

Title: The Pale Rider: Myshkin as Knight of the Apocalypse
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Every reader of *The Idiot* is confronted with the question of how to interpret the ending, in which Dostoevsky's "perfectly good man" fails to save anyone, including himself. The many critics who have posited Myshkin as a Christ figure, or imitator, must either admit that his imitation fails or suggest that salvation lies outside of the text. Several critics (Bethea, Hollander, Rosenshield) emphasize the apocalyptic rather than the salvific potential of the novel, which rushes toward cataclysm and destruction. The goal of the present paper is to reconcile Myshkin's goodness with the catastrophes that follow his arrival in Petersburg and to demonstrate that imitation of Christ can not only coexist with but even necessitates a role in unleashing the Apocalypse. After all, in Revelations Chapter 5, it is a lion and a lamb, representing Christ, who open the seven seals.

Images of horses and horsemen dominate the apocalyptic landscape of *The Idiot*. Dostoevsky even includes four characters who can be identified, on the basis of their names and their associations with certain objects and colors, as the four horsemen of the Apocalypse: Princess Belokonskaia, Ferdyschenko, Nastasia Filippovna, and Ippolit. After fitting Myshkin into this apocalyptic imagery, as a potential horseman and a herald of the end times, the paper focuses on two of his principle equestrian roles: The Poor Knight and Napoleon. The former, representing the chivalric tradition, elucidates Myshkin's mission to love and his failure to love Aglaia or Nastasia Filippovna in the manner in which they desire. The latter, suggesting both a Hegelian world historical figure and Peter the Great (like Napoleon, hailed as both savior and antichrist), demonstrates the limits of earthly success.

I also establish Nastasia Filippovna, the black horseman, and Ippolit, the pale horseman, as doubles for Myshkin associated both with Christ and with the Apocalypse. Their names and behavior carry apocalyptic overtones, but Nastasia Filippovna's surname suggests a sacrificial lamb. Similarly Ippolit, associated by most critics with nihilism and futile, meaningless death, nonetheless dreams of teaching the people (like Myshkin) and dying as a martyr. In rereading Myshkin's dual roles, one must consider the often overlooked redemptive potential of these two characters, as well.