ones who feel most ashamed at the reality of their lives: Nastas'ia Filippovna, General Ivolgin, and Ippolit. In particular for the General and Nastas'ia, shame at their present (fallen) state combined with a desire to return to a innocent past are the major impulses behind most of their utterances and actions. Not untypically for Dostoevskii, the issue of shame as a motive for the narrative impulse and the part it plays in the characters' restructuring of their lives is exemplified not in the words and actions of a plot-defining hero, but in the relatively peripheral figure of General Ivolgin. In an excellent article on the story of the resurrection of Private Kolpakov, Deborah Martinsen argues that the déclassé General uses his lies as a way of restoring his lost social status in contexts where he is reminded of his fall. In this story, the General identifies with both the thief (Kolpakov) and the man who is simultaneously responsible and not responsible for his death (Myshkin's father). The death is any case undone when Kolpakov returns from the grave, thereby erasing the transgression and the need for guilt and

⁸⁶ See David M. Bethea, *The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 62-104; R. Hollander, 'Apocalyptic Framework in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*', *Mosaic*, 7 (1974), 123-39; or William J. Leatherbarrow, 'Apocalyptic Imagery in *The Idiot* and *The Devils*', *Dostoevsky Studies*, 3 (1982), 43-52.

punishment. This provides a partial confession, explanation and justification for Ivolgin's current lowly position, including his hopes for exoneration, as well as prefiguring his future theft and mortification at the hands of Lebedev, which leads to his death.⁸⁷

This story, like the others General Ivolgin tells, is about finding or creating a reality which makes his life liveable. For the General, that clearly involves re-earning the respect he has lost through his own actions; his rank clearly indicates to us his former status, and his pecuniary embarrassment in comparison with his former friend General Epanchin's wealth shows us how far he has fallen, and the lengths to which he must go if he is to recover his position in society. His current physical reality is so pitiful that he is forced to embellish the past to an extraordinary degree (claiming he was Napoleon's page boy in 1812, for example) to make up for it. Creating this different, mental reality allows him to live in relation to others the only way he knows how, as a General, a war hero, and a man of substance. As Meerson points out, the General admits that this is precisely what he is doing.⁸⁸ By ending the story with the words, 'но случай, можно сказать, даже психологический' (VIII, 83), he clearly indicates that the only psychology involved is his own. This is a sympathetic portrayal by Dostoevskii of the basic human need for recognition and the maintenance of one's proper place in life, and it is perhaps to this that the sensible and perceptive Kolia Ivolgin is referring when he calls his father a 'честный

⁸⁷ Martinsen, 'The Cover-Up', pp. 187-190.

⁸⁸ Meerson, 'Ivolgin and Holbein', p. 201.

человек', despite being well aware of his shortcomings (VIII, 113). The impulse to find in narrative a reality one can live with, which also involves asking others to accept that reality, is, as we shall see, of enormous importance to all the protagonists; in several cases, including that of General Ivolgin, it is a life-or-death issue.

Shame plays its part in Myshkin's story-telling as well; although he apparently has nothing to feel ashamed of, and exhibits no such feelings in potentially embarrassing situations, such as when he tells Rogozhin he knows nothing about women, we should recall Aglaia's comment, 'Вы как кончите рассказывать, тотчас же и застыдитесь того, что рассказали' (VIII, 57). The reasons behind Myshkin's shame will be examined in chapter 2.

Ippolit's shame is visible in his constant apologies for the quality of his writing in his 'Neobkhodimoe ob'iasnenie' (for example, VIII, 324), and is largely a result of both his fear of rejection by others and his sense of failure as, owing to his illness and immanent death, he feels that he has achieved nothing, and faces leaving the world without having made his mark on it. In the figure of Ippolit we also see that the impulse to scripting becomes stronger for characters facing death. He writes his 'ob'iasnenie' in order to find a way to live with dying, in the same way that Nastas'ia Filippovna's script in practical terms, and many of Myshkin's stories from Part I in ethical-thematic terms, are also about finding an adequate structure with which to confront inevitable death.⁸⁹ The confession gives Ippolit the

⁸⁹ The implications of death are central to our discussion of Myshkin's script in chapter 2.

opportunity to assert his place in the world and the structure of the novel, where until this point he has been a peripheral figure. This is evidently of extreme importance to him, as dying without establishing one's place in the world in relation to others is a terrifying prospect. It is for this reason that the characters who have the closest relationship with death, either physically, as in the case of Nastas'ia Filippovna, Ippolit and General Ivolgin, psychologically, as with Rogozhin, or in terms of thought-feelings, in Myshkin's case, see the importance of scripting and, accordingly, make most effort to fulfil their roles. Scripting is therefore a response to the fall and to its primary result, human mortality.

The impulse to autobiography provides an interesting analogy to the process of scripting. Both involve the same desire to see one's life in terms of a story and establish one's place in the world, particularly towards the end of that life, as well as to find causal connections between past events and one's present condition:

Partly thanks to Rousseau's *Confessions*, autobiography has come to suggest all but irresistibly the idea of connections, the perception of some sort of pattern and linkage in the disparateness of past experience. Narrative therefore seems its natural ally, since narrative implies connectedness; beginnings, middles, and ends, causes and effects, origins and consequences. The *Confessions* teem with references to links, connections, causes, origins, threads, modifications, developments, anticipations.⁹⁰

Although Sheringham goes on to explain that the situation with Rousseau's *Confessions* is more complex than this, the characters of *Idiot* see their lives

⁹⁰ Michael Sheringham, *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires. Rousseau to Perec* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 31.

in these terms as well, and act accordingly.⁹¹ Furthermore, we know from the *petit-jeu* at Nastas'ia's birthday party that the *Confessions* are important to Dostoevskii's overall conception, as he uses Rousseau's story of the stolen ribbon as his basis for Ferdyschenko's contribution.⁹² By introducing Rousseau as an intertext, Dostoevskii also indicates the characters' preoccupation with narrative causality and endowing life with a plot-like significance.

De Man, furthermore, argues that autobiography is not necessarily just the *result* of life, but can also be the stimulus to life:

We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium.⁹³

Equally the characters in *Idiot* make their lives into a story as part of a pre-conceived project, as opposed to a response to a pre-existing narrative element in their lives; scripting, rather than arising directly out of the lives of the characters, turns life into a story for the characters, because they

⁹¹ Michael Holquist takes this as the premise for his study, *Dostoevsky and the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. x.

⁹² See, for example, J. M. Coetzee, 'Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky', *Comparative Literature*, 37, 3 (1985), 193-232, Malcolm V. Jones, 'Dostoevsky, Rousseau and Others (A Study of the "Alien Voice" in Dostoevsky's Novels)', *Dostoevsky Studies*, 4 (1983), 81-94, and Robin Feuer Miller, 'Rousseau and Dostoevsky: the morality of confession reconsidered', in *Western Philosophical Systems in Russian Literature*, ed. by Anthony M. Mlikotin (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1979), pp. 89-101.

⁹³ 'Autobiography as De-Facement', in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 67-81 (p. 69), author's emphasis.

believe in the idea of life having a story, and orient their actions accordingly.

Furthermore, autobiography, like scripting and indeed any dialogic activity, necessarily involves the participation of the other:

from the point of view of the practitioner, autobiographical narrative requires the sanction of the Other: the sense of compatibility, the fluid interplay, of an inner chain of feelings and an outer chain of causally linked events, is ultimately dependent on an inter-subjective paradigm, a scene of mutual recognition in the self *I* vouchsafe already acknowledges (and assumes that it is in turn acknowledged by) *your* scrutiny.⁹⁴

De Man also states,

Autobiography, then, is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution.⁹⁵

As in the production of autobiography, scripting can only be successful with the sanction or acknowledgement of the other, but in the creation and on-going projection of scripts, this is not a passive process, but requires the active participation of the other. Without this, a script becomes merely a role acted out in isolation; as a form of dialogue, scripting exists only in its interaction with and confirmation by the other, because only the mutual acting out of a script realizes its existence, giving characters opportunities to establish their 'I' both for others and within the text. Sheringham also

⁹⁴ Sheringham, p. 57, author's emphasis.

⁹⁵ 'Autobiography as De-Facement', p. 70.

notices what happens to Rousseau when he feels that the confirmation of his 'I' has been withdrawn, continuing the above quotation,

When this [acknowledgement of the other] is lacking narrative risks grinding to a halt; unsanctioned, it becomes rigid and arbitrary, wholly the province of the Other: a chain *out there* which shuts out a subjectively determined self, condemning it to autistic entrapment and paranoia.⁹⁶

This, according to Sheringham, occurs in Book 9 of the *Confessions*, when Rousseau's sense of his ideal reader is obscured; he succumbs to the belief that he is being persecuted, and 'loses control over his narrative'.⁹⁷ We see a similar process at work in the downfall of General Ivolgin. His tall tales are primarily a means of recovering his lost status in the eyes of others,⁹⁸ but towards the end of the novel, Myshkin's total inability to relate to him or accept his stories on any level, and particularly Lebedev's cruel, wordless (and therefore unanswerable) exposure of his theft of the wallet are primary factors in his death. General Ivolgin appears to be a minor character, and his protracted humiliation and death are often seen as a digression with little relation to the main plot of the novel, but he exemplifies many of the possibilities and pitfalls of scripting, and is thus central to our understanding.



Scripting is therefore a strategy or number of strategies employed by characters in reaction to the impulse to define a story for themselves for

⁹⁶ *French Autobiography*, p. 57, author's emphasis.

⁹⁷ *French Autobiography*, p. 56.

⁹⁸ Martinsen, 'The Cover-Up', p. 187.

their life, which also allows us to assess the role of character in the movement and structuring of narrative. It consists of a number of related elements. It has its basis in the narrative impulse of the characters, while shame and the consequent desire for new life as a result of man's fallen state (in either the general religious sense or specifically relating to the background of particular characters) are important parts of the motivation for scripting, particularly for characters facing death without having established their place in life. It is furthermore not merely a mode of self-perception, but necessarily involves the active participation and confirmation of the other; and its main aims are to assert control over the other protagonists and therefore the text as well.

Furthermore, in identifying the scripting strategies and impulses in the novel, as well as their success or failure, the reader is able to distinguish between degrees of ideal and non-ideal dialogic interaction, an issue which Bakhtin in general fails to address. The present analysis will show that, as in Pushkin's 'Malenkie tragedii', obsession and inflexibility impede interactivity, preventing certain characters from establishing their place in the world of the novel and living their lives according to their own scripts.

Although the current interpretation concentrates on the hero and heroine, it is also necessary to examine the roles of other characters. For example, Ptitsyn's refusal to participate in the story-telling game at Nastas'ia Filippovna's birthday party is indicative of the absence of a scripting impulse in this figure, who as a result remains anonymous and on the fringes of the action. However, the narrator of *Idiot* stresses the importance of 'ordinary people' as a balance to the extremes exhibited by

the central protagonists, needed to anchor the text to the 'reality' of life as experienced by the reader:

Тем не менее, всё-таки пред нами остается вопрос: что делать романисту с людьми ординарными, совершенно «обыкновенными», и как выставить их перед читателем, чтобы сделать их хоть сколько-нибудь интересными? Совершенно миновать их в рассказе никак нельзя, потому что ординарные люди поминутно и в большинстве необходимое звено в связи житейских событий; миновав их, стало быть, нарушим правоподобие. Наполнять романы одними типами или даже просто, для интереса, людьми странными небывалыми, было бы неправоподобно, да пожалуй, и не интересно. По-нашему, писателю надо стараться отыскивать интересные и поучительные оттенки даже и между ординарностями (VIII, 383-384).

The narrator's hint in the final sentence of the instructive nature of the relationship between the ordinary and extraordinary characters in the text is informative, as it implies a connection between originality and scripting. Even characters in the margins of the text show aspects of scripting that help us to understand and define the process; Ptitsyn, content with the course of his life as it is, has no interest in turning it into a story or projecting it onto others, while it is not so much Gania's ambition to be original as his desire to be seen as such that leads him to try to construct a script in which others will take an interest:

Нет ничего обиднее человеку нашего времени и племени, как сказать ему, что он неоригинален, слаб характером, без особенных талантов и человек обыкновенный [...] Нажив деньги, знайте, – я буду в высшей степени оригинальный. Деньги тем всего подлее и ненавистнее, что они даже таланты дают (VIII, 105).

However, the fact that he remains outside the centre of the action shows that he is unable to offer a script, particularly to Aglaia, that is more

interesting or powerful than others' (notably Myshkin's). Similarly, Ferdyshchenko 'как будто по обязанности взял на себя задачу изумлять всех оригинальностью и веселостью, но у него как-то никогда не выходило' (VIII, 80). The sense of their own lack of originality leads these figures to attempt to script themselves into the foreground of the novel, but it is also responsible for their inability to convince others of their scripts' merits. The fact that Nastas'ia Filippovna is repeatedly referred to by the other characters as 'оригинальная' (for example, VIII, 149) is indicative of her power and influence over others in the text. The same epithet is also applied frequently to Prince Myshkin, the other character whose script exerts most pressure on the narrative.

Thus even the minor characters who do not promote competitive scripts still display aspects of the same tendency, while the major – and original – characters act in accordance with the belief that their lives have a plot-like significance and direction, and wish others to participate in their version of the narrative, leading to the potential for clashes between the protagonists, as they each try to persuade others to take up roles in their incompatible scripts. Three categories of scripting are therefore apparent: some (ordinary) characters make no attempt to script and are entirely unconcerned about the effect they have on others; other ordinary figures try to script but, for a variety of reasons, fail to convince others of their scripts' merits; and extraordinary characters are more successful in both the strategies they employ and how these affect their fellow protagonists. As Dostoevskii states in his foreword to *Brat'ia Karamazovy*, 'ибо не только чужак «не всегда» частность и обособление, а напротив, бывает так,

что он-то, пожалуй, и носит в себе иной раз сердцевину целого, а остальные люди его эпохи' (XIV, 6); each age has its own scripts, and it is the extraordinary people who define and make them typical.



In suggesting a framework for interpretation, and exploring some of its implications, the thesis focuses on the strategies of behaviour in the narrative, and what they suggest about the novel's ideas, rather than examining every single instance of scripting. Therefore it concentrates primarily on the wider patterns presented by the behaviour of the most important figures in the novel: Prince Myshkin and Nastas'ia Filippovna. Other instances of scripting by other characters will be introduced throughout in order to highlight common features and establish the nature and effects of the relationships between the protagonists.

The argument is inevitably speculative at times, particularly about the motivation for the characters' behaviour. This is justified, according to the terms of this theory, on two grounds. First, the process of speculation is part of the gap-filling that any reader has to perform in relation to any literary text, as Iser and Todorov point out, and *Idiot* in this way exemplifies the reading process. Second, the characters in the novel also speculate about the motives for the behaviour of others and thus mirror the reading process. In particular both the reader and the other protagonists are forced into speculation about what Nastas'ia Filippovna is doing and why, simply because she is the central absence in the novel and we garner little reliable information about her from her brief appearances alone.

Speculation therefore far from being inappropriate, is a major novelistic strategy.

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Chapter 1. The Disappearing Heroine

Dying,
Is an art, like everything else.
– Sylvia Plath, 'Lady Lazarus'

Souffrons, mais souffrons sur les cimes.
– Victor Hugo, *Contemplations*

One of the major problems facing the reader of *Idiot* is the presentation of the character of Nastas'ia Filippovna. Her motivation and relationships with other characters remain largely obscure, owing to her absence from large sections of the narrative; she makes her entrance in the 'real' time of the novel at the end of chapter 9 of Part I, and in Parts II and III appears for just three brief scenes. In Part IV we witness directly only her confrontation with Aglaia, as subsequent details of her marriage preparations and flight with Rogozhin are sketched in by the narrator after the event.

However, it is clear both from the notebooks and throughout the novel itself that Nastas'ia Filippovna's role is not simply an important one, but that she is central to the plot. Fridlender notes that Dostoevskii considered her to be the second hero of the novel, and highlights the strength of the image of her character: 'образ Настасьи Филипповны [...] всегда особенно властно привлекал к себе внимание читателей романа'.¹ That Dostoevskii believed her to be essential to his initial

¹ 'Roman *Idiot*', in *Tvorchestvo F. M. Dostoevskogo*, ed. by L. D. Opol'skaia and others (Moscow: Nauka, 1959), pp. 173-214 (p. 181).

conception of the novel is suggested by the prominent place in his early notebooks of Mignon/Umetskaia, the precursor of the novel's heroine. Moreover, while the character of the 'Idiot' at this stage is as far from the eventual character of Myshkin as it is possible to be, the figure of Mignon is 'already in essential gesture the Nastasia Filipovna of the final version';² Dostoevskii describes her as a 'Завистница и гордячка', whose ambition is to 'всем отмстить' (IX, 143), later characterizing her as 'вообще, при бесспорной оригинальности и пуантливости капризно-вызывательного и поэтического характера, она выше своей среды' (IX, 151, author's emphasis). What also survives from the notebooks to the final version is the sense of a compelling (for both the readers and the protagonists) relationship of emotional extremes between the hero and heroine, and between the heroine and other characters in the novel, most significantly between Mignon and her rival (called 'the heroine' at this stage but clearly the precursor of Aglaia):

Она ненавидит и Героиню, потому что Героиня льнет к Красавицу, но так как та ужасно хороша, то Миньона, оставшись наедине, целует ей руки и ноги (и тем сильнее ненависть). (Она даже нарочно ноги целует, чтоб за это ненавидеть ещё сильнее. «За это я ещё сильнее ненавидеть буду») (IX, 143).

Nastas'ia Filippovna's position in the finished version of the novel is even more dominant. As Wasiolek states,

² Edward Wasiolek, ed. *The Notebooks for 'The Idiot'*, trans. by Katherine Strelsky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 10.

She sweeps like a storm through the lives of almost all the characters in the novel. She is a dominating force in almost everyone's consciousness: Rogozhin sends his life swirling into unknown destruction for her; Epanchin tries to make her his mistress; Totsky bows in fear and trembling before her caprices; and the Prince is mysteriously and fatefully attracted to her.³

Danow also points out that she is always present in the thoughts and discussions of other characters;⁴ in her absence, it is in large part through the other characters that we have to interpret her. However, the other characters, including the narrator, are often as uncertain about her motives as the reader, and consequently all parties are forced into the same strategy of filling in the gaps in the text in order to make sense of Nastas'ia Filippovna's actions. It is perhaps because of the joint effort of the readers and characters in the novel to fill in the gaps and provide interpretation that, even though she appears so rarely, Nastas'ia Filippovna comes across as a vibrant and fully-drawn character, to whom we can relate, to the extent that the first-time reader of *Idiot* barely notices that she is absent for most of the narrative.

Dostoevskii uses similar techniques in his presentation of Stavrogin in *Besy*. Although the hero makes very few appearances in the course of the novel, he is constantly present in the thoughts of the other characters and particularly in their anticipation of his future actions: much of the novel is built around the plans of others which assume Stavrogin's co-operation, and the fact that when he arrives he does not fulfil the anticipation he

³ Edward Wasiolek, *Dostoevsky: The Major Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1964), p. 87.

⁴ *The Dialogic Sign: Essays on the Major Novels of Dostoevsky* (New York: Lang, 1991), p. 59.

arouses. In the meantime, he becomes fascinating for the reader by being a constant source of fascination for the other characters in the novel.

Furthermore, because Nastas'ia Filippovna's absence is so central, as I will discuss below, and particularly because her relationship with Myshkin is so essential to the direction of the narrative, we cannot begin to understand the hero's actions without first addressing hers. If the novel is 'about' anything on the level of plot, it is surely about the collision of the heroine's outraged suffering and the hero's compassion, and it is therefore necessary to examine both sides of the relationship.

As the thesis aims to look at the ways in which the characters influence each other, this chapter will examine how Nastas'ia Filippovna uses the scripting strategies outlined in the introduction to place herself at the forefront of the other's consciousness and of the narrative even in her absence, the effect this has on others, and what it tells us about her motivation and self-image.

I. CREATING THE HEROINE IN HER ABSENCE: ROGOZHIN'S STORY

Although Nastas'ia Filippovna does not appear in the 'real time' of the novel until half way through Part I, she is referred to repeatedly by other characters from the very beginning as the subject of stories, character assessment and plans. The first story told about her is one of the most striking in the novel: Rogozhin's description of their first encounter and particularly its aftermath arouses enormous interest and influences the reader's and Prince Myshkin's opinion of the heroine. Having related the

story of first seeing Nastas'ia Filippovna and presenting her with a pair of earrings purchased with his father's money, Rogozhin describes his father's reaction:

Тотчас, – продолжал он князю, – про всё узнал, да и Залёжнев каждому встречному пошел болтать. Взял меня родитель и наверху запер, и целый час поучал. «Это я только, говорит, предуготовляю тебя, а вот я со тобой еще на ночь попрощаться зайду». Что ж ты думаешь? Поехал седой к Настасье Филипповне, земно ей кланялся, умолял, и плакал; вынесла она ему, наконец, коробку, шваркнула: «Вот, говорит, тебе, старая борода, твой серьги, а они мне теперь в десять раз дороже ценой, коли из-под такой грозы их Парфен добывал. Кланяйся, говорит, и благодари Парфена Семеныча». Ну, а я этой порой, по матушкину благословению, у Сержки Протушина двадцать рублей достал, да во Псков по машине и отправился, да приехал-то в лихорадке (VIII, 12-13).

Of major significance here is the undermining function of the final sentence, in which Rogozhin notes his absence from the scene he has just described so vividly. The direct juxtaposition of the two events suggests a fundamental question: if Rogozhin was fleeing St Petersburg at the very moment when the scene between his father and Nastas'ia Filippovna was taking place, and is only just returning to the city as the novel opens, how does he know what happened between them? Rogozhin describes the scene in the manner of an eye-witness, even using the present tense 'говорит' to add immediacy to his report of Nastas'ia Filippovna's speech. However, as we also know from his own words that he was not there, we must suspect on these grounds alone that he is misleading both his listener (Myshkin) and the reader in some way. Furthermore, if this aspect of the story is suspect, can we rely on any of the details Rogozhin relates? Our sense that Rogozhin may not be telling the whole truth about the situation is increased

at the end of chapter 1, when the train draws into the station; the narrator's comment, 'Хотя Рогожин и говорил, что он уехал тихонько, но его уже поджидали несколько человек' (VIII, 13), deliberately draws attention to the inconsistencies in Rogozhin's story, undermining it further.

The question of the origin of this story is particularly important as Rogozhin's description contains both the heroine's first utterance of note, and the first suggestion of a special connection between them, thereby establishing one of the main plot-threads in the novel. Any doubts over the accuracy of our first view of Nastas'ia Filippovna will therefore have serious implications for later attempts to interpret her actions and motivation. In the presentation of an avowedly enigmatic heroine, all devices which obscure or undermine our knowledge of her are relevant to interpretation, and Rogozhin's comments and those of others on the same incident therefore deserve careful examination in order to help establish what, if anything, we can learn from Nastas'ia Filippovna's initial appearance in the novel. We must also address the issue of how another's word can play such a dominant role in the advancement of a character's script.

Given that Rogozhin was not present at the meeting between his father and the heroine, and has had minimal opportunity to learn of it in his absence from Petersburg, our first assumption has to be that he has made the story up, perhaps as an exercise in wishful thinking, or in order to impress his sexual prowess on his naïve travelling companion, or just because he likes telling stories, like so many characters in the novel. This possibility appears to be denied, however, when Myshkin relates the tale to

General Epanchin and Gania, and the General responds, 'Да и я, брат, слышал, [...] Тогда же после серег Настасья Филипповна весь анекдот пересказывала' (VIII, 28). Significantly, however, there are no details whatsoever in this exchange which would confirm the accuracy of the story we were initially given; we are merely told that Myshkin 'тут же рассказал про свою встречу с Рогожиным и передал весь рассказ его', and that Gania replies, 'Я про него что-то уже слушал' (VIII, 28). The narrator has already used the same device of glossing over the repetition of narrative in Myshkin's explanations of his background to the various members of the Epanchin household, in order to save the reader the tedium of reading the same details several times (VIII, 21, 24, and later 46 and 84), but on this occasion the absence is far less innocuous. Whilst appearing to verify Rogozhin's story, it in fact does no such thing; we do not know whether Myshkin tells the story verbatim, or merely outlines the salient features and, as we do not know to what the General is agreeing, his confirmation is little short of meaningless. The facts, and with them the character of Nastas'ia Filippovna, continue to elude us, even though on first reading we experience the exact opposite.

Nevertheless, General Epanchin's assertion that Nastas'ia Filippovna has been telling the story both confirms that something happened, and suggests that if Rogozhin has heard about it, she was the original source of the story. Before he relates the tale of his father's visit to Nastas'ia Filippovna, Rogozhin mentions that 'Конев, Василий Васильич, выручил, всё отписал' (VIII, 10). Although he is speaking here of his father's death, it is possible that either this letter, or another one he fails to

mention, describes the scene to him. In this case, the story he tells can only have come from Nastas'ia Filippovna herself, via one or more intermediaries.

This in itself raises further questions of accuracy. If the story came to Rogozhin through an number of intermediaries, it may well have suffered some distortion *en route* (a hidden case of 'Chinese Whispers', to use Malcolm Jones' analogy).⁵ If, on the other hand, Konev, or whoever told Rogozhin, heard it straight from Nastas'ia Filippovna, we can assume her version has survived reasonably intact. In neither case, however, can we discount the possibility that either Rogozhin or Nastas'ia Filippovna (or both) has embellished the facts for their own purpose. The 'truth' about the incident remains unknown and unknowable; even before the main characters and plot are established, the ground of *Idiot* is shifting under the reader's feet.

Furthermore, once we realize that the story must come from Nastas'ia Filippovna herself, we have to wonder whether she related it merely as an amusing incident, or with the intention of transmitting it back to Rogozhin, to encourage him to pursue her. This would suggest that she has already perceived shame or death at his hands as an option, a possibility which is emphasized by the generic connections between the two characters. The Gothic overtones of Rogozhin's character and family background suggest violence, jealousy and obsession, all characteristics of

⁵ See *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin*, pp. 150-51.

which Nastas'ia later makes use in fulfilling her script for herself.⁶ Moreover, the melodramatic aspect of the Gothic also appeals to her well-developed sense of the dramatic and desire to force others to pay attention to her, and coincides with her own view of herself as fallen and doomed woman.

We do not immediately recognize it as such, owing to its early position in the novel, but when we look back at this incident, having established that Nastas'ia Filippovna is attempting to influence the action of the novel from off-stage, we begin to suspect that this is an early indication of the same tendency. In retrospect, when we have established the strategies the heroine uses later in the novel, we can see in Rogozhin's narrative an early paradigm of scripting, as it involves some of the most vital elements of the process: story-telling, a strong sense of the dramatic, and role-playing, in the magnanimous self-image the heroine presents in order to manipulate the other's response. Furthermore, the active participation of the other is already present (both on the part of Rogozhin, as he repeats the story and had an initial role in the incident, and Myshkin, who not only repeats the story and therefore also immediately participates in its 'becoming real' regardless of its truth, but spends the rest of the novel acting in the light of Rogozhin's story). As the interaction of self and other is essential to the event of being, Nastas'ia Filippovna, in spite of her

⁶ On the Gothic aspects of the novel, see Robin Feuer Miller, 'Dostoevsky and the Tale of Terror', in *The Russian Novel from Pushkin to Pasternak*, ed. by John Garrard (New Haven, & London: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 103-121, and R. L. Busch, 'Dostoevsky's Major Novels and the European Gothic Tradition', *Russian Language Journal*, 40 (1986), 57-74.

absence, uses the other in the assertion of her self-image from the opening pages of the novel.

The consequences of the story Rogozhin tells and its possible, but totally unverifiable inaccuracy, are major. For Rogozhin himself, the story, with its apparent endorsement of his actions, is a sign that Nastas'ia Filippovna favours him, which encourages him to pursue his passion for her. Moreover, at the end of chapter 1, Myshkin admits it has also affected him: 'вы мне сами очень понравились и особенно, когда про подвески рассказывали' (VIII, 13). His initial interest in Nastas'ia Filippovna, which is fundamental to the plot of the entire novel, derives from a story about which we have to entertain serious misgivings; if it happened at all, Rogozhin can only have heard it second-hand at best, so we cannot assume it has not been altered in the telling or by the agenda of the teller. Nevertheless, in its influence on Myshkin, and in the abiding first impression it leaves of the heroine on the reader, Rogozhin's utterance gains its own 'truth'; the telling of the story by another gives confirmation to Nastas'ia Filippovna's script even before her aims have been established.

Here the separation of self and other that underlies the process of interpretation in both interpersonal relationships and the text-reader interaction, analysed by Iser, has a dual effect on our initial perception of the heroine and her relationship with Rogozhin:⁷ the gap in this case is widened as the process of interpretation of the self by the other is displaced by an unknown number of possible points of distortion, undermining our

⁷ See introduction, p. 30.

knowledge of the heroine. This lack of certainty regarding the accuracy of Rogozhin's narrative, as well as the reasons for its dissemination, is also the first hint we have of Nastas'ia Filippovna's defence of her loophole; by being elusive, she prevents others from pinning down the facts of the story and using them to finalize her. In the absence of contradictory information, Rogozhin's version of events takes on the appearance of reality for both reader and listener, but simultaneously indicates the heroine's enigmatic nature, which, as we shall see, is an essential component of her scripting.

This device, whereby a statement becomes the truth merely by the fact of it being believed by other characters, even if it is later denied, is used elsewhere in the novel; when Myshkin reveals his inheritance at Nastas'ia Filippovna's birthday party, Ptitsyn's words, 'Может быть, тоже миллиона полтора получите, а пожалуй что и больше' (VIII, 140), gain general acceptance, in spite of the fact that the sum has been plucked from the air as a comparison with Rogozhin's inheritance. Even though the narrator later tells us 'самое наследство в конце концов оказывается вовсе не так замечательным, как о нем сначала распространили' (VIII, 153), the nihilists who try to claim part of the inheritance take the first figure mentioned as the correct one, and we never learn the actual amount involved.

The capacity of gossip and rumour to take over from reality is most evident in the assumptions made about Nastas'ia Filippovna by the other characters. Although at the beginning of the novel Lebedev asserts that she is chaste, which Rogozhin later confirms, most of the other characters cannot be swayed from their belief that she is an immoral woman; Princess

Belokonskaia's remark that Myshkin 'любовницу открыто содержит' (VIII, 422) is not disputed, while Aglaia, despite her knowledge of Myshkin's character, believes that he lived with Nastas'ia Filippovna during their six-month absence from St Petersburg. It is against such judgements and definitions by others that Nastas'ia Filippovna is struggling, and in the story of the earrings we see the first hints of this.

Thus, even though the scene between Nastas'ia Filippovna and his father may not have happened as Rogozhin describes, its impact on the hero remains the same. It is also worth entertaining the possibility that at the end of Part I, in proposing marriage to Nastas'ia Filippovna, Myshkin recalls from the story her apparent appreciation of reckless gallantry with no thought of the consequences for the self. Thus Myshkin, consciously or unconsciously, accepts the very first hints of her script and embarks on his own role within its framework as the pure knight come to rescue her almost immediately after meeting her, when he insists, without knowing why, on going to Nastas'ia Filippovna's birthday party. Rogozhin's story takes on a life of its own regardless of its accuracy, and is central both to the initial characterization of Nastas'ia Filippovna, and the way Myshkin and the reader relate to her, whilst not giving either a single piece of reliable information about the heroine.

II. NASTAS'IA FILIPPOVNA'S LIE: THE STRUGGLE AGAINST OBJECTIFICATION

The next occasion on which Nastas'ia Filippovna's speech is reported, and therefore the next opportunity we have to draw any conclusions about her

intentions or her influence on the other characters and the text is also before she appears in the 'real' time of the novel, during the description of her childhood and seduction at the hands of Totskii. Owing to the fact that the narrator tells the story from Totskii's point of view, as Robin Feuer Miller remarks,⁸ we have no reason to doubt that the heroine actually said the following to General Epanchin and Totskii regarding her possible marriage:

с видом глубочайшего уважения объявила, что она давно уже слышала очень многое об его дочерях, и давно уже привыкла глубоко и искренно уважать их. Одна мысль о том, что она могла бы быть для них хоть чем-нибудь полезною, была бы, кажется, для нее счастьем и гордостью. Это правда, что ей теперь тяжело и скучно; Анфасий Иванович угадал мечты ее; она желала бы воскреснуть, хоть не в любви, так в семействе, сознав новую цель (VIII, 41).

Here we are faced with an entirely different problem; rather than questioning whether Nastas'ia Filippovna actually says these words (although at first glance the indirect form in which they are presented makes them look less convincing than Rogozhin's direct report of her speech in chapter 1), we now have to wonder whether she is lying, and why. Even if some part of her does desire a stable family life, her actions, both in this background chapter and in subsequent events in the novel, strongly suggest that any impulse she has to settle down and live respectably is consistently weaker than her opposing impulse to self-destruction and vengeance; as Matich states, she has numerous opportunities to get married but spurns them all.⁹ Totskii's reaction to her

⁸ *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, p. 101.

⁹ 'Poor Nastja', p. 54.

apparent agreement, 'раз напуганный Тощий и теперь не совсем поверил и долго боялся, нет ли и тут змеи под цветами' (VIII, 42), confirms our suspicion that Nastas'ia Filippovna has no intention of complying with his wishes. In the same section, we are also told that 'она ни в чем не считает себя виновною' (VIII, 41), which clearly contradicts both the reader's and Myshkin's view of her character as the novel develops.

Some answers to the question of why Nastas'ia Filippovna chooses to mislead Totskii and the General on the subject of her marriage can be found in the nature of the references to her by the characters most closely involved in manipulating her fate (General Epanchin, Totskii and Gania) in the opening section of the novel, before her first appearance, and in the contrast offered by Prince Myshkin's impressions of her at this stage.

It is clear from the chapter describing Nastas'ia Filippovna's background, and indeed from the very fact that the narrator assumes Totskii's point of view, that her guardian has tried, and for a long period of time succeeded, in exercising ultimate control over practically every aspect of Nastas'ia Filippovna's life; in one of the first recognizable instances of this strategy that we meet, he has written a script for her, or rather imposed a role on her from his own script. Matich points out that the descriptions of the heroine at Otradnoe strongly resemble an elegant genre painting, as she is surrounded by books from her young ladies' library, drawing materials, musical instruments and a greyhound.¹⁰ Totskii has evidently set the scene

¹⁰ 'Poor Nastja', p. 50.

and moulded the image of his ward to conform to his own refined artistic tastes, and Nastas'ia's desires are not even an issue; when we first see the heroine, she has no script of her own, and is entirely subordinated to the other.

The full extent of the power Totskii's script has over Nastas'ia Filippovna's life, and how this precipitates one of the major crises in the novel, however, is most obvious in his plot, concocted with the help of General Epanchin, to marry her off to Gania Ivolgin. Not only is the very fact of his trying to dispose of her in this way a sign of his control and her lack of value to him as a human being, but this is even confirmed by the abstract language he uses to describe the situation, for example, 'Так как и сам Тотцкий наблюдал покамест, по некоторым особым обстоятельствам, чрезвычайную осторожность в своих шагах' (VIII, 34). Even Gania, who is to a large extent also a victim of the control of the other two, owing to his family's financial circumstances, thinks of it in the same abstract terms: 'самое это изменение, самый выход, на котором он остановился, составляли задачу не малую, — такую задачу, предстоявшее разрешение которой грозило быть хлопотливее и мучительнее всего предыдущего' (VIII, 76). At no point in the opening chapters is Nastas'ia Filippovna's proposed marriage to Gania described by the men involved in any other terms than as a business transaction. The use of abstract language points to the objectification of the heroine in the minds of the men who control her fate; important though Nastas'ia Filippovna is to these characters, in their eyes, she is neither a human being nor even a woman, but an 'обстоятельство'.

In the face of these objectifying assumptions, which undermine her sense of selfhood, the heroine refuses to make her mind up about the marriage: 'она до самой свадьбы (если свадьба состоится) оставляет за собой право сказать «нет», хотя бы в самый последний час' (VIII, 42). This signals her clear perception of her position and the beginning of her fight to free herself from the control of Totskii's script, although there is no hint at this stage of what her own script might involve, beyond the fact that she is determined to retain the right to make her own choice and say the final word about herself, and will not accept the finalizing judgements of others. When Nastas'ia Filippovna also offers Gania a loophole by giving him the opportunity to renege on the deal (VIII, 26), she shows she is aware that he too is a victim in this situation, and subject to the control of others, despite his complicity.

This tendency to objectify Nastas'ia Filippovna in both thought and deed is particularly evident in the reactions of the other characters to the photograph of herself she has given to Gania. In this object, as Dolezel notes, the heroine before her first appearance changes from being a verbal sign to a pictorial sign;¹¹ having already asserted her image through Rogozhin's story and established her place in the preoccupations of Gania, General Epanchin and Totskii, the photograph gives her a presence to which the other protagonists may respond in an uninhibited fashion.

¹¹ 'The Fictional World of Dostoevskij's *The Idiot*' *Russian Literature*, 33 (1993), 239-48 (p. 240).

While Myshkin's three examinations of the portrait are vital in establishing his view of her, the incidental gestures of the other characters are just as important as pointers to their attitudes towards her. Outside of Myshkin's hands, the portrait is generally connected to hostile reactions. Mrs Epanchina, for instance, 'надменным жестом откинула от себя портрет на стол' (VIII, 69), and it is treated with even less respect in the Ivolgin household; Varvara finds it on the floor, and Gania then 'с досадой взял со стола и отбросил на свой письменный стол, стоявший в другом конце комнаты' (VIII, 84). His violence towards Nastas'ia Filippovna is barely displaced,¹² and re-emphasizes the worthlessness of the heroine in the eyes of those who control or sanction control of her.

However, the gift is also taken by all concerned as a sign of her assent to the proposed marriage and as such indicates both their propensity to misread her, and her own ability to confound expectations. The profound tension surrounding Nastas'ia Filippovna's determination to maintain her loophole is thus already present in her photograph, as the gift deliberately provokes incorrect, finalizing assumptions about the heroine and simultaneously provides an opportunity for these assumptions to be undermined, and the possibility of external finalization to be removed.

In stark contrast to the treatment the portrait receives from others, Prince Myshkin treats it with reverence; it is notable that just before Mrs Epanchina tosses the picture away casually, Myshkin kisses it (VIII, 68).

¹² See Zinaida Malenko and James L. Gebhard, 'The Artistic Use of Portraits in Dostoevskij's *Idiot*', *SEEL*, 5 (1961), 243-54 (p. 245).

More importantly, he is the only character who actually bothers to look properly at the image of Nastas'ia Filippovna. It is worth quoting in full the three passages where Myshkin is examining her portrait:

(1) – Так это Настасья Филипповна? – промолвил он, внимательно и любопытно поглядев на портрет: – удивительно хороша! – прибавил он тотчас же с жаром. На портрет было изображена, действительно, необыкновенной красоты женщина. Она была сфотографирована в черном шелковом платье, чрезвычайно простого и изящного фасона; волосы, повидимому, темно-русые, были убраны просто, по-домашнему; глаза темные, глубокие, лоб задумчивый; выражение лица страстное и как бы высокомерное. Она была несколько худа лицом, может быть, и бледна... (VIII, 27).

(2) – Удивительное лицо! – ответил князь, – и я уверен, что судьба ее не из обыкновенных. – Лицо веселое, а она ведь ужасно страдала, а? Об этом глаза говорят, вот эти две косточки, две точки под глазами в начале щек. Это гордое лицо, ужасное гордое, и вот не знаю, добра ли она? Ах, кабы добра! Всё было бы спасено! (VIII, 31-32).

(3) Ему как бы хотелось разгадать что-то, скрывавшееся в этом лице и поразившее его давеча. Давешнее впечатление почти не оставляло его, и теперь он спешил как бы что-то вновь проверить. Это необыкновенное по своей красоте и еще по чему-то лицо сильнее еще поразило его теперь. Как будто необъятная гордость и презрение, почти ненависть, были в этом лице, и в то же время что-то доверчивое, что-то удивительно простодушное; эти два контраста возбуждали как будто даже какое-то сострадание при взгляде на эти черты. Эта ослепляющая красота была даже невыносима, красота бледного лица, чуть не впалых щек и горевших глаз; странная красота! (VIII, 68).

Although we have to retain an open mind as to whether we are seeing an objective view of the portrait, or whether it is coloured by Myshkin's perception or the projection of his own preoccupations onto her, his appreciation of the beauty of Nastas'ia Filippovna is taken over by the

second time he looks at the picture by the recognition of the suffering it depicts, and on the third occasion, he sees for the first time the effect of this suffering on himself. While other characters objectify Nastas'ia Filippovna in relation to themselves, reducing her to otherness, Myshkin seems rather to objectify himself in relation to her. By identifying the heroine's subjective sense of selfhood in the photograph, he immediately opens himself up to allow her to place him in the context of her own script; the hero is, in effect, an ethically ideal reader of Nastas'ia Filippovna. At this stage we are not fully aware of what this involves, although Myshkin's role in the story of Marie has already suggested the direction his actions will take.

That Myshkin's compassion for Nastas'ia Filippovna's suffering arises directly from her portrait is confirmed later in the novel, first, as he recollects, 'но даже во впечатлении от портрета, [...] было слишком много тяжелого. [...] лицо это еще с портрета вызывало из его сердца целое страдание жалости' (VIII, 289), and later, when he tells Radomskii, 'я не могу лица Настасьи Филипповны выносить [...] Я еще утром, на портрете, не мог его вынести' (VIII, 484). As Malenko and Gebhard point out, it is the image created in his mind by the photograph, perhaps more than the woman herself, that stays with him and shapes his future attitude to the heroine.¹³

¹³ 'Portraits', p. 245; the aesthetic aspect of Myshkin's compassion is discussed in detail in chapter 2.

Significantly, this concentration on the heroine's suffering presents a very different view of Nastas'ia Filippovna from that given by the narrator who, following Totskii's point of view, characterizes her behaviour as merely capricious, and gives no impression of the effect her seduction has had on her, because Totskii does not think of her in human terms. In other words, unlike the other characters in *Idiot*, including the narrator, Myshkin reacts to the photograph, and therefore to the person depicted in it, with empathy and compassion, rather than objectifying and finalizing her. Furthermore, by the time of the third examination of the picture, it has been established that in contrast to Adelaida Epanchina's 'взглянуть не умею' (VIII, 50), Myshkin knows how to look. We are thus given a strong impression that the Prince, through his ability to look and reconstruct imaginatively the state of mind of those he is examining (which he has already done in his depiction of the man awaiting execution), at these points comes close to identifying the real Nastas'ia Filippovna, who is otherwise proving extremely elusive at this stage in the novel. That such a process is not automatic or open to everyone is made clear in Dostoevskii's later novel *Podrostok*, when Versilov states,

фотографические снимки чрезвычайно редко выходят похожими, и это понятно: сам оригинал, то есть каждый из нас, чрезвычайно редко бывает похож на себя. В редкие только мгновения человеческое лицо выражает главную черту свою, свою самую характерную мысль. Художник изучает лицо и угадывает эту главную мысль лица, хотя бы в тот момент, в который он списывает, и не было ее вовсе в лице (XIII, 370).

Myshkin's reaction to the photograph of Nastas'ia Filippovna denies the applicability of Versilov's comment to himself, but confirms it as regards

the other characters in the novel; if you know how to look, it is not impossible to see something of the original. This also highlights the fact that even in the photograph Nastas'ia Filippovna is writing a script for the consumption of others. In presenting the portrait to Gania on her birthday, she appears to be signalling her consent to their marriage and behaving like a normal, respectable woman, and most of the characters assume that this is in fact the case.

However, few of the other protagonists even think of looking at the image in order to perceive the role she is playing, as they have exchanged empathy for objectification. They react to the photograph only as an object, and ignore the suffering and pride of the person, which are evident to Myshkin, and as such allow themselves to be misled by the script she is presenting. Myshkin immediately begins to analyse her character and situation, to the extent that he can predict the fate of Rogozhin and Nastas'ia Filippovna only minutes after first seeing the portrait: 'Да что же, жениться, я думаю, и завтра же можно; женился бы, а чрез неделю, пожалуй, и зарезал бы ее...' (VIII, 32). In contrast, others who supposedly know her far better are unable to make even the vaguest guess as to what might happen: 'уж тогда всё дело в том, как у ней в голове мелькнет' (VIII, 28). While the other characters may comment on Nastas'ia Filippovna more obviously, it is only Myshkin who attempts to reconstruct and understand her character from the flimsy evidence given. Conversely, the inability of others to understand her motives or predict her behaviour prevents them from finalizing her; purely by being unpredictable and introducing false scripts, the heroine is able to achieve a degree of selfhood.

Furthermore, we see in the reaction of Myshkin to the photograph, as was earlier evident in Rogozhin's story, the ability of the heroine to affect others; almost immediately upon encountering her (in Rogozhin's case directly, in Myshkin's through pictures and stories), both men fall under her spell and bind themselves to her fate.

The reaction of the other characters to the portrait of the heroine is important for two reasons. First, the photograph is the only true presence Nastas'ia Filippovna has in the early part in the novel as, in her absence, it represents her only means of commenting on herself, asserting her own character in her own terms (and this is what Myshkin, unlike the others, sees), and scripting herself out of the control of others, who have been trying to construct a character and a life for her. The protagonists' reactions to the picture, whether in the conscious search for the 'truth' of the heroine of Myshkin's careful observation, or the unconscious impulse to violence towards it by Gania, are therefore highly significant as indications of their attitudes towards Nastas'ia Filippovna herself. Second, in the photograph itself, as well as in its treatment by others, we have a symbol of the complete objectification of Nastas'ia Filippovna by others, ironically, as it simultaneously represents her main opportunity in the early part of the novel to project herself as a subjective person, and is thus practically her only means of fighting that objectification.

If we accept this scenario, the heroine's lie about her future desires to Totskii and General Epanchin can be understood as a further attempt to avoid objectification by others and to write her own script for the continuation of her life, in order to attain the selfhood she has thus far been

denied. As Bakhtin states, for the Dostoevskian character, 'его самосознание живет своей незавершенностью, своей незакрытостью и нерешенностью';¹⁴ Nastas'ia Filippovna's actions, even before she appears in the novel, are aimed at promoting her script in order to establish herself as a conscious human subject, retain the right to utter the last word about herself, and escape objectification and finalization by others. In doing so, she frees herself from the control of others in order to direct her own existence and write her own script for the future.

Furthermore, this analysis of Nastas'ia Filippovna's situation gives additional weight to our suspicions about the story Rogozhin tells in chapter 1. If she has been propagating the tale of Rogozhin's father's visit, it now begins to look even more like an early signal of her intention to assert her own script, and an attempt to overturn with regard to Totskii's and the General's scripts for her. Thus at the very beginning of *Idiot*, before the main plot line has been established, through his initial, indirect characterization of the heroine and her relation to the figures around her, Dostoevskii provides the reader with hints of the issues of control and the influence of the characters on each other, which later play such a central role in the structuring of novel.

III. THE HEROINE APPEARS: TWO SKANDALY

It is not until the reader – and Prince Myshkin – see Nastas'ia Filippovna's actions towards the end of Part I that her aim becomes apparent. Having

¹⁴ *Problemy*, p. 89.

been objectified and subject to the control of others, as demonstrated through the devices discussed above, her determination to break free of this control and 'author her own life' quickly becomes evident.¹⁵ While there have been hints of scripting activity before this point, namely in Totskii's imposition of his own script onto Nastas'ia Filippovna, her own image being conveyed through the other's words and her photograph, and Myshkin's stories which, as we shall see in chapter 2, are connected with his ethical version of scripting, it is not until the heroine appears and gives clear signals of her preoccupations and intentions that scripting becomes overtly both a theme and a structuring principle in the novel. From this point onwards we see many of the strategies of scripting in Nastas'ia Filippovna's behaviour and its effect on others.

However, when Nastas'ia Filippovna first appears in person, far from asserting her own personality in a straightforward manner, her actions are entirely in keeping with the scripts others have created for her. Gania and his sister assume that the purpose of her visit is to insult his family, and she does not disappoint their expectations, as Vera's conclusion shows: 'конечно, у ней была цель оскорбить, это ясно' (VIII, 101). Nastas'ia's visit to the Ivolgins' is characterized by arrogance from the moment she arrives, when she takes Myshkin for a servant and is rude to him. This is precisely the sort of proud and capricious behaviour we and the other characters have been led to expect, owing to the influence of Totskii's script for her. The heroine's cruelty is evident when she exposes General

¹⁵ See Burgin, 'Reprieve', p. 259.

Ivolgin's story about the lapdog as a fake, having previously encouraged him, and her pride comes to the fore when she scornfully rejects Rogozhin's offer of only 18,000 rubles for her, demanding a higher price. The mayhem and embarrassment she causes by lowering the tone and switching from the role of the prospective bride to that of the haughty and shameless whore provide an early indication of the heroine's ability to control events and others' perceptions of her.

The inclusion of melodramatic principles by the heroine in this scene, as in her later appearances, allows her to heighten the tension and intensify the conflicts between those present. As her behaviour becomes more extreme and eccentric, the atmosphere becomes increasingly ugly, and Gania responds to her provocation by being hysterical and equally melodramatic. Although Nastas'ia at times seems out of control, by being so she makes others lose control as well; it is her *mise en scène* which influences the other characters' reactions and guides the course of events in the major scandal scenes in her favour.

She continues scripting in this vein until the end of the episode, when Prince Myshkin, who has seen her real self in her portrait, and realizes that she is merely acting the role of the person others believe her to be, cries, 'а вам и не стыдно! Разве вы такая, какую теперь представлялись. Да может ли это быть!' His suspicion is confirmed when Nastas'ia Filippovna returns to ask Mrs Ivogina's forgiveness, saying, 'Я ведь и в самом деле не такая, он угадал' (VIII, 99-100). Aided by Myshkin's clarity of vision, we also begin to realize that we cannot rely on the image she presents of herself any more than we can on others'

descriptions of her, as even her own actions in her first appearance seem to be part of a deliberate stance to expose that image as a product of somebody else's script. In abandoning this false script at the end of the incident, Nastas'ia Filippovna also confounds expectations fixed by her previous pattern of behaviour, allowing her to retain her loophole by having the final – and most unexpected – word, to which the others present have no reply. Her ability to change her script in response to the circumstances gives her the opportunity to evade finalization which, as we shall see, becomes her fundamental principle. We also see in this scene the effect that Myshkin has on the heroine; while others bring out her worst instincts, the Prince alone is able to inhibit her manipulative play-acting.

The idea that Nastas'ia Filippovna is acting out a role in a narrative, rather than representing her 'true' self, becomes more obvious in the final scene of Part I, at her birthday party. As a result of her struggle against objectification and attempt to assert a different script from the one to which she has been assigned, the heroine shows a strong metatextual awareness of the significance of playing roles generally. In this section of the novel, Nastas'ia Filippovna frequently uses the language of drama and narrative to comment on events. When Rogozhin arrives, she cries, 'Вот и развязка!' (VIII, 131), she later responds to Myshkin's proposal with the words, 'ну, это там... из романов!' (VIII, 138), and calls the news of his inheritance, 'Развязка неожиданная... я... не так ожидала' (VIII, 140). Pechorin uses similar language in *Geroi nashego vremeni*, comparing his manipulation of events and the other characters in 'Kniazhna Meri' to a drama he is

directing.¹⁶ In a development of this technique, Nastas'ia Filippovna implicates others in her quest for (self-) dramatization by deliberately labelling their actions as elements in narrative and dramatic structuring, thereby connecting them to her own script. She uses such phrases not merely as literary embellishments, but precisely in order to highlight the incorporation of the melodramatic into her appearances, and to inform and influence the other protagonists. As well as behaving in a way Myshkin has already perceived to be an act, Nastas'ia Filippovna deliberately suggests that she is treating the entire scene as a drama or a novel in which she is the author, main protagonist and director, and forces others to see and react to the situation in the same terms.

In agreeing to play the *petit-jeu* at her birthday party, moreover, Nastas'ia Filippovna emphasizes the importance of narrating for the image people present of themselves. She displays a strong interest in other peoples' stories about themselves, as she did previously with General Ivolgin, insisting on listening to his stories, and identifying their source. Nastas'ia Filippovna's reaction to the idea of the game is clearly seen as significant by those involved, as General Epanchin notices 'как увлекает ее эта странная мысль', while the narrator comments, 'может быть, ей именно нравилась циничность и жестокость идеи. Иные даже уверны были, что у ней тут какой-нибудь особый расчет' (VIII, 121).

¹⁶ See C. J. G. Turner, *Pechorin: An Essay on Lermontov's 'A Hero of Our Time'* (Birmingham: Birmingham Slavonic Monographs, 1978), pp. 45-55.

However, it is her own rather strange contribution to the game which establishes the centrality of narrative as a means of self-representation in the novel. When it comes to her turn to tell the story of her worst action, she asks Myshkin whether she should marry Gania (VIII, 130). By using the setting of the game to ask the Prince whether she should accept others' scripts for her or establish her own, narrative becomes overtly part of the direction and structuring of life, 'blurring again the distinction of lived and narrated experience'.¹⁷ The other characters, although anxious to present themselves in a certain light for their own reasons and to promote their own images in the hope that others will concur with their self-presentations, do not see the vital importance of narrating for Nastas'ia Filippovna. Totskii in particular, who was solely concerned with appearing elegant and amusing and lied so blatantly about his own 'worst action', is horrified that she should decide such an important issue by such 'trivial' means. Only Myshkin and Nastas'ia Filippovna herself understand the significance of the game and of telling stories about oneself in general; as the heroine says, 'тут вся моя жизнь на одном волоске висела; чего серьезнее?' (VIII, 131).

In turning the game to her own advantage, and using an apparently unconnected episode to comment on her own situation, the heroine shows great improvisational skills.¹⁸ Her spontaneity and awareness of the possibilities of the present moment enable her to take control of the

¹⁷ Jones, *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin*, p. 127.

¹⁸ See Burgin, 'Reprieve', pp. 259-61.

situation. It is at this point that she breaks free of Totskii's control by refusing to marry Gania, but far from doing so in favour of her own story, she invites bids for alternative proposals of how she should proceed, and again takes up roles projected on to her by others. Gania's offer relates only to the worst of Nastas'ia Filippovna's experience (being the property of other men to be sold on at will), and is in any case merely a continuation of her current status, which is precisely what she wishes to avoid. The suggestion that she can make a new start and lead a happy family life is flatly contradicted both by the attitude of Gania and his family towards her, and by her own provocative behaviour when she visits the Ivolgins. Moreover, the choice of Gania, whose ordinariness is repeatedly emphasized, as a future husband is an insult to the talented, intelligent and eccentric heroine. Regardless of her need to choose her own future, marriage to a jumped-up bureaucrat is clearly not on her agenda, and her question to Myshkin marks her withdrawal from passive participation in the ordinary scripts of others in favour of asserting her own, active and *extra-ordinary* scripts.

In contrast, both Rogozhin and Myshkin present the heroine with images which correspond to her deepest divided impulses. Rogozhin appeals to her feelings of guilt and belief that she should be punished for her crimes by treating her as a whore, and Nastas'ia Filippovna encourages him to bid higher, reinforcing this image of herself and exhibiting her shame for all to see, but in doing so, she simultaneously and paradoxically raises her value, demonstrating her intense pride. Rogozhin's potential for violence towards her, already identified by Myshkin, and the recklessness

he demonstrates in pursuing his passion, imply an awareness on the part of Nastas'ia Filippovna from the start that in encouraging Rogozhin's attentions she is knowingly placing herself in a perilous position, and that she chooses him for this very reason. Moreover, the sinister aspects of his character and family background, with its links to the *skoptsy*, and therefore to the Castrates' practice of sexual mutilation,¹⁹ correspond to the melodramatic and Gothic leanings of the heroine, further suggesting that Nastas'ia Filippovna sees the affinities between them and the use Rogozhin will be to her future script.

Myshkin, meanwhile, awakens her old dream of salvation:

Разве я сама о тебе не мечтала? Это ты прав, давно мечтала, еще в деревне у него, пять лет прожила одна-одинехонька; думаешь-думаешь, бывало-то, мечтаешь-мечтаешь, — и вот всё такого, как ты, воображала, доброго, честного, хорошего и такого же глупенького, что вдруг придет да и скажет: «Вы не виноваты, Настасья Филипповна, а я вас обожаю!» (VIII, 144).

Shame is a major factor in her turning to Myshkin; she wishes to be forgiven and for her shame to be expunged, as she feels guilt for the sin that was committed against her. Shame at her fallen state both drives Nastas'ia Filippovna to fall further, and to crave forgiveness, whilst believing her sin is too great to be forgiven, and is thus a significant impulse in the creation of both directions of her script. Furthermore, Myshkin's proposal also fulfils her need for a defender; we already know from the story of Marie that he has excellent credentials as a saviour of fallen women, but Nastas'ia

¹⁹ Comer, 'Rogozhin and the Castrates', pp. 93-4.

Filippovna is not yet aware of this potential, and the effect on her of the hero's intervention to prevent Gania from hitting his sister is striking:

Настасья Филипповна была тоже очень поражена и поступком Гани и ответом князя. Обыкновенное 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 высказывать, и насмешка словно усиливалась остаться в лице ее. — Право, где-то видела его лицо! — проговорила она вдруг уже серьезно, внезапно вспомнив опять давешний свой вопрос (VIII, 99).

Thus the immediate image Myshkin presents as a defender of women against one of the very men trying to control Nastas'ia Filippovna's life, coupled with his ability to see that she is not the person she pretends to be, mix with her almost-forgotten dream of a return to innocence, allowing her to identify him with salvation even before his proposal of marriage.

There is a strong element of Manichaeism surrounding Nastas'ia Filippovna's relationships with others and beliefs about herself, which are defined by polar opposites with no middle ground. Thus the heroine sees herself simultaneously as both great and worthless, utterly corrupt and totally innocent, and her relationships with both men are influenced by this contradictory self-image. Nastas'ia Filippovna's choice at the end of Part I of becoming Myshkin's princess or Rogozhin's whore therefore exemplifies the two versions of her script for herself and her protagonists. While the 'truth' about all these characters and their relationships may lie somewhere in the middle, it is the fact that the heroine sees herself and others in such binary, black and white terms that is important: innocence/corruption, love/hate, salvation/perdition, princess/whore; all

emotions and ideas are at their most extreme, and the middle ground is excluded.

Peter Brooks allies the polar extremes of Manichaeism to the melodramatic form:

What we most retain from any consideration of melodramatic structures is the sense of a fundamental bipolar contrast and clash. The world according to melodrama is built on an irreducible Manichaeism, the conflict of good and evil not subject to compromise. Melodramatic dilemmas and choices are constructed on the either/or in its extreme form as the all-or-nothing. Polarization is both horizontal and vertical: characters represent extremes, and they undergo extremes, passing from heights to depths, or the reverse, almost instantaneously. The middle ground, and the middle condition are excluded [...] Polarization is not only a dramatic principle but the very means by which integral ethical conditions are identified and shaped, made clear and operative.²⁰

The powerful melodramatic impulse in the novel, emanating particularly from the personality and actions of Nastas'ia Filippovna, is thus both grounded in and complemented by an ethical system which, while it may not be beneficial to her state of mind, gives a consistent thread to her motivation.

The opposition between Myshkin & Rogozhin is set up at the beginning of the novel by the narrator, but it becomes important to the novel only because it is evident to Nastas'ia Filippovna and corresponds to her deeply polarized view of herself. The heroine projects the extremes of her character onto the two men, to make them adopt central roles in the alternative scripts she is preparing in order to free herself from Totskii's

²⁰ *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), p.36.

control. The rivalry between Rogozhin and Myshkin, which becomes a vital component of the novel's main plot, and is responsible for the fates of all three, is thus largely a product of Nastas'ia Filippovna's imaginative perception, and the fact that the roles she offers both echo their natural desires with regard to her. In this we see the reciprocal nature of scripting; without the active participation of Myshkin and Rogozhin, Nastas'ia Filippovna has no script, and cannot assert her own self-image or influence the direction of the narrative.

Both her scripts depend on the perception of her by another being aligned with her own self-definition, and to this end she secures their attention and participation by presenting the sides of her character to which they will best respond. Thus she tells Rogozhin she is worth more than he is offering, raising her own price to heighten the appearance of both her pride and shame in the eyes of others; by putting herself up for auction in this way she simultaneously raises and destroys her own value. By implication this also emphasizes Rogozhin's worthlessness, as she makes it clear that he is a means to an end and has no value to her as a human being. This becomes a major source of motivation for Rogozhin's hatred of the heroine, and she further provokes his jealousy and sense of his own inadequacy by turning to Myshkin. In contrast, in order to attract Myshkin's attention, she tells him about her dream of salvation, appealing generally to his sense of justice and decency, as well as specifically identifying his desire to defend women; but by aligning herself with Rogozhin, she also indicates to Myshkin her perilous position and urgent need for his help. As a convenient shorthand, I shall henceforth refer to Nastas'ia Filippovna's scripting in

relation to Rogozhin as her 'whore script', and that in relation to Myshkin as her 'princess script', as this represents the stark choice she faces at the end of Part I: she can either become Rogozhin's whore or Myshkin's princess. However, it is not merely this choice which is important; it is the heroine's use of these possible roles to play characters off against each other in order to direct the course of events in her favour which classifies her interactivity as scripting. It is the interplay of the different components of her psychological make-up, the fatal, fallen and emancipated aspects, as Matich states, which determine her self-image and the roles she allocates others.²¹

The polarity inherent in Nastas'ia Filippovna's character and its reflection in the relationships of Myshkin and Rogozhin to the heroine (and to each other) are central to the novel. Burgin is therefore some way off the mark in her thought-provoking article when she claims that Nastas'ia Filippovna rejects Myshkin's proposal of marriage because he arrives too late, after she has abandoned her dream of salvation.²² In fact both extremes are present simultaneously, as her response to Myshkin's offer suggests. Recalling her dream of a good man who will tell her, 'Вы не виноваты, Настасья Филипповна, а я вас обожаю!', she continues, 'Да так, бывало, размечтаешься, что с ума сойдешь... А тут придет вот этот: месяца по два гостил в году, опозорит, разобидит, распалит, развратит, уедет,

²¹ O. Matich, 'The Idiot: A Feminist Reading', in *Dostoevski and the Human Condition After a Century*, ed. by A. Ugrinsky, F. Lambasa and V. K. Ozolins (New York: Greenwood, 1986), pp. 53-60 (p. 54).

²² 'Reprieve', p. 260.

— так тысячу раз в пруд хотела кинуться, да подла была, души не хватило' (VIII, 144). Her direct reference to the reality of Totskii's abuse interrupting and destroying her dream also reminds her of her own perceived baseness and guilt, and persuades her that she cannot accept or even believe in the Prince's offer. Furthermore, the recollection of her suicidal ideation, which arose as a result of her abuse, immediately turns her thoughts back to Rogozhin as, having ignored him since Myshkin's proposal, she ends the above speech by announcing her final decision to leave with him; the guilt which led her to consider suicide in the past reasserts itself, and she takes the suicidal option again.

Nastas'ia Filippovna's constant vacillations between the two men, the conflicting desires for both punishment and forgiveness which they represent to her, and her eventual resolution of the conflict, inform the entire sub-structure of the novel, including the final scene uniting the two men over her corpse. It is also essential for her ultimate aim of avoiding finalization by others that the heroine keeps different options alive; retaining the right to change her mind until the final moment is pointless unless she maintains alternative scripts and, owing to her profoundly dualistic, Manichean nature, these alternatives represent opposite extremes. Myshkin strikes a chord with Nastas'ia Filippovna, establishing his script in her mind as a possible alternative. Although she quickly hands back his script, she is, as we shall see throughout the novel, unwilling to surrender it

definitively, as it gives her an additional dimension, allowing her to keep her options open through the availability of choice.²³

The fact that Nastas'ia Filippovna gives others such a prominent role in forming alternative versions of her future life is indicative of an awareness of the importance of interaction with the other in establishing her script. However, it also highlights a serious problem she faces: having been completely defined by the expectations of men and the condemnation of society, without a voice of her own, she is doubly deprived of selfhood. This is where Heldt's analysis is inadequate in claiming that both Nastas'ia Filippovna and Aglaia 'have complete freedom, economic and otherwise, to choose their own fate [...] [Nastas'ia Filippovna] is given a multitude of opportunities to cast aside her role as a femme fatale or fallen woman, she is shown to be capable of living quietly; but she is ultimately unwilling to live'.²⁴ In fact, the choice of both women, and of Nastas'ia Filippovna in particular, is strictly limited by their position in society and dependence on men for their material well-being; Aglaia's attempts to break out of the mould cast for her appear equally impossible without the help of a man (either Myshkin or Gania).

The 'woman question', which has already been mentioned in the novel, at this point becomes a theme, and although there is little evidence to support Radomskii's later suggestion that Myshkin has been seduced by the

²³ The importance of this possibility in achieving selfhood are discussed in chapter 3, pp. 306-18.

²⁴ *Terrible Perfection: Women and Russian Literature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 35.

contemporary issue and the feminist arguments of the nihilist movement (VIII, 481-482), his instinct that this is an important issue in assessing the behaviour of both women is correct. As well as this problem, Nastas'ia Filippovna's position is further complicated by the self-destructive forces she harbours, which impinge significantly on her freedom, as Heldt admits, contradicting her previous statement: 'Aglaia sees that Nastasia Filippovna has tried to manipulate life, but mistakenly thinks that the other woman has a kind of "freedom" in her madness'.²⁵ Nastas'ia Filippovna is far from being free, and although she may successfully wrest herself from Totskii's control, she is not able to assert herself as an individual in her own right. We shall see her unique solution to this paradox in the control she exerts over Rogozhin and others and the influence she gains over the narrative as a result of this as the novel develops.

By the end of Part I, therefore, we have established that for Nastas'ia Filippovna, the impulse to narration is not simply an interest, but literally a matter of life and death, both in the sense that it forms the basis of her scripting, which is vital to her continued existence, and in that one possible direction of her script specifically incorporates her death. In identifying her two dramatically opposing and mutually exclusive scripts suggested by the reactions to her of Rogozhin and Myshkin, and accepting first one and then the other, Nastas'ia Filippovna turns what would otherwise be a role-playing game into an issue with serious consequences for the rest of her life, and the novel. As we have seen, her life up until this

²⁵ *Terrible Perfection*, p. 36.

point has been entirely under the control of another's scripts, but at her party, her desire to assert her own script at whatever cost explodes onto the scene and causes reverberations that continue throughout the rest of *Idiot*.

IV. THE HEROINE DISAPPEARS: CONTROL AND INTERPRETATION

After the two major appearances of Nastas'ia Filippovna at the end of Part I, the six-month gap before Prince Myshkin returns to St Petersburg at the beginning of Part II further distances the reader, who already has little reliable information and is faced with a mass of contradictions surrounding her character, from knowledge of the heroine's actions and motivation:

«провал» повествования между первой и второй частью романа «Идиот» — не «пустышка в лотерее времени», он приковывает к себе пристальное внимание героев и читателей. Из множества совершающихся в этот период событий мы выделяем лишь моменты развития Настасьи Филипповны. Здесь следует заметить прежде всего, что развитие характера героини дается с точки зрения других героев (Рогожина, князя Мышкина, Евгения Павловича).²⁶

It becomes clear that the events of the missing six months are vital to our understanding of the main characters, not only because it represents the most significant period of interaction between them, but also because the hero and the atmosphere of the novel change as a result of it. We are given the strong impression that the time the three main characters spent in Moscow was decisive; in particular, Myshkin feels that it had a very adverse effect on Nastas'ia Filippovna's mental state, while the hero

²⁶ A. F. Sedov, 'Svoeobrazie vremennykh otnoshenii v romane F. M. Dostoevskogo *Idiot* i problema razvitiia geroia', *Filologicheskie nauki*, 4 (1979), 22-6 (p. 25).

himself is so overcome with pain at the thought of her suffering that he cannot bear to think about their time together ('не хотел я ехать сюда! Я хотел всё это здешнее забыть, из сердца вырвать' (VIII, 180)), suggesting a terrible event or period of time which has affected all three protagonists decisively. The fact that the Gothic voice becomes a prominent feature at this point,²⁷ particularly in the scene in Rogozhin's house and in the murder attempt which follows it, also makes the tenor of the narrative more oppressive and threatening, adding to the reader's feeling that something terrible has occurred.

However, the reader and, apparently, the narrator, as well as most of the other characters, are left with little idea about what actually occurred between Myshkin, Rogozhin and Nastas'ia Filippovna during this major lacuna, forcing everyone else present to fill in the gaps in the text. It is also significant that Nastas'ia Filippovna herself is in many ways responsible for this gap in the narrative, as while the narrator follows Myshkin's consciousness, the Prince, having accepted a role in Nastas'ia Filippovna's script, follows hers; it is her decision to leave with Rogozhin which causes the gap. Although he has his own business to attend to in Moscow, Myshkin eventually returns to Petersburg, and the purview of the narrator, because she has already done so.

By shifting the scene of the action away from Petersburg and the narrator's field of vision, Nastas'ia Filippovna highlights the unreliability of the narrator. His previous omniscience is destroyed, and after the six-

²⁷ As Miller points out, *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, p. 108.

month gap between Parts I and II, he is forced to report gossip and rumours rather than 'facts', which serves further to undermine our already limited knowledge of the heroine. All we know with any certainty is that the heroine ran from Rogozhin to Myshkin, and then back to Rogozhin again. However, even this information has to be viewed with some scepticism, as the narrator seems to have no idea what is happening, and much of the corroborating evidence comes from Lebedev, who becomes increasingly unreliable and inconsistent both as a narrator and in the part he plays in the plot of the novel.

By the beginning of Part II, therefore, the reader has had to formulate an image of Nastas'ia Filippovna with very few pointers, and practically none that can be taken at face value, apart from the suffering Prince Myshkin sees as the 'truth' of her character in her portrait, and his assertion that she 'isn't like that' at the Ivolgins'. In Part II, the situation becomes even more problematic for the reader, as the heroine disappears from view altogether. As Morson states, 'We wonder what has happened to Nastas'ia Filippovna and Rogozhin, and their occasional abrupt appearances only remind us all the more palpably that these two characters are largely extraneous to the action of the middle parts'.²⁸ This section will examine the themes of control and interpretation which were hinted at in relation to the heroine in Part I, through the comments about her made by the other characters and the effect of the brief appearances she makes, in order to define the extent and direction of the scripts she has adopted for

²⁸ 'Tempics', p. 110.

herself at the end of Part I, and the influence they have on the other protagonists and the movement of the narrative as a whole.

The first information we receive about Nastas'ia Filippovna in Part II is from Lebedev's conversation with Prince Myshkin (VIII, 166-168). Lebedev says that Nastas'ia Filippovna asked him to save her from Rogozhin in Moscow, but not to tell Myshkin; he claims that she is more afraid of the Prince, and he admits that he brought her back to Rogozhin. Lebedev's description of her treatment of Rogozhin, 'о нем же самом как об апельсиновой корке помышляет, не более, то есть и более, со страхом и ужасом, даже говорить запрещает, а видятся разве только что по необходимости...' confirms the suspicion that she chose him purely as a means to an end and not for himself. Furthermore, in reporting her insistence on her freedom after she left Rogozhin at the altar for a second time ('я, говорит, свободна [...] я, говорит, еще совершенно свободна'), Lebedev emphasizes the fact that retaining her unfinalizability is the basis of her scripting. He also tells Myshkin that she is interested in his interpretation of the Apocalypse, suggesting a preoccupation with judgement and new life. Finally he reveals that Aglaia Epanchina is planning to visit Nastas'ia Filippovna in Pavlovsk, in an early signal of the heroine's continuing ability to influence other characters.

However, as with the descriptions of Nastas'ia Filippovna in Part I, here it again becomes apparent that we cannot necessarily take Lebedev's words at face value. Myshkin is immediately aware that Lebedev is trying to avoid the issue and has something to hide: 'Князю пришло на ум, что Лебедев и действительно, может быть, жметя и кривляется потому

только, что, предчувствуя его вопросы, не знает, как на них ответить, и выгадывает время' (VIII, 161). Later, when the Prince asks him directly what is going on, he tells Lebedev, 'Полноте служить двум господам' (VIII, 166), confirming our suspicion that he is not to be trusted, as he is simultaneously representing conflicting interests. Furthermore, his nephew's suggestion that he will do anything for money (VIII, 161) also undermines his reliability for the reader, who knows nothing about Lebedev's agenda.

This scene, like so many others in the novel, is full of contradictory signals: Lebedev has 'sold' Nastas'ia Filippovna to Rogozhin twice, and as such can be considered as no better than her seducer, Totskii, yet the possibility that he prays for her ('Упокой, господи, душу великой грешницы графини Дюбарри и всех ей подобных' (VIII, 165)) suggests that he has sympathy for her impossible situation and understands something of her mindset. Furthermore, while he is criticized for his lies and lack of principles, it is by Doktorenko, a character we have no reason to trust, and whom the usually amiable Myshkin himself dislikes (VIII, 165). We are left with no more certain information than the fact that Lebedev is playing some part – and possibly more than one – in the intrigue between the main characters, but his motivation and actions remain obscure, thus adding further obstacles to our understanding of the heroine.

Lebedev's role in maintaining the air of mystery around Nastas'ia Filippovna's intentions also suggests that she may have given him the position of confidant and agent specifically because of his lack of straightforwardness and tendency to double-dealing. This also raises the

interesting possibility that in his appearance on the train at the beginning of the novel, Lebedev is already performing this role, in order to attach himself to Rogozhin and facilitate the latter's re-entry into Nastas'ia Filippovna's life. As the novel continues, Nastas'ia Filippovna sows the seeds of confusion through Lebedev, which intrigue the other characters and provoke their interpretations of her. Hidden agendas and the unreliability of the characters such as Lebedev and, increasingly, the narrator, enlarge the gaps in the text, particularly in relation to Nastas'ia Filippovna, forcing the reader, as well as the other protagonists, into speculation and interpretation. Repeated emphasis on the unknowability of the heroine, and the unwillingness of those who are aware of what happened in the missing six months to discuss her actions and motivation, sustain the uncertainty of the reader and the other characters, preventing both groups from finalizing her.

A similar problem arises when Rogozhin describes his relationship with Nastas'ia Filippovna to Myshkin in the following chapter. We have already established from the opening pages of the novel that Rogozhin is an unreliable narrator with regard to Nastas'ia Filippovna, and now, regardless of whether he is telling the truth, his every comment about her must be considered suspect. The means of portraying the heroine in Part I are so full of misleading statements and hidden agendas that even if from now on every word uttered about her was straightforward, some doubts about the reliability of such statements would remain.

In fact, what is noticeable about the scene Rogozhin describes of him beating Nastas'ia Filippovna and then begging her forgiveness is not

on this occasion the unreliability of the story, but the control the heroine exerts over him. Not only is she dictating his actions, but it is she who introduces the literary comparison of the Heine poem (VIII, 177-9), thereby providing Rogozhin with a model for his behaviour. Thus, as with Lebedev's comments discussed above, we begin to see the imprint of Nastas'ia Filippovna on the information we receive about her. The influence she has over others, and the effect this has on both the reader's and the other protagonists' (particularly Myshkin's) perception of the heroine, is a dominant aspect of scripting and displays the skill and power with which she uses the process in order to turn the tables and gain control over others; in this incident she even turns Rogozhin's violent abuse to her own advantage. By this stage the heroine has already established Rogozhin's role in her script as a vengeful murderer through her use of literary projection, and is directing his words and actions even in her absence.

However, while there are hints that Rogozhin is adopting Nastas'ia Filippovna's perspective, we are also reminded that even if he is describing scenes that actually 'happened', they are distorted through his agenda. Thus we at least have to retain suspicions about his analysis of Nastas'ia Filippovna's motives; as Myshkin comments, 'Ты мнителен и ревнив, потому и преувеличил всё, что заметил дурного' (VIII, 179). As the chapter where this conversation occurs is the main source in the novel of the idea that, as the culmination of her 'whore script', Nastas'ia Filippovna wants to marry Rogozhin in order to die at his hands, we have to bear in mind the fact that it is her prospective murderer who supplies her motive –

and his own justification – for the crime. At this point we have no means of verifying Rogozhin's claim, and therefore have to view it with some scepticism. It is also noteworthy that Nastas'ia Filippovna's 'whore script', if we believe Rogozhin, has changed considerably; at her party, she chose Rogozhin for the shame he would bring to her, but her script has now taken on a much darker note.

Myshkin seems unwilling to acknowledge this change; his denial of Rogozhin's interpretation at first seems to undermine the latter's version of events, as we have thus far been given no reason to mistrust the hero, but in fact his inability to comprehend Nastas'ia Filippovna's motive for 'courting the knife' suggests that he is naïve and simply does not understand the nature of her problems. In the light of his previous capacity for understanding her, and the considerable amount of time he spent with her after she first left Rogozhin, his blind-spot on this subject at this point seem odd. It implies that he is unwilling to contemplate the idea that she wishes to harm herself, perhaps because such an admission to himself would tarnish his image of her innocence, or because admitting that she is 'courting the knife' would inevitably entail the immediate resumption of his quest to save her. Although he remains drawn to Nastas'ia Filippovna, it becomes clear from Myshkin's later actions, when he tries to get on with a comparatively normal new life with Aglaia, that he does not wish to continue in his role as champion and protector in Nastas'ia Filippovna's alternative script, in which she is the innocent princess to be saved by Myshkin's chaste prince.

Rogozhin's comments about her desire to die at his hands, therefore, may represent an accurate description of her motives, but doubts are subtly introduced by his previous lack of reliability as a narrator and his personal interest in her death. In Myshkin's questioning of Rogozhin's interpretation of her state of mind yet another layer of uncertainty is highlighted, because Myshkin may still have sound reasons for his beliefs about Nastas'ia, based on his relationship with her. However, again we cannot verify this as it relates to the six-month absence of all three main protagonists. The clash between the two men's opposing views of Nastas'ia Filippovna's motivation, whilst hinting at the emotional extremes operating within her character, also effectively undermines both, leaving the reader with no means of understanding her. The very fact that she is simultaneously playing two contradictory roles, based on her Manichaeistic impulses, in itself prevents understanding or finalization of the heroine; the reader has no solid basis with which to interpret her actions either, owing to the constant question marks against the characters' comments about her, which never take account of both extremes operating in the impulses to her actions, deepening the cycle of obscurity surrounding her self-presentation.

When the action shifts to Pavlovsk, Nastas'ia Filippovna disappears into the background altogether, as the major crowd scene which takes up most of the remainder of Part II of the novel seems to have little to do with her. However, readings of the heroine are present in this section, in that they form an inherent part of the two interpretations of the Prince which are central to this scene, Aglaia's rendition of 'Zhil na svete rytsar' bednyi',

and Keller's article.²⁹ In the first case, the comment on Nastas'ia Filippovna is direct, as Aglaia changes the initials on the poor knight's shield to N.F.B. (VIII, 209), not only to confirm that she is referring to Myshkin, but also to suggest that, as in the case of both the poor knight and his precursor, Don Quixote, his ideal is unworthy and a product of delusion:

в стихах этих прямо изображен человек, способный иметь идеал, во-вторых, раз постав себе идеал, поверить ему, а поверив, слепо отдать ему всю свою жизнь. Там, в стихах этих, не сказано, в чем, собственно, состоял идеал «рыцаря бедного», но видно, что это было какой-то светлый образ, «образ чистой красоты» [...] этому «бедному рыцарю» уже всё равно стало: кто бы ни была и что бы ни сделала его дама. Довольно того, что он ее выбрал и поверил ее «чистой красоте», а затем преклонился пред нею навеки; в том-то и заслуга, что если б она потом хоть воровкой была, то он все-таки должен был ей верить и за ее чистую красоту копыя ломать (VIII, 207).

Aglaia simultaneously praises and criticizes Myshkin for his idealization of Nastas'ia Filippovna, but her attitude towards the heroine is entirely negative, suggesting criminal rather than simply morally questionable behaviour on the part of the 'ideal of pure beauty'.³⁰ In her comments on Nastas'ia Filippovna, Aglaia is trying to re-impose control on the heroine and subject her to objectification again, after the latter's attempt to break free from others' scripts for her.

Similarly, Keller's article comments briefly on Nastas'ia Filippovna's relationship with Myshkin, implying that she is interested in

²⁹ V. A. Viktorovich, 'Pushkinskii motiv v *Idiote* F. M. Dostoevskogo', in *Boldinskie chteniia* (Gor'kii: Volgo-Viatskoe knizhnoe isdatel'stvo, 1980), pp. 126-136 (p. 131).

³⁰ As the villagers try to do in their persecution of Marie in Myshkin's story; see pp. 173-74 below.

him only because of his fortune by juxtaposing the two issues: after news has broken of his inheritance, according to the article, 'около нашего барона в штиблетах, приударившего было за одною известною красавицей-содержанкой, собрался вдруг целая толпа друзей и приятелей' (VIII, 219). As in the other cases of interpretation in this section of the novel, the reliability of the comment about Nastas'ia Filippovna is undermined by the agenda of its author; Viktorovich points out that 'общий мотив в этих двух «романах» – презрительное отношение к героине'.³¹ On the other hand, against this unflattering interpretation of the heroine's motives, the article also contains a more sympathetic, displaced interpretation of her in the image of Burdovskii's mother as another young victim of an ageing libertine, inserted deliberately by the authors of the article to play on Myshkin's known weakness for wronged women.³² However, the fact that this account turns out to be false almost immediately removes any sympathy aroused by the sketch, at least for the other characters present.

The tone of the interpretations of Nastas'ia Filippovna at this stage is increasingly negative: Mrs Epanchina's tirade against the nihilists, after their plot has been exposed, also hints at condemnation of the heroine's behaviour: 'Девушка в доме растет, вдруг среди улицы прыг на дрожки: «Маменька, я на днях за такого-то Карлыча или Иваныча

³¹ 'Siuzhet i povestvovaniia v romane F. M. Dostoevskogo *Idiot*', in *Voprosy siuzhet i kompozitsii v russkoi literature. Mezhvuzovskii sbornik* (Gor'kii: Gor'kovskii universitet, 1988), pp. 63-71 (p. 68).

³² See Matich, 'Poor Nastja', p. 58.

замуж вышла, прощайте!»' (VIII, 237). By connecting Nastas'ia Filippovna's actions with caprice and contemporary ideological fashion, Mrs Epanchina denies the possibility that her behaviour is psychologically motivated by guilt over her seduction by Totskii and her twin desires for revenge and redemption.

After Nastas'ia Filippovna's disappearance, the fact that others incorporate her into their narrative presentations is a sign that they are still preoccupied with the heroine and her actions, and are trying to regain control of the narrative after her departure at the end of Part I left it in chaos and without a main plot to follow. Since the beginning of the novel, attention has focused on Nastas'ia Filippovna in two ways: at first indirectly, through her photograph and the characters' conversations and stories about her, then directly in her two appearances in Part I, which also set up the main plot of *Idiot*, and then indirectly again after Myshkin's return from Moscow, when she is uppermost in the minds of both Myshkin and his two interlocutors, Lebedev and Rogozhin. When the action moves to Pavlovsk, there is a definite change of tone as attention moves away from Nastas'ia Filippovna.³³ The other protagonists try at this point to take advantage of her absence by re-imposing what is effectively their common script for her, which has its origins in their shared assumptions about the moral code and hierarchy, forcing their ideas of what she is and her lack of value as a human being on to the text and onto Myshkin's consciousness; Aglaia's reading of the Pushkin poem in particular is aimed at confronting

³³ On the role of Prince Myshkin and the narrator in this change, see chapters 2 and 3.

the hero with the inadequacy and inappropriateness of the ideal he has chosen, in the hope that he will abandon the heroine and find a more suitable cause. However, in also voicing her strong approval of his quest, Aglaia provides the first hint that she has chosen Myshkin as a potential suitor not in spite of but because of his connection with Nastas'ia Filippovna; in this way the heroine's influence over the actions and interactions of the other protagonists begins to affect their relationships and thus the direction of the plot.

The number of interpretations of Nastas'ia Filippovna in Part II of the novel remind the reader of her continued importance for the other characters. In spite of her absence, they recognize that she is still a central figure and that their relationships with her remain significant; Viktorovich notes the intense interest others have in Nastas'ia Filippovna, and more specifically in her relationship with Myshkin, which gives rise to the endless rumours and interpretations, and informs the structure of the novel.³⁴

However, it is when the heroine reappears in Part II that her pivotal dynamic role in the structure of the narrative – as opposed to remaining the passive object and product of the interpretation and control of others – is gradually realized. Having abandoned Totskii's script for her in favour of 'authoring her own life' at the end of Part I,³⁵ and escaped the burden of being defined by others, Nastas'ia Filippovna not only has to create and

³⁴ 'Pushkinskii motiv', p. 131.

³⁵ Burgin, 'Reprieve', p. 259.

assert her own script, but also has to make others redefine their scripts for her in line with her own. The strategy she adopts to try to achieve this is remarkable, and, for a long section of the novel, almost successful; whereas in Part I, her absence made it easier for the other characters to objectify and finalize her, now she uses her absence to avoid finalization by others, by trying to exert control over them. By remaining enigmatically behind the scenes, she creates a huge gap in the text, which forces the other characters into interpretative mode, putting them under the influence of her script, and preventing them from reverting to their previous habit of finalizing the heroine.

Her absence from the central section of the novel is punctuated – and emphasized by – the three brief appearances she makes in Parts II and III, the longest of which takes up only one and a half pages. These scenes are carefully orchestrated by Nastas'ia Filippovna to create the maximum confusion and interest among the other characters, and strengthen the centrality of her own script in relation to theirs.

The first incident immediately follows the scene in which Aglaia reads 'Rytsar' bednyi' and Kolia reads Keller's article. As the guests leave Lebedev's dacha, Nastas'ia Filippovna – although unnamed – drives past in a carriage and calls out to Radomskii:

Евгений Павлыч! Это ты? [...] Ну, как я рада, что наконец разыскала! Я послала к тебе в город нарочного; двух! Целый день тебя ищут! [...] Новости! [...] За Купферовы векселя не бойся; Рогожин скупил за тридцать, я уговорила. Можешь быть спокоен хоть месяца три еще. А с Бискупом и со всею этою дрянью наверно сладимся, по знакомству! Ну, так вот, всё, значит, благополучно. Будь весел. До завтра! (VIII, 251).

The enormous effect of her appearance and these few words on both the other characters and the course of the narrative is evinced in the ensuing chapters.

The initial result of Nastas'ia Filippovna's words is to compromise Radomskii. This is achieved in two ways. First, by using the familiar form 'ты', the heroine suggests a connection between them, which will blacken his reputation significantly in the eyes of the other witnesses to the scene (specifically the entire Epanchin family). Secondly, the subject of her interjection, IOU's and moneylenders, raises questions about his financial status, which had previously been assumed to be extremely healthy. The suspicions she creates on both fronts are compounded in the next chapter as Prince Shch., Gania and General Epanchin all discuss the incident with Myshkin; the uncertainties regarding both aspects deepen, and belief in Radomskii's version of events (that he is very wealthy, has no connection with Nastas'ia Filippovna, and does not know what she is talking about) begins to evaporate.

On the subject of Nastas'ia Filippovna's relationship with Radomskii, neither Prince Shch. nor Gania thinks there is anything significant going on, although the fact that they come up with different reasons for his knowing her leaves the matter thoroughly unresolved: the Prince says that Radomskii knew Totskii two or three years ago, while Gania claims they met only a few days ago (VIII, 253-255). General Epanchin's suspicions are wild in comparison:

И какой экипаж, белые кони, ведь это шик, ведь это именно то, что называется по-французски шик! Кто это ей? Ей-богу,

согрешил, подумал третьего дня на Евгения Павлыча. Но оказывается, что и быть не может, то для чего она хочет тут расстроить? Вот, вот задача! (VIII, 262).

Significantly, even though the General immediately negates the idea, he does not offer any evidence for doing so, merely suggesting that it would make no sense for the heroine to behave in this way if Radomskii had provided the carriage. However, we know so little about Nastas'ia Filippovna's motivation, and even less about her current actions and lifestyle, that the possibility cannot be disregarded. Indeed, her perversity and contradictory actions suggest that this is precisely the sort of thing that she would do to a benefactor who, like Totskii, bestowed gifts on her as a prelude to extracting sexual favours. As a result of her intervention, the genial figure who appeared as Aglaia began her recital suddenly begins to resemble a predatory libertine.

Moreover, the General's words remind us that several of the other characters have mentioned her fine carriage and horses whilst also discussing the incident, implying in retrospect that they too have had the same thought. When we realize that Prince Shch. states that the heroine has been riding around in the carriage for three days, and Gania then claims that Radomskii met Nastas'ia Filippovna four days ago, the suggestion seems even more likely. Thus what at first appears to be an example of the use of small talk to avoid important issues, which Ginzburg sees as

characteristic of Tolstoi,³⁶ in fact masks deeper suspicions and the rising tide of uncertainty in the novel.

The question of Radomskii's financial security is similarly undermined. Prince Shch. is again unable to be unequivocal in supporting his friend's reputation: 'Никаких векселей у Евгения Павлыча тут и быть не могло! При таком состоянии... Правда, ему случалось, по ветренности, прежде, и даже я его выручал...' (VIII, 253). In Gania's hands these past problems become current: 'Насчет векселей тоже было могло (это Ганя знает даже наверно); у Евгения Павловича состояние, конечно, большое, но «некоторые дела по имению действительно находятся в некотором беспорядке»' (VIII, 255-256). When Varvara confirms that Radomskii has gone to Petersburg with Ptitsyn in order to sort things out (VIII, 256), we begin to realize that the problem is a significant one. Again, General Epanchin's words hint at further depths of intrigue we would otherwise barely imagine, when he mentions the fact that Radomskii is expecting a large inheritance from his uncle:

На видном месте, семидесяти лет, вивер, гастроном и вообще покладливый старикашка... Ха-ха! Я знаю, что он слышал про Настасью Филипповну и даже добивался. Заезжал к нему давеча; не принимает, нездоров, но богат, богат, имеет значение и... [...] а я все-таки боюсь! Не понимаю чего, а боюсь... В воздухе как будто что-то носится, как будто летучая мышь, беда летает, и боюсь, боюсь!.. (VIII, 262).

Perhaps because he is one of the characters who was previously in control and instrumental in attempting to direct the course of Nastas'ia

³⁶ *On Psychological Prose*, ed. and trans. by Judson Rosengrant (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 275.

Filippovna's life, the General, more than others, senses that the situation could soon spin out of control. His words stand out particularly as he has previously given the impression of being devoid of instinct and imagination. He feels that there is something in Nastas'ia Filippovna's words, because it seems she may know Radomskii's uncle, but is unable to define or verify his feeling.

Nevertheless, General Epanchin's words epitomize the growing atmosphere of suspicion and unease in the novel. Nastas'ia Filippovna's appearance creates the impression that there are things going on behind the scenes about which the characters know very little, and that they also recognize that she is in some way trying to manipulate them. The situation is made more difficult for both them, and the reader, by the fact that her motivation is constantly obscured. Prince Shch. defines her intentions thus: 'Без сомнения, эта особа желала как-нибудь и в чем-нибудь помешать Евгению Павлычу, придав ему в глазах свидетелей качества, которых он не имеет и не может иметь' (VIII, 253). The supposition is that this would leave the way open for Myshkin to marry Aglaia, a course of action Nastas'ia Filippovna first suggested at her birthday party (VIII, 143). This seems a plausible interpretation of her motives, but neither we, nor the characters, have enough information to be certain whether this is her only reason for attacking Radomskii, while the fact that suspicion inevitably falls on Myshkin as a result of her intervention also undermines this possibility. The gap created by her absence makes interpretation and speculation both necessary and impossible, preventing her finalization by others. Even the manner of her appearance in this scene adds to the air of

mystery surrounding her, as she is unnamed and unseen in the carriage, and her companion's identity is not revealed.

As Nastas'ia Filippovna underlines the feeling of uncertainty by increasing the number of gaps in the narrative, the other characters are forced into the situation where they have to become readers of the text of which they are a part. Iser points to the vital role of gaps in the reading process and the formation of interpretations: the reader 'is drawn into the events and made to supply what is meant from what is not said. What is said only appears to take on significance as a reference to what is not said; it is the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to the meaning'.³⁷ In *Idiot*, it is not only the reader, but also the characters who have to undergo this process in relation to the heroine. Even Prince Myshkin, who understood Nastas'ia Filippovna from the moment he saw her portrait, must now, like everyone else, interpret her actions from the few hints she gives, although he shows a marked reluctance to do so: 'ожидаемых вопросов или, лучше сказать, одного главного вопроса, которого ждал Ганя, быть не могло' (VIII, 255). Iakobova claims that Myshkin knows and understands more than the narrator,³⁸ but in fact the hero is as much in the dark as the other characters, and nobody has a privileged position. As neither the characters, narrator or reader know what she is doing or what is going on, the narrative is undermined and threatens

³⁷ 'Interaction between Text and Reader', p. 111.

³⁸ 'Siuzhetno-kompozitsionnoe edinstvo romanov F. M. Dostoevskogo', in *Tvorchestvo F. M. Dostoevskogo: Iskustvo sinteza: monografiia* (Ekaterinburg: Izd. Ural'skogo Universiteta, 1991), pp. 157-181 (p. 166).

to descend into chaos; the 'true' plot of the novel appears to be happening elsewhere, and events depicted in the pages of the central section seem irrelevant and unconnected in comparison.

Nastas'ia Filippovna forces the other protagonists to continue to read and interpret her actions with her second appearance of the central section, early in Part III, when the confusion caused by her words to Radomskii has barely died down. Her carnivalistic re-entry into the novel, when she interrupts the genteel scene at the bandstand, surrounded by her rowdy retinue, immediately attracts attention, and the confrontation she causes expands the theme of her previous interpolation. Again, by the very fact of her speaking to Radomskii, and of her familiarity towards him, she implies a connection between them, while her words also return to the subject of his financial situation:

Б-ба! Да ведь вот он! – воскликнула она, вдруг останавливаясь, – то ни с какими курьерами не отыщешь, то как нарочно там сидит, где и не вообразишь... Я ведь думала, что ты там... у дяди! [...] Что?! Разве не знаешь? Он еще не знает, представьте себе! Застрелился! Давеча утром дядя твой застрелился! Мне еще давеча в два часа сказывали; да уж полгорода теперь знает; трехсот пятидесяти тысяч казенных нет, говорят, а другие говорят: пятисот. А я-то все рассчитывала, что он тебе еще наследство оставит; все просвистал. Развратнейший был старикашка... Ну, прощай, *bonne chance*! Так неужели не съездишь? То-то ты в отставку заблаговременно вышел, хитрец! Да вздор, знал, знал заранее: может, вчера еще знал... (VIII, 290).

On this occasion, Nastas'ia Filippovna confirms the speculation that her earlier appearance aroused. General Epanchin's initial feeling that Radomskii's uncle had something to do with her previous words turns out to be correct (a rare moment of insight for the character who is habitually

the last to understand anything in the novel), and it becomes clear at this point, because the latest news she imparts has been anticipated by the General, that she is not simply making it up as was at first suggested.

It is the General again who corroborates her information and picks up on the accusation that Radomskii must have known what happened:

Натурально, давеча могла что-нибудь услышать от приходивших, потому что теперь весь Петербург уже знает и здесь пол-Павловска или и весь уже Павловск. Но какое же тонкое замечание ее насчет мундира-то, как мне пересказали, то есть насчет того, что Евгений Павлыч заблаговременно успел выйти в отставку! Этакий адский намек! [...] Я, конечно, отказываюсь верить, что Евгений Павлыч мог знать заранее про катастрофу, то есть что такого-то числа, в семь часов, и так далее. Но он мог всё это предчувствовать. А я-то, а мы-то все и князь Щ. рассчитывали, что еще тот ему наследство оставит (VIII, 297).

Thus even though it is made clear that Radomskii is not implicated in any financial wrongdoing himself, his reputation is blackened both by association (now not only with Nastas'ia Filippovna, but also with his uncle), and by the suggestion that he has been hiding his knowledge of the whole affair. Furthermore, if we recall his first appearance in the novel, the surprise of those present that he is wearing civilian clothes, 'можно было подумать, что в этой перемене костюма заключалось что-то особенно важно' (VIII, 211), implies that he has been economical with some aspects of the truth about his situation since we first met him.

The ensuing scene in the park, when Nastas'ia Filippovna strikes Radomskii's officer friend with a riding crop, and Myshkin intervenes to prevent the officer retaliating physically, suggests that the situation is spiralling out of control. Both Aglaia and Keller think that Myshkin will be

challenged to a duel – a role for which he is clearly unsuited and which would alter the tenor of the novel irrevocably – and it is only through Radomskii's intervention that such an eventuality is avoided. Nastas'ia Filippovna's actions, although not aimed directly at Myshkin, at this point almost cost him his life as, having embarked on a major role in one of her scripts, the hero feels duty bound to carry it through, particularly when the heroine is attacked, as one of his main roles for her is that of defender, which was instrumental in attracting her attention to him in their first encounter at the Ivolgins'.

The resultant threat to the Prince's life posed by the incident suggests that the subversive element of the carnivalesque is not as positive or life-affirming as Bakhtin assumes. Although the scene features eccentric behaviour on the part of the heroine and her rowdy cohorts, undermining social hierarchies and comprising *'вольный фамильярный контакт между людьми'*,³⁹ the sense here is darker than Bakhtin's analysis of carnival implies, as it jeopardizes not only the hero's very existence, but also the basis of the narrative. Carnival here brings in destructive and chaotic forces, both in terms of the verbal and physical conflict it introduces, and by undermining the certainties of the characters and the reader, and is not the *'веселый относительность всякого строя и порядка'* envisaged by Bakhtin.⁴⁰

³⁹ *Problemy*, p. 208, author's emphasis.

⁴⁰ *Problemy*, p. 211.

Moreover, the other characters begin to recognize the fact that events are threatening to descend into chaos precisely because of Nastas'ia Filippovna's continued involvement in their lives. The fear General Epanchin expresses (quoted above, p. 109) highlights the growing tension felt by the characters in the novel; Myshkin in particular is oppressed by the thought of what Nastas'ia Filippovna might do next (for example, VIII, 288). While no-one knows her agenda for certain, they are aware that she has some intentions regarding them: General Epanchin comments that 'с ее стороны дело мошенническое, то есть по крайней мере иезуитское, для особых целей' (VIII, 296), and, describing her encounters with Radomskii, the narrator states, 'Хотя в наглom приставаии, в афишевании знакомства и короткости, которых не было, заключалась непременно цель, и в этом уже не могло быть теперь сомнения' (VIII, 290).

The uncertainty felt by the other characters with regard to Nastas'ia Filippovna's growing influence on their lives is translated into the structuring of the novel as the opposition between her scripting and that of others brings an extraordinary tension to *Idiot*. While Nastas'ia Filippovna tries to pull the narrative in one direction, to fulfil her own script, others (particularly the narrator and Myshkin, but also the Epanchin family) wish to change direction completely in order to avoid a clash and return equilibrium to the text. In the middle section, the novel appears to be trying to focus on the quiet family scenes with the Epanchins', but this attempt to impose some decorum onto the text is constantly thwarted by the intrusion of rowdy crowd scenes and by Nastas'ia Filippovna's appearances, which

add unwanted tension, confrontations and suspicions to what would otherwise be a comedy of manners.⁴¹ These opposing forces within the narrative help maintain interest in and give movement to a section of the novel that is generally considered to be weak primarily because of its obscure relationship to the main plot, by suggesting that owing to the clash between the characters' intentions and desires, and their need to feel in control of their own lives, events are constantly on the verge of eruption, and the characters are at breaking point. It is primarily Nastas'ia Filippovna who creates this tension, which allows her subtly to move the narrative in her direction in spite of her continuing absence, through her fascination for the rest of the characters and her enigmatic self-presentation.

Further tensions arise in the text as a result of the conflicting desires within the heroine. On the one hand she evidently wishes to pull the narrative towards her, to make her own script central and to attract the attention of others in order to give it the confirmation it needs and control the response of others to her, but on the other hand she also wishes to retain an air of mystery and hide her motivation so that others will not be able to finalize her. The former requires the heroine's presence, while the latter depends on her absence, and it is the tension between the two that leads to her occasional appearances. She uses her entrances for maximum impact, causing shock-waves that continue to reverberate among the other characters for the remainder of the novel. Thus Nastas'ia Filippovna's

⁴¹ See Miller's discussion of the interplay of narrative voices including that of the novel of manners, *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, pp. 98-99.

actions influence not only the other protagonists, but have a powerful effect on the texture of the narrative, as the whole of the central section is woven around her absences and appearances, and the other characters' expectations of disaster, which arise from their fears about the meaning and outcome of her back-stage plotting.

The uncertainty and confusion surrounding Nastas'ia Filippovna's intentions continue throughout the novel in different forms. For example, General Epanchin reports that Aglaia has spelled out Nastas'ia Filippovna's motives: 'эта помешанная «забрала себе в голову во что бы то ни стало меня замуж за князя Льва Николаевича выдать, а для того Евгения Павлыча из дому от нас выживает»...' (VIII, 298). This confirms the suggestion previously made by Prince Shch., but cannot be corroborated. Aglaia may have more access to the thoughts of her rival than the other characters, as she has been receiving letters from her (a fact we have known since early in Part II), but the same problems we have encountered since the first mention of Nastas'ia Filippovna by Rogozhin in Part I prevent us from accepting her interpretation without question: we do not know the heroine's intentions when she sent the letters, whether they represent an accurate reflection of her state of mind, or are merely another example of her trying to manipulate another character. Her contradictory actions and divided impulses suggest that the letters are both sincere and part of a larger game. Furthermore, before we see the letters, we cannot be certain whether Aglaia is misinterpreting their contents, deliberately or otherwise, as we are equally unaware of her intentions. Aglaia's accusation to Myshkin, 'вы жили с ней в деревне какой-то или в городе' (VIII, 360), directly

contradicts his previous assertion that when they were together, they did not even live in the same town (VIII, 173). We have no reason to doubt that Myshkin is telling the truth, but still have no mechanism for ascertaining the source of the discrepancy, because there is more than one possible point of distortion, as in other cases of 'Chinese whispers' in the novel.⁴² Thus, while Aglaia's explanation of Nastas'ia Filippovna's current behaviour seems to fit the facts as we know them, we must remain aware that owing to Nastas'ia Filippovna's strange behaviour and deliberate withdrawal from the text, we are far from being in possession of the whole story.

It is this absence of explanation and certainty which the characters feel – and resent – most forcefully. They all suspect that Nastas'ia Filippovna is trying to control events from the background, but do not know how or why, or what she might do next. Whether or not the heroine is successful in this is a moot point, largely again because we do not know precisely what she is trying to do. In terms of specific domination of the lives of others her effect is small, and if one considers her striving for freedom from the controlling influence of others as her primary goal, then she fails, as she is ultimately unable to break the cycle of shame and the desire for revenge, and remains in the eyes of others a fallen woman, judged to be unworthy of participation in normal societal relations. However, it is also clear that much of the chaos and unease which dominates the central section of the novel originates in her actions, and even if she has no real power over the other characters, they begin to feel

⁴² See p. 63 above.

that she has; her absence from the scene contributes greatly to the inability of the other characters to understand her motivation, particularly as they had previously made finalizing assumptions about her without taking into account her state of mind. The lack of transparency in her self-presentation and interactions with others at this point contributes to their feeling that they are being manipulated. After the scene in the park, the suspicions Radomskii expresses to Myshkin, 'я имею свои причины, чтобы нас не заподозрили в экстренном разговоре с целью; тут есть люди, которые очень интересуются нашими отношениями' (VIII, 307), assumedly referring to Nastas'ia Filippovna, suggest his awareness of both her unseen machinations and the fact that he has to adjust his own behaviour accordingly.

Thus Matich's comment about Nastas'ia Filippovna, 'Although her initial image in the novel is that of an influential courtesan controlling men's lives, it is almost immediately replaced by a string of ambiguities regarding her power and influence over others', is only half correct.⁴³ The initial *image* of the heroine is indeed that of a strong, controlling woman, but this is subtly undermined in the way she is presented in the early part of *Idiot*, forcing the reader eventually to realize that she is in fact entirely under the control of others, but trying to break free of it. Later in the novel, her power over others is more ambiguous, but also arguably stronger than previously, and the characters, many of whom objectified her in Part I, now have to spend far more time considering her mentality and possible plans,

⁴³ 'Poor Nastja', p. 48.

interpreting her actions and the gaps she has left in the text; Nastas'ia Filippovna defends her loophole tenaciously, and stops others finalizing her.

As well as making the characters think they are being influenced by the actions of another, Nastas'ia Filippovna's appearances in the central section of the novel have the effect of turning the tables on them, not only by removing their control, but also by undermining their previously cosy world, by introducing into it the sort of random injustice to which her own life has been subjected at their hands. It is perhaps significant that she targets a relatively random character for her insinuations; until she calls out to Radomskii from her carriage, he has not seemed particularly important, and indeed he gains prominence in the novel as a result of her attentions. An often-cited criticism of the novel is that characters who look as if they are going to be important, such as Gania, fade into the background, as if the author has forgotten about them, while others, like Radomskii, who appear half way through *Idiot*, and had evidently not even been conceived by Dostoevskii when he began writing the novel, become far more important.⁴⁴ However, if one examines this apparently haphazard treatment of the minor characters from the point of view of what Nastas'ia Filippovna is doing, it makes far more sense. Thus Gania and Totskii are important in Part I, but not afterwards, precisely because of their involvement in the plot to control the heroine's life in the first part of the novel, which she must address and destroy before she can assert her own script and try to make

⁴⁴ See Morson, 'Tempics', p. 113.

others participate in it in order to give it confirmation. Radomskii on the other hand becomes important because she chooses to make him prominent, largely, we presume, owing to his connection with Aglaia, although the question of his relationship with the heroine remains unanswered and is another possible source of motivation for her actions. There is in fact little evidence that Aglaia considers Radomskii a serious suitor, her coldness towards him being apparent after she has recited 'Rytsar' bednyi': 'к изумлению князя, та оглядела его в недоумении и вопросительно, точно хотела дать ему знать, что и речи между ними о «рыцаре бедном» быть не могло и что она даже не понимает вопроса' (VIII, 211). Nevertheless, as we lack an alternative motive for Nastas'ia we can only assume that she perceives Radomskii's very presence as a threat to her plans for Myshkin and Aglaia, but owing to her absence and the rumours surrounding the heroine's relationship with Radomskii, there remain gaps in her motivation which neither the reader nor the other characters are able to fill.

The final factor at work in this complex of unknown motives, suspicions and interpretations is the attitude of the other characters towards Nastas'ia Filippovna's sanity. While the narrator states, at her birthday party, after Myshkin announces his inheritance and asks her to marry him, that 'все утверждали потом, что с этого-то мгновения Настасья Филипповна помешалась' (VIII, 140), this opinion, as with so much else in the novel, is quickly undermined. When General Epanchin asks hysterically, 'С ума ведь сошла, ведь сошла? Сошла?', Ptitsyn, who deliberately refuses to participate in the process of scripting which

consumes all the major characters, replies, 'И-нет, это, может быть, не совсем сумасшествие' (VIII, 145). His distance from the tendency displayed by his fellow protagonists suggests that he can see much more clearly than others precisely what she is doing.

Later on, it is apparently only Myshkin who believes her to be mad, making this claim on at least seven different occasions. However, what we see of her actions does not of itself suggest insanity, and the other characters gradually come to the conclusion that she is not mad. General Epanchin denies Myshkin's assertion thus: 'меня тоже такая идея посещала отчасти, и я засыпал спокойно. Но теперь я вижу, что тут думают правильнее, и не верю помешательству. Женщина вздорная, положим, но при этом даже тонкая, не только не безумная' (VIII, 296). Rogozhin also says to the Prince, 'Господь знает! Это ты, может быть, и ошибся ... [...] Какая же сумасшедшая? [...] Как же она для всех прочих в уме, а только тебя одного как помешанная?' (VIII, 304). These statements suggest that the heroine's 'madness' is little more than a figment of Myshkin's imagination, developed to negate the possibility that her behaviour is a deliberate strategy. His constant assertions that she is deranged, which at first we trust on the grounds that he appears to understand her, in the end tell us more about his state of mind than hers. Meanwhile, the other characters, sensing the influence she is gaining over their lives, and the possible reasons behind it, from the point of view of both her specific victimization of Radomskii and her general upsetting of the normal balance of life for everyone involved, see her actions as far too calculated to be the product of insanity. What is important is not whether

Nastas'ia Filippovna is clinically insane (for which there is no evidence), or even neurotic (an easier proposition to entertain), but what the other characters think of her mental state, and how this effects their view of her. By pronouncing her sane, the other protagonists recognize that she has a purpose but, not knowing what that purpose is, those who previously objectivized her and used her for their own ends have particular reason to worry.

Throughout the novel it is the characters' conflicting opinions, rumour and gossip, rather than hard 'facts', that inform the reader, who is then unable to make any definitive conclusions because of the contradictory and unreliable nature of the information presented. Nastas'ia Filippovna encourages such interpretations by remaining absent and keeping her motives hidden, as this enables her to remain enigmatic and thus prevents others from finalizing her. At first this stance appears to disadvantage her, as the prejudices of the other characters and assumptions they make perpetuate the image they have of her as a fallen and worthless woman. However, this is not a wholly negative side-effect of the heroine's actions, as maintaining her image as a whore in the eyes of others is central to fulfilling her script with Rogozhin; as well as the internal confirmation his participation gives to her script, the concurrence of others with this image provides additional external validation.

V. CONFRONTATION AND REVERBERATION

The tension built up in Parts II and III surrounding Nastas'ia Filippovna's intentions appears to dissipate as we move towards the final section of the novel. The appearance of the heroine in the park before Myshkin at the end of Part III marks a second significant change of tone, after the removal of all the main characters to Pavlovsk in Part II. This is the only time she is seen alone with Myshkin in the entire novel, as Danow points out,⁴⁵ and, because she has no audience and is therefore not acting for public consumption, it is also the first time she does not use her presence to create a scandal. This may therefore be the only time in the novel when the heroine is entirely open; her concern for Myshkin's happiness seems genuine, confirming that she has involved him in her script not as part of a game, but with serious intent.

Furthermore, after this encounter, Nastas'ia Filippovna disappears completely from the scene, to the extent that she is not even mentioned for forty pages. During this period, Myshkin tries to get on with his life without her, concentrating on other matters, notably his relationship with Aglaia, and the fate of General Ivolgin. Significantly, however, Myshkin is only able to do this because Nastas'ia Filippovna herself allows him to do so; when they meet in the park, she says to the Prince, 'Я еду завтра, как ты приказал. Я не буду... В последний ведь раз я тебя вижу, в последний! Теперь уж совсем ведь в последний раз!' (VIII, 382). We later discover she has been true to her word, as she has to return to Pavlovsk from the city

⁴⁵ *Dialogic Sign*, p. 56.

especially for the meeting with Aglaia (VIII, 465). Thus even the fact that she is not mentioned for a lengthy period is still primarily due to the influence of her own script on the text. The final section of this chapter will examine Nastas'ia Filippovna's actions and possible motivation as the novel moves towards the denouement, through her letters to Aglaia and the meeting of the two women, to her flight with Rogozhin.

Both the letters which Nastas'ia Filippovna sends to Aglaia and their meeting address the same issues: the characters and fates of the two women, and their relationship with Myshkin; and it is the change in dynamic between the first communications and the face to face confrontation that acts in large part as a catalyst for the final turn of events in the novel. Nastas'ia Filippovna uses her letters as a tool to continue her influence and control over the novel; although in *Idiot* it is often the spoken word which has the greatest effect on the characters, the written word here proves to be just as influential, ensuring that Aglaia continues to be affected by her rival's words long after she has read them. Thus although it is Aglaia who arranges their meeting, she is forced into it by Nastas'ia Filippovna, owing to the lingering presence of the letters, even though the latter has already broken off contact by this stage.

The pressure that Nastas'ia Filippovna exerts on Aglaia is also depicted in other ways. The gloominess of the younger woman is noted after her engagement (VIII, 434), indicating her awareness that she is not in control of her own script, as even at this stage the heroine maintains a powerful, unresolved influence over Myshkin which could re-assert itself at any time (and indeed does at the end of the confrontation scene). This in

turn is responsible for Aglaia's contradictory impulses towards the Prince, evident in her praise-condemnation for the 'poor knight' and her confused behaviour, marked by sudden reversals and changes of mood and attitude towards the hero throughout their strange courtship in the central section. There is also the suggestion that Aglaia chooses Myshkin precisely because of his involvement with the other woman, as it makes him an unsuitable husband and therefore aids her rebellion against her family and lifestyle. Aglaia's contradictory actions and motives indicate her dualistic impulses; the contrary and provocative behaviour and words of Nastas'ia Filippovna arouse suspicions and equally contrary behaviour and words in her rival.⁴⁶

One of the most remarkable features of the letters Nastas'ia Filippovna sends to Aglaia is her view of the character of the younger woman as the acme of spiritual perfection: 'вы для меня – совершенство [...] вы одни можете любить без эгоизма, вы одни можете любить не для себя самой, а для того, кого вы любите' (VIII, 379). However, our knowledge of Aglaia suggests the presence of false notes. While Aglaia may be physically beautiful, there is little in the novel to support the idea of her spiritual beauty; her actions and words, particularly those directed towards Myshkin, are often as confused and contradictory as those of Nastas'ia Filippovna herself, and her cruelty and lack of consideration, for example to Kolia, undermine any notion of moral perfection. Whilst her intelligence and perception with regard to the Prince, for example in

⁴⁶ For the implications of this feature, see chapter 3, pp. 274-78.

recognizing the value of his 'главный ум' (VIII, 356), are not in doubt, it is difficult to believe in the script Nastas'ia Filippovna is writing for her.

The letters themselves also undermine the heroine's apparent endorsement of Aglaia. As Burgin points out, Nastas'ia Filippovna's description her death immediately precedes her prediction of a double wedding (herself to Rogozhin and Myshkin to Aglaia), thus denying the image of perfect happiness she seems to be proposing, and suggesting that Myshkin's marriage to Aglaia would be the death of her.⁴⁷ Although Sedov states, 'в письмах к Аглае представлен момент самораскрытия героини',⁴⁸ they do not represent a total uncovering of the 'facts' about the heroine, and again, our lack of knowledge of her motivation creates obstacles to understanding her behaviour; we cannot be certain whether she genuinely believes everything she says about Aglaia or has some other purpose in mind, or whether both motives are true. The juxtaposition of the images of death and happy marriage in the letters is a sign of her contradictory impulses, as it contains a threat to Aglaia that she will have Nastas'ia Filippovna's death on her conscience if she marries Myshkin, whilst simultaneously professing her desire for this union in order to free the hero from his obligations to her.

The fact that the heroine has consistently denied us reliable information about her state of mind becomes more significant during the confrontation of these women, when the tension between their inaccurate

⁴⁷ 'Reprieve', p. 263.

⁴⁸ 'Vremennykh otnoshenii', p. 25.

and incompatible scripts for each other is in large part responsible for the denouement of the novel. Central to the meeting is Aglaia's critical discourse on the other woman, in which she lays out her pre-planned script for the heroine and the meeting:

вы не могли его полюбить, измучили его и кинули. Вы потому его не могли любить, что слишком горды... нет, не горды, я ошиблась, а потому что вы тщеславны... даже и не это: вы себялюбивы до... сумасшествия, чему доказательством служат и ваши письма ко мне. Вы его, такого простого, не могли полюбить, и даже, может быть, про себя презирали и смеялись над ним, могли полюбить только один свой позор и непрерывную мысль о том, что вы опозорены, и что вас оскорбили. Будь у вас меньше позору, или не будь его вовсе, вы были бы несчастнее... (VIII, 471).

This may be psychologically acute, as Malcolm Jones states,⁴⁹ but does not present the entire picture as, in common with all the characters apart from Myshkin, Aglaia fails to take account of Nastas'ia Filippovna's past trauma and its continuing effect on her self-image and view of her fate, instead contenting herself with a one-sided view of the other woman. The fact that the younger woman does not realize the deadly nature of the events in which she is involved is evinced by her proposal, 'выйдете за Рогожина, какая же тогда обида останется? Даже слишком уж много чести получите!' (VIII, 472). Furthermore, in her interpretation Aglaia is guilty of the very fault of which she earlier accused Myshkin: 'очень грубо так смотреть и судить душу человека, [...]. У вас нежности нет: одна правда, стало быть – несправедливо' (VIII, 354). It is against this very

⁴⁹ 'Sisters and rivals: variations on a theme in Dostoevskii's fiction', in *Die Wirklichkeit der Kunst und das Abenteuer der Interpretation*, ed. by Klaus Manger (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1999), pp. 159-69 (p. 163).

recourse to judgement of the other that Nastas'ia Filippovna is fighting, as judgement involves finalization. The very fact that Aglaia judges Nastas'ia Filippovna, assumes her own superiority and her rival's unworthiness, makes the latter realize that she was wrong to value Aglaia so highly, exclaiming, 'И я ее за ангела почитала!' (VIII, 473). This in turn leads her to abandon the plan laid out in the letters and claim Myshkin for herself.

However, as in the biblical story of David and Uriah examined by Meir Sternberg, the absence of essential information leads the reader to speculate on different and possibly contradictory ideas of the motivation and consequences of events.⁵⁰ Either Nastas'ia Filippovna truly believes in the image of Aglaia set forth in the letters, and bases her dream of the perfect union for Myshkin on this, or she is merely playing games with Aglaia – and indeed Myshkin – in order to spoil their happiness. The heroine's contradictory impulses suggest that both motives are in part true, creating a tension within Nastas'ia Filippovna which is responsible for her sudden reversal. In the first case, the reality of Aglaia's arrogance destroys Nastas'ia's illusions of her worthiness for Myshkin, while in the second case, she does not believe what she wrote, and uses the meeting deliberately to humiliate her rival, whilst appearing to pour shame on herself, and win Myshkin back. Aglaia clearly suspects the latter (which begs the question, why did she arrange the meeting in the first place?), while Myshkin inclines to the former, although again, his reluctance to

⁵⁰ *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Reading and the Drama of Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 192-213.

believe the worst of her may come into play here. Another possibility is that Nastas'ia Filippovna uses the meeting as a test, not only of Myshkin's belief that she is 'not that sort of woman', as Jones suggests,⁵¹ but also of Aglaia's worthiness; on these terms, both women fail. We have no way of knowing which is true, particularly as Nastas'ia Filippovna says little, answering Aglaia's long, prepared speeches with single sentences until her final outburst but, owing to her contradictory motives, all these interpretations seem plausible.

The interplay of alternative hypotheses speaks volumes about the complex psychological state and contradictory desires of the heroine, further undermining the certainty of the other characters regarding her. Even apparent over-motivation can thus produce gaps in the narrative, as we see in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, where Raskol'nikov offers numerous motives which are in many ways more than sufficient to explain the murders he commits, but still fail to identify the root cause of his actions or the priorities of these motives in his mind. In *Idiot*, when presented with multiple, contradictory motives, the other characters and the reader have no definitive explanation with which to compartmentalize (and thus finalize) the heroine, which gives her free rein to control both the text and her fellow protagonists. Whatever her motives in writing to Aglaia, agreeing to the meeting and claiming Myshkin for herself, the heroine's reaction to her rival's behaviour at the meeting sets in motion the denouement and effectively erases Aglaia from the remainder of the novel, proving

⁵¹ 'Sisters and Rivals', p. 164.

Nastas'ia Filippovna's enormous influence on the direction of the narrative. It is Aglaia's failure to understand Nastas'ia Filippovna, and inability to see her as anything other than an unworthy rival, a scheming, morally and socially inferior harlot, which leads the latter to change her script again and keep Myshkin for herself; his salvation from the ruinous influence of the heroine lay in Aglaia's supposed spiritual perfection, but when this is found to be illusory, she is immediately written out of Nastas'ia Filippovna's controlling script.

After the confrontation of Aglaia and Nastas'ia Filippovna, the dynamic of the novel changes as it moves towards the denouement. We are rushed not only through the preparations for the wedding of Myshkin and Nastas'ia Filippovna, suggesting that their marriage is not the main issue for either character, but also through her departure with Rogozhin, and the murder scene is not shown at all. Much of what we are told about the climax of the novel reaches us second-hand and has its basis in rumour, as the narrator is unable to explain or control the action, leaving the reader with persistent doubts about its accuracy and little opportunity to define the motivation behind these events. The elusiveness of the heroine, designed originally to prevent others finalizing her, reaches its peak in the finale of her script, and the narrator seems to be at a loss for how to deal with it.⁵²

The effect on Prince Myshkin of Nastas'ia Filippovna's control is particularly profound. During the clash between the two women he is a total bystander, unable to intervene and with no voice in its outcome. Later,

⁵² Further consequences of this problem will be addressed in chapter 3, pp. 342-45.

we do not see her the death scene as when she departs with Rogozhin, she writes the Prince out of her script, as she previously did with Aglaia, leaving him with no role to play, after which he seems detached and lost.⁵³ However, she also affects others, as we see from the numerous loose ends in the novel, which leave many of the minor character in limbo owing to the rapidity with which the conclusion is reached. This is because while Nastas'ia Filippovna's actions throughout the novel have initiated a series of explosions and reverberations, her death shatters the entire text, removing from the scene all the major protagonists. This leaves a void which the affairs of the minor characters, who have by this stage demonstrated their inability to play leading roles, are insufficient to fill. The suddenness of her demise catches the other characters off guard, and their stories, which overlap with hers and Myshkin's, are cut off by the narrator without resolution. Here we have ultimate proof that Nastas'ia Filippovna succeeds in scripting her life while many of those around her fail; the novel as a whole is structured around her attempts to assert her script, often in spite of the narrator's design, to the extent that it cannot exist after her death.

While the haziness with which details are sketched in as the denouement approaches again highlights the unknowability of the heroine and her resistance to external finalization by others, the acceleration which also occurs in the final section reflects Nastas'ia Filippovna's state of mind

⁵³ Further aspects of Myshkin's reaction to Nastas'ia Filippovna's abrupt departure will be examined in chapter 2, pp. 249-50.

as she reaches her final decision about which script she is going to adopt, suggesting a feeling of inevitability, a sense that everything that could have been done to change the course of events has failed, and that the end is now determined. Myshkin's sense of foreboding before the meeting of the two women, when, 'он не столько свидания их обеих боялся, не странности, не причины этого свидания, ему неизвестной, не разрешения его чем бы то ни было, – он самой Настасьи Филипповны боялся' (VIII, 467), implies that he also sees not only this confrontation but also the subsequent events it triggers off as unavoidable. Certainly Myshkin's passive, resigned attitude to his wedding to the heroine (VIII, 477-481), in stark contrast to his previous active attempts to save her, suggests that he has finally given in to the force of Nastas'ia Filippovna's will. Even though we are told that 'он искренно верил, что она может еще воскреснуть' (VIII, 489), his failure to respond immediately to the news that she has run away with Rogozhin denotes an acknowledgement that he cannot prevent her from doing whatever she perceives to be the best way of taking control of her own life.

Nastas'ia Filippovna's letters to Aglaia not only have the effect of setting up the reversal that occurs when the two women meet, but also have another direct consequence for the fate of the heroine, as it is here that she 'predicts' that her own death will be a copy of the Mazurin case:

Я уверена, что у него в ящике спрятана бритва, обмотанная шелком, как и у того московского убийцы; тот тоже жил с матерью в одном доме и тоже перевязал бритву шелком, чтобы перерезать одну горлу [...] Я бы его убила со страху... Но он меня убьет прежде... (VIII, 380).

When we arrive at the scene of the murder, and Myshkin asks Rogozhin, 'Это как там... в Москве?' (VIII, 504), we are struck by the uncanny accuracy of her description, which leads Morson to speculate,

If Nastas'ia Filippovna has read the same papers the author has, has Rogozhin? Or have they discussed the case? Does Rogozhin derive the details of the murder he commits from events in the real world? When he is killing her, does she know that he is re-enacting the case that so terrifies her, and perhaps for that very reason?⁵⁴

Morson fails to notice, however, that Nastas'ia Filippovna and Rogozhin answer these very questions themselves. The letter from the heroine quoted above continues, 'он [Rogozhin] засмеялся сейчас и говорит, что я брежу; он знает, что я к вам пишу', whilst shortly afterwards, Rogozhin tells Myshkin, 'всякое письмо сама показывала. Про бритву-то помнишь, хе-хе!' (VIII, 382). The fact that Nastas'ia Filippovna deliberately shows Rogozhin the letter describing her murder at his hands, which both parties confirm, suggests that what she has written is not a premonition aimed at Aglaia, to whom it seems to be merely the ravings of a self-obsessed madwoman, but a proposal, or even a command, aimed at the chosen murderer himself. This again points to the vital role of the other in scripting; Nastas'ia Filippovna's design will only work if she can persuade others to act out the roles she gives them, and the description of her murder is the most overt example of this. Aglaia, as the primary implied reader of the letters, is simply a witness both to the plan for the other woman's death, and to the process which leads the heroine to this outcome.

⁵⁴ 'Tempics', p. 125.

Just as previously we suspected that the scandal scenes she created in the first three parts of the novel had a number of targets, thus her letters also appear to be intended for a wider audience than their original addressee. Myshkin, who also reads them, recognizes the origin of the scene, and his question, 'Это как там... в Москве?' suggests that he also sees Nastas'ia Filippovna's role in her own death. The ellipsis even implies that he is also thinking '... в письме?'.

This indicates the strength of Nastas'ia Filippovna's control over Rogozhin. He is enslaved by his role in her script to the extent that on the few occasions when they are seen together from Part II onwards, he seems to lack any independent identity; although he is present at her two appearances in the park in Part III, Rogozhin makes no attempt to participate and his only action on each occasion is to usher the heroine away from the scene. Furthermore, at the end of the confrontation between the two women, when Nastas'ia Filippovna rejects Rogozhin, he leaves without a word of protest despite his evidently intense suffering (VIII, 475). In his relationships with Ippolit and Myshkin as well with the heroine he becomes progressively more of a presence than a personality; deprived of selfhood through his obsessive adherence to the role she has allocated him in her script, Rogozhin becomes incapable of healthy interaction and is reduced to otherness, acting totally according to her will. After her death he no longer has a function, as his role has ended with the climax of her script, and the scene in which he is united with Myshkin is a parody of interaction, indicating his loss of contact with humanity. He is calm and rational, but it is a lucid madness, focusing almost exclusively on continuing his

relationship with Nastas'ia Filippovna by attending to her corpse according to the details of her script, and preventing their discovery and separation. His words are coherently-incoherent, detached from Myshkin and the reality of the situation, and his total lack of remorse both here and later at his trial also shows his spiritual isolation from the other.

As Nastas'ia Filippovna at the very least places the seed of the form of her murder in Rogozhin's mind and exerts a great deal of control over him, we have to view her death as an assisted suicide. She does not directly express suicidal ideation, but Ptitsyn's explanation of the motivation for her behaviour at her name-day party is significant:

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 в самом деле отмстил (VIII, 148).

The heroine clearly has a powerful self-destructive streak, whose origins lie in the abuse she has suffered. This is evinced by her relationship with Rogozhin, who never hides his intention to harm her: 'Да потому-то и идет за меня, что наверно за мной нож ожидает' (VIII, 179). Although, as explained above, we cannot necessarily trust Rogozhin's assessment of Nastas'ia Filippovna's wish for death at his hands, as it coincides so completely with his own impulses, she is also so well aware of his murderous feelings towards her that her repeated returns to him cannot be accidental. Moreover, the shame of the sexually abused young girl frequently results in suicide in Dostoevskii's works, notably those of

Svidrigailov's victim in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, and Matrena in *Besy* (and Olia in *Podrostok*, although her suicide is a result of her belief that she will be abused, rather than any actual abuse). Nastas'ia Filippovna's attraction to Rogozhin can be understood as part of the same impulse. Furthermore, before Myshkin encounters Rogozhin at the end, he discovers that Nastas'ia Filippovna has been reading *Madame Bovary*, which also culminates in the suicide of the disgraced heroine, and feels it significant enough for him to pocket her copy of the novel; for Myshkin at least, Nastas'ia Filippovna's flight with Rogozhin is suicide.

The latter's tendency to violence, meanwhile, is emphasized from the very beginning of the novel, when Myshkin remarks, 'Да что же, жениться, я думаю, и завтра же можно; женился бы, а чрез неделю, пожалуй, и зарезал бы ее...' (VIII, 32). This is later confirmed by his attempt to murder Myshkin and the undefined threat he poses to Ippolit, which is also obscurely linked to the latter's suicide attempt; after telling the story of Rogozhin's appearance in his room late at night, Ippolit states, 'вот этот особенный случай [...] и был причиной, что я совершенно решился' (VIII, 341). Furthermore, the connection between Nastas'ia Filippovna and Rogozhin is defined by violence from the start, when Rogozhin's father beats him because of the earrings he bought for her. Lebedev's description of this scene is significant in that it also contains the first hint of the heroine's fate: 'Ан та самая Настасья Филипповна и есть, чрез которую ваш родитель внушить пожелал калиновым посохом' (VIII, 11). Guelder rose, the wood from which the stick is made, has clusters of white flowers with small red berries, and is thus curiously

reminiscent of the tiny spots of blood on the white wedding dress of the heroine at the end of the novel. The relationship of Rogozhin and Nastas'ia Filippovna is marked from the very beginning of the narrative by the symbiosis of destruction, and the death of the heroine is more an act of collusion between the two than the murder of one by the other. Death therefore features prominently in Nastas'ia Filippovna's scripting. She feels that her guilt and shame can be expiated only by her death – the ultimate punishment for her sins, but also relief from the torture of her life – with the result that death becomes both an impulse to scripting and one of the possible denouements of her script. Furthermore, death is ultimate finalization, and defining one's place in the world according to one's own script before death is vital to achieving a sense of selfhood. Proximity to death also intensifies the scripting impulse of Ippolit and leads him to his own attempt at self-finalization in his suicide bid.

Nastas'ia Filippovna, having spent the entire novel avoiding finalization, retains her unfinalizability even in death, by effecting the consummation of her script out of view of all concerned. The only details we are given about the murder, 'всё дело было утром, в четвертом часу [...] совсем нож как бы на полтора... али даже на два вершка прошел... под самую левую грудь... а крови всего этак с пол-ложки столовой на рубашке вытекло' (VIII, 505), tell us nothing about the circumstances in which it occurred, leaving all parties, as in her life, with unanswered questions and reliant on hearsay, and thus unable to finalize or interpret her. Furthermore, Rogozhin's description is neutral and impersonal; the murder is merely 'всё дело,' and he never mentions her

name, while her corpse is also described in impersonal terms, for example, 'спавший был закрыт с головой белой простыней, но члены как-то неясно обозначались; видно только было, по возвышению, что лежит протянувшись человек' (VIII, 503). This detaches the heroine from the scene and her own death; while the room feels 'еще мертвее,' she is 'спавший,' both dead and not dead, as even in death she remains unfinalizable, and in this sense achieves selfhood, but of a twisted kind.

VI. FREEDOM AND NECESSITY: THE IDEOLOGICAL HEROINE

Throughout *Idiot*, Nastas'ia Filippovna's fight for control of her own life and the right to self-finalization are central, and her reading, both fiction and non-fiction, plays a vital role in this, from the influence of Pushkin's 'Египетские ночи' defined by Burgin, and nihilist novels suggested by Matich, to her reading of *Madame Bovary* just before her death. We see this particularly in the alternative scripts the heroine asserts, as both represent literary archetypes: for Rogozhin she proposes the role of Gothic villain, with herself as both victim and accomplice, while Myshkin takes up the part of the chivalrous knight, bound by duty and love to rescue the innocent maiden. She also, as we have seen uses two text-based models for possible denouements of her 'whore script', the Heine poem and newspaper reports about the Zhemarin murder, casting herself in the role of first probable and then actual victim, against Rogozhin's probable then actual murderer. However, her reading, as well as providing material for her scripting, is also problematic, particularly after Part I, as the heroine takes from her

reading not only the definition of her own character and her response to others (à la Tat'iana Larina and Emma Bovary), but also, more damagingly, her entire world view. While at her birthday party she is constantly alert to the possibilities of the present and is a master of improvisation, after the six-month gap she is also overtaken by story-book logic in which 'everything is linked necessarily'.⁵⁵ The determinism of the traditional nineteenth century novel, exemplified by her copy of *Madame Bovary*, and the perennial role of the fallen woman as sacrificial victim in that genre, hold the foundations for her belief that she cannot be saved.

The fatalism Nastas'ia Filippovna inherits from her reading destroys the idea that she can control her life, removing the notion that she is free to choose her own destiny. Her death at Rogozhin's hands does indeed fulfil one of her scripts, taken from her reading of newspapers, and overtly exhibited in her letter to Aglaia as an indirect means of communicating her instructions to the murderer. By appointing another to fulfil her script, and mediating it cunningly through yet a third person, Nastas'ia Filippovna highlights the complicity of all others in her life and death. Having lived according to the will of others for most of her life, she continues her relationships with many of the same people through her infrequent appearances in the central section of the novel, but shifts the balance of power so that she begins to exert control over them. By involving others in her life to the very end, she also involves them in her death, as she deflects on to them part of the blame. In choosing the manner of her death as well as

⁵⁵ Edwards, p. 91.

its perpetrator, Nastas'ia Filippovna simultaneously proves that she has freed herself from the control of others, whilst implicating that control by others in her death; Rogozhin kills her because it is the only way he can possess (and therefore control) her.

The fact that this assertion of freedom results in her death leaves the heroine in the same tragically paradoxical position as Kirillov in *Besy*. In both cases only suicide can assure absolute freedom, in either the physical or metaphysical sense, but the very fact that there is no other way of proving their free will in itself negates the freedom their actions were intended to bring. Furthermore, Kirillov, like Nastas'ia Filippovna, involves another in his death, undermining the liberty that a totally free choice brings. Although we do not see Nastas'ia Filippovna's final moments, we are given a graphic description of Kirillov's death, in which Petr Verkhovenskii's interference turns a defiant act against God into a grotesque murder (X, 464-76). Thus Nastas'ia Filippovna in effect chooses only the details of her death, while its fulfilment is totally in the hands of an (albeit willing) other, and although she believes it will be the ultimate demonstration of her freedom from the control of others, it in fact merely illustrates how freedom becomes necessity for the obsessive mind. In this paradox scripting highlights the problematic nature of any dialogic activity. The self cannot exist without the sanction and affirmation of the other, but owing to man's dualistic impulses, craves self-affirmation and freedom from the other, and Nastas'ia Filippovna's death illustrates the stark consequences of this paradox. While its demand for freedom from the control and judgement of others is generally a life-affirming impulse which

implies moral choice and responsibility, scripting can also lead to obsession and isolation if it is inflexible or one-sided.

In this sense Nastas'ia Filippovna is very much akin to Dostoevskii's ideological heroes, all of whom focus on the issue of liberty. The logical freedom of pure irrationality is central to the rebellion of the Underground Man, while the development of this concept, leading to the amoral freedom of the Superman, informs the arguments and actions of Raskol'nikov, Stavrogin, Kirillov and Ivan Karamazov. Burgin furthermore relates Nastas'ia Filippovna to the 'dreamers' of Dostoevskii's early stories, living in 'a Petersburg nightmare ... a silent, mysterious, gloomy, wild tragedy with all (its) frenzied horrors, catastrophes, peripeteias, expositions and denouements'.⁵⁶ The dreamer is a type which is also often seen as the precursor of Dostoevskii's later ideological heroes.⁵⁷

In the figure of Nastas'ia Filippovna, Dostoevskii concentrates on a much more practical form of the personal freedom needed by the human personality, without which life is unbearable. Unlike her male counterparts in the other novels, Nastas'ia Filippovna does not think abstractly or present her theory in ideological terms. Instead, we see repeatedly that she thinks in terms of pictures and highly visual narratives, from the picture of Christ and the description of her death in her letters to Aglaia, to her belief that Rogozhin would end up hoarding gold and dying of starvation, and her likening his behaviour after he has beaten her to the Heine poem in which

⁵⁶ 'Reprieve', p. 259; see *PSS*, XVIII, 32.

⁵⁷ See Peace, *Dostoyevsky*, pp. 3-5.

the emperor masks his intended revenge with a show of contrition. The pictorial quality of the ideas in *Idiot* is also evident in Myshkin's early stories, particularly of the man awaiting execution and the vision at the waterfall, indicating her realization of the importance of the aesthetic as part of the process of scripting and therefore as part of the attainment of selfhood.⁵⁸

The essential question Nastas'ia Filippovna faces after the six-month gap, 'Who am I?', also indicates that she is aligned with Dostoevskii's ideological heroes, rather than his 'little men'.⁵⁹ The importance of this issue is evident in her attitude to the other, as she asks in a letter to Aglaia, 'можно ли любить всех, всех людей, всех своих ближних, — я часто задавала себе этот вопрос? Конечно нет, и даже неественно' (VIII, 379). Her words echo Ivan Karamazov's rebellion in particular (XIV, 215), leading Seeley to describe her as a 'sister' to Ivan.⁶⁰ There are also parallels with Stavrogin's, Raskol'nikov's and the underground man's inability to love or connect with the other, and with the Grand Inquisitor's system of reducing others to slavery out of love for them. In her own actions, Nastas'ia Filippovna generally has little regard for the other. She does not reciprocate other's attempts to script, exposing General Ivolgin's lie and refusing to participate in the *petit-jeu* in a normal way, and makes victims out of Radomskii, Aglaia and especially Rogozhin to serve her own purpose. The other for Nastas'ia Filippovna is primarily

⁵⁸ How Myshkin addresses the aesthetic in his scripting will be examined in chapter 2.

⁵⁹ See Frank F. Seeley, 'Dostoyevsky's Women', *SEER*, 39 (1961), 291-312 (p. 304).

⁶⁰ 'Dostoyevsky's women', p. 305.

an agent for her own self-assertion. Only Myshkin seems capable of bringing her back to life, but in the end she rejects the role he is offering as well.

Idiot is often seen as the odd one out amongst Dostoevskii's major novels, precisely because it does not have an ideological hero at the centre of the work who propounds his theory. The underground man, Raskol'nikov, Shigalev, Kirillov, the Grand Inquisitor and Ivan Karamazov are all given opportunities to lay down their ideas on the paradoxes of freedom and the concept of the self. In *Idiot* only Ippolit comes close, in his 'Neobkhodimoe ob'iasnenie', but although, as we shall see in chapter 3, he leaves a deep imprint on the tenor of the novel, the failure of his bid for self-finalization prevents him from taking a central role. In any case, unlike radical ideologists of the other novels, he has no system to propose, and simply rails against the injustice of the world. As he states, 'окончательному решению способствовала, стало быть, не логика, не логическое убеждение, а отвращение' (VIII, 341). The pathetic band of nihilists of whom he is a member, meanwhile, merely demand their rights and have no positive convictions of their own. However, while there is no discrete section of the novel addressing the problem of freedom and defining a solution, the entire narrative is about Nastas'ia Filippovna's quest for freedom and the right to control her own life. The story of her fight for self-definition and the reaction of the other characters to her struggle could in fact be considered to be the main plot of *Idiot*. While the other novels focus on the issue of liberty from the intellectual point of view, when the stating of a theory in stark terms is appropriate, in *Idiot*

Dostoevskii uses a different approach, concentrating on the feelings and desires of the characters, in particular Nastas'ia Filippovna, in their interactivity, to communicate the practical problems of freedom as part of the human condition. In chapter 2, I will examine Prince Myshkin's solution to the problems highlighted by the heroine's scripting.

Chapter 2. Prince Myshkin's Compassionate Realism and the Principles of Saintly Scripting

On ne voit bien qu'avec le cœur. L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux.

– Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince*

Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

– Alexander Pope, *Essays in Criticism*

As with Nastas'ia Filippovna, the figure of Prince Myshkin is shrouded in obscurity, and it is this which accounts for the contradictory interpretations of him discussed in the introduction (pp. 3-11). He is a complex creation, unknowable and indefinable, conceived as an ideal, but evidently falling some way short of being 'Князь Христос' (IX, 246, 249) in the final version of the novel. Another appellation in the notebook, the open-ended 'Князя сфинксом' (IX, 248) is perhaps the best description of the hero, and the overriding problem of the novel is the question of how to solve the 'riddle' his character represents.¹ The aim of this chapter is not to examine the character of Prince Myshkin as such, but to look beyond the traditional axis of the saintly and the malign, in order to see how his personality and vision changes. In order to establish why the Prince's fate becomes so closely bound up with Nastas'ia Filippovna's, this chapter will examine the foundations of his script and the ways in which it changes. It will

¹ Miller examines the development of this aspect of the Prince in the notebooks for the novel, *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, pp. 77-84.

concentrate on Myshkin's vision of a 'higher reality', its origin in his epileptic fits, and its connections with his fundamental ideas ('Сострадание есть главнейший и [...] единственный закон бытия человечества'; 'смирение есть страшная сила'; 'мир спасет красота'; 'времени больше не будет' (VIII, 192; 329; 317; 189)), and will highlight both the positive and negative effects of these ideas on Myshkin's consciousness and his actions, and how these influence the other characters and the shape of the narrative as a whole.

I. THE FOUNDATIONS OF MYSHKIN'S SCRIPT IN NARRATIVE

The opening section of the novel, to the end of chapter seven, when Prince Myshkin leaves the Epanchins' house with Gania, is central to our understanding of the character of the hero and the effect his ideas have on the other protagonists. It is here that we, along with members of the Epanchin household, learn about his experiences in Switzerland, and their fundamental influence on his thinking. However, these early chapters are important not only in terms of the conception of the hero they portray; they are also vital in shaping the novel as a whole, for two reasons. Although we have already by this stage seen the narrative impulse in Rogozhin, it is Myshkin's story-telling in the first half of Part I which establishes narrating as the predominant mode of expression for all the main characters in the novel, and its role both in the creation of another reality and in the scripts which direct the re-creative impulse out towards others. In addition, the stories themselves take as their basic theme this very creation of another

reality. As Slattery states, Myshkin's interest is in the 'illusory line' pointing to the 'mystery of life'.² It is therefore important to examine the Prince's stories and the ideas that have inspired them, in order to define their role in the production of Myshkin's script, and their significance for the rest of *Idiot*.

The first sustained narrative by the Prince is not so much a story as an ethical discourse on capital punishment. Having described the mechanics of the guillotine and the scene he witnessed in Lyons to the Epanchins' servant, Myshkin's primary concern is with the terror and suffering experienced by the man about to be executed, as he wonders, 'что же с душой в эту минуту делается, до каких судорог ее доводят? Надругательство над душой, больше ничего!', and states, 'тут приговор, и в том, что наверно не избежешь, вся ужасная-то мука и сидит, и сильнее этой муки нет на свете' (VIII, 20-21).

Two aspects of this narrative are striking. The hero's ability and willingness to empathize with the suffering of others, even the lowliest and apparently least deserving, stands out; as we saw in his response to Nastas'ia Filippovna, Myshkin is an ideal reader of the condemned man. There is no suggestion of ambiguity in the case to excite our or Myshkin's sympathy; Legros is a hardened criminal and a vicious murderer, and the fact that the Prince can feel compassion for such a person gives us a strong impression at this early stage in the novel of his underlying motivation and

² 'The Frame Tale: Temporality, Fantasy and Innocence in *The Idiot*', *IDS Bulletin*, 9 (1979), 6-25 (p. 14) .

impulse towards goodness without judging, and the essential irrelevance of the nature of a person's sin for Myshkin in the face of their suffering. This impression is heightened through his reference to the Bible: 'Сказано: «Не убий», так за то, что он убил, и его убивать? Нет, это нельзя' (VIII, 20), and, more specifically, to Christ: 'Об этой муке и об этом ужасе и Христос говорил. Нет, с человеком так нельзя поступать!' (VIII, 21). Thus Myshkin himself suggests a link between his own idea and Christ's limitless compassion as an model for behaviour, and also recalls the fact that Christ was also executed and suffered this terror, as His words on the cross showed; 'My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?'³

However, the object of Myshkin's compassion is perhaps even more noticeable. While his ethical position is centralized, his interest in the moral law is secondary; in spite of his reference to the ethical code of the Bible ('Сказано: «Не убий»'), his primary focus is not the (un)acceptability of killing another human being. Rather he is concerned with the effect of the situation on the psyche of the individual, and with this in mind he explores the phenomenon which arouses his compassion: the metaphysical terror brought on by the sentence of death, specifically by the horror of the idea of nothingness after death. The destruction of hope entailed by a total absence of belief in a future life and the full and conscious realization of the proximity and inevitability of death, faced only at the moment when the opportunity to live has been finally denied, is for Myshkin the true, unbearable misery of execution:

³ Matthew 27. 46.

А ведь главная, самая сильная боль, может, не в ранах, а вот что вот знаешь наверно, что вот через час, потом через десять минут, потом через полминуты, потом теперь, вот сейчас – душа из тела вылетит, и что человеком уж больше не будешь, и что это уж наверно; главное то, что *наверно*. [...] Убивать за убийство несоразмерно большее наказание, чем самое преступление. Убийство по приговору несоразмерно ужаснее, чем убийство разбойничье (VIII, 20 author's emphasis).

As Chirkov explains,

Он [«мотив жизни»] звучит [...] в рассказах Мышкина о смертной казни и предсмертных переживаниях осужденного, который наиболее интенсивно ощущает силу и благо жизни именно тогда, когда жизнь у него отнимают «наверно». Ужас в том, что осужденный лишен всякой надежды на спасение, которая остается в той или иной форме в других случаях лишения жизни человека. Вся максимальная острота внутреннего состояния преступника, о котором рассказывает Мышкин, вырастает из чудовищного контраста сознания и жажды жизни перед лицом неминуемой смерти.⁴

Myshkin's first narrative therefore presents us with several clues to his mindset and fundamental beliefs: his compassion, particularly for the humiliated and outcast, his deep concern with ethical issues, and the feeling that nothing can be worse for the individual's state of mind than either forcing him to face death without any suggestion of a new life to come, or depriving him of life at the very moment when he has discovered its true potential. Although the Prince returns to this subject and expands on it, his first statement is revealing, not least because it concentrates on the negative side of Myshkin's idea, on the terror and finality of mortality, not, as he later emphasizes, on the potential to which it points.

⁴ *O Stile Dostoevskogo: problematika, idei, obrazy: prodolzhenie* (Moscow: Nauka, 1967), p. 129.

The reaction of the servant to this discourse is also significant. We have already seen in chapter one that Myshkin, with his 'тихим и примирающим голосом' (VIII, 7) and open, friendly manner, has attracted Rogozhin: 'Князь, неизвестно мне, за что я тебя полюбил' (VIII, 13). Now the Epanchin's servant, having initially been suspicious of the unexpected visitor, changes his attitude immediately upon hearing him speak and, breaking the house rules and all laws of propriety, allows him to smoke. By speaking to the servant openly and as an equal, Myshkin breaks down barriers and encourages the other to be similarly open and receptive. Aglaia may be teasing the hero when she later says of the incident, 'Князь – демократ' (VIII, 54), but the epithet is apt; not only does his compassion embrace all in the story, but he also excludes no-one from the possibility of learning about it.

The remainder of the Prince's narratives in the first half of Part II unfold during his meeting with the Epanchin women. Here, prompted by Mrs Epanchina, he describes unremarkable pastoral scenes from his life in Switzerland, incidentally also introducing to these listeners the suggestion of a link with Christ by mentioning the donkey (VIII, 48).⁵ He then turns to another unusual experience which, as in the case of the execution he witnessed, has evidently occupied his mind a great deal:

У нас там водопад был [...] Тоже иногда в полдень, когда
зайдешь куда-нибудь в горы, станешь один посредине горы,

⁵ Natal'ia Ashimebaeva's new article, 'Comedy between the poles of humour and tragedy, beauty and ugliness: Prince Myshkin as a comic character', in *Two Centuries of Russian Humour and Satire*, ed. by Lesley Milne, trans. by Sarah J. Young (forthcoming), addresses the fact that such biblical references in the novel are obscured by the comic nature of the scenes in which they are presented.

кругом сосны, старые, большие, смолистые; вверху на скале старый замок средневековый, развалины; наша деревенька далеко внизу, чуть видна; солнце яркое, небо голубое, тишина страшная. Вот тут-то, бывало, и зовет всё куда-то, и мне всё казалось, что если пойти все прямо, идти долго-долго и зайти вот за эту линию, за ту самую, где небо с землей встречается, то там вся и разгадка, и тотчас же новую жизнь увидишь, в тысячу раз сильнее и шумней, чем у нас; такой большой город мне всё мечтался, как Неаполь, в нем всё дворцы, шум, гром, жизнь... Да мало ли что мечталось! (VIII, 50-51).

This description is our first indication of Myshkin's vision of a higher reality, a different spatial dimension beyond the horizon where the true nature of the universe, and man's place in it, are revealed. By evoking biblical imagery, the Prince not only indicates that he is speaking of a spiritual dimension, but also introduces the motif of re-creation. The image of the waterfall is connected to both the fountain from which the rivers spring in Genesis 2. 6, and the restoration of the water of life to mankind at the end of Revelation (22. 1-2). Furthermore, the city Myshkin mentions at the end of the vision recalls the rise of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21. 1-2, thus providing indirect metaphoric link between Myshkin's vision and the ultimate re-creation which completes the cycle of the Bible's macrostructure.⁶

The re-creative and Biblical theme which runs through this image also imparts a feeling of great joy at the potential of Myshkin's discovery, in sharp contrast to the bleak picture of despair he painted in his first narrative. However, here too there are darker notes: the ruined castle is a Gothic feature, and implies a threat. Moreover, the 'тишина страшная' can

⁶ See Edwards, p. 5.

be interpreted either negatively or positively. It introduces a further disquieting element, as amidst the hero's positive celebration of life, nature and re-creation, the possibility of a more disturbing side, unidentified or unexplained, remains. However, it is also an oxymoronic epithet of the type used to describe the ineffable in religious experience.⁷ In describing his mystical feeling of oneness with the world and sense of the true meaning of life, Myshkin expresses in metaphorical terms both the nature of this higher plane of existence and the impulse to gain access to it. The hero's vision inspired personally authentic religious feeling in him, but alongside the beauty, hope and harmony, he recognizes the threats posed by ugliness, fear and doubt.

The import of Myshkin's vision of a higher reality is heightened through the context in which his narrative arises. In response to the introductory Swiss tableaux he presents, Adelaida comments, 'Я опять-таки не понимаю, как это можно так прямо рассказывать, [...] я бы никак не нашлась' (VIII, 49). She then admits a similar problem with painting in the following exchange with the hero: 'Я вот сюжета для картины два года найти не могу [...] Найти мне, князь, сюжет для картины. – Я в этом ничего не понимаю. Мне кажется: взглянуть и писать. – Взглянуть не умею' (VIII, 50). When Aglaia hears that Myshkin was happy abroad, she exclaims excitedly ('вскричала'), 'Счастлив! Вы умеете быть счастливым? Так как же вы говорите, что не научился

⁷ See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Penguin, 1982) (first pub. 1902), p. 420.

глядеть?’ (VIII, 50). The Epanchin women instinctively grasp both the importance of seeing and re-creating to leading a life free of suffering, and the conversation points to a strong link between looking in the correct manner and spiritual happiness, providing the first indication of the importance for the novel of the aesthetic as the foundation of ethics.⁸

The preamble to Myshkin’s image of the waterfall fulfils two main functions. In the first place, it serves to sharpen the distinction between the Prince and his interlocutors and thus to highlight the potential of Myshkin as a narrator. The Epanchin women immediately see in their visitor something different and important, someone from whom they can learn; Mrs Epanchina’s words, ‘Я хочу знать, как он умеет говорить’ (VIII, 48), like her daughters’ remarks quoted above, demonstrate her intuition not only that the Prince is able to tell a story, but also of the significance of story-telling in general. Secondly, they also realize, and signal to the reader through this conversation, the essential link between seeing and creating. Even before Adelaida is given the advice, ‘взглянуть и писать’ this is an issue; practically the first words Mrs Epanchina addresses to Myshkin are, ‘Садитесь вот тут, князь, вот на этом кресле, напротив, нет, сюда, к солнцу, к свету ближе подвиньтесь, чтоб я могла видеть’ (VIII, 46).

The connection between seeing and the aesthetic and ethical response it arouses is vital to our understanding of Myshkin’s world-view. We have already by this stage seen examples of the Prince’s aesthetic appreciation in his identification of the painting of the Canton of Uri, the

⁸ See Woronzoff-Dashkoff, ‘The Sympathetic Vision’, p. 71 and *passim*.

care and thought he puts into his calligraphy, and the attention he pays to the photograph of Nastas'ia Filippovna (VIII, 25-32).⁹ As the conversation about seeing and telling unfolds, it becomes clear that rather than being simple aesthetic objects, these items are in fact the first indications of an important theme, the re-creation of another reality in art, both literary and visual, and they are vital not in themselves, but in the responses of other characters to them. Furthermore, the hero's ability to see or read a situation or person clearly connects him to Christ, as it was the mission of Jesus in coming after the Fall to 'open their eyes'.¹⁰

The ethical aspect of seeing and recreating has already arisen in the story Myshkin tells to the servant, but it now becomes clear that there is an additional layer of significance in this first narrative. The fact that the hero begins with an eye-witness account of Legros mounting the scaffold and then broadens his vision to outline the implications of a death sentence indicates to the reader that he has not only seen, but has responded to seeing in a creative and morally responsible way. This is the essence of the re-creative activity which is so central to the characters' scripts; the aesthetic shock of the image presented by the Prince intensifies its moral message, and provides a model for the narrational aspirations of all the protagonists. Immediately after the discussion about seeing and telling, Myshkin's image of the waterfall and the place where earth and sky meet

⁹ On Myshkin's response to the photograph, see pp. 72-74 above.

¹⁰ Acts 26. 18; see Edwards, p. 211.

shows what is possible when one can see properly, and itself re-creates the aesthetic experience for others.

Robert Louis Jackson points out that the opening paragraph of the novel contains a reference to seeing, or rather to *not* seeing: ‘Было так сыро и туманно, что насилу рассвело; в десяти шагах, вправо и влево от дороги, трудно было разглядеть хоть что-нибудь из окон вагона’ (VIII, 5).¹¹ Thus as the novel opens out in Part I, and seeing becomes an overt theme, it seems that Prince Myshkin, having journeyed from his Swiss paradise where clarity of vision is possible, has arrived in a homeland where seeing – and therefore the re-creative activity it inspires – is difficult, immediately implying a spiritual absence in the lives of the people amongst whom he has come. Edwards notes that difficulty with seeing is a sign of the Fall and man’s spiritual death;¹² the comment from I Corinthians 13. 12, ‘for now we see through a glass, darkly’ is an apt description of the spiritual status of the inhabitants of Petersburg when the hero arrives. Aglaia’s comment when Myshkin is first mentioned to the women, ‘с ним можно еще в жмурки [blind man’s buff] играть’ (VIII, 45), again highlights the question of seeing, suggesting three possible interpretations. In Jackson’s view, ‘Myshkin, childlike, is groping about in the darkness. For his own sake, too, it is important that he “move nearer to the light”’.¹³ On the other hand, as this comment is made before the Prince

¹¹ *Dialogues with Dostoevsky: The Overwhelming Questions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 309n..

¹² Edwards, p. 224.

¹³ *Dialogues*, p. 47.

is introduced to them, and before he has had a chance to impress them with his aptitude for story-telling, it could imply either that the Epanchin women cannot truly conceive of being able to see and therefore attribute their own 'blindness' to him as well, or that they think that they will be able to see better than him; both possibilities emphasize their lack of experience of the spiritual dimension in comparison with their visitor.

Aside from the question of seeing and recreating being raised at this point, the possibility of a direct link between this mystical vision and the earlier, harsher story of the man about to be executed seems remote, but the hero then completes his word-picture with a significant phrase, 'А потом мне показалось, что и в тюрьме можно огромную жизнь найти' (VIII, 51), which not only hints at the fact that for Myshkin there is a strong connection between the two ideas, but also allows him to steer the conversation back to the subject of the death sentence, in order to provide the reader and the Epanchin women with a more definitive explanation of his world view. His comment further indicates his belief that the mystery of life, and true spiritual freedom, are to be found within man, and not in external circumstances; by introducing it at this point Myshkin shifts the focus of attention back to the pressing issue of the role which the consciousness of death plays in spiritual awakening.

Aglaia reacts to this observation with cynicism: 'последнюю похвальную мысль я еще в моей «Хрестоматии», когда мне двенадцать лет было, читала', (VIII, 51); she assumes that it is a childish subject on which there is nothing new to say, again emphasizing the lack of a spiritual dimension which sharpens the contrast between Myshkin and his

interlocutors. However, in spite of both this and the apparent inappropriateness of his new theme in the present company, the Prince launches into his next story undeterred.

In returning to the question of capital punishment, Myshkin confirms his intense, even morbid, fascination with the subject. However, his focus on this occasion is somewhat different. Having concentrated in his first narrative on compassion, inspired by the fear and hopelessness experienced by the convict awaiting death without the consolation of eternal life, his second discourse on the issue offers a more positive interpretation. In relating the description of a man sentenced to death and then reprieved at the last minute, the hero widens his viewpoint to examine what lies beyond the terror.

At the end of the execution scene he describes to the servant, Myshkin comments, 'Может быть, и есть такой человек, которому прочли приговор, дали помучиться, а потом сказали: «Ступай, тебе прощают». Вот такой человек, может быть, мог бы рассказать' (VIII, 21), again suggesting that access to another reality and realization of the true meaning of death are of central importance to story-telling, for the listener as well as the speaker, as well as indicating his own prowess as a narrator. His use of rhetorical questions and dramatic suspense arouses and maintains the interest of the reader and the servant. For the former, this is reawakened in his later conversation with the Epanchin women, when he reveals that he has indeed met a man who can tell such a story: 'в промежутке между двумя приговорами, двадцать минут или по крайне

мере четверть часа, он прожил под несомненным убеждением, что через несколько минут он вдруг умрет' (VIII, 51).

By presenting this narrative as a true story, two levels of authenticity are achieved. Firstly, Dostoevskii's own reprieve from the firing squad gives credence to Myshkin's description and his view of the topic as a whole for the reader. Secondly, the Epanchins are also presented with the real, not the imaginary, and thus, as sceptical listeners, are more likely to be convinced of the truth of the description and the significance of the theme. Furthermore, the fact that the Prince met this man 'last year' (VIII, 51), significantly before he witnessed the execution of Legros ('Бот я уж месяц назад это видел' (VIII, 20)), suggests that he had already spent a great deal of time thinking about the implications of the death sentence for the human psyche by the time he saw it for himself. He now tells us, 'Мне ужасно хотелось слушать, когда он иногда припоминал свои тогдашние впечатления, и я несколько раз начинал его вновь расспрашивать' (VIII, 51), again indicating his belief in the necessity of acquiring this knowledge.

The story itself again concentrates on the effect of the certainty and finality of death, when the remaining minutes of life can be counted, and once more gives little suggestion of the possibility of an afterlife. Only the rays of the sun glinting on the cupola hint at another level of existence after death, as 'ему казалось, что эти лучи его новая природа, что он через три минуты как-нибудь сольется с ними...' (VIII, 52), but even with the presence of the church this is so close to dust and nothingness that it cannot provide comfort or hope. Nevertheless, in contrast to the terror evident in

Legros' reaction, the Prince on this occasion depicts the great potential in the condemned man's situation:

Выходило, что остается жить минут пять, не больше. Он говорил, что эти пять минут казались ему бесконечным сроком, огромным богатством; ему казалось, что в эти пять минут он проживет столько жизней, что еще сейчас нечего и думать о последнем мгновении (VIII, 52).

Rather than focusing on the end of this fixed period of time remaining, as Myshkin had in his earlier narrative, here the emphasis is on the experience of the passing of time under these circumstances. The intensity with which the condemned man experiences his remaining minutes, and feels his mortality as a physical rather than simply an intellectual truth, suggests both that this is real life, and that there is a possibility of spiritual regeneration, as Dostoevskii himself felt after his own reprieve, according to a letter to his brother (XXVIII.i, 88). When the precise moment of death is calculated and contemplated beforehand, all the delusions of everyday life are forcibly stripped away.

Although Myshkin clearly wishes to highlight the positive aspect of this idea and the value of life it reveals, he does not deny its terrifying side, again commenting on the agony of the hope that death is not in fact inevitable and the horror of dying without belief in the afterlife:

Неизвестность и отвращение от этого нового, которое будет и сейчас наступит, были ужасны; но он говорит, что ничего не было для него в это время тяжелее, как непрерывная мысль: «Что, если бы не умирать! Что, если бы воротить жизнь, — какая бесконечность!» (VIII, 52).

However, the misery of such an experience is of secondary importance to the Prince's design for this narrative, which is to emphasize the value of life. Having remarked on the burden of hope, Myshkin returns swiftly to the potential of the idea of total awareness of time (and mortality), telling the assembled family that the reprieved man continued, 'Я бы тогда каждую минуту в целый век обратил, ничего бы не потерял, каждую бы минуту счетом отсчитывал, уж ничего бы даром не истратил!' (VIII, 52).

Although he later admits, 'вовсе не так жил и много-много минут потерял' (VIII, 53), Myshkin is convinced there is some truth in the man's words. When Alexandra remarks, 'Ну, стало быть, вот вам и опыт, стало быть, и нельзя жить, взаправду «отсчитывая счетом»', he will not completely deny the idea: 'Да, почему-нибудь да нельзя же [...] мне самому это казалось... А все-таки как-то не верится' (VIII, 53). Slattery, agreeing with Alexandra's point of view, suggests that clinging to the notion that every second of life can be counted is one of the hero's major faults, as it is a denial of the temporal reality of human life: 'to be enmeshed in human life is to be in human time', and to place oneself outside human time is to cease participation in human life.¹⁴

While in some respects this is a fair criticism, it ignores a basic fact. In his descriptions of men awaiting execution, Myshkin is describing in its most clarified and shocking form the inevitable conclusion of all human life. Therefore this access to a different temporal perception from that

¹⁴ 'Frame Tale', pp. 15-16.

which we normally experience, which Slattery calls 'a violation of human temporality, constructed in order to escape from the horrible certainty of the future',¹⁵ is in fact a refinement of human temporality in order to confront that certainty. The Prince is asserting that by fully realizing and understanding one's true, mortal nature, man can appreciate the essential value of life, which gives rise to the aspiration to count every minute. As Belopol'skii notes, 'Мышкин утверждает необходимость серьезного отношения к собственной жизни: поскольку жизнь — ценность, надо ценить каждую минуту'.¹⁶ The hero's final comments show his awareness of the difficulty, or perhaps impossibility, of this task, but the idea of examining one's relation to time with respect to the inevitability of death, far from fleeing reality, is in fact addressing directly the problem of perceiving the reality of the 'world as it is given'.¹⁷

When we look at the next execution narrative told by Myshkin, which returns to the scene of Legros' execution, many of the same features recur. The idea of counting every second is illustrated in the prisoner's journey to the scaffold, as his perception of time becomes more intense and elongated in inverse proportion to the amount of time he has left to live:

Я думаю, что вот тут тоже кажется, что еще бесконечно жить остается, пока везут. Мне кажется, он, наверно, думал дорогой: «Еще долго, еще жить три улицы остается; вот это проеду, потом еще та останется, потом еще та, где булочник направо... еще когда-то доедем до булочника!» (VIII, 55).

¹⁵ 'Frame Tale', p. 15.

¹⁶ *Dostoevskii i filosofskaia mysl' ego epokhi. Kontsepsiia cheloveka* (Rostov: Izd. Rostovskogo universiteta, 1987), p. 164.

¹⁷ Slattery, 'Frame Tale', p. 16.

The loss of hope that accompanies the knowledge of the precise moment of one's death is also evident in the silence of the prisoner after he has been told he will be executed that morning, and Myshkin's compassion for the convict's despair is aroused by the bitter consolation of his final meal: 'ну, не насмешка ли это? Ведь, подумаешь, как это жестоко, а с другой стороны, ей-богу, эти невинные люди от чистого сердца делают и уверены, что это человеколюбие' (VIII, 55).

The theme of compassion is further highlighted through its absence, as the Prince imagines the prisoner's thoughts on seeing the crowds who have come to watch his death. While Myshkin may have visited the scene in the spirit of research into human suffering and compassion, it is clear that for the majority of spectators, the event merely provides grim entertainment, and no thoughts are spared for the feelings of the condemned man. The description of the opposition of the convict and the crowd, 'Кругом народ, крик, шум, десять тысяч лиц, десять тысяч глаз, — всё это надо перенести, а главное, мысль: «Вот их десять тысяч, а их никого не казнят, а меня-то казнят!»' (VIII, 55), suggests that the subject would experience an intense feeling of separation and isolation from the rest of humanity. There is no sense of co-feeling or co-suffering to expiate the terror of the prisoner, but simply objectification, as we saw in relation to Nastas'ia Filippovna in chapter one above, and a denial of his humanity as punishment is used to provide a spectacle for the onlookers. For Myshkin this evidently adds to the condemned man's pain and suffering, and even though he is described as a 'большой злодей', such inhumane treatment is still wrong. From this point of view, the Prince's response

conforms to the Russian tradition of seeing convicts as unfortunate rather than evil, to be pitied rather than punished. Konstantin Barsht relates the importance of faces in Dostoevskii's creative process specifically to the writer's conception of faith: 'According to Dostoevskii, art, by requiring of the artist love for the subject of the depiction irrespective of the morality of the face being depicted, places him in the position of the Christian obliged to love his enemy'.¹⁸

As the condemned man mounts the scaffold, Myshkin returns to the idea of perception sharpening with the nearness of the moment of death, when 'голова ужасно живет и работает, должно быть, сильно, сильно, сильно, как машина в ходу' (VIII, 56). Again he suggests that this is a moment of absolute truth, with no room for delusions about the nature of reality and mortality; the prisoner at this point 'все знает' (VIII, 56, author's emphasis). The fact that the hero sees the significance of the fully conscious realization of the instant before death as the experience of true reality, free from all delusions, is evinced in his comment, 'Я бы, если бы лежал, я бы нарочно слушал и услышал' (VIII, 56). The most terrifying moment, of hearing the guillotine blade as it descends, is also for Myshkin the moment of maximal awareness of the true nature of life, and is therefore the most valid experience, even if it is followed immediately by annihilation.

¹⁸ 'Defining the face: observations on Dostoevskii's creative processes', in *Russian Literature, Modernism and the Visual Arts*, ed. by Catriona Kelly and Stephen Lovell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 23- 57 (p.26).

Furthermore, as in the case of Myshkin's other narratives about the death sentence, such knowledge and understanding are not suggestive of a belief in the afterlife. In the first two stories, the absence of the idea of immortality is evident in the metaphysical terror of the possibility of nothingness after death. In his final story directly pertaining to the psyche of the condemned man, the hero overtly denies that faith or the promise of eternal life are possibilities, as although he depicts the prisoner kissing the proffered crucifix avidly, 'вряд ли в эту минуту что-нибудь религиозное сознавал' (VIII, 56).

The absence of faith as a factor affecting the experiences of the men sentenced to death in these three narratives, in the words of a character who mentions Christ and uses biblical imagery, and has been linked to Christ by many critics, is striking. It suggests an awareness by Myshkin of the difficulty of belief in another, higher reality, and a deep sense of compassion for the poor souls who do not have this comfort. Furthermore, his understanding of the importance of faith in the face of impending death, illustrated with extreme examples, gives additional grounding to his belief in the use of narrative to create access to another reality, where a different relationship to space and, more importantly, in view of human mortality, time, is possible.

In this sense the final story he tells about the death sentence conforms to the aesthetic principle in several ways. Not only does he narrate after seeing, becoming an ethically ideal narrator as well as an ideal reader, and compelling his listeners to ponder his meaning (which is apparent in Alexandra's response, 'Это, конечно, непохоже на квиетизм')

(VIII, 56)), but his description is also linked to both narrative technique and visual art. Liza Knapp connects the development of Dostoevskii's 'fantastic realism' to his own reprieve from the death sentence as,

after experiencing those ten harrowing minutes of being face-to-face with death and after relating them to himself and others, Dostoevsky, as an artist, went on to concentrate on depicting the invisible moments of psychic intensity, the most dramatic of these being times in which death is apprehended. The eschatological bent taken by Dostoevsky's thought produced a literary style with the concomitant urgency and immediacy.¹⁹

The 'fantastic premise' of the direct apprehension and mediation of the experience of death,²⁰ gives rise to Dostoevskii's – and Myshkin's – narrative impulse of 'реализм в высшем смысле' (XXVII, 65). Myshkin's execution stories are also linked to Dostoevskii's personal experience in some of their details. In particular, the image of the prisoner kissing the crucifix in spite of his evident lack of belief reprises the actions of the confirmed atheists Petrashevskii and Speshnev.²¹ Furthermore, the absence of hope in the reprieved man's story, in which he perceives that he will merge into the rays of the sun and nothingness, recalls Speshnev's words, 'un peu de poussiere', in reply to Dostoevskii's 'nous serons avec le Christ'.²² By reflecting his own experience in Myshkin's narratives, Dostoevskii highlights the importance of the knowledge of death from the

¹⁹ *Dostoevsky as Reformer: The Petrashevsky Case*, ed. and trans. by Liza Knapp (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1987), p. 24.

²⁰ Knapp, *Dostoevsky as Reformer*, p. 23.

²¹ Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1850-1859* (London: Robson, 1983), p. 55.

²² See Frank, *The Years of Ordeal*, p. 58.

point of view of the development of his artistic technique, but he also conveys the concomitant ethical imperative of the rebirth to new life.

Myshkin also proposes the scene as a subject for a painting: ‘мне ужасно бы, ужасно бы хотелось, чтобы вы или кто-нибудь это нарисовал! [...] Я тогда же подумал, что картина будет полезная’ (VIII, 55). The fact that he refers to such a painting as ‘useful’ again suggests that he perceives the aesthetic object in ethical terms, as something that will encourage others to see what he can see, again affirming the primary necessity of visual contact to stimulate an ethical response: ‘Тут он взглянул в мою сторону; я поглядел на его лицо и всё понял...’ (VIII, 55). The composition he outlines for the painting at the end of his description intensifies this aspect: ‘Крест и голова – вот картина, лицо священника, палача, его двух служителей и несколько голов и глаз снизу, – всё это можно нарисовать как бы на третьем плане, в тумане, для аксессуара...’ (VIII, 56). By representing the watching crowd as an indistinct, faceless mass and as background to the sharp focus of the real subject, Myshkin is again highlighting the total separateness of the spectators, and their objectification of the condemned man (again echoing the treatment of Nastas’ia Filippovna by others), which further augments his fear and misery.

The aesthetic aspect of the painting proposed by the Prince is given another angle through its connection to another work of art, as he says, ‘Я в Базеле недвно одну такую картину видел’ (VIII, 55). Here the value of seeing such a painting for the ethical response it provokes is emphasized, as Myshkin continues, ‘Мне очень хочется вам рассказать... Я когда-

нибудь расскажу... очень меня поразила' (VIII, 55). In his discussion of a heightened state of awareness, in which the aesthetic element plays a large part, his feverish insistence of the effect of this portrait on him, and its possible effect on others, even at second hand, reveals how essential he believes this aspect of his vision to be.

Furthermore, the fact that this work has been identified by the editors of the Academy Edition as Hans Fries' 'The Beheading of John the Baptist' (1514) (IX, 433) raises additional issues. By introducing this murder from the Gospels, Prince Myshkin also points to the execution of Christ, further underlining the nothingness that follows death in his tales, and initially suggesting a total denial of the Resurrection.²³ However, if we re-examine the reference to Christ in Myshkin's first story, a different solution is again suggested. It is worth quoting the passage in full:

Может быть, и есть такой человек, которому прочли приговор, дали помучиться, а потом сказали: «Ступай, тебе прощают». Вот этакой человек, может быть, мог бы рассказать. Об этой муке и об этом ужасе и Христос говорил. Нет, с человеком так нельзя поступать! (VIII, 21).

By juxtaposing the image of Christ to that of the reprieved man, the Prince implies that Christ, who has experienced the horror of death, has been reprieved through resurrection in order to reveal what the end of life truly signifies. His death and resurrection show that the fear of death can be conquered, and that His forgiveness is there to save mankind from this horror. Therefore, although muted, Myshkin's stories about men

²³ An issue which later becomes central with the introduction of the Holbein painting 'Christ in the Tomb' in Part II; see pp. 220-22 and 296-97 below.

condemned to death do in fact contain hints of the existence of life after death, and of a specifically religious (as opposed to organic) side to his vision. However, he makes little of this point, and in general it is the possibilities of realizing another plane of existence in this life, rather than the next, on which he concentrates. Furthermore, by highlighting different facets of the experience of faith in his narratives, both the practical and the spiritual, the hope of the presence of faith and the despair of its absence, Myshkin does not insist on a one-sided interpretation of his vision and ideas, but rather depicts the tension which exists between faith and doubt and the difficulty of achieving the former in the face of the latter.

The Epanchins, like Rogozhin before them, pick up on the Christian aspects of his discourse and self-image. Although the General's 'точно бог послал!' (VIII, 44) has little to do with religious feeling and is more an expression of relief that the Prince will distract attention from his involvement in the Nastas'ia Filippovna affair, Mrs Epanchina's words, 'я верую, что вас именно для меня бог привел в Петербург из Швейцарии. Может быть, будет у вас другие дела, но главное, для меня' (VIII, 70) both emphasize the religious dimension and suggest that she too is searching for an ideal. Moreover, Adelaida's statement, 'вы философ и нас приехали поучать' (VIII, 51) indicates in more general terms the importance the family ascribes to the Prince so soon after their acquaintance.

The significance of faces to Myshkin's ethical stance is clear by this stage; his discourse on the condemned man as a subject for a painting confirms his belief that a skilful examination and depiction of a face can

reveal the spiritual state of the person, and thus arouse a true ethical response in the observer. As Johnson states, 'Dostoevskii's notion of the good in this, his most ethical, novel is a way of seeing the face of the other'.²⁴ The sisters also see the significance of faces in provoking a response which binds people together, as is evinced by Adelaida's words, 'если уж вы такой знаток лиц, то наверно были и влюблены' (VIII, 57). However, Myshkin's reply, 'Я не был влюблен [...] я... был счастлив иначе' (VIII, 57) suggests a different emphasis and an alternative basis for relationships, but one which he apparently believes to be equally valid and a source of great joy. His final story serves to unfold this idea, and although in many ways the texture and content of this narrative are completely unlike the previous ones, the connection to both subjects of the face of the other centralizes compassion for the suffering of others as the main foundation of the hero's worldview.

The story of Marie is also interesting because, having seen the ideological basis of Myshkin's script in the earlier narratives, both the reader and the Epanchin women now for the first time witness how this is translated into action, which is essential for three reasons. It gives us an idea of what the Prince considers to be appropriate ethical behaviour, which in turn allows us in the first place to speculate on his future actions and the course of the novel and secondly, to judge the efficacy of those actions. This gains increasing significance as the novel develops and the reader begins to recognize some similarities between Myshkin's actions in the

²⁴ 'The Face of the Other in *The Idiot*', *Slavic Review*, 50 (1991), 867-78 (p. 867).

Marie narrative and his response to Nastas'ia Filippovna. More importantly, it indicates that the hero is not a man of straw. Without actions to back up his ideas, Myshkin would be a character like Rudin or Oblomov – eloquent but ultimately ineffectual (a typical ‘superfluous man’, in other words) – or worse, a charlatan and hypocrite, in which case he would resemble Foma Fomich Opiskin in *Selo Stepanchikova*. By moving into the sphere of his own actions, he both proves that his ideas are not merely theoretical but can be employed in everyday reality, and implies the pointlessness of abstract thinking without concrete application; religious feeling and the perception of another reality are meaningless if they are not translated into positive ethical action.²⁵ However, most importantly, in telling the story of Marie, the hero indicates for the first time a shift from the fundamental activities of reading (seeing) and narrating to true scripting, as here he introduces for the first time the importance of the active response to the other in his schema. By moving to a story where his own ideas on ethical behaviour come into conflict with those of the community, Myshkin illustrates the fact that confirmation (or denial) of one's script can only be provided by the other, and shows the difficulties of human interrelations.

A strong sense of compassion as the basis for ethical behaviour in relation to the other lies at the centre of the story about Marie. Having concentrated in his earlier narratives on one group of isolated and reviled people, those who have been condemned to death, now Myshkin turns to

²⁵ The relevance of this theme to the structuring of the text is examined in chapter 3.

another example of the habitually humiliated and rejected, the fallen woman. When Marie returns, broken and abused, from her adventure with a travelling salesman, and the entire village, including her own mother, turns against her, the Prince treats her kindly and gently and does not accuse her. He sees only her misery and pain, and tries to alleviate them and return her dignity, thereby illustrating to the Epanchins his idea of the proper ethical response to seeing the face of suffering. He specifically denies that this is love in the accepted, sexual sense, insisting, 'тут вовсе не было любви. Если бы вы знали, какое это было несчастное создание, то вам бы самым стало ее очень жаль, как и мне' (VIII, 58). He kisses her to show that he considers her to be a human being, his equal, and worthy of love and affection, not because he is in love with her, and sees vindication for his actions in the fact that 'она умерла почти счастливая [...] она забыла свою черную беду' (VIII, 62).

The judgemental reaction of the villagers is for Myshkin the epitome of unethical behaviour, as she is treated as an outcast, humiliated and punished repeatedly despite her evident sickness and misery: 'когда она воротилась больная и истерзанная, никакого-то к ней сострадания не было ни в ком! Какие они на это жестокие! Какие у них тяжелые на это понятия!' (VIII, 59). It is significant that the two traditional moral keystones of the community, the teacher and the pastor, are among her most vociferous accusers, as is her mother, whom one might expect to protect and forgive an errant child. Both the villagers and Myshkin therefore consider justice to be on their side, but the inhumanity shown to Marie, out of all proportion to her crime, suggests that their code of

behaviour is imperfect, as it is inflexible and takes no account of human feeling; it is a code of vengeance, retribution and vilification, not of compassion, love and forgiveness.

Neither in this case nor in that of the condemned man is the object of the Prince's compassion innocent. Legros is described as a 'большой злодей' (VIII, 55), and while the situation may be more ambiguous with regard to Marie, Myshkin twice emphasizes her own feelings of guilt, noting that she 'сама считала себя за какую-то самую последнюю тварь' (VIII, 59), and 'до самого конца считала себя великою преступницею' (VIII, 62-63). Like Nastas'ia Filippovna, Marie's sense of her own responsibility for her situation is the greatest source of her suffering, and the condemnatory attitude of the villagers merely intensifies this. Myshkin denies she is to blame, stating 'я с самого начала ее нисколько за виноватую почитал, а только за несчастную' (VIII, 60), an indication that, as with Legros, and as we shall later see in his reaction to Nastas'ia Filippovna, the question of her guilt is for the Prince simply less important than the fact of her suffering.

Slattery argues that Myshkin's interpretation of his own actions is wrong because he does not understand the code of the community, claiming the villagers 'seek justice' but love Marie, and that their moral code is a unifying force.²⁶ However, he does not address the question, justice for what? Marie has offended the sensibilities of the parish, and failed in her duty to her mother, but has harmed herself more than others. In any case

²⁶ 'Frame Tale', pp. 19-20.

this hardly merits her pariah status, and when the Prince comments, ‘Я слышал даже, что ее хотели присудить к наказанию’ (VIII, 60), the extremity of their reaction to her sin, even in a morally intolerant society, becomes clear. Furthermore, the unifying effect of the villagers’ moral code is undermined by the fact that it is a unity based on exclusion and separation. While Myshkin’s compassion encompasses all, the villagers’ morality, like that of the spectators in the previous narrative, isolates and objectifies those most in need of compassion and affirmation of their ‘I’, those who are suffering for their sins. The biblical echoes in this story support this conclusion; sharing her name with Mary Magdalene, Marie also resembles the woman taken in adultery of the Gospel of John 8. 3, but although the villagers may claim to practice Christian morality, only Myshkin emulates Christ’s goodness. As Dostoevskii states in the notebooks for Part II of the novel, ‘сострадание – всё Христианство’ (IX, 270).

The importance of children to the story is evident in Myshkin’s opening remarks:

Ребенку можно всё говорить, – всё [...] От детей ничего не надо утаивать под предлогом, что они маленькие и что им рано знать. Какая грустная и несчастная мысль! И как хорошо сами дети подмечают, что отцы считают их слишком маленькими и ничего не понимающими, тогда как они всё понимают. Большие не знают, что ребенок даже в самом трудном деле может дать чрезвычайно важный совет (VIII, 58).

These words suggest an additional focus in the story of Marie, as it also highlights the effect of the hero’s compassion on others, specifically the children of the village. At first they, like the adults, persecute Marie, but

under Myshkin's guidance grow to love and try to help to support her. Having been influenced at first by their parents' judgemental attitude, their open minds and natural innocence bring them over to the hero's more compassionate stance; unlike the blinkered adults, the children see the benefits of Myshkin's gentle, loving treatment of the unfortunate Marie, and emulate it. His script is accepted by Marie and the children, and this eventually appears to affect the adult villagers, as when Marie is close to death, 'В деревне, кажется, стали жалеть Мари, по крайней мере детей уже не останавливали и не бранили, как прежде' (VIII, 62). However, after the funeral, the villagers' challenge to his script resurfaces, destroying the possibility of harmonious relations; 'и началось на меня главное гонение всей деревни из-за детей' (VIII, 63). Little has changed as a result of Myshkin's actions; having lost one victim, the villagers merely substitute another, who has also questioned their rigid moral code. Although hope for the future and the realization of Myshkin's dream of compassion for all is maintained in the continued good will of the children, the negative reaction of their parents, and even the Prince's doctor, shows the difficulty of his task, and the distance of society as a whole from the ideal of Christ's compassion, owing to the problematic and diverse nature of human relations.

The wider significance of children in the novel is also signalled here. The innocence of children means that their vision has not been darkened or obscured by knowledge of evil, so they can see purely and respond naturally, free from judgement or bias. The fact that Myshkin's character is frequently described as childlike and is perceived as such by

others also suggests that his ability to see clearly and react in an ethically positive manner originates in his own innocence; as Belopol'skii notes, 'Для Достоевского ребенок – нормальный естественный человек, «ангел божий», поэтому акцентирование детских качеств в том или ином герое равнозначно выделению черт, «истинно человеческих», «доброй природы» человека'.²⁷ The first hint of a connection between the hero and children occurs in the opening conversation of the novel, when he says that his illness is 'вроде падучей или виттовой пляски' (VIII, 6). The oddness of this alternative diagnosis is reinforced later in *Idiot*, both in the fact that it becomes clear that he does indeed have epilepsy, and in the absence of any further mention of chorea (St Vitus' Dance). However, the fact that the non-medical name for this disease originates in the child martyr to whom sufferers prayed suggests that Myshkin is even at this early stage establishing his link with children as part of his spirituality.

The Prince then raises the subject of his childlikeness, as perceived by Schneider, towards the end of the Marie story:

он вполне убедился, что я сам совершенный ребенок, то есть вполне ребенок, что я только ростом и лицом похож на взрослого, но что развитием, душой, характером и, может быть, даже умом я не взрослый, и так и останусь, хотя я бы до шестидесяти лет прожил (VIII, 63).

Although Myshkin denies that this is true, he does admit a special affinity with children, and a preference for their company, continuing,

²⁷ *Dostoevskii*, p. 71.

Но одно только правда, я и в самом деле не люблю быть с взрослыми, с людьми, с большими, — и это я давно заметил, — не люблю, потому что не умею. Что бы они ни говорили со мной, как бы добрый ко мне ни были, все-таки с ними мне всегда тяжело почему-то, и я ужасно рад, когда могу уйти поскорее к товарищам, а товарищи мои всегда были дети, но не потому, что я сам был ребенок, а потому, что меня просто тянуло к детям (VIII, 63).

Schneider is clearly not the only person to see the child in the Prince; when General Epanchin introduces him to the women of the family, he calls the visitor a 'совершенный ребенок' (VIII, 44), which in turn leads to the comment about blind man's buff mentioned above. Mrs Epanchina, in calling herself a child, also sees her likeness to Myshkin in this regard (VIII, 65). His childlikeness is also evident in the behaviour he exhibits, as he is frank and open and sees no need to dissemble not, as Guardini states, because he is too well brought up.²⁸ Rather, it is because in his innocence he cannot conceive of baseness or the need to deceive in others.²⁹

The link between the hero and children is continued throughout the novel, for example in Aglaia's criticism of his use of schoolboy phrases (VIII, 435), and his friendship with Kolia Ivolgin. The importance of children as a moral barometer is also emphasized, particularly in the reactions of others to the honest and faithful Kolia. Aglaia's and Gania's rudeness to Kolia count as black marks against their characters in the eyes of the reader, and in contrast the fact that Radomskii later in the novel shows him consideration and talks to him as an adult is a positive attribute,

²⁸ 'Dostoevsky's Idiot', p. 362.

²⁹ Keller, 'Prince Myshkin', p. 19.

as it reflects the Prince's values, with which the reader quickly identifies. Myshkin's depiction of the innocence of children and insistence on their intelligence resound through the entire novel, providing a further key to our understanding of his worldview.

Therefore by the end of the final narrative told by the Prince at the Epanchins', both his audience and the reader have identified the main elements of his vision, which provides the ideological basis for his script. As its starting point, he contends that the true reality of life is obscured, but can be perceived if one faces and fully comprehends the fact of mortality. This knowledge is indeed terrifying, but there is potential for understanding beyond the horror, in the discovery of access to another dimension, a reality described by Myshkin in terms of a different spatial order in his waterfall vision, and in the alteration of the perception of time experienced by the men condemned to death. This other, higher reality is for the hero the true order of things, and both the form and the content of his narratives point to his visualization and re-creation for others of the nature of the universe, and man's position in it. The Prince's value as a story-teller and ability to express his ideas, and the contrast with the other characters who are unable to do so, emphasizes his status as a singular man who has access to a higher revealed truth. Children, like Myshkin, have the potential to see the truth through the purity of their vision, while Christ is present as an ideal of compassion and a supreme example of suffering and a model of how to face death.

The hero does not ignore the dark side of existence, of doubt and the terror of death; rather, he highlights these aspects and concentrates on

the reality of human suffering. His knowledge of the existence of a higher reality allows Myshkin to see the suffering of all beings, as all are subject to the same laws of nature, and it is this that arouses his intense feeling of compassion and desire to act accordingly. As Zernov states,

Dostoevsky shows that suffering lies in the very nature of man as a free and morally responsible being, that nothing can eliminate it as long as man remains what he is, and that the purpose of human evolution is not to abolish suffering, but to explain its meaning, for only those who are not afraid of pain are matured and truly free people.³⁰

The aesthetic principle is important as learning to see and depict in words or pictures, as the Prince does in his stories, stimulates an ethical response.

Three concepts are therefore evident in the Prince's interactivity as a model for the co-existence and interaction of all the protagonists: reading (seeing), narrating and scripting. In his stories he highlights the consequences of inharmonious self-other relations, and in his actions directed towards the other he attempts to remove conflict and aggression, and provide a positive example for others to follow, as part of a 'saintly script' which is aimed not at self-assertion, but at allowing the other to achieve selfhood; he uses his stories to 'предложить как пример для подражания окружающей его действительности'.³¹ Furthermore, the fact that the closeness and inevitability of death is the subject of many of Myshkin's narratives signals his understanding of the importance of

³⁰ *Three Russian Prophets: Khomiakov, Dostoevsky, Soloviev* (London: SCM Press, 1944), p. 93.

³¹ Iakobova, 'Siuzhetno-kompozitsionnoe edinstvo', p. 167.

defining the 'plot of life', not simply on a personal level, as is the case with the protagonists who are physically approaching death, but as a general rule motivating human behaviour.

The ideological background formulated in the early chapters of the novel is essential to our understanding of the personality of Prince Myshkin, as it provides the basic motivation for his actions, and therefore informs the whole of *Idiot*. We have already seen a positive response to his narratives in the fact that Aglaia takes the Prince into her confidence, so shortly after meeting him, over the delicate issue of Gania's letter (VIII, 71-73); from the image of his personality presented in his stories, Aglaia realizes that Myshkin can be trusted and is willing to serve others. In an early indication of the effect one character's actions can have on another, the hero's involvement in the Aglaia-Gania story immediately cuts off one possible continuation of the novel; in his first active involvement in the interactions of the other characters in the real time of the novel, Myshkin affects the future direction of the narrative.

When the hero leaves the Epanchin house, the texture of the novel alters, as he moves from expounding his ideas to putting them into practice, from seeing and narrating to scripting proper. His thoughts as he left Switzerland to return to Russia, 'Теперь я к людям иду; я, может быть, ничего не знаю, но наступила новая жизнь' (VIII, 64), further suggest that the experiences he has described to the Epanchins constituted a prelude to his testing of his ideas by coming amongst his own people and participating in their interactions.

II: THE FOUNDATIONS OF MYSHKIN'S SCRIPT IN ACTION

By the time the Prince leaves the Epanchin house, not only has he presented an outline of his worldview, but he has also given hints of the course of action he will take. The story of Marie illustrates his compassion for a fallen woman and his concern to alleviate her suffering and change the attitudes of others. The fact that another fallen woman, Nastas'ia Filippovna, has already made her presence felt in the novel, is significant in itself, but her true importance for Myshkin, and the strongest indication of the form their future relationship will take, lies in his response to her portrait, reiterating the central role of the aesthetic principle in arousing compassion. As Goerner states, 'the impression that the portrait makes on Myshkin determines much of the action of the novel'.³²

As discussed in chapter 1, Myshkin's comment in reference to the portrait, 'она ведь ужасно страдала, а?' (VIII, 31), particularly in the context of the lack of interest shown by the other characters in Nastas'ia Filippovna as a conscious and feeling being, immediately highlights the origin of the hero's compassion in the aesthetic response. He uses the photograph to stimulate his imagination and learn about her personality and suffering, concluding, 'как будто необъятная гордость и презрение, почти ненависть, были в этом лице, и в то же время что-то доверчивое, что-то удивительно простодушное; эти два контраста возбуждали как будто даже какое-то сострадание при взгляде на эти

³² T. Goerner, 'The Theme of Art and Aesthetics in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*', *Ulbardus Review*, 2.2 (1982), 79-95 (p. 84).

черты' (VIII, 68). Malenko and Gebhard note that 'the more he looks at it, the more strongly are his impressions of the depth and complexity of her suffering reinforced; the more deeply is he convinced of her extreme suffering'.³³ As I point out in chapter 1, it is her portrait, rather than the face itself, that remains with the hero as an unbearable reminder of her pain and his desire to assuage it. Kinosita remarks that,

Мышкин проницательно ощущает психологическую раздвоенность Настасьи Филипповны, контрастность несогласных черт ее лица внушает ему сострадание к ней. Именно здесь, [...], представлена Мышкиным основа того его ощущения, согласно которому красота может иметь положительный характер и функционировать как сила, спасающая мир. Эта основа – ощущение «сострадания».³⁴

Further confirmation that the portrait inspires Myshkin's compassion and calls him to action is found in his brief exchange with Mrs Epanchina: 'Так вы такую-то красоту цените? – Да... такую... – То есть именно такую? – Именно такую. – За что? – В этом лице... страдания много...' (VIII, 69). This is the clearest indication we are given in the novel of the importance of suffering and its aesthetic representation for Myshkin's worldview, and the effect this will have on *Idiot* as a whole. Moreover, his thoughts as he goes to collect the picture for Mrs Epanchina, '«Конечно, скверно, что я про портрет проговорился [...] Но... может быть, я и хорошо сделал, что проговорился...» У него начинала мелькать одна странная идея, впрочем еще не совсем ясная' (VIII, 67),

³³ 'Portraits', p. 245.

³⁴ 'Poniatie "krasoty" v svete idei estetiki Dostoevskogo', in *Dostoevskii: materialy i issledovaniia*, 11, ed. by E. A. Smirnova (St Petersburg: Nauka, 1994), pp. 96-101 (p. 98).

suggest not only that his mission to save a second fallen woman is beginning to formulate in his mind, but also that he is ready to declare it as such. Immediately upon arriving in St Petersburg, he finds a twin object for his mission, both to save the fallen woman, and to open the eyes of others to the ethical-aesthetic way of life and the possibility of emulating his own saintly scripting. By showing them the photograph, he can illustrate the aesthetic principle in action by emphasizing her suffering and his own compassion, in order to try to change their attitude. However, despite their interest in the Prince's discourse on suffering and paintings, the Epanchins fail to apply what they have been told and, like the villagers in the story they have just heard, respond negatively. Again, Myshkin is unable to persuade other parties to go along with the script he is suggesting; his mission is far from straightforward, as altering the worldview of others and their attitudes to their fellow men and women is no easy task.

The first seven chapters of the novel, therefore, contain both his fundamental ideology and the seeds of his new idea to transform his beliefs into action. It is interesting that Dostoevskii, when writing the novel, referred to chapters 1 to 7 as 'Part I' and 8 to 16 as 'Part II', unlike the division to which we are now accustomed, suggesting that the author thought of this first section as a discrete entity.³⁵ Having introduced Myshkin's motivational basis, the focus of the novel now shifts to how this effects the creation of his active script, primarily in relation to Nastas'ia

³⁵ See the author's letter to the editorial office of *Russkii vestnik*, 24 December 1867 (5 January 1868), in *PSS*, XXVIII.ii, 329.

Filippovna and modelled on his experience with Marie, but also with regard to the other protagonists and the more general ethical-aesthetic sphere. It is here that we begin to see the full significance of his saintly scripting, as he moves from reading and narrating to ethical interacting.

The fact that the Prince has stumbled on someone else's story becomes evident the moment Nastas'ia Filippovna's name is mentioned by General Epanchin (VIII, 26) so soon after Rogozhin's narrative. As the action moves to the Ivolgins' apartment, the hero's involvement immediately deepens. However, rather than assuming an active role straight away, he moves into the background while events develop around him. He also, after the verbal skills he exhibited at the Epanchins, now reverts to the quiet, listening stance we first saw in his encounter with Rogozhin, and for the same reason: to allow others to establish their voices and assert their 'I'.

Myshkin's reaction to General Ivolgin is particularly significant. As outlined above (pp. 44-46), the General's fantastic stories are an indication of his desire to erase the shame of past misdemeanours and regain his lost status; he is one of Dostoevskii's 'little men', as defined by Seeley, for whom the question of restoring dignity is paramount.³⁶ However, he is thwarted in his attempts to create a new script by the negative response of those around him. The intense shame Gania feels with regard to his father is evident in his horror when the latter meets Nastas'ia Filippovna: 'он должен теперь испить еще эту ужасную чашу, и, главное, в такую минуту' (VIII, 90). While Gania's shame has its roots in his own wounded

³⁶ 'Dostoyevsky's women', p. 304.

pride at his recent loss of status, his mother seems to be ashamed of her husband for more personal reasons, as he cuts such a pitiful figure. She is less aggressive than her son, but by negating the General's stories, with the interjection, 'Это не так, это ошибка [...] Mon mari se trompe' (VIII, 83), and attempting to call him away (VIII, 91-92), she also seeks to deny his efforts to save face and re-establish himself. Even his mistress treats him with contempt (VIII, 111), although he claims that in visiting her 'я возрождаюсь духом и сюда несусь мои житейские и семейные горести' (VIII, 110).

Only Myshkin and Kolia Ivolgin oppose such treatment of the General. Although he conspires with his mother to remove his father from Nastas'ia Filippovna's presence, Kolia's endorsement of his father's essential honesty (VIII, 113) is significant as it comes from the mouth of a child who is free from prejudice or hidden motives. In the scene with the heroine, Kolia's sensitivity to his father's suffering and shame clearly allies him to Myshkin's compassionate outlook; the pain he feels for the General is evident as he implores the Prince, '– Да убедите хоть вы его как-нибудь! Нельзя ли? Пожалуйста! – И у бедного мальчика даже слезы негодования горели на глазах' (VIII, 92). However, despite supporting his father, Kolia takes a realistic approach, and is later surprised that Myshkin has put his trust in him: 'странно, что вы от него чего-нибудь ожидали' (VIII, 112). Although he wishes to see the General's dignity restored, he obviously does not believe that involving him in practical matters or relying on him in a normal way will achieve anything.

Prince Myshkin lacks the experience of General Ivolgin's behaviour that his son has, and whether because of this or his commitment to treat all human beings equally whatever their sins and allow them their dignity, he enlists the General's help in finding Nastas'ia Filippovna. In spite of the urgency of his business, and the fact that Ivolgin takes him on a wild goose chase, the hero is reluctant to abandon him. For the first time we see that Myshkin's saintly script involves not only allowing others to assert their 'I' through narrative and self-expression, but also gives them control, allowing them the possibility of directing events themselves. However, in doing so his plans are compromised, as General Ivolgin's script for the evening threaten to overtake and undermine the hero's. Myshkin's doubts about the General also indicate his awareness of the difficulty of his stance, as allowing others fully to assert their 'I' or take control places his own mission in jeopardy: 'Князь был в отчаянии. Он понять не мог, как мог он так глупо довериться. В сущности, он и не доверялся; он рассчитывал на генерала, чтобы только как-нибудь войти к Настасье Филипповне, хотя бы даже с некоторым скандалом' (VIII, 107). This reflects Myshkin's discomfort and continuing uncertainty about how to respond to the General's extravagant lies; in their earlier encounter, 'князь начинал слушать с некоторою недоверчивостью' (VIII, 81), and on several occasions tries gently to correct his version of events (VIII, 81, 109). Nevertheless, he avoids openly undermining the General and hides his scepticism to the extent that despite the latter's obviously tenuous relationship to truth and the everyday world, Myshkin is prepared to take him at his word.

The Prince's decision to trust General Ivolgin is a indication of his compassion; like Kolia, he can see the General's suffering, and wishes to diminish it, in contrast with the other members of the family, who are driven by shame and embarrassment to try to contradict, or silence and control him. Although compassion has been a mainstay of Myshkin's narratives from the beginning of Part I, it is only when he moves away from the Epanchin house and encounters more of his own people that the form of this compassion becomes evident. It is not simply a matter of his feeling sorry for the humiliated and abused, or of defending them from attack by others, although we see Myshkin acting on these impulses, particularly when he prevents Gania from hitting his sister (VIII, 99). Nor is it just a case of attempting to change the attitudes of others, except by example, as he did in the story of Marie.

While these points play a significant role, the active expression of the Prince's compassion is to be found rather in his humility and self-effacement. The other characters in the novel are primarily concerned with asserting their own 'I', as is evinced not only by Nastas'ia Filippovna's melodramatic play-acting, which is designed to attract and sustain attention, but also by the fact that all the stories told by the rest of the protagonists in Part I (General Ivolgin and the participants in the *petit-jeu* at Nastas'ia's birthday party) have the self as their subject and promotion of the self-image as their basis. Myshkin's narratives, in contrast, have the other as their subject, and although the hero plays a role in his own stories, it is only in terms of his response to the suffering of others. When he moves from narrative to action, the same principle is at work; for much of this section of

the novel, he is a silent bystander or listener, allowing others to assert their 'I' and participating only when that 'I' is threatened. By listening to General Ivolgin, saving Varvara from her brother's slap, and encouraging Nastas'ia Filippovna to forge an identity for herself, rather than submitting to others' views of her, the Prince champions the 'I' of others when it is under attack. His actions are constantly aimed at restoring face to the other or avoiding their defacement.³⁷ As Belopol'skii asserts, 'ему совершенно чужд эгоизм'.³⁸

Myshkin applies this principle in response to any suffering or even potential suffering that he sees; in accepting Gania's slap, not only does he prevent Varvara from experiencing pain (both physical and emotional), which would cause a further breakdown in family relations, but he also takes on Gania's shame for his base action: 'закрыл руками лицо, отошел в угол, стал лицом к стене, и прерывающимся голосом проговорил: — О, как вы будете стыдиться своего поступка!' (VIII, 99). Furthermore, having already perceived Nastas'ia Filippovna's suffering by examining her photograph, he takes on the role of the servant she assumes him to be (VIII, 86-87), immediately signalling to her his willingness to deny his own self in order to help her assert hers, in a voluntary act of kenosis.³⁹ Again he deems his own position to be secondary, and allows others to direct events and project their own scripts.

³⁷ Johnson, 'Face of the Other', pp. 871-74.

³⁸ *Dostoevskii*, p. 71.

³⁹ See Webster, 'Kenotic Holiness', pp. 198-99, 213.

As discussed above (pp. 142-44), the denial of the 'I' by others is the root of much, perhaps all suffering and, as we see in Raskol'nikov's Napoleon theory, Shigalev's revolutionary plan and the Grand Inquisitor's twisted version of love, lies at the root of the anthill theory, which reduces the mass of humanity to slavery and otherness. An active response to reverse this process, negating one's own 'I' for the benefit of the other, therefore lies at the heart of ethical life, which Myshkin tries to emulate.

Fridlender states that, 'Победа нравственного начала возможно, с точки зрения Достоевского, лишь путем отказа от своей личности, отказа от «гордости», путем самоотречения, «смирения», подавления «плоти»'.⁴⁰ This is clearly linked to Dostoevskii's thoughts from his notebook on the death of his first wife, in 1864:

Возлюбить человека, *как самого себя*, по заповеди Христовой, – невозможно. Закон личности связывает. Я препятствует. [...] высочайшее употребление, которое может сделать из своей личности, из полноты развития своего я, – это как бы уничтожить это я, отдать его целиком всем и каждому безраздельно и беззаветно. И это величайшее счастье. Таким образом, закон я сливается с законом гуманизма, и в слитии, оба, и я и все (по-видимому, две крайние противоположности), взаимно уничтож[енн]ые друг для друга, в то же самое время достигают и высшей цели своего индивидуального развития каждый особо. (XX, 172-175, author's emphasis).

Humility and its basis in dissolving the 'I' for the sake of the other are therefore the keys to compassionate behaviour; by losing oneself in the other, and erasing the distinction between 'I' and 'Thou', the suffering of others becomes one's own. Furthermore, as denying oneself for the sake of

⁴⁰ *Realizm Dostoevskogo* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1964), p. 251.

the other is so difficult and contrary to the ego's normal impulses, to take this path, as Myshkin does, involves great self-sacrifice. In *Zimnie zametki*, Dostoevskii notes that, 'Самовольное, совершенно сознательное и никем не принужденное самопожертвование всего себя в пользу всех есть, по-моему, признак величайшего развития личности, высочайшего свободы собственной воли' (V, 79). Pustovoit sees self-sacrifice as the expression of universal responsibility: 'Идея самопожертвования в миропонимании Достоевского соприкасается с идеей вины человека и ответственности его за все происходящее вокруг и вообще в мире'.⁴¹ Myshkin's compassion and humility therefore both originate in seeing that he is not separate from other beings and intensify his ability to perceive this fact; assertion of the 'I', although a natural desire, denies one's connection to the other, and the hero attempts to reverse this impulse in order to re-establish a sense of interconnectedness and mutual responsibility for the suffering of others. Thus the essence of the unconditional love of Christ for all humanity is also the motivation for Myshkin's actions: 'Любовь и сострадание открывают ему сердца ближних, устраняют барьеры, разъединяющие люди, вызывают ответную реакцию любви и доброжелательства'.⁴²

Moreover, Kinoshita states that compassion and humility are more than simply themes or character traits:

⁴¹ 'Khristianskaia obraznost' v romanakh Dostoevskogo', in *Russkaia literatura XIX veka i khristianstvo*, pp. 82-91 (p. 84).

⁴² Belopol'skii, p. 72.

По словарям «смирение» означает «отсутствие гордости, высокомерия; сознание своего ничтожества, своей слабости». Это – определенная позиция по отношению к окружающему. И я полагаю, что Мышкин не просто герой романа. Он представляет также важную черту авторского подхода к людям, без его смирения, без его сострадания к людям никто из персонажей романа не открыл бы в себе «человека в человеке». В этом смысле «смирение» и «сострадание» для Достоевского не отвлеченные моралистические категории, а категории поэтические, связанные с главной художественной идеей автора.⁴³

Our investigation has shown that compassion lies at the heart of Myshkin's ethical notion of seeing and informs his response in thought and deed. His humility and self-effacement constitute the active expression of his primary motivation, allowing him to discover the 'man in man', and as such have a major effect on the course of *Idiot*, because they involve a shift in the relationship between self and other.

In moving into the sphere of interaction, the hero projects his script in several ways. Myshkin's originality, which, like Nastas'ia Filippovna's, in itself suggests that he has a plot-defining script to offer, is a major source of his ability to affect others and change their opinions of him. His unusual and inappropriate narratives and unconventional behaviour, for example in talking to the servant, attract the attention of others who, as we have noted, see that he has a story worth listening to. He is, as Robin Feuer Miller states, a 'crafty narrator';⁴⁴ in the literal sense, he is a master of his craft, as his use of rhetoric and his ability to interest others demonstrate. He also shows his willingness to play roles when he becomes a servant for

⁴³ 'Poniatie "krasoty"', p. 101.

⁴⁴ *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, p. 187.

Nastas'ia Filippovna and highlights his own inadequacy by calling himself an idiot. The fact that other characters compare themselves, often unfavourably, to Myshkin indicates that they perceive the fundamental difference between themselves and the Prince;⁴⁵ he is original precisely because of the lack of compassion and humility in others.

Furthermore, the characters respond to the hero's openness and readiness to discuss taboo subjects by placing their trust in him. Aglaia, despite her criticism of his ideas, confides in him about Gania's letter, as we have seen. Gania repeatedly accuses the Prince of interference and telling tales and betrays his ignorance of the latter's true capabilities, saying, 'О! идиот пр-ро-клятый, [...] и рассказать ничего не умеет!' (VIII, 75). However, after the scene with Nastas'ia Filippovna, he revises his opinion completely with the words, 'И с чего я взял давеча, что вы идиот! Вы замечаете то, чего другие никогда не заметят', before proceeding to confess frankly to Myshkin his state of mind and the situation he is in (VIII, 102-104), again suggesting that he now perceives the Prince's essentially honourable and trustworthy nature and is prepared to put himself at the hero's mercy. In this way we see the essentially dialogic nature of scripting; having earlier established reading and narrating as primary activities in the production of a script, we now see in the way others respond to Myshkin by sharing their secrets with him and involving him in their own dramas, which allows them to assert their own selfhood.

⁴⁵ See D. L. Sorkina, 'K voprosu o strukture kharakterov v romane F. M. Dostoevskogo *Idiot*', in *Ideinost' i masterstvo pisatel'ia. Uchenie zapiski*, 67 (Tomsk: Tomskskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1967), pp. 109-122 (p. 110).

The Prince's self-effacing script is easy for others to adopt as it involves no compromise to their own impulse to self-assertion.

The pattern of characters initially doubting Myshkin (in some cases before they have even seen him, as with Mrs Epanchina (VIII, 44-47)) before recognizing his positive qualities is repeated frequently. It is evident in the fact that Nastas'ia Filippovna mistakes him for a servant, but also in the reactions of minor figures. When the future heroine is introduced to the hero, 'князь ясно даже услышал слово «идиот» прошептанное сзади его, кажется, Фердыщенко в пояснение' (VIII, 89), but later, by asking Myshkin to draw lots and effectively act as referee for the *petit-jeu*, Ferdyshchenko acknowledges the Prince's honesty; he has no place in such sordid games, and no bad story to tell. Later the same character suggests that the hero will take Nastas'ia Filippovna (VIII, 138), perceiving that his humility will prevent him from treating her as other men do. The fact that so many of the characters change their opinion of Myshkin so soon after meeting him not only suggests the strength of his good will and compassion, which appears to attract everyone, but also marks him out from the other protagonists, who lack such qualities and are totally unused to personalities and ideas like the Prince's, and at first do not know how to react to such alien traits as honesty and openness. It further indicates that Myshkin's scripting in the first part of the novel is largely successful, as he does change the attitudes of others, if only temporarily in most cases.

However, overturning the beliefs of others and enabling them to see compassionately is only one side of his script, and the importance he ascribes to its other main facet, establishing his mission to save Nastas'ia

Filippovna, is evident in his insistence on going to her birthday party uninvited, and the desperation he betrays by enlisting General Ivolgin's help, implying a determination to put his script into action. Seeking out and protecting the fallen woman is the active mission which gives him his place in life, and allows him to fulfil his ideas on compassion and humility. Failure to act on this impulse would undermine his entire *raison d'être*.

By involving himself in the fate of Nastas'ia Filippovna and proposing marriage to her, Prince Myshkin activates his script, based on the motivating principles he outlined in the early chapters of the novel, and his interception in her affairs proves to be crucial for the novel and all the main characters. Having correctly seen that she is playing a role and is 'not like that' (VIII, 99), the hero has already demonstrated his trustworthy and non-judgemental nature to his new-found heroine. She in return puts her faith in him, asking him whether she should marry Gania, and abiding by his decision (VIII, 130), thereby giving him a significant role in her script. This indicates the multi-dimensional and interactive nature of scripting, in its expectation of and dependence on a compatible script from others. We do not know, of course, what Nastas'ia Filippovna would have done if Myshkin had given a different answer; in any case, it appears certain that she chose the Prince to make this decision precisely because of his honesty and perception, as it is abundantly evident that he is unlikely to endorse a marriage based on dishonesty, coercion and material gain. His response to her question shows that he is a good choice and a worthy champion of the heroine's cause, and suggests that she asked him the question to test his worthiness and suitability for a key role in her script.

The confirmation that he has a part to play in Nastas'ia Filippovna's life encourages Myshkin to raise the stakes, to propose not simply marriage but a new script for her in line with his own: 'Я вас честную беру, [...] а не рогожинскую' (VIII, 138). When he then mentions his inheritance for the first time, the proposal ceases to be a ridiculous idea, and it becomes clear that it appeals to a long-lost hope of salvation in the heroine and an alternative script where her shame is erased and her dignity and self-respect restored.⁴⁶

The Prince commands the attention of Nastas'ia Filippovna not only by appealing to her desire for salvation and respect, but also through his sense of the dramatic. Having remained curiously silent for much of the party, given his determination to be present, he shows effective use of timing to maximize the impact of his dramatic revelations on the other protagonists. We have already seen his expert employment of rhetorical devices to heighten interest in his stories and, as he moves into action, he demonstrates equal skill in performance; by first proposing marriage, then breaking the news of his inheritance (about which he has known all day) at this crucial juncture, Myshkin ensures absolute attention on himself as a potential partner and alternative direction for Nastas'ia Filippovna.

However, the attention the hero has to draw to himself in order to present his script also highlights the paradoxical nature of his involvement in the scripting process. We have examined the centrality of asserting the 'I' as a primary impulse to scripting, and seen in the previous chapter that

⁴⁶ See chapter 1, p. 85.

Nastas'ia Filippovna vigorously defends her loophole in order to avoid objectification by the other and retain the last word about herself. In his feuilleton of 15 June 1847, Dostoevskii described the importance of man's self-expression 'вследствие самой естественной необходимости человеческой сознать, осуществить и обусловить свое Я в действительной жизни' (XVIII, 31), confirming that this was a major issue for the writer from the beginning of his career.

Myshkin, in contrast, has as his basic script, in both ideological and practical terms, precisely the opposite impulse: everything in his script is directed away from himself and towards the other.⁴⁷ Not only is his compassion inspired by the face of the other, but more significantly, his humility exists solely in terms of its orientation towards the other, and thus demands the suppression of his own 'I'. It is perhaps for this reason that Myshkin's shame when he has finished telling a story is mentioned; although his narratives focus on the other, the very fact that he draws attention to himself in the telling undermines his attempts at self-effacement. In his main active script, to save the fallen Nastas'ia Filippovna from both her abusers and her own guilt, the Prince takes second position; unlike the other protagonists, he does not attack her loophole or try to control or force her to follow his path. Instead, he simply appeals to her better nature, proposes his script as an alternative and waits for her to come to him (which, over the course of the novel, she does more than once).

⁴⁷ Berdiaev notes this movement towards the other in Myshkin's actions, *Mirosozertsanie Dostoevskago* (Paris: YMCA, 1968), p. 40.

Morson and Emerson are therefore wrong to suggest that Myshkin's benevolence monologizes others;⁴⁸ even his question to the heroine, 'разве вы такая' (VIII, 99), is entirely open and unfinalizing, giving Nastas'ia Filippovna the opportunity to supply her own self-definition and control the direction of her life.

Therefore Myshkin, whilst adhering to the main features of the scripting process, also turns it on its head to produce his saintly script, which allows others to take control of the course of events and is aimed not at asserting his own 'I' but at allowing others to assert theirs. He is generally disinclined to contradict others when they classify or objectify him, and even when he confronts Gania over the latter's accusation of interference and idiocy, he couches his objection in terms which do not negate the criticism completely: 'я прежде действительно был так нездоров, что и в самом деле был почти идиот; но теперь я давно уже выздоровел, и потому мне несколько неприятно, когда меня называют идиотом в глаза' (VIII, 75). By recalling his own (past) idiocy, and not denying this appellation forcefully when it is used by others, not only does Myshkin not defend his loophole, but he also gives the other characters a point at which to attack it themselves. It is therefore significant that Dostoevskii chose the label 'Idiot' for the title of the novel, and indeed repeatedly mentions a character called 'Idiot' from the beginning of the notebooks (IX, 141 and *passim*), long before he had a fixed idea of the shape or content of the overall work, or even of the personality of the hero.

⁴⁸ *Prosaics*, p. 467.

Furthermore, the final sentence of the main body of the novel reinforces the definition of Myshkin as an idiot by another:

И если бы сам Шнейдер явился теперь из Швейцарии взглянуть на своего бывшего ученика и пациента, то и он, припомнив то состояние, в котором бывал иногда князь в первый год лечения своего в Швейцарии, махнул бы теперь рукой и сказал бы, как тогда, «Идиот!» (VIII, 507).

As both the title of the novel and its final word on the hero as an active participant, 'Idiot' thus stands as a symbol of Myshkin's lack of desire to assert his 'I' and defend his loophole, and consequently also of his attempts to allow others to define their 'I'. The Prince's self-effacing saintly scripting is therefore his defining characteristic and the central principle of the novel. It both influences the narrative in terms of the direction in which his actions take the novel, as he is the focus of attention for the other protagonists as well as for *Idiot* as a whole, and provides tension in its challenge to the self-assertion of the other characters, as they too fight for control of their lives and the narrative.

III: THE FOUNDATIONS OF MYSHKIN'S SCRIPT IN EXPERIENCE

It is not until early in Part II of the novel that the reader witnesses the true origin of the Prince's underlying ideology, when his thoughts about his experience of epilepsy are revealed before his fit. The chapter in which Myshkin wanders round St Petersburg is not only one of the most vivid and evocative in the novel, but also has the quality of an internal narrative, which expands and explicates the themes of his stories from Part I.

Initially the hero concentrates on the change in his sensations and the feeling of completeness and understanding he experiences:

Ощущение жизни, самосознания почти удесят�ялось в эти мгновения, продолжавшиеся как молния. Ум, сердце озарялись необыкновенным светом; все волнения, все сомнения его, все беспокойства как бы умиротворялись, разом, разрешались в какое-то высшее спокойствие, полное ясной, гармоничной радости и надежды, полное разума и окончательной причины [...] В том же, что это действительно «красота и молитва», что это действительно «высший синтез жизни», в этом сомневаться не мог, да и сомнений не мог допустить [...] Мгновения эти были именно одним только необыкновенным усилением самосознания [...] самосознание и в то же время самоощущения в высшей степени непосредственного (VIII, 188).

The alteration in perception experienced by Myshkin before the onset of his attack is the key to his entire worldview. As with his vision of the waterfall and the place where earth and sky meet, the prelude to his fit demonstrates his access to a higher reality and the possibility of true clarity, with regard to both the self and the nature of existence. His heightened awareness recalls the different temporal perspective he introduced while discussing the thoughts of condemned men; the idea of counting every second and experiencing the full value of life when it is under threat, described in his stories in Part I, has clearly arisen in the hero's mind as a result of his own illness, and accounts for his refusal to deny his belief that it is possible to live in this way (VIII, 53). Moreover, the fact that the characteristic falling and loss of consciousness associated with the fit signify an *imitatio mori* suggests an additional link between Myshkin's epilepsy and the death sentence as, in his attacks, he has repeatedly undergone a pre-death-like

experience.⁴⁹ However, as one repeatedly 'reprieved' from this death, he is also able to reflect on the changes to his consciousness and perception, and incorporate them into his philosophy of life. As noted above, it is the moment before death that uncovers maximal awareness, suggesting to Myshkin that his own experience is analogous to the seconds before execution. Cox also demonstrates that the end/recurring motif highlighted by Myshkin's epilepsy unites the themes of death, reprieve and resurrection in the novel.⁵⁰

The connection between Myshkin's overall philosophy of life and his pre-epileptic consciousness is further emphasized by his use of religious metaphors. As in his earlier stories, he introduces the spiritual aspect of his vision by using religious language, and on this occasion the fact that he employs a simple comparison reinforces the suggestion that this is not the essential point of his (now internalized) discourse. Having referred to the Gospels in his narratives in Part I in order to highlight ideas of suffering and compassion, Myshkin now expands his viewpoint to include not only the book of Revelation, but also to compare his experience to Islam, again implying that his vision, while being a personal article of faith, lies beyond the bounds of any single religion:

В этот момент, — как говорил он однажды Рогожину, в Москве, во время их тамошних сходов, — в этот момент мне как-то становится понятно необычайное слово о том, что *времени*

⁴⁹ Freud states that such attacks 'signify an identification with a dead person', in 'Dostoevsky and Parricide', in *Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by René Wellek (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1962), pp. 98-111 (p. 102).

⁵⁰ *Between Earth and Heaven: Shakespeare, Dostoevsky and the Meaning of Christian Tragedy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 170.

больше не будет. Вероятно, [...] это та же самая секунда, в которую не успел пролиться опрокинувшийся кувшин с водой, эпилептика Магомета, успевшего, однако, в ту самую секунду обозреть все жилища Аллаховы (VIII, 189, author's emphasis).

As well as linking his own idea of a higher reality to faith in general, the Prince in both cases describes a different temporal dimension, as he did in his narratives about the death sentence. The story of Mohammed is relevant not only because it connects the hero with another spiritual epileptic, but also because it suggests that in this moment of heightened awareness, the whole of life ('все жилища Аллаховы') can be seen simultaneously. The quotation from Revelation fixes the origin of the hero's re-creative impulse in his epilepsy, and gives a clear indication of the meaning of this altered perception of reality, as the Apocalypse both contains great horror and heralds the end of suffering: 'and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away'.⁵¹ The pain that is the result of man's fall in Genesis is erased at the end of the New Testament through Christ's compassion, and the fact that Myshkin is also inspired to look beyond time to end the suffering of others suggests an understanding of the true nature of reality, originating in the first place in his epileptic aura. Thus it is not only the access to a higher reality, but also the practical compassion that arises as a result of the understanding of this-worldly suffering which causes the hero to think, 'Да, за этот момент можно отдать всю жизнь!' (VIII, 188). It is for this reason that I call Myshkin's underlying ideology

⁵¹ Revelation 21. 4.

and its influence on his actions and his saintly scripting 'Compassionate Realism', as the ethical counterpart of the 'Fantastic Realism' which also originates in the direct apprehension of death.⁵²

Morson is therefore wrong to connect the Prince's attitude to his fit to the disease of 'isolated presentness', in which 'the present may grow so intense that it almost banishes both memory and anticipation. Only now matters'.⁵³ He states,

Myshkin is well aware that such a temporality is also morally dangerous. The 'highest' moment lies beyond good and evil, inasmuch as good and evil depend on consequences. The infinite present renders all other moments inconsequential [...] It serves for [such characters] as yet another route to the idea that 'all is permitted'. Previous commitments vanish and anticipated results do not count.⁵⁴

Morson compares Myshkin's attraction to epileptic time to Aleksei Ivanovich's obsession with the 'moment of transformation' of gambling in *Igrok*, and the revolutionaries in *Besy*, who are 'captivated by revolutionism', and 'attracted by a time when the past is abolished, when anything can happen in an infinitely intensified present'.⁵⁵ However, although Myshkin's fit is problematic, as we shall see, Morson ignores a basic difference between these other cases and the Prince's, for in no way does it lead to 'a neglect of daily life'.⁵⁶ While in *Igrok* Aleksei loses all sense of moral responsibility, even eventually for Polina, under the

⁵² See p. 166 above.

⁵³ *Narrative and Freedom*, p. 201.

⁵⁴ *Narrative and Freedom*, p. 202.

⁵⁵ *Narrative and Freedom*, pp. 203-5.

⁵⁶ *Narrative and Freedom*, p. 205.

influence of gambling, and attends to no other aspect of his (or anyone else's) life, Myshkin has a quest in his daily life, to help the other achieve selfhood and, rather than destroying his sense of responsibility, the moment before his fit, like the analogous moment before death, actually engenders for the Prince a full realization of the consequences of human actions through recognition of the interconnectedness of all the causal conditions of human life. Far from isolating Myshkin from the present, epileptic time reinforces the importance of now, of experiencing every second, not only in the responsibility which underlies moral choice, but also in the fact that selfhood in Bakhtinian terms is achieved only in interactive events in the present.⁵⁷

The characteristic pattern of epilepsy, with mounting tension and its sudden release, is evident in the climax of the scene when, at the very moment of the murder attempt, Myshkin falls into a fit; it is this which

⁵⁷ The idea of presentness developed in *Idiot* has parallels with Buddhist meditation techniques, in which moment-to-moment awareness of presentness is used to develop understanding of dependent origination and the interconnectedness of all beings, and to erode the distinction of self and other; the original discourse of the Buddha detailing practical instructions for the foundations of mindfulness through meditation techniques, the *Satipatthana sutta*, can be found on the website 'Access to Insight: Readings in Theravada Buddhism', <<http://www.accesstinsight.org/canon/majjhima/index.html>> (14 June 2001). For further implications of the links between these issues, see Sogyal Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, ed. by Patrick Gaffney and Andrew Harvey (London: Rider, 1998), pp. 14-117. Three articles have linked Dostoevskii with Buddhism; Irina Kirk, 'Buddhistic Elements in *The Idiot*', *Studia Slavica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 18.1-2 (1972), 77-84, traces the similarities between Myshkin and Siddartha Gautama (the Buddha); Michael Futrell, 'Buddhism and *The Brothers Karamazov*', *Dostoevsky Studies*, 2 (1981), 155-162, examines the figure of Alesha Karamazov in relation to the Bodhisattva ideal of universal compassion; and G. Pomerants, 'Knjaz' Myshkin', *Sintaksis*, 9 (1981), 112-66, relates the Prince's vision at the waterfall to Zen art and philosophy (p. 153). The concept of presentness in *Idiot* as it relates to Buddhist thinking would also appear to be a fruitful area for future study but is, alas, outside the scope of the current research.

saves him from Rogozhin's knife. However this dynamic is apparent not only during his bouts of illness; as Dalton points out,

the novel also shows this 'epileptic' pattern in its larger structure: the action seems to progress unevenly, in waves of tension that gather and burst in climactic scenes of spectacular emotional violence, leaving the narrative energy of the novel depleted and for a time directionless, until a new wave of tension begins to accumulate.⁵⁸

Catteau also states that Dostoevskii used his epilepsy as part of a 'bolder orchestration', and notes that Dostoevskii's style in the novel is marked by 'a violent and convulsive impetus'.⁵⁹

If we examine the major crowd scenes in the novel, especially those featuring Nastas'ia Filippovna in Part I, where emotional conflict is heightened to the point of hysteria, we see that it is through Myshkin's words and actions that the tension is released. By accepting Gania's slap and questioning the heroine's behaviour at the Ivolgins', and by proposing marriage and revealing news of his inheritance in the following scene, the Prince diffuses the tension through his unexpected, conciliatory reactions, his humility and openness, which break the cycle of mistrust and abuse, allowing human interrelations to return to the normal and harmonious. The epileptic pattern which prevents Rogozhin from perpetrating a great crime is also employed by the hero to avert other conflicts, and in this way he uses his saintly script to impose control over the text and the other characters. While Nastas'ia Filippovna exerts control through melodramatic

⁵⁸ *Unconscious Structure*, p. 124.

⁵⁹ *Process of Literary Creation*, pp. 123, 130.

means which intensify oppositions, charging the atmosphere with conflict and aggression, Myshkin's gentle version of control, originating like his vision of a higher reality in his epilepsy, removes aggression and opposition, projecting a sense of calm onto scenes previously defined by hysteria and tension, as well as introducing an alternative model of behaviour. Gania's sudden volte-face with regard to the hero after the first scene (VIII, 101-6) illustrates the potential of Myshkin's actions, arising from his illness, to change people for the better, if only temporarily. Not only does the Prince's entire philosophy of life originate in his illness, but he is also able to use the structure it provides to inhibit the aberrant behaviour of the protagonists; at the Epanchins' soirée, his epilepsy intervenes to halt his own inappropriate actions. It is this dynamic which defines the peaks and troughs of emotional tension which characterize the structuring of the novel.

The passage discussed above containing Myshkin's thoughts about the spiritually beneficial aspects of his experience of epilepsy (pp. 200-201) is also significant in that it marks a shift in the Prince's ideas, as he concludes this train of thought, 'Да, в Москве они часто сходились с Рогожиным и говорили не об одном этом. «Рогожин давеча сказал, что я был тогда ему братом; он это в первый раз сегодня сказал»' (VIII, 189). The fact that he has thought about this issue and discussed it previously indicates that it is a meaningful part of his ideological make-up, not merely a random preoccupation brought on by his illness.

More importantly, by recalling Rogozhin as a person, rather than as a pair of eyes following him, for the first time since leaving his house,

Myshkin turns from the general to the particular. Having mentally examined the nature of his experience, he now moves on to think about current events and the question of compassion in relation to Rogozhin's treatment of Nastas'ia Filippovna, and how it differs from his own, wondering, 'Разве не способен к свету Рогожин? Он говорит, что любит ее не так, что в нем нет сострадания, нет «никакой такой жалости». [...] Гм... Рогожин за книгой, – разве уж это не «жалость», не начало «жалости»?' (VIII, 191). Although it seems unlikely that Rogozhin will overcome his cruel and morbid passion through reading a book, the Prince is not merely returning here to the aesthetic principle; he is also highlighting the mutual nature of compassion and the fact that as an interdependent process, it provides a sound basis for his saintly scripting. Rogozhin's admission that when Nastas'ia Filippovna suggested he read Solov'ev, 'в первый раз как живой человек вздохнул' (VIII, 179), indicates that if shown compassion, he is capable of responding, and that he is in many ways as much a victim of the heroine as she is of him, as aside from this incident she treats him with contempt and persistently denies him the possibility of selfhood, as we saw in chapter 1. Myshkin further reiterates his own feelings and hopes for both Nastas'ia Filippovna and Rogozhin:

А ему, князю, любить страстно эту женщину – почти немисливо, почти было бы жестокостью, бесчеловечностью. [...] у него [Рогожин] огромное сердце, которое может страдать и сострадать. Когда он узнает всю истину и когда убедится, какое жалкое существо эта поврежденная, полоумная, – разве не простит он ей тогда прежнее, все мучения свои? Разве не станет ее слугой, братом, другом, провидением? Сострадание осмыслит и научит самого Рогожина. Сострадание есть

главнейший и, может быть, единственный закон бытия человечества (VIII, 191-92).

In this way, the hero demonstrates the link between his compassion, his active script to save the fallen woman from her suffering, and the rest of his vision.

However, the chapter leading up to his fit, in spite of, or perhaps because of its centrality in establishing the origin of Myshkin's vision and the links between his ideas and his actions, also highlights a number of problems regarding the hero's underlying ideology which undermine his script and have a significant effect on the subsequent development of the novel.

As in his earlier story of the man reprieved from the death sentence, when the Prince acknowledged the horror of the situation but concentrated on the potential of the altered perception the man experienced, so in his own repeated 'reprieves' Myshkin also faces horror and darkness as an intrinsic part of his revelation of a higher reality. He rationalizes the negative side of his vision and the fact that it is a consequence of his illness:

Что же в том, что это болезнь? – решил он наконец. – Какое до того дело, что это напряжение ненормальное, если самый результат, если минута ощущения, припоминаемая и рассматриваемая уже в здоровом состоянии, оказывается в высшей степени гармонией, красотой, дает неслыханное и негаданное дотоле чувство полноты, меры, примирения и восторженного молитвенного слияния с самым высшим синтезом жизни? (VIII, 188).

However, he does not deny the true ambiguity of his experience:

‘отупление, душевный мрак, идиотизм стояли пред ним ярким

последствием этих «высочайших минут» (VIII, 188). The joy of witnessing the 'higher synthesis' and the despair that follows are two sides of the same coin; Murav sees the internal contradictions of the epileptic experience, its '*pro* and *contra*', in her words, as being indicative of its open-endedness and indefinability.⁶⁰ Myshkin, however, feels that the moment of light and understanding is worth the spiritual annihilation to which it inevitably leads.

The dark side of the Prince's vision exists not only on the metaphysical level in the question of whether his ideology is valid, given the ambiguous nature of its origins, but also on a practical level, as it affects his thought processes about the current situation. Again his ideas in the abstract are shown to underpin the motivation for his actions, but as this now concerns negative aspects of the basis of his vision, the consequences are equally negative.

The confusion and lack of concentration evident in Myshkin before his fit pervade the entire chapter. His mind skips from one subject to another ('впрочем' is used six times on page 190 alone to indicate six changes of direction), and we are told, 'Он знал, что в такое предприпадочное время он бывает необыкновенно рассеян и часто даже смешивает предметы и лица, если глядит на них без особого, напряженного внимания' (VIII, 187). We later witness this as his thoughts move quickly from the Zhemarin murder to his recent encounter with Lebedev, mixing the two issues into a single event: 'И какой же, однако,

⁶⁰ *Holy Foolishness*, p. 83.

гадкий и вседозволенный прыщек этот давешний племянник Лебедева! А впрочем, что же я? [...] разве он убил эти существа, этих шесть человек? Я как будто смешиваю... как это странно...' (VIII, 190). Given his previous attention to faces as the basis for his compassion, the confusion brought on by his epilepsy is potentially disastrous.

When Myshkin then turns to the question of whether Rogozhin would kill, the negative implications of his current state of mind become clear, as his morbid preoccupation with murderers (the ultimate deniers of others' selfhood) escalates. Although the Prince suggests on his first day in Russia that Rogozhin might kill Nastas'ia Filippovna, his suspiciousness now is of a different order; and even though his rival does not deny the probability of his killing the heroine, and provokes Myshkin's paranoia by following him, the damage caused to the hero's vision by his participation in Rogozhin's mind games is severe. On the one hand he mentally tries to exonerate the latter, but on the other, despite his earlier promise not to do so, and in the full knowledge that his opponent is following him, he deliberately provokes Rogozhin's murderous jealousy by searching for the murder weapon in a shop and going to the heroine's house, testing whether the other man is following his own violent script which cuts him off from his fellow men, or has accepted Myshkin's compassionate and harmonious alternative; it soon becomes clear that the former is true.

The troubling nature of these semi-conscious thoughts and actions for the Prince, and his anxiety that they are undermining his script and adversely affecting his compassion towards others, are apparent from the beginning of the chapter:

он был в мучительном напряжении и беспокойстве и в то же самое время чувствовал необыкновенную потребность уединения. Ему хотелось быть одному и отдаться всему этому страдательному напряжению совершенно пассивно, не ища ни малейшего выхода. Он с отвращением не хотел разрешать нахлынувших в его душу и сердце вопросов. «Что же, разве я виноват во всем этом?» бормотал он про себе, почти не сознавая своих слов (VIII, 186).

In his provocation of Rogozhin, Myshkin not only sees his own complicity in his rival's future crime, but also feels guilt at his failure to remain free of judgement. In Part I of the novel, the hero is characterized by his refusal to judge even the worst criminal. Now he assumes Rogozhin (as well as Lebedev and his nephew) are guilty even before the event, and castigates himself, 'Не преступление ли, не низость ли с моей стороны так цинически-откровенно сделать такое предположение!' (VIII, 190). Nevertheless, although fully aware of his fault, he continues the quest to prove his idea true. As judging the other entails objectifying them and claiming for oneself the right to say the final word about them, it is entirely opposed to Myshkin's ideal of giving dignity and respect to the other through self-effacement and humility. The hero's final words before his fit, 'Парфен, не верю!..' (VIII, 195) signal the irreconcilable nature of the two sides of his epilepsy. He can neither believe nor not believe; his compassion and knowledge of the other's suffering prevents him from acknowledging the crime even as it is being committed, while the loss of his essential trusting nature brought on by his illness induces him to participate in the very planning of the crime. The breakdown in the Prince's humility, which causes him to suspect and judge others, compromises his compassion and therefore his entire being. In comparison with the

standards of non-judgement he set for himself in Part I, he has suffered a fall from grace.

The ambivalent nature of Myshkin's revelation is paralleled in changes that we see in his behaviour from the beginning of Part II, suggesting that the suspiciousness and paranoia he experiences before his fit do not denote a momentary lapse of purity caused by the onset of his illness, but a definite and consistent change in his personality which radically and permanently alters the tenor of the novel.

We immediately become aware of the difference in Myshkin from Part I, as his appearance has changed: 'всё платье было другое, сшитое в Москве и хорошим портным' (VIII, 159). However, in contrast to his eccentric garb of Part I, which set him apart from others and in which he was apparently comfortable, now the Prince looks simply incongruous, as 'и в платье был недостаток: слишком уж сшито было по моде' (VIII, 159). By adopting new, fashionable attire, as Slattery points out, Myshkin is also signalling a new attachment to the temporality of Russian life.⁶¹ In line with the importance of the perception of time illustrated in his early narratives the hero, when he first arrives in Petersburg is still living according to his 'железные серебряные часы', and claims, 'О, у меня время терпит; у меня время совершенно мое' (VIII, 19, 23). On his return to the city, however, he is in a hurry, 'как бы боясь потерять время или

⁶¹ *Fantastic Prince*, p. 79.

не застать кого-то дома' (VIII, 159), suggesting that his own relation to time has changed.⁶²

Furthermore, his conversation with Lebedev shows us that, in contrast to his former naïveté, Myshkin is now fully aware when someone is trying to deceive him. His impatience with Lebedev's games is evident, and he is more forceful and uncompromising in cutting through the latter's constant evasions in order to ascertain the current situation than he was, for example, with General Ivolgin in Part I: 'Вы думали, что я из моей глуши не подымусь по вашему первому уведомлению, и написали для отчистки совести. А я вот и приехал. Ну, полноте, не обманываете' (VIII, 166). From a worldly point of view, the hero is a more integrated human being, and is able to cope with the ambiguities of life far better than previously, although as we see in his fit, and in subsequent events in the novel, this move towards the norms of behaviour of the other protagonists has serious implications for Myshkin's entire ideology and the saintly scripting it supports. The fact that the Prince's attitude towards others has changed is emphasized by his abrupt departure from Lebedev's: 'Выходя, он забыл даже сказать «прощайте», даже голову не кивнул, что несовместно было с известною Лебедеву вежливостью и внимательностью князя' (VIII, 169). His open-hearted friendliness towards all has been abandoned for the sake of expediency, suggesting that his guiding principles – the foundations of his saintly scripting – have been fundamentally undermined. Whereas earlier he ceded control to others and

⁶² See Slattery, *Fantastic Prince*, p. 79.

participated in their attempts to assert their 'I', he is now impatient with the other and anxious to keep control of the situation himself.

Myshkin's ability to communicate and teach is also damaged. We have seen the strength of his narratives in outlining his worldview and shaping others' opinions of him in Part I of the novel. However, it soon becomes clear in Part II that he is now deprived of that power. Although in the four stories he tells Rogozhin he is trying, as in his previous narratives, to say something about human nature and faith, these stories are remarkable not for the clarity of Myshkin's vision, but for the inappropriate response of the listener:

Рогожин покатились со смеху. Он хохотал так, как будто был в каком-то припадке. Даже странно было смотреть на этот смех после такого мрачного недавнего настроения. – Вот это я люблю! Нет, вот это лучше всего! – выкрикивал он конвульсивно, чуть не задыхаясь. – Один совсем в бога не верует, а другой уж до того верует, что и людей режет по молитве... Нет, этого, брат князь, не выдумаешь! Ха-ха-ха! Нет, это лучше всего!.. (VIII, 183).

As William James states, 'there is no worse lie than a truth misunderstood by those who hear it'.⁶³ When Rogozhin identifies with the man who sold his Christ and the murderer, and acts on both these impulses, we witness the negative consequences of a mis-directed narrative and the failure of the other to take up the role allocated by a particular script. As scripting is mutual and interactive, the wrong attitude of another can have dire consequences. The Prince tells the stories in order to open Rogozhin's heart to the possibility of a new life, as part of his mission to rehabilitate both

⁶³ *Religious Experience*, p. 355.

Nastas'ia Filippovna and his opponent. His stories attempt to inspire a sense of compassion by emphasizing the interconnections between people suggesting that the drunken soldier who sold his cross is the husband of the young mother, as Robin Feuer Miller notes.⁶⁴ However, Rogozhin reflects on precisely the wrong aspects for Myshkin's purpose, indicating that in contrast to his earlier perspicacity, the Prince on this occasion misread the situation and the personality and intentions of his interlocutor. For a character who has placed so much emphasis on seeing as the first step to compassion and humility, the disappearance of this faculty is disastrous, and implies that the gap between the other protagonists, who have difficulty seeing, and Myshkin, the wise outsider who can teach them how to look, has narrowed.

We also witness a decline in Myshkin's ability to influence others for the better and gain their trust. In Part I of the novel, we see the Epanchins (in particular Aglaia), Rogozhin, Nastas'ia Filippovna, Kolia and even Gania warm to the Prince and place their trust in him as a result of his expression of the ideal in narrative and action. Now Rogozhin's reaction tells us the limits of the hero's influence, and Rogozhin's unwillingness to trust Myshkin or accept his script:

Я, как тебя нет предо мною, то тотчас же к тебе злобу и чувствую, Лев Николаевич. В эти три месяца, что я тебя не видал, каждую минуту на тебя злобился, ей-богу. Так бы тебя взял и отравил чем-нибудь! Вот так. Теперь ты четверти часа со

⁶⁴ In 'Dostoevskii's Parables: Paradox and Plot', in *Cultural Discontinuity and Reconstruction: the Byzanto-Slav heritage and the creation of a Russian national literature in the nineteenth century*, ed. by Jostein Børtnes and Ingunn Lunde (Oslo: Solum forlag, 1997), pp. 168-184 (p. 175).

мною не сидишь, а уж вся злоба моя проходит, и ты мне опять по-прежнему люб (VIII, 174).

The message of hope and positive example of ethical behaviour he sets for others are useless in the face of a violent and obsessive counter-script.

As well as mis-reading Rogozhin, it also becomes clear during their conversation that the hero has a limited understanding of Nastas'ia Filippovna's motivation. In particular, although he accepts that Rogozhin will probably kill the heroine, he cannot comprehend why she courts this: 'Уж, конечно, она не так дурно думает о тебе, как ты говоришь. Ведь иначе значило бы, что она сознательно в воду или под нож идет, за тебя выходя. Разве может быть это? Кто сознательно в воду или под нож идет?' (VIII, 179). His inability to grasp this point could signify three things, each of which compromises his worldview: either he has a blindspot preventing him from seeing the central role of guilt and shame in the suffering of others, in which case his compassionate impulse is misplaced or incomplete, as it ignores the desire for punishment (and this has already been suggested in his pronouncing the innocence of both Nastas'ia Filippovna and Marie, in the face of their own certainty of their guilt), or he is deliberately understating the danger, or he simply does not know what is going on. In the latter two cases he would appear to be providing an overly optimistic interpretation of the situation in order to extricate himself from a difficult position. In all three scenarios, the failure of his insight and the damage it implies to his all-inclusive compassion, when taken in conjunction with the other differences we have noted, can be seen as part of

a new pattern of behaviour, signifying a deterioration in the positive personality and actions of Myshkin.

The roots of this alteration are twofold, and both are to be found in the missing six months between Parts I and II. The first is raised in the final scene of Part I, but only exerts its influence during the extended absence and, like his new relation to temporality, is signalled by his fashionable new clothes: the Prince's inheritance is in large part responsible for his fall from grace. The purity of his intentions (and therefore his actions) is immediately undermined by his newly-acquired wealth, as we see when he effectively joins in the bidding for Nastas'ia Filippovna; although trying to free her from the shame of being bought and sold, he does so by also offering her riches. Perhaps most importantly, the money brings Myshkin into contact with the material world. On receiving his inheritance, Myshkin ceases to be an outsider. As the novel develops, he is surrounded by mercenary hangers-on and false claimants on the one hand, and members of high society for whom money signifies substance and respectability on the other, while the attention he receives when he announces his inheritance is contrary to his practice of humility and self-effacement.

The hero's awareness that he has been compromised by his relations with other people is shown shortly before his fit, when he wishes for the first of several times that he was completely alone and far away (VIII, 186); he recognizes that although the other is needed for self-affirmation, his lost separateness from society has rendered him ineffective and jeopardized his mission. This also signals the paradoxical nature of human relations, as the need for the other to participate in the event of being is constantly at risk

from the assertion of power and rights, which lead to denial of others' selfhood. The possibility of the ideal self-other relationship raised by Myshkin's saintly scripting in Part I of *Idiot* is therefore undermined by the dangers of the conflicts that characterize interhuman relations in the world of the novel.

The second origin of the change in Myshkin lies in the substance of the 'absent centre' of the novel: the interaction between the hero, Nastas'ia Filippovna and Rogozhin in the six-month gap which follows Part I. The significance of these missing months is often overlooked by critics; Turner examines the evidence of what happens in the gap between Parts I and II, but does not address the issue of why the novel was written in this fashion.⁶⁵ Danow examines the role of absence and lack of communication in *Idiot*, particularly in the depiction of Nastas'ia Filippovna, but does not extend the subject to look at the six month gap.⁶⁶ However, when the temporal arrangement of the novel is considered, this gap has to be of central importance, as it covers the entire course of the relationship between the three main protagonists, Myshkin, Rogozhin and Nastas'ia Filippovna. As Fridlender states, 'о событиях, имевших место в это время, автор говорит лишь бегло – они характеризуются в той мере, в какой это необходимо для понимания отношений, сложившихся между героями к началу второй части'.⁶⁷ If we look at the external structure, Part I takes place over a single day, setting the scene, and

⁶⁵ 'Between Part I and Part II of The Idiot', *SEER*, 65, 4 (1987), 517-36.

⁶⁶ *Dialogic Sign*, pp. 55-68.

⁶⁷ 'Roman *Idiot*', p. 204.

introducing the characters, but the central relationship of the three main characters is only definitively established at the end of that day, at Nastas'ia Filippovna's birthday party, with the hero's proposal of marriage and Rogozhin's successful bid for her.

We turn the page to begin Part II expecting to read about the continuing adventures of our three protagonists, only to be told that this information is not available, even to the narrator whom we thought to be omniscient. We are given vague details of scandals, affairs and crises, but never shown the more detailed picture, despite occasional references to this period throughout the remainder of the novel. As Part II develops, sub-plots take centre-stage, and Myshkin has little chance to see Rogozhin or Nastas'ia Filippovna, and even less chance to talk to them. However, the reader remains aware that the absent relationship between these three continues to occupy the central plot-line, which is confirmed as the denouement refocuses attention on them. As Dostoevskii wrote to his niece in October 1868, 'для развязки романа почти и писался и задуман был весь роман' (XXVIII.ii, 318).

The reader is placed in the rather bizarre position of trying to make sense of a denouement involving a triad of relationships that have never been addressed directly, and have been completely sidelined for over half the novel. In these circumstances, the missing six months gain in significance, as they encompass the whole period of the relationship between the three protagonists. As Danow remarks, 'what the reader is not shown [...] counts for as much in the total aesthetic and dramatic effect as

what is made part of his purview'.⁶⁸ Without knowing what occurred in this absent section, we can have only the haziest impression of the motives of all three, and of what happens at the end of the novel. However, as the lines of causation have been erased, we have to find other means of coming to this understanding.

While this lack of information disconcerts the reader, there are also four major changes to the texture of *Idiot* after the gap between Parts I and II. When the story resumes in Part II, it feels almost like a different novel, emphasizing the significance of the missing months. Frank comments that 'the first part of *The Idiot* was conceived and written as a self-contained unity and perhaps may best be read as an independent novella'.⁶⁹ The temporal movement of the novel alters, the position and reliability of the narrator changes, the story takes a whole new direction, and the characters of all three major protagonists in this central triangle are in many ways different. As all these changes occur either immediately or shortly after the six-month gap, this is evidently their point of origin.⁷⁰

As well as the difference we note in Myshkin's character when he returns to St Petersburg, there is also evidence of a change in Rogozhin. Lord refers to it, and Hollander mentions that he is no longer susceptible to Myshkin's light, as he once was, but otherwise this feature is rarely addressed.⁷¹ However, it is immediately presented to the reader at the start

⁶⁸ *Dialogic Sign*, p. 61.

⁶⁹ *The Miraculous Years*, p. 325.

⁷⁰ The temporal and narrational changes will be examined in chapter 3, pp. 328-45.

⁷¹ Lord, *Essays and Perspectives*, p. 98; Hollander, 'Apocalyptic Framework', p. 136.

of Part II, as both the reader and Myshkin see the 'странный, горячий взгляд чьих-то двух глаз, в толпе' (VIII, 158). The intensely physical presence of Rogozhin in Part I, when he twice bursts on the scene surrounded by a crowd, creating the maximum noise and attention, is replaced by a wraith, a shadowy figure in the park, the product of a dream or hallucination. None of the characters he threatens, Myshkin, Ippolit, and Nastas'ia Filippovna, are even sure whether he is actually there or not; the otherness to which the heroine has reduced him seems to deprive him of all humanity and even the concrete form of a living being. Having previously been characterized by drunken and rowdy behaviour and surrounded by a chaotic mob, he is now subdued and solitary, and the torment he is suffering owing to his relationship with Nastas'ia Filippovna is apparent in his description of their violent and damaging interactions before his attempt on the Prince's life.

The darkness that has descended on Rogozhin is symbolized in two ways: firstly by the gloomy house with which he is now connected, its oppressive history connected with religious sects and his father's avarice intensifying the burden of his morbid passion; and secondly by the painting of the dead Christ contained within the house. The thematic significance of the Holbein painting has been discussed thoroughly.⁷² However, its

⁷² See, for example, E. Gaede, 'Lecture d'un Tableau: Le "Christ Mort" de Holbein dans *L'Idiot* de Dostoïevski', *Annales de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Luminaires de Nice*, 41 (1981), 107-23; E. I. Marchenko, "'Strannaia kartina" Gansa Golbeina Mladshogo v romane F. Dostoevskogo *Idiot*', in *Stil' – obraz – vremia. Problemy istorii i teorii iskusstva. Sbornik statei*, ed. by M. N. Sokolov (Moscow: Akademiia khudozhestv SSSR, 1991), pp. 93-118; I Molnar, "'One's faith could be smashed by such a picture": Interrelation of Word and Image (Icon) in Dostoevsky's Fiction: Holbein's "Christ in the Tomb" in the Ideological and Compositional Structure of the novel *The Idiot*', *Acta Litteraria Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 32, 3-4 (1990), 245-58; Julia Kristeva,

structural importance to the novel, arising from the characters' responses to it, has not been addressed. For all three participants in the major emotional triangle of the novel, the painting addresses and exemplifies issues of major personal concern, connected with the time they spent in Moscow between Parts I and II, and how that period changed their lives. Nastas'ia Filippovna's suffering and eventual death are echoed in Holbein's depiction of Christ, as is the impossibility of her being resurrected by Myshkin, while for Rogozhin, the painting both precipitates his loss of faith and represents what it can lead to, in terms both of his own suffering and the destruction he can bring to others.

The Gothic overtones of *Idiot* are most sharply defined here, not only in the threatening presence of the Rogozhin residence itself (which Ippolit later describes as being 'похож на кладбище' (VIII, 338)), but also in the fact that it holds such a terrifying and realistic representation of death. The Holbein painting has an analogous function to the horrifying wax model of a maggot-ridden corpse found at the Castle of Udolpho in Ann Radcliffe's novel (which Dostoevskii knew from childhood, and referred to in *Brat'ia Karamazovy* (XV, 158)); it is an object of terror at the heart of a terrible place, simultaneously a reminder of base deeds and an inspiration to further evil. At a point when Myshkin's vision is being undermined by his illness and early signs of the changes he has undergone, the intrusion of the Gothic provides an additional threat to the hero's entire

'Holbein's Dead Christ', *Zone*, 3 (1989), 238-69; Jeffrey Meyers, 'Holbein and *The Idiot*', in *Painting and the Novel* (Manchester: Manchester University Press; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1975), pp. 136-47; Meerson, 'Ivolgin and Holbein', pp. 208-10; Muller, 'Obraz Khrista', pp. 378-80.

worldview, and as the melodramatic heroine Nastas'ia Filippovna also reflects many Gothic characteristics, we suspect that the darkness inherent in this feature has played a major role in the change in the hero after the six-month gap.

The hero cannot bear to look at the painting of Christ, as it presents Christ as man, Christ as failure, Christ stripped of His divine attributes and unable to overcome the laws of nature, objectivized in death and denied His usual meaning as an ideal model of selfhood.⁷³ This forces him to confront his own failure, or rather, on this first occasion, to avoid confronting it, as it reflects his inability to fulfil his self-appointed mission to save the fallen woman, Nastas'ia Filippovna, as well as the compromising of the Christ-like qualities he enjoyed when he first returned to Russia from Switzerland. Both the painting of the dead Christ and the changing presentation of the Prince show that what was thought to be eternal is in fact temporary and finite. In the Holbein and in the confusion of his mind before his fit, Myshkin faces all the issues of how he has changed, what he has lost, and where he has failed.

This leads to a conscious act of suppression by Myshkin of the events between his two visits to Petersburg, as he attempts to draw a line under the past and lead a more normal life, rather than an unconscious act of repression, as suggested by Elizabeth Dalton's interpretation.⁷⁴ The Holbein, in which the Prince's ideology is both crystallized and questioned,

⁷³ This aspect of the Holbein will be discussed in relation to Ippolit in chapter 3, pp. 296-98 below.

⁷⁴ *Unconscious Structure*, pp. 174-6.

begins this process, and after the period of maximal uncertainty in the novel, the change of direction is completed by Myshkin's fit. The timing of the attack is significant, as it introduces the origin of his worldview in his experience after having demonstrated the 'superstructure' of his ideas and actions it inspires. On the basis of his perceptive narratives and compassionate nature and actions in Part I, the hero comes across in an extremely positive light, but on his return to Petersburg, significant doubts begin to appear. When these are then shown to be an inherent part of the experience underlying his entire ideology, both his philosophy and his actions are compromised, and as a result, the remainder of the novel is characterized by a shift in focus, with the darker side of Myshkin's vision asserting itself more forcefully and gradually weakening his ethical stance.

It is this which leads to the lack of focus in the central section of the novel; Myshkin, losing sight of his ideal and having abandoned his mission, is looking for a replacement, another cause which will allow him to express the ideal through ethical interaction. However, while he tries to ignore the past, other characters perpetually remind him of his mission.

IV: ROCKING THE FOUNDATIONS

After the first hints of an alteration in Myshkin's character and behaviour in the opening chapters of Part II, the removal to Pavlovsk which follows his fit constitutes a total change in direction which fundamentally alters the tenor of *Idiot*. As the action shifts, we find ourselves in a different type of novel altogether; the tension, pain and hysteria surrounding the central

emotional triangle appears to have vanished, as Nastas'ia Filippovna withdraws to the background and Myshkin, weakened by his illness and the pressure of the situation, seems to have abandoned his mission to save her, leaving the novel without a substantial plot to follow. As the narrative of *Idiot* centres on the consciousness of the Prince, when he 'loses the plot', the novel also suffers a total loss of direction.

This is evident in the diffusion of the highly-charged atmosphere which characterized the second half of Part I and the prelude to his fit at the beginning of Part II, as in Pavlovsk he is no longer participating in the painful internal conflict of Nastas'ia Filippovna. In keeping with his means of reducing the tension in Part I to avoid damaging self-other relations, after his fit the Prince does the same by cutting himself off from contact with the heroine. On this occasion, however, his action, although designed primarily to keep the peace, appears less positive, as it involves ignoring the reality of the situation and the suffering of others. Furthermore, while his role in the scandal scenes of Part I was to lessen the tension, his attempt to repeat the process in Parts II and III paradoxically deprives him of this fundamental role and the possibility of setting an example to others through his actions.

In spite of the reduction in tension caused by Nastas'ia Filippovna's disappearance and the hero's decision to change direction and normalize his life, there are still underlying threats to the situation, aside from the heroine's occasional appearances and their consequences (including a possible duel for Myshkin). Radomskii's uncle's suicide, the threat which Rogozhin represents to Ippolit (as well as the persisting memory of his

attempt to murder the hero), the ugly scene with the nihilists and the apocalyptic atmosphere introduced by Lebedev's interpretation of Revelation all create tension in the middle section of the novel, undermining the uneasy balance which Myshkin has established. Furthermore, the deterioration of Myshkin's positive attributes, and the profound effect this has on the structure of the novel, become evident in the crowd scenes which constitute the major action of Parts II and III.

Both of the middle parts of *Idiot* after the move to Pavlovsk are constructed around a single major scene, with all the main characters except Nastas'ia Filippovna present in one episode or the other. In each case, the focus of attention is a pair of narratives: 'Zhil na svete rytsar' bednyi' and Keller's article in Part II, and Lebedev's interpretation of the Apocalypse and story of the cannibal, followed by Ippolit's 'Neobkhodimoe ob'iasnenie' in Part III. The themes of these narratives have been widely discussed;⁷⁵ however, they also have enormous significance for the structure of the novel, as indicators of the way it has changed and of Myshkin's new position within the text.

⁷⁵ On the Pushkin poem see in particular Fiene, 'Pushkin's "Poor Knight"'; I. L. Al'mi, 'O prevrashcheniiakh pushkinskogo "Zhil na svete rytsar' bednyi" v khudozhestvennom mire Dostoevskogo', in *Siuzhet i vremia. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov. K semidesiatiletiiu Georgiia Vasil'evicha Krasnova*, ed. by V. A. Viktorovich and others (Kolomna: Kolomenskii pedagogicheskii institut, 1991), pp. 131-134; V. A. Viktorovich, 'Pushkinskii motiv v *Idiote* F. M. Dostoevskogo', in *Boldinskie chteniia* (Gor'kii: Volgo-Viatskoe knizhnoe isdatel'stvo, 1980), pp. 126-136, and Viktorovich, 'Siuzhet i povestvovaniia'; Bethea, *Shape of Apocalypse*, Hollander, 'Apocalyptic Framework', and Leatherbarrow, 'Apocalyptic Imagery', on connections with the Book of Revelation; examinations of Ippolit's confession occur in criticism on the Holbein painting cited above (note 72, p. 222), but see also Bethea, pp. 97-99, and V. I. Aripovskii, 'Obraz Ippolita v kompozitsionnoi strukture romana F. M. Dostoevskogo *Idiot*', in *Voprosy russkoi literatury, Vypusk 3* (Izd. L'vovskogo universiteta, 1966), pp. 41-46.

In line with the norms established by the Prince's stories in Part I, narrative continues to be the primary mode of expression for the protagonists. However, it quickly becomes apparent that the move to Pavlovsk marks the end of Myshkin's centrality as an intradiegetic narrator. In broad terms this occurs because his vision of a higher reality, which is so strong in Part I, becomes less adequate to his more complex life and relations to others following the traumatic events we do not witness in Moscow. After the failure of his parables of faith to open the heart of Rogozhin, he makes no further attempt to tell stories (except at the Epanchins' soirée, where he mis-reads the situation, in contrast to his earlier perspicacity, and fails spectacularly to explain his ideas), and is in general silent in comparison with his earlier willingness to talk.

Myshkin's new-found reticence illustrates one of the major themes of the novel: 'the difficulty of expressing adequately and truthfully not only the most sacred truths but even ordinary everyday facts'.⁷⁶ This is a problem which preoccupies Ippolit, as is evinced by his apologies for the poor style of his 'ob'iasnenie', for example, 'Мне кажется, я написал сейчас ужасную глупость' (VIII, 332). However, it is a problem which clearly does not affect the Prince in the early part of the novel, when narrative is his most important means of communication. It appears to be an issue only for the self-conscious narrator; the least self-conscious storytellers in the novel, General Ivolgin and Lebedev, are never worried about expressing themselves badly. The same is true of Myshkin in Part I, but if

⁷⁶ Jones, *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin*, p. 113.

he is not already aware of this at the beginning of Part II, the effect of his parables on Rogozhin is sufficient to show him that narrating is not a risk-free business; it can in fact have far-reaching consequences which can be negative as well as positive, and it is in part this knowledge which makes him more circumspect later on.

Furthermore, he has also by this stage lost confidence in his ideas, owing to the ambiguous origins of his worldview in his illness, and his inability to save Nastas'ia Filippovna. As both his philosophy and actions are undermined, Myshkin falters and ceases to believe in his strengths as a narrator, admitting on his only subsequent (and unsuccessful) attempt to express his ideas at the Epanchins' soirée:

Я всегда боюсь моим смешным видом скомпрометировать мысль и *главную идею*. Я не имею жеста. Я имею жест всегда противоположный, а это вызывает смехи унижает идею. Чувства меры тоже нет, а это главное; это даже самое главное... Я знаю, что мне лучше сидеть и молчать (VIII, 458, author's emphasis).

After having exemplified the Christ-like quality of seeing and the importance of narrating as an indication of his access to a higher reality in Part I, Myshkin's fall is emphasized by his loss of these abilities as he, like the other characters, moves into problematic relations with language and expression; 'from the moment [...] that the humans listen to the wrong words – to the words that are wrong – untroubled relation is lost, with God-as-word, and with the divine word in the universe and in men'.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Edwards, p. 219.

As a result of the Prince's silence, the middle section of the novel must be defined by other means, and this is achieved largely by other characters' inserted narratives commenting on him. Keller's article, Aglaia's rendition of 'Rytsar' bednyi' (formulated as a critique of Myshkin's mission), and Ippolit's confession (which frames many of the hero's ideas in an ironic context) all contribute to the gradual erosion of Myshkin's script and its replacement with the differently-angled images others have of him, which introduce different patterns of expectations and new possible directions for the Prince. Lebedev, meanwhile, takes over the hero's key role of describing another, higher reality, but his interpretation is doom-laden and negates the hopefulness of Myshkin's ideal, and Ippolit's nightmarish visions replace the Prince's religious experience at the waterfall.

The two narratives in Part II are commentaries on the personality of the Prince, while those in Part III concentrate on his ideas, and all four contribute to the undermining of Myshkin's integrity in his actions and underlying ideology. They also contain reminders of his mission, and offer alternative scripts to redefine attitudes towards him, hoping thereby to influence the subsequent direction of the narrative. In the first interpretation of him, Aglaia specifically denies that the comparison of the hero with the 'Rytsar' bednyi' implies a criticism: 'Я сначала не понимала и смеялась, а теперь люблю «рыцаря бедного», а главное, уважаю его подвиги' (VIII, 207). However, despite this endorsement, the poem seriously undermines the image of the Prince, as the figure to whom Aglaia compares

him, the knight, is mad. Furthermore her analysis implicitly criticizes his mission, as in stating,

он ее выбрал и поверил ее «чистой красоте», а затем уже преклонился пред нею навеки; в том-то и заслуга, что если б она потом хоть воровкой была, то он все-таки должен был ей верить и за ее чистую красоту копья ломать (VIII, 207),

she is suggesting that his mission is pure fantasy, and that by choosing an unworthy subject, Myshkin is failing to live up to the expectations he aroused when he first appeared. Aglaia uses the Pushkin poem to suggest a different script for the Prince and Nastas'ia Filippovna, but in doing so she undermines the ideal which lies behind his attempt to save the fallen and suffering woman.

Krieger notes that, according to Nastas'ia Filippovna's letter's, Myshkin refers to Aglaia 'как о «свете»' (VIII, 379), and that when Aglaia recites the Pushkin poem, the phrase '*lumens coeli*' ('light of heaven') offers the younger woman as an alternative ideal for the Prince.⁷⁸ I would suggest that just as is it Aglaia's deliberate aim to deride the object of the hero's mission, she is also consciously, using the very words Myshkin used (in a source as yet unseen by the reader or the hero, but whose existence has already been mentioned), offering herself as a protagonist in a worthier script. However, as Krieger states, it is attachment to this alternative, earthly ideal which proves to be the Prince's undoing, as in shifting his

⁷⁸ 'Curse of Saintliness', p. 45.

focus away from Nastas'ia Filippovna, he is moving from *agape* to *eros* and serving himself rather than the other.⁷⁹

Keller's libellous article which follows the Pushkin poem is a more direct attack on the Prince's reputation, as here for the first time the honesty and purity of the hero are questioned. By accusing Myshkin of profligacy, promiscuity, arrogance and a lack of concern for others, amongst other things, the article suggests that he is guilty of the same sins as other men, in stark contrast to everything we have assumed about the hero thus far. We strongly suspect that this narrative is a tissue of lies (a feeling which is heightened when we learn that the congenital liar Lebedev has a hand in it (VIII, 241-42)), but as a result of the six-month gap and other key absences (such as the lack of reliable information about Myshkin's childhood), and the fact that certain details do coincide with what we already know, neither we nor the other characters present are in a position to judge whether there is any truth to the allegations at all.⁸⁰ The strong effect this has on the other protagonists is evident: 'Это... это уж я не понимаю! – вскичал Иван Федорович в высочайшей степени негодования' (VIII, 219). The belief others have of the hero, inspired by his actions and words on the day of his arrival, is damaged by Keller's narrative. For Myshkin himself, an interpretation so contrary to the spirit of his scripting and his main idea further damages his ability to read and respond to a situation; his attempt at

⁷⁹ 'Curse of Saintliness', pp. 44-45.

⁸⁰ See K. I. Megaeva, 'Avtorskaia pozitsiia v romane Dostoevskogo *Idiot*', in *Khudozhestvennyi tekst i literaturnyi zhanr. Mezhevuzovskii nauchno-tematicheskii sbornik* (Makhachkala: Dagestanskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1980), pp. 62-74 (p. 72).

conciliation by offering money to Burdovskii, even after the claim has been exposed as false, is seen by the nihilists as arrogance and superiority, not generosity as was intended, indicating the difficulty of negotiating interhuman relations in the face of conflicting agendas. The hero's saintly script is adversely affected by others' scripts for him; after Nastas'ia Filippovna's first appearance in the park, which immediately follows this scene, many of the other characters are suspicious of Myshkin, as they presume he must be involved in the heroine's machinations, in contrast to their trusting attitude in Part I.

Moreover, as others project their scripts onto him in the central section of the novel, both the reader's view of him and the shape of the narrative change subtly. For example, when Myshkin first mentions his inheritance at the end of Part I, we are told the origin of the money, the Moscow merchant Papushin (VIII, 139-140). However, when Burdovskii appears to claim part of the inheritance, the nihilists concentrate on the link between Pavlishchev and Myshkin, to the extent that the true source of the Prince's new-found wealth is forgotten and becomes almost irrelevant. The interpretation forced onto Myshkin by Keller's article and events surrounding the nihilists' visit establishes a different causality, which, even though it is totally illusory, has a powerful effect on the reader and colours our view of Myshkin (especially regarding the conversion of Pavlishchev to Catholicism) no less than if it were true. Not only is there no ontological

difference between truth and lies in a literary text,⁸¹ but there is no practical difference either. Rumours such as the ones spread by Keller's vaudeville version of Myshkin's life become possible realities, as the 'truth' of any narrative, and any external effect it has, depend only on belief in it. As aspects of Keller's article are assumed by some of the characters to be correct (for example Princess Belokon'skaia's assertion 'что он любовницу открыто содержит' (VIII, 442)), faith in Myshkin as a positive force in the novel begins to wane. Moreover, his personal lack of direction following the six-month gap and his decision to renounce his quest to save Nastasia Filippovna is emphasized by the parallel lack of movement in the narrative, and is indicative of the characters' (including Myshkin's) inability to find a new script and a meaningful direction in which to steer the text.

Another problem arises for Myshkin as a result of these two narratives. While his move to the background signifies an attempt to maintain his humility and self-effacement despite the loss of other positive qualities, he is thwarted by the constant insistence of the other protagonists on sustaining the image of him at the centre of the text, reminding him, in mocking tones, of his abandoned mission. Furthermore, although they have gathered from the hero the importance of story-telling, the other characters do not use it for the positive ends of allowing the other to achieve selfhood. The fact that Aglaia and Keller (and Lebedev as co-author) use satire and

⁸¹ See David K. Danow, *The Thought of Mikhail Bakhtin: From Word to Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 107.

irony in their narratives to tease and humiliate the Prince indicates that they have not adopted the compassionate aspect of his worldview. They do not see, as Myshkin does, that humility is a voluntary practice, and is negative and divisive when imposed by the other, as it then becomes humiliation, which is a sign of objectification, precisely the outcome he wishes to avoid. Thus while the other characters follow the hero in some respects, in others they directly oppose his ideal, which both evinces the difficulty of persuading another to accept one's script and take an active, compatible role in order to affirm its truth, and further suggests the deterioration of Myshkin's vision and his ability to influence others for the better. The aimless and unsettled tenor of the narrative continues as neither script suggested in Part II allows the Prince to return to his underlying ideal.

The inserted narratives and discussions surrounding them in Part III further undermine the Prince's position in the novel. Lebedev's eschatology and story of the cannibal concentrate on the contemporary spiritual malaise afflicting society; his challenge, 'покажите мне связующую настоящее человечество мысль хоть вполовину такой силы, как в тех столетиях' (VIII, 315), echoes Myshkin's attempts earlier to reawaken the spiritual dimension amongst those who cannot see. However, the purity of the hero's ideas and his intentions in expressing them is now sullied by the fact that they are endorsed by such a buffoonish figure who has a history of misleading others for no apparent reason, with the result that the other protagonists' belief in Myshkin's vision and access to the ideal is damaged even further. Moreover, the Prince's lack of contribution to a subject which is close to his own heart is highlighted: 'До сих пор он в молчании

слушал споривших и не ввязывался в разговор [...] Может быть, он и ни слова бы не сказал в целый вечер' (VIII, 313). This again confirms his unwillingness to speak, even on the spiritual and ethical issues which were the mainstay of his discourse in Part I.

Ippolit's confession places a further question mark against Myshkin's idea by emphasizing the failure of its translation into action. The 'Neobkhdimoe ob'iasnenie' reveals Ippolit's affinity with Myshkin, despite their apparent differences. In the course of his narrative, Ippolit mentions nearly all the ideas we associate with the Prince: 'мир спасет красота'; 'времени больше не будет'; the condemned man; the problem of adequately expressing ideas; 'смирение есть страшная сила'; and the loss of faith precipitated by the Holbein painting of Christ (VIII, 317-344). Ultimately, he says more about Myshkin's ideas than the Prince ever does himself.⁸² However, the fact that these ideas, which arose out of the perception of human suffering, are now raised by a character who is in despair, and indeed is on the brink of attempting suicide, implies that the hero has failed him. Myshkin's intentions are good, and his perception in seeing what Ippolit needs to ease his final days is remarkable ('зелень и чистый воздух, по его мнению, непременно произведут во мне какую-нибудь физическую перемену, и мое волнение и мои сны переменятся и, может быть, облегчатся' (VIII, 321, author's emphasis)). However, he is ultimately unable to help the young consumptive spiritually, as Ippolit is unwilling to give up his cynical and rebellious stance in favour of

⁸² See Miller, *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, p. 200.

Myshkin's conception of a peaceful and contemplative death in which everything can be comprehended.

Ippolit's suffering is comparable to that of Nastas'ia Filippovna, and suggests an alternative mission for Myshkin. However, the younger man rejects the Prince's saintly script in favour of his own, allied to Rogozhin's dark vision. In 'returning the ticket' to Myshkin and using his 'ob'iasnenie' to draw attention to the loss of the ideal and the failure of the hero to change his, the young consumptive becomes his adversary and radically alters the tenor of the narrative.⁸³ Ippolit's discourse, and particularly the discussion it contains of Holbein's 'Christ in the Tomb', has a profound effect on the Prince. Ippolit becomes essential to the structure of the novel as a whole, because the psychological consistency of Myshkin depends on his continued evasion of the issues raised by the painting.⁸⁴ In his role as a replacement for the newly silenced Myshkin, Ippolit acts as a catalyst in the structure of the novel, sparking off a second change in direction. When he raises the issues that are important to the hero, and discusses the painting, the Prince is forced to face the cause he has abandoned and the responsibilities he has abdicated since he himself saw the painting and suppressed the distressing events of the past. This leads to a renewed participation in the fate of Nastas'ia Filippovna, which he has been avoiding since his arrival in Pavlovsk, as his apparent unwillingness to become involved in the heroine's mysterious affairs

⁸³ As we shall examine in chapter 3, pp. 229-308, 332-34.

⁸⁴ See the commentary in Wasiolek, ed., *Notebooks for 'The Idiot'*, p. 164.

with Radomskii, and his unlikely amorous interest in Aglaia, show. After the meandering central section, his conviction of the importance of his ideal is gradually restored, owing to Ippolit's narrative and the heroine's letters to Aglaia, and from this point onwards events follow each other with a fresh sense of urgency, as the central characters hurtle towards the final crisis. However, by this stage the atmosphere of the novel has darkened owing to the influence of Ippolit's tragic narrative, and the hope of salvation and a new life have now disappeared.

Just as after the first appearance of the painting, there is another period of uncertainty, this time longer, before Myshkin's epilepsy intervenes again to determine the final direction of the novel. In both cases the Holbein painting is a catalyst for a partial change in direction, thereby acting as a framing device for the middle part of the novel, and this is completed by alterations in Myshkin's consciousness caused by his epileptic fits. The painting therefore provides the second structuring impulse in the novel to emerge from Myshkin's consciousness. While the 'epileptic structure' has the beneficial effect of reducing tension and preventing the other characters' harmful actions and words, the frame introduced by the Holbein has more negative implications. In the first place, it leads to the Prince ignoring the suffering of Nastas'ia Filippovna and undermines the selfless attitude he exhibited in Part I. In the second place, the imposition of this frame also severely impacts on his use of the 'epileptic structure'; instead of dissipating the tension, he antagonizes the nihilists, he fails to intervene to prevent Ippolit's suicide attempt, and finally, at the meeting of the two women he is a hapless onlooker who can

do nothing to avert impending disaster. Under the influence of the painting, Myshkin's capacity for action is damaged, radically altering the tenor of the novel.

In the second transitional period, following Ippolit's narrative, a number of issues surrounding his relation to the other further indicate the corruption of his idea and the effect this has on his actions, which have profound implications for the renewal of his mission and compromise his ability to save his heroine.

The first issue is the Prince's dream of being Napoleon whilst sleeping on the bench in the park after Ippolit's suicide attempt. When Aglaia teases him about his dream, 'Может, фельдмаршалом себя воображаете и что Наполеона разбили?', she receives the unexpected reply, 'Ну вот честное слово, я об этом думаю, особенно когда засыпаю, – засмеялся князь, – только я не Наполеона, а всё австрийцев разбиваю' (VIII, 354). His admission recalls Porfiry Petrovich's question from *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, 'кто ж у нас на Руси себя Наполеоном теперь не считает?' (VI, 204), and marks an extraordinary reversal; the self-effacing hero of Part I whose main aim was to prevent the suffering of others now, we discover, dreams, like Raskol'nikov, of wading through fields of blood and asserting his greatness at the expense of all others.

The seemingly irrelevant digression on the disgrace and death of General Ivolgin also serves to show how far Myshkin has fallen. His reaction to the General's stories towards the end of the novel is partly responsible for the latter's demise. A note of dishonesty and embarrassment

creeps into his responses to Ivolgin, suggesting that the hero is humouring him rather than, as before, seriously attempting to restore his dignity:

Князь высказал свою фразу из прописей в твердой уверенности, что она произведет прекрасное действие. Он как-то инстинктивно догадался, что какою-нибудь подобною пустозвонною, но приятною фразой, сказанною кстати, можно вдруг покорить и умирить душу такого человека и особенно в таком положении, как генерал (VIII, 404).

The fact that the General notices this change in Myshkin's attitude is evinced in their next interview, when, 'утонченность выражений, почтительный тон видимо польстили генералу, хотя он всё еще иногда взглядывал со внезапною недоверчивостью' (VIII, 410). The Prince is also aware that he is behaving differently, 'как-то странно робея, точно гость его был фарфоровый, а он поминутно боялся его разбить' (VIII, 409). His deliberately excessive endorsement of the General's story about Napoleon is a further sign that his ability to efface himself in order to allow the other to assert his or her own script has become inconsistent, and also highlights the double thoughts to which he has recently admitted. General Ivolgin perceives that Myshkin pities him, and 'от него не примет «знаков сострадания, унижающих достоинство без того уже несчастного человека»' (VIII, 418); the compassion which defines the Prince's relations to others earlier in the novel has been corrupted to the extent that it is now marked not by his own humility, but by his humiliation of another, and the failure of the expectations he raised through the orientation of his actions towards the other in Part I.

The soirée organized by the Epanchins to introduce Myshkin into society and announce his engagement to Aglaia highlights the decline of the hero in several ways. In the first place, the occasion amounts to a public declaration that he has abandoned his mission and is prepared to settle down to normal life away from Nastas'ia Filippovna. In the second place, and perhaps more significantly, his words and thoughts indicate his distance from the ideal he represented in Part I. In stark contrast with his earlier fluent expression of his ideas to the Epanchins, in which seeing and narrating are essential, the party in Part IV is marked by his failure to see and his inability to express himself. His ability to read faces was emphasized in the first scenes of the novel as the first step towards his saintly scripting, and performed a vital role in establishing his mission to save Nastas'ia Filippovna, but now he is easily fooled by dissembling appearances: 'всё-то это общество князь принял за самую чистую монету' (VIII, 445). Moreover, not only is he unable to articulate his ideas, but even their very quality seems to have been corrupted; previously he spoke of compassion and the need to recognize the true nature of reality through the awareness of presentness, but at the soirée he enters into a bigoted tirade about Catholicism, and raves incoherently about an aristocratic revolution, which appears to contradict his earlier concern for the abused and unfortunate, divides him from those who have no money or nobility, and is undermined by his failure to see the true – and distinctly unflattering – natures of the very members of society whose nobility he is championing (VIII, 449-459). By this stage, unable to read a situation or narrate, all aspects of Myshkin's saintly scripting are under threat.

Therefore, just as his involvement with General Ivolgin is an attempt to evade the real issue of the return to his quest, so Myshkin's engagement to Aglaia further confirms his unwillingness to sacrifice himself for Nastas'ia Filippovna and signals his fall away from the ideal before the denouement. Their relationship is strange and contradictory, as it arises out of the conflict of two incompatible scripts; for Myshkin it signifies a move towards normality, away from the pain and misery of his relationship with Nastas'ia Filippovna, while it seems inspired on Aglaia's part by the desire to annoy her parents by choosing the most unsuitable husband possible, and is thus anti-normality.⁸⁵ Myshkin appears to be in love with her, but their relationship is perpetually strained and abnormal, owing partly to Aglaia's dualistic impulses, but also to the pervasive influence of Nastas'ia Filippovna. Aglaia's attachment to the hero develops because of rather than in spite of his connection to Nastas'ia Filippovna, as it casts doubts on his propriety in the eyes of others, as well as giving her a point of attack which allows her to assert her voice at the expense of her suitor's. Furthermore, as we have seen, it is Nastas'ia Filippovna who initially recommends the other woman to the Prince, rejecting his proposal of marriage with the words, 'тебе теперь надо Аглаю Епанчину' (VIII, 143), which suggests that Myshkin, having failed to persuade her to take up the alternative script he is offering, is trying to respond to her own

⁸⁵ Diana L. Burgin, 'Prince Myshkin: The True Lover and "Impossible Bridegroom": A Problem in Dostoevskian Narrative', *SEEJ*, 27 (1983), 158-75, calls it a 'parody of romantic love' (p. 169).

alternative script for him, in order to maintain his commitment to hear and react to her voice and to be a servant to her cause.

The fact that the relationship between Myshkin and Aglaia has been invented by Nastas'ia Filippovna implies that its continuation or otherwise is also dependent on the older woman (which is confirmed by the withdrawal of her consent at the confrontation of the two women). After Ippolit's confession and its description of the Holbein painting have reawakened in the Prince his keen sensitivity to Nastas'ia Filippovna's suffering, his alternative arrangements are threatened, as he is bound to fulfil his duty towards her whatever the cost to himself. Aglaia's warning before the soirée, 'если вы говорите о чем-нибудь вроде смертной казни, или об экономическом состоянии России, или о том, что «мир спасет красота», то... я, конечно порадуюсь и посмеюсь очень, но... предупреждаю вас заранее: не кажитесь мне потом на глаза!' (VIII, 436), thus has two functions. Firstly, it suggests that Myshkin, through his attempt to begin a 'normal' relationship, has been reduced to the level of General Ivolgin, an embarrassment to be silenced, indicating his inadequacy as a lover or possible husband. Secondly, the fact that he then fulfils her prediction by breaking the Chinese vase, talking inappropriately, and succumbing to an attack of epilepsy, proving that she is correct, also implies that the hero subconsciously intends to behave in this way, in order

to provide himself with an alibi which will extricate him from this relationship, freeing him to return to his mission.⁸⁶

Furthermore, by trying to build a normal relationship, Myshkin reveals his distance from the innocent, asexual hero of Part I who claims, 'я ведь по прирожденной болезни моей даже совсем женщин не знаю', and 'я не могу жениться ни на ком, я нездоров' (VIII, 14, 32). By the final part of the novel, he appears to have forgotten these admissions, and is ready to embark on marriage, which in itself suggests that he is turning away from his vision. In the extract of his diary written on the death of his first wife, which points to the origin and significance of Myshkin's compassion and humility, Dostoevskii also comments,

Женитьба и посягновение на женщину есть как бы величайшее *оттолкновение от гуманизма*, совершенное обособление пары от *всех* (мало остается для всех). Семейство, то есть закон природы, но все-таки ненормальное, эгоистическое в полном смысле от человека. Семейство – это величайшая святыня человека на земле, ибо посредством этого закона природы человек достигает развития (то есть сменой поколений) цели. Но в то же время человек по закону же природы, во имя окончательного идеала своей цели, должен беспрерывно отрицать его. (Двойственность) (XX, 173, author's emphasis).

The hero's love for Nastas'ia Filippovna is love for the sake of the other; that for Aglaia is love for the sake of the self.⁸⁷ Kasatkina notes the confusion in both Myshkin's mind and in the expectations of others between the universal love which Christ showed and the exclusive love of

⁸⁶ J. R. Maze, 'Dostoevsky: Epilepsy, Mysticism and Homosexuality', *American Imago*, 2 (1981), 155-83 (p. 170).

⁸⁷ See A. Skaftymov, 'Tematicheskaia kompozitsiia romana *Idiot*', in *Nravstvennie iskaniia russkikh pisatelei: stat'i i issledovaniia o russkikh klassikakh* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1972), pp. 23-87 (p. 73).

marriage; by expressing his intention to marry Nastas'ia Filippovna, 'он сразу же исключает себя из мира Божеской любви и ввергает в мир любви человеческой, т. е. любви исключительной. Именно из попытки князя сочетать эти два несочитаемых вида любви и рождается весь кошмар'.⁸⁸ He is unable to carry through the process he begins with his proposal to the heroine, as his 'love-pity' for her and his assertion to Radomskii that he can love both of them at once provide ample proof that his 'love' is not as exclusive as either woman would like it to be; his inability to understand that he cannot have relationships with both women indicates the fundamental difference between the reality of the situation and Myshkin's perception of it, and again highlights the difficulty of maintaining positive interrelations with all, especially when the characters' scripts are mutually exclusive and follow opposing agendas.

Moreover, the Prince's strange relationship with Aglaia shows this problem even more acutely, as his expression of his desires, 'с нею говорить, с нею сидеть, с нею гулять, и, кто знает, может быть, этим одним он остался бы доволен на всю свою жизнь!' (VIII, 429), contains no hint of passion, suggesting that he has in mind platonic companionship rather than a consummated marriage.⁸⁹ Like his outburst at the party, his entire relationship with Aglaia feels inauthentic and fails to convince the reader. Myshkin is therefore left in an emotional no-man's land, no longer separate enough to love as Christ loved, nor involved enough to lead a

⁸⁸ *Kharakterologiia Dostoevskogo*, p. 206; for further references to this link, see introduction, note 12, p.5.

⁸⁹ As Novikova notes, 'Agiograficheskie motivy', p. 35.

normal life. Thus, while the Prince's separateness begins as a positive attribute, linking him to the image of Christ, it is subverted subtly by his own actions to become much closer to the spiritual isolation which afflicts Ivan Karamazov and Stavrogin, who are equally incapable of forming close bonds with other people, particularly women.

The final word of Dostoevskii's note, 'Двойственность' provides a further key to our understanding of Myshkin's downfall. As we have seen, dualism originates in the Fall, and is both the impulse and the means to story-telling, which tries to re-create the world before the Fall.⁹⁰ Myshkin's vision of a world of perfect harmony clearly ties into this, and the ease with which he delivers his narratives in Part I suggests a lack of ambiguity in his language; words and their meanings still coincide for him, again implying a link to pre-lapsarian wholeness and the absence of division. Furthermore, the humility and compassion of his saintly scripting are essentially anti-dualistic, as they oppose the view of the separation of the self from the other. Arriving from his Swiss paradise, the Prince seems to embody Christ-like qualities precisely because he opposes dualistic tendencies.

Meanwhile, the other protagonists are prey to the forces of dualism; it is seen in particular in the Manichaeism of Nastas'ia Filippovna and the opposing scripts she contemplates, and equally in Aglaia's endless contradictions and Rogozhin's and Ippolit's oscillations between loving and hating Myshkin. Most of the characters exhibit dualism in their belief that Nastas'ia Filippovna is different from them, and worth less than them,

⁹⁰ Edwards, pp. 4; 73-4 and *passim*.

and this is even true of the heroine herself, who sees Aglaia and the Prince as being worth infinitely more than herself (and Rogozhin infinitely less); it is the insistence on the distinction of self and other which causes the protagonists trouble. When Myshkin appears, his anti-dualistic stance gives hope to a community that has lost its guiding principles and its 'binding idea'; Lebedev's phrase is particularly apt, as the characters are afflicted primarily by a loss of the ability to see their connections to each other.

However, after the six-month gap the Prince also succumbs to dualism. The fact that his fit is a contradictory experience of light and darkness shows that Myshkin, as human, does have dualistic elements to his character, but these are hidden at the beginning of the novel beneath the law of compassion and his access to a higher reality. His contact with others in whom dualism is sharply defined results in the resurfacing of this impulse. His constant desire to be alone (for example, VIII, 186) suggests an awareness that he has lost something essential as a result of living in the 'real world'. His new intention to court and marry Aglaia is proof of a new, divided nature, as is his inability to tell stories after Part I, and he also becomes prone to suspiciousness and 'double thoughts': 'Две мысли вместе сошлись, это очень часто случается. Со мной беспрерывно' (VIII, 258). Double thoughts are present in his suspiciousness of Rogozhin before his first fit, but overcoming them in order to be honest, open and unhypocritical is part of his saintly scripting, and once he has lost contact with the ideal, he is no longer capable of suppressing them. Furthermore, his treatment of General Ivolgin discussed above suggests that his compassion has turned to pity which, as Thompson remarks, implies

distance and condescension, even contempt, through separation of the self from the other.⁹¹ This has enormous implications for the Prince's relationship with Nastas'ia Filippovna; she rejects his marriage proposal as she fears that he would end up despising her (VIII, 144), and towards the end of the novel her suspicions seem justified, as his compassion and humility have already been compromised.

Thus we witness Myshkin's gradual descent to the dualistic level of the other characters, the corruption of his vision of a higher reality, and the negative effect this has on his actions; 'finally, these opposites and the larger paradox of their contiguity looms so large that they must be acknowledged as a constitutive force in the work'.⁹² Therefore although the hero attempts to return to his mission to save Nastas'ia Filippovna after Ippolit's confession and more particularly after his second fit, his failure is inevitable as he is no longer the man who thought up the idea; not only does the heroine finally reject the script he offers her, but his ability to script in general is undermined to the extent that he is unable to play the role he initially proposed. The confrontation between the two women is a dramatic expression of his failure to overcome his dualism in a sustained way, the effect this has on others, and his helplessness in the face of it. His selfish side confronts his selfless side, but as this all takes place externally to the Prince, he is a powerless bystander with neither a role to play nor a

⁹¹ 'Motifs of Compassion in Dostoevskii's Novels', in *Cultural Discontinuity and Reconstruction*, pp. 185-201 (p. 192).

⁹² Anderson, *Myths of Duality*, p. 69.

choice to make, and is unable to relieve the tension of the situation through the imposition of the 'epileptic structure', as he did in earlier moments of heightened emotional conflict. The compassionate realism which in the story of Marie and in his initial contact with Nastas'ia Filippovna involved practical efforts to relieve the situation and change the attitudes of others is so eroded by the time of the denouement that he is capable only of weeping and stroking the other like a child (VIII, 475, 506).

By the end of the novel, a number of problems relating to the loss of the hero's positive attributes are apparent. He is no longer able to influence the other characters for the better or persuade them of his good intentions, as the debacle over General Ivolgin shows. Others begin to reject his saintly script; for example, before Ippolit's confession, Rogozhin refuses to accept the Prince's forgiveness for the murder attempt, stating, 'Да я, может, в том ни разу с тех пор и не покался, а ты уже свое братское прощение мне прислал. Может, я в тот же вечер о другом совсем уже думал, а об этом...' (VIII, 303). Ultimately neither Aglaia nor Nastas'ia Filippovna will accept the non-exclusive love he is offering, and Radomskii's critical analysis of his behaviour and motivation (VIII, 481-85) indicates a failure by all concerned; the other protagonists (none more so than the two women) have misunderstood the very essence of the Prince's ideal of selfless love, and he in turn has failed to convey it to them or persuade them of the rightness of his cause.

Although his saintly scripting prioritizes compassion over sexual love, it is paradoxically the very fact that Myshkin is not in love with Nastas'ia Filippovna (and indeed is apparently in love with another) which

precipitates her disaster, as it is this which forces the heroine to return to Rogozhin. The failure of the hero's saintly scripting therefore means that others who rely on his self-effacement are deprived of choice and their own route to selfhood; as well as Nastas'ia Filippovna, this in particular affects General Ivolgin and Aglaia. This problem in turn highlights the interconnection of all beings and the vital importance of harmonious interaction, as well as its difficulty. The Prince's inability to live up to the expectations he arouses has disastrous consequences for many of the characters with whom he comes into contact

Central to Myshkin's failure is the deterioration of the very quality which marks him out as different from the other characters, and the most essential component of his saintly script: compassion. Although his sense of co-feeling and co-suffering does not desert him entirely – he never becomes the openly malign character of Lord's analysis⁹³ – it becomes weak and inconsistent. As we have seen, his inability to respond compassionately to General Ivolgin contributes to the latter's demise, and Radomskii berates the Prince for his lack of compassion towards Aglaia, who is also suffering (VIII, 482). It is the loss of his own innocence and compassion rather than his insistence on the innocence of others *per se* which contributes to their destruction.⁹⁴ Again, this issue impacts most directly on Nastas'ia Filippovna as she has been the focus of his

⁹³ See introduction, pp. 7-8 above.

⁹⁴ As claimed, for example, by Korman, 'Problema avtora', p. 391, or Arpad Kovacs, 'The Poetics of *The Idiot*: on the Problem of Dostoevsky's Thinking about Genre', in *Critical Essays on Dostoevsky*, ed. by Robin Feuer Miller (Boston, MA: Hall, 1986), pp. 116-126 (p. 124).

consciousness and his saintly scripting since the beginning of the novel; when the strength of his compassion wanes and he is tempted by earthly passions, he is no longer willing to sacrifice himself for her sake. His reunion with Rogozhin, a character for whom the absence of compassion is axiomatic ('никакой такой во мне нет к ней жалости' (VIII, 174)) over the heroine's corpse indicates that even a slight shift away from the ideal allies Myshkin to the consequences of its absolute denial. He arrives in the world of the novel full of hope and with the aim of overcoming dualism and lessening the divisive separation of self from other, but by the end is himself infected with dualistic 'двойные мысли' and creates more divisions between the characters, owing to his contact with the material world and the very qualities man acquired at the Fall, in the form of the pride of Nastas'ia Filippovna, Ippolit and Aglaia, and the base sensuality of Rogozhin.⁹⁵

With his failure to save Nastas'ia Filippovna Myshkin is, like Rogozhin, left without a script at the end of the novel. He abandons all his other causes and cut himself off from other interactions in order belatedly to complete his mission, but when the heroine writes him out of her script by escaping with Rogozhin, the Prince's lack of direction or plan for the future, In sharp contrast to his active response to her departure in Part I, is all too apparent:

Он побледнел, но принял известие тихо, едва слышно проговорив: «Я боялся; но я все-таки не думал, что будет

⁹⁵ See William J. Leatherbarrow, *Fedor Dostoevsky* (Boston, MA: Twayne, 1981), pp. 111-17.

это...» – и потом, помолчав немного, прибавил: «Впрочем... в ее состоянии... это совершенно в порядке вещей». Такой отзыв уже сам Келлер называл потом «беспримерною философией». Князь вышел из церкви, по-видимому, спокойный и бодрый; так по крайней мере многие заметили и потом рассказывали (VIII, 493–4).

While the murder scene is unfolding in Petersburg, the narrator and hero, by now irrelevant to the heroine's purpose, remain in Pavlovsk with an incongruous display of trivial domesticity as, 'Вошедших усадили, начался разговор, стали подавать чай' (VIII, 494).

Myshkin's incoherent babble and concentration on trivial details in his final conversation with Rogozhin indicate the complete loss of ability to interact and the lack of a meaningful continuation for the existence of either man, and the hero is subjected to external finalization in the appellation 'idiot.' Nastas'ia Filippovna's bid for freedom and selfhood has, in effect, deprived those most closely allied to her script of their own selfhood, and her death marks the end of the road for both men.

The deterioration of the Prince's saintly scripting is evident in other ways; the fact that he has failed to save anyone is emphasized by Rogozhin's total absence of compassion or remorse at his trial, while Aglaia's ludicrous marriage separates her from her loving family and shows that she has learnt nothing. Ippolit turns away from Myshkin and towards Rogozhin, and dies in agony and terror, and Gania's machinations continue throughout the novel despite his apparent change of heart at the beginning of Part II. A few sparks of hope, however, remain, suggesting that the Prince has had an effect on some characters; Radomskii in particular seems to have moved towards ideal, selfless relationships in the

epilogue, as we discover that he ‘принял самое горячее участие в судьбе несчастного «идиота»’ and writes regularly to two of the most sympathetic characters in the novel, Kolia Ivolgin and Vera Lebedeva (VIII, 508). Mrs Epanchina, who supports Myshkin throughout the novel (as a person, if not as a suitor for her daughter), also shows compassion in her final words, ‘по крайней мере вот здесь, над этим бедным, хоть по-русски поплакала’ (VIII, 510). After the true ending of the novel, in which Myshkin and Rogozhin are united over the corpse of Nastas’ia Filippovna, the epilogue ends with Radonskii and Mrs Epanchina similarly united over the helpless idiot who has inspired them. Nevertheless, the end of the novel is bleak, pointing to the impossibility of sustaining the ideal of selfless love in human interactions, even for a character imbued with the spirit of compassion; as Dostoevskii wrote in the notebooks for the novel, ‘всё, что выработалось бы в князе, угасло в могиле’ (IX, 252).

In the light of these reflections on the deterioration of Myshkin’s access to the ideal, his ability to express it and to influence others for the better, I shall examine in chapter three the implications of the absence or corruption of the ideal in the interactivity of the protagonists.

Chapter 3. Inter- and Intra-Human Conflict: Ethics and the Meta-Narrational Ideal

What has become clear from the above analysis of *Idiot* is the central role played by the opposition of self and other in the dynamics of the novel. It is fundamental to both Myshkin's saintly scripting, which aims to erode the distinction between self and other, and to Nastas'ia Filippovna's bid for freedom from the control of others, which heightens that separation. The characters employ scripting strategies to harness others in the service of their own self-affirmation, playing on the interdependent self-other relations which lie at the heart of dialogic activity to define and alter their own positions – as well as those of others – within the text, and thus to shape the movement of the narrative as a whole.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the main factors influencing self-other relations, in ethical, existential and, implicitly, psychological terms, by examining how the characters respond to the dilemmas, paradoxes and conflicts inherent in human interactions, and the effect this has on the structuring of the novel. Although neither scripting nor the wider spectrum of self-other relations is a religious issue as such, we have seen the strong connection between the protagonists' interactions and problems of faith and doubt, particularly with respect to Myshkin's ideal and the saintly scripting which it supports, but also relating to Rogozhin's loss of faith, Nastas'ia Filippovna's inability to believe in love for humanity, and Ippolit's existential crisis, as well as the general impulse to re-creation

through narrative which originates in the Fall. As it is these characters who have the most profound influence on the text, in terms of both plot and atmosphere, it is necessary to examine the trends of ethical and unethical interactivity at work in the novel, in order to define the relationship between faith and narrative in *Idiot*. The current chapter will therefore focus on further aspects of interhuman relations within the context of biblical theology, in order to establish the pressures brought to bear on the protagonists and the narrative, the obstacles encountered in the striving for the ethical ideal, and the consequences for both characters and narrative of its absence. It will then address the issue of the relationship between the protagonists and the narrator, as an analogy to the relationship of man to God, to suggest a meta-narrational dimension to the novel, dramatizing the question of belief and its loss, which was central to Dostoevskii's oeuvre as a whole.

I. 'A DOUBLE MINDED MAN IS UNSTABLE IN ALL HIS WAYS': THE EPISTLE OF JAMES AND THE LOSS OF THE 'BINDING IDEA'

Woe to the bloody city! It is
all full of lies and robbery.
– Nahum 3.1.

Prince Myshkin's admission of his own 'двойные мысли' (VIII, 258) has an enormous impact on the subsequent development of the novel. It has practical implications for his interaction with other characters, as we have seen, for example, in relation to the downfall and death of General Ivolgin and in the dilemma the hero faces over trying to reconcile his love for

Aglaia and his compassion for Nastas'ia Filippovna, which harms both women. It also undermines the reader's positive opinion of the hero, garnered in Part I, as the previously firm motivational basis for his actions and attitude to the other is placed under question. Moreover, it points to the source of conflicting impulses and contradictory actions of other protagonists, most significantly in Nastas'ia Filippovna's oscillation between Myshkin and Rogozhin, but also in Ippolit's mirroring of the same dilemma, the confusing signals Rogozhin sends in taking the heroine and Myshkin to be blessed by his mother when he is harbouring murderous thoughts about both, and Aglaia's constant and unexplained reversals with regard to the hero. Among the minor characters, the mysterious and unexplained activities of Lebedev, Radomskii and Gania, who all show positive impulses amidst their deceit, demonstrate that practically no major character remains untouched by the phenomenon.

Echoes of Myshkin's 'double thoughts' and the dualism that afflicts others in the novel are found in the 'double minded man' of the Epistle of James (1. 8 and 4. 8) (the Greek in both cases is 'διψυχος,' meaning literally 'of two souls', 'of two minds';¹ the Authorized Version has 'double minded' both times, preserving the use of the same phrase, as in the original, while the Revised English Bible has 'in two minds' (I. 8) and 'whose motives are mixed' (4. 8); the Russian translation has 'с двоящимися мыслями' for the first, and 'двоедушные' for the second

¹ Alexander Souter, *A Pocket Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916), p. 67.

occurrence). James is the only book of the New Testament to contain the epithet. Sophie Laws goes to considerable lengths to connect it Jewish and Old Testament thought in order to claim that it is 'most likely that the background is an idiom current in Greek-speaking Judaism. Its coining is not remarkable'.² However, the very fact that it is worthy of such attention highlights its uniqueness and significance to the theme of dualism within the context of the New Testament teaching. Laws points out the sustained nature of

James' indictment of disunity and inconsistency in human behaviour [...] Man is torn apart by conflicting desires, rendering his prayer ineffective; and prayer is also rendered ineffective by doubt. The man who separates hearing and action deceives himself; and to divorce faith and works is to make faith worthless. Disunity mars human relationships, with 'discrimination between persons,' especially between rich and poor.³

James therefore reflects on both inner double-mindedness and external rifts between people as the sources of strife and loss of righteousness in the community, and places in opposition to the double minded man the ideal figure of the wise man who avoids such pitfalls.

Laws' description could equally be applied to Dostoevskii's work as a whole, but its relevance to *Idiot* is particularly apparent. Kunil'skii, noting the similarity of the images of doubleness, and undoubtedly the associated themes of conflict and contradiction in both texts, states that Dostoevskii 'часто обращался' to James, although he offers no concrete

² *A Commentary on The Epistle of James* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1980), p. 60.

³ *Commentary*, p. 29.

evidence for this.⁴ However, according to the extraordinary electronic concordance compiled under Professor V. N. Zakharov at Petrozavodsk State University since Kunil'skii's article was published, which includes all the notes and markings the author made in his copy of the New Testament, there are seven marks in the Epistle of James.⁵ Although the references to the 'double minded man' are not among these, it is difficult not to conclude with Kunil'skii that 'автор романа «Идиот», видимо, не мог не обратить внимания на эти слова'.⁶

Aside from the 'double minded man' who is 'unstable in all his ways,' the central themes of James, the testing of the righteous and the abuse of money and speech, provide significant parallels between the biblical text and *Idiot*. The theme of trials and testing, introduced in 1. 2, acts as a subtext for much of the epistle.⁷ It also recalls the 'testing' of the 'положительно прекрасный человек' through his encounter with the materialistic and dualistic world of St Petersburg: 'Главный конфликт романа – конфликт герой с миром, испытание идеалов героя жизнью'.⁸

One of the most apparent forms of testing in *Idiot* is directly related to scripting. As we have seen, characters test each other's compatibility and

⁴ 'Printsip "snizheniia"', p. 37.

⁵ 'Ves' Dostoevskogo', Petrozavodskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta <<http://www.karelia.ru/~Dostoevsky/evang/info.htm>> (15 January – 18 June 2001).

⁶ 'Printsip "snizheniia"', p. 37.

⁷ See Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1982), p. 35.

⁸ Belopol'skii, p. 123; see also J. P. Stern, 'The Testing of the Prince: On the Realism of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*', in *Gorski Vijenac: A Garland of Essays Offered to Professor Elizabeth Mary Hill*, ed. by R. Auty, L. R. Lewitter and A. P. Vlasto (Cambridge: MHRA, 1970), pp. 252-67 (pp. 257-59).

willingness to participate in the roles they are being allocated, such as when Nastas'ia Filippovna asks Myshkin about her marriage plans, and when Myshkin tests Rogozhin's murderous intentions at the beginning of Part II. In the first instance the Prince passes the test, but later most of the characters fail and prove themselves to be unsuitable for the role on trial; for example, Rogozhin fails Myshkin's test and shows that he is following his own, not the hero's, script, Myshkin fails Aglaia's test at the soirée, and all parties fail the various tests they set each other at the confrontation between the two women.

Although this feature may be remote from the testing of faith through doubt in the Epistle of James, there are similarities, as in both cases it is a trial of convictions; while the Epistle faith in God is in question, in *Idiot* the protagonists test their faith in each other. If the tests are passed, harmonious and sympathetic co-relations are established; if they are failed, conflict and division ensue. Furthermore, in both texts testing is also carried out through the divisive threats posed by money and false speech. As in *Idiot* the Prince succumbs to the double-mindedness which is evident in so many of the other characters as a result of his trial, the pressures brought to bear on him deserve serious consideration.

James' assumption that the wealthy tend to be unjust and unrighteous is evident in his repeated warnings about their ultimate fate, such as,

Go to now, ye rich men, and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them

shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped your treasure together for the last days (5. 1-3).

Money is ephemeral and meaningless in the face of inevitable death: 'Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow' (4. 13). As Davids states, 'Not to worry about wealth means not to store up wealth, but to seek righteousness and to put treasure in heaven. The rich almost by definition have their wealth stored on earth and thus are not rich towards God'.⁹ The poor, in contrast, are 'rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him' (2. 5). The juxtaposition of rich and poor runs throughout the Epistle, highlighting the divisive nature of wealth and the abuse of power which is frequently associated with it, for example, 'Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich, in that he is made low' (1. 9-10). Laws notes here that while the poor are 'brothers', the rich, through the absence of this appellation, are specifically excluded from this spiritual community.¹⁰ Money divides people not only from each other, but from God as well; 'lives based on having are less free than lives based on either doing or on being [...] only those who have no private interests can follow an ideal straight away'.¹¹

Money is not simply a theme, but a vital force in the structuring of *Idiot*, and an obsession for most of the characters, as it is in some guise in

⁹ *Epistle*, p. 44.

¹⁰ *Commentary*, p. 62.

¹¹ James, *Religious Experience*, pp. 317-19.

most of Dostoevskii's major novels. Catteau sees money as a 'ruling power in Dostoyevsky's creative environment', and the fact that he devotes 33 pages to a 'brief summary' indicates the extensive implications of the subject.¹² Leatherbarrow comments that in his first plans for the novel, Dostoevskii concentrated on the decline of the Russian family through a preoccupation with the material rather than with the spiritual, a theme which survives in the final text in the form of the Epanchin family.¹³ However, the presence of investors such as General Epanchin and Ptitsyn represents only the tip of the iceberg of the theme of money and its influence on human behaviour. From the outset of *Idiot* it is a topic of conversation, as Myshkin and Rogozhin discuss the latter's inheritance and the former's medical fees (VIII, 6-9). Both General Epanchin and Rogozhin offer Myshkin money, Ferdyschchenko's story of his 'worst deed' involves stealing three rubles and allowing a maid to take the blame for it, and later General Ivolgin's theft of Lebedev's wallet plays a major role in his decline and death. Money in the novel is a source of temptation for those who have none, and an instrument of power for the rich; 'стихия денег, почти лишенная рациональное основы, становится разрушительной'.¹⁴ Gania's determination to become a 'Rothschild' reveals the power of wealth to obviate the need for other positive attributes: 'Нажив деньги,

¹² *Process of Literary Creation*, pp. 135-168.

¹³ *Fedor Dostoevsky*, p. 99; C. J. G. Turner, 'Dostoevsky's *Idiot*: Treasure in Earthen Vessels', *Dostoevsky Studies*, 6 (1985), 173-80, and Roger B. Anderson, 'The *Idiot* and the Subtext of Modern Materialism', *Dostoevsky Studies*, 9 (1989), 77-89 take the same theme.

¹⁴ V. A. Geronimus, 'Religioznoe opravlenie krasoty v romane F. M. Dostoevskogo *Idiot*', in *Russkaia literatura XIX veka i khristianstvo*, pp. 32-42 (p. 33).

знайте, – я буду человек в высшей степени оригинальный. Деньги тем всего подлее и ненавистнее, что они даже таланты дают’ (VIII, 105). His unseen machinations with regard to Aglaia are apparently financially motivated, as part of his scheme to ‘get rich quick’: ‘Вот эту-то я всю гимнастику и перескочу и прямо с капитала начну’ (VIII, 105). Like Arkadii in *Podrostok*, Gania is seduced by the power money bestows, not by wealth *per se*, indicating its wide sphere of influence; it can gratify material desires or be used to dominate others. The Epistle’s question, ‘Do not rich men oppress you?’ (2. 6) indicates that James also saw the abuse of power as part of the issue of wealth.

Money also plays an essential role in several important scenes in the novel; for example, the economic situation of Radomskii and his uncle provides Nastas’ia Filippovna with a point of attack for her two appearances in the park in Parts II and III which, as we have seen, have reverberations for long periods in the middle section of the novel. However, the focus on money is sharpest at the heroine’s birthday party. The proposed engagement of Nastas’ia Filippovna is a financial transaction between Totskii, General Epanchin and Gania, but with the help of Rogozhin, the heroine strips away the polite façade to reveal the true nature of the event, turning it into a public auction, with the package of 100,000 rubles wrapped significantly in the pages of *Birzhevye vedomosti* (VIII, 135) taking the centre of attention when it is thrown on the fire as a signal that Nastas’ia Filippovna is freeing herself from the slavery of money and its dominating influence.

Myshkin's inheritance is revealed in the same scene and, as suggested above (pp. 216-17), has great significance for the subsequent development of the novel. In the early part of the novel, in contrast to others, the hero shows a balanced relation to money, as he is neither attached to it (selling his diamond pin to help Marie (VIII, 60)) nor offended by offers of financial assistance from others, and thus recalls James' ideal 'wise man' who is unconcerned about worldly treasures (it should also be noted that Nastas'ia Filippovna is similar to Myshkin in this respect; she accepts wealth and privilege, but we are told she could live quite easily without them (VIII, 114-115)). The fact that the Prince is taken more seriously by the other characters after they have heard about his new-found wealth has parallels with James' contrast of the 'man with a gold ring, and goodly apparel' with 'a poor man in vile raiment';

and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? (2. 2-5).

While Myshkin only takes on the external trappings of wealth when he returns to Petersburg in Part II, the subtle change in others' attitudes towards him on discovering that he is of material worth indicates that society in the novel is guilty of differing standards in treating their fellow men (a fact most clearly seen in General Epanchin, who severs his ties with General Ivolgin after the latter's fall from grace, and treats Gania with contempt over Nastas'ia Filippovna, as well as becoming distinctly more

solicitous towards Myshkin at the birthday party and afterwards); the attraction of money is thus responsible for creating divisions and disunity.

A further result of Myshkin's inheritance is the appearance of false claimants and other rogues and hangers-on, whose primary motive is to make a profit out of the hero. Lebedev is significant in this regard, as he consistently and simultaneously, and apparently with no qualms whatsoever, offers his services to and colludes with opposing sides in many of the novel's conflicts, for example, assisting Keller in writing the slanderous article about Myshkin (VIII, 241-242) in spite of his professed support for the Prince. His only motive for this appears to be financial, and he will even, as in the case of the article, betray a trust for the smallest amount (6 rubles). Although at times he seems a sensitive character, such as when he prays for the souls of great sinners like Du Barry, in general others for Lebedev represent only opportunities for financial gain and intrigue.

However, the affair of 'Pavlishchev's son' is the most obvious and sustained example of this tendency, and the fact that this confrontation constitutes one of the central scenes of Part II suggests the importance the author attached to the theme. As well as being targeted for his generosity and supposed simplicity, this episode also reveals an additional change in Myshkin. From being a character who could give and receive money with equanimity, his inheritance places him in a more problematic position as, although he is still happy to give his money away, he fails to recognize the implications for the pride of the other, and thus offends the nihilists sense of self-worth even when acting generously. The hero's new-found wealth

automatically places him in a position of social superiority, which leads others to form antagonistic and coercive relations with him, and despite his overriding concern for the status of the other's 'I', which lies at the heart of his saintly scripting, he becomes unable to project this idea onto others, as they ascribe their own greed and fascination with money to Myshkin.

The alienation which undermines relations between the Prince and others as a result of his inheritance and their jealousy of his wealth thus has serious implications for the hero's scripting ability, as without the active co-operation of others, it cannot succeed. His inheritance almost inevitably removes the possibility of consenting participation by others, but he is not prepared to employ harmful or coercive means to achieve his ends, as this would go against his ideal. The very fact of his inheritance splits him internally, placing him in a catch-22 situation; as a result of his new position, he must force others to participate if his script is to succeed, but to do so would mean that it had already failed according to the principles of his saintly scripting.

Money is therefore a major – perhaps *the* major – source of envy, which leads inevitably to conflict, 'For when envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work' (James 3.16). 'Confusion' here is a translation of the Greek 'ἀκαταστασία', meaning '*disturbance, upheaval, revolution, almost anarchy*',¹⁵ the adjectival form of which, 'ἀκαταστατος,' is used to describe the double minded man of 1. 8. Although the Russian Bible does not employ the same word in both cases, using 'не тверд' in the

¹⁵ Souter, p. 10.

first instance and 'неустройство' in the second, even the synonyms make the matter clear: division and disorder, the essence of double-mindedness, are the result of greed and craving, which undermine the foundations of harmonious societal relations. In this sense money is not only important in its own right as a cause of disunity in the theology of the Epistle, but also stands as a metaphor for any kind of material (as opposed to spiritual) desires, which equally create division between people:

From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not (4. 1-3).

Pleasure and the desire for it create divisions between men, as they are literally self-centred feelings which disregard the needs and desires of others.

Nastas'ia Filippovna's and Myshkin's alternative scripts for Rogozhin's life had he not met the heroine illustrate the strong connection between money and sexual passion. The hero, again inspired by a portrait to perceive the personality it depicts, says Rogozhin would have turned into his father, 'только деньги молча и сумрачно наживая', while Nastas'ia's version goes much further: 'и уж так бы ты свои деньги полюбил, что и не два миллиона, а, пожалуй бы, и десять скопил, да на мешках своих с голоду бы и помер, потому у тебя во всем страсть, всё ты до страсти доводишь' (VIII, 178). The character who bears the brunt of his passions sees most clearly that the mania for possessions is the same whether its

object is another person or money.¹⁶ This obsession with the material and physical leads to inflexibility and the tendency to produce one-sided scripts which are an obstacle rather than an encouragement to interaction, and in the extreme case of Rogozhin we see its most disastrous consequences for all concerned.

The role of money as a motivating force for the characters in *Idiot* is reinforced in Lebedev's interpretation of the Apocalypse, which explores the ethico-religious implications of materialism:

мы при третьем коне, вороном, и при всаднике, имеющем меру в руке своей, так как всё в нынешний век на мере и на договоре, и все люди своего только права и ищут: «мера пшеницы за динарий и три меры ячменя за динарий»... да еще дух свободный, и сердце чистое, и тело здоровое, и все дары божии при этом хотят сохранить. Но на едином праве не сохраняют, и за сим последует конь бледный и тот, коему имя Смерть, а за ним уже ад... (VIII, 167-168).

The fact that *Idiot* abounds in apocalyptic references and symbolism, such as the names Princess *Belokon'skaia*, recalling the fourth, pale horse, and the *Vesy* ('Scales') hotel, which both echo the above quotation, signals the importance of the theme to Dostoevskii's artistic conception.¹⁷ In the first place it augments the doom-laden atmosphere of the novel, highlighting the unethical attitudes and actions which are standard practice for many of the

¹⁶ See Sidney Monas, 'Across the Threshold: *The Idiot* as a Petersburg Tale', in *New Essays on Dostoevsky*, ed. by Malcolm V. Jones and Garth M. Terry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 67-93 (p. 85).

¹⁷ On aspects of the Apocalyptic theme in the novel, see Leatherbarrow, 'Apocalyptic Imagery'; Bethea, *Shape of Apocalypse*, pp. 62-104; Hollander, 'Apocalyptic Framework', and G. Rosenshield, 'Chaos, Apocalypse and the Laws of Nature: Autonomy and "Unity" in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*', *Slavic Review*, 50 (1991), 879-89.

characters, and suggesting that judgement and damnation are perilously close.

Hollander, however, points out that Lebedev's eschatology is not traditional, as the third horse normally signifies famine,¹⁸ and it is in this idiosyncratic element of his interpretation that parallels with the Epistle of James also stand out. Connecting money and mercantilism to the third horse, and to the Apocalypse in general, places responsibility for the nearness of Judgement firmly on human action (whereas famine implies a disaster that is largely outside the sphere of human influence), characterizing wealth and the negative emotions and actions that spring from it, as James does, as a major source of strife and sin. Furthermore, by linking railways and the tendency they represent to the star Wormwood of Revelation 8. 11 (VIII, 309), Lebedev creates a new, broader level of apocalyptic imagery, which reinforces the notion of man's responsibility for the current physical and emotional environment: 'Собственно одни железные дороги не замутят источников жизни, а всё это в целом-с проклято, всё это настроение наших последних веков, в его общем целом, научном и практическом, может быть, и действительном проклято-с' (VIII, 310).

The role of railways in the novel is evident from the first page, when Myshkin meets Rogozhin and Lebedev in a carriage on the Warsaw-St Petersburg train, and continues as train journeys and railway stations feature throughout (particularly in the Prince's wanderings before his first

¹⁸ 'Apocalyptic Framework', p. 130.

fit, but Nastas'ia Filippovna's second scandalous appearance in Pavlovsk also takes place at the station). The theme is re-emphasized in the fact that several of the characters are investors in the railway system (notably General Epanchin, who is further characterized by the narrator as a 'practical man' (VIII, 268-270), linking him to Lebedev's idea quoted above), which provides an additional link to the financial motif. Even more significant is Lebedev calling his nephew, Doktorenko, who works on the railways, 'будущий второй убийца будущего второго семейства Жемариных' (VIII, 161), as in the juxtaposition of railways, money and murder, he provides the first example of the inevitable consequences of mercantilism and materialism. The Epistle of James points to the same conclusion, as the warning to the rich man quoted above (pp. 257-58) ends with the phrase 'Ye have condemned and killed the just' (5. 6; see also 1. 15). Thus money is not simply a disunifying element, but can lead to the ultimate denial of the other. This fact is emphasized in *Idiot* in the images of machines which link Lebedev's interpretation to both Myshkin's description of the guillotine in his first story about execution, and Ippolit's alienated depiction of nature 'в виде какой-нибудь громадной машины новейшего устройства' (VIII, 339). As anti-human and devoid of a spiritual dimension, science, connected to wealth through Lebedev's railway metaphor and the recurring motif of investment in the railway system, has its basis in materialism and is thus a destructive force.

The problem typified by the railways and the 'scientific tendency' is expressed most clearly when Ptitsyn, the archetypal practical man who, as a moneylender, both perpetuates and profits from the desires, envies and

external inequalities of others, defends the benefits of the new transport system: 'Да хоть ко всеобщей солидарности и равновесию интересов приведет,' to which Lebedev responds, 'И только, только! Не принимая никакого нравственного основания, кроме удовлетворения личного эгоизма и материальной необходимости? Всеобщий мир, всеобщее счастье – из необходимости!' (VIII, 310). Concentration on individual desires and self-assertion has damaged society by reinforcing the separation of self and other and ignoring man's spiritual development and concomitant moral responsibilities, as 'телеги, подвозящие хлеб всему человечеству, без нравственного основания поступку, могут прехладнокровно исключить из наслаждения подвозимым значительную часть человечества, что уже и было...' (VIII, 312). Echoing the Gospel (and Old Testament) axiom 'Man shall not live by bread alone' (Matthew 4. 4), Lebedev illustrates how a society based on material and financial values 'без той связующей, направляющей сердце и оплодотворяющей источники жизни мысли!' (VIII, 315) has the power to exclude. As we saw in the story of Marie (p. 174), the 'excluding unity' of the villagers perpetuates prejudice and division. Thus *Idiot*, through a complex web of inter-related motifs surrounding the central theme of money (encompassing other material obsessions, including the lust to worldly power, and the scientific-rationalistic tendency), expresses the same attitude as the Epistle of James: wealth both retards spiritual and ethical practice and divides people from each other, the ultimate consequences of which are double-mindedness and murder.

While money is seen largely as a source of external disunity, the abuse of speech is indicative of (and a further impulse to) both outer and inner double-mindedness. False and harsh speech are a source of division in the community for James, with gossip and slander singled out for particular condemnation: 'Speak not evil of one another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law' (4. 11). On the internal level, this also signifies that slander and gossip are signs of inconsistency between the words a person uses to speak to God and to other men, which renders faith worthless: 'If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is in vain' (1. 26). This tendency for James is manifested physically in faith without works (1. 23; 2. 14, 17, 20); 'a claim to true wisdom cannot be upheld in the context of an inconsistent style of life'.¹⁹ In this sense, concentrating on gathering worldly rather than spiritual wealth, as discussed above, is also part of this theme.

This aspect of the Epistle is generally seen as being a warning against possible abuses or misreadings of the Pauline theology of justification:

a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law:

¹⁹ Laws, p. 161.

for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (Galatians 2. 16).²⁰

This can for James lead to the advocacy of a quietist faith abjuring charity in favour of faith that God will provide.²¹ As Davids states, 'James has observed much verbal commitment to Christian affirmations without endurance and with a lack of practical follow-through'.²² The assertion that 'faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone' (2. 17) is his response.

In terms of Dostoevskii's dialogue with the New Testament, James' theology is significant for two reasons. Firstly, of the seven marks Dostoevskii made in the Epistle, listed in the Petrozavodsk concordance, three relate directly to the problem of faith without works (1. 23; 2. 14, 20), and two indirectly, as they refer to the abuse of speech and mastery of the tongue (3. 2, 6). Although it is impossible to draw any definitive conclusions from this, it suggests that Dostoevskii saw these as important aspects of the Epistle. Secondly, Cox notes that Dostoevskii also saw dangers in Pauline theology from the opposite extreme, as the assertion that 'All things are lawful for me' (1 Corinthians 10. 23) can be taken out of the context of faith and used as a rationalistic argument, leading to Raskol'nikov's experimentation with the Napoleon theory, Stavrogin's terminal alienation from life, and Ivan Karamazov's rebellion.²³

²⁰ See also Galatians 3. 24; Romans 5. 1; Ephesians 2. 8-9.

²¹ Laws, pp. 128-33.

²² *Epistle*, p. 50.

²³ *Between Earth and Heaven*, p. 42.

The fact that all these characters are subject to radical dualism, owing to their extreme self-assertion,²⁴ suggests that in his search for the antithesis of his anti-heroes, Dostoevskii would turn to an antithetical theology. As a corruption of the original meaning of 'All things are lawful for me' is the mainstay of his ideological heroes, it is plausible to argue that the simple, unambiguous call to ethical action and freedom from hypocrisy which characterize the Epistle of James would have appealed to Dostoevskii in his attempt to depict a 'положительно прекрасный человек' as an antidote to the self-assertion and dualism of his negative and spiritually isolated characters.

The central opposition of the novel, the Myshkin—others axis,²⁵ supports this theory, as in contrast to the greed, jealousy and harsh speech of the other characters, the hero, particularly in the opening section of the novel, is driven by compassion, open-heartedness and generosity, and speaks with the aim of increasing others' understanding of the need for these qualities. In this too he strongly resembles the 'wise man' of the Epistle, standing out as avoiding the abuses of speech, as well as money and power, to which others are prey: 'Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom' (3. 13). The Prince also demonstrates the ideal of faith with works, as we see in his move to positive action to help Marie in his story, and later Nastas'ia Filippovna, General Ivolgin and Ippolit in

²⁴ S. Askol'dov, 'Religiozno-eticheskoe znachenie Dostoevskogo', in *Dostoevskii: Stat'i i materialy*, tom 1, ed. by A. S. Dolinin (St Petersburg: Mysl', 1922), pp. 1-32 (pp. 3-10).

²⁵ See F. I. Evnin, 'Myshkin i drugie', *Russkaia Literatura*, 3 (1968), 37-52 (p. 39).

the real time of the novel; his is not a quietist belief-system which passively assumes that faith is sufficient in itself, but involves active participation to relieve the suffering of others; 'указав постепенно на *Князя в действии*, будет довольно' (IX, 252, author's emphasis).

Early in the notebooks for *Idiot*, before any fixed decisions about either the characters or plot had been made, Dostoevskii also wrote, 'Христианин и в то же время не верит. *Двойственность глубокой натуры. Язык в зеркале*' (IX, 185, author's emphasis). Although, as we note above, it is impossible to justify privileging one comment amidst a mass of frequently contradictory notes, this suggests that some of Dostoevskii's concerns, even in the initial stages of planning the novel, were similar to those of James. The theme of doubleness and the tongue as its agent are, as we have seen, major problems for the Epistle, while doubt is also a central issue as it is a source and sign of double-mindedness, 'For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed' (1. 6). Doubt is moreover the central example of faith without works in the Epistle, against which tendency the Old Testament figures of Abraham (2. 21), Rahab (2. 25) and Job (5. 11) are presented as unwavering in their faith and demonstrating this in their actions; 'Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?' (2. 22). The fact that James refers to righteous characters from the Old Testament, where doubleness is depicted as being the fruit of sin, further reinforces the idea that freedom from double-mindedness and doubt are the keys to an ethical life; one should not forget that Job is a particularly important figure for Dostoevskii, being a significant influence on *Brat'ia Karamazovy* and the

religious ideals of Starets Zosima.²⁶ Furthermore, James also employs the metaphor of the mirror: 'for if any be a hearer and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass' (1. 23). Significantly, Dostoevskii marked this verse, which also pertains to the problem of faith without works, in his copy of the New Testament. Therefore, by juxtaposing doubt, doubleness, the tongue and the image of the mirror in his note, Dostoevskii demonstrates an instinctive awareness of the interconnections between these issues and a certain sympathy, whether conscious or not, with James' theology, suggesting that he perceived the relevance of these problems to the novel and in relation to each other before its form, plot or characters were developed.

In the final text of *Idiot*, verbal communication is, as we have seen, central to the interactions of the characters and particularly to the impulse to re-creation which stands as the primary basis for the protagonists' scripting. Furthermore, the origin of the narrative impulse in the Fall is also the source of man's dualism, which in itself has a strong linguistic component, in the form of the serpent's lie which introduced ambiguity into communication.²⁷ The contradictory impulses of Nastas'ia Filippovna, Aglaia's conflicting signals to Myshkin, Lebedev's habit of working for both sides in a dispute, and Gania's apparent change of heart at the beginning of Part II, followed by his later reversion to type, all testify to the characters' dualistic tendencies. Although dualism is inevitable as a result

²⁶ See, for example, V. Liakhu, 'O vliianii poetiki Biblii na poetiku F. M. Dostoevskogo', *Voprosy literatury*, 4 (1998), 129-143 (pp. 140-41).

²⁷ See introduction, pp. 41-43.

of the Fall and man's loss of his original wholeness, the extreme forms of double-mindedness exhibited in the novel lead to a bifurcation of the scripting impulse, as the characters are constantly being pulled in different directions, both by the contradictory and incompatible elements in their own psyche, and by the same factors at work in others. In particular, the oscillations of Nastas'ia Filippovna and Aglaia with regard to the hero not only indicate internal divisions, but also impact powerfully on his consciousness. According to the principles of saintly scripting, which strives for a solution to the problem of dualism by reducing the separation and conflict between self and other, he must attempt to reconcile both the opposition between the two women and the internal divisions within them. However, his admission of his 'двойные мысли' also demonstrates his later descent into dualism.

As most of the characters in the novel are engaged in narrating in one way or another, the presence of lies and related abuses of speech in *Idiot* gains additional significance as a force for and a further indication of double-mindedness, as in the Epistle of James; in particular, the decline of Myshkin, which is evident in his speech, for example in his dishonesty to General Ivolgin and his inability to express his ideas at the Epanchins' soirée, can be seen not only as indicative of his Fall but also as a shift away from the ideal man James postulates, and a move towards the double-mindedness of the rest of society.

Lies, slander, gossip and harsh criticism account for a significant proportion of the characters' communication in the novel. As Miller notes, practically every inserted narrative in the text contains some sort of

falsehood, such as Aglaia changing the initials on the poor knight's shield, General Ivolgin's tall tales and Totskii claiming that a trivial story about sexual rivalry is his worst deed.²⁸ Outside the inserted narratives, the same is true; Lebedev's constant and meaningless lies, even to the extent of reversing his name and patronymic, are matched by Aglaia's lies about her feelings for the Prince and Gania, while Ippolit pointlessly claims to have consulted Dr B-n, only to admit later that this is untrue (VIII, 165; 360; 322). Lies, which when they concern others are a source of conflict, also introduce contradictory impulses and separate people from the truth internally.

However, much of the characters' discourse is more ambiguous, as the boundaries between lies, gossip and criticism frequently overlap, with the result that the 'truth' is distorted and obscured; for example, Aglaia's harshness towards Nastas'ia Filippovna has its basis in the rumours spread about her, rather than any direct experience or knowledge but, as with others' criticism and gossip about her, serves to perpetuate a false perception. This form of judgement by men of each other is a particularly condemned as an abuse of speech in James, who asks, 'who art thou that judgest another?' (4. 12). Furthermore, the irony of Aglaia's criticism of Myshkin, 'У вас нежности нет: одна правда, стало быть, — несправедливо' (VIII, 354), lies in the fact that while only the ethically-oriented hero is ready to judge with forgiveness and to be judged and forgiven, and also sees that this is what others need for their self-

²⁸ *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, p. 10.

affirmation (in particular Ippolit), others in the novel are merely moralistic, passing judgement with no element of forgiveness, and without allowing others to judge them.²⁹

Another aspect of the question of speech and its relation to truth is seen in Rogozhin's story about the heroine in the opening chapter of the novel where, as outlined above, we are unable to distinguish between truth, rumour and outright falsehood. The main consequence of this is that as readers we feel unable to trust Rogozhin as a narrator, which both undermines the reader's ability to know what is 'really' happening, and adds to his later characterization as a shadowy, ghost-like figure, which suggests that he has lost all connection with the reality of the concrete, everyday world. A similar problem occurs towards the end of the novel with respect to the narrator. As he moves away from omniscience and the direct representation of events and instead reports rumour, we have little guarantee of reliability, particularly as Myshkin's relationship with Nastas'ia Filippovna returns to the foreground; as we are already aware that the popular assumptions of her promiscuity and of a sexual liaison between them are in fact false, we have little reason to believe that the events which the narrator reconstructs for us from the same gossip-mongers are any more accurate. Rumours and gossip are problematic for human relations as they provoke speculation, which in turn gives rise to further potential falsehoods, as well as mistrust between people; they are also problematic for narrative, as they undermine the reader's reference points, according to

²⁹ See Cox, *Between Earth and Heaven*, pp. 179-80.

which a coherent standard of truth for the literary text (within its own terms) may usually be defined. When lies are the habitual mode of address in a narrative, it becomes impossible for either readers or protagonists to define any such standard. We see throughout the novel that the characters' interpretations of each other are central to the structuring of the text, but the high level of unreliable narration, owing to the presence of hidden agendas and contradictory motives, introduces doubt into the most straightforward interpretation. Many of the protagonists' scripts for each other are based on falsehood or mis-readings, which jeopardize interrelations as well as the stability of the text.

Keller's article and the visit of the nihilists during which it appears provides one of the most consistent examples of lies, slander, gossip and harsh criticism in the novel. The article itself interweaves truth, half-truth and absolute un-truth concerning Myshkin's inheritance and casts gross aspersions on his, his father's, and Pavlishchev's characters (VIII, 217-21), leaving both the reader and the other protagonists listening aware that they have been presented with a wildly inaccurate version of events, but unable to provide a more accurate or fair account to counter most of its accusations. Lies in the novel perpetuate lies, and the separation of reality and its (false) representation, an indication of the abuse of speech and as such an example of double-mindedness, is reinforced.

Moreover, lies are also a source of division between people which, in the case of the nihilists and Keller's article, makes it even more unlikely that others will accept their point of view and act accordingly; co-operation is needed for scripting to succeed, and when it is withdrawn owing to its

creator's false representation or abuse of the very person who is being allocated a particular role, a script is almost bound to be rejected.

One of the paradoxes of scripting (and of dialogue in general) is that it is founded on the impulse to self-assertion, but requires the active participation of another. This participation cannot be assumed, and is easily lost as a consequence of the dualistic nature of man. Myshkin in Part I of the novel offers a more harmonious alternative of interaction for the sake of the other. However, he cannot rely on their willing participation either, as the nihilists in this episode are also trying to direct the narrative according to their own script; the lies about Myshkin in Keller's article provide an alternative past to the one we have already been given, forcing a slight change in direction as the other characters' and the readers' perception of the hero's goodness and capacity to improve the lives of others is undermined. As we have seen, Myshkin's confidence in his mission and his ideas is damaged, which threatens his ability to act for the sake of the other; their lies and slander introduce doubt into his mind. Furthermore, the other characters cease to trust him and suspect he is not being open, particularly after Nastas'ia Filippovna's first attack on Radomskii.

The confrontation with the nihilists also highlights another aspect of the abuse of speech and the dualism in which it results. Although the political position of the visitors is never precisely defined, it is clear from their words and their ideological opposition to Myshkin that they are rationalists, as the main points of their argument concern not moral obligation, but logic and rights: 'Кто бы ни были ваши свидетели, хотя бы и ваши друзья, но так как они не могут не согласиться с правом

Бурдовского (потому что оно, очевидно, математическое)' (VIII, 224-225). Their credo, 'право человеческое, натуральное, право здравого смысла и голоса совести' (VIII, 223), bases the whole of life within the sphere of the human, and repudiates all notion of a divine or spiritual dimension.

However, the heavy irony which pervades the scene demonstrates the fact that the nihilists are also guilty of faith without works, even according to their own rationalistic beliefs. The rights of man are apparently an article of faith to them, yet in the reality of their speech, it degenerates into mere assertion of their own rights at the expense of the other. Throughout the episode, they repeat the word 'право' like a mantra, uttering it 31 times in chapter 8 of Part II alone, always in the form of a demand ('Требуем, требуем, требуем, а не просим!..' (VIII, 224)) for their rights to be respected ('мы в своем праве'), or as a denial of the rights of others, such as, 'имели вы право', and 'Но права не имеете, права не имеете, права не имеете!.. [...] вы не имеете права!' (VIII, 216). Furthermore, their insistence on being treated as equals and that Burdovskii is not a charity case implies that they are democrats who do not recognize social or financial distinctions, yet in contrast to Myshkin, who talks to the Epanchins' footman as an equal and is unconcerned when Nastas'ia Filippovna mistakes him for a servant, the nihilists are affronted at being treated in this way, complaining, 'два часа прождать в вашей лакейской' and 'я вам не лакей!' (VIII, 216). Despite their protestations of equality, they are far from applying this principle to others, and are thus not backing up their belief with appropriate actions and words. In this sense,

the 'Pavlishchev's son' episode can be seen as a modern, secular analogy to James' problem of faith without works; and as scripting demands concrete action and interaction by all parties, the inability to translate words into deeds severely compromises the ability of these characters to impose their ideology onto the text or persuade others of the merits of their script.

Burdovskii's and his associates' persistent denial of others' rights whilst asserting their own demonstrates the distinction that they make between self and other, which causes conflict between the two camps. It also exposes a lie at the heart of their beliefs, as although they claim to defend the rights of man, they in actuality are defending only self-interest, a discrepancy which implies double-mindedness. The tendency to falsehood and self-deception is also illustrated in the visitors' mistrust of others, as they presume that everyone, like them, is prone to deception: 'Ну, князь, вы очень не сильны в арифметике, или уже очень сильны, хоть и представляетесь простячком' (VIII, 228), and 'это или уж слишком невинно, или уж слишком ловко...' (VIII, 235). Lies thus cause division through perpetuating distrust, and undermine the potentialities of scripting; in projecting their assumption that deceit is the norm onto Myshkin, the inflexibility of the radicals rules out the possibility of unexpected reactions, and are therefore unable to respond spontaneously. It is for this reason that their script for the novel fails, and the group quickly returns to the background.

Moreover, the mathematical and logical formulae the nihilists use to support their case are shown to provide an inadequate basis for values when their case is disproved. Having set out Burdovskii's claim purely with the

intention of securing Myshkin's agreement that they are logically in the right, their argument cannot hold good when one aspect of it is found to be faulty. The logical conclusion of their claim, when the new proof that Burdovskii was not Pavlishchev's son at all is introduced, is that the Prince has no moral obligation whatsoever to settle. When a single factor in an equation is proved to be untrue, the rationale of their entire argument disintegrates.

The mathematical and logical stance of the nihilists is therefore an intellectual analogy to the railways/science motif discussed above, as both tendencies prioritize a rationalistic basis for life at the expense of the spiritual. The two strands are connected firstly in the fact that episode with 'Pavlishchev's son' pivots on the issue of money, but more significantly in the other characters' discussions of the moral implications of the radicals' ideas. When Lebedev compares his nephew to Gorskii, he establishes the link between railways, mercantilism and murder, and this idea is continued when he characterizes the visitors' political views thus: 'теперь уже считается прямо за право, что если очень чего-нибудь захочется, то уж ни пред какими преградами не останавливаться, хотя бы пришлось ужокошить при этом восемь персон-с' (VIII, 214). Myshkin confirms the connection even as his compassion and gentle judgement tempered with forgiveness lead him to deny it; 'Уверяю вас, что Горские и Даниловы только случаи, а эти только... ошибаются' (VIII, 214).

The twisted logic that Doktorenko uses to 'prove' that 'важен принцип', and 'всё равно, что сто, что двести пятьдесят,' when challenged about the money they have (or rather, have not) returned to

Myshkin, is compared by Radomskii to the utilitarian defence of the Gorskii case (VIII, 236), and the exposé of the moral consequences of nihilism and rationalism is completed by this character and Mrs Epanchina. The latter sees that the radicals have lost their 'binding idea', as 'в Бога не веруют, в Христа не веруют!' (VIII, 238), and suggests that the inevitable result of a reliance on earthly values is murder: 'Он денег твоих, десяти тысяч, пожалуй, и по совести не возьмет, а ночью придет и зарежет, да и вынет их из шкатулки. По совести вынет! Это у него не бесчестно!' (VIII, 237). Furthermore, her outburst contains echoes of Rogozhin's knife, his interest in Myshkin's story of the murderer, and his attempt to kill his 'brother' and rival. Although Rogozhin operates at the opposite extreme, with no rationality at all, the two paths converge, as both end in total denial of the other and moral cannibalism. Radomskii makes the connection more explicitly: 'Вы таки консеквенты: [...] от правы силы до права тигров и крокодилов и даже до Данилова и Горского недалеко', as

от этого дела может прямо перескочить на право силы, то есть на право единичного кулака и личного захотения, как, впрочем, и очень часто кончалось на свете. Остановился же Прудон на праве силы. В американскую войну многие самые передовые либералы объявили себя в пользу плантаторов, в том числе, что негры суть негры, ниже белого племени, а, стало быть, право силы за белыми... (VIII, 245).

Thus through the nihilists' assertion of their rights and Lebedev's exposition of the loss of a 'binding idea', alongside the recurring motifs of contemporary murder cases and money, Dostoevskii introduces into *Idiot* a broad set of interrelated ideas illustrating the continuing relevance of

James' themes of the abuse of wealth and speech and the divisions they cause, both internal and external.

The theme of double-mindedness stands out in the Epistle of James as it is part of the Jewish tradition going back to Genesis and the Fall,³⁰ which is also, as we have seen, the origin of the narrative impulse which is vital to the protagonists of *Idiot*. Lies and related examples of the wrong use of speech are therefore not merely a further indication of the Fall, but are also significant in the process of scripting in which the protagonists participate. Gossip and falsehood are generally inimical to Myshkin's brand of saintly scripting, for although they are motivated by the need for self-assertion, they divide people inwardly from the truth, thus reinforcing the dualism which is the main feature of their fallen status. Although 'truth' is in some ways an unimportant concept in relation to scripting, as the whole process depends more on the subjective images of themselves and others that the characters are projecting than on any 'objective' reality, false or abusive speech places characters in opposition to each other, thereby undermining the mutuality and interactive nature of scripting; without the active participation of the other, which is needed for true self-affirmation, the script a character tries to project will fail.

It is for this reason that although many of the characters participate in aspects of the scripting principle, such as the narrative impulse and the drive to present the personality they wish to others, we generally do not see the whole process, as it is frequently halted owing to the inflexible and

³⁰ See Laws, pp. 3-4; 58-61.

coercive practices of the protagonists. Thus through alienating others, Burdovskii and his associates, Gania, his father and, to a certain extent, Aglaia all find that co-operation is withdrawn and their scripts literally have nowhere to go. This is why the stories of many of the minor characters occasionally gravitate to the surface only to disappear again, as they cannot maintain a consistent place in the consciousness of another. For example, after threatening to be a strong force in Part I, owing to his role in Totskii's script for Nastas'ia Filippovna, Gania recedes into the background and fails to make an impact in the rest of the novel, while in the scene with the nihilists, the hero, abused by Keller's article, refuses to play the weak, capitulating role the visitors have in mind for him (although he equally avoids the more aggressive stance Mrs Epanchina and Aglaia would prefer to see), which foils their plans and prevents them from occupying a prominent position in the remainder of the novel. This lack of assent is a common theme; others do not accept the stories that Ferdyshchenko and General Epanchin tell (VIII, 124; 127), while Nastas'ia Filippovna also refuses to participate in the *petit-jeu* in a normal way. As we shall see (pp. 302-4 below), Ippolit is also alienated by the failure of others to take his confession and suicide attempt seriously (which is one of the reasons why he turns from Myshkin to Rogozhin) and, in the final analysis, Nastas'ia Filippovna does not consent to the role the hero offers her. Lies and harsh speech, whilst appearing to be a short-cut to self-assertion, fail to take account of the negative impact they have, which frequently leads to the other's self-assertion rather than consent, and are thus responsible for the

failure of many of the characters' attempts to project a script onto the novel.

The two central figures, Nastas'ia Filippovna and Myshkin, offer alternatives to this trend and different solutions to the paradox of the need for self-assertion and the need for the other. The heroine, as we have seen, is in large part a successful scripter, as she achieves the final aim of one of her scripts and influences the preoccupations of others for long periods in the novel. Paradoxically, however, one of her main means of achieving this control is through slander and gossip, as she turns others' lies about her to her own advantage, presenting herself as the infernal, capricious woman most of them imagine her to be, and damning Radomskii both by drawing attention to an apparent association with her and through further use of gossip. She uses the features of unreliable narration founded on rumours to retain her unfinalizability and to increase the uncertainty and unease of the other protagonists.

In Part I of the novel the Prince, in contrast, tries to present an ideal model of scripting which is honest and avoids harsh speech and self-assertion, but rather uses gentle persuasion to encourage the other to participate. While Nastas'ia Filippovna's perverse version of scripting reinforces her essential dualism, Myshkin's saintly scripting demonstrates through his avoidance of lies and attention to the other's need for self-affirmation the potential of the process for the ultimate aim of overcoming double-mindedness and re-creating a higher reality by recovering a sense of pre-lapsarian wholeness.

However, after the six month gap we also see the decline of the hero's anti-dualism, which arises as a result of his 'двойные мысли'. It is evident in his failure to express his ideas at the Epanchins' party, and also in the fact that far from helping Ippolit and General Ivolgin, as he intends, he makes matters worse for both, as his compassion is compromised. Although in the projection of his saintly script in Part I Myshkin shows himself to be a competent participant in the process, he is thrown totally off course by the force of Nastas'ia Filippovna's Manichaeistic scripting and the pressures introduced by the material world and the prevalence of harsh speech. This leads him to focus more on worldly preoccupations and results in assertion of the ego and corruption of his ideal. Consequently, he loses the ability to persuade others to participate in his script; Aglaia disputes and denies his ideas, and Ippolit and Nastas'ia Filippovna both turn to Rogozhin in the end.

Given the similarities between the themes and oppositions of the two texts, another noteworthy aspect of the Epistle of James is worth addressing in respect of possible links to Dostoevskii's novel: it contains no reference to the figure of the divine Christ or the Resurrection.³¹ This feature seems even more curious in view of the fact that authorship of the letter is generally attributed to Jesus' brother, who had a conversion experience as result of seeing the resurrected Christ.³² This anomaly was in part responsible for the theological disputes which prevented the Epistle

³¹ See Laws, p. 3.

³² See 1 Corinthians 15. 7.

from becoming part of the New Testament canon until the comparatively late date of the fourth century.³³ It is also the main reason why it stands out as being qualitatively different from other books of the New Testament. As *Idiot* is so close to James' theology in many ways, the implications of this absence for our interpretation of Dostoevskii's attempt to portray a 'положительно прекрасный человек' are worth examining.

In a further parallel between the two texts, *Idiot* equally lacks any substantial reference to the resurrection as a reality and a source of faith. In the major image of Christ in the novel, the Holbein painting, the possibility of resurrection is specifically absent, as Ippolit's critique shows, while Myshkin's comment, 'Да от этой картины у иного еще вера может пропасть', and Rogozhin's mysterious reply, 'пропадает и то' (VIII, 182), point to the consequences of this lacuna. Likewise, in the stories of executions, as we have seen, the hero also emphasizes the fact that the idea of resurrection or an afterlife is missing (see pp. 149-50, 159-60, 165), while even Lebedev's apocalyptic vision ends with death and the fourth horse, not the 'new heaven and new earth' of Revelation 21. 1. The only positive reference to an example of resurrection is in General Ivolgin's tale of Private Kolpakov, where the meaninglessness of the event, owing to it being divorced from faith, is highlighted.³⁴ Furthermore, although Myshkin talks of 'resurrecting' Nastas'ia Filippovna, he is thinking in purely symbolic terms of a spiritual rebirth into a new and better life, both in the

³³ Davids, p. 7.

³⁴ See Meerson, 'Ivolgin and Holbein', p. 202.

novel and in notebook entries, for example, 'он перевоспитывает Н[астасью] Ф[илипповну] и воскрешает душу' (IX, 246). The Resurrection of Christ, the vital event for the Orthodox church, is absent from the theology of the novel, as it is missing from the beliefs of most of the characters, a fact to which Lebedev's interpretation of the Apocalypse and bemoaning the loss of a 'binding idea', the nihilists' demand of their rights, and Mrs Epanchina's 'в Бога не веруют, в Христа не веруют!' (VIII, 238) all testify.

In the absence of any mention of the Resurrection or the Pauline doctrine of Grace, faith and salvation in the Epistle of James are revealed through the simple values of honesty, openness and compassion for the needy, which are mirrored in Myshkin's ideal, as examined in chapter 2. In spite of the fact that the Prince's access to another reality originates in the moment of light he experiences before his fit, his faith too is demonstrated in his actions, as we see in his attempts to help Nastas'ia Filippovna, Ippolit, General Ivolgin and others, and in his general concern for the humiliated and weak; Myshkin, particularly in Part I of the novel, is imbued with the ideal of 'practical Christianity' (IX, 268). Whether or not Jesus' brother was the author of the Epistle, the fact that it is in his name gives its theology the subtext of James' conversion experience, suggesting that while this was the source of his own faith, it was not to be seen as an indispensable part of the transmission of that faith to others. Similarly, Prince Myshkin is inspired by a religious experience, but it is his actions arising out of his vision of a higher reality that constitute the expression of his faith.

The frequent comparison of Prince Myshkin to Christ (particularly as portrayed in John's Gospel)³⁵ is, as we have seen, problematic, as it fails to take into account the change that occurs in the hero and the deterioration of the ideal he represents as the novel progresses. Moreover, Myshkin does not resemble Renan's rationalistic interpretation of Christ, as although the hero of *Idiot* is clearly not divine, he does have access to an authentic, irrational, religious experience. He compares this experience to Christianity and Islam, but his references are metaphorical rather than organic, and his vision is not linked to Christ or the divine. It is instead a moment of mystic insight into the nature of spatial and temporal reality which is personally convincing and informs his actions. Renan's humanized 'Christ' is impossible, as 'неверие в воплощение и божественность Христа неизбежно приводит к «Мертвому Христу», который воскреснуть не может'.³⁶ However, Myshkin, as an ideal in the early part of the novel, does not reinforce this theme, but rather offers an alternative to it.³⁷

Therefore in his ideals and in the ethical alternative he presents to the double-mindedness of the rest of society, Myshkin is a 'natural Christian', a 'христианин-гуманист, одержимый стремлением вносить

³⁵ See, for example, Ermilova, *Taina*, p. 5.

³⁶ I. A. Kirillova, 'Khristos v zhizni i tvorchestve Dostoevskogo', in *Dostoevskii: materialy i issledovaniia*, 14, ed. by N. F. Budanova (St Petersburg: Nauka, 1997), pp. 18-25 (p. 24); see also Ludmilla Koehler, 'Renan, Dostoevskii and Fedorov', *CASS*, 17 (1983), 362-71 (pp. 362-63), and B. N. Tikhomirov, 'O "khristologii" Dostoevskogo', in *Dostoevskii: materialy i issledovaniia*, 11, ed. by E. A. Smirnova (St Petersburg: Nauka, 1994), pp. 102-21 (p. 105).

³⁷ See Woronzoff-Dashkoff, p. 64.

свет и добро во всякую душу',³⁸ who strongly resembles the 'wise man' of James' practical theology. The Epistle's opposition of the wise and the double-minded provides an extremely telling comparison for *Idiot*, as in Part I of the novel, Myshkin's ability to speak wisely and lack of interest in money are in sharp contrast to the lies, criticism and greed of others. His later decline into double-mindedness occurs largely as a result of his inheritance and the force of the abusive words and divisive attitudes of those around him. Thus in the course of the novel, as in James, we see the ideal, the difficulty for men of maintaining it in the face of worldly temptations and problematic self-other relations, and the consequences of the total absence of the ideal for human behaviour and interaction.

II. SELF AND OTHER IN DOSTOEVSKII'S AESTHETIC ACTIVITY: IPPOLIT, THE NARRATOR, AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE SAINTLY SCRIPT

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.
– W. B. Yeats, 'The Second Coming'

The comparison of the Epistle of James with *Idiot* has shown the importance of interaction on the ethical level, and highlighted the difficulty of reconciling the impulse to self-assertion, which underlies scripting and has its origin in the dualistic nature of humanity and the tendency to

³⁸ Vladimir Kotel'nikov, 'Khristoditseia Dostoevskogo', in *Dostoevskii i mirovaia kul'tura*, 11, ed. by Karen Stepanian and others (St Petersburg: Serebrianyi vek, 1998), pp. 20-28 (p. 26).

separate oneself from one's fellow beings, with the simultaneous need for the other to confirm one's self-image. The significance of interactivity and the impact it has on the characters and the dynamics of the text is most evident in the fatal influence of Nastas'ia Filippovna's script on Myshkin and Rogozhin, but also in the fact that the hero's compassion and humility deteriorate after sustained contact with the pride and obsessiveness of others.

Bakhtin's conception of the human personality centres on the problem of dualism and the need for interaction as the foundation of dialogue:

один человек, остающийся только с самим собою, не может свести концы с концами даже в самых глубоких и интимных сферах своей духовной жизни, не может обойтись без другого сознания. Человек никогда не найдет всей полноты только в себе самом;

самая же установка человека по отношению к чужому слову и чужому сознанию является, в сущности, основной темой всех произведений Достоевского. Отношение героя к себе самому неразрывно связано с отношением другого к нему. Сознание себя самого все время ощущает себя на фоне сознания о нем другого, «я для себя» на фоне «я для другого». Поэтому слово о себе героя строится под непрерывным воздействием чужого слова о нем.³⁹

Bakhtin posits dialogue as an ideal of self-affirmation arising from co-existence and interaction.⁴⁰ This suggests a harmonious unity with the other in a polyphonic 'мир взаимно освещающихся мыслью, мир

³⁹ *Problemy*, pp. 306, 354.

⁴⁰ *Problemy*, p. 47.

сопряженных смысловых человеческих сознаний'.⁴¹ However, very few readers would agree with the idea that harmonious co-operation forms the basis of works where the vast majority of interaction involves dispute, violence, coercion, violation and withdrawal, on the verbal, physical and emotional levels. While Bakhtin addresses polyphony as an ideal, the novels themselves depict the varying ways in which polyphony breaks down and dialogue is distorted and corrupted (a fact which Malcolm Jones takes as the starting point for his illuminating study *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin*).⁴²

One of the results of concentrating on the ideal model of interaction is that it fails to take fully into consideration the nature of the problematic relationship of self to other and the effect this has on the text. Given the huge gap between the ideal self-other relations we see emanating from the Prince in Part I, and the frequently disastrous interactivity of the other characters and of Myshkin later in the novel, the theme of the breakdown of interhuman relations is evidently of extreme importance, particularly as this interaction is the locus of the idea which is central to the development of the Dostoevskian hero: 'сфера ее бытия не индивидуальное сознание, а диалогическое общение между сознаниями'.⁴³

The above comparison of *Idiot* with the Epistle of James highlights some aspects of this fundamental relationship and its breakdown in terms of the relation of man to man. As *Idiot* is a fictional narrative, and one in

⁴¹ *Problemy*, p. 163.

⁴² pp. 6-7.

⁴³ *Problemy*, p. 147.

which narrating plays such a prominent – and interactive – role as the major scripting strategy of many of the characters, it is also necessary to examine the self-other opposition in terms of the relation of narrators to characters, as it is through the direct mediation of dialogic interactivity by the author/narrator that the characters have the potential to come into being and achieve selfhood within the text. For this reason, we shall turn to Bakhtin's earlier work, 'Avtor i geroi v esteticheskoi deiatel'nosti', in which the different perception of self and other is fundamental to the formation of ethical relationships as well as to the author's depiction of the hero.⁴⁴

In 'Avtor i geroi', Bakhtin characterizes the essential separation of self from other as a difference of perception:

Этот всегда наличный по отношению ко всякому другому человеку *избыток* моего видения, знания, обладания обусловлен единственностью и незаместимостью моего места в мире: ведь на этом месте в это время в данной совокупности обстоятельств я единственный нахожусь – все другие люди вне меня.⁴⁵

The result of this is that one perceives oneself from within as unique, unfinalized and open, whilst perceiving others from without as a completed and 'убедительное переживание человеческой конечности'.⁴⁶ This is linked to Myshkin's aesthetic ideal of seeing as the foundation of ethical activity. Only through looking and sympathetic co-experiencing can one perceive the self in the other.⁴⁷ For the moral being this inspires an

⁴⁴ in *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, pp. 7-180.

⁴⁵ 'Avtor i geroi', p. 23, author's emphasis.

⁴⁶ 'Avtor i geroi', p. 34.

⁴⁷ See Woronzoff-Dashkoff, p. 17.

acceptance of the other's feeling of their own uniqueness and unfinalizability, and in the case of Myshkin in the opening chapters of the novel, leads to him encouraging others to achieve selfhood on the concrete level of interaction, in line with the principles of his own saintly scripting and with the fundamental impulse to scripting of all the main characters. This 'excess of seeing' has social and ethical implications, but these are secondary resultants of a primary existential dilemma, a fact which is well illustrated by Ippolit's 'Neobkhodimoe ob'iasnenie'.

Alienation and isolation, in other words separation from others and the world, the central theme of Ippolit's narrative, arise from the consciousness of the personal proximity of death. As Bakhtin states,

целое моей жизни не имеет значимости в ценностном контексте моей жизни. События моего рождения, ценностного пребывания в мире и, наконец, моей смерти совершаются не во мне и не для меня. Эмоциональный вес моей жизни *в ее целом* не существует для меня самого.⁴⁸

This is because 'существенное значение имеет антиципация смерти для эстетического завершения человека [...] Мы предвосхищаем смерть другого как неизбежную смысловую неосуществленность, как смысловую неудачу всей жизни, создавая такие формы оправдания ее, которые он сам со своего места принципиально найти не может'.⁴⁹

Facing death for Ippolit signifies facing the immanent inevitability of being finalized by others without having the chance to make his mark in the

⁴⁸ 'Avtor i geroi', p. 93, author's emphasis.

⁴⁹ 'Avtor i geroi', p. 114.

world in order to turn the judgements of others in his favour and allow him a degree of self-finalization. His lamentation at his failure to affirm himself in the eyes of others is anguished: 'Я хотел быть деятелем, я имел право... О, как я много хотел!', and 'никакого-то воспоминания не сумел оставить! Ни звука, ни следа, ни одного дела, не распространил ни одного убеждения!..' (VIII, 247-248). This illustrates his desire to overcome the fact of his impending death by claiming for himself the immortality of controlling the memories of others according to his own self-image, and his 'ob'iasnenie' is an attempt to script this self-definition into existence. He emphasizes the fact that he is setting up a loophole in advance of his death with his comment, 'не хочу уходить, не оставив слова в ответ' (VIII, 341).

Ippolit's narrative focuses on various aspects of the separation of self and other; his preference for Meier's wall and isolation from human beings is noted (VIII, 322), and his alienation from nature is equally evident in the fact that he sees everything as 'ваш', not 'наш' or 'мой', and believes, 'одного меня счел за лишнего' (VIII, 343). Furthermore, the cruelty of his reaction to Surikov over the death of the latter's baby reveals an absence of compassion and fellow-feeling, mirrored by the callous cheerfulness with which the nihilist doctor Kislorodov pronounces Ippolit's death sentence (VIII, 323-329). He also proposes a partial solution in individual charitable acts as a means to re-establishing personal contact with the other, in line with Myshkin's belief in good deeds, although the story of his own good deed seems not to achieve this and he remains distant throughout the episode. Ippolit's meditation on personal acts of charity

raises a further problem for those rapidly approaching death; there is literally not enough time, so he has to choose a good action which is 'помельче и которое в моих *средствах*' (VIII, 336, author's emphasis). As his time runs out, the possibilities of making his life significant in the eyes of others and himself diminishes. Impending death in fact leads logically to the other extreme, absolute self-assertion and denial of the other: 'что если бы мне вдруг вздумалось теперь убить кого угодно, хоть десять человек разом' (VIII, 342).

However, the fact that Ippolit's fundamental problem in relation to his 'I' is existential as much as it is practical is revealed in his dreams and in his response to the Holbein painting 'Christ in the Tomb'. The implications of the naturalistic depiction of Christ's death, which destroys faith in the possibility of the resurrection, are well known, but Bakhtin's discussion of Christ points to another source of existential angst. The Christ of the Gospels, according to Bakhtin, is the perfect of example of the ideal self combined with the ideal other, echoing Dostoevskii's sentiments in the diary fragment 'Masha lezhit na stole':

синтез *этического солипсизма*, бесконечной строгости к себе самому человека, то есть безукоризненно чистого отношения к себе самому, с *этически-эстетической добротой* к другому: здесь впервые явилось бесконечно углубленное *я-для-себя* [...] безмерно доброе к другому, воздающее всю правду другому как таковому, раскрывающее и утверждающее всю полноту ценностного своеобразия другого.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ 'Avtor i geroi', p. 51, author's emphasis; on Dostoevskii's contribution to this subject, see pp. 189-90 above.

The image of Christ is important not only because it provides a paradigmatic model of the ideal relation of self to other, but also because it reflects man's relation to God. As Coates states, 'in becoming man, Christ saves God from the necessary neutrality of a disembodied consciousness and allows him to participate fully in the world'; through His becoming, Christ concretizes the relation of man to God as the central I/Thou orientation.⁵¹

The denial of Christ's divinity in the Holbein painting removes the possibility of experiencing these ideal relationships for Ippolit, and it is perhaps for this reason that he comments, 'в картине же Рогожина о красоте и слова нет' (VIII, 338). The stark realism of the painting leaves no room for other possibilities or interpretations.⁵² Ippolit sees not only the loss of an ideal to emulate but also, and more importantly, the implications of the loss of these relationships for his own selfhood; without Christ (as Ideal Other) and God (as Absolute Other), he has no pre-existing other outside himself affirming his 'I' in all its unfinalizability. The possibilities of self-affirmation are diminished owing to the partial and judgemental nature of men, who are all equally seeking to confirm their selfhood, leading inevitably to conflict and the self-assertion of some at the expense of others, a situation which we have already witnessed in the novel in Burdovskii's gang's insistence on their rights, in which Ippolit participated,

⁵¹ *Christianity in Bakhtin: God and the Exiled Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 35, 38.

⁵² See Murav, *Holy Foolishness*, p. 83.

and consequent denial of others' rights; the painting therefore confirms what has already happened to Ippolit.

The dreams with which 'Neobkhodimoe ob'iasnenie' begins and ends are also linked to the question of the ideal other. Hollander points out that the trident shape of the monstrous scorpion in the first dream symbolizes the Antichrist, and that the struggle with the dog recalls Christ's battle against the Antichrist; Norma emulates Christ's ideal otherness through her act of self-sacrifice.⁵³ Bethea notes that in his critique of the Holbein, Ippolit sees a reversal of his dream, as nature is now 'в виде какой-нибудь громадной машине новейшего устройства, которая бессмысленно захватила, раздробила и поглотила в себя, глухо и бесчувственно, великое и бесценное существо' (VIII, 339).⁵⁴ In contrast to the earlier dream, where the scorpion is crushed in Norma's jaws, now Christ is being crushed and devoured, with no ideal other to save him.

Bethea comments on the parallel of Myshkin's arrival at the end of the scorpion dream and the appearance of Rogozhin after Ippolit has been thinking about the Holbein, suggesting that the first instance implies meaning and resurrection, which the second forcefully denies.⁵⁵ The meaninglessness of Rogozhin's 'visit' lies chiefly in the fact that he is silent but mocking (VIII, 340); the ideal other is replaced by a nightmare other, who refuses to participate in any dialogue and finalizes Ippolit with a humiliating glance, thus destroying the possibility of self-affirmation. The

⁵³ 'Apocalyptic Framework', p. 135.

⁵⁴ See *Shape of Apocalypse*, pp. 98-99.

⁵⁵ *Shape of Apocalypse*, pp. 98-99.

‘странные, обижающие меня формы’ (VIII, 341) to which life is reduced for Ippolit therefore indicate the disastrous nature of the absence of the other for the continuing confirmation of the ‘I’. The breakdown of the embodied world and the confusion between dreams and reality which afflict Ippolit as a result of his loss of essential contact with the other are also evident in Rogozhin who, as we have seen, turns into a ghostly figure after the gap between Parts I and II. The otherness of Rogozhin, which has its origin in Nastas’ia Filippovna’s treatment of him, undermines his ability to participate in concrete reality. Ippolit’s strange dreams and Rogozhin’s loss of contact with the physical ground of being are similar to Svidrigailov’s grizzly nightmares and Stavrogin’s and Ivan Karamazov’s devils. The loss of the sense of interconnection with others is responsible for the disastrous fates of many of Dostoevskii’s protagonists.

Bakhtin states that ‘эстетическая ценность сплошь осуществлялась имманентно одному созданию, и не допускается противопоставление я и другого’.⁵⁶ The ideal relationship of author to hero is analogous to the relationship of God to man, as it allows the character to experience his own selfhood rather than imposing otherness on him. Ippolit’s narrative is therefore not merely an attempt to define his position in the world, but is also a bid for selfhood through becoming a narrator and scripting himself into the novel in order to control its direction. Like Nastas’ia Filippovna, he is aware of the conventions of the genre, commenting, ‘все сошлось и уладилось, как будто нарочно было к тому

⁵⁶ ‘Avtor i geroi’, p. 58, author’s emphasis.

приготовлено, решительно точно в романе' (VIII, 333). Miller notes that Ippolit frequently echoes the words and ideas of the narrator, reversing the normal relationship and suggesting a degree of metatextual awareness.⁵⁷ Just as the heroine fights against outside determination and finalization, so Ippolit instinctively feels the inadequacy of his characteriness and strives to free himself from it through narrative self-determination; he makes a drama out of his exclusion in order to become a director rather than a puppet.⁵⁸ While Kirillov in *Besy* proposes to kill himself in order to prove that God does not exist and to become a god himself, Ippolit's narrative and its denouement, his planned suicide, are conceived to prove the unreality of the narrator and to make himself a narrator; his is primarily a metatextual rebellion.

'Neobkhodimoe ob'iasnenie' attempts to achieve his aims by re-configuring self-other relations, placing Ippolit, the new author, at the centre as a self, and is directed towards the other both inwardly and outwardly. The inner orientation of the narrative is formulated as a polemic with another's (Myshkin's) ideas; Ippolit says that he conceived of it after meeting the Prince at the incident with Burdovskii, and admits, 'может быть, я приезжал в Павловск, главное, чтобы его увидеть' (VIII, 322). As noted above, Ippolit mentions all of Myshkin's ideas, but uses ironic distance to separate himself from the original source. In belated reply to Lebedev's impassioned question 'чем вы спасете мир' (VIII, 310), Ippolit

⁵⁷ *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, p.214.

⁵⁸ As Monas states, 'Threshold', p. 80.

asks, 'Правда, князь, что вы раз говорили, что мир спасет «красота»? [...] князь утверждает, что мир спасет красота! [...] Какая красота спасет мир?' (VIII, 317). In another's unsympathetic words the concept seems obscure and inadequate; Ippolit is questioning the Prince's entire ethical-aesthetic ideal in his own 'execution story'. The richness of time experienced by the condemned man in Myshkin's vision appears positively callous in the light of Ippolit's existential crisis and horrific dreams, and the four stories of faith the former told in response to the Holbein are almost erased by the power of the latter's examination of its meaning. Furthermore, he characterizes the Prince as an inflexible clerical type who will impose on him 'христианские доказательства, [...] что в сущности оно даже и лучше, что вы умираете' and assure him of his reward in the next life (VIII, 342, 344).⁵⁹ Although this view has little to do with our experience of Myshkin, it helps Ippolit subtly to undermine the Prince's ideas and challenge his position at the centre of the novel, as he attempts to become its ideological hero.⁶⁰

Myshkin's willingness to cede selfhood to the other makes him an easy target for Ippolit. Much more problematic is the outward orientation of his narrative as, like all other bids for selfhood in the novel, it is subject to the consent and participation of others, namely his listeners. He uses a number of scripting strategies in order to attract and hold the attention of

⁵⁹ See Carroll, *Break-Out*, p. 26.

⁶⁰ See Malcolm V. Jones, 'Roman-Nevaliashka: further thoughts on the structure of Dostoevsky's *Idiot*,' in *Translating Culture*, ed. by Geir Kjetsaa, Lennart Lörngren, and Gunnar Opeide (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 2001), pp. 129-39, (pp. 133-36) on Ippolit's role in altering the atmosphere of the novel.

his audience and win control of the narrative, and in many ways proves himself to be an excellent exponent of the scripting process. His control over events at the birthday party in fact begins some time before his reading, as it is he who asks Lebedev about the star Wormwood (VIII, 309), thus ensuring that the verbose eschatologist will establish an appropriately apocalyptic atmosphere for Ippolit's apocalyptic moment. He creates a tense and dramatic situation by producing his 'пакет с красною печатью', which 'всех притягивал, точно магнет' (VIII, 318); 'even before he begins to read, Ippolit displays a shrewdness about how to manipulate his audience which rivals the skill of the narrator'.⁶¹ In using narrative to establish his 'I' in the face of his impending death, Ippolit makes a strong attempt to script himself into *Idiot*, and the theatricality of the death he plans, of which the reading is an integral part, suggests that he will make his mark on the novel and avoid external finalization.

However, the negative reactions of the other characters and their role in Ippolit's subsequent failure to carry his script through to its conclusion highlights the difficulty of achieving the participation and confirmation of others. The heckling he receives after the scorpion dream undermines his confidence in his qualities as a human being, as his pathetic rejoinder, 'ВЫ МЕНЯ СОВСЕМ НЕ ЛЮБИТЕ!' (VIII, 325) demonstrates. It also provokes uncertainty about his abilities as a narrator. His anxiety about the form of his narrative, arising out of his knowledge of the difficulty of expressing ideas, betrays the fear that he will not be taken seriously, and

⁶¹ Miller, *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, p. 214.

will thus be denied a substantial and memorable role in the novel: 'Пусть простить меня это выражения [...] пожалуй хоть как плохому литератору, не умевшему выразить свою мысль' (VIII, 337). His worries are confirmed in the end in the response of his listeners, who are not simply critical, but seem entirely indifferent to both his narrative and the fate he has chosen. Gania's immediate reaction is to make remarks about the weather to Ptitsyn and suggest they go home, while the previously harmless Ferdyshchenko condemns Ippolit's 'феноменальное слабосилие' (VIII, 345). Ptitsyn is even more cruel, double-checking exactly what he means when he expresses his wish to donate his body for research, and Radomskii speaks to Ippolit 'покровительственно растягивая свои слова' (VIII, 346-347).

Their suspicion that Ippolit's narrative counts for nothing and that he will not carry through his conviction to its conclusion leads them to provoke him into his finale, but their callousness is extreme, when one takes into account the youthfulness of Ippolit and his terrible plight. Furthermore, when he does try to complete his narrative by shooting himself, his intention has already altered as a result of the negative reactions of others, as it is no longer suicide because there is no point in living for two weeks. It becomes instead an attempt to prove himself in the eyes of others, who do not believe that he has the strength of will to kill himself, and assume that his entire explanation is thus a lie. These suspicions persist after his failed suicide attempt, which provokes laughter rather than shock or reflection amongst the other characters, reducing Ippolit from his intended grand gesture, freeing himself from the necessity

of the other, to grovelling to others in an attempt to convince them that he really did mean to kill himself (VIII, 349).

The reactions of others thus ruin Ippolit's bid for narrative self-determination in three ways. Firstly, their judgement and condemnation move him closer to, rather than away from, external finalization; secondly, they separate his suicide attempt from his final conviction, and thus destroy its meaning for him; and thirdly, the distress they cause him leads him to botch the shooting, again demonstrating the importance of the response of others both on an individual level and for the direction of the narrative as a whole. The lack of sympathy displayed by these characters indicates that they are far from being ideal readers for Ippolit. Only Myshkin sees the effect others have on Ippolit: 'Может, я и вправду подтолкнул его под руку тем, что... не говорил ничего; он, может, подумал, что и я сомневаюсь в том, что он застрелится?' (VIII, 350). However, while the Prince's omission may be a factor, the rest of the audience do not acknowledge their common guilt or any awareness of the power of their words and attitudes to influence the other's state of mind and actions.

Ippolit, on the other hand, is only too aware of the implications of the words and actions of others for the self, and he would instinctively choose the separation of Meier's wall over the trees of Pavlovsk and human contact, as he believes that 'люди и созданы, чтоб друг друга мучить' (VIII, 328). Nevertheless, the fact that he reads his 'Neobkhodimoe ob'iasnenie' to an audience reveals an equal understanding of the essential role played by the other in the achievement of selfhood, as is evinced by his alertness to the need to 'проверить это завтра за чтением, по

впечатлению на слушателей' (VIII, 322). As Bakhtin states, 'мы постоянно и напряженно подстрегаем, ловим отражения нашей жизни в плане сознания других людей, и отдельных ее моментов и даже целого жизни'.⁶² This is because,

я совершенно не представляю себе своего внешнего образа, между тем как образы действующих лиц моей мечты, даже самые второстепенные, представляются с поразительной иногда отчетливостью и полнотой [...] я представляю лишь результат произведенного ею впечатления на других людей.⁶³

Moreover, Ippolit's awareness of the importance of the other is apparent in his discourse on individual charity, as its benefits lie not in any conception of morality but on participation in the chain of interconnected human actions: 'И почему вы знаете, какое участие вы будете иметь в будущем разрешении судеб человечества' (VIII, 366).

His sensitivity to the ramifications of actions, as well as his limited remaining lifespan, indicate that Ippolit is, like the condemned man who feels every second, intensely alert to time. In his narrative, Ippolit highlights two interrelated aspects of time which have enormous significance for our reading of the novel: process and presentness. His attention to the process of writing is evident in his comment, 'Мне нужно поспешить и кончить все это «объяснение» непременно до завтра. Стало быть, у меня не будет времени перечитать и поправить' (VIII, 322). He is equally aware of the importance of the present moment in his

⁶² 'Avtor i geroi', p. 17.

⁶³ 'Avtor i geroi', p. 27.

reading, stating, '*теперь* (и, может быть, только в эту минуту) я желаю, чтобы те, которые будут судить мой поступок, могли ясно видеть, из какой логической цепи выводов вышло мое «последнее убеждение»' (VIII, 337, author's emphasis). However, the significance of the present moment and on-going process is not limited to Ippolit's role as a narrator. His famous Columbus metaphor stresses that 'дело в жизни, в одной жизни, – в открывании ее, непрерывном и вечном, а совсем не в открытии!' (VIII, 327); life as it is lived focuses on the present process, not the future product.

Bakhtin emphasizes that coming into being through interaction with the other is temporal and has the character of an event, as 'я поступаю делом, словом, мыслью, чувством; я живу, я становлюсь поступком'.⁶⁴ As a result of this, the experience of one's own relation to time is radically different from that of the other, as one sees the self as being unfinalizable, incomplete and essentially outside time, whereas the other is perceived as finalized, completed and within time; 'другой мне всегда противостоит как объект, его внешний образ – в пространстве, его внутренняя жизнь – во времени'.⁶⁵

Ippolit's sense of the importance of time and the present moment is an indication of his fear of the approach of death as the onset of otherness, as a 'временно завершенная жизнь безнадежна с точки зрения движущего ее смысла'.⁶⁶ It is primarily for this reason that he rebels

⁶⁴ 'Avtor i geroi', p. 121.

⁶⁵ 'Avtor i geroi', p. 97.

⁶⁶ 'Avtor i geroi', p. 112.

against the perceived determinism of the genre in which he is trapped, in order to make himself a narrator. As Morson states,

If life is product, then the present moment loses its presentness and becomes something resembling the portion of a recording we happen to be watching or the page we are reading in an already written novel. All outcomes are given. Dostoevsky believed that such a view would utterly destroy the meaningfulness of concepts essential to our humanness: choice, responsibility, and creativity.⁶⁷

Ippolit, who in facing death also faces the inevitability of his life changing from process to product, aims to achieve presentness in his reading by playing on the distinction of past, present and future and gradually bringing them together in a single moment of self-finalizing nowness, when he will shoot himself. Four time-periods are in fact specified in the explanation: the past, in which he experienced the events he depicts and formulated his conviction, the very recent past, in which he wrote his narrative, the present, in which he is reading it and assessing its effect on others, and the future, the climax of his narrative, his suicide. As he reads, the past of his acting, thinking and writing merges with the present reading, and in his intended death all time will become one, in a creative solution to the problem of time, mortality and narration. Thus as a narrator Ippolit can gain control over time and access to presentness in a way that as a character already condemned to death and subject to external finalization he feels he is denied.

However, in the failure of his suicide attempt, Ippolit also fails to reconcile these different temporalities. For all his expert use of scripting

⁶⁷ *Narrative and Freedom*, p. 9.

strategies and the strength of his inserted narrative, he is prevented from fulfilling his script and taking control of the direction of the novel, in large part owing to the refusal of others to participate in his striving for self-affirmation. Nevertheless, as we see in the remainder of the novel, he leaves a powerful imprint on the text, as the darker side with its threatening images of the dead Christ and nature as a huge machine blind to the suffering of humanity becomes dominant and obscures Myshkin's ideal of compassion and human interconnectedness. Ippolit's narrative may not have the outcome he envisages, but its effect on the novel as a whole is undeniable.

Presentness is essential not only because it involves choice, and thus moral responsibility, but also precisely because the self's coming into being is dependent on interaction with the other. Only present awareness of this fact allows one to participate truly in acts of becoming; 'It is the human act alone in its performative aspect which knows and possesses life as a whole'.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the perceived incompleteness and unfinalizability of the self is in itself the result of an understanding of both the closed, determinate nature of the other and the concomitant importance of the other in defining the self. Presentness is also necessary for successful scripting precisely because it offers options, different possibilities and new directions; perceptive and spontaneous protagonists can seize the moment in order to turn attention towards themselves (or others) and thus influence the movement of the narrative.

⁶⁸ Coates, p. 28.

Ippolit is far from being the only character in *Idiot* who has a problematic relation to presentness, although his degree of awareness of its importance is unusual. Many of the other protagonists fail to see the significance of time as a factor in their becoming, and their orientation to the past or future is a serious obstacle to the possibility of their achieving selfhood. General Ivolgin, for example, shows awareness of the importance of the present moment in monitoring others for their reactions to his tales (for example, VIII, 410), a feature which indicates his participation in the scripting process. However, he orients his self-image entirely according to his past 'history' and hopes for future exoneration and a return to his former position, both of which are entirely illusory and lack grounding in his current situation. The present becomes for the General little more than an ongoing opportunity to re-write the past, and in doing so he neglects the now to the extent that he does not participate in family life or normal human interaction at all. In Part I, he takes the Prince on a wild goose chase instead of attending to his interlocutor's present needs and requests, and we also learn that he has been writing meaningless IOUs to Ippolit's mother, which are relevant only in the fantastic possible future where his problems are miraculously resolved and he regains his former status (VIII, 111). The fact that the IOUs bear no relation to his present situation is confirmed when, between Parts I and II, he is incarcerated in debtors' prison. Even the passive description of the event confirms that he sees no relation between his current actions and their possible consequences: 'с ним почти в то же время случилось одно совсем непредвиденное обстоятельство' (VIII, 156).

Later, when he is forced to face the present moment in the affair of Lebedev's wallet, General Ivolgin literally has no strategy which would help him. The delusion that it is possible to exist in an invented past or future is stripped away, leaving no relation to the present, which leads rapidly to his decline and death. As an un-self-conscious story-teller intent on creating an improved script his life through fantastic narratives, the General is remarkably successful, but his failure to attend to the present in a coherent or active way has serious consequences for his position; it results firstly in his being sidelined, silenced or ignored by his family, and secondly in the severing of all human relations, thus removing all possibility of achieving selfhood, as the other is absent and interaction is rendered impossible.

Gania Ivolgin has a similarly inadequate relation to the present, but in contrast to his father, he is largely future-oriented. Although he feels wounded by his family's current position in comparison with their former wealth and status, it is his desire for instant future riches which dominates his thinking and actions. He even criticizes Ptitsyn for gathering his wealth slowly, on a day-to-day basis, claiming, 'вот эту-то я всю гимнастику и перескочу и прямо с капитала начну' (VIII, 105). His future imagined wealth forms his entire *raison d'être*, but beyond the plan of marrying money, he seems to have no concrete idea of how to achieve it in the present – indeed, there is no concept of achievement at all, as he appears to rely on a fortune dropping into his lap without any effort on his part; action and achievement come later still, when he already has the money.

By concentrating solely on the future and delaying action until after the moment of his transformation, Gania fails to take an active role in the novel. He is central in Part I purely because of his passive involvement in General Epanchin's and Totskii's plan for Nastas'ia Filippovna, but his true attitude is revealed in his inability to act in the present. His letter to Aglaia demonstrates an unwillingness to make choices, and it is precisely for this reason that she despises him. With his future transformation already in Nastas'ia Filippovna's hands, he places a further decision in Aglaia's, by asking her for 'одно слово' (VIII, 72), thus abdicating responsibility for his situation and deflecting the blame for his failure to achieve greatness on to others. Equally, at Nastas'ia Filippovna's birthday party, he should in the light of his position play a major role, but instead remains passive and on the sidelines; he takes no part in the *petit-jeu*, and raises no protest when Rogozhin usurps proceedings. His obsession with the future is such that he is unable to fight for it in the present. Furthermore, Gania's lack of presentness is evident when he refuses to rescue the 100,000 rubles from the fire; according to his own programme he should have taken the money (and indeed he later regrets his failure to do so), but he is thwarted by his inability to attend to the present moment. His only true moment of presentness occurs in his fight with his sister, when he slaps Myshkin, but insofar as this incident is defined by his hysteria, it has no constructive function.

In his orientation towards the future and consequent inability to act, Gania illustrates a variation on two of the 'diseases of presentness' outlined

by Morson.⁶⁹ His neglect of present opportunities in favour of the future allies him to the 'desiccated present'.⁷⁰ However, insofar as he relies entirely on an imagined moment of personal transformation for his coming into being, he lives in the 'isolated present',⁷¹ although in this case as it is an aspiration rather than something he has actually experienced, the 'isolated future' would perhaps be more accurate.

Gania's neglect of the present has two major consequences. Firstly, his ignorance of the concepts of striving and process leads him into total inactivity; he is an armchair Columbus who would sit at home imagining the moment of discovery and the possibilities thereafter, and wait for America to come to him, a stance which is analogous to the problem of faith without works in the Epistle of James. However, it should also be noted that Dostoevskii's conception of faith with works is somewhat different to James'. While in the Epistle, faith can only be demonstrated and proved through works, Dostoevskii suggests that faith can only be attained through works. This is particularly clear in his final artistic work, in which Zosima states that it is possible to open one's eyes to the reality of faith,

опытом деятельной любви. Постарайтесь любить ваших ближних деятельно и неустанно. По мере того как будете преуспевать в любви, будете убеждаться и в бытии бога, и в бессмертии души ваша. Если же дойдете до полного самоотвержения в любви к ближнему, тогда уж несомненно

⁶⁹ *Narrative and Freedom*, pp. 188-206.

⁷⁰ *Narrative and Freedom*, p. 198.

⁷¹ *Narrative and Freedom*, p. 201.

уверуете, и никакое сомнение даже и не возмoжет зайти в вашу душу. Это испытано, это точно (XIV, 52).

The relevance of the issue of faith without works to *Idiot* is evident in the fact that without the striving and the process of action, the discovery (the object of faith) will never be achieved. James warns that this type of attitude leads to double-mindedness, as words are separated from deeds, resulting in inconsistency and instability. Secondly, as Gania rejects all interactive possibilities in the present, he is incapable of gaining selfhood and thus, once he is no longer relevant to the central plot of Nastas'ia Filippovna's fate, he slips into the background. Although he may do a lot of *plotting* unseen by the reader, he is unable to script as he has no capacity for action or creativity and neglects interpersonal relations to the extent that he has no influence over others, and thus has no possibility of attaining selfhood or becoming a major protagonist.

Aglaia also shows signs of an uneasy relationship to the present. At times she is aware of the importance of the now and its choices, for example in the matter of her engagement to Myshkin, stating 'решается чрезвычайная минута судьбы моей' (VIII, 426). Elsewhere, however, she fails to maintain the present point of view. Like Gania, her future hopes take the form of a vague, diffuse ideal, involving being useful and free from the constraints of her position in society, but in the here and now she makes no progress towards its achievement. In a further example of Dostoevskii's conception of the inefficacy of faith without works and the tendency to focus on the product instead of the process, Aglaia's 'action' is confined to

meeting Myshkin on the green bench to talk about her pipe-dream of opening a school.

However, in other ways, and particularly in one key moment, she is firmly stuck in the past. In the crucial confrontation scene between the two women, although she claims that she came 'с человеческою речью,' Aglaia admits, 'уже решила, о чем буду [...] говорить,' and proceeds to deliver her sustained psychological analysis of Nastas'ia Filippovna in 'давно уже приготовленные и обдуманые слова' (VIII, 471). Her pre-judgements about her rival are already set in stone, and as a result she has no interest in the event at hand, even though she initiated it, and thus pays no attention to the situation: 'Она машинально оправляла свою одежду и даже с беспокойством переменила однажды место, подвигаясь к углу дивана. Вряд ли она и сама сознавала все свои движения; но бессознательность еще усиливала их обиду' (VIII, 468-70). Finalization of the other is a past-oriented activity which obviates presentness. Nastas'ia Filippovna may have misjudged Aglaia, but her alertness to the present situation allows her to change her mind and include new options when necessary (as we saw to full effect at her birthday party); Aglaia, on the other hand, does not bother to read the situation at all, as she assumes that her pre-judgements are true and that there is nothing new to learn about her rival. She organizes the meeting in order to deliver a speech, not to interact with, or attempt to understand, the other.

Although this may be a deliberate strategy to insult the other woman, the scene highlights a significant problem for Aglaia, as when Nastas'ia Filippovna attacks her lofty assumption of superiority, she has

nowhere to go. Instead of listening to her opponent's replies and adjusting her own script accordingly, she merely continues her litany of accusations, which sound increasingly irrelevant ('Захотела быть честною, так и в прачки бы шла' (VIII, 473)), and fails to see where the confrontation is heading. Her lack of attention to the present moment leaves her with no spontaneity or openness, and she therefore cannot react to Nastas'ia Filippovna's sudden change of direction. Aglaia's past-oriented finalizing tendency and lack of awareness of the present moment are thus in large part responsible for the outcome of the meeting, as her attitude insults her rival, encouraging the latter to switch tactics, which leaves Aglaia with no response despite having orchestrated the scene. Her script for the episode is inadequate because of her lack of presentness, and it is for this reason that she fails to win the day.

This pattern is very similar to the failure of the nihilists, the arch-finalizers of the novel, to persuade others to participate in their view of reality, and it therefore comes as no surprise that on the only occasion when Aglaia gets to the point and asks Nastas'ia Filippovna what she is doing, her questions parrot the nihilists' refrain: 'по какому праву [...] по какому праву [...] по какому праву' (VIII, 472). This similarity, plus the fact that Aglaia is connected to nihilism by her mother (VIII, 271) highlights her problematic self-other relations in both perceptual and ethical terms. In undermining the other for the sake of herself, rather than participating in a mutual act of becoming, Aglaia betrays her double-mindedness, as she perceives herself as different from others and acts inconsistently and divisively in her interpersonal relations. This is particularly evident in her

constant reversals with regard to Myshkin which, unlike Nastas'ia Filippovna's oscillations, seem to have no purpose whatsoever, and in particular in her attempts to silence him (to deny him a voice and therefore a self) before the soirée with her repetitions of 'молчите' (VIII, 437).

Aglaia's inability to be spontaneous is also evident in her choice of inserted narrative. Her reading of 'Rytsar' bednyi' should provide her with an ideal opportunity to assert her own script, but although the poem leaves a powerful impression on the novel and its hero, it advances her selfhood only insofar as it signals her own feelings to Myshkin and proposes herself as an alternative ideal for his mission, which encourages him to pursue his connection with her. Her subsequent position in the novel is thus entirely dependent on the Prince, and she therefore remains essentially other, unable to assert her position in the narrative in her own right, and only appearing when Myshkin has nothing more pressing to preoccupy him.⁷² Aglaia's failure in this respect is linked to an absence of presentness and creativity, as the poem is another's work. While her sister cannot find a subject for a painting, Aglaia's lack of spontaneity and imagination leads to her to produce a fake, a copy with the barest minimum of personal creative contribution and, as Morson states, 'for creativity to be real, it must be a genuine *process* of unpredetermined becoming'.⁷³ She fails to produce a script that will challenge for a prominent position in the novel as she is more concerned with the fixedness of the past and vague hopes for the

⁷² As Guerard notes, 'On the Composition of Dostoevskii's *Idiot*', *Mosaic*, 8 (1974), 201-15 (p. 206).

⁷³ *Narrative and Freedom*, p. 24, author's emphasis.

future than with the creative and ethical possibilities of the present. As a result does not truly challenge for selfhood within the narrative, and finds herself scripted out of the major drama prior to the denouement.

Significantly, the characters who have problems relating to the present also have difficulties controlling their own lives. Aglaia constantly complains about her family's attempts to control her future, and many of her actions are aimed at freeing herself from this. Gania, lacking the power he craves, takes his frustration out on his family by being a petty tyrant, and his father is constantly subjected to others' efforts to silence him. The above analysis of Ippolit has also shown that the loss of control he feels owing to his death sentence is responsible for his rebellion.

Nastas'ia Filippovna's awareness of the importance of presentness and its possibilities for achieving selfhood is similarly central to her striving for control over the other characters and the text. Even more so than the other characters, she also has unresolved issues of major consequence in the past and the future but, unlike Gania, Aglaia and General Ivolgin, she sees that these problems can be solved only in the present. Her spontaneity and alertness to new choices, particularly at her birthday party, indicate her understanding that the potentialities of scripting and the solution to the problem of selfhood lie in present interactivity. It is for this reason that she strives to exert control over others, as by doing so she is able to impose her own script onto the narrative.

In contrast to the difficulties other characters have in establishing true self-other relations and orienting their actions and words to the present, Prince Myshkin in Part I of the novel has no such problems. On the ethical-

thematic level, as we have seen, his stories and behaviour provide an ideal model of the relation of self to other, while the emphasis in his stories on the importance of awareness of presentness, particularly in the moment before death and in the analogous moment of light before his fit, indicates an instinctive understanding of its role in establishing the true, unfinalized, open self. Later, the deterioration of his ideal is evident in his inability to read the faces of others at the Epanchins' soirée and his failure to help either General Ivolgin or Ippolit in their search for selfhood, and in the fact that when he is no longer capable of narrating himself, his ideas are undermined through their ironic expression in the hostile words of another.

Just as other protagonists' attitudes to the other and to time are reflected in their meta-narrational positions in the novel, the hero's ideal and its corruption are also defined by his relation to the narrator and, owing to his centrality, are also responsible for shaping the narrative as a whole. Myshkin's closeness to the narrator is particularly obvious throughout Part I as, although the narrator depicts other characters' consciousnesses, notably in relating Nastas'ia Filippovna's background and current situation, when General Epanchin's and Totskii's points of view come to the fore, in the present time of the novel he remains allied to the hero. Other characters come and go, but the fact that Myshkin is the only protagonist present in every scene immediately indicates to the reader not only his importance but also his intimate connection with the narrator.

However, of more significance is the fact that the narrator makes no attempt to finalize his hero. After his initial sketch of Myshkin's physical appearance, the narrator allows him to speak with his own voice without

interruptions, analysis or judgement: 'сам открывается, без объяснений от автора, кроме разве первой главы' (IX, 248). Whenever an external, finalizing definition is applied to Myshkin, it comes not from the narrator, but from other characters, most persistently in their repeated reference to the unfounded allegation that he is an idiot. We frequently hear the narrator's voice when he turns his attention to other characters, for example in the ironic tones which undermine General Epanchin's self-image, or in reducing characters to the status of types, as in the early characterization of Lebedev, when we are told, 'эти господа всезнайки встречаются иногда, даже довольно часто, в известном общественном слое' (VIII, 8). However, this rarely occurs in relation to Myshkin at this early stage, as the hero is given the freedom of self-presentation within the narrative and is thus able to remain a 'Sphinx'.⁷⁴ Miller argues convincingly that 'enigmatic explanation' is central to the presentation of the hero, again indicating the ideal nature of the narrator's relation to Myshkin.⁷⁵ By remaining external to the Prince, and reporting his words (and later his thoughts) without comment,⁷⁶ the narrator allows his hero freedom from finalization, just as Myshkin attempts to help others, in particular Nastas'ia Filippovna, to achieve selfhood and evade finalization by others. Tucker's suggestion that Myshkin in Part I of the novel is fighting with the narrator for control of the

⁷⁴ See Miller, *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, p. 102.

⁷⁵ *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, pp. 77-78 and passim.

⁷⁶ See Miller, *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, pp. 93, 106.

narrative is therefore inaccurate;⁷⁷ the hero is rather supported by the narrator, and at this stage at least no such tension exists.

The narrator's direct mediation of Myshkin's words and refusal to interpret him play a significant role in the hero's coming into being, which in itself suggests an ideal relationship between the two. Furthermore, this mirrors the attitude the Prince takes in his main script for the novel, in which he attempts to be the perfect interlocutor, allowing others to assert their selfhood, and is in sharp contrast to many of the protagonists, who routinely finalize others with harsh judgements and seek to deny them a voice and therefore the possibility of selfhood. The narrator is an ideal reader of Myshkin, who translates this capacity into the action of narrating, just as the ideal hero within the text, the Prince, translates his reading into narrative and interaction through his saintly scripting.

The temporality of *Idiot* also plays a fundamental role in the relation of Prince Myshkin to the narrator, as the presentness of the narration also undermines the possibility of finalization. It is therefore linked to the basis of selfhood in present interaction, as well as to the open-ended experience of presentness when 'there shall be time no longer' in Myshkin's pre-epileptic aura and in the final moments of the condemned man. The ideal of living in the full awareness of now is paralleled by the narrative also depicting the undetermined present. As Morson states, many of Dostoevskii's innovations in the novel form have their origin in 'his

⁷⁷ 'Dostoevsky's *Idiot*: Defining Myshkin', *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* (1997), 23-40 (pp. 31-32).

attempts to avoid the unavoidable fatalism – the inevitable inevitability – of narrative'.⁷⁸ In *Idiot*, the feeling of open-endedness and lack of determinism is emphasized by the feature Morson calls 'sideshadowing,' whereby different outcomes and other possible events are constantly suggested: speaking of *Besy*, he states, 'sideshadowing endows the novel with a sense of the unexpected and the mysterious. *Other possibilities* threaten to erupt at any moment and cast their shadow over everything that happens'.⁷⁹

Idiot contains many examples of sideshadowing as outlined by Morson; the notebooks teem with 'other possibilities', different combinations of events and varying outcomes from the same event, and traces of these spill over into the novel.⁸⁰ The predominance of rumour (presented openly as such) over directly reported fact immediately implies that events might have been otherwise, even when no concrete alternative is offered. Different possible denouements are also suggested by the characters, for example by Ippolit, whose anxiety about certain possible future results of current events is palpable when he says to Myshkin:

Я ведь боюсь лишь за Аглаю: Рогожин знает, как вы ее любите; любовь за любовь; вы у него отняли Настасью Филипповну, он убьет Аглаю Ивановну; хоть она теперь и не ваша, а все-таки ведь вам тяжело будет, не правда ли? (VIII, 489).

⁷⁸ *Narrative and Freedom*, p. 41.

⁷⁹ *Narrative and Freedom*, p. 120, author's emphasis.

⁸⁰ See Morson, 'Tempics', pp. 112-16.

After the events of Nastas'ia Filippovna's birthday party, in which the heroine's spontaneity and awareness of presentness are evident in the fact that she keeps all her options open, makes choices and alters her script in response to others' interventions, such speculation confirms the feeling that anything could happen, as nothing is fixed or pre-determined. As Morson remarks, 'the present is not "completed" because one does not know what will come of it; that incompleteness is essential to our experience of presentness'.⁸¹ The simultaneity of the narrator with the action and the other characters, in particular the hero, adds to their sense of autonomy and unfinalizability; the protagonists might be infinitely otherwise, because nothing is pre-determined, and the events in which they are participating equally might be otherwise, if they so choose.

Furthermore, in a traditional example of the novel genre, 'автор-созерцатель всегда временно объемлет целое, он всегда *позже*, и не только временно, а в смысле *позже*'.⁸² However, this is not the case with *Idiot*, owing to the processual manner in which it was written.⁸³ Here the narrator is not looking back over a set of completed events with the benefit of hindsight and reflection, but instead is simultaneous with the action of the novel and particularly with the hero. This prevents the narrator from providing definitive judgements on either, and removes the sense of end-determination which characterizes the genre and automatically finalizes the protagonists before the fact.

⁸¹ *Narrative and Freedom*, p. 181.

⁸² Bakhtin, 'Avtor i geroi', p. 104, author's emphasis.

⁸³ See Morson, 'Tempics', pp. 119-21.

The novel draws attention to this aspect of its creation not only by including contemporary criminal cases which occurred only after the writing had begun, but also through Ippolit's theory of process, discussed above.⁸⁴ Process is important as it prioritizes the striving, the effort and the activity, rather than the goal itself and is, as we have seen, analogous to the emphasis on faith with works in the Epistle of James. Faith alone is pure product which, as we witness in the secular examples of Aglaia, Gania and the nihilists, can lead to either passivity in the present or double-mindedness, which causes separation and disharmony between people. On three occasions James describes faith without works as 'dead' (2. 17, 20, 26). The parallel is evident; while in the Epistle faith may only be demonstrated and proved through actions, in Dostoevskii's fictional text only in works (actions) can man achieve faith, as only in his interrelations and interactions with others can he become a self. Bakhtin, without referring to the theological question, puts forward the same idea: 'жизнь (и сознание) изнутри себя самой есть не что иное, как осуществление веры; чистое самоосознание жизни есть осознание веры (то есть нужды и надежды, несамоудовлетворенности и возможности)'.⁸⁵ By concentrating on the processual and the present, on the present process of interactivity which engenders selfhood, the narrative actualizes the idea of faith with works in its striving to discover the ideal, as Malcolm Jones' recent translation of Ippolit's Columbus metaphor into meta-narrative terms

⁸⁴ See Morson, 'Tempics', pp. 122, 126-7.

⁸⁵ 'Avtor i geroi', pp. 126-27.

suggests: 'You can be sure that the Dostoevskian novel achieves its natural balance not when it focuses on a realisation of the ideal, but when it presents the process of discovering it'.⁸⁶

As the ideal in *Idiot* centres on the figure of Myshkin, he is also at the forefront of this process. The narrator's present perspective enables the direct presentation of the hero in the coming into being, striving to fulfil his quest and living his ideal. Myshkin's awareness of the significance of the present moment and his own presentness and unfinalizability within the narrative are fundamental to his becoming a true ethical hero, as he is able to 'переживать бытийную определенность жизненных положений, их смену, из разнообразие, но не определяющую и не кончающую героя смену, фабулизм, ничего не завершающий и все оставляющий открытым'.⁸⁷ The Prince's openness and presentness enable him to make moral choices in his interactions with others, which is the foundation of ethical selfhood in the process of its becoming. As Bakhtin states, 'эстетическая ценность осуществляется в момент пребывания созерцателя внутри созерцаемого объекта [...] эстетическая ценность сплошь осуществлялась имманентно одному созданию, и не допускается противопоставление я и другого'.⁸⁸ The relationship of Myshkin and the narrator achieves this ideal in the first part of the novel by reducing the spatial distance between the hero and the narrator almost to nothing, and removing the temporal difference altogether, so that as

⁸⁶ 'Roman-Nevaliashka', p. 132.

⁸⁷ Bakhtin, 'Avtor i geroi', p. 138.

⁸⁸ 'Avtor i geroi', pp. 57-58, author's emphasis.

separate voices they become practically indistinguishable. Therefore, just as on the thematic and ethical level, where the ideal relationship of self to other is mediated through the hero's saintly scripting in Part I, on the meta-narrative level this ideal is also evident in the relationship of Myshkin to the narrator, as here too the dualistic distinction of self and other is eroded. Myshkin avoids otherness and becomes a self because the narrator does not assert his own 'I', but instead allows the other to assert his. Bakhtin again draws parallels between this relationship and that of God to man, as it depends on the same capacity for love:

существенный момент [...] есть принципиально трансгредийный дар одаряемому, с одной стороны, и его глубокое отношение именно к одаряемому, с другой стороны: не он, но для него; отсюда обогащение носит формальный, преображающий характер, переводит одаряемого в новый план бытия. В новый план переводится не материал (не объект), но субъект – герой.⁸⁹

It is the loving willingness to bestow the gift of selfhood on the other which is the essence of the ideal, and which allies the meta-narrational perspective to the thematic. Prince Myshkin, having become a self through the grace of the narrator, reflects this ideal in his own relationships and in turn attempts to give others the same possibility of selfhood. It is for this reason that Nastas'ia Filippovna, Ippolit and even the Epanchins' servant call Myshkin a 'man' ('человек'); they all see that he is a true, unfinalized self, the ideal who has the capacity and desire to bestow selfhood on others. Only through annihilation of the ego as the highest ideal of self-development can one

⁸⁹ 'Avtor i geroi', pp. 80-81.

love as Christ loves, that is, freely, without judgement or demands, and fully participating in others' coming into being.⁹⁰

However, the fact that annihilation of the ego is necessary suggests that the ego must be present in the first place, in order for it to be overcome. Selfhood is a precondition for the ideal relationship, as only a true 'I' can perceive its unfinalizability and openness and is able to see that the essence of selfhood lies in the present interaction with the other and in *their* coming into being. For this reason, even though Dostoevskii's anti-heroes and other negative characters are self-conscious in Bakhtin's sense, most do not achieve the ethical-aesthetic ideal of selfhood because they do not concern themselves with the other in the present. In effect, they take their selfhood and run, cutting themselves off from the other rather than passing on the gift, in order to prove their own self-sufficiency and primacy. However, in doing so these characters deny themselves the continuing interaction needed on a moment-to-moment basis to develop and sustain the 'I', and as a result find themselves unable to function in the present, mentally fixated on the past or future, or prone to doubleness owing to the lack of a concrete other with whom to interact. Such characters have risen above the level of the traditional objectivized hero, but are unable to handle their status responsibly, and slip back into varying degrees of otherness such as passivity or the abuse of other beings, owing to their failure to perceive the essential interconnectedness of all beings.

⁹⁰ See *PSS*, XX, 172-75, and pp. 189-90 above on this extract.

In creating the positive hero of *Idiot*, the search for the ideal led Dostoevskii to the opposite pole of a character who perceives the true responsibilities of selfhood. However, the notebooks for the novel reveal that the author, before he came to the gentleness and humility of Myshkin, experimented with every aspect of separateness and otherness which characterize his anti-heroes. The 'idiot' of the notebooks is vain, proud, deceitful, intellectually arrogant and obsessed with power, particularly sexual domination, none of which bears any resemblance to the hero of the novel. This suggests that the notebooks act as a prequel to the novel proper, in which the ideal hero gradually comes into being by overcoming separation and doubleness, and that he achieves true selfhood, and therefore the possibility of participating in an ideal self-other relationship, only once all traces of egocentricity have been left behind. It is perhaps for this reason that Myshkin in particular but also *Idiot* as a whole, unlike Dostoevskii's other novels and their heroes, lack distinguishable doubles; as the Prince is a true self, at least in Part I of the novel, he avoids double-mindedness. External doubles are sustained by internal dualism, and as Myshkin's ideal involves looking beyond the habitual separation of self and other and overcoming double thoughts, he is therefore not afflicted by such manifestations.

Through his coming into being in the world of the novel, Myshkin thus continues the process begun by the narrator, as the aesthetic ideal (which is also evident in the hero's early narratives) is transformed into the ethical and reaches out towards the other characters. His saintly scripting thus emanates from his perfect relationship with the narrator in Part I,

which he attempts to emulate in his interactions with others, both through his stories, which highlight the need for positive self-other relations and the importance of presentness, particularly in the face of death, and through his compassionate concern for the other's selfhood, as we witness in his reactions to Nastas'ia Filippovna and General Ivolgin. The hero's creativity, seen in his inserted narratives in the early part of the novel, suggests that his ideal is aesthetic as well as ethical, and points to the true meaning of Myshkin's belief that 'мир спасет красота'. The novel therefore posits the ideal of an interconnected chain of being which encompasses both the narrative and thematic levels; the ideal relationship of self to other is initiated in the narrator's exemplary attitude to the hero, and the selfhood this engenders also allows him to play the same role for others. To use Zosima's phrase, everyone is responsible for everything, because everyone is literally responsible for everyone else's coming into being and thus avoiding the problems of otherness.

However, while this is the picture presented in Part I of *Idiot*, it is not true of the rest of the novel. Although glimpses of the ideal remain visible throughout, it is evident from the beginning of Part II that the relationship between Myshkin and the narrator has changed fundamentally. In contrast to the narrator's earlier merging with the hero and apparent omniscience, now we learn that the two have separated to the extent where the former is unable to report directly any of the latter's movements during his six-month absence and instead relies on rumour to give us a sketchy and inadequate version of events which are vital to our understanding of the remainder of the novel. Thus even before we are aware of the changes in

Myshkin's appearance and behaviour towards others, the meta-narrative, through the very existence of the extended gap, indicates that something is wrong and that the ideal has faltered. It is interesting that in the preparatory material for the novel, one of the few consistent features amidst the mass of contradictory information and endless changes of direction is the presence of a gap between the first two parts. There are six different mentions of a break between Parts I and II, ranging in time scale from three weeks to six months.⁹¹ Wasiolek sees Dostoevskii's indecision over the length of the gap as further evidence of his uncertainty about how the novel was to continue, but the very fact that the gap is mentioned so frequently suggests that the author had already decided that some of the key events in the story of the protagonists were not to be shown to the reader, and that this would have a fundamental effect on the continuation of the novel.

The most plausible explanation for the six-month gap is that the Prince deliberately excludes the narrator from these events, resulting in separation and the loss of the ideal narrator-hero relationship. Myshkin detaches himself from the narrator, an act which suggests that in contrast to his previous understanding of the interdependent nature of the self-other relationship, he is now moving towards the self-sufficiency and isolationism which characterize Dostoevskii's anti-heroes and, even if not intentionally, is abusing his freedom and the gift of selfhood by cutting himself off from the other. As active participation with the other is so central to Myshkin's script in Part I, the loss of this ideal on the meta-

⁹¹ See Wasiolek, ed. *The Notebooks for 'The Idiot'*, p. 159.

narrational level has severe consequences for his status as a positive hero. Another possible explanation is that the narrator actively colludes with Myshkin in order to suppress the painful memories of this period, by conveniently renouncing his omniscient position and paying no attention to the fact that something extraordinary and terrible has happened with severe consequences for the three main protagonists. However, in this case as well the ideal is lost; the narrator can no longer be counted as reliable with regard to Myshkin as he is apparently ready to jeopardize his creativity, the form of his narrative and the interconnected chain of being he established in Part I, in order to protect the sensibilities of the hero.

The bout of selective amnesia with which the novel is afflicted, whether caused by the hero alone or in conjunction with the narrator, suggests that Myshkin's perfect selfhood has been damaged. Just as his relations with other people begin to deteriorate after his return from Moscow, so also we begin to perceive a growing distance between the hero and the narrator and a falling away from the ideal their relationship represented in the early part of the novel. The narrator's creativity is subverted by his separation from Myshkin and the consequent loss of the ideal, and he is forced to continue his narrative without depicting the relationships which are supposed to be at its centre. This change gradually becomes evident when the action moves to Pavlovsk and away from the Myshkin – Nastas'ia Filippovna – Rogozhin triad, as the narrator – like his hero – searches for a new direction.

The difficulty the narrator has in finding an alternative path is evident in the aimlessness of the central section as, although the main

episodes are linked to the novel thematically, they have little relation to anything that might resemble a coherent plot. The narrative flirts with the total loss of form as possible continuations, such as potential stories with the nihilists and Gania are tested out and abandoned. Even Aglaia's relationship with Myshkin comes under this heading; hinted at in her reading of 'Rytsar' bednyi', the subject is raised with increasing frequency from the end of Part II until it is suddenly aborted with Nastas'ia Filippovna's reappearance in Part IV.

As the narrator struggles to find a new plot and, perhaps, a new set of relationships in which the hero might recover his ideal, the other characters' ability to script becomes essential to the continuation of the novel. New, prominent roles are there for the taking and the narrator effectively conducts live, on-set auditions. The characters' use of narrative, capacity for the dramatic, and spontaneity and adaptability therefore become central, as they have the opportunity to affirm their selfhood and play a major role in the re-structuring of the novel, if they can attract the interest of others, including the narrator, and persuade them to shift the focus of attention in their direction. However, none of these characters make an adequate claim for selfhood through their scripts; Burdovskii rapidly moves into the background, Gania, as we have seen, fails miserably, and Aglaia, ultimately, does not fare much better. Moreover, far from revealing Myshkin's ideal again, these new relationships expose his double-mindedness and absence of the earlier ideal by highlighting his inadequate response to others, for example when he inappropriately offers money to Burdovskii. We also see a deterioration in the Prince's ability to

script, as others withdraw their consent and refuse to confirm the hero's point of view. When he first meets Rogozhin, the latter supports the notion of Myshkin's saintliness with the words 'таких, как ты, бог любит' (VIII, 14). Later, however, as we have seen, Rogozhin denies Myshkin's belief that Nastas'ia Filippovna is mad, and specifically rejects forgiveness and the possibility of friendship (VIII, 303), Aglaia tries to silence him and derides his ideas, and Lebedev tries to prevent his marriage by having him declared insane (VIII, 477-78).⁹² Thus rather than being restored, the Prince's selfhood is further undermined by such interactions, leading the narrator to lose even more confidence in him.

Of all the characters auditioning in the central section, only Ippolit presents a strong script capable of becoming a major focus of the novel. Furthermore, although it is vetoed by the other characters, it affects the narrator, as it does Myshkin, very deeply, and for the same reason: it is a challenge to their shared ideal. As Malcolm Jones suggests, Ippolit's confession manipulates the entire focus of the novel

into accepting an image of the world in which the ultimate forces are unremittingly hostile to all human ideals and uplifting illusions, which threatens to undermine Myshkin's commitment to Christian compassion and is all too plausible as a backdrop to the narrated events. A novel which begins with a 'positively beautiful man' at its centre, ends with a twisted rebel [...] as its 'axis'.⁹³

⁹² On this occasion, the withdrawal of consent continues, as the doctor refuses to endorse Lebedev's script.

⁹³ 'Roman-Nevaliashka', p. 136.

Ippolit's dark vision subverts the form of the novel by denying the possibility of the very ideal of selfhood which the narrative has been striving to depict. Although others prevent his self-affirmation, his ideology is imprinted on the text, fundamentally challenging the coming into being of both the hero and the narrator, and questioning the grounds of their existence. As this has already been undermined by the change in Myshkin and the missing six months, the confession comes as a further blow to an already unstable narrative.

However, it is not only Ippolit's existential opposition to the narrator and Myshkin which is responsible for the increasing loss of form, as his 'Neobkhodimoe ob'iasnenie' also highlights another reason: he has stories and intrigues everywhere, which increasingly intrude on the narrative. When Ippolit reveals his manuscript, 'Евгений Павлович даже привскочил на своем стуле; Ганя быстро придвинулся к столу; Рогожин тоже, но с какою-то брюзгливою досадой, как бы понимая в чем дело' (VIII, 318). The narrator also comments, 'может быть, действительно ждали чего-то необыкновенно' (VIII, 320), immediately indicating to the reader that relationships and events about which we know nothing are going on in the background.

The importance of these relationships to the visible action of the novel is confirmed when Ippolit mentions his conversation with Rogozhin and the latter's role in his decision to commit suicide, but the details of their exchange are not reported, with the result that Rogozhin's words, 'не так этот предмет надо обдѣлывать, парень, не так...' (VIII, 320), are as obscure after the 'ob'iasnenie' as they were when uttered. Similarly,

Ippolit's relations with Gania and Radomskii remain mysterious and undefined, and his wish for Aglaia to have a copy of his manuscript is never fully explained. The reader is made aware that such connections exist, but instead of increasing our understanding of events in the novel, these hints merely raise unanswerable questions, such as, why are they so interested in Ippolit?; why does Radomskii abandon his intention of doing a good deed after hearing the confession?; why does Gania, who clearly despises him, allow Ippolit to live with them?; and to what extent has the young rebel influenced Aglaia? Ippolit challenges both the ideal and the bizarre love triangles at the centre of the novel, and proposes instead a new direction focusing on his existential crisis and his, rather than Myshkin's, relations with the other characters, and indeed, at times, it looks as though this would be a more interesting – and more Dostoevskian – continuation for the novel after the aimless nature of the middle section.

The tendency to produce parallel plots is an aspect of presentness not specifically identified by Morson. Although he addresses the vexed question of the many loose ends in the novel, he sees them only as further examples of events that might happen but do not, which confirm the unfinalizability of the text by confounding the reader's expectation that such foreshadows will be fulfilled.⁹⁴ However, a closer examination of the novel reveals that the loose ends are related to parallel plots continuing in the background. These are not events which might have happened, but rather hints of other unseen events going on at the same time, which have

⁹⁴ See Morson, 'Tempics', p. 122.

consequences for the characters involved and affect their behaviour in relation to the main (visible) action of the novel. As a result of these parallel plots, we gain the impression that the characters are developing and changing outside our purview, a fact which is most evident with regard to Gania who, after his aggressive and self-serving performance in Part I, seems to have changed substantially by Part II, when we discover he has been working as an agent for Myshkin, but then reverts to type later in the novel by demonstrating his antipathy towards Ippolit, reactivating his plan of marrying Aglaia for money and again placing himself in opposition to the Prince. We have little idea of why he changes, as we see nothing of the underlying circumstances, but this sense of constant movement and flux amongst the protagonists increases our sense of the processual nature of the novel, and prevents finalization of the characters; in the spirit of Morson's enterprise, I call this feature 'parashadowing'.

Ippolit's parallel plots, which repeatedly resurface until the end of the novel, and other stories such as Gania's plan, which are of only incidental concern for the main focus of the novel, continue, largely unseen, in the margins of the page. The novel does not simply present a dynamic central story which is the only concern for all the protagonists. Aside from their roles in the Myshkin-Nastas'ia Filippovna plot, all but the most minor characters such as Mrs Ivolgina are actively involved in dramas of their own, in which they are the heroes or have a plot-defining part to play, and attempt to influence others in order to gain confirmation for their scripts and achieve selfhood. Some of these alternative plots tear open the fabric of the novel, as in the case of Ippolit's narrative, which in effect casts

an enormous parashadow over the entire second half of the text as he indicates the extent of his relationships and involvements outside the main plot, while others, such as the much less successful attempt of Gania to script himself into the novel, merely create minor flaws on the surface.

Although parashadowing is an aspect of presentness which leaves the text open and subject to process and change, it is not necessarily a positive force, as it undermines the narrator's control of his material, with the result that the entire narrative is in danger of collapse; without a specific connection to the ideal, openness can lead to a disastrous loss of form. In the second half of the novel, the proliferation of parashadows, particularly in relation to Ippolit's intrigues, threatens to eclipse the original plot, a fact which adds weight to Malcolm Jones' assertion that the 'Neobkhodimoe ob'iasnenie' tips the balance in *Idiot* away from the ideal and back towards darkness and despair.⁹⁵ Ippolit's denial of the possibility of selfhood, and of narrative as its expression, places him in fundamental opposition to the narrator, and by introducing parashadows he further impairs the ability of the narrative to advance this ideal. In doing so, Ippolit plays a significant role in shifting the focus of the novel away from Myshkin's message of hope, compassion and the possibility of interaction which allows all to achieve selfhood, and towards the darker vision of human isolation and misery and the impossibility of attaining selfhood.

The narrator's control of the text is also weakened by Nastas'ia Filippovna, who is a master of parashadowing. Her first two appearances in

⁹⁵ 'Roman-Nevaliashka', p. 136.

Pavlovsk cast two major parashadows on the novel, one in relation to herself, the other to Radomskii. Her intrusions indicate to both the reader and the other characters that she remains active in the background, and that Radomskii also has ongoing and intriguing private affairs of which we have seen nothing. As well as using this device to avoid finalization by others, Nastas'ia Filippovna, as we have seen, gains a pervasive influence over the entire text by forcing herself to the forefront of the other protagonists' thoughts and speculations, and in doing so, she also undermines the narrator's position. The parashadows she introduces highlight the essential lack of plot in the central section and create the impression that the narrator is telling the wrong story altogether; she places a question mark against the narrator's fitness to narrate, and suggests that she is controlling events even in her absence, whilst also acting as a reminder of the hero's failure to save her, which further weakens the ideal. Through her use of parashadows we also see that Nastas'ia Filippovna's bid for self-determination, even more so than Ippolit's, extends to a sustained attempt to take over the narrative and control both the future direction of events and the entire atmosphere of the text.

Against this background, the narrator's loss of control, linked with Myshkin's falling away from the ideal and consequent corruption of the perfect self-other relationship of the two, becomes increasingly obvious. In the second half of the novel, the change in the Prince is marked in several ways. As well as admitting that he suffers from double thoughts, he is guilty of psychologism and, in contrast to his previous openness and refusal to judge, now makes simplistic, finalizing statements about the heroine

which remove her individuality and reduce her to the status of a type: 'знаешь ли, что женщина способна замучить человека жестокостями и насмешками, и ни разу ...' (VIII, 303). Furthermore, his failure to help Ippolit is evident in the youngster's accusation that it is even the hero's 'help' which has led him to turn to Rogozhin and formulate his 'final conviction': 'Это вы теперь всё подвели! Это вы меня довели до припадка! Вы умирающего довели до стыда, вы, вы, вы виноваты в подлом моем малодушии!' (VIII, 249). When Myshkin then fails to prevent Ippolit's suicide attempt, as he is momentarily distracted (VIII, 348), we become aware of how far he has fallen. In Part I the hero shows an overriding concern for those facing death, but now, although he is not indifferent to Ippolit's fate in the way that other characters appear to be, this concern is absent; the Myshkin of Part I who prevented Gania from hitting his sister would, we feel, have remained constantly vigilant and never have allowed the situation to arise.

After Ippolit's narrative matters quickly deteriorate and the relationship between Myshkin and the narrator, already damaged by the six-month gap, reaches its nadir when, in Part IV, chapter 3, the narrator, who until this point has been temporally simultaneous with the action, suddenly interrupts his chronology. In explaining General Ivolgin's downfall, the phrases 'суматоха с генералом во всякое другое время кончилась бы ничем', and 'на этот раз в «суматохе с генералом» проявилось нечто необыкновенное' (VIII, 400, 401), indicate that the narrator is now reflecting the perspective of the story as it is viewed after the event, rather than as it appears at the time. As presentness plays a

fundamental role in coming into being, this change is extremely significant, marking a further split between Myshkin and the narrator. The interruption of chronology is possibly due to Myshkin's shame at having failed the General, suggesting that, as with the painful events of the missing six months, he is again trying to erase it from his consciousness. However, on this occasion the narrator does not participate in the cover-up, but instead exposes the inadequacies of the Prince, suggesting a loss of patience. Thus while Murav sees the change which occurs in the texture of the narrative in the second half of the novel as being primarily the result of a shift in the narrator's position,⁹⁶ it is more accurate to state that both Myshkin and the narrator change. They lose trust in one another, and in their shared ethical and meta-narrational ideal. Having allowed the hero to express his ideas directly, the narrator in the second half of the novel becomes increasingly unwilling to continue in this mode;⁹⁷ now he merely tells us that Myshkin talked and does not present his words (VIII, 429). Moreover, at the soirée which marks the descent of the Prince's ideal into farce, the previously supportive narrator describes him in critical and patronizing tones in a single paragraph stretching for four and a half pages.⁹⁸ The extended description of Myshkin's inadequacies emphasizes the change in him and in his relationship with the narrator since the opening chapters of the novel.

Furthermore, the narrator has already by this stage betrayed a reluctance to continue his focus on the main events and the most important

⁹⁶ *Holy Foolishness*, p. 84.

⁹⁷ As Miller notes, *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, pp. 145-161.

⁹⁸ See Miller, *Author, Narrator, and Reader*, pp. 149-50.

characters. His excessive interest in ordinary and practical people, which he indulges at the beginning of Parts III and IV (VIII, 268-70, 383-88) indicates that he is no longer able to cope with the fantastic and extraordinary characters who were the mainstay of his initial conception, Nastas'ia Filippovna and Prince Myshkin. Faced with the disappearance and eccentric behaviour of the former, and the ethical deterioration of the latter, the narrator, confused and searching for a new story, turns with increasing frequency to trivial issues such as Gania's reactivated plot to marry Aglaia. As Myshkin's ideal fades and his mission is side-lined, the narrative becomes gradually more aimless and fragmented.

Towards the end of the novel, the hero, as well as failing to participate in the other's quest for selfhood (in the final episode with General Ivolgin) also loses his sense of the openness of time, as he becomes prey to determinism. More than embarrassment or shame at breaking the vase at the Epanchins' soirée, it is the 'сбывшееся пророчество' which horrifies him (VIII, 454); the fulfilment of the premonition suggests to Myshkin that he is wrong about the openness of time and the importance of presentness. This anxiety concerning the metaphysics of the novel and the hero's role in its expression is analogous to doubt which, as the Epistle of James states, is a form of double-mindedness. The move towards determinism implies that Myshkin has lost his faith in the possibility of selfhood and moral responsibility and, as it parallels the narrator's loss of presentness, which also undermines the hero's selfhood, points to the corruption of the ideal.

However, the definitive separation of Myshkin and the narrator occurs only after the confrontation of Nastas'ia Filippovna and Aglaia. In this key scene the Prince reveals the extent of the loss of his selfhood and ability to act for the other. Although his feelings about the meeting are described ('всё это он давно уже предчувствовал. Самый фантастический сон обратился вдруг в самую яркую и резко обозначившуюся действительность' (VIII, 470)), he plays no active part in the scene and is reduced to the status of onlooker. At the end of Part I Myshkin makes strenuous efforts to find the heroine, intervenes to offer her new life and an alternative script, and follows her to Moscow in order to try to fulfil his promise. However, by the time of the confrontation scene, he is a bystander who does not make an active choice to stay with Nastas'ia Filippovna and return to his quest, but does so by default when Aglaia proves unable to stand her ground. Myshkin's similarity to Rogozhin at this point is instructive; the fact that neither man participates actively in the scene implies that both are reduced to otherness. Nothing depends on them as, ultimately, only Nastas'ia Filippovna, in her twisted striving for selfhood, has a choice.

The Prince's sacrifice of the chance of normal happiness with Aglaia suggests that he is re-focusing on the ideal and retreating from egoism, but in fact matters have changed so much that it is by this stage hopeless; lacking in presentness and selfhood, alienated from the narrator and undermined by Ippolit's dark vision, he no longer has the capacity to be I-for-another. His passive, fatalistic acceptance of the situation is evident in his attitude towards the wedding: 'князь согласился свободно; даже

как-то рассеянно и вроде того, как если бы попросили у него какую-нибудь довольно обыкновенную вещь' (VIII, 478). The perfect self who previously championed choice, responsibility and presentness now merely goes through the motions and behaves as though everything is end-determined. Returning to his quest seems to be more a case of attempting to save himself from his loss of faith in the ideal than trying to save the heroine.

Emphasizing Myshkin's alienation from himself and from the present, the narrator withdraws completely from his relationship with the hero. From this point onwards, although he is not an embodied chronicler, the narrator behaves as though he is, relying on eye-witness accounts for key events, without any privileged knowledge of what is happening, exchanging omniscience for gossip. His descriptions of events are littered with qualifications such as, 'нам совершенно известно,' 'мы знаем также,' 'нам известно также,' 'рассказывали' (VIII, 478), which suggest not knowledge but its absence. As the comparison with the Epistle of James has shown, gossip is a divisive force, which undermines both interpersonal relations and the stability of narrative. The fact that the narrator indulges in it indicates that he too has lost sight of the ideal with which the novel began, and is now prepared to perpetuate potential falsehoods which prevent harmonious interaction and condemn the characters to otherness rather than help them to achieve selfhood; he too is guilty of faith without works, according to the meta-narrational standard with which the novel began.

Not only is the narrator losing control of the events he is supposed to be narrating by this stage, but half the time he does not even know what the events are, as his confidence in and patience with both Myshkin and his own narrative are undermined. His reaction to the forthcoming wedding indicates his complete loss of interest in the hero:

И вот, если бы спросили у нас разъяснения, — не насчет нигилистических оттенков события, а просто лишь насчет того, в какой степени удовлетворяет назначенная свадьба действительным желаниям князя, в чем именно состоят в настоящую минуту эти желания, как именно определить состояние духа нашего героя в настоящий момент и пр., и пр. в этом же роде, — то мы, признаемся, были бы в большом затруднении ответить (VIII, 477).

The split in Myshkin's personality caused by double-mindedness and his decline into otherness coincides with the dissociation of the narrator from the hero's consciousness, leaving the narrative in a state of total uncertainty and further emphasizing the loss of the ideal. Moreover, when the narrator notes his approval of Radomskii's interpretation of the Prince, stating, 'Разумно и ясно, и, повторяем, с чрезвычайною даже психологией, развернул он пред князем картину всех бывших собственных отношений князя к Настасье Филипповне' (VIII, 481), he moves towards the tendency to finalize and pass judgement on the hero who in Part I was given his own voice, and is thus himself guilty of a failure to sustain the striving for the ideal.

As the narrator is so closely allied to Myshkin's consciousness, when this is undermined by the forces of double-mindedness and otherness (the hero's fall), the fabric of the narrative is also corrupted by the

impossibility of expression, which is the linguistic result of the Fall. As Jones states, 'In Part IV the narrator appears obsessed with the business of narrating itself',⁹⁹ as the story he is supposed to be telling becomes progressively more difficult to define:

Прошло две недели после события, рассказанного в последней главе, и положение действующих лиц нашего рассказа до того изменилось, что нам чрезвычайно трудно приступить к продолжению без особых объяснений. И однако, мы чувствуем, что должны ограничиться простым изложением фактов, по возможности без особых объяснений, и по весьма простой причине: потому, что сами, во многих случаях, затрудняемся объяснить происшедшее. Такое предуведомление с нашей стороны должно показаться весьма странным и неясным читателю: как рассказывать то, о чем не имеешь ни ясного понятия, ни личного мнения? (VIII, 475-76).

Like his hero in the latter part of the novel, the narrator has lost the ability to narrate, again suggesting an underlying connection between the two which, when it is subverted and subsequently broken, has an enormous impact on the form of *Idiot*; the inability to narrate of both is in large part due to the loss of presentness and selfhood, and the corruption of their ideal relationship.

By the end of the novel, therefore, the ideal has disintegrated and the narrative is on the verge of collapse; Myshkin and the narrator are detached from each other and insensitive to the present, destroying the interconnected chain of being which they initiated. When Rogozhin rescues Nastas'ia Filippovna, neither the Prince nor the narrator has any further part to play, and it is for this reason that the flight and murder scene are not

⁹⁹ Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin, pp. 115-16.

depicted. Nastas'ia Filippovna has taken control of the narrative to the extent that when she changes her mind on her wedding day, she scripts Myshkin – and indeed the narrator – out. The narrator's failure is evident in his inability to mediate the most important event of the novel, while Myshkin's fatalistic attitude and lack of positive reaction is in stark contrast to his earlier concern for those facing death and his willingness to follow the heroine and fight for her salvation.

The novel, which begins with the 'положительно прекрасный человек,' an ideal narrator-hero relationship as a model of selfhood, and a saintly script which aims to extend the interconnected chain of being to the other characters, who are suffering as a result of their inability to interact with each other in the present, ends with the affirmation of the very opposite of the ideal. The hero is unable to withstand his testing; to return to Dostoevskii's famous letter about his creation, what the novel depicts is not simply a 'положительно прекрасный человек,' but also the fact that he is so difficult to portray, especially nowadays (XXVIII.ii, 251). Meanwhile, Nastas'ia Filippovna's awareness of presentness and its choices, her flair for the dramatic, and her ability to persuade or coerce others into participating in her script allow her to achieve her ultimate goal, the freedom of absolute narrative self-determination. However, her self-affirmation is at the expense of the other; in order to attain it, she breaks the chain; although she uses the other for her own coming into being, it is in no sense a mutual event, as Rogozhin, Myshkin and the narrator (as well as Aglaia, Radomskii and Gania) all discover to their cost.

The open-ended, un-pre-determined form of the narrative, which reflects Myshkin's ideal of the possibility of awareness of every second and achieving selfhood through the process of interaction in the present, buckles and finally collapses under the pressure of Nastas'ia Filippovna's scripting and the determinism she imposes on the text. It is the culmination of her script which gives the novel closure, as it causes not only her death, but also Rogozhin's illness and imprisonment and the Prince's idiocy, while even Aglaia's marriage can be seen as an indirect result of the heroine's control over the text and Myshkin. The character of the hero is, as we have seen, developed as an antithesis to Dostoevskii's ambivalent creations and ideologues, and the remnants of his script, his own fate notwithstanding, ensure the continuing openness of the narrative. The strength of Nastas'ia Filippovna's will, however, combined with Ippolit's spiritual anguish and dark vision of reality and Rogozhin's primal instincts and willing enslavement to the heroine's purpose, return the mania for self-affirmation, power over others and (a)moral freedom in the face of impending annihilation to the forefront of the narrative, tipping the balance away from the ideal and faith, towards doubt and double-mindedness. In doing so, they test and subvert the form of the novel to the point of destruction.

Conclusion

This psycho-poetic analysis of *Idiot*, concentrating on character as the structural determinant of the novel, has identified four main strands dominating the ideas and actions of the protagonists. The first two, self-other interaction, in both practical and perceptual terms, and issues of faith and doubt, or wholeness and dualism, particularly in the context of human mortality, are linked by the other two: presentness and the concept of scripting. Scripting not only impels and controls interaction but also, because its re-creative impulse originates in the Fall and human dualism, gives it direction from within the characters, as they attempt to define and alter their relations with others and their place in the world of the novel according to their own conceptions of reality, in order to achieve selfhood. Presentness is an important aspect of scripting, as true dialogic interaction leading to selfhood can only occur in the present, and because it introduces choice and moral responsibility into interhuman relations. By facing the fundamental problems of faith, dualism and the self, attempting to address the problems of temporality and reconcile life with the fact of death, and using their interactions to explore and define their attitudes to these issues, the protagonists are instrumental in structuring the text through the process of contextualizing their own existence.

By highlighting the strategies the characters use in their attempts to control the other protagonists and the direction of the narrative, through adopting roles based on literary and cultural prototypes and allocating to others complementary parts in their scripts, as well as examining the extent

to which they succeed, the concept of scripting enables us to define the dynamic influence of the characters on the structuring of the text. The ideas and attitudes underpinning the protagonists' scripts thus also play a significant role in shaping their interactivity and the direction and movement of the novel as a whole. Scripting therefore differs from French's concept of 'storiness' in three ways,¹ as storiness is spiritually negative, relatively static and backward-looking. In contrast, scripting is spiritually neutral (depending on the content of the script it can be either positive or negative, although negative aspects can impose serious limits on the viability of a script), and is forward-looking and dynamic. It is a means of controlling others as well as a source of self-orientation and, unlike French's analysis, incorporates the compelling arguments put forward by Morson on temporality in the novel.² It posits a future not only as yet uncreated, but also susceptible in the process of its creation to the influence of individual characters' scripts; it is because the novel was written without a pre-determined plan and instead is presented in the process of its becoming that the characters are able to influence its structuring.

Prince Myshkin proposes a solution to the essential existential and psychological problems faced by the characters, in an ideal model of ethical reading, narrating and saintly scripting, which focuses on the connections between faith and human interaction and privileges the other over the self, aiming to overcome dualism and the separation of self from other in order

¹ *Dostoevsky's 'Idiot': Dialogue and the Spiritually Good Life*, see pp. 13, 32 above.

² In 'Tempics' and *Narrative and Freedom*, see pp. 202-3, 307-37 above.

to gain access to a 'higher reality'. Furthermore, its open-endedness and affirmation of the possibilities of presentness, illustrated in his execution stories and originating in his pre-epileptic aura, are reflected in the presentness of the narration.

Nastas'ia Filippovna's Manichaeistic scripting, in contrast, grounded in shame at her fallen state and the overwhelming desire to free herself from the control and finalizing tendencies of others and achieve self-determination, reinforces her dualism, but also allows her to exert a great deal of pressure on the narrative and the other characters. Aided by Ippolit's anguished vision of human misery and isolation, and the many attacks – physical, verbal and emotional – on the Prince by others, as well as the detrimental influence on the hero of external, worldly forces (in particular money and exclusive, romantic love), the heroine gradually undermines Myshkin's compassion and message of hope, replacing it with the bleak atmosphere and increasingly tragic sense of determinism which permeate the latter part of *Idiot*. The collision of the major scripts give tension to the narrative, but the balance gradually shifts away from the openness of the Prince's saintly scripting towards closure through Nastas'ia Filippovna's control and Ippolit's negation of the possibility of selfhood, resulting in the loss of the ideal. The denouement illustrates the disastrous consequences of this for the protagonists and the narrative.

By examining the text through the prism of Bakhtin's essay 'Avtor i geroi', which focuses on the perceptual difference between self and other and its implications for both human interaction and narrative, in conjunction with the themes of double-mindedness, doubt and conflict

raised by the Epistle of James, we have been able to identify the nature of the ethical-aesthetic ideal and its problematic, paradoxical aspects which present obstacles to its achievement in both ethical and narrational terms. The structuring of *Idiot* therefore provides a meta-narrational analogue to the tension of faith and doubt as it impacts on the interrelations of the protagonists.

This reading accounts for the ambiguous and complex character of Prince Myshkin by examining the movement and change in his personality, attitudes and actions in relation to the peculiar features of the narrative and the changes it undergoes after Part I. It also explains the central role played by Nastas'ia Filippovna, Dostoevskii's most extraordinary and compelling female creation, who has been generally underestimated by critical approaches thus far, and Ippolit's essential contribution to the form of the novel. In doing so, this line of investigation suggests a new approach to the analysis of character in narrative which draws a line between post-structuralism and Bakhtinian poetics; character, in this conception, is both a textual phenomenon and textual determinant, and an embodied voice in a dialogue of ideas. The shifting dynamics of *Idiot* and its strange, experimental structuring are therefore the result of the interplay of the characters' competing scripts as they fight for selfhood and control amongst each other and within the world of the novel.

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