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The Russian Antihero, Or: The Eastern Alternative to the Western World

Summary

The article is an attempt to reflect on the category of the Russian antihero not only as a literary phenomenon, but also as a philosophical and cultural one. The concept of antihero refers to problems that are important for the formation of modern culture, because it models a certain type of anthropology of characters who critically fit into the traditionally established model of heroism and European identity. The Eastern (Russian) perspective adopted here provides an alternative to both Western anthropology and the Western antihero. The specificity of the Russian antihero can be described, among others, on the basis of distinctively Russian problems, such as the so-called 'superfluous man' or 'broad soul.' The Russian antihero is open to criticism of Western values, such as reason, 'disenchantment of the world' (rationalization), and social activism.

Keywords

antihero, Russia, Dostoyevsky, Goncharov, 'living life,' 'superfluous man'

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The word 'antihero' belongs to words with an unstable meaning. On the one hand, it seems to have certain customary meaning (like 'horse' or 'youth'), which is understandable in itself, for example when used in sports reports to describe a football player who, standing in front of an empty goal, misses terribly. On the other hand, however, it refers to a literary or film character to indicate their de-heroized traits and inability to act. However, Anglo-Saxon researchers and critics have something completely different in mind here (they situate the antihero primarily in popular culture, especially in film and entertainment) than Russian ones. It is also justified to claim that the concept of antihero has much broader connotations precisely in the latter tradition, where it cannot be reduced only to a literary (or film) construct, but turns out to be a sign of belonging to a modern formation of the Eastern culture, in which the antihero becomes a clear sign of identity. It is manifested by the opposition of 'us' and 'them,' where 'us' means people of the East (especially Russians), and 'them' indicates people of the West, representatives of the 'disenchanted world,' dominated by the cult of reason, rationalization and pragmatism in action (driven by instrumental reason). In this sense, the antihero counters the Western hero with completely different values: love of nativeness, mystery, the element of irrationality, in short, everything that is characterized by the metaphor of a 'broad' soul: sentient (sensitive, affectionate, melancholic, but also unpredictable, dangerous), poetic, religious and... anti-religious. Simply put: full of ambivalence.

Who is an antihero? He is an outsider, a character who is in particular conflict with commonly accepted norms and forms of social life, questioning them and justifying this attitude in a reflective way. The antihero is not simply an unprincipled scoundrel or villain. He is most often involved in moral conflicts and sometimes causes resentment. However, he also evokes sympathy in equal measure. Sometimes he scares and saddens, but, on other occasions, entertains and amuses. One of the most important theories of humour (represented, among others, by Kant, Hegel, Vischer, Nikolay Chernyshevsky, J. B. Boriev, Anatoly Lunacharsky) (see: Ziomek, 2000, p. 22) assumes, as its condition, contrast, deviation from the norm, contradiction. The antihero is a person who, if he has

bad intentions, causes good outcomes. If he desires good, he achieves evil. The more he dreams of ideals, the more he discredits them and the other way round. The lack of heroic features in this case reveals a longing for heroism; questioning generally accepted moral principles also shows a longing for these principles. As a conscious and self-aware man, the antihero only discovers the illusory or fictional nature of the social order, and exposes its instability, impermanence and hypocrisy, whereas at the same time he dreams of such perfect order. He is indeed a nihilist, but in the sense of disappointment that he experiences when he recognizes that an ideal world does not exist. It is hard not to recall here the definition of a nihilist by Friedrich Nietzsche (2003, p. 87): “A nihilist is a man who judges that the real world ought not to be, and that the world as it ought to be does not exist.” But precisely for this reason, paradoxically, he is also a moralist. Recognizing the abstraction of codified ethical systems, he formulates a morality based on sensitivity and basic human feelings. This morality is the expression of an encounter with a changeable and foundationless world, with another human being who is ephemeral, weak and suffering.

When it comes to the antihero tradition, the Russian context deserves special attention and distinction. The word antihero itself has Russian origins (*антимеро́й*). It was used for the first time in *Notes from Underground* (1864) by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, a novel in which the basic model of this sort of character was created (“a novel needs a hero, and all the traits for an antihero are expressly gathered together here”). It should be emphasized here that although it is possible to distinguish several subtypes of this character, as one can read in the Russian *Literary Encyclopedia*, they all appear in the most radical form in Dostoyevsky’s work.

It is reasonable to assume that the type referred to as *лишний человек*, the ‘superfluous man,’¹ precedes radical heroes associated

1 Among the ‘superfluous men’ one could mention heroes such as: Eugene Onegin (Pushkin), Pechorin (Lermontov’s *A Hero of Our Times*), Rudin (from Turgenyev’s novel of the same title), Oblomov (Goncharov’s title character), Leonid Stepanovich (*Leonid Stepanovich i Lyudmila Sergeyevna* by Avdotia Glinka) or Valerian Pustovtsev (*The Asmodeus of Our Times* by Viktor Askochensky).

with historical Russian nihilism, so it has a prototypical dimension². Before the works of Dostoyevsky (who created various types of antiheroes, e.g. Stavrogin in *Demons*, Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, etc.), one should mention Lermontov (*A Hero of Our Times*) and Pushkin (*Eugene Onegin*), the works of Nikolai Gogol, and later Chekhov. A special place in this tradition is certainly occupied by Oblomov, the title character of Ivan Goncharov's 1859 novel, a Russian classic. I will return to these matters later on.

The antihero's place of residence is a carnivalized world. Some characters from ancient and later heroic poems and comedies have a carnivalized image. One perceives the way of thinking and personalities of these figures in clear opposition to the cultural model in force in a given historical period³.

The carnival image of the world, as it is known thanks to Mikhail Bakhtin, placed emphasis on freeing oneself from binding, universal and permanent truths and values, and opted for perceiving the world as becoming, dynamic and renewing. It also abolished the hierarchical nature of relations in favour of equality (Bakhtin, 1983, p. 148).

The 17th and 18th centuries marked the definite departure from carnival sensibility, its place was taken by seriousness – from then on it claimed to express the truth about human existence (Bakhtin, 1983, p. 161). Bakhtin, however, believes that the carnival image of the world is subject to a deeper adaptation, and although its external manifestations disappear, its new dimension turns out to be the carnivalization of passion, the essence of which is the ambivalence of love and hatred, greed and selflessness, lust for power and humble humility, comedy and tragedy, etc. (Bakhtin, 1983, p. 168). A literary character with antiheroic features that will turn out to be

2 For more on this subject, see: Kryska, 1998.

3 As Krystyna Ruta-Rutkowska writes: "The comedy of Aristophanes negates [...] pathos, opposes the belief in the inviolable hierarchy of the world. Therefore, it often creates inverted visions, based on the idea of a different hierarchy. [...] the vision of the world contained in the Aristophanic comedy [...] turns out to be too subversive, exceeding the norms «of good taste». Not only does it make the body, which is cursed because it is sinful and devoid of any rationality, a matrix for understanding reality, but it also contradicts order; it mixes reason and instinct, unofficial and official, uplifting and «scandalous»." See: Ruta-Rutkowska, 2002, pp. 429, 434.

a consequence of this adaptation is a romantic hero – Byron’s Don Juan, Goethe’s Faust, Słowacki’s Kordian, Pechorin from Lermontov’s *A Hero of Our Times*, or Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin. They consistently reject the generally accepted system of moral values, lifestyles and universally respected life and social goals approved by the traditional paradigm of European culture. In this sense, one can talk about **the first antihero model**. It often includes literary characters with unique, outstanding features, but unruly and rebellious (like Stavrogin from Dostoyevsky’s *Demons*). **The second antihero model** would be defined by characters who could be described as **everymen** – average, weak, lost, de-heroized – like Oblomov, the title character of Goncharov’s novel. The antihero is an inverted idealist: ideals and the world of spirit are what he desires, but he is aware of the futility of this desire. The world of ideals does not exist. In this sense, one can call Faust, Werther or Kordian antiheroes. However, Tristan, Robin Hood, Rob Roy or Janosik are not antiheroes. Although they question the officially recognized system of values, they are heroes “in the eyes of socially and politically disadvantaged classes,” as Hanna Gosk (1992, p. 115) notes.

Certainly, the second and no less important antihero tradition, next to the carnival one, is the one that can be traced back to the world of fairy tales, fables and epic poems, and in which a demonic element is visible, as Meletinsky (1994) notes. At first, it poses a challenge to the activity of the heroes, who tirelessly fight against it. However, since the 17th and 18th centuries, when the departure from carnival sensibility becomes more and more visible, and the joy of life is replaced by the awareness of the seriousness of the world and existence, demonism sometimes becomes the experience of literary characters themselves (from the legendary motif of selling one’s soul to the human-devil figures of Satan from Milton’s *Paradise Lost* or Marlowe’s *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*). Therefore, Romanticism once again turns out to be an important breakthrough, in which the antiheroic element is found in the metaphorical unconscious and dark side of the soul (e.g. the motif of the twin, the doppelgänger). A whole range of characters could be mentioned here: Don Juan and Manfred (Byron), Mandeville and St. Leon (Godwin), Faust (Goethe), Pechorin (Lermontov), and Polish

ones: Konrad (Mickiewicz), Kordian (Słowacki) or Count Henryk (Kraśiński) – with various reservations, of course. The demonic nature of antihero, a special kind of ‘dichotomy,’ is expressed here as various forms of division, the clash of forces of good and evil, also in the perspective of romantic irony distancing itself from the world. Each time they prove isolation, loneliness and suffering of an individual.

Following the romantic lead, one may notice that Don Juan, Pechorin and Onegin undoubtedly gravitate towards the category of antihero. What is certain is that while the concept of antihero cannot be unreservedly compatible with the romantic attitude, this relationship does exist. An antihero is a disappointed idealist who experiences existence as passing of time, transience and impermanence. The bridge between the romantic and the modernist antihero (in the narrower sense of the word modernism) may be the category of dandyism, a rebellion against mass culture and the established social order, with the simultaneous failure to put forward any ideal (apart from an aesthetic one) or a new system of values. The category of dandyism seems to connect the above-mentioned romantic heroes and leads to the modernist dandy antihero: Jean des Esseintes from *Against the Grain* and Durtal from *Là-bas* by Huysmans, Lord Harry and Dorian Gray from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Wilde or Lafcadio from *The Vatican Cellars* by Gide.

The unquestionable and original concept of Russian culture and literature certainly is the superfluous man, which I mentioned earlier. The term itself has its source in literature, it appears for the first time in 1850 in Ivan Turgenev’s *The Diary of a Superfluous Man*. The protagonist, thirty-year-old Tchulkaturin, terminally ill with tuberculosis, decides to describe his life in a diary. All his relatives have left him, except for his old maid. There is no reason to summarize Turgenev’s novel here, but it is enough to note that it contains important attributes and properties typical of the Russian antihero: clerical work, illness, unrequited love, in-depth self-analysis, a feeling of being useless and an inability to cope with the challenges of the world.

The concept of superfluous man turns out to be extremely accurate in relation to many of the central figures of 19th-century Russian

literature. It can also be said that the superfluous man becomes very important for the formation of the literary figure of antihero, he also precedes the radical heroes associated with historical Russian nihilism, so he has a prototypical character (see: Kryska, 1998). In this context, references are made to Eugene Onegin from the novel in verse of the same title by Alexander Pushkin, Pechorin from Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Times*, Bazarov from Turgenev's *Fathers and Children*, and Beltov from Alexander Herzen's novel *Who is to Blame?* (who could be somewhat compared to Stanisław Wokulski from *The Doll* by Bolesław Prus), Rudin from the novel of the same title by Turgenev, Belkov from Chekhov's story *The Man in the Case*, Oblomov from the novel by Ivan Goncharov (*Oblomov*), Leonid Stepanovich (*Leonid Stepanovich i Lyudmila Sergeevna* by Avdotia Glinka), Rodion Raskolnikov from Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, or Valerian Pustovtsev (*The Asmodeus of Our Times* by Viktor Askochensky).

It would take a long time to list further examples, because this type of a literary figure seems to be one of the dominant types in Russian literature of the 19th century. An amusing exemplification of a superfluous man is an episodic character (the comically presented *лишний человек*) from *Oblomov* by Ivan Goncharov (1978, p. 39), whose *superfluity* is characterized by the narrator as follows:

A man of indeterminate age, with an indeterminate face entered; it was difficult to guess how old he was, he was neither beautiful nor ugly, neither tall nor short, neither blond nor dark-haired. Nature has not endowed him with any particular, more expressive feature, good or bad. [...] Having heard his name, one will immediately forget it, as well as his face; one will pay no attention to what he says. His presence will bring nothing to the company, just as his absence will deprive them of nothing.

There is no doubt that in the superfluous man developed in Russia one finds the essential features of an antihero: stagnation and inability to act, alienation, a sense of uselessness of one's own existence resulting from the inability to fulfil one's own aspirations and ideals, despite one's undoubted talents and education. A superfluous man

searches for the meaning of his existence, but cannot find it. At the same time, it must be emphasized that the experience of the superfluous man is primarily typical of representatives of the nobility (where officers and soldiers play a special role) and the emerging intelligentsia.

This is a very important context because it prompts one to ask the following question: is the problem of the Russian antihero limited to the problems of a specific social class? This question should be answered carefully. One has to notice that it is impossible to describe an antihero without also locating him in another extremely important layer of the Russian society, namely, the layer of clerks. While the 'antihero' implications of the nobility and intelligentsia could be characterized as resulting from a specific anomic state, lack of perspectives and the resulting anxieties that plague the intelligentsia, the participation of the layer of clerks in the formation of antihero seems no less significant. As Juri Lotman (2010, p. 29) notes, state power in Russia was based on two pillars: the military (considered noble and hence belonging primarily to the nobility), where the superfluous men are, so to speak, recruited from; and the clerks. Due to the monthly salary, a clerk inevitably becomes completely dependent on the state and, therefore, its bureaucratic machine. The one who was initially supposed to serve the social order, at least according to Peter the Great's intentions, is more and more often seen from the worst side, as a formalist and a bribe taker. Dependence on the salary makes him passive, and low social prestige triggers in him a humble attitude, as well as frustration and anger (maliciousness) (Lotman, 2010, p. 29). In this way, the clerical status defines new antiheroic features that one finds in the works of the writers who presented them with such insight. I am thinking here primarily of the works of Nikolai Gogol (with his *Dead Souls*, *The Government Inspector*, *The Nose*, *Diary of a Madman* and many other works in which satire on the clerical status is one of the most characteristic features) and Fyodor Dostoyevsky (with his numerous creations and... creatures of the office, appearing throughout his writing). A special place in his work is certainly occupied by the first modernist antihero (by profession: clerk) from the previously mentioned *Notes from Underground*.

It is tempting, of course, to divide the Russian antiheroes into intellectuals (nobility, military, teachers, artists) and officials. However, I think that this would be an inaccurate division, because it reduces the problem of antihero to a specific profession or occupation. This is, of course, an important historical and cultural context for these characters, but it does not yet allow one to capture their essence. Similarly, it would be equally wrong to reduce antihero to superfluous man. It seems that while every antihero can be interpreted as a redundant, superfluous man, rejected by society or rejecting it himself, not every *лишний человек*, in the sense in which he is understood in Russian literature, is necessarily an antihero (for example, Bazarov from Turgenev's *Fathers and Children* is not one). I believe that what needs to be emphasized is the fact that antihero cannot simply be reduced to a romantic hero; such an identification is not justified (for example, is Silvio from Pushkin's short story *The Shot* an antihero?). However, this issue would require separate discussion.

To sum up, it is necessary to emphasize that both pillars of the Russian state, the military (noble) class and the clerks, despite completely different conditions, goals and needs, have many common features that led to the creation and unrestricted development of literary characters who can be defined as antiheroes. These features include self-awareness, passivity, a sense of meaninglessness of existence, problems with identity (a particular kind of indeterminacy, different for an intellectual, different for an official), suffering, and finally, a constant split between the desire for freedom (often: unrestrained) and the feeling of enslavement by various external (socio-cultural) and internal factors (mental helplessness).

Playboy – loser (klutz) – the dark type

Meanwhile, I would like to propose another possible way of approaching the concept of antihero, this time more from the literary and anthropological-literary perspective. It seems that, basically, one could talk about three models here: playboy (dandy, trickster, seducer), loser (klutz, the man of resentment) and the dark type (demonic, tragic). I will add right away that such a taxonomy does not fully

convince me (as evidenced by a number of not necessarily synonymous terms in brackets). All modelling is always about cutting margins and cannot handle mixed situations. Modelling is always just constructing, forming to fit a specific interpretation. On the other hand, it allows one to see things clearly. I would like to emphasize here that the types I propose are in fact impure and that certain features, actions and goals of one literary character may fall within different types. The terms: the playboy, the loser, the dark type can only serve as an interpretation of the character's dominant feature.

The playboy antihero (I am aware of the inadequacy of this term) appears in literature as a dandy, a charming trickster, or a seducer. In the description of the literary work, he is characterized as an educated and refined type. At the same time, however, he comes across as a person who is bored with the world which, for some reason, no longer provides him with the stimuli he needs to live. The clearest representative of this type in Russian literature is Eugene Onegin. This type seems to have its origins in carnival culture and literature. He is characterized by weakened self-reflection and focusing his attention primarily on the external world, with which he decides to play in various ways: he fools around, seduces, experiments, makes up things. He is unpredictable. Sometimes he is simply a comic character (like General Ivolgin or Ferdyschchenko from Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*), sometimes a self-confident ironist (like the Count from Pushkin's already mentioned short story *The Shot*, who eats cherries from his hat during a pistol duel, smiling mockingly). Sometimes, however, and this is probably the most interesting, since the most complicated case, he shows features of the demonic type, like Stavrogin from *Demons* or Svidrigailov from *Crime and Punishment*. If one was to recall Søren Kierkegaard, the type discussed here is an aesthete. He cannot be a hero in the strict sense because he is significantly devoid of heroic features. His existence takes place, as it were, beyond good and evil, beyond moral choices. An aesthete, as Kierkegaard presents him, is a man who wants to avoid the radical moral alternative of 'either/or' at all costs, and instead seeks ever stronger stimuli. However, when he reaches the end of his experiments, due to weariness or deepened self-awareness, he chooses a change of life or despair, which often

ends in suicide. This type of antihero, marked by undoubted comic features, turns out to be, in fact, a sad person with no faith in the meaning of his own existence.

Another type of antihero, very well represented in Russian literature of the 19th century, is **a loser and a klutz**. Characters of this sort in Russian literature are most often presented as comic and grotesque, but even in their case there are significant moments of sadness and melancholy. The type in question can be found both among representatives of the nobility and the officials. However, one could reasonably believe that this differentiation of worlds also differentiates the attitudes of antiheroes. Those from the nobility are often good-natured and naive idealists, while the clerks are frustrated and full of resentment.

Undoubtedly, the most important example of this type of antihero in the Russian nobility is Oblomov, the protagonist of Ivan Goncharov's novel of the same title. The entire novel is full of all kinds of antiheroes. Ilya Oblomov, a nobleman of extraordinary intelligence and talents, is particularly passive and stagnant in life, he is incapable of action, a weak, superfluous man. At the same time, however, he is naive and big-hearted. It should be emphasized that Goncharov's hero is also a character manifesting an important philosophical attitude, and the work takes on the characteristics of a morality play. Here Oblomov, visited in his room by his friends, seems to be in the position of a person put to the test. The first of his guests, Volkov, tries to persuade the protagonist to participate in the world of fun and entertainment. Oblomov refuses. Another friend, Sudbinsky, explains to Ilya the benefits of office work and career. Oblomov also rejects this possibility, seeing work as the source of enslavement. Finally, Petkin, who praises the social value of writing, is also rejected by Oblomov. However, the central, axiologically and ethically significant opposition in the novel is the confrontation between friends: the title character and Stoltz, a German by origin. Stoltz embodies the spirit of Western activity and entrepreneurship. The friendship between the German and the Russian is significant here and proves mutual fascination, but also a radically different way of looking at the world. One can claim that it is a certain prototype of Russian-German relations, a friendship full of tensions.

Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky from *Demons*, Prince Myshkin from *The Idiot* (Dostoyevsky), and Grushnitsky from *A Hero of Our Times* (Lermontov) have similar 'Oblomov-like' features. In the context of the antiheroic world of the nobility, it is worth paying attention, at least briefly, to another type of antiheroes who appear only episodically: servants and butlers. Most often portrayed in a grotesque manner, they are antiheroes because, to a greater or lesser extent, they question the sense of the tasks entrusted to them and rebel against them, thus undermining the social order to which they belong (an example may be Oblomov's servant Zakhar, or a butler mentioned by Gogol in *The Diary of a Madman*, who hits his master in the face).

'Losers' from the world of the officials look completely different. These are (anti)heroes who react to the humility, routine and passivity imposed on them by the bureaucratic system with frustration and resentment, hostility towards the surrounding world. Suffering and anger, disappointment, paradoxical formalism and disagreement with the world as it is, are the domain of the most often comically presented characters in Anton Chekhov's works – Belikov from *The Man in the Case* or Chervyakov from *The Death of a Government Clerk*. Nasty officials-losers appear often in the works of Nikolai Gogol, whose satire on the clerical status, mixed with sadness, reached the highest level (*The Government Inspector*, *The Overcoat*, *The Diary of a Madman*, *The Nose*). A clerk is also an inseparable character from Dostoyevsky's prose. His particular incarnation appears in the novel *Notes from Underground* (1864), which is the most important one in the context of the discussed antihero character. The (anti)hero of this work introduces himself to the reader at first as a former clerk who found satisfaction in being unpleasant towards others. Seen from this narrow perspective, he would be just another case of the antihero-official. However, this is a character that definitely goes beyond such frameworks, and it is not without reason that so much space has been devoted to him not only in the history of literature, but also in philosophy. It is enough to recall the fact that that Dostoyevsky's novel was considered one of the most representative examples of European existentialism, and its hero – a prototypical existentialist; this figure was also repeatedly referred to the

nihilistic movement in Russia, emerging in the 1840s and formed in the 1850s (during the reign of Alexander II). The case of the hero of *Notes from Underground* is an excellent example of rebellion against the Western model of the world, embodied by theoretical thinking and the cult of social activity. Dostoyevsky's hero contrasts them with an attitude that advocates what he calls 'living life.' The phrase itself appeared in Russia as a translation from German of *Ein Lebendiges Leben* and was used in the language of the Russian intelligentsia even before the 1830s. Dostoyevsky himself uses this formula in an apophatic manner in *Notes from Underground*, *The Adolescent* and *A Writer's Diary*. However, what is interesting in the context of the present paper is the appearance of this term in the first of the above-mentioned novels, in which for the first time in the history of literature (it is never enough to repeat it) the concept of antihero appeared. Moreover, both concepts, 'living life' and antihero, are inextricably linked by Dostoyevsky. The first-person (anti)hero of the work justifies his hatred of the world, among other things, by the fact that no one actually knows what this 'living life' is anymore and that he is the only one who has really managed to get close to it. *Notes from Underground*, using negative terms, answer the question of what it actually is: firstly, it opposes 'book' life; secondly, it opposes all artificially derived dead theories; thirdly, 'living life' opposes the 'mathematization of the world,' calculations, rationalization, in short, it opposes instrumental reason; fourthly, it is against all types of activists and, to put it another way, against the fetishization of action and turning it into an object of cult; finally, fifthly, 'living life' questions the order of established social norms (organized in a bourgeois manner) and argues against any standardization and uniformity of life. However, the protagonist himself says that he only manages to get close to 'living life,' not participate in it. This is because the progenitor of modern antiheroes himself lives *podpol'yu* – under the floor, he leads the life of an underground man, separated from 'living life.' Dostoyevsky does not answer the question about what actually animates this 'living life' in *Notes from Underground*. Nevertheless, his work clearly shows that the guarantee of 'living life' is the living God (not the God of philosophers!) and *pochva* – the soil. In the dark creation of his antihero, Dostoyevsky

created a vision of human existence searching for the truth about oneself and authenticity, understood as unconditioned life. What is very interesting, he posed the problem of authenticity ('living life') differently and more broadly than the philosophers of existence, who emphasized in authenticity primarily the distinguishing feature of what is individualistic and what belongs to the individual. It seems that for Dostoyevsky 'living life' has many meanings and it is difficult to find a clear and unambiguous explanation for it. Is it a state of consciousness? Or maybe an equivalent of the state of nature (as in Jean-Jacques Rousseau)? Or does it determine the nature of existence? Is it the highest dimension of existence? Does it belong to being, or is it rather what encompasses it? Isn't it what one participates in oneself, or what one can participate in? Perhaps all of these questions should be answered affirmatively. Certainly, Dostoyevsky's concept is interesting and special because it combines two dimensions: radically individualistic and radically religious. Hence, it is possible to answer the question why the antihero of *Notes from Underground* did not get to know 'living life,' but only approached it: he did not manage to leave the underground, he locked himself under the floor in the basement of radical individualism, which he considered to be hell. Aware of this and aware of his guilt, he approaches 'living life,' the meaning of which he only senses.

It can be said that the antihero of *Notes from Underground* is an extremely complex character, **a dark antihero** with demonic features, a repulsive and cynical character whose core personality trait is resentment – vengeful hostility towards the surrounding world and meanness, revealed in the scene of deception and humiliation of the woman who loves him who sees salvation in him. It seems that none of Dostoyevsky's dark antiheroes (and one could mention many, e.g. Stavrogin from *Demons*, Svidrigailov or Raskolnikov from *Crime and Punishment*) can equal him. Partly, as it is known, this is because the tsarist censorship did not allow Dostoyevsky to publish the last part of the work, in which the hero experiences conversion. The result is a novel that initially appears to be a manifesto of nihilism. Nothing could be further from the truth. Rather, the writer tries to show what can happen to a person detached from the soil. Dostoyevsky's novels cannot be understood without reference to

the Russian *Pochvennichestvo* (почвенничество), however, this is an issue that requires independent discussion. Let us return to the antihero. He is not simply a clearly negative hero. He can be, especially in the first part, a trickster, arguing with a world from which all values have been eliminated, the world of the West and its atheistic socialism and instrumental reason. The hero in a special way questions both the entire European philosophical tradition, focused on a rationalistic view of the world, and the literary tradition associated with the dominant type of literary figure. In the last paragraphs of the work, the hero of the novel wants to counter the threats coming from the West with the idea of 'living life.'

Is antihero a man from Russia? This question cannot be answered clearly, i.e. unambiguously. After all, antihero is a character present in literature, film, and modern European culture, whose tradition is rich and diverse. However, it is certainly justified to say that the Russian tradition is of fundamental importance here, especially when it comes to the modern world. The Russian antihero cannot be reduced to a literary construct, but is a proposal of a 'different' modernity and a different philosophical proposition compared to the West, a different type of understanding of the world and a different sensitivity.

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