For Dostoevsky, the watch and spy upon the occult depths of our souls, needs no daylight. On purpose he veils his poetic creations in half-darkness; so that, like the ancient Furies, he may steal by night upon the culprit... – Vyacheslav Ivanov

Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevskii was much more than a novelist on the St. Petersberg cultural scene. Crafting complicated rhetorical solutions to some of the most gripping debates of his day, Dostoevskii and his ideas interacted with a plethora of other prominent actors in the imperial capital in an effort to promulgate a vision of the state of Russian culture in the age of the Great Reforms. In this paper, I explore Dostoevskii’s reactions to spiritualism in Russia and, by contrasting his views with those of another opponent of spiritualism, chemist Dmitri Ivanovich Mendeleev (1834–1907), propose a contextual reading of both the author and one of his most intriguing literary creations. In particular, I shall focus on three sections of his voluminous Dnevnik pisatel’ya (Writer’s diary), a text written and published from 1873 to 1881. In length alone, the Diary competes with Pestreplenie i nakazanie (Crime and punishment) and Brat’ia Karamazovy (The Brothers Karamazov) combined, and it was created over a longer period of time than any of his other works. Yet, while it encapsulates so much of Dostoevskii’s time and thought, it has often been overlooked. Some of this neglect can be ascribed to its unusual publication history. The idea for the Diary was to publish a monthly periodical that included fiction, journalism, autobiography, literary criticism, political commentary, and philosophy, with both author and contemporary readers uncertain about which topics might be discussed in the future, presenting interesting problems of genre.1 Although Dostoevskii conceived of the idea for his


2. There were good financial reasons for initiating it in this format. As Dostoevskii’s wife recalled, he obtained a steady salary from Grazhdanin as its editor and was paid in addition for any entries of the Diary that he published, thus turning the Diary into a money-making venture while drumming up interest for its realization as a self-standing monthly.


5. There is still no complete biography of Mendeleev in any language. The best remains Nikolai A. Figurovskii, Dmitri Ivanovich Mendeleev, 1834–1907 (Moscow, 1961).

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phenomena of table-turning, spirit-rapping, levitation, automatic writing, spirit materialization, and so on. The Russian adaptation of western spiritualism drew much attention at the time, even earning note from so lofty a critic as Friedrich Engels, who cited Russian intellectuals’ attempts to extirpate it as a healthy exemplar for English spiritualists. As a way for Russians of all classes to deal with political, social, and economic dislocation after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, spiritualism gained a substantial following in opposition to the established tradition of Russian Orthodoxy. Dostoevsky’s and Mendeleev’s intertwining arguments against spiritualism and each other have (with one exception) received only superficial attention in the literature on Russian spiritualism. It is important to stress that at no point did Dostoevsky and Mendeleev disagree about the status of spiritualist phenomena: both considered them to be fraudulent or hallucinations. Instead of concentrating on what happened in the séances, I emphasize both authors’ attempts to persuade readers of their own interpretations of the events. My argument is that each carefully crafted a polemical rhetoric to persuade Russian readers to reject spiritualism, while feeling that the other’s style would not only be ineffectual but would actually fan the flames. Such a deep disagreement was a consequence of the time scale on which each one thought persuasion had to work. Urgency and a sense of immediate crisis (in Dostoevsky’s case) had deep rhetorical consequences.

5. The Russian term for the movement, spiritanism, is perhaps more felicitously translated “spiritualism,” but I have opted throughout to translate it as “spiritualism.” The Russian term comes from the French spiritanisme, which primarily refers to the doctrines of the school of the French mystic Allan Kardec, who emphasized active spirit involvement in everyday life and reincarnation. The Russian movement, however, was much more heavily influenced by Anglo-American spiritualism, which emphasized psychic energy and physical effects and was more likely to entertain a scientific agnosticism.


9. Throughout I use the word rhetoric to refer to the set of techniques designed an author employs to generate a specific effect within the audience, as explicated by Wayne C. Booth, A Rhetoric of Irony (Chicago, 1974). Booth’s emphasis on the moral pressure rhetoric can exert on an audience is especially important to my argument. There is a surprising paucity of analytical literature on the question of tone in literature, the central question of this essay. A fascinating approach to analysing an author’s “point of view” using the construction of a text is offered in Boris A. Uspenskii, Poetika kompozitsii: Struktura khudozhestvennogo teksta i tipologiya kompozitsionnykh formy (Moscow, 1970), esp. 16–17.

By explicating the rhetorical aspects of Dostoevsky’s spiritualist articles, I hope to help repair an asymmetry generated by the systemic (but very understandable) bias in Dostoevsky scholarship toward analysis of the novels. Along with the bulk of the Diary, the work on spiritualism has been relegated to the category of Dostoevsky’s “journalism,” which is substantially less trodden by the heels of scholarship. In general, a tendency persists to view his novels as the expression of the “artful” and “true” writer, and the Diary as an expression of a knee-jerk reactionary, xenophobe, and anti-Semite. I am not about to deny the offensiveness of many of the polemics in the Diary, but this attitude has obscured important elements of an affirmative worldview defended by Dostoevsky. An analysis of spiritualism and Dostoevsky will not only illuminate our view of him as a writer and journalist but will also develop him as a figure in the history of Russian science, where he has often been overlooked despite his frequently expressed views on the natural sciences and their impact on Russian culture. This neglect is unfortunate, since previous studies that have considered Dostoevsky as an active participant in local cultural debates have greatly enriched our understanding of both his fiction and Russian culture. The more he is treated as a real historical figure in dialogue with real Russian intellectuals, I argue, the more we will in turn understand about his rhetorical strategies.

Spiritualism and Dostoevsky’s Diary

Spiritualism in Russia, as was the case with spiritualism in many other European nations, descended directly from a local American movement of the 1840s, which then spread to England, and finally to the rest of Europe. The history of the American and English spiritualist communities has 10. For one example, see Marina Kostalevskaya, Dostoevsky and Soloviev: The Art of Integral Vision (New Haven, 1997), 137.


been chronicled elsewhere. Less widely discussed has been the emergence of spiritualism within the cultural circles of St. Petersburg society. Although many Russians had encountered spiritualism in trips abroad, the startling ascendancy of spiritualism took place under the guidance of Aleksandr N. Aksakov (1832–1903), cousin to the leading Slavophile thinkers. Aksakov first became interested in spiritualism by reading the works of Emanuel Swedenborg and Andrew Jackson Davis, whom he translated into Russian (although he was denied permission to publish in the case of the latter). Having become interested in psychical phenomena, he enrolled as a free student in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Moscow in 1855 and studied physiology, physics, chemistry, and anatomy, eventually publishing a translation into Russian of Count Szapary’s work on magnetism and medicine. In 1874 he published the first issue of a Leipzig journal, Psychische Studien, which he edited for many years, and he also composed a magnum opus for spiritualists, Animanism und Spiritualismus. Dostoevski’s encounter with spiritualism was overdetermined. As a self-conscious Peterburger who socialized with the local elite and read the daily periodicals, he was inundated with casual and not-so-casual endorsements and criticisms of séances and the latest British medium. His library contained a variety of domestic and foreign works on spiritualism, including a few by Aksakov. Furthermore, his close associate, former fel-low journalist, and sometime friend/enemy, Nikolai Strakhov, heavily attacked spiritualism. Dostoevski also conducted an extensive correspondence with spiritualist and St. Petersburg University zoologist Nikolai P. Vagner (1829–1907), who doubted as a writer of children’s books under the name “Kitty Cat” (Kot Murlyka). Dostoevski even ran into A. N. Aksakov while taking a cure at Eins. In a letter to his wife, he dubbed Aksakov “the nihilist” for his interest in spiritualism, which he saw as destructive of religion. Dostoevski very much respected Ivan S. Aksakov, the noted Slavophile, but was disappointed by his cousin Aleksandr, dismissively commenting, “There are now lots of Aksakoffs.” Dostoevski quickly swallowed his original distaste, angling for an invitation to a séance at Aksakov’s in a letter to Vagner: “What is happening at Aksakov’s? Will there really be séances? I’m ready to ask him myself (when everyone in my family is well, of course) whether he won’t admit me to at least one séance of his.” Although Dostoevski clearly wanted to attend a séance, he was quite firm in stating that “I absolutely cannot, after all, feel indifferent about spiritualism.” After some more inquiries about the arrival of Madame Claire, a British medium destined for ignominy before Mendeleev’s commission, Dostoevski was finally invited to a séance on 15 August 1876.

Dostoevski in Relation to Balzac, Dickens, and Gogol (1966; reprint, Evanston, 1998), 225; and Robin Reiter Miller, “Dostoevski’s ‘The Dream of a Ridiculous Man’ and the Ge-neric Envelope,” in Elizabeth Chereh Allen and Gary Saul Morson, eds., Freedom and Re-sponsibility in Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert Louis Jackson (Evanston, 1995), 90. 18. Strakhov also corresponded with Mendeleev and provided a link between Dosto-evski and the chemist during this period. See Linda Gerstein, Nikolai Strakhov (Cambridge, Mass., 1971). 19. Dostoevski to Anna Dostoevskaya, letter 579, 29 May (10 June) 1875, Ems, F. M. Dostoevski, Pisma sovremennikam v vremeni 1849–1925 (Leningrad, 1972–1996; hereafter PSS), 29(ii):52; translation from Fyodor Dostoevsky, Complete Letters, Volume 4, 1872–1877, ed. and trans. David A. Lowe (Ann Arbor, 1991; hereafter CL4), 222. There is sporadic correspondence with Vagner from 4 December 1875 (letter 597) to 26 January 1877 (letter 666). As a sign of friendship, Dostoevski announced Suët, a semi-spiritualist journal edited by Vagner, in his Diary: the announcement caused some bad press and is the topic of the last letter between the two. 20. Dostoevski to Nikolai Vagner, 21 December 1875, Petersburg (letter 609), PSS, 29(ii):68; translation from CL4, 265. V. Prishlykova, the wife of the future editor of the Russian spiritualist journal Rebus, recalled that Dostoevski had a “negative attitude” toward spiritualism, although “he criticized those people who simply mocked and laughed at spiritualism in public.” V. Prishlykova, “Vospominaniiia o Dostoevskom,” Rebus, 1885, no. 25–26: 290–291, 246–247. Prishlykova saw Dostoevski as an unconscious spiritualist, who did not want to admit the reality of the effects before him. A penetrating contemporary criticism of her account pointed out that even had Dostoevski wanted to believe, his metaphysical objections would have prevented it. A. German, “Po povodu stat’i ‘Vospominaniiia o Dostoevskom,”’ Rebus, 1885, no. 25–26: 343–345. 21. On Claire, see Dostoevski to Vagner, 2 January 1876, Petersburg, (letter 602), PSS, 29(ii):70; CL4, 267. Also present at the séance was literary figure N. S. Leskov. His public remarks at the séance were disingenuous, although he remarked on Dostoevski’s skepticism, N. Leskov, “Prikhoz v redaktsii ‘Meduizhihiiskiaschek s 15-go fevralia,”’ Grazhdanin, 19 February 1876, no. 9: 254–256. Although Leskov claimed he was not a spiritualist, Dostoevski had been in contact with him for some years on this topic, and Aksakov was impressed by much in Leskov’s poetry that touched “on one of the basic dogmas of contemporary spiritualism”’ Aksakov to Leskov, 12 June 1872, Pushkin’skii dom, d. 612, c. 232. L. 1–20.
Long before that sçance, however, Dostoevskii penned his first article on spiritualism in the debut issue of the self-standing Writer's Diary, published in January 1876. In this piece, "Spiritualism. Something about Devils. The Extraordinary Cleverness of Devils, If Only These Are Devils," Dostoevskii engages with a "very amusing and, most important, fashionable topic," the rage of spiritualism. With characteristic humor, he relates a story he heard about a man who sat in a chair while spirits hurled it about the room, and this is in St. Petersburg, the capital! Spirits haunting houses, Nikolai Gogol writing from the netherworld, and mass enthusiasm seem to be interfering with people "working and meekly earning their ranks." Dostoevskii sets himself to resolve whether there really are any spirits or "devils." He is aware of the scholarly commission established in St. Petersburg to investigate spiritualism, but he feels that it will necessarily turn up no results, since "in order to investigate the question of whether these are devils at work at least one member of the committee must be able and have the opportunity to admit the existence of devils, even as a hypothesis. But it is hardly likely that even one member of the committee can be found who believes in devils. . . . And therefore on this question the committee is incompetent."

Dostoevskii's subsequent attempt to admit their existence as a hypothesis is delightfully ironic and playful. First, he criticizes those who claimed that devils did not exist because such devils made grammatical mistakes when they talked to spiritualists (through automatic writing or table-rapping, presumably) and had not yet revealed one astonishing or miraculous fact. On the contrary, Dostoevskii argues that a demonstration by the devils of their cleverness would be stupid. Suppose they did invent something on the same order of importance as the telegraph and communicated it to the world. While at first they would achieve a wide following, eventually people would become bored with the devils as they integrated the miracle into their everyday lives. And once bored, there would be no way to win them back. So the worst thing the devils could do would be to show their powers. But if they were to make mistakes and plod along ungrammatically, the curious would be drawn to them while the rationalists would scoff and do nothing. And all this would establish the "fundamental principle of [the devils'] kingdom"—discord: "Now please observe how the devils introduce discord among us and, so to say, from the very first step began spiritualism with discord." When scientists eventually mobilize against spiritualism, they will belittle the devils' idiocy and the idiocy of their followers, the latter of whom will retrench and thus foment true discord. Thus, if devils did exist, Dostoevskii surmises, they are performing their job admirably!

22. All quotations from the Diary are from the recent translation by Kenneth Lantz, modified occasionally for style in accordance with PSS. Fyodor Dostoevskii, A Writer's Diary, volume 1, 1873–1876, and volume 2, 1877–1881, trans. Kenneth Lantz ( Evanston, 1994; hereafter Lantz edition).
23. Ibid., 333; PSS, 22: 32-33.

The essence of this argument is to show that Mendeleev's commission would fail to eradicate spiritualism. What is even more provocative, the devils implicitly want the commission to produce a null result, because that would enable them to spread even more discord. First, the commission's stance against spiritualism would generate fervent adherence to the tenets of the dogma out of pride. Second, the devils would then act to subvert the commission from within, after it had already spoken against their existence:

Now imagine if such a thing happened here. No sooner would the learned commission, its work finished and the wretched fraud exposed, turn its back than the devils would seize one of its most obdurate members—even, say, Mr. Mendeleev himself, who has exposed spiritualism in his public lectures—and catch him up at once in their nets, just as they caught Crookes and Olcott in their time. They would take him aside and lift him into the air for five minutes, materialize before him various dead people he had known, and do it all in such a manner that he could no longer have any doubts. And what would happen then, tell me? As a true scientist he would have to accept actual fact—he, who has been giving lectures! What a picture, what a shame, what an uproar, what shouts and cries of indignation? The commission would be discredited. So if devils did exist (which they do not), they would be acting like they do not (so they do). Dostoevskii repeatedly assures us that this is "only a joke" and that he has "most definitely been joking and having fun from the first word to the last" but he does see a real quandary here:

If we regard spiritualism as something that bears within it some sort of new religion (and almost all, even the most sober-minded among the spiritualists, are inclined to share even a little of that view), then something of what I have said above might be taken seriously. And therefore, may God grant speedy success to the free study of the question from both sides. . . . But to shout at one another, to heap scorn on one another and ostracize one another for spiritualism, means, in my view, only to strengthen and disseminate the idea of spiritualism in its worst sense.

The aspect of spiritualism that Dostoevskii finds most disturbing is its "mysticism," an accusation that has often been leveled at the author himself. Dostoevskii's understanding of the mystical, however, involves the belief in an unmediated religious communion with the divine; from the perspective of Dostoevskii's Orthodoxy, this form of religious belief wavers between the twin sins of idolatry (in this case, of the medium) and putting oneself in the place of Christ. This attack on mysticism forms the back-

focused attack on the commission, an attack centered on issues of tone and literary form. It appears that the attacks on the spiritualists have faded in favor of attacks on the antischismatics, but this would be a misreading. Rather, his attacks on the spiritualists have moved to a non-"mathematical" mode of persuasion.

Just as the March 1876 article had moved from January's evenhanded criticism of both sides to a focus on the commission, the April 1876 article, "Just a Bit More about Spiritualism," is even more narrowly directed at Mendeleev. Some intriguing parallels and antiparallels in the biographies of Dostoevskii and Mendeleev are relevant to a historical understanding of this dispute. Dostoevskii hailed from Moscow, and Mendeleev was born in Tobolsk, Siberia; both interpreted their presence in Petersburg as representatives of "real" Russia in the westernized capital. Furthermore, both returned to Petersburg in the early 1860s after a long hiatus; Dostoevskii from penal servitude and internal exile in Siberia, and Mendeleev from several years of study in Heidelberg, Germany. Dostoevskii returned from the east, Mendeleev from the west, and the clash between the two was read by both in symbolic overtones that reflected the central tensions in the Russia of the Great Reforms. The debate outlined here, then, was seen by both participants (and by their readers) as about more than raps on a table and the tone of a report: it was about the appropriate direction for Russia.

According to Dostoevskii, Mendeleev had provided a clear example of how not to conduct a battle against "isolation." Dostoevskii claims to have found the essence of spiritualism, and even though he was counseled by an unnamed friend (Konstantin Pobedonoscev, Procurator of the Holy Synod) not to write it, he felt it was too important to leave to Mendeleev and his public lectures. It was not that Dostoevskii thought he could reason against spiritualism better than Mendeleev; quite the contrary:

Besides, I am convinced that no article of mine could work either to support or destroy spiritualism. Mr. Mendeleev, who is delivering his lectures in Solianoi Gorodok at the very moment that I am writing these lines, probably looks at the matter differently and is lecturing with the noble intent of "crushing spiritualism." It's always pleasant to listen to lectures with such admirable tendencies; yet I think that whoever wants to put his faith in spiritualism will not be stopped by lectures or even by entire commissions, while those who do not believe, at least if they truly do not want to believe, will not be swayed by anything. That is precisely the con-

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30. Lantz edition, 422; PSS, 22:100-101. Pribytkova recalls that, in her presence, Dostoevskii attacked spiritualism as "mysticism." Pribytnik, "Vospominanija o Dostoe-

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Dostoevskii’s Rhetoric of Resonances

The key to unlocking Dostoevskii’s positive efforts to discredit spiritualism is his decision to embed the three articles in the complicated text of the Diary, a text that has often eluded interpretation as a whole because of its wonderful artistry. The Diary contains, along with journalistic articles, a series of powerful fictional pieces that are some of Dostoevskii’s most touching creations (“Bobok” [Bobok], “Krotkaya” [The meek one], “Malchik u Khrista na elke” [The boy at Christ’s Christmas party], “Son shmehsnogo cheloveka” [The dream of a ridiculous man], some of which we shall return to shortly). A common approach to the Diary, especially by those interested in Dostoevskii’s fiction, has been to ignore the corpus and treat the stories individually, amputated from their immediate context. The opposite extreme has been to hack out elements of Dostoevskii’s life story or “clues” to novelistic interpretation from the semiautobiographical segments of the Diary, an approach that often obscures those texts’ original function in the Diary as a whole.

The Diary performs several interrelated artistic tasks and it coheres (albeit somewhat unstably) by tracing a set of themes through what would otherwise resemble a random collection of writings from all genres. These

36. Lantz edition, 462, 464; PSS, 22: 130, 132. Some clerics endorsed spiritualism as a way to bring individuals back to the church. Dostoevskii disagreed vehemently. “I have been told, among other things, that some of our clergy have rejected in aspects of spiritualism—it allegedly inspires faith, for the appearance of ghosts at least comprises a protest against the universal materialism. What reasoning? No, pure atheism would be better than spiritualism!” Pushkinskii dom, 1, 100, No. 29479, SSKsb 12, as quoted in Volgin and Rabinson, “Dostoevsky and Mendeleev,” 189–90.


38. For an attempt to use the Diary for biography, see Frank, Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt. 70. Malcolm Jones has correctly noted the dangers of attempts to use the Diary to “unlock” the novels. See Jones, Dostoevsky after Bakhint: Readings in Dostoevsky’s Fantastic Realism (Cambridge, Eng., 1990), xvi.
"themes" are broad intellectual and emotional issues that provide a common substrate to the diverse manifest content of the various fictional works, articles, and essays in the Diary. This content is in turn broadly organized into several repeating subjects, which I shall refer to as "topics." A broad variety of these themes and topics link tangentially to spiritualism. The first and most striking topic is the Eastern Question—the fate of Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman-controlled Balkans and the role of Russia as messianic protector—"a question that Dostoevskii called in his correspondence "the struggle with the whole idea of the West, that is, with socialism." The jingoistic and xenophobic (not to mention anti-Semitic) overtones of Dostoevskii's discussion of the Eastern Question are largely responsible for readers' neglect of the Diary. Dostoevskii links spiritualism, a movement that originated in the United States and came to Russia primarily from English sources, to both proletarian movements and western imports. Spiritualism thus belongs to the Eastern Question, but it also links to the second major topic: false religions and conversions from Orthodoxy. The third major topic is the epidemic of recent suicides, which Dostoevskii also attributes to atheism and loss of faith. The final two topics, which do not relate to spiritualism, are the problems of the newly introduced legal system, including trial-by-jury and decretal attorneys, and the plight of children.

The themes of the Diary are fewer and more internally connected. The dominant theme, although least relevant for Dostoevskii's argument against spiritualism, is Russia's connection to its people (narod), and how that bond justifies Russia's millenarian role as savior of both west and east. Most members of the Russian intelligentsia found this extreme view alienating, and it is the source, so David Goldstein persuasively argues, of Dostoevskii's attack on Judaism as a competing millenarian movement. The second and third major themes (both interconnected with the first) are also mutually intertwined, resonate throughout the spiritualism articles, and link his antispiritualism/anti-Mendeleev position to the Diary as a whole. The second theme is that intellectuals tend to oversimplify the "messy" complexity of modern life, channeling the world into simplistic and dangerous schemes (like socialism). The commission and the spiritualists are both guilty of such oversimplification, the former by misunderstanding the motivations of the spiritualists, the latter by distorting true religion through mystical oversimplifications. The final major theme is that without a belief in the immortality of the soul, there is no guiding principle for civilization, morality, or life itself—the central idea behind The Brothers Karamazov, which draws so much from the Diary. Science alone, without faith, Dostoevskii contended, could not solve Russia's urgent crisis.

Dostoevskii insisted that the Diary did have a defined form that performed an artistic function. As he remarked to his physician Stepan Ianovskii as he was about to suspend the Diary in late 1877: "The Diary acquired such a shape all by itself that it is impossible to alter its form even the least bit." My understanding of this "form" is closely related to Robert Belknap's insightful reading of the Grand Inquisitor story from Karamazov. In this story, Jesus returns to Seville and converses with the Grand Inquisitor, who tells Jesus that his pure faith is no longer necessary, since the church rationally and paternalistically cares for the people, who would only be lost without miracles, bread, and complete bondage. Dostoevskii, and many of his readers since, considered the Inquisitor's argument a compelling and logical case against Christianity. As Belknap argues, following Dostoevskii, much of Karamazov is meant to serve as a "refutation" of the Grand Inquisitor's position, a refutation that many readers do not see. This is not accidental; Dostoevskii never intended to engage with the Inquisitor on rational grounds, since he considered the Inquisitor's view unassailable from that perspective, and attempts to refute it logically would only trap one in the discourse of rationality and lead one to reject Christianity. Instead of confronting this argument directly, Dostoevskii sets up repelling resonances between the Inquisitor's argument, the Inquisitor, his herald Ivan Karamazov, and other negative characters in the book. By using rhetorical, and not rational, techniques, Dostoevskii "refutes" the Inquisitor's argument on an emotional level, on the level of faith.


40. Dostoevskii to Mikhail Pogodin, 20 February 1873 (letter 471), PS 29 (1):265-64; translation from CLA.63, emphasis in the original.

41. Dostoevskii's focus on the low-class aspects of spiritualism can be contrasted with Lev Tolstoi's approach in Anna Karenina and Pilya Pravovedenii (The fruits of enlightenment), where spiritualism is seen as a disease of effete elites. I would like to thank William Todd for emphasizing this point.

The spiritualism articles are part of the same strategy of a rhetoric of resonances, which Dostoevskii honed throughout the Diary. At the very least, Dostoevskii worked out the elements of the Grand Inquisitor’s argument through the pages of the Diary, even, some have argued, drawing it directly from the spiritualism pieces. Here we see dialogic devices working in Dostoevskii’s journalism when arguing against real positions taken by his contemporaries. Dostoevskii portrays their ideas clearly and then uses structural resonances to undercut their position on a suprarational, emotional level. How does this resonant strategy work in the Diary with respect to spiritualism? There are a few outstanding examples. First, the story “Bobok” from the 1873 Diary, narrated by a boorish clerk with journalistic aspirations, tells the story of a visit to a grave yard where the narrator eavesdrops on the boring, uncultured, and mundane conversations of the recently deceased. Hailed by Mikhail Bakhtin as the centerpiece of menippean satire in Dostoevskii, “Bobok” is also in part a remarkable parody of spiritualism: a mediator listens to the other world and finds nothing extraordinary, just as Dostoevskii’s “devils” deliberately proclaim irrelevances in the January Diary. The bitter narrator’s unconscious self-satirization clearly beckons the reader to dismiss such beliefs. Similarly, in the controversial utopian (or anti-utopian?) story “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man,” the bewildered narrator is taken to an alternate world where he meets Edenic children of paradise who lead a carefree existence. The ridiculous man soon corrupts these children and then returns to earth to preach the need to strive for divine paradise, even though it will inevitably be corrupted. This story has been subjected to much analysis, but here I only wish to note that the children of the utopia commune with their dead, an ability they lose when they “fall” into our earthly corruption. The ambivalence with which these “utopians” are treated also

Inquisitor. See Kraeger and Barnhart, Dostoevskii on Evil and Atonement. The Ontology of Personality in His Major Fiction (Leuweston, Mem, 1992). 47. A specific example from the Grand Inquisitor’s monologue reads, ‘But did you not know that as soon as man rejects miracles then he simultaneously rejects God, because man is not looking for God so much as for miracles. And since man is hopeless without miracles, he will create new miracles for himself, will turn to sorcery and witchcraft, even though otherwise he may be a heretic, and an atheist.’ PSS: 14:253. The strong case for the spiritualism articles being the basis for the Inquisitor’s claim is made in Tumanov, “Pubsisihri Dostoevskogo,” 199; D. V. Grishin, Dostoevski – Chudey. pijatise” tamily: Dostoevskii 1 semy “Dniznik Pipatides” (Melbourne, 1978), 109, 241; and Vasily Rozanov, Dostoievksi and the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor, trans. Spencer E. Roberts (Ithaca, 1972), 50. Robert Belknap notes that the scientific “materialism” attacked in The Brothers Karamazov was in part drawn from Dostoevskii’s view of Mendeleev, but he does not clarify what kind of materialism Mendeleev stood for or the link to the Grand Inquisitor. Robert L. Belknap, The Genesis of The Brothers Karamazov: The Aesthetics, Ideology, and Psychology of Text Making (Evanston, 1990), 34 and 149. 48. Mikhail Bakhtin, in his immensely influential interpretation of Dostoevskii, specifically excludes the Diary from any polyphony, except for the fictional insertions. Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevskii’s Prose, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, 1984), 91, 95, 166. For a dialogical reading of the journalism, see Charles A. Moser, “Dostoevsky and the Aesthetics of Journalism,” Dostoevsky Studies 5 (1982): 27–41, and the work of Gary Saul Morson.

resonates with spirit communication and mysticism. Dostoevskii’s resonances may not seem powerful here, but that is precisely because they were never meant to function when rationally articulated or viewed out of context. A more obvious resonance is the implicit comparison of Mendeleev’s commission to the insincere rationalizations of scientizing lawyers, a refrain that runs throughout the text. A host of other resonances can be found: spiritualism as a disease of the western proletariat; blind adherence to science as the cause of atheism and socialism from Vissarion Belinski to the 1870s; and the impossibility of “proving” issues of faith as the only barrier to suicide and immorality.

Dostoevskii had carefully considered the proper form and structure for his Diary; he did not develop the resonant method of persuasion lightly. He had, for instance, mocked spiritualism in his two preceding novels. In Besy (The demons), spiritualism makes its first appearance in Dostoevskii’s literary creations. Shatrov, the former idealist, cuckold, and victim of the novel’s murderous revolutionaries — a figure who consistently represents misguided enthusiasm in intellectual thought — tells the narrator that he and the suicidal atheist Kirillov had encountered spiritualism on a trip to America and loved it just as they loved “lynching, revolvers, vagrancy.” Both the association with America and the character of the travelers are meant to repel the reader from spiritualism. Even more explicitly, A Raw Youth, written in between the first two waves of the Diary, concludes with the befuddled old Prince Nikolai Sifol’skii going into raptures to the narrator about the wondrous stories he has heard of spiritualism. With this tale, spiritualism moves from being dangerous to appearing plain ridiculous, for much of this novel’s plot centers on the prince’s inability to comprehend life’s realities.

Part of the innovation of the Diary, I argue, was to take this type of resonance from the realm of the fictional and inject it into the journalistic and polemical. As he wrote to Khristina Alchevskaya on 9 April 1876, already months into the publication of the self-standing Diary: “Would you believe, for instance, that I still haven’t managed to work out for myself the form of The Diary, and I don’t even know whether I’ll ever get it right.” He was certain, however, that he could not just bluntly state his conclusions. As he wrote in a revealing letter to his close friend Vsevolod Solov’ev:

One bright correspondent from the provinces even reproached me for starting up conversations about lots of things in The Diary, touching on lots of things, but never yet having taken them to their conclusion, and encouraged me not to be timid. And so I up and stated the last word of
Mendelev's text, "Materiały dla suzdalenia o spiriizme" (Materials for a judgment of spiritualism), emerged out of the complicated workings of his commission, whose course it documents. The commission was born on 6 May 1875, when Mendelev proposed to the Russian Physical Society that they form a commission to investigate "mediumistic phenomena." The ostensible goal at the beginning of this investigation, as stated in these Materials, was to remove the cloak of mystery from spiritualism. Both spiritualists and antischismatics agreed that it was crucial to fight off mysticism in society, and this agreement was central to the idea behind the commission from the very start. At the first meeting of the commission on 7 May 1875, Mendelev insisted on inviting spiritualists A. M. Butlerov, N. P. Vagner, and A. N. Aksakov to join the commission. The idea was that they (in practice Aksakov) could recruit mediums and teach the members of the commission's nonspiritualists what to look for. Mendelev was taking a gamble: if the commission conducted a fair deliberation and came out endorsing spiritualism, his plan would backfire in a big way. Mendelev took pains to ensure that this did not occur.

On 9 May, the first session attended by the spiritualist members, the commission decided to bring spiritualist mediums from abroad and experiment with them under controlled séance conditions. Forty sâances in all were to be held from September 1875 to May 1876. Mendelev attended a series of private séances throughout the late spring, but the first true commission séance was set for 27 October, when Aksakov made plans for the Petty brothers from Newcastle to come to St. Petersburg. It was decided that they would conduct two sessions a week at Mendelev's apartment. Six meetings later, on 20 November, Mendelev violated the agreed-upon experimental conditions and lit a match in the middle of a séance, catching the Pettey's committing fraud. On 15 December Mendelev gave his first public lecture, the proceeds from which were sent to help Christian Slavs persecuted by Ottomans. In January the commission met four times with Madame Claire as the medium. On 13 April, having completed only a fraction of the sâances proposed, the commission published its conclusion in the newspaper Golos: "Spiritualist phenomena occur from unconscious movements or conscious deception, and spiritualist teachings are superstition." A month later, Mendelev published the Materials.

57. For an account of these sâances by both the pro-Mendelev and pro-spiritualist sides, respectively, see Aleksandr A. Makarenia and Anatoli I. Nutritkin, Mendelev v Peterburge (Leningrad, 1982), 150; and Britten, Nineteenth Century Miracles, 355. Britten takes a firm view of Mendelev, accusing him of having "passed judgment before they met at the first séance."
58. For an amusing account of Mendelev's openly rude behavior at this particular séance, see that given by his daughter in Alekandr A. Makarenia and Irina N. Filimonova, eds., D. I. Mendelev v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov (Moscow, 1969), 175.
59. Dmitri Mendelev, ed., Materialy dlia suzdalenia o spiriizme (St. Petersburg, 1876), 69.
The text of the Materials covers almost 400 pages, and there is no space here for the detailed analysis the text deserves. Instead, I shall confine my comments to its structure alone, which has been little noticed even by Mendeleev scholars. The book declares on its title page that all proceeds were earmarked for the construction of a meteorological aero-stat, which would measure the temperature of layers of atmospheric air in a proposed balloon expedition. Why such a declaration? The point is driven home in the book's foreword: "However far apart these two subjects, spiritualism and meteorology, appear, there exists between them a certain connection, a remote truth. 'Spiritualist teachings are superstition,' thus concluded the commission that examined mediumistic phenomena, and meteorology has also battled and will still battle with the superstitions that dominate with respect to the weather. In this battle, as in any other, material means are needed. Thus let one superstition help against another however it can." Mendeleev not only wanted to use the debunking of one superstition to end another, he also wanted to boost science's status by juxtaposing a pseudo-science (spiritualism) with a real science (meteorology). At precisely this moment, meteorology was undergoing a public transformation from a changeable and erratic collection of sailors' catchphrases and astrological predictions to a science battling for respectability. Mendeleev played on one of these themes.

The approach the Materials employs a similar rhetoric of juxtapositions. Mendeleev reproduced the minutes of every meeting of the commission, including any relevant correspondence as appendices. The early meetings were purely organizational, yet all the participants are named, and each proposal is cataloged in neutral language. The reader realizes that Mendeleev was never the chair of any meeting of the commission, and he was never the scribe who kept the minutes. These minutes continue for over 100 pages and are followed by the itemized appendices, thus providing the "materials for judgment" advertised by the title. But Mendeleev does not give the reader's judgment too long a leash. Mendeleev extensively comments on almost every entry of the minutes through his dutilfully signed footnotes that tell the reader how to interpret individual statements. Although Mendeleev had used footnotes extensively in revising his famous textbook, The Principles of Chemistry (1st ed., 1869–1871), they perform an entirely different role in the Materials. Here he spars with the material was moved into footnotes. Furthermore, as Mendeleev revised the text over the course of his lifetime—there were eight editions by his death in 1907—he heavily annotated the text with footnotes that not only added technical information but also provided updates on crucial chemical developments, such as the discovery of radioactivity or of the noble gases. In the Principles, footnotes were a solution to the problems of revision and also served to divide advanced readers from beginners. In the Materials, however, Mendeleev employed footnotes as necessary companions to the text, and (as there was only one edition) clearly did not serve as a revision device.

60. Part of the reason the Materials have been so undervalued by scholars is that some of the most interesting aspects of book are not included in Mendeleev's more widely available collected works, which include only the foreword and Mendeleev's two public lectures.
61. Mendeleev, Materialy divo nauchenia o spiritezme, frontispiece.
62. Ibid., as Mendeleev makes this connection again at the end of his second lecture.
64. The first edition of the Principles is almost devoid of footnotes, as more technical material was placed in smaller print for advanced students. In later editions, this technical

65. "Mendeleev, Materialy divo naukenia o spiritezme, 1.
66. One could also end up hoisted by one's own petard. Aleksandr Askakov, furious at the way Mendeleev treated his medium during the official séances and upset at the tone of the Materials, republished the minutes of the commission with his own rhetoric of juxtapositions: he put his commentary in the text immediately following each sentence that he felt required exegesis. A. Askakov, Razablachenia: Istoriia mediurnicheskoi Komissii Fiziicheskogo Oslablenia pri S.-Peterburgskom Universitete s prilozheniem vsekh protokolov i protokoln dukanementov (St. Petersburg, 1883). He also published a separate pamphlet excerpting just his attack on the commission's official conclusion: Pomiatniki razabluchenii: Zakharov mediumnicheskoi Komissii Fiziicheskogo Oslablenia pri S.-Peterburgskom Universitete s prinechemeniiam (St. Petersburg, 1885).
the minutes and collecting the various appended articles, as well as editing his own public lectures and giving even them a set of footnotes to explicate their original meanings—including a note targeted at Dostoevski’s Diary.67 Mendeleev’s title was not a joke: one could clearly deploy the materials in the Materials in order to form a “judgment about spiritualism.” But it was equally true that Mendeleev closely guided the reader while that judgment was being formulated. Mendeleev employed both the haughty tone and the positivism that Dostoevski deployed as a straightforward strategy of juxtaposition meant to shock the educated public out of the spiritualist fad.

Spiritualism as a Question of Urgency

It is clear, then, that Mendeleev was trying to convince people, and he developed a rhetorical form that would convey not only the appropriate message against spiritualism, but also the correct method by which one would come to these conclusions. But if this was the case, why did Dostoevski “misread” Mendeleev’s aims so badly? The question is poorly posed. Barring complete cynicism or total naiveté on Dostoevski’s part (neither a plausible characterization), the reader would have to assume that Dostoevski understood and agreed with Mendeleev’s aims—he just differed strongly about the method and tone used. Dostoevski, unlike Mendeleev, did not see spiritualism as a passing craze, but as a serious threat that demanded urgent pacification. Dostoevski’s oblique rhetoric of resonances was not an attempt to duck the issue of correcting spiritualists; it was a head-on confrontation with a fad Dostoevski considered “dangerous” in the extreme. Dostoevski believed Mendeleev’s direct attack to be a dismissal of its seriousness.

Dostoevski was immensely troubled by what he saw as destructive “isolation” in Russian society after the Great Reforms, whether it came in the form of suicide, the abandonment of religion, public cynicism, or spiritualism. These concerns, reflected in the Diary, run throughout all his novels from Poor Folk onward.68 And so when his publics against spiritualism failed to convert people to his millenarian cause or to stop Mendeleev from publishing the Materials, Dostoevski took up his pen again in his last satirical feuilleton, “From the Country Walk of Kuźma Prutkov and His Friend,” originally published in Goschadzha, 10 October 1878, while Dostoevski was on hiatus from the Diary.69 The narrator reports taking a casual stroll on Elagin Island in St. Petersburg, when Triton appeared to the flower of high society in a puddle of water. After convincing everyone of his reality, Triton promptly disintegrated into the puddle and immediately people “began to doubt themselves and not believe, although they had seen it with their own eyes.” Soon Triton’s appearance or nonappearance became a cause célèbre, with a scientific commission formed under Mendeleev’s auspices to show that it could not have happened. “Of course, they did not know what to decide and stood there like lost ones, denying the appearance [of Triton] just to be on the safe side.” Triton’s adherents protested the findings of the commission in vain. No one in this brief satire comes off well, and the connection to spiritualism, even two years after the fact, would be apparent to the informed reader. Dostoevski’s tactics and argument had not changed.

Why did Dostoevski speak out yet again? He was unable, I argue, to let his lack of success the first time dissuade him, since the issue was vital and needed to be resolved as soon as possible. For example, Joseph Frank has noted that when Dostoevski’s criticism of nihilism in Notes from Underground failed to generate the desired effect, he recapitulated similar themes in the much more successful Crime and Punishment.70 Spiritualism, as we have seen, was for Dostoevski a form of “isolation” that trivialized religion through mysticism, and what was needed was more faith in true Orthodoxy. Following Vladimir Solov’ev, Dostoevski perceived his writing as part of a religious mission to provide, through a suitably purified Orthodox Church, the unity sorely lacking in Russian culture.71 Since this was his goal, and since throughout the Diary Dostoevski stressed the immense of the Apocalypse, every soul that was deluded by spiritualism was a soul that was not saved and thus could not set a religious example of true faith to Europe. This was an issue of urgency. For Mendeleev, spiritualists just needed to be confronted; for Dostoevski, they were devils to be exorcised—and soon.

Dostoevski felt he had no choice but to intervene. Mendeleev’s approach was simply inadequate, as Dostoevski indicated in his rough notes to the March article on spiritualism: “Spiritualism. The absurdity of theories and irrefutable facts. Scientific research is the most normal road, but we need different researchers: ours are uneducated [neobrazovanny]. This very Mendeleev, for example,. . . is uneducated. . . These are not Fausts, not Humboldts—scientists with world-class thoughts and worldly generality; these are petty technicians and hacks.”72 For Dostoevski, there was an ironic mismatch of the impelling urgency he felt and the rhetorical cadence he had to use to meet his goal. His endeavors to reconcile feuding political factions—whether while editing Vremia, in his Pushkin speech, or through his Native Soil political philosophy—were part of this effort to convince through free dialogue.73 The most urgent task was

67. This footnote in particular reflects the contrast in approach between the two. Mendeleev claimed that it was possible to be a spiritualist in spirit (go dekhom) like Dostoevski, and to “believe in devils and reject spiritualist facts,” citing Dostoevski’s January Diary as an example. Mendeleev, Materirov dlia naukdenia o spiridizme, 357n. The fact that he missed Dostoevski’s irony is quite characteristic.
70. Frank, Dostoevsky. The Miraculous Years, 69.
71. Kostalesk, Dostoevsky and Solov’ev, 3.
72. PSS, 24:292, emphasis in the original. Dostoevski’s rhetorical strategy demanded that he tone down such inflammatory observations in the published Diary.
73. See Frank, Dostoevsky. The Miraculous Years, 500; Frank, Dostoevsky. The Star of Liberation, 51; and the intellectual history by Wayne Dowler, Dostoevsky, Grigor’ev, and Native Soil Conservatism (Toronto, 1982).
to meet and discuss without urgency, to fulfill Russia's pressing destiny through relaxed conversation—a set of paradoxes worthy of one of Dostoevskii's literary creations. Dostoevskii's philosophy of art, his efforts to persuade by posing questions for the reader to answer rather than answering them directly, were products of the culture of chaos and possibility in which he found himself.74 Mendeleev's stance was not appropriate to the times.

There was even some doubt about Mendeleev's stance altogether. In 1894, Viktor Pritykto and Aksakov claimed that Mendeleev had finally recanted and admitted the existence of mediumistic phenomena. Apparently, Mendeleev approached Pritykto while at a party, brought up spiritualism, and discussed some of the various hoaxes he had seen among professional mediums in America. Despite his mocking tone, Pritykto asked Mendeleev if he now believed in the phenomena, and Mendeleev said: "They exist . . . I saw . . . But they are rare . . . It isn't worth paying attention to them, and not a single serious, busy man would get involved with them." When Pritykto expressed surprise, Mendeleev responded: "What? You don't understand? All this is garbage, nonsense!" Exultantly, Pritykto claimed that this was a recantation, and Aksakov offered evidence of the mediums who must have changed Mendeleev's mind. Maria Carlson has even taken this "admission" as evidence of a change of heart.75 Did Mendeleev actually change his mind? I consider this extremely unlikely. First of all, the beginning of the conversation consisted of Mendeleev pulling Pritykto's leg, a joke of this kind being entirely consistent with Mendeleev's character. Second, Mendeleev would hardly have made such an admission to a spiritualist journalist, given his concerns about using a proper forum. And, finally, in 1904 Mendeleev reaffirmed the commission's conclusions.

This article gave Mendeleev the last word, if only because he lived longer than all his interlocutors, spiritualist or diarist. In 1904, twenty-three years after the novelist's death, Mendeleev published an article in the newspaper Novoe vremia on psychic phenomena. Entitled "Spiritualist Knots," the article relates the story of Iosif Nikolaevich Livchak, a railroad consultant, who had come to Mendeleev's house thirty years earlier and demonstrated his ability to tie knots in a piece of string fastened at both ends to an oaken table. He performed this feat many times, not revealing the secret publicly, at one time tying the knots in front of Mendeleev's guests, including Dostoevskii (the only time, it appears, when the two men

76. The string still survives in Mendeleev's archive.
as well. The concerns of faith, scientific belief, and the proper rhetoric were not resolved by the publications of either critic, just as Dostoevskii forecast in his April 1876 Diary entry. It is to these specific concerns, and not to generalizations about Dostoevskii’s rejection of the “west” or “science,” that we should address historical investigation. Dostoevskii was deeply involved in a culture that was in flux, and he chronicled the tensions between knowledge and belief, Russia and the “west”—the source of both Mendeleev’s doctrine and the spiritualists’—that remain central to any cultural history of late imperial Russia.