## I. Introduction

Fyodor Dostoevsky, in his novel *The Idiot*, shows that it is the society and its norms and values which is responsible for the exclusion of deformed or long term diseased people from the society. In another word, the people labeled as disabled in a society are either suppressed or they are bound to leave the society. The hypocritical social value which is regarded as norms, in fact, has created difficulties in the lives of disabled people as well as these norms give legitimacy to others to make fun of or to suppress the voices of these disabled people.

The nineteenth century Russian society was undergoing severe breakdown of moral and family values owing to the onset of materialist values. The Russian society was corroded by avariciousness, moral corruption and spiritual desolation. In such a society, a man suffering from epilepsy and unexplained spells of insanity, named Myshkin, returns back to the society after four years from Sanitarium of Switzerland where he was getting treatment for his diseases. The Russian society, which was governed by its own typical norms and values, at first, suspected at his arrival. His dresses and his manners were unconventional for other social members. He became the 'man of entertainment,' not the 'man of love.' His kindness and frankness not only made others to laugh at him but also gave opportunity to others to cheat him. He came to the Russian society as a messenger of love, and tried to teach the values of love and forgiveness in a human life. But his ideologies were teased or in another sense, couldn't fit itself in the preexisting middle class social norm. Even his own love had been tormented between two women. No one had really understood him. The people, who were following the Russian middle class social norm, created a lot of difficulties in his

life. As a result, he was alienated and he was unable to fit himself in that society. So, at the end of novel, he left the Russian society and went back to the Sanitarium of Switzerland.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky was born into the family of a former military physician, Mikhail Andreyevich Dostoyevsky (1789-1839) who practiced at the Moscow Mariinsky Hospital for the poor. Dostoyevsky's father was ennobled in 1828 and acquired moderate wealth: he and his wife, Mariya Fyodorovna (1800-1837), had three more sons and three daughters. As a youth, Dostoyevsky lost his mother to tuberculosis and his father to an incident that officially was declared a stroke but purportedly was a homicide carried out by his enraged serfs.

After spending several years at private boarding schools (1833-1837), Dostoyevsky studied Military Engineering in St. Petersburg (1838-1843) while secretly pursuing his love for literature. He worked for less than a year as an engineer in the armed forces and abandoned that position in 1844 in order to dedicate himself fully to translating fiction and writing. Dostoyevsky's literary debut, *Poor Folk*, was an immense success with the Public: a sentimental novel in letters, it is imbued with mild social criticism and earned enthusiastic praise from Russia's most influential contemporary critic, Vissarion Belinsky. But Sub –sequent short stories and novellas such as, *The Double*, an openly Fogolesque story of split consciousness as well as an intriguing experiment in unreliable narration- disappointed many of Dostoyevsky's early admires. Peter Smith contends in "Dostoevsky's death penalty in *The Idiot*," "Dostoyevsky continued to consciously resist attempts to label him politically or aesthetically . . . time and again, he ventured out from grim social reality into other dimensions" (46). Myshkin

in *The Idiot* is the psychologically abnormal and the fanatic Dostoevsky–for which St. Petersburg's eerie artificiality proved a most intriguing milieu.

In April 1848, Dostoevsky was arrested together with thirty-four other members of the underground socialist Petrashevsky Circle and interrogated for several months in the infamous Peter-Paul- Fortress. Charged with having read Belinsky's letter Gogol at one of the circle's meetings, Dostoevsky was sentenced to death. Smith reiterates of Dostoevsky's later life:

> Yet, in a dramatic mock-execution, Nilolai I commuted the capital punishment to hard labor and exile in Siberia. A decade later, Dostoyevsky returned to St. Petersburg as a profoundly transformed man. Humbled and physically weakened, he had internalized the official triad of Tsar, People, and Orthodox Church in a most personal way, distancing himself from his early utopian beliefs while re-conceptualizing his recent harsh experiences among classes- criminals and political prisoners, officers and officials, peasant merchants. Dostoyevsky's worldview was now dominated by values such as humility, self-restraint, and forgiveness, all to be applied in the present, while giving up his faith in the creation of a harmonious empire in the future. (47)

The spirit of radical social protest that had brought Dostoevsky so dangerously close to Communist persuasions in the 1840s was from now on attributed to certain dubious characters in his fiction, fiction, albeit without ever being denounced completely.

Eager to participate in contemporary debates, Dostoyevsky, jointly with his brother Mikhail (1820-1864), published the conservative journals *Vremya (Time, 1861-*

*63) and Epokha (The Epoch,-65),* both of which encountered financial and censorship quarrels. In his semi-fictional *Notes from the House of the Dead,* (1862)- the most authentic and harrowing account of the life of Siberian convicts prior to Chekhov and Solzhenitsyn –Dostoyevsky depicts the tragedy of thousands of gifted but misguided human beings whose innate complexity he had come to respect. An even more aggressive assault on mainstream persuasions was, *Notes from the Underground* written as a quasi-confession of an embittered, pathologically self-conscious outsider, this anti-liberal diatribe was intended as a provocation, to unsettle the bourgeois consciousness with its uncompromising anarchism and subversive wit." Notes from the Underground "became the prelude to Dostoyevsky's mature phase.

The year 1866 saw the completion, in a feverish rush, of two masterpieces that mark Dostoyevsky's final arrival at a form of literary expression congenial to his intentions. *Crime and Punishment* analyzes the transgression of traditional Christian morality by a student who considers himself superior to his corrupt and greedy environment. On a somewhat lighter note, *The Gambler* depicts the dramatic incompatibility of Russian and Western European mentalities against the background of a German gambling resort. Endlessly haunted by creditors and needy family members, the Dostoevsky escaped abroad, spending years in Switzerland, Germany, and Italy. They often lived near casinos where the writer unsuccessfully tried to resolve his financial ills. Against all offs, during this period Dostoyevsky created some of his most accomplished works, particularly the novel *Idiot* (1868), the declared goal of which was to portray a "perfectly beautiful human being." The title character, an impoverished price, clashes with the rapidly modernizing, cynical St. Petersburg society. Dostoevsky's following

novel, *The Devils* was interpreted as anti-nihilist. The Devils presents an astute analysis of the causality underlying terrorism, and societal disintegration. *The Brother Karamazov* became Dostoevsky's literary testament and indeed can be read as a peculiar synthesis of his artistic and philosophical strivings.

Notwithstanding, Dostoyevsky's significance for Russian and world culture derives from a numbers of factors, among them the depth of his psychological perceptiveness, his complex grasp of human nature, and his ability to foresee long-term consequences of human action- an ability that sometimes bordered on the prophetic. Robert Smithson puts it: "together with his rhetorical and dramatic gifts, these factors outweigh less presentable features in the author's persona such as national and religious prejudice" (158-59). Smithson further contends:

> Dostoevsky's willingness to admit into his universe utterly antagonistic forces- from unabashed sinners whose unspeakable acts of blasphemy challenge the very foundations of faith, to character of angelic purity--has led to his worldwide perception as an eminently Christian author. But it also caused distrust in certain quarters of the Orthodox Church: as a matter of fact, his confidence in a gospel of all--forgiveness was criticized as "rosy Christianity," a religious aberration neglecting the strictness of divine law. From a programmatic point of view, Dostoyevsky preached a Christianity of the heart, as opposed to one of pragmatism and rational calculation. (160)

Dostoyevsky's impact on modern intellectual movements is enormous: Freud's psychoanalysis found valuable evidence in his depictions of the mysterious subconscious,

whereas Camus' existentialism took from the Russian author an understanding of man's inability to cope with freedom and his possible preference for a state of no – responsibility.

Dostoyevsky was arguably the first writer to position a philosophical idea at the very heart of a fictional text. The reason that Dostoyevsk's major works have maintained their disquieting energy lies mainly in their structural openness toward a variety of interpretative patterns, all of which can present textual evidence for their particular reading.

The very beginning of the novel introduces the protagonist Myshkin with other two characters in a train en route to St. Petersburg. From the onset, Myshkin appears to be an outsider in Russian society: he dresses like a foreigner and acts as if unaware of the societal norms of the Russian aristocracy. Indeed, he is different from the other Russian aristocrats in several regards. First Myshkin does not follow societal conventions and is not afraid of its sanctions, which mainly come in the form of ridicule. He meets a roguish young called Rogozhin, who has an unhealthy obsession with a beautiful young woman named Nastasya Filippovna, a nosy government official named Lebedyev, who figures prominently throughout the novel in the train.

Myshkin is suspected at his first visit to the General Yepanchins house by other including General himself. The people of this house think that Myshkin has come here to have some favor or money from General for the treatment of his epileptic foot and his idiocy. However, his frankness is able to assure them that his intention to be there is simply to visit his distant relatives Mrs.Yepanchin. Then Myshkin is offered for a job by General who is impressed by the handwriting of Myshkin. In General's house, he learns

that Miss Nastassya Flippovna is going to announce whether or not she will marry Ganya on the day of her twenty –fifth birthday, at this evening's party. Even though he is not invited for the Filippovna's birthday party, he goes to Nastassya Filipponvna's. He thinks to himself that the worst that could happen would be that the guests would laugh at him and escort him out. "Some of the other characters in the novel, such as Ganya, such shame would be absolutely terrible," Leonard Sinclair penetrates over the characterization in Dostoevsky's work, "for Myshkin, however, it is no big deal" (207). He is not afraid of being laughed at; in fact, when others laugh at him, he joins in with them. When Myshkin first visits the Yepanchins, the girls indirectly call him an ass and then laugh, but he laughs with them. Sinclair further judges the characterization:

> Myshkin is very open and frank. He tells new acquaintances his personal history- including the bit about living in a sanitarium for several years – right away. He does not believe in societal small talk, instead preferring to immediately jump into a discussion of the issues that are his prime concern. At the "engagement" dinner party at the Yepanchins, he fervently discusses grand subjects such as religion and the future of aristocracy. However, Myshkin's is highly naïve, and he is therefore fooled by members of the high society. He takes their affected friendship for genuine and sincere feeling. Perhaps his innocence is the reason for his special affinity for children. The adult world, however, is too superficial and conventional for him. (208)

Myshkin does not take offense at anyone, no matter how horrific the character's action toward him. After Ganya's slap, Myshkin does not hit back or challenge Ganya to a duel-

a common recourse for action at the time. Instead, Myshkin tells Ganya that he should be ashamed of himself and leaves the room. In response to Burdovsky's lie that he is Pavlishchev's son, not only is Myshkin not angry, but he is also still willing to help Burdovsky financially. Even after Keller writes a slanderous and insulting article about Myshkin, the prince still makes Keller the best man at his wedding. Lebedev constantly lies to Myshkin and even tries to commit him to an insane asylum; when Lebedev admits this, Myshkin merely laughs in response. Aglaya constantly mocks and insults the prince, but this only saddens him. When Aglaya expresses any wish for reconciliation. Myshkin is ecstatic with joy. In short, Prince Myshkin does not bear grudges against anyone, even Rogozhin, who almost kills him. In light of Myshkin's seemingly impossible naivete, Virtually all the characters in the novel call him an 'idiot.'

He attempts to help everyone he meets and always holds the needs of others above his own. In the end, he is ready to marry Nastassya Filippovna because he feels it is necessary to save her, even though he is in love with Aglaya instead. Myshkin's compassion toward others knows no boundaries. He is too good for a world corrupted by money, lust, and individual vanity. As a result, he couldn't fit himself in the Russian middle class norm and has to run away from the society.

Dostoevsky's most controversial fictional work, *The Idiot* received tremendous critical acclamation after its publication in 1868. The book is considered to be one of his most profound masterpieces whereas others argue against it for its undeveloped plot and ruthless comedy. Edward Wasiolek, in "The Notes for the Idiot: Fyodor Dostoevsky," holds, "since Myshkin declined to give himself to the impoverished Russian middle class

ideals, his turning up to delirium was inevitable; Myshkin's peril is the universal phenomenon of those cast away from society" (24).

Indeed, in recent decades many critics have attempted to salvage the literary merits of *The Idiot*, arguing that while the fiction might be structurally deficient, it is also rich in esoteric spiritual and philosophical insights. More than anything else *The Idiot* fulfills the requirements of a genesis of normal mind. Michel Foucault writes in his most celebrated and widely cited essay 'Truth and Power':

> We need, then to locate the notion of discontinuity in its proper context. And perhaps there is another concept which is both mere difficult and more central to your thought, the concept of an event. For in relation tom the event a whole generation was long trapped in an impasse ... a dichotomy was established between structures (the thinkable), that which doesn't end cannot enter into the mechanism and the play of analysis. (qtd. In Adams 1136)

The citation encapsulates the basic ethos of socially ostracized in that Foucault has theorized and assimilated the pangs of being out cast as Myshkin of *The Idiot*. "It is a part of a notion of progress, of industrialization and of ideological consolidation of the power of bourgeoisie". Lennard J. Davis claims in *The Disability Studies Reader*, "The implications of the hegemony of normalcy are profound and extend into the very heart of cultural production" (26):

> The novel form, those proliferators or ideology, is intricately connected with concepts of the norm. From the typicality of the central character to the normalizing devices of plot to bring deviant characters back into the

> norms of society to the normalizing coda of ending, the nineteenth and twentieth century novel promulgates and disburses notions of normalcy and extensions makes of physical differences. Characters with disabilities are always marked with ideological meaning as are moments of disease or accident that transform such characters. (26)

It has always been a societal tendency to send 'different' and unthinkable people to asylum or Sanatorium because society itself is a construction of normalcy, "a disciplinary" (qtd in Transitions and challenges 244). Charles Larmore quotes Foucault:

> A key aspect of disciplinary society, Foucault observes, is the "reversal of the political axis of individualization (1977:192). In feudal society, the power and privileged a person possess, the more the person was regarded as individual. In modern disciplinary regimes however, "as power becomes more anonymous and more functional, those on whom it is exercised tend to be more strong individualized. " For example, "the healthy child is more individualized than the adult, the patient more than the healthy man, the madman and delinquent more than the normal and not delinquent. (244)

Boris Bursov, a well known soviet literary scholar, portrays the importance of money in bourgeoisie society for which Dostoevsky had a great hatred and contempt;

> Dostoevsky condemned the vices of 19$^{th}$ century in which money became the measure of all things, as only a person uncared with these vices and fully aware of their fatal nature could do it. Like Dostoevsky who was himself in the power of what he was bitterly warring against, his many of

> the characters are endowed with similar features, such as Lebdev; Kolya, the young brother of Gynya; Ivolgin and to some extent Ganya himself in *The Idiot*.

In the above lines, Boris, Boris observes how the social norms are created regarding the value of money.

So, this thesis tries to show how the hypocritical social norms have created a lot of problems in the life of disabled people like Myshkin. It also focuses on such social norms which take the disabled people as a social problem. These people are always either suppressed or fooled or excluded from the society. The disabled people, even though some how they can contributes something to the society, are excluded either from he society or from the social work simply because of the preexisting social perception upon them.

For this purpose this thesis will be intensively text based .The hypothesis will be examined through the perspectives of New Historicism and Disabilities study. Since Disability Studies follows what is the ethos on contemporary literary criticism—that of New Historicism, the thesis will exploit the revisiting of norms and values prevalent in nineteenth century Russia, along with the shrewd speculation over the politics of disabling. A close link of disability studies with new historicism is the consequence of Michel Foucault who himself was documented as disabled and perplexing. His studies in the birth of asylum reassert the fact that people in power construct the norms for normal. Theoretical terminologies, tools, and perspectives will be obtained through library consultations and internet websites. This thesis is divided into four main chapters. The first chapter introduces the novel, novelist, the background of the work and a general

direction this thesis take in course of study. The second chapter introduces and elaborates the critical concepts of New Historicism and Disabilities study. The same tool will be used in the third chapter to analyze the novel. Mainly, it is shown that the writer's condition of life affected his writing, and that he saw the problems in disabled people's life is created by the rigid social norms so much rampant and upheld in the late nineteenth century Russian society. The fourth chapter is the concluding section, rounding up the thesis by showing that the hypothesis set at the beginning was correct and the novel is a critique of social utopian norms. The findings and suggestions of thesis are also included in this chapter.

## II. Theoretical Terrain

### Literary Disability Studies: Critical Reflections on Images of Disability

Disability Studies refers generally to the examination of disability as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon. In contrast to clinical, medical, or therapeutic perspectives on disability, Disability Studies focuses on how disability is defined and represented in society. From this perspective, disability is not a characteristic that exists in the person so defined, but a construct that finds its meaning in social and cultural context. For centuries, people with disabilities have been an oppressed and repressed group. People with disabilities have been isolated, incarcerated, observed, written about, operated, institutionalized, and controlled to a degree probably unequal to the experienced by any other minority group. The deformed people as well as the people who have the life long disease are considered as a disable people in a society.

Scholarly academic and research definitions attempt to provide a conceptual framework with which to approach to the complete phenomena of disability regardless of age, gender, race, and other social characteristics. While there is still dichotomy between persons identified as having disability and those who do not, the scholarly research approaches are not predicated in the need to identify persons for either clinical or administrative purposes as either-or. Within the research perspective, there is recognition of the idea of disability as a continuum rather than an absolute. The nature of that continuum is currently being developed through some of the conceptualization, modeling, and operation of disability measures currently taking place.

The development of disability study as an academic discipline, really took off during the 1990s. While there had been previous accounts exploring the implications of the social model of disability. Disability studies are a global phenomenon that aims to promote radical knowledge, activism and practice in relation to disability. Disability is broadly understood as the mainstream exclusion of people with sensory, physical or cognitive impairments. Disability study aims to interrogate and change elements of the disabling world, including the political, economic, social, cultural, interpersonal, relational and discursive.

Disability Studies originally arose in the academy from Sociology and has developed more recently in the Humanities where it is an area of critical inquiry that is parallel to, informed by, and overlapping with Feminist Studies. In its broadest sense, Disability Studies in the Humanities undertakes a radical critique of disability. The fundamental premise of Disability Studies is that disability is a culturally fabricated narrative of the body, a system that produces subjects by differentiating and marking bodies.

Disability is a broad term within which cluster ideological categories as varied as sick, deformed, ugly, old, maimed, afflicted, abnormal, or debilitated--all of which disadvantage people by devaluing bodies that do not conform to certain cultural standards. Thus, disability functions to preserve and validate such privileged designations as beautiful, healthy, normal, fit, competent, and intelligent--all of which provide cultural capital to those who can claim such status and reside within these social identities. It is, then, the various interactions between bodies and world that create disability from the raw material of human variation and precariousness.

Disability, then, is the unorthodox made flesh, refusing to be normalized, neutralized, or homogenized. More important, in an era governed by the abstract principle of universal equality, disability signals that the body cannot be universalized. Shaped by history, defined by particularity, and at odds with its environment, disability confounds any notion of a generalizable, stable physical state of being. The cripple before the stairs, the blind person before the printed page, the deaf person before the radio, the amputee before the typewriter, and the dwarf before the counter are all proof that the myriad structures and practices of material, daily life enforce the cultural standard of a universal human being with a narrow range of bodily and mental variation.

The conspicuous absence of disability from critical anthologies is no more existent. So as not to obscure the progress of literary disability studies, discipline of criticism is introduced to the pioneering work of Lennard J. Davis. The contributions of Davis is further elaborated in Sandra Stiff's "The Anti-heroic: Davis' deconstruction of Normalcy" published in *Hudson Review*:

> The Minority Model, which informs Disability Studies, presents the experience of disability as seen through the lens of those persons with disabilities and characterizes that experience as socially, politically, and economically constructed. The Minority Model is not the study of disability, but rather, the study of the shared experience of disability. Lennard Davis (1997), in The Disability Studies Reader, contends that "we live in a world of norms." The problem with disability, then, is not the disability or the person with the disability, but rather the "the way that normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled person,"

> stemming from the erroneous assumption that persons with disabilities are abnormal, and therefore undesirable. (158)

Stiff's assimilation with Davis's theorization reveals the problem of disability which results from a hostile environment that does not accommodate persons with disabilities and that assigns them an inferior status. Stiff examines the perception of disability from the perspective of the disabled person: "Our anger is not about having a 'chip on your shoulder', our grief is not a 'failure to come to terms with disability" (159). For Stiff, the social ostracization of disables stems from "the erroneous assumption that persons with disabilities are abnormal, and therefore undesirable" (158).

Leonard Davis's works concern with what sorts of bodies are taken for normal, with how such norms are constructed, and with how and why abnormal or disabled bodies have traditionally been represented in literary texts. The overriding concerns of the works is with how the body's shape and capacities have been assumed to determine character and fate and how physical and mental impairments have been used in literature to signify moral and psychological states. With more recent texts, Davis's texts are concerned with how representation may challenge conventional conceptions of 'normality' and 'disability.'

Accompanying *Enforcing Normalcy*, Davis received a publicity flyer with the usual eulogies about the text. Davis attempts a more challenging offering. He presents a theorisation of the cultural construction and maintenance of the boundary between the hearing and the deaf, disabled and abled, normal and abnormal. He also expresses commitment (albeit at a rather abstract level) to a liberatory politics which challenges an

oppressive disablist society. His book is thus not about 'the Deaf', but rather, about social relationships and the constitution of differences within specific cultural contexts.

*Enforcing Normalcy* begins by noting that whilst fashionable discourse theory has devoted a great deal of attention to unruly, transgressive bodies as the site of excess and pleasure, there is a strange silence and even a repression of the 'disabled' body. In the academy attempts to include disability within the curriculum are met with expressions of concern that such courses will 'water down' scholarship. Disability continues to be perceived as being about disabled people. As such, disability is seen as being concerned with issues such as 'self-esteem', relevant only to disabled people and their 'careers,' as Davis aptly comments, “the concept of disability has been relegated to a side-show, a freak show at that, far away from the academic midway of progressive ideas and concerns” (l58).

The author demonstrates a central paradox in contemporary culture. Impairment is a normal part of the human condition, yet is marginalized and invisible within mainstream culture. The impaired body represents the repressed underside of the category of the 'normal' body. Yet mainstream culture remains oblivious to the pervasive presence of disability. Disability is everywhere, but able bodied people cannot bear to think about disability, since it challenges their own fantasies of wholeness.

Davis documents the constitution of Deaf people within modern culture. Davis identifies a marked rise in the centrality of the category of deafness, in the Enlightenment. From 1600 to 1800, alongside the development of print technologies, there was a marked growth in literacy. Under such circumstances, “the deaf person became the totemic representation of the new [temporarily deafened] reading public . . .

the fascination with conversation in the eighteenth century can be seen as a kind of cultural nostalgia for a form that was in the process of becoming an anachronism" (62). By representing such a loss, Davis suggests that "as with any good totem, the deaf person was both universalized and marginalized" (62-3).

Davis goes on (in Chapter Five) to look at the specific psychological resonance's which silence has for hearing people in modern culture. He writes, "silence equals death, absence, meaninglessness" (l09); "silence is local, it is particular, not systematic or totalizing" (l12). As such, the deaf person violates modernist rules of narrativity. However, silence is also a necessary condition for speech. It accounts for meaning and frames articulation: "the consideration of deafness goes to the very heart of issues about representation, communication and language" (124). What Davis seems to be arguing is that the concepts of deafness and muteness are both necessary and subversive for hearing culture.

"The first assumption that has to be countered in arguing for disability studies is that the 'normal' or 'able' person is already fully up to speed on the subject," Lennard J. Davis writes in *Disability Studies Reader*, "my experience is that while most 'normal' things they understand the issue of disability, they in fact do not" (2) .Levis claims that 'normal' people make notions about disables based on films which are, in fact, imaginary: "when it comes to disability, 'normal' people are quite willing to volunteer solutions, present anecdotes, recall from a vast array of films instances they take for fact" (2). Levis writes:

> No one would dare to such a leap into Heideggerian philosophy for example or the art the Renaissance. But disability seems so oblivious –a

> missing limb, blindness, deafness. What could be simpler to understand? One simply has to imagine the loss of the limb, the absent sense, and one is half way there. Just the addition of a liberal dose of sympathy and pity along with a generous acceptance of ramps and voice- synthesized computers allows the average person to speak with knowledge on the subject. (Davis "Introduction" 2)

Davis claims that disability studies, like any other discourse, require a base of knowledge and a familiarity with discursive terms and methodologies, most often, some personal involvement. The "apparent ease of intuitive knowledge" is really another aspect of discrimination against people with disabilities (2). "How could there be anything complex, intellectually interesting, or politically relevant about a missing limb or a chronic impairment?" Levis interrogates to come to a solution, "pity or empathy do not lend themselves to philosophy, philology or theoretical considerations in general" (2).

But, far from pity or empathy, people working in the field of disability are articulating and theorizing a political, social, and ideological critique. The works contained in this *reader*, are only samplings of the many articles and books published on the subject, is representative of this growing specialization as it spans the human sciences--literary studies, art history, anthropology, sociology, post-colonial studies, theory, feminist studies, and so on. Davis contends of this book[disability studies reader] that this is a reader "that places disability in a political, social and cultural context that theorizes and historicizes deafness or blindness or disability in similarly complex ways to the way race, class and gender has been theorized" (2-3). Davis has accumulated vast arrays of implications of disability studies:

> Disability studies, as did cultural studies, unite a variety of ongoing work. That this work was largely hidden from view is a telling fact. If one looks up "disability" or "disability studies" in a database or library catalogue, one will find slim pickings, particularly if the areas of medical treatment, hospital or institutional management and out patient treatment are eliminated. The reason for this death of reference is complex. (3)

As it is outlined above, the ongoing studies on disability faced a major setback as Davis has termed it “death” because of “complex” references (3). The work of many scholars who investigated aspects of the body is now being reassembled into the field of disability studies. “so for example, Sandar Man's work on disease, David Rothman on asylums, Erving Goffman on stigma, Leslie Fieldler on freaks, Susan Sontag on the metaphors of illness, Mikhail Bakhtin on grotesque” (4). Davis outlines some pioneer works on references for disability studies which he reiterates is “followed by postmodern work like Michel Foucault on disease, mental illness, and sexuality, Jacques Derrida on blindness, Kaja Silverman on deformity in film, Judith Butler and Susan Bordo on anorexia”( 4). All of these works might not have been as existing under the rubric of disability studies, but as the field evolves, it recuperates and includes this earlier work as a retrospectively organized set of originating documents much in that way that “structuralism turned back to the work of Saussure or that Marx relied on Hegel” (4).

While this historical reserve of writing on disease, the body, freakishness and so on exists, the work of a newer generation of writers and scholars looks toward feminist, Marxist, postmodern, and cultural studies models for understanding the relation between that body and power. This next generation of writing tends to be created from within the

boundaries of disability. “While many earlier writers had an anthropological approach, with the weakness and imperial quality of anthropological work,” Davis further contends, “others wrote from the perspective of ‘having’ a disability (5). That type of work tended to be written so that normal people might know what it is like to be blind, crippled, deaf, and so on.

Where as Davis’s observation elucidates all critical heritages bestowed upon Disability are not out of contempt: “that the danger of that kind of project is that it is embarked on with the aim of evoking ‘sympathy’ or ‘understanding’” (5). Davis says that all such attempts were the aesthetic outlet of normal people themselves:

> The dialectical relation of power involved in such ultimately ends up having the writing be for the "normal." The inappropriateness of such "sensitizing" work can be seen in works written, for example, to whites explaining what it is like to be black or to men explaining what it is like to be female. Disability studies, for the most part, shun this unequal power transaction in favor of advocacy, investigation, inquiry, archeology, genealogy, dialectic, and deconstruction. (5)

The citation put above encapsulates Davis’s conclusion where the model of a sovereign subject reveling or revealing in that subjectivity is put into question. A chapter which Davis himself has contributed in the book, “Constructing normalcy: The bell curve, the novel, and the invention of disable body in the nineteenth century,” is intended to expose the bitter reality behind construction of normalcy. So much of writing about disability has focused on the disabled person as the object of study; just as “the study of race has focused on the person of color” (“Constructing Normalcy,” Davis 9).

But as with recent scholarship on race, which has turned its attention to whiteness, Davis would like to focus not so much on the construction of disability as on the construction of normalcy because the "problem is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled person" (9). Davis further writes: "a common assumption would be that some concept of the norm must have always existed. After all, people seem to have an inherent desire to compare themselves to others . . . but the idea of norm is la condition of human nature than it is feature of a certain kind of society" (9). Davis further writes:

> First, the application of the idea of a norm to the human body creates the idea of deviation or a "deviant" body. Second, the idea of norm pushes the normal variation of the body through a stricter template guiding the way the body "should" be. Third, the revision of the "normal curve of distribution" into quartiles, ranked in order, and so on, creates a new kind of "ideal." This statistical ideal is unlike the classical ideal which contains no imperative to be the ideal. (17)

The new ideal of ranked order is powered by the imperative of the norm, and then is supplemented by the notion of progress, human perfectibility, and the elimination of deviance, to create a "dominating, hegemonic vision of what the human body should be" (17). The emphasis on nation and national fitness obviously plays into the metaphor of the body, Davis ventures, "of course, such arguments are based on a false notion of the body politic-- as if a hunchbacked citizenry would make a hunchbacked nation" (18). More disturbing is the industrial mentality: "The belief combined with an industrial mentality that saw workers as interchangeable and therefore sought to create a universal

worker whose physical characteristics would be uniform, as would the result of their labors--a uniform product" (18).

Davis's treatment of disability in literary genre, especially novel exposes the power politics which pampers the true representation of disable subject: "if disability appears in a novel, it is rarely centrally represented" (21). "It is unusual for a main character to be a person with disabilities," Davis postmortems the representation of characters in novel:

> Although minor characters, like Tiny Tim, can be deformed in ways that arouse pity. In the case of Esther Summerson, who is scarred by small pox, her scars are made virtually to disappear through the agency of love. On the other hand, as sufficient research has shown, more often than not villains tend to be physically abnormal: scared, deformed or mutilated. (21)

This problem of representation is further illumined in Harlan Hahn's essay "Advertising the acceptably employable image: disability and capitalism" where Hahn begins with the nature of disability construction under capitalism. The examination of disability and the industrial system indicates that the unemployment rate of disabled adults may be traced to broad economic forces rather than to "individual impairments" and that the existence of person with disabilities as well as other marginal groups "reduces pressures which might otherwise disrupt the operation of capitalism" (Hahn 173).

But these investigations could be pursued without questioning prevalent suppositions about the alleged correlation between disability and a lack of productivity that have formed a keystone of the "functional- limitations" paradigm (173). "There

seems to be little doubt that disability has been used as a device for screening out potential employees on application forms," Hahn writes, "and that employers often cannot accurately evaluate the capabilities might be developed within the context of the 'functional-limitations' approach by ascribing their unemployment primarily to bodily deficiencies and the supposedly restricted range of occupational opportunities available to them" (173).

The rise of industrialism produced extensive changes in the disabled as well as non-disabled people. As factories replaced private dwellings as the primary sites of production, routines and architectural configurations were standardized to suit non-disabled workers. Both the design of worksites and of the products that were manufactures gave virtually no attention to the needs of people with disabilities Hahn writes:

> As a result, patterns of aversion and avoidance toward disabled persons were embedded in the construction of commodities, landscapes, and buildings that would remain for centuries. In addition, the mechanization of production often resulted in accidents that expanded the ranks of the disabled minority and that prompted a demand by employers for worker's compensation policies to increase the predictability of the relatively slight legal risks of such incidents. (177)

Standards of acceptable and appropriate personal appearance promoted by the agents of a capitalist economy have vast implications for the study of social and economic behavior. "Although these images may seem to comprise an almost indestructible hegemony, analysts must not ignore the unique propensity of human beings to change their feelings

about perceptible physical differences at various times," Hahn reiterates the American case, "the symbols of beauty that dominate twentieth century America are not the ones which have been seen as desirable or attractive by most societies" (185).

In fact, history contains many examples of admired and prized physical attributes that would subsequently be viewed as deviant and bizarre. The trends might indicate that, for people with visible disabilities and other oppressed groups, "there may be important values to be derived from honoring and even to the narcissistic standards of the dominant majority" (185).

Numerous scholarly attempts have compared disability with postcoloniality, as Sanjeev Kumar Uprety has done in "Disability and Postcoloniality in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children and Third World Novels," Uprety writes: "insofar as colonialism involves subjugation and disempowerment of a people, it is not radically different from other forms of oppression, including those rooted in gender, race, class and ability" (365). It is true that different forms of oppression generate different relations and distributions of power; configurations that are rooted in the specific histories and the political context of those oppressions. It seems reasonable to presume that there are certain affiliations and similarities that cut across the diverse forms of oppression. Uprety quotes Harlan Lane:

> Harlan Lane explores one of these affiliations in his study of the commonalities between the cultural oppression suffered by the colonized people of Africa and that suffered by deaf communities. He discovers commonalities between the traits attributed to the Africans in the colonial literature, and the traits attributed to deaf people in the professional literature. (qtd. in Davis 366)

Both the deaf people and the colonized are described in these representations as aggressive, stubborn and shrewd on the one hand, and as submissive, shy and passive on the others; both are described as being "socially, cognitively, behaviorally, emotionally . . . incompetent" (366). Disability studies principally focuses on the disabled person as the object of study, just has the study of race has focused on the person of color.

Disability studies is not simply an academic paradigm, it is also an emancipatory paradigm; tied to the development of the disabled people's movement, populated by a number of organic intellectuals in Gramsci's sense of the world and focused upon praxis-- the dual promotion of social theory and social change. Such politicized visions have inevitably reflected the politics of different national contexts. In British disability studies, for example, impairment and disability have been clearly separated from one another in the development of what has been termed the social model of disability. This model situates analysis of disability and impairments in a sociological context: the social model of disability is, first and foremost, a focus on the environmental and social barriers which excludes people with perceived impairments from mainstream society. It makes a clear distinction between impairments and disability: the former refers to biological characteristics of the body and mind, and the latter to society is failure to address the needs of disabled people. This is not denial of the importance of impairment, it is, however, a concerted attempt to provide a clear an ambiguous framework within which policies can be developed which focus on those aspects of disabled people's lives which can and should be charged.

Though new historicism erupted long before disability studies as an academic discipline in western academics, the latter preserves the spirit of the former in that

disability conceives in revisiting and challenging prevailing mode of societal organization. As with new historicism, disability studies challenges the categorization of mankind in the grounds of physical attributes. Now, disability studies beliefs, every organization, culture, society, and state should treat ‘disables’ and ‘ables’ placing them horizontally, in stead of placing Able and disable in vertical hierarchy.

**New Historicism**

Foucault's notions of ‘power’ and ‘discourse’ were particularly formative to the development of a critical approach to literary and critical theory known as New Historicism in the early 1980s. These literary critics, new historicists like Stephen Greenblatt, Louise Montrose, Jonathan Goldberg, Kermode, H. Aram Veeser and others, are more interested in the relationship between history and literature. They tried to dismantle the bridge between literature and history widened by New Critics and Structuralists. New Historicists argue that we can not know texts in isolation of their historical context. But unlike Old Historicists, New Historicists insist that an interpretation is subjectively filtered through one's own set of historically conditioned view-points. Hence, there is no 'objective' history. Here, for the purpose and interest of this research Greenblatt and Montrose's notions on relation between history and fiction will be studied.

Greenblatt begins his most theoretical statement on New Historicism in *Towards a Poetics of Culture,* by stating that his methodology is at best a practice rather than a doctrine: “one of the peculiar characteristics of the 'new' historicism' in literary studies is precisely unresolved and in some ways disingenuous is has been – I have been-about the relation to literary theory” (1). He points out some of the influences on the school

(Michel Foucault an European anthropological and social theorists) while distinguishing the approach from both Marxist critics like Frederic Jameson and post-structuralist critics like Jean-Francois Leotard, Greenblatt argues that both Jameson and Lyotard employ history in an effort to support one theoretical viewpoint that in turn leads to their monolithic and contradictory versions of capitalism. History functions in both cases as a convenient anecdotal ornament upon theoretical structure, and capitalism appears not as a complex and social and economic development in the West but as a malign philosophical principle.

Greenblatt argues that New Historicism, by contrast, works to remain always attuned to the contradictions of any historical moment, including those moments dominated by capitalism. On the issue of the relation between private and public or between the aesthetic and political realms, Greenblatt argues:

> The effortless invocation of two apparently contradictory accounts of art is characteristic of American capitalism in the late twentieth century and an outcome of long-term tendencies in the relationship of art and capital; in the same moment a working distinction between the aesthetic and the real is established and abrogated. (10)

The result of such attunement to the contradictions of any given historical moment leads Greenblatt (and other New Historicism) into a number of basic premises: one should begin with specific details, anecdotes, and examples in order to avoid a totalizing version of history: one should proceed from such details to illustrate how they are tied up with larger contradictory forces in a given time period, no matter how apparently innocuous the detail may seem at first; one should remain self-conscious about one's methodologies,

thus resisting "a historicism based upon faith in the transparency of sins and interpretative procedures;" one should be suspicious of liberatory narratives: everything is ,on some level, caught up in the circulations of power in a given time period; and all cultural products whether they are high art, political documents, personal letters, or trash ,are a part of larger discursive structures and, so, can offer clues to the ideological contradictions of a given time period"(12). In introduction to “The Power of Form in the English Renaissance,” Greenblatt differentiates:

> What we call the New Historicism reforms both the new criticism, which views the text as a self-contained structure, and the earlier historicism which was monological and attempted to discover a unitary political vision. Both of these earlier modes of analysis, engaged in a project of uniting disparate and contradictory elements an organic whole, whether in the text itself or in its historical background .The earlier historicism, moreover, viewed the resulting totality or unity as a historical fact rather than the product of interpretation or of the ideological leanings of certain groups. (25)

The goal of new historicism for Greenblatt is to put cultural objects in some interesting relationship to social and historical processes. He distinguishes new historicism from the old principally by the convention that the new correctly holds that at no stage of history is there one single political vision but rather completely ones, and that the cultural environment which the old historicism regarded as an historical fact is, instead, a creation of the historian. In an interview with Harvey Bloom Greenblatt says, “one simple way to

describing new historicism is to say that it's interested in the symbol dimensions of symbolic practice."

Louis Montrose, a prominent new historicist views literature and history as fully interdependent. He thinks 'new' historicism' has been constituted as an academic site of ideological struggle between containment and subversion. "Within the context of the containment –subversion debate my own position has been that a closed and static monolithic and homogeneous notion of ideology must be replaced by one that is heterogeneous and unstable, permeable and processed," Montrose writes, "the key concern of New Historicist critic is the historicity of text and textuality of history; all texts are embedded in specific historical, social and material context" (45). Literary texts too are the material products of specific historical conditions. Literary texts, therefore, must be treated along with its historical context. Likewise, by the textuality of history he means that access to a "full and authentic past" is never possible (45).

Montrose, in his study of Elizabethan drama, focuses on how Elizabethan culture involves bringing oppositions and otherness into visibility so as to reinforce the norms of the dominant Elizabethan power. This type of cultural is dispersed across a whole range of texts, from literature to travel writing. Montrose, thus, sees the impossibility of subverting the dominant culture when he says that "a text creates the culture by which it is created, saves the fantasies by which it is shaped, begets that by which it is begotten" (46). Montrose emphasizes that literary texts act out the concerns of ruling class by reproducing and renewing the powerful discourses which sustain the system. According to Montrose, "we live in history and that the form and pressure of history are made manifest in our subjective thoughts and actions, in our beliefs and desires" (49).

According to New Historicists, the idea of a uniform and harmonious culture is a myth imposed on history and propagated by ruling classes in their own interests. So the new historicists focus not in history but in histories. New historicism, thus, is characterized by, as Louis Montrose says, "a shift from history to histories" (51). This is to say that history is not a homogeneous and stable pattern of facts and events. New Historicists assert that the historians, like the authors of literary texts, possess a subjective view. They too are informed by the circumstances and discourses specific to their era. So they can no longer claim that their study of the past is detached and objective.

Furthermore, literary texts polish the dominant ideas of a particular time by representing alternatives or deviations as threatening. The new historicists tend to examine widely different texts in order to show that those texts play a key role in mediating power relation within the state role to contain, and make safe, that subversion.

## III. Critiquing the 'Utopia' of Norm in *The Idiot*

Fyodor Dostoevsky portrays an epileptic and a delirious through Myshkin-- the character upon whom the Russian Society focuses with amusement. Endowed with psychedelic attributes and professing a childlike, innocent belief in the possibility of achieving heaven on earth, Myshkin fails to cooperate with Russian middle class people. Russian society extols a middle class value as a norm. This middle class value as a social norm is the primary cause of Myshkin's exclusion from the so-called partying with Russian middle class people.

Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* examines disability as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon through Myshkin, Nastassya Filippovna, Ganya and other characters: the plot unfolds on how disability is defined and represented in society. From Dostoevsky's perspective, disability in his characters is not a characteristic that exists in the person so defined, but a construct that finds its meaning in social and cultural context. Idiots in *Idiot* have been isolated, incarcerated, observed, written about, operated, institutionalized, and controlled. The deformed people as well as the people who have the life-long disease, epilepsy in Myshkin, and extreme beauty in Nastassya Filippovna, are considered social defiles in the nineteenth century Russian society.

Dostoevsky punches the aristocratic middle class society prominent in the Czar ruling system in the then Russia: he seems to favor the so-called disable because Myshkin himself is the mouthpiece of the author. Dostoevsky is an ardent critic of the society he is living with because the culture and tradition that the society considers to be normal

clinches individualism and freewill. Under the social condition his characters suffer, Dostoevsky sympathizes and exert a voice of rebellion for the so-called socially marginalized group of people and individuals.

Myshkin's failure to cope with his class can be understood as the mainstream exclusion of people with sensory, physical or cognitive impairments. Dostoevsky attempts to interrogate and change elements of the disabling world, including the political, economic, social, cultural, interpersonal, and relational and hazards that Myshkin faces in nineteenth century Russia: "'Prince Lyov Nikolayevitch Myshkin is my name,' the latter replied with prompt and unhesitating readiness" (4). The narrator highlights Myshkin's abnormality:

> The man's suspicion grew more and more marked: the prince was too unlike the ordinary run of visitors. Though a certain hour the general used often, almost everyday in fact, to receive the visitors of the most varied description, especially on business, yet in spite of the latitude of his instructions, the attendant felt great hesitation, 'Are you really from abroad?' he asked, in spite of himself, and was confused. (14)

The citation encapsulates the basic ethos of socially ostracized in that Dostoevsky has painted and assimilated the pangs of being out cast as Myshkin in *The Idiot*. It has always been a societal tendency to send 'different' and unthinkable people to asylum or Sanatorium because society itself is a construction of 'normal.' "*The Idiot* conveys bleak despair as Dostoevsky provides a harsh indictment of the real world particulars of the Russian class of his day" (VI), introduction to *The Idiot* from Wordsworth edition reads to penetrate over Myshkin's peril.

The fundamental premise of *The Idiot*'s plot is that Myshkin's disability is a culturally fabricated narrative of the body, a system that produces subjects by differentiating and marking bodies. Edward Wasiolek, in *The Notes for the Idiot: Fyodor Dostoevsky*, holds, "Since Myshkin declined to give himself to the impoverished Russian middle class ideals, his turning up to delirium was inevitable; Myshkin's peril is the universal phenomenon of those cast away from society" (24). Indeed, in recent decades many critics have attempted to salvage the literary merits of *The Idiot*, arguing that while the fiction might be structurally deficient, it is also rich in esoteric spiritual and philosophical insights. More than anything else *The Idiot* fulfills the requirements of a Genesis of normal mind.

Myshkin's character portrayal is clustered with ideological categories as varied as sick, deformed, ugly, old, maimed, afflicted, abnormal, or debilitated--all of which disadvantage him by devaluing Myshkin who does not conform to certain cultural standards. Thus, nineteenth century Russian aristocratic class functions to preserve and validate such privileged designations as beautiful, healthy, normal, fit, competent, and intelligent--all of which provide cultural capital to those who can claim such status and reside within these social identities. Myshkin, then, is the unorthodox made flesh, refusing to be normalized, neutralized, or homogenized. More important, in an era governed by the aristocratic principles of bourgeoisie economy, Myshkin's performances in *The Idiot* signal that the body and thought cannot be universalized. Shaped by history, defined by particularity, and at odds with its environment, Myshkin confounds any notion of a generalizable, stable physical state of being.

Accompanying his specialization in calligraphy, and story-telling, Myshkin receives a publicity flyer with the usual eulogies about the traverses of his life in General Yepanchin's household. Dostoevsky attempts a more challenging offering. He presents a figure of aristocratic Russian family of the cultural construction and maintenance of the boundary between the hearing and the deaf, disabled and abled, normal and abnormal. He also expresses commitment (albeit at a rather abstract level) to a liberatory politics which challenges an oppressive disablist society. His book is thus not about the disable, but rather, about social relationships and the constitution of differences within specific cultural contexts.

*The Idiot* begins by noting that Prince Lev Nikolayevich Myshkin, a fair-haired young man in his late twenties and a descendant of one of the oldest Russian lines of nobility, arrives in St. Petersburg on a November morning. Dostoevsky introduces Myshkin, his protagonist, while in the train:

> One of them was a short man about twenty-seven, with almost black curly hair and small, grey, fairy eyes. He had a broad and flat nose and high cheek bones. His thin lips were continually curved in and insolent, mocking and even malicious smile. What was particularly striking about the young man's face was its death-like pallor, which gave him a look of exhaustion in spite of his sturdy figure, and at the same time and almost painfully passionate expression, out of keeping with his coarse and insolent smile and hard and conceited looking eyes. (*The Idiot*, 1)

Myshkin's "death-like pallor" casts early premonition of his long illness, while other physical attributes serves to portray him beyond normal. He has spent the last four years

in a Swiss clinic for treatment of his 'idiocy' and 'epilepsy.' Myshkin's only relation in St. Petersburg is the very distant Lizaveta Prokofyevna Yepanchin. Madame Yepanchin is the wife of General Yepanchin, a wealthy and respected man in his late fifties. While fashionable aristocratic nineteenth century has devoted a great deal of attention to unruly, transgressive bodies, like that of Myshkin, as the site of excess and pleasure, there is a strange silence among Yepanchins when Myshkin narrates his traveling experiences. Here is the glimpse of first meeting between Myshkin and general:

> 'Well prince,' said the general, with a good humored smile, if you really are sort of person you seem to be, it will pleasure to make your acquaintance, only I am a busy man, you see, and I will sit down again directly to look through and sign something, and I am going to his grace's, and then to the office, so though I am glad to see people… nice ones, that is, but… I am so sure however, that you are a man of very good breeding. (22)

The author demonstrates a central paradox in nineteenth century Russian culture. Impairment is a normal part of the Myshkin's condition, yet is marginalized and invisible within mainstream culture. Disability is everywhere, but able bodied people cannot bear to think about disability, since it challenges their own fantasies of wholeness. Myshkin's conversation with the dark man, chosen to represent 'general' men, reveals his accounts of disease that made him different from others:

> He betrayed no suspicion of the extreme impertinence of some of his misplaced and ideal questions. He told him he had been a long while, over four years, away from Russia, that he had been sent abroad for his health

> on account of a strange nervous disease, something of the nature of epilepsy or St. Vipus's dance, attacks of twitching and trembling. The dark man smiled several times as he listened, and laughed, especially when, in answer to his inquiry, 'Well, have they cured you?' his companion answered, 'No, they have not.' (2)

Dostoevsky documents the constitution of aristocrats within modern culture. He identifies a marked rise in the centrality of the category of nineteenth century Russian aristocrats "who know everything" (4). Such omniscient gentlemen are to be found pretty often in a certain stratum of society. Dostoevsky ventures through additional attributes of this class of society:

> All the restless curiosity and faculties of their mind are irresistibly bent in one direction, no doubt from lack of more important ideas and interest in life, as the critic of today would explain. But the words, 'They know everything,' must be taken in rather limited sense. The people of whose lives they know every detail would be at a loss to imagine their motives. I have seen learned men, literary men, poets, politicians, who shout and found in that science their loftiest comfort and their ultimate goal, and have indeed made their career only means of it. (4)

Alongside the development of industrial technologies, there is a marked growth in aristocracy. Under such circumstances, "the learned men, literary men, poets, politicians" become the totemic representation of the new public . . . the fascination with conversation in the nineteenth century can be seen as a kind of cultural nostalgia for a form that was in the process of becoming an anachronism. By representing such a loss, Dostoevsky

suggests that as with any good to them, the unusual person is both universalized and marginalized:

> ‘Prince Myshkin? Lyov Nikolayevitch? I don’t know it. I don’t believe I have ever heard of it,’ the official responded, thoughtfully. ‘I don’t mean the surname, its an historical name, its to be found in Karamzin’s history, and with good reason; I mean you personally, and indeed there are no prince Myshkins to meet anywhere, one never hears of them.’ (4)

The prince makes acquaintance of the Yepanchins, who have three daughters, Alexandra, Adelaida, and Aglaya, the latter being the youngest and the most beautiful.

“People even talked of sacrifices made by the two elder sisters for the sake of the youngest, who was the idol of the house,” The narrator puts the hypocrisy of the then Russian privileged class upon matchmaking , “they were not fond of showing themselves off in society and were modest to a fault” (13). The narrator further unveils the character-attributes of the three sisters:

> No one could reproach them with haughtiness or conceit, yet they were known to be proud and to understand their own value. The eldest was a musician, and the second painted remarkably well… in a word a great deal was said in praise of them. But there were hostile critics. People talk with horror of the number of the books they have read. They were in no hurry to get married; they valued belonging to certain circle in society, yet not to excess. This was the more remarkable as everyone knew the attitude, the character, the aims and the desires of their father. (13)

Dostoevsky goes on to look at the specific psychological resonance's which female beauty has for aristocratic people in modern culture. Physical beauty equals wealth, prosperity, and a good (though old in age) match. As such, "hostile critics," are always aware of number of books (meaning books filled with emotions and sentiments) these sisters have read. Thus, though she is the symbol of beauty, Aglaya falls under the scrutiny of society; perhaps the narrator is preparing her for the role of heroine who is to be sacrificed in society's altar. Dostoevsky violates modernist rules of narrativity. However, moderate beauty is also a necessary condition for matchmaking. It accounts for meaning and frames articulation: the consideration of beauty goes to the very heart of issues about marriage. What Dostoevsky seems to be arguing is that the concepts of beauty and idiocy are both necessary and subversive for culture. Myshkin himself admits his sickness, while conversing with the general:

> 'Oh, so you are philosopher; but are you aware of any talents, of any ability whatever in yourself, of any sort by which you can earn your living?' 'Oh, please don't apologize. No, I fancy I have no talents or special abilities; quite the contrary in fact, for I am an invalid and have not had a systematic education.' (23)

The first assumption that has to be countered in arguing for Myshkin is that the 'normal' or 'able' person is already fully up to speed on the subject, Myshkin's experience is that while most 'normal' things they understand the issue of disability, they in fact do not. Myshkin claims that he is an 'invalid' and has not had a 'systematic education.' 'Normal' people, like the general make notions about such invalids based on films which are, in

fact, imaginary: when it comes to disability, 'normal' people are quite willing to volunteer solutions, and present anecdotes.

But, far from pity or empathy, aristocratic people are articulating and theorizing a political, social, and ideological critique of 'idiots' like Myshkin. The narrative contained in *The Idiot*, is only samplings of the many such social malpractices. Dostoevsky's narration this novel is a reader that places disability in a political, social and cultural context: the narrator chronicles Myshkin's life:

> Myshkin lost his parents when he was a small child. He had grown up and spent all his life in the country, as his health made country air essential. Myshkin said that, although he remembered everything, there was much in his past life he could not explain, because he had never fully understood it. Frequent attacks of his illness had made him almost an idiot (Myshkin used that word idiot). He said that Pavlishpchev had met in Berlin professor Schneider, a Swiss, who was specialist in such disease, where he had patients suffering even from idiocy and insanity, and treated them on his own method. Schneider had kept him and continued his treatment for those two years, and although he had not completely cured him, he greatly improved his condition. (23)

As it is outlined above, the efforts on curing disability faces a major setback as Myshkin has termed it "although he remembered everything, there was much in his past life he could not explain, because he had never fully understood it" (23). Frequent attacks of his illness had made him almost an idiot. The work of many doctors who investigated aspects

of Myshkin's idiocy is now being reassembled into insanity, who attempted to treat him on their own method.

While this historical reserve of fiction on disease, the body, and freakishness and so on exists, this work Dostoevsky looks toward cultural interpretation for understanding the relation between that body and power. Idiot tends to be created from within the boundaries of disability. *The Idiot* tends to be written so that normal people might know what it is like to be blind, crippled, deaf, and so on. Where as Dostoevsky's observation elucidates all cultural heritages bestowed upon Myshkin which are not out of contempt:

> My first impression was very strong one, Myshkin repeated. When I was brought from Russia through various German towns, I simply looked about in silence and, I remember, ask no questions. That was after a long series of violent and painful attacks of my illness, and when my complaint was at its worst and my fits frequent, I always sank into complete stupefaction. I lost my memory, and though my brain worked, the logical sequence of ideas seemed broken. I couldn't connect more than two or three ideas together. That's how it seems to me. When the fits became less frequent and violent, I became strong and healthy again as I am now. I remember I was insufferably sad; I wanted to cry. I was all the while lost and in wonder and uneasiness. What affected me most was that everything was strange; I realized that. I was crushed by the strangeness of it. (49)

The citation put above encapsulates Dostoevsky's theme where the model of a sovereign subject reveling or revealing in that subjectivity is put into question. The danger of Myshkin's kind of suffering is that it is embarked on with the aim of evoking sympathy

or understanding. Myshkin says that the suffering is "after a long series of violent and painful attacks" of his illness, and he "always sank into complete stupefaction": he lost his memory, and though his brain worked, "the logical sequence of ideas seemed broken" (49). He couldn't connect more than two or three ideas together.

Dostoevsky's entire narrative in *The Idiot* efforts to invent disable body in the nineteenth century which is intended to expose the bitter reality behind construction of normalcy. So much of narrative about Idiocy has focused on the Idiot person as the object of study, above all Myshkin's life and thoughts:

> At the beginning, I had, and I used to become very restless. I was continually thinking of the life I would live: I wanted to know what life had in store for me. I was particularly restless at some moments. You know there are such moments, especially in solitude. There was small waterfall there; it fell from a height on the mountain, such a tiny thread, almost perpendicular – forming, white and splashing. Though it fell from a great height, it didn't seem so high; it was the third of my career. At such moments I was sometimes overcome with great restlessness; at midday I wandered on mountains… fancying that if I walked straight on, far away, I should find the key to the mystery. (52)

Dostoevsky would like to focus not so much on the construction of Idiocy as on the construction of normalcy because the problem is not the person with idiocy; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the idiot person. A common assumption would be that some concept of the norm must have always existed. After all, people seem to have an inherent desire to compare themselves to others. But the

idea of norm is a condition of human nature than it is feature of a certain kind of society. The application of the idea of a norm to the human body creates the idea of deviation or a deviant body. Myshkin says, "I wanted to know what life had in store for me" which made him "particularly restless at some moments" (49). He spends most of his time in solitude.

The idea of norm pushes the normal variation of the body through a stricter template guiding the way the body should be. The new ideal of ranked order is powered by the imperative of the norm, and then is supplemented by the notion of progress, human perfectibility, and the elimination of deviance, to create a dominating, hegemonic vision of what the human body should be. Such arguments are based on a false notion of the body politic. More disturbing is the aristocratic mentality.

Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, different from other nineteen century novels, exposes the power politics which pampers the true representation of disable subject: Idiocy appears in a novel, and is centrally represented. It is usual for a main character to be a person with disability in *The Idiot*. Most of the time Myshkin himself narrates the story:

> I never reckoned on leaving the village, and it did not enter my mind that I should one day come back here to Russia. I thought I would always stay there. But I saw at last that Schneider couldn't go on keeping me; and then something turned up, so important apparently that answered for me that I was coming. I shall see into it and take advice. My life will perhaps be quite changed but that doesn't matter. What does matter is that my whole life is already changed. I thought now I am going among people. I know

> nothing, but a new life has begun for me. I determined to do my work resolutely and honestly. I may find it dull and difficult among people. (67)

This problem of representation is further illumined in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* where he presents the nature of 'idiocy' construction under capitalism. The examination of Idiocy and the industrial system indicates that Myshkin can not pursue his life without questioning prevalent suppositions about the alleged correlation between so-called insanity and a lack of productivity. Though he is "determined" to do his work "resolutely and honestly," he finds it "dull and difficult" among people. The rise of industrialism in Russia produced extensive changes in the disabled as well as non-disabled people.

Standards of acceptable and appropriate personal appearance promoted by the agents of aristocracy and nobility have vast implications for the study of social and economic behavior of 'other' characters in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. Although the images aristocracy may seem to comprise an almost indestructible hegemony, we must not ignore the unique propensity of 'idiots' to change their feelings about perceptible physical differences at various times: Nastassya Filippovna, the symbol of beauty who dominates nineteenth century Russia, is not the one who have been seen as desirable bride in the narrative. Totsky, her mentor, is always after her beauty:

> Five years of life in Petersburg had followed and, of course many things had become clear in that time. Totsky's position was not an agreeable one. The worst of it was that, having been once intimidated, he could never quite regain his confidence. He was afraid and could not even tell why – he was simply afraid of Nastasya Filippovna. For some time during the first two years he suspected that Nastasya Filippovna wanted to marry him

> herself, but did not speak from her extraordinary pride and was obstinately waiting for him to make an offer. It would have been a strange demand, but he had become suspicious; he frowned and brooded unpleasantly. To his great and unpleasant surprise, he was convinced by something that happened that, even he made the offer, he would not be accepted. It seemed to him that there was only one possible explanation: that the pride of the offended and fantastic woman had reached such a peach of frenzy that she preferred to express her scorn once for all by refusing him, to securing her future position and mounting to inaccessible heights of grandeur. (39)

In fact, *The Idiot* contains many examples of admired and prized physical attributes that would subsequently be viewed as deviant and bizarre by aristocratic society. Nastasya Filippovna's beauty is incomprehensible to Totsky. He feels that Nastasya Filippovna cannot come under his surveillance because "the pride of the offended and fantastic woman had reached such a peach of frenzy that she preferred to express her scorn once for all by refusing him," which he suspects is "to securing her future position and mounting to inaccessible heights of grandeur" (39).

Insofar as Feudalism and aristocracy in *The Idiot* involves subjugation and disempowerment of a people, it is not radically different from other forms of oppression, including those rooted in gender, race, class and ability. It is true that different forms of oppression generate different relations and distributions of power; configurations that are rooted in the specific histories and the political context of those oppressions. It seems

reasonable to presume, in Dostoevsky's narrative, that there are certain affiliations and similarities that cut across the diverse forms of oppression.

Myshkin's 'idiocy' is portrayed in Dostoevsky's representation as aggressive, stubborn and shrewd on the one hand, and as submissive, shy and passive on the other. Dostoevsky focuses on the 'Idiot' person as the object of study. Dostoevsky presents an emancipatory paradigm in *The Idiot*: his narrative is tied to the development of the disable people, populated by a number of physically, socially, economically, and psychologically disables.

Dostoevsky's world in *The Idiot* is focused upon praxis-- the dual analysis of social theory and social change. Such visions have inevitably reflected the lives of major characters. *The Idiot* situates analysis of disability and impairments in a sociological context: Myshkin's model of disability is, first and foremost, a focus on the environmental and social barriers which excludes people with perceived impairments from mainstream society. Russian aristocratic society fails to address the needs of disabled people. Dostoevsky's narrative is not denial of the impairment, it is, however, a concerted attempt to provide a clear and ambiguous framework within which people with disability can be developed which focus on aspects of disabled people's lives which can and should be acknowledged in the society's mainstream.

Myshkin's notions of marriage and career are particularly formative to the development of a critical approach against Russian aristocracy, and nobility of birth. He tries to dismantle the bridge between working people and aristocrats. The result of such attunement to the contradictions of given historical moment leads Myshkin into a number of basic premises: he should begin as a professional in calligraphy, march and

settle along the lines of Russian aristocracy—partying, and attending dinner-calls. He is suspicious of liberatory bourgeoisie economy and aristocracy: everything he does, on some level, is caught up in resisting circulations of power; and all cultural products whether they are personal letters, or trash, proving himself a part of larger discursive structures who can offer clues to the ideological contradictions. The narrative unfolds:

> Myshkin pondered as he went. He task he led upon him impressed him unpleasantly. The thought of the letter from Ganya to Agalia was unpleasant too. But when he was the length of two rooms from the drawing room, he stopped shut and began looking at the portrait of Nastasya Filippovna. He seemed trying to decipher something that had struck him before, hidden in that face. The impression it had made had scarcely left him. It was extraordinary from its beauty and from something else in it. There was a look of unbounded pride and content, almost hatred, in that face, and at the same time something confiding, something wonderfully simple-hearted. (76)

The goal of Dostoevsky is to put cultural characters in some interesting relationship to social and historical processes. He distinguishes Myshkin from the old Russian aristocracy principally by the fact that the Myshkin holds different physical, psychological, and academic development though he belongs to conventional, aristocratic class.

Dostoevsky has constituted *The Idiot* as a site of ideological struggle between containment and subversion. A closed and static, monolithic and homogeneous, notion of Russian aristocratic ideology is replaced by one that is heterogeneous and unstable,

permeable and processed in the character of Myshkin. Dostoevsky involves in bringing oppositions and otherness into visibility so as to examine the norms of the dominant aristocratic power. This type of cultural otherness is dispersed across a whole narrative of Idiot: the possibility of subverting the dominant culture. When he speaks to Gavril Ardalionovitch, "that I was once so ill that I was really was almost an idiot; but I have got over that long ago, and so I rather disliked it when people call me idiot to my face" (80), Myshkin comes to identify himself with other people's sufferings: "thought I can excuse it in you in consideration of your ill luck, but in your vexation you have been abusive to me twice already . . . I don't like that at all, especially so suddenly at first acquaintance" (80). *Idiot* is not merely the acting out the concerns of ruling class by reproducing and renewing the powerful discourses which sustain the system; rather Dostoevsky's characters live in history and that the form and pressure of history are made manifest in their subjective thoughts and actions, in their beliefs and desires.

In Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* the idea of a uniform and harmonious culture becomes a myth imposed on history and propagated by ruling classes in their own interests. *The Idiot,* thus, is characterized by a shift from history to histories. This is to say that history is not a homogeneous and stable pattern of facts and events in *The Idiot*. Dostoevsky seems to be well informed by the circumstances and discourses specific to his era. So, *The Idiot* does no longer claim that Dostoevsky's narrative is detached and objective.

Furthermore, Fyodor Dostoevsky polishes the dominant ideas of a particular time by representing alternatives or deviations as threatening. He tends to examine widely different characters in order to show that those characters play a key role in mediating power relation within the state role to contain, and make safe, that subversion. We see

that Ganya is a vain, ambitious man who is very controlling toward his family members. He clearly wishes to appear of a higher social class than he really is, as we see in the fact that his apartment is beyond what he can afford and in his shame about taking on boarders:

> Ambitious and vain to a hyper-sensitive, morbid degree, he had been seeking for the last two months for any sort of means by which he could build up a more presentable and gentlemanly mode of life. Yet he felt himself without experience, and perhaps likely to go ashtray in the path he had chosen. At home, where he was a despot, he had taken up in despair an attitude of complete cynicism. (97)

Ganya is embarrassed not only by his financial status, but also by his family, particularly his father. Ganya beseeches Myshkin not to tell his family about what happened at the Yepanchins, nor to tell anyone about what Ganya's family is like. When Nastassya Filippovna arrives, Ganya is extremely vexed by the embarrassment his father will cause him. In Ganya's outburst we see the first of several instances in the novel when characters lose control themselves to satisfy the societal requirements. Ganya's tempter boils over: his anger, caused by his vanity, has no limits. He even goes so far as to hit his sister and then the prince. Myshkin screams at Ganya:

> I shall never again look at you as a scoundrel, said Myshkin. Just now I thought of you as quite wicked, and you have so rejoiced me all of a sudden. It’s a lesson to me not to judge without experience. Now I see that you can reconsider wicked, nor even a really demoralized man. In my

> opinion you are simply one of the most ordinary men that could possibly be, only perhaps very weak and not at all original one. (113)

General Ivolgin also lacks control—over language rather than temper. The general's lies have no motivation whatsoever; he simply tells them compulsively and seemingly for no reason. There are a number of interesting references to literature in *The Idiot,* which have different functions in the narrative. In this section, General Ivolgin makes a reference to Dumas's *The Three Musketeers,* for instance, and tells a lie that is essentially a retelling of a story he once read in the newspaper.

Chapter nine introduces Nastassya Filippovna, an enigmatic woman whose appearance in Ganya's apartment surprises everyone. Both the characters and we ourselves are fascinated with her, as she is someone for whom virtually no limits to action exist. Her behavior is utterly unpredictable, as she refuses to follow any societal prescriptions for how she should act—a trait that makes her dramatically interesting and erratic. Upon arrival at Ganya's apartment, Nastassya Filippovna laughs and acts unceremoniously, as though she assumes the role society expects her—as a fallen woman who has transgressed through extramarital sex—to play. Myshkin appears to be the only one who sees through her behavior and confronts her with the assertion that it does not match her real personality. The prince's claim characterizes both her and him, as his recognition differentiates him from the other characters.

We also see the other characters continue to impose roles upon Myshkin in addition to the most frequent role, that of the "idiot." Though despised by everybody, Myshkin remains true at heart. He advises Nastasya Filippovna not to marry any men for money:

> Myshkin felt very uneasy as he went on, and did all he could to give himself courage. 'The worst that can happen,' he thought, 'is that she will refuse to see me and will think something bad of me; or perhaps she will see me and laugh in my face. And in fact the prospect did not alarm him very much, but to the question what he would do and why he was going there he could find no satisfactory answer. It would hardly be altogether right thing, even if he were to catch a favorable opportunity, to say to Nastasya Filippovna, 'don't marry that man, don't be your own destruction. He doesn't love you, it's your money he loves, he told me so himself, and I have come to tell you.' (125)

Nastasya Filippovna mistakes the prince for a butler, while Rogozhin calls him a sheep. The image of Myshkin as a sheep contrasts him with Rogozhin, whose character reminds us of the devil. In fact, Rogozhin's name comes from the Russian word '*rog*,' meaning 'horn.' A sheep—a common symbol for an innocent who is sacrificed for the sake of others—is a telling characterization of the enigmatic prince. As we read the novel, we must think about whether we see Myshkin in the role of the sacrificial lamb, or whether this portrayal—like the other countless portrayals various characters propose—proves inadequate to describe him.

Dostoevsky proposes a solution bringing the two invalids, Myshkin and Nastasya Filippovna, into a common understanding. Even she thinks of marrying him. The following romantic conversation puts a part of reader's catharsis:

> 'I am going to marry an honest woman,' said Myshkin. 'Do you mean that I am an honest woman?'

> "Yes."
>
> 'Oh, all those notions come out of novels! Those are old fashioned fancies, prince darling; nowadays the world has grown wiser. And how can you get married? You want a nurse to look after you!'
>
> 'I know nothing about it, Nastasya Filippovna. I have seen nothing of life. You're right there, but I consider that you will be doing me an honor, not I you. I am nothing, and you have suffered and have come pure out of that hell, and that is a great deal. No one here would do that. I… Nastasya Filippovna… I love you! I would die for you, Nastasya Filippovna! I won't let anyone say a word about you. If we are poor, I will work, Nastasya Filippovna . . . .' (153)

But not to avail, society does not has that courage to see the beauty and brain come together, hence the novel has to further separate them, and place them where they are. Nastasya Filippovna can not marry Myshkin because she is living under the patronage of Totsky, and has been a continuous beautiful bird of prey to the general. It does not matter how much they can love each other and live happily for the nineteenth century Russian aristocracy. But, for them, this would have been ridiculous as they feel that 'idiots' can live no life on their own.

The meeting of Aglaya and Nastasya Filippovna arguably marks the climax of *The Idiot.* After this point, the direction of the plot's action is irreversible. With this meeting perishes the last hope for the prince finding happiness with Aglaya. The meeting also seems like a necessary step in resolving Aglaya's insecurity and doubts about Nastasya Filippovna. Aglaya's reaction to the other woman is not a favorable one; she

calls Nastasya Filippovna a vain, selfish woman who would be unhappier if she did not feel so much self-depreciation. While it is true that Nastasya Filippovna's dishonor is not her fault, she could have started an honest life once she had the chance, without so much drama. Aglaya believes Nastasya Filippovna would have been more honest if she left Totsky without theatrics.

Aglaya's characterization of Nastasya Filippovna is a unique one among the characters in the novel; we are invited to assess her words. Before hearing Aglaya's words, we are presented with two polar-opposite views of Nastasya Filippovna's situation: that of Myshkin and that of everyone else. The prince insists that she is blameless, a woman who is worthy of the highest respect and admiration as well as pity for her suffering. Most other characters dismiss her as a dishonorable creature, an insane woman, or both. Aglaya's assessment holds that while Nastasya Filippovna is indeed blameless for her dishonor, she has gone too far in her self-depreciation, which, according to Aglaya, arises from abundant self-love.

Likewise, Nastasya Filippovna presents an intriguing characterization of Aglaya. Nastasya Filippovna says that Aglaya is afraid of her because Aglaya doubts the prince's true attachment to her. Nastassya Filippovna also says that she thought much higher of Aglaya physically, intellectually, and spiritually. Her revenge on Aglaya is that Myshkin will leave Aglaya immediately upon Nastassya Filippovna's request—which is in fact exactly what happens, although the prince does not truly cease to love Aglaya. Nastassya Filippovna's "revenge" calls into question the deepness of her love for Myshkin.

For the prince [Myshkin], the encounter between Aglaya and Nastassya Filippovna presents the choice between his two different forms of love for the two

women—romantic and compassionate, respectively. His inability to choose means ruin for himself and for Aglaya. After this meeting, Myshkin begins to go crazy. When Radomsky visits him, the prince is unable to assess the situation rationally. He believes that if only he explained his feelings to Aglaya, she would understand. In reality, however, this is not the case at all. Aglaya has failed to understand him all along; after he betrays her by hesitating in his choice between her and Nastassya Filippovna, she certainly will never be with him now. Thus, the text critiques the utopia of norm prevalent in the then Russian society.

## IV. Conclusion

This research makes a study of interweaving issues of disability – epilepsy and derision in particular – in Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot*. Apart from examining the way in which Myshkin and Nastasya Filippovna are represented in this Russian text written at the high time of Russian aristocracy, my primary focus has been to illumine Russian aristocratic culture that subjugates peoples who slightly disagree with the then social values. In particular, my attempt has been to examine *The Idiot* that emerges as a ruthless commentary over Russian aristocratic culture. In the first part I have analyzed Dostoevsky's work from the eyes of other critics and Dostoevsky's life. Whereas the succeeding chapter chronicles the critical voices on literary disability studies, the third chapter comes to put the characteristic features of Russian aristocracy in the pretext of so called disabled people's degradation.

I have tried to rethink the notion of 'disable' in *The Idiot* in terms of Leonard J. Davis and other similar theorists' critical voices. In general my research exposes the bitter part of Russian aristocratic social values that imposes upon the development of psychological and cultural identity formation of an individual. The entire effort in bringing out this research stems from my attempt to locate these images of disability at the intersections of socio-political thought. Hence I have concluded the research by discussing some of the strategies Dostoevsky has used to reconstruct a sense of wholeness and coherence, to imagine a human society inclusive of physical and psychological deviants.

Bodies and identities become transformed in Fyodor Dostoevsky's The Idiot as they enter a space where the boarders of normalcy are being transgressed and rewritten.

Myshkin, including Nastasya Filippovna and Ganya, are transformed as their positions are altered when they try to abscond from nineteenth-century Russian aristocratic values. Myshkin is caught up in between two worlds; the world of himself and the outer world of the General and other Russian aristocratic families. This research concerns with what sorts of bodies are taken for normal, with how such norms are constructed, and with how and why abnormal or disabled bodies have traditionally been represented in literary texts. The overriding concerns of the work is with how the body's shape and capacities have been assumed to determine character and fate and how physical and mental impairments have been used in *The Idiot* to signify moral and psychological states. Dostoevsky's text is concerned with how representation may challenge conventional conceptions of 'normality' and 'disability.'

Myshkin's disability continues to be perceived as being deviant. As such, he is seen as being concerned with issues such as 'self-esteem', relevant only to disabled people and their 'careers,' as Davis aptly comments, "the concept of disability has been relegated to a side-show, a freak show at that, far away from the academic midway of progressive ideas and concerns" (l58). Dostoyevsky's impact on modern intellectual movements is enormous: Freud's psychoanalysis found valuable evidence in his depictions of the mysterious subconscious, whereas Camus' existentialism took from the Russian author an understanding of man's inability to cope with freedom and his possible preference for a state of no–responsibility.

Dostoyevsky is arguably the first writer to position a philosophical idea at the very heart of a fictional text. The reason that Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* has maintained its disquieting energy lies mainly in its structural openness toward a variety of interpretative

patterns, all of which can present textual evidence for their particular reading. Myshkin's actions attempt to provide a conceptual framework with which to approach to the complete phenomena of disability regardless of age, gender, race, and other social characteristics. While there is still dichotomy between persons identified as having disability and those who do not, Dostoevsky does not predict in the need to identify persons for either clinical or administrative purposes as either-or. Within this research perspective, there is recognition of the idea of disability as a continuum rather than an absolute. The nature of that continuum has been developed through some of the conceptualization, modeling, and operation of disability measures currently taking place.

Dostoevsky's fiction works within Myshkin's peril that is suspended between the serious and the comic, between real identity and inventive fantasy. Suspended between the real and the unreal, the novel subverts both the real history perpetrated by Russian aristocracy, and also the equally the true history invented by the local elite. On the one hand, thus, the party seen in *The Idiot* can be considered as the satire aimed at nineteenth-century Russian aristocracy. However, the incomprehensive silence of Myshkin has a double edge; not only does it signify the discursive gaze that turns disable identities into alien and abnormal but it also serves to criticize aristocratic culture.

Dostoevsky's fiction, thus, works from the position of disabled double vision--a position of power from which it is possible to challenge both the Russian society and the local structures of power. However, this power of Myshkin is purchased at a cost; the costs that disable subjects have to pay as they enter into the aristocratic space of multiple humiliation and symbolic deformity. In order to acquire a voice in the contemporary context they must enter multiple symbolic orders; this act deforms them symbolically,

and that deformity finds expression in the images of texts that they produce. The power of rewriting and reinscription must be acquired at the cost of self eraser and reiterated pain. The influx of western media and fashion has resulted in an increasing marginalization of disabled within which nineteenth-century Russian identity is formed. Myshkin's experience is but an experience of multiple alienation and disability. It is this experience of disability that Dostoevsky literalized and thus paves the way for researches like this, an experience of losing their voice and vision even as they enter the symbolic networks of aristocratic cultures and society.

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