Buried Alive: The Development of the Individual in Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the House of the Dead*

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# Introduction

Dostoevsky’s writings explore human psychology in the context of a troubled 19th century Russian society. *Notes from the House of the Dead* was one of the most influential of these works -- a loosely autobiographical prison narrative formed from his imprisoned exile in Siberia. The narrator, Goryanchikov, describes the experience that reshapes Dostoevsky’s political and religious identity. There is little coherent plot movement, but the story is driven through the characters’ responses to their imprisoned environment. Although each character suffers the same imprisonment, they suffer it with widely different reactions. I will argue the worst of the prisoners’ punishments according to Dostoevsky is the imprisonment of their individuality.

For Dostoevsky, *Notes from the House of the Dead* becomes a metaphor for the deterioration of individuality under a hypothetical Socialist government. Goryanchikov must reject the idea that punishment is equally felt in his fellow inmates in order to see them as equals and, ultimately, as individuals. Goryanchikov’s discovery of his fellow inmates’ experiences describes the reformation of Dostoevsky’s political and religious identity. This reformation is evident as Goryanchikov’s self-absorbed feelings fade into compassionate feelings toward his fellow inmates. He sees that incarceration removes the characters’ individuality, forcing them into a life where they are “dead” with no escape from the monotony of uniformity. The prisoners’ escape from the monotony is a religious and political protest against the push among intellectuals for a Socialist government in Russia. This desire for freedom shapes the ideology of Dostoevsky’s later works.

# Companion of the Chain: Dostoevsky’s Penal Servitude

Goryanchikov begins his narrative by separating the outside world from the prison. He describes that beyond the fortress rests a “radiant free world where people lived like everybody else” (Dostoevsky 8). The story takes place within the enclosure, where there lies a world with “its own peculiar laws, its own dress, its own mores and customs… [the] house of the living dead” (Dostoevsky 8). Lewis Bagby introduces how to approach Goryanchikov’s story based on the disclaimer of this introductory paragraph. Dostoevsky invites us to experience the book as Goryanchikov experiences his prison sentence, forgetting the world outside the enclosure, though the prison is nestled in a lively town (Bagby 141). This introduction strengthens the first person narrative Dostoevsky uses for the novel.

Part of the significance of the first person viewpoint is that Goryanchikov’s penal servitude is fundamentally intertwined with Dostoevsky’s own experience. Dostoevsky seeks to penetrate his own experience by analyzing the individuals he met in his prison sentence. Many scholars argue his fictitious characters are thinly veiled copies of Dostoevsky’s fellow inmates (Bagby 144). Dostoevsky’s prison experience began when he was arrested at the age of 28 for belonging to the Petrashevsky Circle, a group of socialist Russian intellectuals (Chew and Vilain 14). The Petrashevsky Circle members were outlawed by Nicholas I for their libertine views (Troyan 363). Following his arrest, Dostoevsky was thrown in jail and experienced a mock execution where he was blindfolded and lined up against a firing squad. The experience shook him and increased his tendencies for epileptic attacks for the rest of his life (Dostoevsky Letters 178). Then, on January 23, 1850, Dostoevsky was sent to Omsk, a Siberian labor camp, where he would serve a four-year sentence (Dostoevsky Letters 183, 186).

Though his books were taken from him and he was not allowed to write letters during his incarceration, Dostoevsky illicitly kept a notebook compiled of 522 entries of songs, folk-sayings, and idioms he wrote throughout his time in prison (Chew and Vilain 14). While he would later remain silent on the autobiographical nature of *Notes from the House of the Dead*, he included over half these journal entries in the published novel. Dostoevsky therefore remains the eye-witness of each event described in *Notes from the House of the Dead* (Minihan 185). This was his first novel-length book to use the first person narrative.

There are many parallels between Goryanchikov and Dostoevsky -- they served in similar labor camps. Goryanchikov’s barracks are strikingly comparable to those Dostoevsky described in letters after his release from prison – rotted floors, pools of mud everywhere, and windows covered in frost (Dostoevsky Letters 187). Both describe their miserable encounters working outside in the cold; Dostoevsky worked in conditions as cold as -55 degrees and even lost a toe as a result of his labor sentence (Dostoevsky Letters 187). Both Dostoevsky and Goryanchikov are also noblemen.

The similarities between Dostoevsky and Goryanchikov are so striking that people in Dostoevsky’s lifetime mistakenly thought he killed his wife – the crime for which Goryanchikov served his sentence. However, there are key differences between the two – Dostoevsky describes Goryanchikov’s feelings as an “other,” especially in the presence of political prisoners (Dostoevsky 268). Goryanchikov is warned that many convicts do not like noblemen, “especially the political ones; they wouldn’t mind murdering all [the noblemen]” (Dostoevsky 32). This separation between noblemen and political convicts was upsetting to Dostoevsky, who entered the prison as both a nobleman and a political radical intent on freeing the common man from serfdom (Frank 782). Dostoevsky wrote in his letters, “The convicts are a coarse people, irritable and spiteful. Their hatred of nobility exceeds all bounds, and therefore they greeted us nobles with hostility” (Dostoevsky Letters 186).

The parallels between the two narratives are so strong there can be little doubt that Dostoevsky describes his own experiences through Goryanchikov’s narration. *Notes from the House of the Dead*, then explains the experience that transformed Dostoevsky from a materialist socialist to someone who championed the value of the individual and ultimately rejected socialism. Goryanchikov himself does not experience this transformation; Dostoevsky uses his journey as an allegory for the suffering caused by socialism.

# Suffering and Serfdom: Socialism in Mid 19th Century Russia

Before entering prison, Dostoevky’s Socialist views showed the ideal life contained in a self-sustained, functioning society. However, Goryanchikov’s fellow convicts needed to assert their own autonomy by acting out in insignificant ways. One of the harmful detriments of Socialism is its lack of individuality. The Petrashevsky Circle – along with other Socialist societies at the time – believed in providing for the material need of society and ignoring individual desires (Troyan 379). An individual’s potential is realized through his or her place within society. However, Goryanchikov explains how his fellow prisoners cannot be separated into neat categories based on their social standing or place within a functioning social system.

The Petrashevsky Circle asserted a materialist philosophy – stating that all phenomena are a result of material interactions. Petrashevsky members therefore reject religious metaphysical claims. They believed nature was eternal and matter could not be annihilated (Troyan 364). As a result, phenomena are inherently connected to one another. One’s duties to oneself include guarding one’s own welfare for the sake of one’s neighbors, thereby promoting a healthily functioning society (Troyan 365). Each person’s actions directly impact the fate of the rest of society. This inherent unity of society, man, and nature highlights the futility of one individual, “Man, taken singly, can accomplish little, but in and by society he can accomplish everything” (Troyan 368).

One of Dostoevsky’s early works, *Poor Folk*, illustrates the dystopian opposite of this ideal socialist society. *Poor Folk* is an epistolary novel written four years before Dostoevsky’s trial and imprisonment. It is his first novel and first major work before *Notes from the House of the Dead*. The work follows Devuskin, a man who is in love with his younger distant relative, Varinka (Trubeekoj 150). Devuskin experiences desperate economic circumstances and is unable to raise his living conditions to care for Varinka. She, meanwhile, is nearly sold without her consent to many suitors by her money-hungry guardian (Trubeekoj 151). At the end of the novel, she receives a proposal from a rich suitor. She leaves Devuskin forever and secures her place away from the poverty she has been subjected to her entire life (Trubeekoj 152). *Poor Folk* represents Dostoevsky’s socialist views under the Petrashevsky Circle. In it, he heavily critiques serfdom and explores the idea that one’s happiness is dependent on one’s status in society.

Many critics split Dostoevsky’s works into two categories: pre-prison writings – the most famous and popular of which is *Poor Folk* -- and post-prison writings (Shestov 147-148). After his penal servitude, which was completed in 1854, Dostoevsky renounces his earlier Socialist convictions (Shestov 148).

Both *Notes from the House of the Dead* and *Poor Folk* struggle against reality in some way; they both explore characters desiring to be in different situations. In *Poor Folk*, Devuskin and Varinka suffer a fate handed down to them from serfdom. The convicts in *Notes from the House of the Dead* do not suffer from lack of money or good social standing. They suffer because they are forced to live in a community together, work the same job, keep the same hours, and are expected to give up their sense of individuality. Their “dead house” is, effectively, a fully functioning communistic society.

to be alone is a normal need, like drinking and eating, otherwise in this forced communism you’ll become a misanthrope. Human company will become a poison and an infection (Dosteovsky Letters 195).

Goryanchikov often reflects on the futility of circumstance and the inability to arise from one’s situation. However, unlike Devuskin and Varinka, his fellow inmates do not desire material goods. He notes that the convicts steal from each other frequently, but not to benefit their situation. Thieves, he notes, “money and gain play only a secondary role” (Dostoevsky 20). Instead, the convicts see smuggling as part of their vocation – taking part in this vocation is an assertion of their individuality and autonomy. Money becomes a way for the convicts to attempt to assert their individuality, but freedom is their ultimate desire (Dostoevsky 81)

# Pliable Animal: The Imprisoned Individual

When Goryanchikov first enters prison, he attempts to treat his fellow prisoners as a unified whole. He separates them from himself by referring to them as “the convicts” throughout the first chapters. However, he soon discovers there are numerous inequalities separating each person’s situation – inequalities of time and of sentence, and most importantly, of the way convicts respond to their own prison sentence. He notes,

One man will waste away in prison, will melt like a candle, whereas another had no nation until he was imprisoned that there could be such a merry life in the world, such a pleasant club of jolly comrades... Take, for example, an educated man, with a developed conscience, a man of consciousness, with a cultivated heart. The pain in his own heart alone will be enough to kill him with its torments before any punishment can. He condemns himself for his crime far more mercilessly, far more pitilessly than the sternest law. But alongside him is a man who has never once, during the entire duration of his imprisonment, thought about the murder he committed… Can it really be said that the same punishment is felt by these two men in equal degrees? But what’s the use of dwelling on unsolvable problems? (Dostoevsky 53)

He realizes he cannot treat the prisoners equally as he wanted to, but must see them as individuals serving the same sentence with widely different reactions. He later discovers he cannot “classify the convicts into categories… We did have a life, and it was not merely an official existence but our own inner life” (Dostoevsky 262).

Goryanchikov avoids speaking of his own crime, which is perhaps how he is able to give such a comprehensive view of others’ crimes and sentences. While Goryanchikov lacks remorse and self-reflection, he does not attempt to justify his crimes as others do. At the beginning of the novel, this is one of many ways he alienates himself from his companions. As Joseph Frank notes, Dostoevsky’s consciousness – and that of Goryanchikov – seem to “elude our grasp” in favor of the experiences of Goryanchikov’s companions (Frank 780). He does not speak of his own crime – though we know he is in prison from killing his wife from the prefatory notes to the novel (Dostoevsky 5). The development of the individual, then, does not occur in the main character but in the supporting characters Goryanchikov meets throughout the novel.

This initial separation between Goryanchikov and his fellow inmates is not the only separation focused on at the beginning of the novel. The most severe separation between society and its prisoners is not the physical walls, but the bitter hatred the prisoners feel towards society. While Dostoevsky was unarguably wronged by a society stifling his individual speech, Goryanchikov cannot make the same claim. He never claims he was justified in his crime, nor does he attempt to blame society for his imprisonment. However, like elsewhere in the novel, Goryanchikov often has little to say of his own experience compared to the condition of others. He notes that the criminal,

who has rebelled against society, hates it and almost considers himself to be in the right and it to be in the wrong. What’s more, he has already been punished by society, and he almost always considers that this has cleansed him and settled his account (Dostoevsky 16).

The drudgery of prison life is one of the most important introductory remarks in *Notes from the House of the Dead*. Goryanchikov does not attempt to claim the prisoners are treated cruelly. He even mentions the abundance of sufficient – though bland – food, and the convicts are surprisingly undisturbed by the amount of cockroaches in their soup (Dostoevsky 24). There are regular beatings, some of which are interrupted by doctors “when they observe that any further beating would inevitably bring about the prisoner’s death” (Dostoevsky 58). These horrors are treated almost mundanely by Goryanchikov and his fellow inmates.

The prisoners’ greatest complaint involves the compulsory nature of their work and lifestyle (Dostoevsky 23). This theme cycles throughout the novel – the prisoners live together in a “herd-like contiguity” in the prison barracks (Frank 794). They dress, work, and sleep at the same intervals, making no autonomous decisions in their daily activities. As Goryanchikov realizes communal living’s dehumanizing effects, Dostoevsky moves further from the Socialist ideals that brought him into prison. Each day, Goryanchikov notes, feels as if it had happened the day before (Dostoevsky 293)

Goryanchikov’s prison did not involve meaningless work, which Goryanchikov considers to be a demeaning and inhumane punishment (Dostoevsky 23). He mentions prisons where prisoners are sentenced to move the same rocks from one end of the quarry to the other each day. He states this is a punishment much worse than death for the prisoner (Dostoevsky 25). The penal work in Goryanchikov’s prison is boring and difficult at intervals, but allows the prisoner to work with a rational goal in mind. Instead of working for rewards a free man might enjoy – such as economic or social benefit – the convicts enjoyed the physical progress of their labor. Still, the prisoners assert their individuality however they can—often by acting out. Some prisoners, once deprived of liberty, join in senseless arguments and work with aversion (Minihan 190). There is a hideous rhythm to the pattern of life the prisoners suffer (Fennell 227).

Dostoevsky also spoke in his letters about the drudgery of prison life and its detrimental effects. Goryanchikov comments on the monotony of each day, and that the only hope he could find was in his eventual freedom from prison,

Those long, boring days were so monotonous that it was as if water was dripping drop by drop from the roof after a rain… In the end I did become stronger: I waited, I counted off each day, and even though a thousand of them still remained, I counted them off one by one with delight; I ushered out and buried each passing day, and at the beginning of each new day I rejoiced that there now remained not a thousand days but only nine hundred ninety nine (Dostoevsky 293).

Goryanchikov comments on the strange experience of a convict who has been well behaved and suddenly manifests his free will through violent actions (Dostoevsky 83). Goryanchikov likens this to intoxication – the men finally act on their impulsive desires.

# Company of Convicts: Reactions to Imprisonment

Goryanchikov avoids commenting on his own crime, or on life outside of the prison. Since the opening paragraph, he concentrates only on life inside. After he acknowledges the state of the prison itself, he begins to comment on his fellow inmates. Each of these characters represents different reactions and coping mechanisms to the dehumanizing monotony of prison life. Minihan notes, “[The prisoners] are humiliated in their human dignity and uphold it with spite, distortion, and obstinacy” (Minihan 191). Of the characters Goryanchikov encounters, the most impressionable are Petrov, Akim, Aley, and Gazin.

One of the most obvious differences between prisoners in *Notes from the House of the Dead* is that between good and evil. Goryanchikov separates the callous from the goodhearted. Another distinction he makes is the way the prisoners respond to their crimes. He notes that while some men waste away and are almost consumed with guilt over what they have done, others never once think of their past and only focus on their present misfortunes. There are also those who enter prison hoping to escape their life outside. The most intelligent people Goryanchikov encounters in prison do not experience pangs of conscience over their crimes. Only the unintelligent, illiterate people think of their wrongdoings (Minihan 193).

## Petrov: The Fearless Convict

Petrov is one of Goryanchikov’s first friends in prison, and one of the most dynamic characters described. When Goryanchikov enters prison, Petrov takes it upon himself to visit Goryanchikov’s room every day (Dostoevsky 103). Like other convicts who saw it as their vocation to steal from others, Petrov frequently steals from Goryanchikov and confesses as a mark of friendship (Dostoevsky 104). Goryanchikov had known Petrov for several years before being told the criminal has a fearsome reputation. One of Goryanchikov’s unnamed comrades remarks of Petrov, “he’s the most determined and fearless of all the convicts… He’ll slice you up if the fancy takes him; he’ll just slice you up without flinching and without remorse” (Dostoevsky 106). This gruesome picture represents one of the common themes throughout the novel: that seemingly innocent people are capable of remorseless, violent action. He also represents the curious bonds of friendship that can be made in prison. When Goryanchikov confronts Petrov with stealing his bible – the only book prisoners are allowed – the latter acknowledges the theft but neither apologizes nor returns the property (Dostoevsky 109). Despite this, the two remain friends until Goryanchikov is released from prison (Dostoevsky 306).

Temira Pachmuss notes that Petrov represents a theme Dostoevsky will later explore in the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov*. While he yearns for freedom and often exercises his desires for freedom, he fears assuming responsibility for his own actions (Pachmuss 51). Petrov is a dynamic character because he shows both care for Goryanchikov and a complete disregard for his own wrongdoings against Goryanchikov (Pachmuss 51). He also represents one of the aforementioned thieves who see theft as their vocation and not as a moral issue.

## Akim: The Reliable Convict

Akim Akimytch is one of Goryanchikov’s fellow hated noblemen. He was, “lean, dull-witted, horribly illiterate, extremely argumentative, and punctilious… [with] a fault-finding, exacting, and quarrelsome character” (Dostoevsky 30). Akim murdered a nobleman of an allied tribe for setting fire to Akim’s fortress (Dostoevsky 31). Unlike some other comrades, Akim willingly shares this information with Goryanchikov and willingly admits he was in the wrong. Because of his sensitive and honest nature, Akim is charged with the good conduct of his fellow prisoners (Dostoevsky 70-71). He carries out his duties without showing favor. This leads Goryanchikov to meditate on the goodness of his fellow prisoners in contrast with the goodness of free men. “Perhaps these people are by no means so much worse than the outsiders, than those who have remained there, outside the prison” (Dostoevsky 71). Another contrast prevalent in Akim’s character is intelligence. Though he is illiterate and a nobleman, there is “no trade he didn’t know” (Dostoevsky 31). His ingenuity and natural talent break him out of the stereotypes Goryanchikov originally places him in. He remains, however, a simple man with simple desires (Rowe 165-166).

## Aley: The Childlike Convict

Aley also causes Goryanchikov to rethink his original aversion to his fellow prisoners. He describes Aley as “far from an ordinary human being… and one of the best encounters in all my life” (Dostoevsky 65). He can hardly believe Aley has been subjected to such a harsh prison. He learns Aley is serving time for a violent armed robbery (Dostoevsky 64). Aley often helps him with his work and even cries in moments of tenderness (Dostoevsky 67). Like the few recreational activities the convicts are allowed, Aley brings joy to the other prisoners (Dosteovsky 160).

William Woodin Rowe argues Aley represents the childlike state of many of the prisoners. These childish desires and tendencies are mentioned elsewhere throughout *Notes from the House of the Dead*, especially in the Christmas pageant scene (Rowe 162). Aley portrays this tendency more often than the other inmates, however. He exerts a sort of “holy radiance” (Rowe 164). Another moment of childlike lightheartedness is at Eastertime, when the prisoners bring the little money they had for the church collection (Minihan 188). These moments of childlike wonder create a strong contrast to the brutality of prison. Goryanchikov seems to delight in these moments. He even takes himself on as Aley’s father figure (Rowe 163).

## Gazin: The Unredeemable Convict

Vodka is an illicit, though common substance in the prison, and Gazin controls its spread. Goryanchikov does not interact with Gazin frequently. He learns from others that Gazin is frequently drunk and violent, and he owns a capital on bootlegging in the prison (Dosteovsky 39). The vodka dealer in prison uses associates to run his business. He does not risk his own life (Dostoevsky 43). The substance is often diluted when it reaches the convict, and the convict has little complaint, not having the ability to procure any of it for himself (Dostoevsky 44). Gazin carefully does not allow his story to be shared among the convicts. There are rumors that he was a soldier, but his past is completely shrouded in his present dealings (Dosteovsky 49-50).

Gazin shows man’s delight in degradation and iniquity (Pachmuss 155). Dostoevsky uses Gazin as the embodiment of pure evil (Minihan 194). Other prisoners remark with horror that Gazin committed crimes against children in his past. His desires are base and money driven. Goryanchikov remarks there is little a prisoner values higher than money, and Gavin’s monopoly on vodka sales is only one manifestation of this desire. The prisoners value money because it represents one facet of freedom, though the freedom is short lived (Minihan 189). Vodka does not only represent monetary freedom for Gazin, but also freedom for those who purchase it. Goryanchikov notes,

Vodka always gets into the hands of the condemned prisoner before the punishment… a fabulous price is paid for it, and the condemned man would rather deprive himself of the necessities of life for half a year than fail to accumulate enough money for a small bottle (Dostoevsky 57).

Gazin asserts his individuality by controlling this aspect of as well – freedom from pain during corporal punishment. His trade is successful because the prisoners are willing to pay this “fabulous price” to control even a few hours of their punishment.

# Resurrection from the Dead: Religion and Individuality

Though Dostoevsky entered prison as a materialist socialist, religious imagery is unavoidable in *Notes from the House of the Dead*. The title itself creates a horrific image – that of the living man buried alive (Shestov 161). In the last paragraph of the novel, Goryanchikov is resurrected from these horrors. He thanks God for his freedom.

The shackles fell to the ground. I lifted them up… I wanted to hold them in my hands and look at them for the last time. It seemed amazing to me that they had just been on my legs.

“Well, go with God! With God!” the convicts said curtly and gruffly, but they also sounded as if they were somehow pleased.

Yes, with God! Freedom, a new life, resurrection from the dead… What a glorious moment! (Dostoevsky 309)

In this passage, Dostoevsky overturns the image he began with: the reader and Goryanchikov are both released from the horror of being buried alive and are introduced to a new life: a literal resurrection from the “house of the dead.” Dostoevsky treats the movement into the prison as tragic necessity. Even the beatings enacted in prison are seen by the prisoners as a sad, though inevitable, fate. However, he contributes his release to neither society nor as the effect of his punishment, but to God.

Harry Moore states one of Dostoevsky’s most identifiable traits in his later works is the duality in humanity. Humans’ ability to fathom life and death is a poignant expression of their dual natures (Moore xiv). Dostoevsky asserts this duality means people cling to the spiritual while also desiring material goods – the way Goryanchikov’s fellow convicts both pursue spirituality and attempt to gain worth through monetary gain (Moore 15). Dostoevksy’s later works show humans as spiritual beings burdened with base instincts (Moore 50).

The convicts respond to these religious impulses in different ways. Gary Rosenshield argues Dostoevsky’s treatment of the Abrahamic faiths is one of the few major works of the nineteenth-century fiction that portray religious practices of all the Abrahamic faiths (Rosensheild 581). Dostoevsky does not treat these faiths with equal reverence, however. Isai Fomitch serves as a representation of Judaism as a whole -- the prisoners even refer to him as “our only Jew” (Rosenshield 585). In a novel dedicated to showing people as individuals, this kind of typecasting is uncharacteristic. Besides adding humor to the story, Fomitch creates a contrast between the convicts’ treatment of Judaism and Christianity. The most religious passage in the novel is the Christmas scene. Goryanchikov describes his fellow convicts at Christmastime as collectively reverent, displaying signs of friendship, peace, and good will (Rosenshield 591-592).

Goryanchikov’s feelings about Christianity’s compelling nature reflect Dostoevsky’s views on leaving prison. In his first letter to his brother after leaving Omsk, Dostoevsky writes he has a thirst for Christ and faith, despite being a “child of disbelief and doubt” (Dostoevsky Letters 194). He states, “there is nothing more beautiful, more profound, more attractive than Christ… If it really were that the truth lay outside Christ, I would prefer to remain with Christ than with the truth” (Dostoevsky Letters 195). Despite his doubts – fueled by his early encounters with materialist socialism – Dostoevsky experiences a persuasive pull towards Christianity he cannot ignore.

This persuasive nature of Christianity, while strong, does not override one’s individuality. Christianity appeals to man’s religious impulses, but to follow Christianity is an expression of one’s self-determination (Ivanov 17). Dostoevsky had a strong sense of guilt and often counted himself among the evildoers, but he still believed positive qualities exist in every human being (Ivanov 28, Moore 176). He did not idealize even the most reverent of convicts, but focused instead on their beliefs and practices alongside their less spiritual natures (Rosensheild 592). He also notes intellectuals are incapable of understanding the common people’s religion because they are alienated from them, approaching belief from a sociological and rational perspective (Rosensheild 597). The prisoners’ exercise of their spiritual natures, along with their more base materialistic desires – such as women and vodka – is an example of their desire to express their individuality.

One aspect of his early ideals Dostoevsky did maintain in regards to his treatment of faith is the hope for a better life on earth. Instead of maintaining this ideal as a socialist, however, he baptizes the idea and it becomes a more religious hope for society. In his notebooks after he left prison, he wrote that Russia could bring about Europe’s spiritual rebirth (Moore 59). He dreams of a societal unity through Christ (Ivanov 116). It is clear Dostoevsky continued to yearn for an ideal on earth – only one that could not be found through reason. Man’s spiritual nature, he believed, could one day conquer his animal self, exercising the positive qualities that exist in every human being (Moore 183-184).

# Conclusion

There is little doubt Dostoevsky’s religious and political ideas changed after his prison experience, but many scholars do not attempt to make causal claims between his incarceration experience and his altered ideas. *Notes from the House of the Dead* is a unique work – it is his first novel-length first person narrative. It closely resembles an experience many scholars will claim was one of the most traumatic of his life. It also introduces themes which feature in his later, more well-known works: the discovery of the “Russian soul” and the belief in Russia as a spiritual guide in *The Possessed*, the exploration of raw consciousness in *Notes from the Underground*, the theme of crime and moral development in *Crime and Punishment*, and the dual identity of characters in *The Brothers Karamazov* (Lampert 232- 249). His letters following his prison experiences show a political and religious change of heart. These are all strong claims in favor of arguing a causal connection between Dostoevsky’s critique of socialism and the suppression of the individual he witnessed in *Notes from the House of the Dead*.

Dostoevsky’s works are undoubtedly influential, but there are many similarities in particular with *Notes from the House of the Dead* and Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s works. Solzhenitsyn’s first novel, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denitsovich*, follows a prisoner of war through one day in his prison sentence. Like Goryanchikov, he works outside in the sub-zero temperatures laying bricks each day (Garrard 8). Time is marked by meals and the days are so cyclical that Solzhenitsyn only portrays one day, given all are relatively the same (Garrard 8). Solzhenitsyn agrees with Dostoevsky that the worst of the punishment is not the corporal punishment but the loss of hope, anticipation, and freedom (Garrard 9). Solzhenitsyn himself witnessed enormous atrocities at the hands of a Socialist government, whereas Dostoevsky worked only against a hypothetical Socialist society. Their similar conclusions show Dostoevsky was remarkably ahead of his time.

Dostoevsky’s prison experiences left him with a deeper understanding of the nature of humanity. He maintains his concern for the poor and lower classes that he had before entering prison in his later books. This led Soviet scholars to briefly attempt to portray Dostoevsky as sympathetic to their cause before they determined the two philosophies are “fundamentally incompatible” (Seduro 305). However, he no longer idealized the destitute but learned to treat them as individuals each with their own important narrative.

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