

Cultural Colonialism and Resistance in the Nineteenth-Century Russian Novels

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Abstract:

The Russian obsession with European culture, predominantly French and English, is not a recent phenomenon. The nation of Russia was always straddled between the two continents of Asia and Europe, and this peculiar geographical position extended into the cultural domain as well. In my Paper, I will be specifically exploring the novel *Anna Karenina* (1878) by Leo Tolstoy and the novels *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and *Devils* (1871) by Fyodor Dostoevsky. Through my Paper, I will be exploring how seminal writers like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky wrestled with the cultural crisis in the nineteenth century Russia brought about by the influx of European ideas such as nihilism, utilitarianism, socialism, atheism etc into the Russian mainland.

Keywords: Colonialism, Novels, Ideology, Russian Orthodox Church, Nihilism, Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Christianity, Socialism.

On June 4, 2007, an article was published in *The Telegraph* depicting how a group of more than 10000 young Russians were re-enacting episodes from English history in Ivanovka, which was located about 40 miles from Moscow. During summertime in Russia, they tried to re-enact the War of Roses and drank mead from enormous clay mugs, while women in their group made 'exotic' meals with 'primitive' English recipes. Yelena Nosova, a member of this group, claimed that they appreciate Russian history, but they consider the English history more romantic.

The Russian obsession with European culture, predominantly French and English, is not a recent phenomenon. The nation of Russia was always straddled between the two continents of Asia and Europe, and this peculiar geographical position extended into the cultural domain as well. Christianity in Russia, represented by the Russian Orthodox Church, was more mystical than its

Catholic counterpart in Europe. Unlike the mainland of Europe, the Russian community was more conservative, feudal, and traditional. Except for the October Revolution, social changes made their way to Russia at a slower pace than in other European nations. However, since Catherine the Great communicated through letters with the French philosopher Voltaire, European culture and civilisation became matters of great interest to the general Russian community. This state of affairs was augmented by the faster pace of industrialisation and progressive social and political changes in the European mainland. Colonisation of Asian and African nations gave England and France unprecedented economic and political supremacy as well. Russian intelligentsia began paying closer attention to European philosophy and social and political changes in the European mainland.

The nineteenth century was a period of rapid social and political changes for the West. Technological and industrial developments were also an essential feature of this period. Otto von Bismarck succeeded in uniting Germany in the 1860s. The administration of India by East India Company came to an end after the rebellion of 1857. The United States grew in size and strength after the Civil War. From the side of Asia, Japan was modernised after the Meiji restoration of 1868. However, Russia's problem was that despite possessing large land area and human resources, raising enough capital to support rapid industrial development to compete with more advanced western nations on a commercial basis proved to be an insurmountable problem. The fundamental dilemma faced by the Russian administration was that rapid economic and industrial development risked social unrest and political upheaval. Russian intelligentsia was already clamouring for reforms in various fields like agriculture, industry, and women's status.

During the nineteenth century, Russia boasted of a considerably larger population than that of more developed Western nations. There was an exponential growth in the population of Russia during the period from 1850 to 1910. However, most of this population was concentrated in rural areas, and they chiefly engaged in agriculture as their chief occupation. The problem was that most of the Russian peasants and landowners were opposed to the idea of modernising the practice of agriculture. Leo Tolstoy mentioned this scenario in his work *Anna Karenina* (1878). Twenty per cent of all farmland in Russia consisted of large estates of more than fifty square kilometres. However, few of them were worked inefficient large-scale units. Industrial growth in Russia was significant but not comparable to that of major European powers like Britain, Germany, and France. Major industrial regions in Russia included St. Petersburg, Moscow, Baltic cities and

southern Ural Mountains. During the nineteenth century, Russia was ruled by autocratic Czars, who exercised absolute control and authority.

The primary debate among Russian intelligentsia during the nineteenth century was between Slavophiles and Western Liberals. Konstantin Sergeevich, a prominent Slavophile, stated that Russia's westernised elite sought to destroy Russia's ordinary people's traditional principles, which, according to him, had a religious foundation. According to him, Russia was a nation built on voluntary contribution, freedom, and peace, whereas European nations developed through violence, slavery, and hostility. Russians placed more emphasis on their conscience as well as on their religious and social tradition. Europeans, on the other hand, were more rational and objective. Sergeevich opined that the best example of the Russian principle could be found in the peasant village commune. Peasant village commune was a native Russian institution embodying the principle of genuine communality of human relations. The peasant village commune's necessary foundation was 'internal justice,' meaning traditional principles that the commune's members willingly obeyed rather than an external law or mandate that compelled obedience. (Lantz 10)

If the Russian attitude to Europe bordered on extremes, then its approach to America was more ambiguous. All kinds of Russians regarded Europe as a place of rationality and centre of western civilisation. The difference consisted of whether they considered it an example to be emulated or some evil influence discarded. However, Russians had different and conflicted images of America in their mind. The earliest popular image of America among Russians was a new world of opportunities and unimpeded freedom. A Rousseauistic and Romantic world where humanity could be reborn. However, a different view of America emerged during the 1830s and 1840s. In their writings, Slavophiles portrayed America as a land of crass materialism and unbounded individualism, whereas Russia, by contrast, was a collectivist, conservative utopia. Articles on one or another aspect of American life were an everyday staple of the Russian journals of the 1840s and 1850s. Like the emancipation of slaves and the American Civil War, development in America was closely followed in the Russian press (Lantz 11). These various and conflicting viewpoints of America and Europe were reflected in the writings of significant writers of the period like Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, and Ivan Turgenev. In this paper, I will be analysing the novel *Anna Karenina* (1878) by Leo Tolstoy as well as *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and *Devils* (1871) by Fyodor Dostoevsky.

However, one must always keep in mind that the phenomenon of 'cultural colonisation' that this paper talks about concerning Russia was very different from India and Algeria's colonisation by Britain and France, respectively. Many historians consider Russia itself as one of the colonial powers during the nineteenth and preceding centuries though Russians practised colonisation of a different variety. According to the famous historian Sergei Solov'ev, "The history of Russia is the history of a country that colonises itself." Before the First World War, Russia was a member of the International Colonial Institute based on Brussels. European powers exchanged ideas and techniques for the effective administration of their respective colonies. The Tsarist regime in Russia during its last days accelerated what can be described as a 'colonising movement' (kolonizatsionnoedvizhenie) of Ukrainian and Russian peasants into Central Asia, where they were settled on land which was taken away from Kazakhs and Kyrgyz who were local inhabitants of the area. This movement was the Resettlement of the Administration plan, whose journal was called *Voprosy Kolonizatsii* (Questions of Colonisation).

Keeping these facts in mind, the term 'cultural colonisation' which this paper uses concerning Russia is the same as the concept of colonisation of mind put forward by Frantz Fanon in seminal texts like *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Like France and Britain, nations in the European mainland achieved staggering economic growth and experienced sweeping political reforms during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Like Russia, China, and Turkey, nations outside the European mainland were forced to realise their backwardness by comparison. The question of responding to the pressures of European civilisation confronted all these nations. Russia was the first nation to face the challenge squarely. Peter the Great, who ruled Russia during the beginning of the eighteenth century, chose to 'westernise' Russia as rapidly as possible (Morson 144). What the Emperor wanted was not just a modernisation of the Russian society, but he wanted Russian aristocracy to adopt western mores wholesale. The reforms initiated by Peter the Great made a lasting impact on Russian culture. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the primary language of Russian aristocracy became French replacing Russian. Borrowing from Homi Bhabha, one can argue that Peter the Great wanted to create 'Mimic Russian Men' imitating Europeans. In fact, under Peter the Great's orders, an Academy of Science was opened in Russia even before Russians were literate enough, let alone scientifically accomplished. The Academy was hence staffed with foreigners. All major institutions in Russia, including the Government, the church, and the military, underwent rapid transformation.

The new Julian calendar dated events as Europeans did. *The Book of Deportment* taught European manners to Russian aristocrats who were forced to practise western behaviours from cutlery to conduct conversations in salons (Morson 144). However, the most crucial change was that women emerged from seclusion and became partners in social and intellectual life. These cultural and social changes were reflected in nineteenth-century Russian novelists like Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Turgenev. The nihilists, anarchists, and liberals who play prominent roles in novels like *Crime and punishment*, *Fathers and Sons*, *Devils*, and *Anna Karenina* can be considered as the products of the wholesale 'westernisation' of Russia initiated by Peter the Great. However, despite all the reforms undertaken by Peter the Great, Russia remained economically backward compared to Britain and France even during the nineteenth century.

However, the social and political changes initiated by Peter the Great never went unopposed. Russian Slavophiles questioned the need to affect a radical break from the past by importing ideologies and social customs from Europe. They opposed not the modernisation of Russia, but the neglect of Russian culture and heritage. The problem with Peter the Great, according to them, was that he was in a hurry. Culture develops gradually over centuries, and social and political changes cannot be imposed suddenly in accordance with the whims and fancies of an emperor. Drawing an analogy with the British society, Slavophiles described Peter the Great as the ultimate 'whig' (Morson, 155). The seminal writer Dostoevsky himself, an admirer of European literature, was an ardent Slavophile and opposed the uncritical application of European value systems in the Russian context.

At this point, it is worthwhile to elaborate on the history of St Petersburg and how Peter the Great in 1703 converted a swampland into one of the most westernised cities in Russia. However, this city, which later became a symbol of cosmopolitanism and enlightened Europe, was founded on the harshest conditions; the Emperor forced peasants and workers to work long hours under unforgiving climatic conditions. Finally, in the year 1712, St Petersburg replaced Moscow as the capital of Russia. In the mind of Peter the Great and the architects he employed, the geometric symmetry of St Petersburg symbolised the triumph of reason over custom, mind over nature, and design over contingency (Morson 145). In contrast to the clear lines of St Petersburg, the haphazard Moscow stood for gradualism, custom, and embeddedness within the historical process. In his novel *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky puts the proposition forwards that

Raskolnikov's rationalist theories justifying murder are an outcome of the spirit of the city in which he lives, which is St Petersburg. Similarly, the hero of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, who devotes his life to a struggle against abstract rationalism, loathes the city of St Petersburg (Morson 145).

Leo Tolstoy was and still is one of the most celebrated novelists worldwide known for his magnum opus *War and Peace* (1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1878), which is considered the pinnacle of realist fiction. However, Tolstoy's contemporaries found it difficult to categorise him. His belief in man's natural goodness and his antagonism towards the state and sympathy with village peasants suggested that he must be a radical. Russian police once raided the village schools he founded on charges of subversion. On the contrary, Tolstoy's strong Christian beliefs, as well as his firm support of traditional institutions like family hinted at the possibility that, in reality, he might be a conservative and Slavophile. However, even though he was religious, his religiosity was individualistic and not the orthodox variety. Hence late in life, he was exiled by the Russian Orthodox Church. Even though he was antagonistic towards the state, he never believed in a violent revolution. The only revolution he ever believed in was a Christian moral revolution, which will make people more compassionate and better human beings. He also never subscribed to the materialism of many of the radicals and nihilists of his time.

The novel *Anna Karenina* reads like a serious discussion the distinguished author is having with his readers. The topics of the discussion include but are not limited to land reforms in Russia, Tolstoy's concept of an ideal marriage, the simple life of serfs, the glitter and superficiality of city life, rights of women, and so on. Levin's character in this novel represents Tolstoy himself, and Levin's marriage with Kitty symbolises Tolstoy's marriage with Sophiya. This novel is full of scenes that depict Russian obsession with European culture. His novel was also a direct challenge to Russia's radical intelligentsia, which spurred by western liberal ideas had been attacking the 'institution' of the family for more than a decade. Many nihilists had already advocated sexual freedom, communal living, and communal raising of children.

Tolstoy first mentions about his decision to write a novel regarding the theme of adultery (which turned out to be *Anna Karenina*) in a letter to his friend and admiring critic Strakhov. Tolstoy never considered *War and Peace* to be a novel; he regarded it as an epic. Tolstoy began the novel to write about a flawed woman who deserts her virtuous husband for her illicit lover's

sake. However, as the novel-writing proceeded, Tolstoy began to sympathise with Anna's character more and more. In the final version of the novel, Anna is transformed into a charming and morally honest woman who, for the sake of pure romantic love, deserts her husband, Karenin. Tolstoy portrays Karenin as an efficient bureaucrat but one who is devoid of romantic passion.

Tolstoy was an avid reader of French literature throughout his life. He owned a copy of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856). However, the work which influenced him the most and prompted him to write *Anna Karenina* was an essay by Alexander Dumas titled *Man-Woman* (1873). This essay deals with the theme of a husband's right to discipline, punish, and even kill an unfaithful wife. Tolstoy was very much impressed with this essay. He mentions about this essay in a letter he wrote to his wife's sister in 1873. While Tolstoy follows Dumas's model to an extent in sketching the relationship between Karenin and Anna, he abandons it while portraying Levin and Kitty's relationship. However, even here, Tolstoy follows Dumas's model of classifying women into three categories: women of the temple (virgins), women of the family (wives), and women of the street (courtesans). In the novel *Anna Karenina*, Kitty's friend Varenka remains in the first category. Kitty moves from the first category to second in keeping with the church sacraments. Anna moves from the second category to the third category by breaking the sacrament of marriage. Like Dumas, Tolstoy also kills his adulteress heroine; however, unlike Dumas, Tolstoy also provides a happy picture of married life through the portrayal of Levin and Kitty (Meyer ix).

The exciting and essential subplot of *Anna Karenina* sketches the life of Levin and his marriage with Kitty. In this subplot, Tolstoy portrays his spiritual struggles, philosophical ideas, and views regarding Russia's contemporary events during Tolstoy's time. Schopenhauer and Rousseau were two European philosophers who greatly influenced Tolstoy and, thereby, Levin's character in this novel as well, who, after all, is a portrayal of Tolstoy himself.

The character of Sergey Ivanovich in *Anna Karenina* stands as a representative of European rationality. Sergey is the half-brother of Levin and is an accomplished scholar. Sergey is an abstract thinker and believes that one can generalise all human experience and arrive at practical solutions to all social problems through precise and calculated reasoning. However, Levin does not share his half-brother's point of view; circumstances vary from place to place, and generalisations are impossible. In all the arguments between Sergey and Levin, the former resorts to his chain of

reasoning, whereas the latter resorts to his experiences. Sergey had a favourable opinion of Levin but considered him too much under the control of momentary influences.

Even in his earlier novel *War and Peace*, Tolstoy rejected the ideal of rational thought process. The characters of Kutuzov and Bagration, who are the best generals in *War and Peace*, reject the idea of a science of battle. They instead rely on their ability to take advantage of unforeseen circumstances. They also see soldiers not as cogs in the machinery of war but as real people with emotions and feelings. Hence, they rely on not theoretical but practical reasoning.

In one of the famous scenes in *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy criticises the Russian obsession with French. Levin observes that Dolly (who eventually becomes his sister-in-law) teaches her children to talk in French. According to Levin, forcing children to speak in an alien language is equivalent to weaning them away from sincerity (In this context, it will be worthwhile to recall the disagreements and disputes in post-independent Algeria and India regarding the status of the coloniser's tongue in the newly independent nation-states). In another scene in this novel, Levin, who has greatly read European philosophers, is still traumatised at the sight of his brother's intense suffering. However, his wife Kitty, though, no intellectual knows precisely what to do to help Nikolai (Levin's Brother) who is dying. Levin realises that despite the breadth of his knowledge, his wife knows more about the great mystery of death than he does. The novel *Anna Karenina* ends with a rejection of the Darwinian notion of survival of the fittest in favour of the Christian principle of loving one's fellow beings.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, Levin's character in this novel represents Tolstoy himself. His failure to successfully modernise his farming practices signify Russia's inability to modernise itself on European lines. When Levin returned to his estate after being rejected by Kitty, he was informed by the bailiff that the buckwheat in the new drying kiln had been a little scorched. Levin realised to his dismay that "a little scorched" means ruined. Levin realised that despite giving precise instructions hundreds of times, the peasants simply misused his valuable technical pieces of equipment. He also came to know that his plans for sowing clover early cannot be put into practice, and his new English seed oats suffer from a touch of mildew. Thus Levin, the reformer, and moderniser encounter a series of disappointments (Morson 152). Through the portrayal of Levin's failure to successfully modernise his farmland, Tolstoy was criticising the tendency of various western intellectuals to look for the root cause of various social ills and diverse historical

events. Through his novels like *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy put forward the radical proposition that there is no root cause behind human misery or various historical events. They are all a cumulative effect of many irreducibly different things.

Agricultural passages in the novel *Anna Karenina* left Tolstoy open to parody, especially by the radicals. However, these passages are significant to understand one of the essential themes in this novel, and that is the modernisation of Russia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The character of landowner Levin, in this novel, plans to write a book regarding agriculture, which will give crucial importance to the Russian labourer and his relation to the land. Levin was aware that his theories regarding agriculture are diametrically opposed to many of the political economists' prominent opinions on the topic. Through his work, Levin wanted to provide a different perspective on why modernisation of farmlands in Russia on European lines was met with failure. Through his work, Levin put forward the proposition that merely exporting machines from the West without considering the people who are to use them is a recipe for failure. According to Levin, culture matters, and people are not mere providers of many units of interchangeable working hours (Morson 158). This analogy of farming applies to attempts at the general modernisation of Russia along European lines as well. This is how Levin reflects upon Russian labourers and their silent antagonism to modern technology. "When capital is applied in the European way the produce is small...this simply arises from the fact that the labourers want to work and work well only in their own peculiar way, and that this antagonism is not incidental but invariable and has its roots in the national spirit" (Morson 158-159).

Just like Tolstoy, Dostoevsky was also an ardent reader and admirer of European literature. Dostoevsky's first grounding in aesthetics came from romantic thought, most notably the writings of Johann Schiller. Hugo, Balzac, George Sand, and Charles Dickens were some other writers who made a seminal impression on Dostoevsky. Francois-Rene de Chateaubriand's contention that Christianity is not only truth but also beauty strengthened the primarily Christian foundation of Dostoevsky's aesthetics. The 1850s and 1860s saw the rise of philosophical materialism in Russia. Inspired by Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian philosophy, thinkers like Nikolai Chernyshevsky and Dmitri Pisarev began attacking all kinds of philosophical idealism in literary writings. Pisarev even went to the extent of arguing that art has no objective value but was merely an idea of the 'beautiful.' Dostoevsky understood the social relevance of literary works. Still, he objected to the notion of

solely using art as a tool for social welfare and reform. Dostoevsky argued that art is as vital to humanity as eating and drinking. In his words

Art is as much a need for humanity as eating and drinking. The need for beauty and creations that embody it is inseparable from humanity, and without it, the man perhaps might not want to live on earth. Man thirsts for beauty find and accept beauty *without any conditions* but just as it is, simply because it is beauty; and he bows down before it with reverence without asking what use it is and what one can buy with it and it is in this perhaps that the greatest mystery of artistic creation lies, that an image of the beauty created by him at once becomes an ideal without any conditions. (qtd in Lantz 5)

Intelligentsia in Russia during the nineteenth century was divided into various factions characterised by their different ideological positions. There was a moderate faction during the 1840s who were known as the "liberals," and they wanted gradual, limited, and peaceful modernisation of Russia along European lines through reforms and not revolution. There was also a radical faction dominated by younger men who were influenced by utopian Socialism, and they dreamed of far-reaching social change through a political revolution. They emerged during the 1850s. Then there were the Slavophiles who opposed the Westernisation of Russia, and they became especially active after the reign of Nicolas I had ended. Even more conservative than Slavophiles were the group members of 'native soil conservatism' (pochvennichestvo) founded by Grigorev, Strakhov, and Dostoevsky himself (Offord 116).

The characters in Dostoevsky's novels are, in fact, artistic depictions of the ideologies, values, belief systems, and attitudes of the intelligentsia. Through his characters such as Raskolnikov, Verkhovensky, and Kirillov, Dostoevsky managed more than any other author in his time to give a highly caricatured portrait of the rootless intellectual who emerges from the dark underground of nihilism into the sunlit valley of humanity, charity, and Christian virtue. Dostoevsky's mission in life was to help construct a broad humane culture characterised by the integration of reason and faith, moral commitment, passionate engagement with ideas, and great even millenarian expectations (Offord 115). Through journals such as *Time* and *Epoch* and literary works such as *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* (1863), Dostoevsky criticised many Westernised intellectuals in Russia who mindlessly imitated western culture tradition while wilfully forgetting their Russian roots. *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* was a memoir of his

journey to Europe during the summer of 1862, and in this work, he portrayed a Europe which was rotting from inside as a result of moral corruption.

Many critics consider Dostoevsky to be the most Christian of all Russian writers. The figure of Jesus Christ appears prominently in all his novels, which are all condemnations of nihilism and atheism. Dostoevsky considered the French philosopher Voltaire to be the first thinker who sowed the seeds of doubt in the idea of a just and loving God. He believed the aftermath of the French Revolution was the first attempt at organisation of a human society without Christ. He considered Socialism as an attempt to create a society on a rational, material basis. The narrator of *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) states that Socialism attempts "not to reach heaven from earth but to bring heaven down to earth." When a correspondent asked Dostoevsky in 1876 what was needed to keep men from killing themselves, he referred to Christ's statement, "Man does not live by bread alone." Following are his exact words

Today's *Socialism* in Europe and Russia as well everywhere does away with Christ and is concerned first of all with *bread*; it resorts to science and affirms that the reasons for all of humanity's woes are only *poverty*, the struggle for survival, 'the corruption of the environment' ...if there will be no spiritual life, no ideal of beauty, then humans will despair, will die, will go out of their minds, will kill themselves or fall into pagan fantasies. But since the Christ bore within his person and his word the ideal of beauty in the souls of men; having that ideal in their souls, all would become brothers to one another and then, of course, working for one another, would become rich as well. But if you give them bread, they, out of boredom, perhaps will become enemies to each other. (qtd in Lantz 6)

Dostoevsky considered atheism an intellectual conceit, an individual's attempt to reach beyond himself purely by rational means. However, according to Dostoevsky, roots of religious feeling lies not in reason but a person's whole being. This what the character of Myshkin in the novel *The Idiot* (1868) says regarding religious feeling.

The essence of religious feeling has nothing to do with any process of reasoning or any misdemeanours and crimes or any sort of atheism; it is something altogether different, and it will always be different; there is something here that our atheists will always miss, and they will never talk about that. But the important thing is that you will notice it most clearly and quickly in a Russian heart. (qtd in Lantz 23)

However, the chief enemy Dostoevsky targeted in his writings was not atheism or Socialism but Roman Catholicism. Speaking as a representative of the Russian Orthodox Church, Dostoevsky denounced Catholicism as the incarnation of Anti-Christ. Dostoevsky considered Catholicism to be the antithesis of the teachings of Jesus Christ and as a continuation of the Roman Empire. Dostoevsky also denounced Protestantism and viewed it as a movement that was on the path to atheism.

Dostoevsky provided the first description of the novel *Crime and Punishment* (1866) in a letter he wrote to the *Russian Messenger* editor, Mikhail Katkov, in mid-September 1865 (Lantz 71). Dostoevsky most probably came upon the idea of this novel during the time he spent in a Siberian prison, where he met many "Napoleonic" prisoners who carried out their crimes with meticulous planning and cold-blooded reasoning. He described the central character of *Crime and Punishment* as a young man in the grip of certain "half baked" ideas of the 1860s, such as materialism, utilitarianism, and nihilism, which were challenging the core values of Russian society. The central premise of this novel was that there were two kinds of people in this world; the ordinary ones who live their lives in submission to laws and the extraordinary ones such as Newtons, Mohammeds and Napoleons who have the power to bring something new to this world and they also have the right to transgress ordinary laws and even to wade in blood for the fulfilment of their objectives. The protagonist of this novel murders to test this idea and finds out that he can never escape the guilty pangs of conscience or convince himself of any valid reason for committing the murder. *Crime and Punishment* was in fact, a direct challenge to the ideas of the liberal thinker Chernyshevsky who insisted that that human behaviour was entirely rational and could be wholly explained and understood in terms of human self-interest. However, Raskolnikov, the protagonist of this novel, realises that the crime he committed is in no way a rational act, and neither is it in his self-interest.

Balzac was a significant influence on Dostoevsky for his first major novel, *Crime, and Punishment*. *Crime and Punishment* tells the story of the student Raskolnikov who murders an old pawnbroker woman and finally surrenders before the police. The epilogue of the novel shows his spiritual transformation. Balzac was a major influence on Dostoevsky in the aesthetic and ideological structure of the novel. The vivid renderings of Paris's urban landscape in Balzac's novel *Pere Goriot* (1819) gave Dostoevsky, a model for his portrait of St Petersburg in *Crime and*

Punishment. More importantly, Eugene Rastignac in *Pere Goriot* can be considered a prototype of Raskolnikov. Through the character of Rastignac, Balzac explores the concept of a 'superior being' who has the right to commit crimes to reach a noble goal. Like Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's novel, Rastignac receives letters from his mother and sister informing him that they will make sacrifices for him. However, Rastignac decides to solve his financial problems by himself and thereby help his family as well. An escaped convict by the name of Vautrin advise him to commit a crime by arguing that there are no moral principles and laws just circumstances, and a superior man is above both events and circumstances.

However, Balzac's view of human behaviour and Dostoevsky's view of the same were radically different. In his 1842 forward to *La Comedie Humaine* (1829-1848), Balzac explains human behaviour theory. According to Balzac, the world of humans and the world of animals are remarkably similar. Like an animal that takes upon its external form and characteristics depending on the milieu in which it is called upon to evolve, a human being is also conditioned by the society in which he lives. According to Balzac, "French society will be the real author; I would only be the secretary." However, Balzac also claims that he writes under the light of two eternal truths, religion and monarchy.

However, Dostoevsky's characters, even though firmly set in a social and cultural context, are by no means determined by that context. Even though prompted by poverty, the crime of Raskolnikov is more a product of his psychology rather than social and cultural forces. He murders to test an idea and attempt to resolve his own intellectual and personal dilemmas. For Balzac, characters are merely devices through which the author can illuminate the society around them. For Dostoevsky, characters are concrete individuals shaped by their ideas while being set firmly in a socio-cultural context.

Balzac was also crucial to Dostoevsky because his novels provided him with a vision of France in particular and Europe in general. Dostoevsky saw Europe's old structures, such as aristocracy and church crumbling under the weight of a rapacious and new breed of bourgeois whose only motivations were material enrichment and social prestige. Dostoevsky considered Europe to be decaying from within due to a lack of concrete moral values. He portrayed a picture of Europe in works like *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* and *A Writer's Diary* (1873).

Decades later, poets like Ezra Pound and T.S Eliot expressed similar views from within Europe as well.

The novel *Devils* occupies an important position in the chain of ideological Russian novels in the nineteenth century. All the novels belonging to this group dealt with the rise of a group of youngsters who were not only westernised but also irreligious and nihilistic. The first work in this chain was Alexander Herzen's *Who is to Blame?* (1846) This work had as its central character a superfluous aristocratic hero. Ivan Turgenev replied to Herzen through his magnum opus *Fathers and Sons* (1862). This novel shows a man of the younger generation; a self-styled nihilist brought low by his involvement with a society woman. In *Devils*, Dostoevsky refers to the characters and themes of both Herzen's and Turgenev's work. Dostoevsky began his work on the novel *Devils* in late 1869 when he was on a self-imposed exile in Europe (Lantz 84). Dostoevsky planned through his novel to expose the destructive consequences of the nihilism of the 1860s. A series of political events in Europe and Russia gave Dostoevsky the initial prompting to write a political pamphlet denouncing nihilism. This pamphlet, in the end, turned out to be the novel *Devils*. These political events included the outbreak of Franco-Prussian War in July 1870 (which pitted two of the greatest powers of the continent in a deadly struggle), the rise and fall of Paris commune, burning of the Tuileries Palace in 1871 and most importantly the notorious Nechaev case. In 1869, a young student named Ivanov was murdered by Nechaev and the members of his secret revolutionary committee. Sergei Nechaev was a revolutionary and conspirator, and he was also a disciple and friend of the anarchist Bakunin. After reading about Ivanov's murder, Dostoevsky was shocked, and he revised his earlier tolerant view of the nihilists, which he held during the early 1860s. Dostoevsky viewed them as clearly the enemy of the ordinary people and Russia's established order from then onwards. (Lantz 85)

However, the plot of *Devils* does not revolve around a political conspiracy modelled on the Nechaev affair. Instead, it is centred on the enigmatic figure of Nikolai Stavrogin, and the moral and philosophical issues linked to him occupy the centre stage in this novel. Nikolai Stavrogin is a mysterious figure in this novel, and whatever we know of him comes from the piecing together of the different images of him held by other characters. Peter Verkhoensky, who heads the nihilist group, sees Stavrogin as a charismatic figure who will win followers for his cause; on the other hand, Shatov, a Slavophile, sees him as a champion of orthodoxy and Russianness, Kirrilov sees

him as a proto-Nietzschean atheist. Morbid Liza Tushina sees him as a Don Juan like figure. Among all literary characters created by Dostoevsky, Stavrogin is the fullest embodiment of nihilism. The novel ends with the suicide of Stavrogin.

Dostoevsky distinguished between two types of atheists in his writings. The first type of atheists is characterised by their indifference to questions of religion and spirituality. Characters like the Svidrigailovs and Stavrogins from the novel *Devils* belong to this group. Dostoevsky considers these band of atheists to be doomed and bound to perish in despair. The second kind of atheist, on the other hand, is desperately looking for something to believe in. Dostoevsky calls them 'pure atheists' and considers them very close to religious belief.

The character of Kirrilov in *Devils* is a perfect example of the second type of atheist. Kirillov has been "tormented by God" his whole life, and he is a believer who desperately tries not to be one. The character of Stavrogin tells Kirillov that when he comes to visit Kirrilov again, he would have come to believe in God. Peter Verkhoensky likewise tells him that he believes more than a priest. Just like Tolstoy Dostoevsky also believed in an authentic Russian self, having its roots in Russian culture and heritage. The novel *Devils* can be read as an outright condemnation of nihilism and all the violence and anarchy that ideology carries. In fact, after the October Revolution in the twentieth century (which can be read as an outcome of Western liberal ideas), many writers found out that Soviet police system in Russia evolved in the same way that Dostoevsky prophesied in *Devils* through the character of Shigalyov and the revolutionary society of which he was a member of. According to Shigalyov, one-tenth of the community members should hold absolute power over the remainder who have lost their individuality, and moral and spiritual freedom will return to a state of primaeval innocence, materially secure, and happy in their equality (Lantz 87). Peter Verkhoensky considered Shigalyov a genius, and he tells Stavrogin regarding Shigalyov's plans.

Everyone belongs to all the others, and the others belong to each one. They're all slaves and equal in their slavery...Those with higher abilities can't help being despots and have always done more harm than good; they'll either be banished or executed. A Cicero will have his tongue cut out, a Copernicus will have his eyes gouged out, a Shakespeare will be stoned that's Shigalyov's system for you! Slaves must be equal: without despotism,

there has never been any freedom or equality, but there must be equality in the herd. That's Shigalyov's system! (qtd in Lantz 87)

Before concluding this paper, it will be worthwhile to elaborate upon Dostoevsky's historical speech on the unveiling of the memorial in Aleksandr Pushkin's honour in the year 1880. Writers of differing ideological camps were invited to attend the event, and the two chief speakers of this event were Ivan Turgenev and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Ivan Turgenev was considered the unofficial representative of the liberal, Westerniser camp, and Dostoevsky was viewed as the champion of the conservative, Slavophile tradition. In his speech, Turgenev while paying tribute to Pushkin, refused to give him the unquestioned title of Russia's National poet in the same sense as Goethe, Moliere or Shakespeare in Europe. Dostoevsky spoke after Turgenev on the third day of the event. In his speech, he hailed Pushkin as the writer who upheld the Russian ideal of universal reconciliation and brotherhood. He used as examples Pushkin's works like the poem "The Gypsies" and the classic work *Eugene Onegin* (1833) to illustrate his point. According to Dostoevsky, Pushkin presented through his literary works the character of the "unhappy wanderer in his native land" (Lantz 342). Dostoevsky considered this character the embodiment of the Westernized Russians who had broken away from the common people's values. According to Dostoevsky, such people should come back to their roots and embrace the values of the common people of Russia. In the words of Dostoevsky

Indeed, the mission of the Russian is unquestionably pan-European and universal. To become a real Russian, to become completely Russian, perhaps means just... to become a brother to all people, *a panhuman*, if you like. ...To become a genuine Russian will mean specifically: to strive to bring an ultimate reconciliation to Europe's contradictions, to indicate that the solution to Europe's anguish is to be found in the panhuman and all-unifying Russian soul, to enfold all our brethren within it with brotherly love, and at last, perhaps, to utter the ultimate word of great, general harmony, ultimate brotherly accord of all tribes through the law of Christ's Gospel. (qtd in Lantz 342)

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