



INNER SUFFERING AND CONSTANT STRUGGLES: EXPLORING DOSTOYEVSKY'S *THE ETERNAL HUSBAND* THROUGH PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The Eternal Husband, written by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, is about the mental anguish and suffering that every human being experiences. The author, in this case, focuses on two individuals who share this mental torment: Velchaninov and Pavel Pavlovich. Velchaninov had an affair with Pavlovich's wife, who is now deceased. Pavlovich was aware of the affair with Velchaninov and was deeply in love with his wife, who was his weakness. Pavlovich knows of his wife's affair with Velchaninov, and he feels emotionally crushed, yet he does not speak about it. Velchaninov was also mentally disturbed after encountering Pavlovich and had some guilt and remorse, crawling into his inner self. The Velchaninov's mind was disturbed because of his earlier involvement while behaving this way. The woman's adultery, in this instance, causes Velchaninov and Pavlovich an emotional breakdown, leading them to mental illness. The book also demonstrates that Velchaninov and Pavlovich are emotionally distressed and mentally suffering because of the external social pressure and fully demonstrates the psychosocial aspects of the external social system that mentally ill individuals live in. The novella captures the stillness of the human mind, and the emotional and mental weakness, stemming from social expectations. The novella also elaborates how emotional weakness from social expectations can create mental detours from living. The novella illustrates that emotional struggles are a facet of one's humanity. The emotional wounds that people carry are often invisible, yet they impact people's lives deeply.

Keywords: *Emotional Struggle, Guilt, Inner Conflict, Mental Suffering, Psychosocial, Social Expectations*

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1. Introduction

The Eternal Husband (1917) is a novella by the noted Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky. The novella focuses on Velchaninov and Pavel Pavlovich, two men tied together by the dead woman who is the wife of Pavel. Velchaninov had a liaison with Pavel's wife, and after her death, they encounter each other once more. This encounter brings to the surface the emotions of culpability, envy, anguish, and perplexity. The narrative is concerned with the past and the way it shapes the mental state and the behavior of people in the present. It illustrates the tenacity of emotions and the transformative elasticity of such emotions on a person. The novella deals with fundamental problems of anguish, estrangement, envy, culpability, and revenge. It examines the struggle of people to cope with their anguish and to function on a day to day basis. *The Eternal Husband* (1917) illustrates the disturbing mental and emotional conflict of people which is sixty the silence of the people. The novella illustrates the complex web of emotions of human beings and the enduring impact of yesteryears on present lives.

1.1. Research Objectives

- To explore how past memories shape the social attire of people in *The Eternal Husband*.
- To explore how self-judgment and inner guilt lead to self-destruction in the novel.
- To explore how the nostalgia of a true love became a tool of suffering in the selected novel.

1.2. Research Questions

1. How past memories shape the social attire of people in *The Eternal Husband*?
2. How self-judgment and inner guilt lead to self-destruction in *The Eternal Husband*?
3. How the nostalgia of a true love became a tool of suffering in the selected novel?

1.3. Problem Statement

2. In *The Eternal Husband* (1917), it portrays how the characters suffer. This hints the effect on person's life from hidden thoughts, undisclosed secrets, and guilt. The lead in the novel, Velchaninov, deals with an internal contradiction from the negative consequences of his past life. This feeling is expressed in an unclear manner, but the actions, i.e. silence, tell it all. This novel is a representation of the Russia of the 19th century, its culture and society. People were prohibited to show their real and entire feelings. The author shows the actual oppression of society. Most papers discuss the religious or philosophical elements in Dostoyevsky's work. Very few touch on emotional pain and mental anguish as social pressure. This paper is going to focus on *The Eternal Husband* (1917) and how it depicts the relationship between an individual's thoughts and society. It assesses the impact of guilt, concealed feelings, and internal strife on the lives of the characters.

1.4. Research Significance

The guilt, shame, and regret from past encounters and how memories influence the present is a primary concern of this novel. The novel depicts the relationship of individuals within the framework of a society. Earlier works concentrate on religion, sheer human emotion, and the crisis of identity; some even liken the work to stage plays with the husband and lover in conflict. The inner turmoil of the characters in the novel has not been addressed. Therefore, my study examines the psychological distress of characters and the social constructs that generate fear to uphold and protect the reputation and honor. In this case, the social distress would be a means to understanding the emotional distress. Emotional distress is the region of human concern, as it is the most complicated of all concerns; therefore, it is most valuable for future studies. This distress is a reflection of the concern of society and is indicative of the mental health of that society. The study will be based on the works of Erikson to address the gap.

2. Literature Review

Phillips (2024) explains that Velchaninov's odd entanglement with Trusotsky is the key focus of the story. Trusotsky's wife slept with Velchaninov. Velchaninov appears to be disliking Trusotsky; however, the article posits that there seems to be some hidden attraction that Velchaninov also has for Trusotsky. Furthermore, Trusotsky is more communicative about his feelings, which is why some scholars have suggested that there is the possibility of homoerotic tension. Barros (2015) commented that there is a literary parallel of this article to the two famous novels, *The Eternal Husband* (1917) by Dostoevsky and *Dom Casmurro* by Machado de Assis. The emphasis is on how both authors employ the literary tool of doubt. They do not provide definite answers to the audience, thus forcing them to linger in the story which in turn, makes the narrative more ambiguous. This method instils a psychological feeling of doubt in the audience. The authors wrote from disparate standpoints which make the audience ponder on the intricacies of truth, the phenomena of memory, and the behavior of man.

Abuhassan and Azmi (2019) offer an analysis of *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoevsky as Namli (2022) describes. This analysis attempts to engage with the novel and the responses to the complexities of human suffering. It examines the novel as conveying the reality of pain and the living through the pain as a condition of existence. Moreover, the novel wrestles with the problem of the moral imperative in the presence of suffering. What should we do, morally, when there is suffering in the world? Dostoevsky reveals, through the characters of the novel, the relational nature of suffering, that is, how suffering invites and even compels an individual to interact with others and the world around them. Abuhassan and Azmi (2019) analysis is based on Erikson's psychosocial theory of development, and he argues that the main character is stagnant in her emotional and social growth. She lacks practical abilities in the industry vs. inferiority stage; the only competency she perceives is the one dwelling in Jane, the one with the talent and ability. She is incapable of identifying

her strength and deficiencies. In the vs. role of the stage, she lacks self-knowledge and the self-grasp. Her connection with other people is inequitable; her relation with Harriet is that of a mother to a child rather than a daughter to a mother. Even with Mr. Knightley, she avoids facing her. In the intimacy vs. isolation stage, her marriage does not demonstrate her true emotional maturity. It feels like she wants to keep Mr. Knightley close just to make sure she does not lose him. This shows she still needs to develop further.

The hardships of the main character of the novel *Eleanor and Park*, Eleanor, are analyzed by Kinanti and Daulay (2020) to explain their research. After marrying Richie, who is abusive towards her, Eleanor's mother is in a new on a financially precarious situation. The research scam of mistreatment says Eleanor suffers through and studies the consequences of such mistreatment on her psychosocial development. The researchers use four of Erikson's eight psychosocial stages. Although Eleanor completed the early developmental stages of her childhood, the abusive experiences by Richie are external hindrances to the three successive stages. Consequently, she has trust issues and is unable to build and maintain healthy relationships. She then begins to isolate herself and suffers from chronic feelings of inadequacy.

Meriska, Sili, & Wati (2018) examine Anna's emotional challenges through the lens of the Eriksonian psychosocial theory. Anna has no emotional safety and proximity with her mother which makes her emotional self-understanding and sufficiency difficult. Emotionally, her mother's lack of comfort and support creates relational distance. Consequently, Anna becomes confused about her identity and experiences a sense of emptiness. This illustrates the extent to which a family's absence of love, support, and emotional bonding negatively impacts a child's emotional and psychological development.

Wibowo (2019) analyzes the character of Clay Jensen in the novel *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher. Clay listens to the tapes of Hannah Baker, a girl he liked, who died by suicide and who recorded 13 reasons on the tapes. As he listens to the tapes, Clay learns the different reasons that led to Hannah's suicide. He goes through a number of emotions, like guilt, sorrow, and perplexity. This study analyzes psychosocial theory in the context of Clay's emotional and social development.

Kusuma (2025) mentions that this study examines the character of Queen Elizabeth in the movie *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007) using Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory. Elizabeth struggles with the internal conflict of her wants, reasoning, and her morals. This conflict helps her be a good firm leader of her nation. In Erikson's theory, this face of Elizabeth is as a result of key stages in her life, each of which she will be faced with crucial political and societal challenges.

Immazuddin (2021) focuses on the character of Iris and her mother Melody in

the novel *Red at the Bone*. He demonstrates that Melody and Iris suffer from emotional development stagnation. The primary emotional reason is the insufficient mother and child bond in Iris' early years. Iris is unable to create a better bond with her mother Melody and this weakens their emotional connection. The impaired emotional development of each of them in their early lives is manifested in the emotional behavior, confusion, and disconnection which makes their lives, socially and psychologically distant.

Hamzah (2016) mentions that this study examines the social and emotional challenges of Elizabeth Gilbert, the protagonist of *Eat, Pray, Love*. She experiences a psychosocial crisis of feeling lost, and this happens at the crossroads of life when someone experiences major life changes and struggles with a sense of purpose and healthy relational dynamics. Elizabeth struggles with the relational dynamics of loneliness and the difficulty of forming close relationships. This leaves her feeling empty and unsure of her self-concept.

Cicilia Angelis, Miranti & Dwiastuty (2019) state that this study examines the emotional and personal growth of the protagonist in the film *Gifted Hands*. The study shows that Ben encounters obstacles and, at the same time, the support of others which promotes his self-understanding and forward movement in life. It shows the impact of social contact and personal engagement on growth dimensions of psychosocial integration, especially in identity formation, decision-making, and relational dynamics.

3. Theoretical Framework

Psychosocial theory provides an important framework for analyzing the complex interaction between an individual's psychological state and the social environment that shapes human behavior. The concept of psychosocial development is most prominently associated with Erik Erikson, who expanded upon the ideas of Sigmund Freud by emphasizing the influence of social relationships, cultural expectations, and life experiences on the development of personality. Unlike purely psychological approaches that focus only on the inner mind, psychosocial theory explains how personal identity, emotional conflicts, and behavioral patterns emerge through continuous interaction between the self and society. Therefore, this perspective is particularly useful for literary analysis where characters' internal struggles are deeply connected with their social circumstances.

Psychosocial theory proposes that individuals experience psychological tensions as they attempt to negotiate social expectations, personal desires, and moral values. These tensions often lead to identity crises, emotional instability, and behavioral contradictions. Erikson outlined eight stages of psychosocial development, each characterized by a central conflict that individuals must resolve to develop a healthy sense of identity. Although these stages are generally applied to human development across a lifetime, the theory also

provides valuable insights into adult psychological conflicts such as feelings of insecurity, guilt, shame, and isolation. Such emotional states often appear in literary characters whose lives are shaped by social pressures, failed relationships, and moral dilemmas.

In literary studies, psychosocial theory helps scholars explore how characters' internal emotions are shaped by external social forces. Literature frequently portrays individuals struggling with identity, power dynamics, jealousy, betrayal, and emotional trauma within a specific social setting. A psychosocial approach examines how these conflicts emerge from the interaction between personal psychology and societal structures such as family relationships, marriage, social status, and cultural expectations. Through this perspective, fictional characters are understood not merely as isolated psychological beings but as individuals whose mental suffering is deeply rooted in their social environment. This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant for analyzing the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky, whose novels often focus on the psychological turmoil of individuals living within rigid social and moral systems. Dostoevsky's characters frequently experience intense emotional conflicts, moral guilt, and existential anxiety, which reflect both their internal psychological states and the pressures of society. His narratives portray individuals trapped between personal desires and social obligations, leading to profound inner suffering and psychological instability.

In the context of *The Eternal Husband*, psychosocial theory allows the researcher to examine the protagonist's emotional distress, jealousy, humiliation, and obsessive behavior as products of both personal psychological trauma and social expectations surrounding masculinity, marriage, and honor. The characters' actions are shaped not only by their inner insecurities but also by the societal norms that define relationships, loyalty, and personal identity. By applying the psychosocial perspective, the study highlights how inner suffering emerges from the intersection of psychological conflicts and social pressures. Thus, psychosocial theory serves as an effective analytical framework for understanding the constant struggles experienced by the characters in *The Eternal Husband*. It enables the research to explore how emotional pain, identity crises, and destructive behaviors develop within a broader social context, ultimately revealing the intricate relationship between individual psychology and social reality.

4. Finding and Analysis

The Eternal Husband (1917) by Fyodor Dostoevsky is a psychological novella focusing on human guilt for emotions, and emotions for unspoken truths. Velchaninov is a protagonist, Velchaninov gets entangled in affairs with another man's wife, the man being her husband, Trusotsky. The self-sentencing, the burden of conscience, and the weight of the world, serve as a guide to the interactions between the two and the consequences thereof. Human beings and their actions serve a purpose to the study of social and psychological problems of the world. The first phase of this study tried to

analyze the social behavior and normalization of individual and collective psychological disturbances due to the memory of unforgettable and past unchangeable. The characters of the story portray a visible past in their emotions and overall psycho-socio behavior. The sadness, tiredness, and uneasiness of the characters reflect a psycho-socio past manifested in the present social interactions.

Those eyes which were already surrounded by tiny wrinkles had begun to betray the cynicism of a worn-out man of doubtful morals, a duplicity, an ever-increasing irony, and another shade of feeling which was new, a shade of sadness and of pain, a sort of absent-minded sadness as though about nothing in particular and yet acute (Dostoyevsky, 1917, p.8).

As stated in the first objective of the study, the quotation illustrates that the man's past encounters have profoundly shaped his character. One can clearly see a tiredness and sadness in his eyes which is a clear reaction from the memories and difficulties of his previous life. This illustrates that previous experiences still impact an individual's social behavior and emotional disposition. People's past experiences have sculpted their present social identities. It demonstrates that memories do not fade away, they remain alive in a person.

The meaning of it is horns, Pavel Pavlovitch rapped out, taking away his fingers from his forehead at last. Those are your horns? My own, generously bestowed, Pavel Pavlovitch said with a very nasty grimace. Both were silent. You are a plucky fellow, I must say, Velchaninov pronounced. Because I showed you my decorations? (Dostoyevsky, 1917, p.51)

In this instance 'horns denotes that Pavel Pavlovitch was cheated on by his wife. This is an angry admission. The sneer, if one could call it that, was an indication of how pained, hurt, and defensive he was. The shame came from a third party. The silence is an illustration of an awkward moment. There is an element of astonishment in the word of Velchaninov. Pavel's response is that of an embarrassed person who is resigned to the fact that this is the truth. "I am *The Eternal Husband*. I heard that expression from you, Alexey Ivanovitch, long ago when you were staying with us in those days. I remember many of your sayings that year. Last time when you said here *The Eternal Husband*, I reflected." (Dostoyevsky, 1917, p.101)

In this chapter, the man referring to himself as the 'eternal husband' is quoting Alexey Ivanovitch. This means the phrase lingered in his mind for quite a while and would now seem to him to describe him best. An eternal husband means a husband for life, who is always hurt, and made a fool. Another meaning to this is the husband for life, who is always in pain and is a fool. He states that he pondered over the words, this indicating that he now understands his pain and weakness in a more heightened level. This instance illustrates the man's sorrow and shame, and the trauma that was carried over from his past.

Of course it was Pavel Pavlovitch, but anyone meeting him by chance might almost have failed to recognize him at the minute so changed was his whole appearance. He was sitting awkwardly upright in the armchair owing to his hands being tied behind his back; his face looked distorted, exhausted, and greenish, and he quivered all over from time to time. (Dostoyevsky, 1917, p.117)

It has been noted that Pavel Pavlovitch does not look the same as usual. He has changed so much that if he met someone by chance they would not recognize him. He has his hands tied behind his back and is sitting down. His face is tired and shows that he is not well either physically or mentally. His body has slight tremors which can mean he is nervous, scared, or just very weak. The author describes Pavel's situation this way so the reader can understand the depth of his sufferings as well as his loss of control, and the mental strain he is under that makes him look weak and distressed. The second goal examines the relationship between self-estrangement and self-imposed guilt as factors of disintegration. The characters regret, fear, and shame and, in the explanation of the narrative, they self-loathe as a result of their history and, as a consequence, become psychologically weak. This self-directed blame consumes the individual's inner tranquility and self-assurance.

Why did some things he remembered strike him now as positive crimes? And it was not a question of the judgments of his mind; only he would have put little faith in his gloomy, solitary, and sick mind, but it reached the point of curses and almost of tears, of inward tears. Why, two years before, he would not have believed it if he had been told that he would ever shed tears (Dostoyevsky, 1917, p.10)

The second objective of the research, and according to this quotation, the past had a strong influence on the man's present feelings. What used to be normal to him now seem like big errors or even a crime. He experiences an emotional and psychological discomfort. His feelings of guilt and remorse are so strong that even he is surprised that he could cry, and indeed now he does. This demonstrates that the emotional state of an individual is affected by time and recalled memory. The past makes one confront their errors, which reflects the fact that memories impact a person's psyche and conduct.

He was excited and at the same time disconcerted and felt that he could not grasp the position. He was even somewhat ashamed that there proved to be neither mystery nor danger. The whole phantasmagoria had proved to be nothing; all that had turned up was the foolish figure of some Pavel Pavlovitch. And yet he did not believe that it was all so simple; he had a vague presentiment and dread of something (Dostoyevsky, 1917, p.22).

These lines describe the mentally confused state of the character. Excited, but disturbed because of the situation. He is expecting something mysterious, maybe even dangerous. When nothing appears, he is filled with shame because of his fear. The situation

is still straightforward, but his mind is still confused. He still feels fear. It shows his anxiety and psychological weakness. Previous experiences made him jumpy, he fear and imagination controlled his thoughts. "He quite understands the position and will take his revenge on me through Liza he thought with horror. The charming figure of the poor child rose mournfully before, for a moment, his heart beat faster at the thought that he would soon, within two hours, see his Liza again." (Dostoyevsky, 1917, p.58)

A sense of entrapment and fear pervades his words. He is sure that some enemy has devised a scheme of revenge through Liza. Anger and terror grip him. He thought that Liza was suffering violence like the described above, and that compounded his fear. He anticipates that this revenge will obliterate him. It shows the devastation that earlier deeds and recollections inflict upon him. His unbalanced mental state is dominated by the fear of revenge. It shows the complexity of suffering that is entailed in relationships. Guilt, fear, and memory entwined in a way to create the sickness of the psyche. The citation expresses the profound entrapment of the psyche as a consequence of the intertwining of guilt and memory. "I consider that I have never lowered myself as I have today to begin with, by consenting to go with you, and then by what happened there. It was so paltry, so pitiful, I have defiled and debased myself by mixing myself up in and forgetting." (Dostoyevsky, 1917, p.100)

The quotation illustrates the speaker's shame. He feels lower than ever today. First, he regrets going with the other person. Then, he reflects on bad things related and on losing the good with the involvement he had. He is angry for the involvement on the loss of self-respect and dignity. These lines express most regrets, guilt, and self-disappointment. The third objective was to examine true love nostalgia and its elements of suffering instead of comfort. This was a key point of the novella. The memories of love and of the friendship involved the jealous, sadness, and emotional suffering.

We are two old friends, very old friends, and we've come together in the fullest sincerity to recall to one another the priceless bond of friendship of which the dear departed was the precious link, and he was so carried away by the ecstasy of his feeling that he bowed his head as before, hiding his face in his hat. Velchaninov watched him with aversion and uneasiness (Dostoyevsky, 1917, p.26).

The speaker's shame and self-deprecation are evident in this quotation. He believes that today is the lowest point of his life. He experiences remorse for having gone with the unnamed person. He reflects on the events and feels that he has, in some way, contaminated his reputation. He is angry with himself for being so self-ignoring and undignified. There is a stream of self-critical words that convey his remorse, and disappointment in himself. The third objective explored the potential of true love nostalgia to be a negative, rather than positive, experience, which was significant in the context of

the story. The reminiscence of love and companionship was, in some cases, detrimentally associated with jealousy, sorrow, and emotional suffering.

In *The Eternal Husband*, one can observe how a man emotionally pressurizes a woman by claiming, in a disturbing manner, that something terrible will happen to him. He also does fear-inducing, disturbing things to her in order to obtain her compliance. The woman, in a tense outpouring of distress, screams, embraces him, and promises to never do that again. She is clearly caught in an emotional bind with his controlling, psychological pressure. From the situation, one can also see that Dostoevsky is demonstrating the use of emotionally manipulative, controlling behaviors to obtain and retain a relationship that is very dysfunctional.

We are men of different worlds understand that and between us lies a grave he added in a furious whisper and suddenly relies what he had done and how do you know pavel pavlovitch face was suddenly pale and distorted How do you know what that little grave here means for me he cried steping up to velchaninov with a ridiculous but horrible gesture pressed his fist against his heart I know that little grave here, and we both stand at the side of that little grave, but on my side there is more than on yours, more (Dostoyevsky, 1917, pp.103-104).

The character says to the other person that they are completely different, and as a result, they cannot make a connection. A “little grave” reflects a deep emotional ache and loss, which, in this case, is the cause of anger and the outburst. Though the other person does know of the loss, he says that he suffers more than the other person. He believes that the other person does not know and understand the depth of his hurt. The other person does not know the extent of his loss, and he is quite emotional because of that. The character’s emotional injury is compounded by the loss and the other person’s inability to empathize. The character’s emotional loss, anger, and emotional injury are compounded by the other person’s inability to show that he is sympathetic. “The phantoms were all familiar figures; his room seemed to be full of people, and the door into the passage stood open at the table, which was set in the middle of the room. There was one man exactly as in a similar dream he had had a month before” (Dostoyevsky, 1917, p.115). The character is describing that in his room, he perceives the other people as ghosts in his room, and the people as phantoms, which is strange because he thinks he knows the people. The room’s openness is either because he internally believes the people to be phantoms, or because the door is open. Because table is set, he believes that the person is more real than a ghost or phantom, and more real than the dream person. In his mind, he is combining reality with fantasy, showing us that he is troubled by memories or even feelings that keep coming back. The author wants the audience to experience the anxiety, the disorientation, and the feeling of entrapment in the troubling thoughts.

5. Conclusion

The research employs psychosocial theory which posits that emotion and social relations impact the individual and drives behavior. This theory is fitting given that Dostoyevsky constructs characters whose reflections and exacerbated feelings intertwine in the social dimension. The primary goal was to establish an understanding of how social behavior and the social identity of individuals is affected by remembrances of the past. The selected quotes indicate that the characters' past experiences are mirrored in their expressions and emotions. The characters illustrate that emotions and social actions in the present are adversely affected by the recollection of past experiences. The second objective dealt with the consequences of self-judgment and inner guilt and how they can be self-destructive. Analysis of the texts suggest that the characters experience regret and shame and are fearful. They heavily self-judge their past actions and, resultantly, become emotionally weak and pained. This inner guilt erodes their peace and confidence. The third objective dealt with nostalgia for true love and how it can become a source of suffering instead of providing comfort. Remembrance of love and friendship is a source of jealousy, sadness, and emotional pain. This research fills a gap by bringing these ideas together from a psychosocial perspective. Previous work discusses guilt or memory alone, but this work shows memory, guilt, and social relations in *The Eternal Husband* (1917) to evoke ceaseless inner suffering.

This study has analyzed inner alienation and perpetual conflict in the case of Dostoyevsky's *The Eternal Husband* (1917) from a psychosocial standpoint. The study demonstrates how socially an emotionally spun individuals behavior is a result of past recollections. It also confirms that an individual's self-assessment with inner feelings of guilt triggered psychological discomfort and a breakdown of a self. In addition, recollections of genuine love do not always provide consolation, in fact, they frequently distress. The psychosocial perspective used in this study demonstrates the individual's inner feelings and psychosocial networks they create on themselves through emotional distress. In total, the study demonstrates how deeply and in what manner Dostoyevsky values and presents memory, guilt, and love as components of human being.

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