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CONRAD AND DOSTOEVSKY: AN UNSUSPECTED BROTHERHOOD

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Robert James Berry

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## SYNOPSIS

This thesis attempts a comparative study of Conrad and Dostoevsky. In doing so, it proposes a significant relationship between the ideological, political and literary worlds of both authors.

The work is undertaken in eight chapters. Chapter One explores Conrad and Dostoevsky's respective national and cultural identities. It reflects on Conrad's recorded reactions to Dostoevsky and his work, and speculates on the latter's likely response to Conrad.

Chapter Two challenges established critical formulae that suggest Dostoevsky is a purely 'Dionysian' writer. The view that Conrad is a consummate 'Apollonian' artist is similarly brought into question. Chapter Three considers Conrad and Dostoevsky as major literary innovators. To support my argument, Bakhtin's critical concepts of 'polyphony' and 'monology' are introduced, and applied in a Dostoevskyan and Conradian context. Especially highlighted is my debate on Conrad's 'polyphonic' narrative technique in Lord Jim (1900). The notable fusion of disparate literary genres in Conrad and Dostoevsky's novels is explored in Chapter Four. Elements of 'adventure', 'thriller',

'romance', and 'detective' fiction are identified in each novelist's world. My argument, however, restricts itself to an extensive analysis of the surprising importance of the 'Gothic' elements in both writers' worlds.

Chapters Five and Six concentrate on Conrad and Dostoevsky's profound insights into the fundamental character of the human personality. Chapter Five considers their parallel interpretations of mankind's quintessentially materialist nature. Chapter Six looks at their strikingly similar visions of man's violent and carnal identity, and his primary urge to dominate other weaker individuals.

Chapters Seven and Eight consider two central themes in Conrad and Dostoevsky's fiction, that of anarchist politics and nihilism respectively. Their political and ideological responses to these issues are investigated in some detail, and significant interpretive parallels established.

Finally, the conclusion undertakes to once again assure the reader of the surprising and unsuspected bonds that exist between these two seemingly alien writers.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## A NOTE ON EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

In the case of Conrad, I have attempted to refer to the standard collected edition of his works throughout, that published by J.M. Dent & Sons in 1923. Where I have consulted alternative editions of his texts, I have clearly indicated this in my references.

In Dostoevsky's case, I have endeavoured to consult as many different translations as possible. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, such an approach seems appropriate when a novelist is being considered in translation. Secondly, I felt it important to acknowledge the current spate of new Dostoevsky translations. The 'standard' versions by Garnett and Magarshack are, it seems, in the process of being usurped by the more contemporary translations of McDuff, Katz, Coulson, et.al. This fact, I feel, deserves appropriate recognition.

I have added the dates of all texts to constantly alert the reader of the time-period under discussion.

A NOTE ON REFERENCES

All quotations are indicated by the author's last name, unless otherwise specified.



## CHAPTER ONE

### BIRTHRIGHTS

Conrad refers directly to Dostoevsky on only two occasions. Both times, it is in letters to his close friend and literary mentor, Edward Garnett. Garnett had shown himself to be a keen, almost fanatic Russophile, much influenced by the extensive translations of Dostoevsky, Turgenev and Tolstoy being undertaken by his wife, Constance. On the publication of Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov, Garnett took the opportunity to send Conrad a copy. The response,

recorded in a letter of 27th May 1912, is notable for its savagely dismissive contempt:

It's terrifically bad and impressive and exasperating. Moreover, I don't know what D. [Dostoevsky] stands for or reveals, but I do know that he is too Russian for me. It sounds to me like some fierce mouthings from prehistoric ages.  
(Jean-Aubry 2 140)

Some five years later, eager to express his praise for a critical work of Garnett's on Turgenev, Conrad again mentions Dostoevsky (192).<sup>1</sup> In his letter, Conrad praises the lasting effectiveness of Turgenev's characters; the balanced "serene" novelist, Conrad judges, has endowed his fictional protagonists with a warm, generous, and realistic humanity (Conrad, Notes on life and Letters 48). In developing his argument, Conrad goes on to contrast Turgenev's methods with that of another writer, a writer who presents not human beings, but "strange beasts in a menagerie or damned souls knocking themselves to pieces in the stuffy darkness of mystical contradictions" (47). Three paragraphs later, Conrad discloses the name of this other novelist, "the convulsed terror-haunted Dostoevski" (48).

Much, I would argue, can be gleaned from these heated

remarks. They suggest not merely an antipathy towards Dostoevsky, but indicate a more ingrained, aesthetic rejection. The critic Ian Watt, indeed, has defined Conrad's response to Dostoevsky as an obsessive hatred (Conrad in the Nineteenth Century 111). A careful analysis of Conrad's recorded comments therefore (together with other passages which do not name but strongly imply Dostoevsky), will help to identify what is a complex cultural, political and literary reaction.

Whilst denying any ability to comprehend Dostoevsky's general ethos in his 1912 letter, Conrad does make the revealing statement that the novelist is, unpalatably, "too Russian" for him. Conrad was born in 1857 in the Russian-occupied Ukranian town of Berdyczow, whose ancient Polish heritage had been severed by the series of brutal partitions between 1793 and 1795 (Halecki 202-213). Under a tripartite agreement, Poland was divided between the powers of Russia, Prussia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Conrad, therefore, was born into a society which felt its quintessential Polish identity, but laboured under the crushing power of an autocratic Russian regime, a regime which was either tolerated with resignation or, more often, actively despised.

After long years of repression and a failed insurrection in 1830-1, Polish hatred found expression in the major uprising of 1863. Conrad was six years old. For intensely

personal reasons, this event was to prove of moulding significance to Conrad's whole political development and vision. His father, Apollo Korzeniowski, a fanatical patriot and a guiding force at the forefront of the Polish independence movement, was exiled to Siberian Russia for his significant part in the insurrection, together with his wife and son. At the age of twelve, Conrad was orphaned, both his parents having died from tuberculosis, a direct result of the harsh conditions they had faced in political exile. This nightmare experience - the influence of which can never be overstated - branded an indelible print of hatred for Russia, and all things Russian, on Conrad's mind. Testimony of these early feelings, as I will show, can be found throughout Conrad's writings, most especially in the Russo-Polish essays of Notes on Life and Letters (1921), and in Under Western Eyes (1911).

These intensely personal matters, however, do not fully explain Conrad's hostile rejection of Dostoevsky as a Russian. For Conrad's very Polishness exposes him to what might be termed an historical 'idee fixe' in the national mentality. Poles, in fact, had long rejected all Russian cultural values as barbaric and uncivilized. Such a view seems founded in the Polish nation's own awareness of its legacy of democratic and liberal ideals, ideals alien to

Russia's long reliance on an absolutist autocracy. Russia, indeed, was felt to have adopted more Eastern, even Asiatic traditions, which had their roots in Constantinople and the Orthodox faith. In contrast, historians charting the development of the Polish Republic from the tenth century onwards, have observed a protean parliamentary and administrative structure, a democratic system that has exerted a profound influence on the development of European values and consciousness. Norman Davies, in the title he chooses for his history of Poland, adds credence to this interpretation; for him, Poland is the very "Heart of Europe".

Given this fundamental cultural divide between Poland and Russia - immeasurably heightened under a forced occupation - it was more than exasperating for Conrad to find his close literary friends admiring his own work for its powerful Slavonic qualities.<sup>2</sup> To counter this misguided tendency in his readers, we find Conrad regularly asserting his own Polishness, as well as his adherence to the national belief in the "superior character of [the] Polish civilization" (Notes on Life and Letters 121). In his 'Author's Note' to A Personal Record (1912), for example, we are told

nothing is more foreign than what in the literary

world is called Slavonism, to the Polish temperament with its tradition of self-government, its chivalrous view of moral restraints and an exaggerated respect for individual rights: not to mention the important fact that the whole Polish mentality [is] Western in complexion. (The Mirror of the Sea and A Personal Record vi-vii)

In his 1919 essay 'The Crime of Partition', Conrad deals historically with his nation, taking a similar pride in his birthright. "The Polish state", Conrad argues, offers a singular instance of an extremely liberal administrative federalism which, in its parliamentary life as well as its international politics, presented a complete unity of feeling and purpose" (Notes on Life and Letters 120).

In the light of Conrad's views on Poland's democratic heritage, it is unsurprising that Russia and her people, in Conrad's assessment, seemed savages from "prehistoric ages" (Jean-Aubry 2 140)<sup>3</sup>. In effect, Conrad's profound commitment to Poland's tradition of enlightened ideals made Russian autocratic society seem morally reprehensible, especially since its perverted values were brutally enforced upon his own country. Russia's ideological representatives like

Dostoevsky, therefore, could only be regarded as utterly intolerable.

Perhaps Conrad's most venomous assaults on the Russian political system occur in his 1905 essay 'Autocracy and War', and the Russo-Swiss novel Under Western Eyes (1911). In these works Conrad expresses his absolute hatred of Russia; it is a bitter, personal rejection, especially since it comes from an author usually noted for his ethos of emotional restraint.

When Conrad's father Apollo Korzeniowski refers to the Slavonic race as a "vermin of thugs and torturers" in his 1864 essay 'Poland and Muscovy', it is, quite justifiably, an intensely personal response to years of exile and hardship for himself, his wife and child (Under Familial Eyes, ed. Najder 76).<sup>4</sup> Whilst Conrad adopts his father's acrimonious tone, he does reject Russia on more historical, political and ethical grounds:

She is and has been simply the negation of everything worth living for. She is not an empty void; she is a yawning chasm between East and West; a bottomless abyss that has swallowed up every hope of mercy, every aspiration towards personal dignity, towards freedom, towards

knowledge, every ennobling desire of the heart, every redeeming whisper of conscience. Those that have peered into that abyss, where the dreams of Pan Slavism, of universal conquest, mingled with the hate and contempt for Western ideas, drift impotently like shapes of mist, know well that it is bottomless; that there is no ground for anything that could in the remotest degree serve even the lowest interests of mankind. ('Autocracy and War', Notes on Life and Letters 100-1).

In this sweeping pronouncement, two major objections are raised. What Conrad initially rejects is the sense that a whole people can be "swallowed up" under the iron heel of a merciless autocratic regime; that freedom is crushed, the redeeming qualities of "the heart" suffocated. Earlier in this essay he personifies Russia as a "gigantic and dreaded phantom" (86), a "ravenous ghoul" "bristling with bayonets, armed with chains, hung over with holy images" (89). Conrad's Russia is a military and religious tyranny of supernatural proportions, a tyranny that oppresses its people by an inhuman and pitiless political system. For Conrad, Russian autocracy is the "worst crime against humanity"; it is the "ruthless destruction of innumerable minds" (99).



In many ways, Conrad's powerful condemnation tends to speak of the Russian system and its enslaved people in fairly generalized terms. It is worthwhile, therefore, to turn briefly to the fictionalized world of Under Western Eyes (1911), where Conrad arguably wages a more incisive attack. The creation of a dramatized text where the reader can become immersed in the intimate lives of specific characters living under Conrad's Russia, arguably produces a more moving visualization of the precise nature of this "worst crime against humanity" (99). In the novel, for instance, the force of the Russian Empire is realized in the joint figures of General T- and Councillor Mikulin. To Razumov, these upholders of the system assume the role of omnipotent gods who, we are assured, live in "the full sense of their unbounded power over the lives in Russia, [treating Razumov] with cursory disdain, like two Olympians glancing at a worm" (Dent ed. 306). On another occasion, the novel's only respected revolutionary, Sophia Antonovna, seems to speak for Conrad when she exclaims: "Truly there are millions of people in Russia who would envy the life of dogs in this country [Switzerland]" (245).

To return again to our original extract from 'Autocracy and War' (1905), a closer analysis of that text shows Conrad expressing not only his acute abhorrence of Russia's

suppression of her people. He also observes an urge for world domination in the autocratic mentality, the so-called "dreams of Panslavism, of universal conquest". This point is particularly significant, I would argue, not merely for gauging the extent of Conrad's Russophobia. For in many essential respects, it ingeniously satirizes Dostoevsky's own hopes for the Russian nation. Indeed, Dostoevsky passionately believed that the Slavonic, non-European ideals of Russia could offer a moral and religious torch towards the West's very necessary spiritual regeneration. That Conrad has indeed "peered" into the Russian psyche, even perhaps into Dostoevsky's own personal nationalist vision, gains much credence in the light of these provocative words (Notes on Life and Letters: 100). Conrad's original supposition in his 1912 Garnett letter, which claims to deny any understanding of what Dostoevsky "stands for or reveals" as a Russian, is certainly countered by these informed remarks regarding the so-called Panslavic Dream (Jean-Aubry 2 140). That Conrad regarded Russia's grandiose mission as "bottomless" and despicable is certainly undeniable ('Autocracy and War', Notes on Life and Letters, 100). For him, it is another aspect of all that renders Russia, and her representatives like Dostoevsky, alien and repugnant.

The 1912 Garnett letter provides vital testimony of

Conrad's rejection of Dostoevsky on cultural and national grounds. Yet its implications do not cease entirely with these objections. For having attacked Dostoevsky's very Russianness, Conrad goes on to isolate a distaste for what he terms the "fierce mouthings" of the author. Here, rather than a socio-political grievance, we are offered what seems, on investigation, primarily a literary criticism.

Conrad, as he noted in early letters to his cousin and confidante Marguerite Poradowska, saw his own literary allegiance resting with the nineteenth century French novelists, particularly Flaubert and Maupassant (Baines 181-184). Flaubert, termed by Charles Lalo as the official "apostle of the impersonality of art" (Fanger 242), cultivated, in works like Madame Bovary (1857), a tone of extreme ironic detachment towards his characters. He is also revered, furthermore, for his almost legendary devotion to a painstaking literary craftsmanship, for his masterly development of a restrained prose style. Whilst Conrad does follow in the tradition of Flaubert's exacting literary standards, what seems most important here is that he has internalized and developed Flaubert's particular stress on the necessity for emotional restraint in art. In 'A Familiar Preface' to A Personal Record (1912), Conrad judges that the expression of extreme emotions in literature suggests not

merely a loss of dignity, but leaves the artist who practices such a method open to accusations of insincerity. Though Conrad admits art involves "laying one's soul more or less bare to the world", he does stress an equal necessity "for decency", a regard "for the dignity of one's work", a need to restrain oneself from "losing for one moving moment" the "full ... possession" of oneself. He continues: "I proceed in peace to declare that I have always suspected in the effort to bring into play the extremities of emotions the debasing touch of insincerity" ('A Familiar Preface' to A Personal Record xvi-xvii).

In the light of such comments, the briefest of glances into many of Dostoevsky's novels - whether it be melodramatic scenes of Marmeladovian grief in Crime and Punishment (1866), or the self-indulgent chronicle of Ippolit Terentyev's misery in The Idiot (1869) - can be seen to provide Conrad with plentiful examples of the kind of hyper-emotionalism he distrusts. In his 1917 essay on Turgenev, Turgenev's "serene" and controlled literary emotionalism provided the contrast to Dostoevsky's "convulsed, terror-haunted" world (Notes on Life and Letters 48). The very word "convulsed", as well as being a possible derogatory reference to Dostoevsky's epilepsy, suggests a helpless unrestraint, a violence wholly at odds with

Conrad's need for a dignified reserve. The term "terror-haunted", when considered more closely, is perhaps less clear cut, even anomalous. On first consideration, the epithet would seem to offer a rejection of Dostoevsky's emotional extremism parallel in mood to Conrad's other comments. "Terror-haunted", after all, does seem an appropriate phrase to apply to many of Dostoevsky's fictional creations, whether it be the guilt-ridden Raskolnikov, or the agonized Ivan Karamazov who is haunted by a modern-day devil. Conrad, indeed, might consider himself thoroughly justified in dismissing Dostoevsky's figures as non-realist, or too fantastic. This, in effect, is what he does when he says Dostoevsky's world seems peopled by "strange beasts" from a "menagerie", and "damned souls" intent on "knocking themselves to pieces" (Notes on Life and Letters 47). For Conrad, whose own fiction observes a marked sense of Flaubertian detachment, Dostoevsky's "frenzied world of violent emotion and tortured souls" (Frank, The Seeds of Revolt 1821-1849 65) might well appear insane madness.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, I cannot resist commenting upon an essential contradiction in Conrad's argument. Though Conrad decries Dostoevsky's "terror-haunted" world, a look at his own writing amply illustrates his intense awareness of the

terrors that lie in wait for all men. In Lord Jim (1900), for instance, Jim's desire, once on the Orient, to find an "easy billet" where he can "loung[e] safely through existence" (Dent ed. 9), is undermined immediately by his own "nondescript form of terror", which is described as "crouching silently behind a pane of glass" (34). The Marlow of 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), of course, encounters what could be well described as a "terror-haunted" realm, when he descends into the depths of the African wilderness, far from the flimsy, easily eroded protection of so-called civilized society. Despite the fact that Conrad finds Dostoevsky's "terror-haunted" image so unacceptably at odds with his own imagined equanimity, there is much evidence to suggest a degree of literary intimacy that Conrad would have found deeply disturbing.

Having labelled Dostoevsky's fictional creations "strange beasts" and "damned souls" in his Turgenev essay, Conrad goes on to make reference to the spiritual world in which these characters exist. A detailed consideration of Conrad's actual diction here seems to indicate another ethical objection to Dostoevsky, both as a Russian and a novelist.

To Conrad, the lives of Dostoevsky's protagonists are

said to take place within the "stuffy darkness of mystical contradictions" (Notes on Life and Letters 47). In 'Autocracy and War' (1905), Conrad had previously spoken of the Russian people, under their yoke of autocracy, as cut off "from air, from light" (86), buried in a "mental darkness" similar to slavery (92). When he judges the frenetic figures of Dostoevsky's fiction to be existing in a "stuffy darkness", it seems reasonable to assume Conrad is equating his personal vision of Russia with Dostoevsky's fictional world. When Conrad speaks of the "mystical contradictions" implicit in Dostoevsky's vision, however, the charge takes on a greater complexity. Given that Conrad has already made reference to the objectionable nature of a Russia "hung over with holy images" (89), the word "mystical" assumes, in this context, a particularly religious quality.

As his writing, and particularly his correspondence with R.B. Cunninghame Graham make clear, the impact of Darwinism and the Scientific Revolution made a Christian view of the universe seem naive and idealized to Conrad. The absence of God in his celebrated image of the earth as a "machine", evolving on "severely scientific" principles, amply illustrates Conrad's atheistic tendencies (Watts 56). In this particular connection, therefore, the excesses of

Russian Orthodox dependency might well seem misguided and full of contradictions. In a letter to Edward Garnett, in this instance referring to Tolstoy's beliefs, Conrad expresses his distaste for Christianity, which he feels has been historically distorted and exploited by mankind. The upholder of such degraded values is, in Conrad's opinion, open to suspicion:

'Dislike' as a definition of my attitude to Tols.[toy] is but a rough and approximate term ... The base from which he starts - Christianity - is distasteful to me. I am not blind to its services but the absurd Oriental fable from which it starts irritates me. Great, improving, softening, compassionate it may be but it has lent itself with amazing facility to cruel distortion and is the only religion which, with its impossible standards, has brought an infinity of anguish to innumerable souls - on this earth. (See Ingram 83).

Although Conrad pays homage to the "great, improving, softening, [and] compassionate" virtues of Christian belief in this extract, these factors do not counteract what is basically a powerful rejection. In Dostoevsky's vision, of course, it is precisely these rejected "improving" aspects



of Christianity which form the basis of his own personal creed. By way of an introductory reference here, it is useful to point to Dostoevsky's fundamental adherence to the figure of Christ as a regenerative and redeeming force for mankind. For Dostoevsky, the choice was simple: modern man must follow Christ's example, or perish. Russian Nihilism,<sup>6</sup> - like Victorian Darwinism - implied a denial of God, left man without a spiritual foundation, and was for Dostoevsky an alien and negative concept. Characters who adopt a nihilistic creed, like Stavrogin in The Devils (1871), find suicide its only logical outcome. For figures like Raskolnikov, whose initial denial of God leads him to such agonizing torment, it is a final acceptance of Christian values, under Sonya's tutelage, that assures him his spiritual salvation. For Dostoevsky, religion is vital; on this basis alone, it is plain to see his Christian vision standing in total opposition to Conrad's own form of post-Darwinian atheism.

As Ian Watt comments in Conrad in the Nineteenth Century (1980), Conrad harboured an instinctive "mistrust for absolute transcendental affirmations" (167). This is nicely illustrated, I would argue, in the way Conrad contemptuously rejects Michaelis's paradisaical vision of an anarchist future in The Secret Agent (1907). Here,

Michaelis's golden world is "planned out like an immense and nice hospital, with gardens and flowers, in which the strong are to devote themselves to the nursing of the weak" (Dent ed. 263). The Christian parallels here seem self-evident. To Conrad, Dostoevsky's trust in man's salvation through Christ might find itself discredited in a similar way, accused of an Utopian naivety, then dismissed with comparable acidity. That Conrad singles out the "mystical contradictions" he sees in the spiritual lives of Dostoevsky's characters goes a long way towards establishing not only deep cultural and political divides. It also provides evidence of Conrad's entire rejection of Dostoevsky's religious creed.

At the time of Conrad's birth in 1857, Dostoevsky was embarking on his final year of political exile as an army lieutenant in the Siberian outpost of Semipalatinsk, little more than 500 kilometers from the present Mongolian border. When Dostoevsky died in 1881, a further fourteen years would elapse before Conrad published his first novel, Almayer's Folly (1895). Though a precise picture of Conrad's reaction to Dostoevsky may be established from his correspondence, Dostoevsky could have had no knowledge of Conrad's work. Despite this, it is possible to speculate on a likely response, and to produce strong evidence indicating Dostoevsky's cultural and ethical opposition to Conrad.

In the first instance, Conrad's status as a Polish national would have prompted an instinctive mistrust in Dostoevsky. Whilst Polish citizens nurtured an inveterate belief in Slavic barbarity, Russia's attitude to her suppressed neighbour shows signs of a parallel hostility. Following the series of uprisings against Russia, a feeling of increasing acrimony towards Poles began to root itself in the Slav mentality. The historian Hugh Seton-Watson, referring to the 1830-1 revolution, notes that politically-astute Russians displayed an unanimous enmity towards Polish demands for the return of their Eastern provinces, such as the Ukraine and Lithuania (288). These regions were regarded as part of the Russian Empire, and little sympathy was shown towards the Polish movement demanding national independence. Even the normally sensitive Pushkin (1799-1837), despite his friendship with the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), shows himself ungenerous and unyielding over the question of Polish politics, and Poland's claims for liberation (Seton-Watson 47). At the onset of the 1863 revolution, Seton-Watson observes a wholly entrenched arrogance in many Russians, particularly the ultra-loyalist Slavophiles who believed "the Poles were really good Slav peasants, unfortunately corrupted by centuries of Catholicism and landlordism, who, given a chance, would revert to their primeval Slav loyalties" (377).

Although leading literary radicals like the philosopher Herzen (1812-1870), and the influential critic Chernyshevsky (1828-1889), were outspoken in their support of the Polish cause, an analysis of Dostoevsky's writings reveals how closely his own views approximate to the general climate of Slavonic scorn for Poland and her people.

Dostoevsky's only extended period of exposure to Polish nationals took place during his imprisonment at the Omsk Convict Stockade in Western Siberia, between 1850 and 1854. The majority of these Poles were, like himself, political prisoners of noble rank, whose involvement in the cause of Polish freedom had resulted in exile. In his memoirs from The House of the Dead (1860), Dostoevsky records his initial responses to these men. What first strikes Dostoevsky's narrator is the haughty, sneering, and chilly superciliousness of the Poles towards their fellow prisoners, especially the peasant-convicts. In fact, Dostoevsky isolates and criticizes the Poles' sense of disgust in the face of Russian barbarity, a sentiment shared by Conrad himself. The first reference to Polish political offenders speaks of their "refined, insulting politeness" and their "extremely uncommunicative", aristocratic manner; this stance was interpreted by both Dostoevsky and the peasant-convicts as contempt towards Russians, and was

especially disliked (The House of the Dead, trans. McDuff 51). Though the narrator begins to build relationships with a number of these men, his initial sympathy for these prisoners is gradually replaced by a feeling that even "the best of them" was "morbid, exclusive, intolerant in the highest degree". The formation of close relations with one character, the partly respected M-Cki, is spoken of as undermined by the "deep, latent scepticism" the narrator finds so intolerable in this Pole's temperament, as well as his inability to "open his heart to anyone" (323). Although a degree of sensitivity is registered for their plight, the narrator's lasting impression of Polish nationals is that they are "bitter, irritable, mistrustful" men, firm in their conviction that Russians (particularly the peasant classes), are generally without "a single redeeming feature, a single trace of humanity" (324). For Dostoevsky, who praises the "quite remarkable" nature of the Russian convict in The House of the Dead (1860), such sentiments did little to endear him to Polish values. By implication, therefore, Conrad's writings, which clearly express the same chilly arrogance towards Slavs, are likely to have aroused little sympathy in Dostoevsky (355).

The House of the Dead (1860), although its eventual judgement is unfavourable, does attempt to maintain a degree

of objectivity regarding Poles. This objectivity is not evident in Dostoevsky's later novels. This fact might well be related to a personal incident in Dostoevsky's career as editor of the journal 'Vremya' (Time). Though the incident cannot be said to parallel the death of Conrad's father, the experience may nevertheless have tainted any remaining sympathies Dostoevsky felt for the Polish people. At the outbreak of the 1863 uprising, when national feeling was at its fiercest against Poland, Dostoevsky's literary collaborator on 'Vremya', N.N. Strakhov, was invited to write an article on the Polish situation. The essay, entitled 'The Fateful Question', was to have dire consequences for Dostoevsky's journal. Rather than expressing the required outrage, the ambivalent tone of Strakhov's article suggested a celebration of Polish culture. As a result the Russian censor intervened, and an imperial order was issued. 'Vremya' was pilloried as an unpatriotic organ that "offended national feelings", and its swift closure demanded (Grossman, Dostoevsky 272).

It may be significant, therefore, that from Crime and Punishment (1866) onwards, fictional Polish characters, as well as references to Poland in Dostoevsky's novels, become prey to a routine of contemptuous mockery. In The Gambler (1866), for example, the narrator passes comment on the

proliferation of "so many wretched little Poles" in Europe (trans. Coulson 22); similarly, Porfiry Petrovich, on the point of extracting a confession from Raskolnikov, judges that a Russian murderer will rather face his punishment, whereas a cowardly Pole is likely to escape abroad (Crime and Punishment, trans. Garnett 309). It is in The Brothers Karamazov (1880), however, that the most sustained passages of Polish xenophobia occur. Prior to his arrest for parricide, Dmitry Karamazov falls into the company of two Poles, Grushenka's one-time lover Vrublesky, and his companion. To the drunken Dmitry and his group, both men are contemptible figures. The Poles, not only intolerably haughty, are also described as "rather greasy", and physically repugnant (trans. Magarshack 95). As the scene becomes more heated, reference is made to the Polish political situation; the two Poles then offer an impassioned toast to Russia "within her borders of 1772". At this, Dmitry, seemingly speaking for Dostoevsky, dubs the two men "damn fools". The chorus of derisive approval that follows from the drinking party suggests the contempt felt for Polish independence throughout Russia (500). Further insulting comments are made regarding the Poles' broken Russian, and their spluttering indignation provides general entertainment when it is proved that they are cheating at cards. As they flee the scene, Grushenka's parting comment

"Good riddance to bad rubbish", concludes an episode which leaves little doubt about Dostoevsky's contempt for Poland, her people, and their concerns (509).

Though Dostoevsky reviles the Polish mentality and her national politics on numerous occasions, Poland can also be seen to take on a larger, general significance in Dostoevsky's world-picture. Referring to current Polish hostilities in his Winter Notes on Summer Impressions (1863), Dostoevsky observes that "the Polish war is a war of two Christianities - it is the beginning of the future war between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, in other words - of the Slavic genius with European civilization" (Quoted in Frank, The Stir of Liberation 1860-5 274).

This passage points clearly to two major objections against Poland - her Catholic faith, and her status as a representative of European civilization and values. Dostoevsky believed implicitly in Russia's future role as a sort of spiritual messiah to the western world, and insisted on the greater superiority of both the Orthodox faith and the "Slavic genius". His writing, indeed, expresses an entrenched hatred towards both Catholicism, and what he saw as the spiritual vacuum now existing at the heart of European civilization. For him, the Catholic faith - as



practised in Poland and throughout Europe - had betrayed that spirit of Christianity he felt still remained intact in Russian orthodoxy; in Europe, "Christ's message of love and charity" had been desecrated by promises of "worldly goods and comforts" (188). Dostoevsky's intensely hostile interpretation of Catholicism is arguably most evident in his 'Legend of the Grand Inquisitor' in The Brothers Karamazov (1880). Here the Catholic Inquisitor, who has corrupted Jesus's message and offers material solace in the place of spiritual values, bread instead of miracles, meets and talks to Christ at the Second Coming. As Ivan Karamazov relates, the Inquisitor informs Christ that

'everything ... has been handed over by you to the Pope, and therefore, everything is now in the Pope's hands, and there's no need for you to come at all now - at any rate, do not interfere for the time being'. (trans. Magarshack 294)

To Dostoevsky, a sacred religious message has been violated by Catholicism, and upholders of the faith, like the Poles, stand condemned in Dostoevsky's intolerant, and often sweeping imagination. By direct implication, of course, Conrad would have been foremost among the despised.

In Winter Notes on Summer Impressions (1863) Dostoevsky

does not merely isolate Poland as a centre of Catholicism. He alludes to the country as a representative of European civilization; she is an enemy to his Slavic sensibilities. For Dostoevsky, Poland, and the whole of Europe, was a land of waning spiritual beliefs, a land that had prostituted its higher values for the pursuit of earthly, material gain. Escaping his Russian creditors in late 1862, Dostoevsky embarked on his first and formative European tour, a tour which took him to Germany, Belgium, France, England, and Italy. Expecting to find "a land of holy wonders" in Europe, Dostoevsky was appalled by the debasing worship of money and the greedy pursuit of possessions he saw around him, particularly in Paris and London (Quoted in Frank, The Stir of Liberation 1860-5 181). Reviewing his overall impressions of France and her people, he wrote to his friend Strakhov: "The Frenchman is pleasant, honest, polite, but false, and money for him is everything. No trace of any ideal" (186).

In London, swarms of men and women drinking "to the point of insensibility" in "beer houses ... adorned like palaces" suggested to him false worship; the city, in his imagination, appeared like a "Babylon" where "the Apocalypse ... [came] to pass before your eyes" at every corner (Mochulsky, 233).

If we reconsider Dostoevsky's symbolic interpretation of the Polish War in Winter Notes on Summer Impressions (1863), it seems clear that he views Poland as prey to the kind of European corruption he saw in Paris and London, something requiring the scourge of "slavic genius" to dispel its essential depravity. The extent of Dostoevsky's Ultra-Slavonism, what might be termed his European xenophobia, can never be overestimated; indeed it seemed to grow in strength with his increasing years. Despite the fact that Conrad is wholly critical of Western materialism - whether it be in the Belgian Congo or in his fictional Costaguana - his very status as a European Pole might well have prompted suspicions in Dostoevsky's mind, suspicions as to the sincerity of Conrad's rejection of material values.

On investigation, it does seem clear that Conrad's own Russophobia is paralleled, even matched, by an inveterate contempt for Poland and Poles in Dostoevsky. Further examination, however, reveals that Dostoevsky may well have found strong objection to Conrad's adoption of England, and her language. On a number of occasions during Conrad's literary career, attention was drawn to the novelty of a Polish born author writing not in his native language but in what, in effect, was his third tongue. The well-known critic, Robert Lynd, writing in 'The Daily News' on 10th

August 1908, saw it as "a very regrettable thing" that Conrad had ceased to write in his own Polish, and pointed to the consequent loss of "concentration and intensity of vision" implicit in forsaking one's native language. In an article that is known to have particularly incensed Conrad, Lynd ends by dubbing the writer a "homeless person" (Najder, Chronicle 340-1). Much attention, of course, has been given to the theme of national betrayal in Conrad's writing, and a convincing parallel has been drawn between Lord Jim's desertion of the 'Patna', and Conrad's own sense of betrayal at leaving Poland. In the light of these facts, it becomes difficult to ignore Dostoevsky's own feelings regarding the question of national identity.

In The Devils (1871), the novel's moral spokesman, Shatov, proclaims that "he who loses his ties with his native soil, loses his gods - that is, all his aims" (trans. Magarshack 667). For Dostoevsky, whose own harrowing experience of autocratic rule did little to dampen his life-long adherence to Tsar and Country, this sentiment amounts to a formal expression of creed. That he was severely critical of those that discarded their birthrights is evidenced by his hostile reaction to Turgenev, who fled to Germany, then France, following the furore raised by his novel Fathers and Sons (1861). From the time of his

startling rise to literary prominence with Poor Folk (1846), Dostoevsky had waged an intermittent battle with the aristocratic Turgenev. In Dostoevsky's mind, Turgenev's highly Westernised criticisms of Russia amounted to national disloyalty. After a protracted period of dissent, Dostoevsky finally vented his full hatred for Turgenev, creating a celebrated and scathing parody of him in The Devils (1871). In the figure of the vain litterateur Karmazinov, Dostoevsky satirizes many aspects of Turgenev's personality that were odious to him, most notably the writer's flight from Russia, and his current residence in the hated Germany. Paying homage to the "very first works, which were so full of spontaneous poetry" (96), Dostoevsky goes on to mock the Turgenev who is now severed from the mainstream of Russian thought, the "great genius" who "has completely lost touch with his native country" (478). To illustrate this decline, Dostoevsky's caricature Karmazinov delivers a public reading from a piece entitled 'Merci', a skit on Turgenev's two stories 'Ghosts' (1864) and 'Enough' (1865). In Dostoevsky's hands, the work becomes a pompous, saccharine farce, a lifeless succession of fragmented images:

They were sitting somewhere in Germany. Suddenly they beheld Pompey or Cassius on the eve of the battle, and a chill rapture runs down their backs. Some water-nymph starts squeaking in the bushes.

Gluck plays a fiddle in the rushes .... And suddenly everything vanishes, and the great genius is crossing the Volga in winter in a thaw. (475-6)

Whilst an amusing parody of Turgenev's mature literary style, the language of this passage is of course over-inflated, absurd, and aimless. The final image, furthermore, seems to imply a faded, remote memory, rather than a genuinely living experience. In a letter to A. Maikov recounting a meeting with Turgenev in Baden-Baden, Dostoevsky reports suggesting that his enemy purchase a telescope to see Russia, before writing about her from such a distance (see Mochulsky 328). In The Devils (1871) and in his letters, Dostoevsky creates a Turgenev who, in leaving his homeland, has certainly lost "his aims", "his ties", and his Russian "Gods". He has denied himself direction and coherent purpose, in Dostoevsky's opinion. Quite simply, Turgenev is "a traitor" (quoted in Mochulsky 328), and a regenade. There can be little doubt of this when Karmazinov, the arrogant Germanophile, delivers the following profoundly self-condemning sentiment: "'When the city council proposed laying a new drainage pipe, then I felt in my heart that this Karlsruhe drainage question was more pleasing and clear to me than all the questions concerning my dear fatherland'" (The Devils 452).

Although, as a fellow-Russian novelist, Turgenev's national betrayal was particularly galling to Dostoevsky, it is not unreasonable to suggest that any deliberate severing of national identity would be condemned, and considered threatening to literary genius in his opinion. In the light of this, it does seem probable that Conrad would have faced a parallel charge of forsaking not merely his native soil and ties, but also his mother tongue. Dostoevsky's frenzied reaction to Turgenev, indeed, offers itself as a valuable guide in assessing the extent of Dostoevsky's contempt for those who stand accused - as Conrad frequently is - of betraying their birthrights and heritage.

Moving away from the personal and cultural antipathies that Conrad would have prompted in Dostoevsky, a brief reflection on Conrad's deeply pessimistic world vision might lead us to suspect evidence of a major ethical divide separating the two authors. Both Dostoevsky and Conrad, of course, show themselves deeply aware of the dark capabilities of the human soul, whether it be in the "base, cynical, filthy, unjust.... violent" world of the Siberian prisonhouse (The House of the Dead 89), or in the mankind capable of indulging in "unspeakable rites" in the Belgian Congo ('Heart of Darkness', Penguin ed. 86). For Dostoevsky, however, full recognition of man's evil potential never

denies the possibility of regeneration and a Christian redemption. This fact, I would argue, provides an ever-present force for optimism throughout Dostoevsky's work. Conrad's post-Darwinian world, without a spiritual core, offering only dark fatalism and unrelieved suffering, is likely to have provoked an angry and hostile reaction in Dostoevsky. For the writer who cherished a belief in mankind's higher spiritual demands - a conviction that bread alone, as in the 'Legend of the Grand Inquisitor' (The Brothers Karamazov 288-311), will not satisfy the human condition - Conrad's vision of a man wholly motivated by self-interest would have been regarded as a desperate ideology. There is much evidence, as I shall now show, to indicate Dostoevsky's antagonism towards the kind of Godless fatalism - the belief that man is essentially "un animal mechant" (a wicked animal) - that we find at the heart of Conrad's vision (Watts 117).

Referring to his reaction to the pessimist philosopher Alfred Schopenhauer (1788-1860), Joseph Frank isolates Dostoevsky's Siberian years as formative in creating a fixed cynicism, an innate distrust, against the sort of beliefs which stress existence is merely a realm of pain and suffering. As Frank comments, Dostoevsky was hardly qualified as a "receptive listener" to such creeds, having



"fought his own way back from hopelessness" at the Omsk Convict-Stockade (Frank, The Stir of Liberation 271). That he reacted strongly to those who fostered such views is evidenced by his reaction to his friend and collaborator on 'Vremya', N.N. Strakhov. In an 1862 essay dealing with the radical movement, Strakhov digresses to consider a striking metaphysical issue: "Is man really good? [he asks] Are we really able boldly to deny his rottenness?.... No, [he is] rotten to the core!" (Frank, The Stir of Liberation 195-6) Dostoevsky's response to this remark was adamant; he "would hate, despise and persecute" such a philosophy until the end of his life (196). In a similar vein, it is not surprising to find Turgenev again the source of Dostoevsky's anger. Now living in Germany, Turgenev's late work began to take on a quality of atheistic, almost scientific fatalism. In one letter, he muses: "'Is there God? I don't know. But now I do know the law of causality. Twice two is four'". With a lyrical despair reminiscent of Conrad's own use of the French language for philosophical speculation, Turgenev speaks of an inevitable "resignation ... la hideuse resignation". Following their notorious meeting in Baden-Baden, Dostoevsky wrote to Maikov (28th August 1867), stressing that Turgenev's metaphysical stance "insulted [him] ... too deeply" to permit any sympathy or sensitivity towards his current literary endeavours (Mochulsky 329).

Even in Crime and Punishment (1866), it is important to remember, a faithless human "louse" like Raskolnikov is eventually pulled back from his nihilistic despair towards spiritual regeneration and belief. Given Dostoevsky's own hard-won optimism, and his strong censure of all fatalism, a brief glance at Conrad's overpoweringly pessimistic vision is surely enough to convince us of Dostoevsky's likely hostility.

The best examples of Conrad's general philosophy, of course, are to be found in his letters to R.B. Cunninghame Graham. Whereas Dostoevsky labours for hope, the tone in many of these letters illustrates Conrad's resigned belief in "the futility - the ghastly, jocular futility of life" (Watts 59). In a letter dated 31st January 1898, for instance, the nature and extent of Conrad's pessimism becomes apparent. For him, like Schopenhauer before him, man's plight is essentially tragic; in a Godless universe, Conrad's human animal is entirely corrupt, exclusively prompted by motives of self-interest:

Life [is] after all - an uninterrupted agony of effort ... To be part of the animal kingdom under the conditions of this earth is very well - but as soon as you know of your slavery the pain, the anger, the strife - the tragedy begins .... Our

relief is in stupidity, in drunkenness of all kinds, in lies, in beliefs, in murder, thieving, reforming - in negation, in contempt - each man according to the promptings of his particular devil. There is no morality, no knowledge and no hope; there is only the consciousness of ourselves which drives us about a world that whether seen in a convex or a concave mirror is always but a vain and fleeting appearance (Watts 70-1)

The almost complete despair of this extract cannot be underemphasized; it typifies Conrad's fatalist vision, a vision that was criticised by his contemporaries for its unmitigated bleakness. D.H. Lawrence, in a 1912 letter to Edward Garnett, says of Conrad: "Why all this giving in before you start, that pervades Conrad and such folks - the writers among the Ruins. I can't forgive Conrad for being so sad and for giving in" (Beal 132).

Given the weight of Dostoevsky's unforgiving reaction to men like Strakhov and Turgenev, it seems appropriate to quote Lawrence's remarks here. Dostoevsky, I would argue, is likely to have strongly supported Lawrence's sentiments towards Conrad. Indeed, Conrad's mankind, subject to an "anarchistic end of utter desolation, madness, and despair"

('Author's Note' to The Secret Agent, Penguin ed. 43), lies in complete contrast to Dostoevsky's world where, through struggle, "the story [is] of the gradual renewal of ... man ... his gradual regeneration.... his passing from one world to another" (Crime and Punishment, trans. Magarshack 493).

For Dostoevsky, whose brave optimism was born out of his Siberian experiences, Conrad's surrender to hopelessness would surely have been greeted with unguarded derision.

From the above argument, it might seem that I have established a reasonably concrete case for abandoning my comparative thesis! Any sense of a significant 'brotherhood' existing between Conrad and Dostoevsky would, at this stage, seem to be either remote or peripheral. In the following chapters, however, I shall endeavour to suggest that there are in fact many unsuspected literary, political, and ideological unities existing between both writers' worlds.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER

1. 02.05.1917. This letter, it should be noted, was later revised and published as a preface to Garnett's work, and finally included in Conrad's Notes on Life and Letters (1921).

2. For example, in a review of 21.10.1911 in the journal Nation, Garnett places Conrad's art in the tradition of the nineteenth century Russian novel.

3. It is interesting to note the essentially parallel vision of Conrad's father Apollo, himself an accomplished essayist, translator and nationalist poet, in his essay 'Poland and Muscovy' (1864). Collected in Conrad Under Familial Eyes, ed. Z. Najder, pp.75-88.

4. Apollo was exiled at Vologda and Chernikhov between 1862 and 1868. His wife died in April 1865.

5. It is interesting to note that D.H. Lawrence also dismissed the sincerity of Dostoevsky's vision, believing his Christian optimism false and his real nature to be found in what he terms the author's "shadowy and rat-like" hate. See Lawrence's Selected Literary Criticism.

6. The literary debate on Nihilism, started by Turgenev in Fathers and Sons (1861) continued throughout the 1860's and 70's; all of Dostoevsky's major novels consider this issue.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERARY ETHOS

A superficial appraisal of the tenor and style of both Conrad and Dostoevsky's novels might suggest that we are dealing with two novelists whose temperaments and methods are irreconcilable. Joseph Frank, in his introduction to Boris Brasol's translation of The Diary of a Writer (1873-1881), provides, I feel, a just assessment of Dostoevsky's popular literary image:

The name of Dostoevsky, for an average Western reader, is apt to evoke the figure of a tormented genius existing on the edge of madness and

creating novels of hallucinatory power out of the fantasies of his own demented psyche. (ix)

It is not only the themes and characters of Dostoevsky's novels that have precipitated this remarkable literary image. The colourful details of the author's personal life - his imprisonment, his gambling, his notorious epilepsy - have all meant that his literary method has become associated with extremes of emotion, wildness, even uncontrolled creative inspiration. To employ Nietzsche's well-known critical distinction, Dostoevsky might be said to have a thoroughly 'Dionysian' literary temperament.

The critic, Konstantin Mochulsky, contrasting the frenetic, Bacchic spirit of Dostoevsky's work with that of his contemporaries, refers to the balanced and meticulously crafted art of Tolstoy and Turgenev. So unlike Dostoevsky's fiction, Mochulsky suggests, the work of these novelists "is directed to the sense of measure and harmony.... [whose] summit lies in dispassionate, aesthetic contemplation" (434). Mochulsky's observation, of course, neatly defines Nietzsche's so-called 'Apollonian' literary temperament; it is a temperament, I would argue, that closely approximates to Conrad's own artistic methods and ethos.

As I have previously mentioned, Conrad is known to have



deeply deplored unrestrained writing, what he termed the "laying [of] one's soul more or less bare to the world", if it is at the expense of balance, and that "decency" necessary for fine writing ('A Familiar Preface' to A Personal Record (1912) xvi). In almost every line of Conrad we are aware, often through complex narrative methods, that Conrad favours Alex Heyst's edict in Victory (1915). Literature, like life, should be conducted with a strong sense of rational "detachment". Contrary to Dostoevsky's popular image, Conrad is usually linked to that tradition of creative writers whose work is crafted in a rarified atmosphere where each sentence becomes a minor sculpture, wrought through long and agonizing labour. It is apposite to mention here Gustave Flaubert and Henry James as novelists from this select priesthood of literary mastercraftsman. Their names, of course, have become associated with Conrad and his artistic ethos. Indeed, in A Personal Record (1912), Conrad clearly indicates his adherence to Flaubert's creative literary temperament:

The kind Norman giant [Conrad observes] ... was he not, in his unworldly, almost ascetic, devotion to his art a sort of literary, saint-like hermit? (3)

Conrad's well-known purist devotion to Art is clearly illustrated in a number of his letters which stress the

theme of "dream[ing] for hours, hours! over a sentence and even then [being unable to] .... put it together so as to satisfy the cravings of my soul" (Collected Letters of Conrad 1 287). Such statements, we might feel, tend to place Conrad in a literary world far removed from the popular conception we have of Dostoevsky's artistic methods and humour.

A brief reflection on the nature of Conrad and Dostoevsky's respective literary temperaments does suggest entirely different creative methods. It might seem apparent, furthermore, that Conrad is an essentially 'narrative' author, whereas Dostoevsky's work relies more fundamentally upon dramatic dialogue. This important distinction can be made clear by a brief consideration of each authors' major novels.

In The Secret Agent (1907), for instance, it can be argued that the thrust of Conrad's "simple tale" is delivered primarily through his ironic narrative technique, rather than through the action, or through dramatic dialogue. The vast canvas of Nostromo (1904), of course, depends upon a complex web of interlocking narratives to create Costaguana and her people. Despite the dynamic nature of this tale of rebellion and political violence - a genre

in which we might reasonably expect to find the stress placed on dramatic dialogue - Conrad consistently recounts his characters' exploits through narration, regularly rendering events in retrospect, even employing the epistolary form at key moments. The one major deviation from this pronounced narrative method occurs at the novel's close, where dialogue might be claimed to dominate. Significantly, it is here that many critics feel Nostromo (1904) falters.

In stark contrast, the monologue of the Underground Man forcefully underlines Dostoevsky's adherence to a dramatic exposition of character and plot. Indeed the critic, A.V. Lunacharsky, in his 1929 article 'On Dostoevsky's Multi-Voicedness', defines Dostoevsky's novels as "brilliantly staged dialogues", dialogues which render their author a mere spectator to the "convulsive disputes" he initiates (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 32-3). It is telling to observe that Dostoevsky's Notebooks, which chart the intricate development of his plots and the creation of his protagonists, often present ideas and conflicts in play-format. As an example of this, the notorious passage charting the meeting of Stavrogin and Father Tikhon in The Devils (1871), is developed in Dostoevsky's Notebook in the following way:

The Prince [later Stavrogin] replies: I also love what is foreign. I love science, art.

Tikhon: As a guest, and not as a master in his own home. You love science, then why didn't you become a man of science? You love universal mankind - but do you believe in it? Do you believe in God and Christ? ... You don't know anything holy! If only you would revere something as holy.

The Prince: What for? (Mochulsky 425)

This example, one of many such, offers a valuable insight into Dostoevsky's whole method of composition, a method which depends strongly on both the theatrical and the dramatic. In the novel The Idiot (1869), for example, it is significant that our first introduction to Myshkin's inner world is given in the long monologue he delivers to the Yepanchin women regarding his past life in Switzerland (trans. Magarshack 74-99). Though Dostoevsky might have incorporated a narrative account of this time into the novel, he favours the use of a monologue that might easily be transposed onto the stage. In The Brothers Karamazov (1880), it should be remembered, Dostoevsky decides to present his vision of contemporary atheism not directly from Ivan, but through the additional dramatic and parabolic medium of 'The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor'. Though the melodramatic frenzy of many of Dostoevsky's scenes makes us

naturally associate his work with drama, it is his concentration on dialogue for thematic and ideological purposes that seems to clinch the argument in favour of Dostoevsky as a truly 'dramatic' artist. In this light, Dostoevsky's semi-theatrical world might seem to contradict Conrad's more narrative art and methods.

In general terms, this view of Conrad as a narrative, 'Apollonian' artist, in contrast to the 'Dionysian', dramatic image of Dostoevsky, tends to place the writers at opposing ends of the literary spectrum. If one considers the issues arising from this distinction in greater detail, however, quite a different, and less categorical picture can be seen to emerge.

In relation to Dostoevsky's work, I would argue, the term 'Dionysian' suggests a quality of wildness and uncontrolled inspiration. The label, by definition, tends to preclude any intense concern for literary craft or structure. In a famous criticism, Henry James refers to the novels of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy as "loose baggy monsters" (James, The Art of the Novel 189), an image that has been particularly difficult to displace in critical circles. In contrast, as I have said, Conrad's emphatic adherence to literary craftsmanship is readily apparent in his letters

and, perhaps most significantly, in his 'Preface' to The Nigger of Narcissus (1897). In this essay, which amounts to a statement of his literary creed, Conrad suggests that "it is only through an unremitting never-discouraged care for the shape and ring of sentences that an approach can be made, ... [through the] common surface of words", towards the rendering of a complete and truthful vision of the world (Dent ed. ix). If one accepts Henry James's sweeping assertion suggesting sloppy techniques and methods in Dostoevsky's novels, there could be little question of a connection developing between the two authors as exponents of crafted literary art. To refute Henry James's damaging charge, I now intend to show, through a close analysis of certain novels, that Dostoevsky's fictional craft, his desire to structure his texts, is just as strongly active as in Conrad's case.

The Devils (1871) is most frequently advocated as Dostoevsky's least cohesive major text. Many critics would argue that the novel is undermined by innumerable digressive passages that confuse and dilute the overall structure of Dostoevsky's work. It is not until the final part of the novel, for instance, that the anarchist's plot to murder Shatov finally emerges. Prior to this, it has been suggested, Dostoevsky's novelistic structure has been near

chaotic, and his vast cast of characters emmeshed in seemingly unassociated sub-dramas. In a letter to A.A. Strakhov on 24th March 1870, Dostoevsky admits that he held no great hopes for his novel from an artistic point of view. His intention, as he claims, was primarily to express his political stance regarding the Russian anarchist movement and its nihilistic ideology. He comments:

I have great hopes for the piece I'm writing.... not from an artistic point of view - I want to express several thoughts, even if the artistic side suffers. These thoughts have accumulated in my mind and heart and have to be expressed. Let it be a pamphlet, but at least I'll have my say.

(Wasioliek 208-9)

Although The Devils (1871) is, I feel, a profound artistic achievement, it would be foolish to ignore some of the structural deficiencies existing within the novel. Indeed, if we accept Dostoevsky's assessment of the literary value of this novel, it does seem fair to discount the work from our present discussion, and limit our argument to a debate on the artistic achievement of Dostoevsky's other late novels. Rather than referring to Crime and Punishment (1866), a work that is generally regarded as Dostoevsky's most successfully integrated and concentrated dramatic text, I shall focus on an extended analysis of the structure and

literary craftsmanship evident in the first book of The Idiot (1869). This novel, I would argue, is not normally credited for a concern with form, language, and literary technique, as is the vast majority of Conrad's fiction.

It might not immediately strike the reader that the opening book of The Idiot (1869) occurs over one day. Although a comparison with Joyce's formal structuring of Ulysses (1922) might not be wholly appropriate, it is significant that Dostoevsky scrupulously observes an exact chronology, following the classical dramatic formula. In the novel's first sentence, we are told it is 9 am when Prince Myshkin, Rogozhin, and Lebedev arrive in St. Petersburg. This precise time-structuring continues when, at 11 am, Myshkin visits the Yepanchin household to meet the General. At 12.30 pm, he lunches with Lisaveta Prokofyevna and her three daughters. Indeed, Dostoevsky constructs the novel so that the major protagonists of the story are introduced as a natural consequence of Myshkin's journeying; he acts as a catalyst, in fact, bringing individual and family crises to the fore. In charting the afternoon, which takes Myshkin to the Ivolgin household in search of lodgings, Dostoevsky directs the action towards the intrigue surrounding Nastasya Filippovna's evening party, and the expected announcement of her marriage plans. Nastasya's half-crazed appearance at



Ganya's generates Myskhin's frantic hunt for her flat, which occupies the late afternoon and early evening. He is finally admitted to her party, we are told, at 9.30 pm. The growing tension finally explodes at 11.30 pm, when Rogozhin bids his 100,000 rubles for Nastasya, and the first book closes with the sensational money-burning scene. Despite the frenzied melodrama of Dostoevsky's scenario, he strictly observes a tight dramatic time-structure throughout. There are few digressive passages to interrupt the direction and compressed tension of his text. Though one might cite the Prince's difficulties with General Ivolgin, whose farcical antics delay his arrival at Nastasya Filippovna's, this episode is not really a comic aside (The Idiot, trans. Magarshack 147-55). Instead, it tends to promote a mood of tense expectation and frustration, as Myskhin is thwarted in his search for Nastasya's flat. From this perspective, I would argue, it can be seen that Dostoevsky's careful construction of the opening book of The Idiot (1869) suggests not an author reliant on a wayward 'Dionysian' inspiration, but a novelist deeply concerned with precise literary craftsmanship.

In the earlier part of my discussion, I referred to popular critical conceptions that exist regarding the respective literary skills of Conrad and Dostoevsky. I noted

Conrad's well-known devotion to a meticulously crafted, and restrained narrative language, his almost priestly care for the very "shape and ring" of each individual sentence ('Preface', The Nigger of Narcissus ix). Whilst it would be rash to invest Dostoevsky with these qualities, it does seem necessary to review the many critical works which refer to his frenzied use of language. A brief analysis of the first part of The Idiot (1869), I would suggest, reveals that Dostoevsky's supposed lack of restraint is not evident in the language he employs to depict his scenes. The wildness, I would argue, is solely a characteristic of his fantastic plot, and the bizarre actions of his characters. To illustrate this point, it would be apt to examine one of Book One's most fevered scenes.

When the Prince's afternoon at Ganya Ivolgin's household is disrupted by the appearance of Nastasya and Rogozhin, the direction of Dostoevsky's tale seems bound on a familiar, melodramatic course. Ganya, whose mercenary hopes for the fortune of Nastasya causes much family resentment, becomes embroiled in a heated argument with his sister, Varya. She concludes the dispute by spitting in her brother's face. Ganya, in uncontrollable rage, strikes out at her, only to be prevented by the hand of Myshkin. In retaliation, Ganya directs his hatred onto the Prince,

resoundingly slapping his face. Though the scene could hardly be more extreme, it is significant that Dostoevsky's narrative language remains precise and controlled throughout. Indeed, he employs brief, purely functional sentences that tend to rationalize, even distance, the incident:

For a few moments they stood like that, facing each other. Ganya still clasped her hand in his. Varya tried to pull it away with all her might, but, unable to restrain herself any longer and beside herself, she suddenly spat in her brother's face ... Ganya felt dizzy, and, completely forgetting himself, he aimed a blow at his sister with all his strength. He would have struck her in the face, if another hand had not suddenly caught hold of his. The Prince stood between him and his sister ... Mad with fury, he gave the Prince a resounding slap in the face. (137-8)

Such balanced and restrained narrative language is far more evident in Dostoevsky's novels than might be suspected by those who adhere to a Jamesian view of Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky, I propose, is not a wild, inspirational artist, a novelist who pays scant attention to that "unremitting never-discouraged care" for structure and language of which

Conrad speaks ('Preface', The Nigger of Narcissus ix). Such an interpretation of the first part of The Idiot (1869), I would argue, tends to challenge fixed critical prejudices, establishing Dostoevsky's active concern for literary craftsmanship. This fact, indeed, enables us to forge closer links between both novelists. We can begin to regard them as artistic allies, allies consciously pursuing stylistic perfection.

Though Conrad and Dostoevsky can be argued to share a common commitment to literary craftsmanship, the establishing of truly significant bonds between their worlds and artistic aims requires a far more detailed analysis. It is necessary, for instance, to consider their respective conceptions of reality itself, and its realization in their novels.

Though an early advocate of Dostoevsky's first novel, Poor Folk (1846), the Russian critic, Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848), expressed a deep distaste for Dostoevsky's next short work, The Double (1846). In a well-known assessment of this striking and unusual tale, where a minor Petersburg clerk, Golyadkin, is terrorized by his own doppelganger, Belinsky points to an aspect of Dostoevsky's writing that surfaces again and again in much of his later fiction. In a statement that would surely have elicited Conrad's approval,

Belinsky comments that "in our days, the fantastic can have a place only in madhouses, but not in literature, [it] being the business of doctors, not poets" (Quoted in Frank, Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt 177). This early reference to the "fantastic" element in Dostoevsky's work, where the intensity of his scenes stretches the reader to the boundaries of what is either believable or emotionally tolerable, is memorably illustrated throughout Crime and Punishment (1866). We might point, for example, to the scene where the recently bereaved and consumptive Katerina Marmelodova dances and sings in a crowded Petersburg street, hysterically begging for alms. Though Conrad memorably dismissed such episodes as the "fierce mouthings" (Jean-Aubry 2 140) of a "terror-haunted" author (Notes on Life and Letters 48), what he considered as "fantastic" was, for Dostoevsky, the true reality of a situation. Indeed, Dostoevsky's realism does not involve the depiction of each event and thought that might occupy the life of a Leopold Bloom, for instance. Instead, it is a forced entry into a more extreme, but no less valid, level of the human psyche. On a number of occasions, Dostoevsky defends what he himself termed his "fantastic realism".

Accused in his own times of exaggeration and implausibility, Dostoevsky attacked the prevailing trend of

contemporaries like Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-1889), who asked art to duplicate scientifically the everyday mundanities of life. Chernyshevsky, as his novel What is to be Done? (1862) makes abundantly clear, saw the purpose of art being neither to "improve reality" or to "beautify it", but simply to "reproduce it" (Quoted in Becker 64). Emile Zola, whose work Dostoevsky once condemned as "filth" (Quoted in Kjetsaa 305), comes naturally to mind in this connection; Zola, of course, saw the novel as a form that should be committed to an exact reproduction of life. Dostoevsky, however, insisted that such a method merely produced an insufficient, surface reality. Though his own realism might be "fantastic", Dostoevsky insists that it is only with this full realism that one can 'find the man in a man'. Clarifying his position, he states, " I am a realist in the higher sense, i.e., I depict all the depths of the human soul" (Quoted in Fanger 215).

In a letter to his friend Strakhov, Dostoevsky defines his position in the following terms:

I have my own particular opinions about the real. What most call fantastic and impossible is often for me real in its actual and deepest meaning - the true reality. A record of everyday events is for me far from realism. (Quoted in Kjetsaa 137-8)

In support of his vision, Dostoevsky points to the often fantastic nature of the everyday world as recorded in newspapers. Here, he claims, tales of extreme emotion and violence are repeatedly encountered. Vindicating his "fantastic realism" to Strakhov, Dostoevsky comments:

In every single newspaper, you can find stories about absolutely real yet absolutely strange facts that our writers would reject and call fantastic - these things hold no interest for them. And yet these stories are the deep and living reality, because they are facts. They happen every day, every moment; they are in no way exceptional.  
(137)

In his extensive journalistic venture The Diary of a Writer (1873-1881), Dostoevsky shows himself to be a keen observer of contemporary criminal cases, cases notable for their intense passion or peculiar cruelty. In a number of instances, these fantastic, yet real cases, are incorporated into his final novel, The Brothers Karamazov (1880). Most memorable of these, perhaps, are the legal trials involving parental violence and torture against children. Referred to in The Diary of a Writer (1873-1881), they appear again in Ivan Karamazov's gory testimony denying the existence of a loving God in the fifth book of The Brothers Karamazov

(1880), 'Pro and Contra' (see Magarshack 276-87). This need in Dostoevsky to justify the 'extreme' in his fiction, and prove it as the 'reality', provides us with the strongest evidence of his adherence to a "fantastic realism".

It might at first seem difficult to reconcile Dostoevsky's fantastic world with Conrad's own view of reality. In the much quoted 'Preface' to The Nigger of the Narcissus (1897), Conrad speaks of his need to reveal "the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment" (Dent ed. x). In a way that recalls T.S. Eliot, the task of Conrad's writing lies in the total unveiling of reality through "moment[s] of vision" (xii). Rather than necessarily insisting man's reality is 'extreme' in the Dostoevskyan sense, Conrad demands from his work not a re-interpretation of man's world, but an absolute unveiling of it. His literary world is founded on the attempt "to snatch in a moment of courage...[each] passing phase of life". In a famous passage which reaches to the very heart his artistic ethos, Conrad writes that he wants

to make you [the reader] hear, ... make you feel,  
... make you SEE. That - and no more, and it is  
everything. (x)

In Conrad's attempt to drive a clear path towards this



ultimately real vision of the world, it is possible (even in these brief extracts) to divine the almost superhuman exertion he feels is required to successfully accomplish his task. In an 1896 letter to his first publisher T. Fisher Unwin, Conrad elaborates on this need for absolute vividness in the quest for total realism. The nature of Conrad's remorseless pursuit, even his tendency towards extremism in this matter is, I feel, strikingly apparent in this passage:

A picture of life [he writes] is saved from failure by the merciless vividness of detail. Like a dream it must be startling, undeniable, absurd and appalling. Like a dream it may be ludicrous or tragic and like a dream pitiless and inevitable; a thing monstrous or sweet from which You cannot escape. (Collected Letters of Conrad 1 303)

The adjectives he invokes in this passage suggest that, in the task of rendering a full and completely vivid reality, Conrad feels it is permissible to employ methods of extreme representation not usually associated with his 'Apollonian' literary temperament. A brief consideration of the imagery used in some of his major novels, I would argue, does illustrate the extent to which Conrad was willing to go in order to make his reality "as PELLUCID as clean plate glass" (339) (Conrad's emphasis).

In Under Western Eyes (1911), of course, Conrad delivers a withering critique of what he sees as the charlatanism of all but one of his Genevan anarchists. Amongst these motley figures, it is arguably Madame de S- who is depicted with the fiercest imagery; Conrad's portrait of her, in fact, recalls Dickens's caricatures. Whilst parody, by definition, demands an inflated language, the full scale of Conrad's method is somewhat surprising when considered in detail. In describing the simple process of eating a cake, for instance, the fantastic nature of Conrad's imagery produces a picture so grotesque in its naked reality that it far outstrips any mere intention to insult. Its effect, rather, is to reveal Madame de S-'s actual mortality, giving us a glimpse of the skull beneath the skin:

With imperturbable gravity he [Peter Ivanovitch] undid the string and smoothed the paper open on a part of the table within the reach of Madame de S-'s hand ... From time to time ... [she] extended a claw-like hand, glittering with costly rings, towards the paper of cakes, took up one and devoured it, displaying her big false teeth ghoulishly. (Dent ed. 217)

In the writings of both Conrad and Dostoevsky, it is significant to note how 'the grotesque' is used not for

traditional comic ends, but as a serious device for revealing a higher realism. Madame de S-, indeed, might not look out of place alongside Dostoevsky's most bizarre fictional creations; supremely grotesque figures such as Marmeladov, who are, nevertheless, gripped by a very real and terrible poverty.

It is in the appearance and behaviour of Necator, the anarchist who horribly deafens Razumov at the close of Under Western Eyes (1911), that Conrad's fantastic imagery reaches a zenith. The imagery he employs aims not simply to create an obese and loathsome double-agent. It plumbs, in its use of extremes, the far more sinister reality of the situation. The fantastic nature of Necator's hallmark, a paper with the letters 'N.N.' that he pins onto the chests of his executed victims, shines a light into the sordid underworld of Conrad's anarchists. No mere caricatural representation, I would suggest, could hope to achieve Conrad's complex results. In this striking detail, which the narrator admits is "picturesque" (266), Conrad's task of depicting the essential reality of his scene - however bold and bizarre the outcome - is readily evident. Necator's appearance, Razumov admits, provokes in him not just a sense of laughter but, significantly, a feeling of horror:

The abrupt squeaks of the fat man seemed to

proceed from that thing like a balloon he carried under his overcoat. The stolidity of his attitude, the big feet, the lifeless, hanging hands, the enormous bloodless cheek, the thin wisps of hair straggling down the nape of the neck ... that creature [was] so grotesque as to set town dogs barking at its mere sight. (266-7)

Conrad's distorted and fantastic human specimen, it should be remembered, is but one figure in the gallery of bizarre characters that dominates Under Western Eyes (1911), as well as The Secret Agent (1907). The fact that Conrad employs similar techniques in both novels, indeed, suggests evidence of a consistent literary method and ethos. Instances of extreme representation, in fact, are a far more prolific feature of Conrad's writing than might at first be suspected. Despite his ironic treatment of character in The Secret Agent (1907), Stevie's horrible death and the account of his mortal remains - termed by the narrator as "the by-products of a butcher's shop" (Dent ed. 88) - alert us to Conrad's bizarre imagery, his vivid realism. In 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), it is also notable that Conrad punctuates his whole text with a series of fantastic images. The doctor Marlow visits prior to his voyage measures the bumps on his head to assess his sanity. The two women who act as

secretaries for the Belgian company are shown knitting black wool in a sinister setting that recalls Dickens's A Tale of Two Cities (1859), as well as obvious classical myths. When Marlow reaches the river itself, the fire that damages the first trading post is tackled by an absurdly mannered agent who, insisting everyone is "behaving splendidly, splendidly" (Dent ed. 76), proceeds to use a holed tin bucket to extinguish the flames. Such fantastic episodes, as Conrad's text makes abundantly clear, are far from idle comic devices in the tale. They are essential in the construction of what Conrad terms "the overwhelming realities of this strange world" (93).

The wealth of fantastic imagery in Conrad's writing does tend to establish an unsuspected union between his literary world and methods, and the notorious excesses of Dostoevsky's "fantastic realism". As I have said, the reality Dostoevsky depicts in his novels is rooted in his fundamental philosophical belief in the extreme nature of man's world. Though Conrad does not necessarily share this belief, his unremitting labour to create an intensely vivid picture of life means that he does employ an elementally fantastic language. This fact, I would suggest, forges significant links between the literary worlds of both novelists. Even if Conrad and Dostoevsky cannot be claimed

to share common metaphysical conceptions of reality, this methodological association establishes an intriguing relationship. In Conrad's case particularly, it calls into question the generally accepted critical assessment of his work. In the light of these observations, I would argue, he can no longer be regarded as a purely 'Apollonian' artist.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### CONRAD, DOSTOEVSKY, AND BAKHTIN

In a letter written to Ernest Dawson in 1902, Conrad laments the current absence of originality and invention in the novel form. For him, the writer who will re-animate, indeed recast, the genre must be patiently, even resignedly, awaited:

I doubt if greatness can be attained now in imaginative prose work. When it comes it will be

in a new form; in a form for which we are not ripe as yet. Till the hour strikes and the man appears we must plod in the beaten track we must eternally 'rabacher' [repeat] the old formulas of expression. (Collected Letters 2 463)

Despite his own grave comments, there are few contemporary critics who would dispute Conrad's right to be regarded as a major literary innovator. In many respects, Conrad's work provides that "new form", dispenses with those "old formulas of expression", which his letter despairs of discovering in the modern novel. The establishment, indeed, tends to extol Conrad's novels precisely for this kind of originality, particularly the new developments they make, for example, in the field of narrative technique. Together with Henry James, Conrad's pioneering work is now fixed at the forefront of the movement that gave rise to the so-called 'modernist revolution' of Joyce, Woolf, and Lawrence.

Considering his stature as a literary innovator, it might at first seem unwise to yoke Conrad with Dostoevsky. The latter's work, after all, is not widely admired for its novelistic invention or experiment, or the technical contributions it brings to the form. Notes from the Underground (1864) alone is singled out for the modernity of its narrator's internalized monologue, and the striking, almost Beckettian representation of its anti-hero's consciousness. Beyond this, however, the mass of critical



attention towards Dostoevsky concentrates more on the ideological content of his work, rather than its additions to the novel form. Perhaps the major exception to this rule lies in the work of the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975). His Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, originally written in 1929, and substantially revised and expanded in 1963, provides a tenacious and illuminating re-interpretation of Dostoevsky's entire opus. Bakhtin's essential thesis, voiced boldly from the outset, is that Dostoevsky "created something like a new artistic model of the world, one in which many basic aspects of the old artistic form were subjected to a radical restructuring" (3). Though I intend to consider his views on Dostoevsky at some length, there are further reasons for looking at Bakhtin's theories. Because of the broad critical scope and application of his text, Bakhtin's views on Dostoevsky's art tend to highlight the remarkable invention in Conrad's writing as well. Bakhtin's whole critical apparatus, in fact, can be applied as a unifying vehicle which greatly illuminates the novels of Conrad, as well as those of Dostoevsky. I intend, therefore, to adopt a primarily Bakhtinian approach to underpin my study of novelistic innovation in the texts of both authors. It is to Bakhtin's central ideas on Dostoevsky, however, that I shall first turn.

Undeniably, the claims for Dostoevsky's art outlined in Bakhtin's text are nothing less than grandiose. Dostoevsky, he insists, has created a "fundamentally new novelistic genre". His work, Bakhtin asserts, "does not fit any of the preconceived frameworks of historico-literary schemes that we usually apply to various species of the European novel" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 7). To illustrate Dostoevsky's advances, Bakhtin elaborately defines the nature of the pre-Dostoevskyan novel, coining the term "monologic" to describe its essential identity. In his opinion, character, in a monologic text, always remains subordinate to the author and his world-view. The novelist's protagonist, at a fundamental level, is primarily the mouthpiece for the author's ideological position. Character and action, inevitably, are submitted to the overarching and singular vision of the author. To use Bakhtin's own words, the monologic novelist is "located as if in some higher decision-making position" above his characters (63). His view of the hero's consciousness, therefore, is entirely subjective; he presents closed and finalized accounts of his characters. For these reasons, Bakhtin judges, the monologic novelist does not allow his creations an identity beyond his own ideological perspective of the world. A useful analogy to clarify this position might be taken from T.S. Eliot's

poem 'The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock' (1917). Prufrock, in a remarkable passage, describes himself as fixed "in a formulated phrase", "sprawling on a pin/ ... wriggling on the wall" (15). As Bakhtin's book offers no substantial example to illustrate his theory, Prufrock's metaphoric condition might be usefully cited to show the fixed nature of character caught in a monologic design. Rather like the immobile Prufrock, the monologic hero is unable to voice his own consciousness; he is subjected entirely to another's (in this case the author's) omniscient will. To use Bakhtin's own terms, "the hero has no access from within"; he is merely "part of the authorial consciousness defining and representing him" (52).

The originality of Dostoevsky's art, in Bakhtin's opinion, lies in its ability to liberate fictional consciousness. In his novels, Dostoevsky creates not "voiceless slaves, but free people, capable of standing alongside their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even rebelling against him" (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 8). Indeed, Bakhtin's key concept is that Dostoevsky is the first novelist to genuinely allow his characters to speak for themselves. In his estimation, they are no longer merely probed or analyzed by their author; they are allowed to "reveal" themselves (58). Character, to

employ Bakhtin's terminology, is not simply an object of "authorial discourse", as it would be in a monologic text. In the Dostoevskyan world, the hero becomes "a fully valid, autonomous carrier of his own individual word". Perhaps the most obvious and immediate illustration of this can be taken from Crime and Punishment (1866). It is not difficult to see, for example, how Raskolnikov is possessed of a fully independent voice. He has a complete system of ethics, an intricate set of ideological values, which are entirely alien to Dostoevsky's core Christian vision of the world. Despite this, Dostoevsky treats him, as Bakhtin says, as both "ideologically authoritative and independent" (5). Dostoevsky does not speak about his character, in the monologic sense, but allows him his own "autonomous discourse" (53). Perhaps the only challenge to this rule comes in the epilogue of Crime and Punishment (1866), where Raskolnikov's final regeneration is conducted through a third person narrator strongly identified with Dostoevsky's own authorial voice. Rather than discrediting Bakhtin's work, however, the epilogue tends to enhance the general validity of his theory, for it strongly underlines the unique independence Raskolnikov's voice has achieved in the preceding episodes of the novel. Indeed, looking at Dostoevsky's achievement in toto, Bakhtin sees his work as marked by such autonomy in the characterization. Not only

Raskolnikov, but figures like Stavrogin, Sonya, Ivan Karamazov, and Prince Myskhin, are all protagonists with fully weighted discourses. The chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels, Bakhtin judges, is precisely this "plurality of independent and unmerged voices", this genuine "polyphony of fully valid" discourses (6) (my emphasis). Applying this musical term to literature, Bakhtin creates a neat label to describe Dostoevsky's striking contribution to the prose form; he is "the creator of the polyphonic novel" (7).

Working from this idea, Bakhtin continues to reinforce and elaborate his theory by extensive reference to a large body of Russian and European criticism on Dostoevsky's writing. A. V. Lunacharsky, in his article, 'On Dostoevsky's "Multi-Voicedness"' (1929), had already noted that the author seemed "merely a witness to ... [the] convulsive disputes" of his characters. Rather than being embroiled in the debate, Dostoevsky simply "looks on with curiosity to see how all of it will end, what turn the matter will take" (33). For Bakhtin, Lunacharsky's observation provides a perfect model for the author's role within a polyphonic novel. Previous to Dostoevsky, of course, character had been subordinate to the sole, shaping influence of the monologic author, who might ultimately consider his protagonists as

his puppets. Lunacharsky's statement, Bakhtin suggests, implies that Dostoevsky is not merely able to transcend that subjectivity which is a part of authorial control; he can, in effect, validly create several independent worlds, or consciousnesses, within each of his novels. Citing the critic Otto Kaus, Bakhtin insists that Dostoevsky presents "utterly contradictory and mutually exclusive concepts" with equal validity and weight (18). A brief examination of the discourse of Alyosha and Ivan in The Brothers Karamazov (1881) will clarify this observation. The spiritual Alyosha, and the atheist Ivan, clearly realize their ideologies in impassioned, independent, and equally powerful voices. In fact, the ideological arguments in the mouths of these opposing characters remain unmarred. Their creation is unhindered by that subjectivity associated with the monologic novelist, who must always reduce matters to his own singular and overarching viewpoint. The polyphonic design, in Bakhtin's final assessment, allows this representation of "polar opposites" to be fully realized for the first time in the novel form (14).

Arguably Bakhtin's most profound critical contribution, however, is his interpretation of the more abstract, even philosophical ramifications of Dostoevsky's art. The monologic author, as Bakhtin repeatedly stresses, purports

to a complete understanding of his characters. All information, all knowledge, is filtered through his authorial consciousness; he presents, in essence, an objectivized and finalized report of his protagonist. As an example of this, Bakhtin points to Gogol's story 'The Overcoat' (1842), in which Akaky Akakievich's character is indeed 'reported' solely through the medium of an authorially omniscient narrator. In Bakhtin's belief, such a novelistic approach is flawed at the most fundamental level. "A living human being", he insists, "cannot be turned into the voiceless object of some secondhand, finalizing cognitive process" (58). The information provided by the monologic novelist is, therefore, "a lie", a "degrading and deadening" account that cannot capture the true reality of character (59). It does not allow, to cite Dostoevsky's famous dictum, 'the man in man' to be realized. "In a human being", Bakhtin declares, there is "always something that only he himself can reveal, in a free act of self-consciousness and discourse, something that does not submit to an externalizing secondhand definition". Bakhtin's comments can be interpreted firstly as a bold rejection of the monologic form. They can also be seen to re-affirm the true validity of Dostoevsky's new method. By liberating character consciousness from the author, Dostoevsky has indeed created a "fundamentally new form for visualizing a

human being in art" (58). He has assumed "a radically new [authorial] position with regard to the hero" (59). The polyphonic form, however, provides a further innovatory advance. It respects what Bakhtin calls "that internally unfinalizable something in man" (58) (Bakhtin's emphasis). As material in the polyphonic novel is no longer subordinate to the author's will, Bakhtin argues, a novelist's comprehension of his character's discourse must remain fundamentally incomplete. Dostoevsky's writing, therefore, tends to uphold the thesis

that man is not a final and defined quantity upon which firm calculations can be made; man is free, and can therefore violate any regulating norms which might be thrust upon him. (59)

In these terms, Dostoevsky's work supports a novelistic conception that might be thought, particularly in English writing, to have developed only in more recent times. The acceptance of man's unrealizable complexity, the novelist's admission of an elementary 'ignorance' of his characters, is a major theme in the work of Henry James, Ford Madox Ford and, of course, Conrad. Their novels are now generally considered as a fundamental challenge to the normal model of omniscient authorial commentary on character, which so dominated nineteenth century Victorian and European literature.



Whilst it is a critically established view that early twentieth century novelists like Conrad pioneered the notion of man's fundamental unrealizability, to link Dostoevsky's writing with this novelistic conception is both exciting and original. Indeed, Bakhtin's views, in this context, confer upon Dostoevsky's art a significant modernist stature. One can point to figures like the Underground Man or Ippolit Terentyev in The Idiot (1869), whose discourses seem characterized by their explosive irrationality, by their perverse, even self-destructive logic. Ippolit's manic unpredictability, from one angle, might even be interpreted as an ideological challenge to normal authorial methods. He consistently rebels against any fixed pattern of behaviour that might be thrust upon him. He tends, in fact, to neatly illustrate Dostoevsky's larger belief in man's essentially irrational and ever-shifting personality.

Any critical survey cannot afford to overlook or undervalue the striking new light Bakhtin's work casts on Dostoevsky as an innovatory artist. The broad sweep of his analysis, however, and the enormous claims he makes for Dostoevsky's art, means his work is open to considerable critical dissension. Joseph Frank, to take just one example, states that Bakhtin "draws certain extreme conclusions from

... [his] insights which in my opinion are quite untenable" (Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt 1821-1849 156). Whilst I do not entirely share Frank's misgivings, I do feel certain questionable critical assessments within Bakhtin's text cannot be conveniently overlooked, as they weaken his central vision of Dostoevsky's originality. In defining the novel form before Dostoevsky, for instance, Bakhtin does not offer a substantial example of a monologic text to clarify his theory. Furthermore, he dismisses some major literary figures as purely monologic, when their work might appear to admirably fit his own polyphonic principles. In Shakespeare's dramas, Bakhtin admits there are "certain elements, embryonic rudiments, early buddings of polyphony" (33). Despite this cautious synopsis, however, Bakhtin finally concludes that "Shakespearean characters are not ideologists in the full sense of the word". Each play, he judges, permits only "one fully valid voice, the voice of a hero" (34). As polyphony demands a plurality of voices - more than just a Hamlet, or a Macbeth, or a Lear - Shakespeare's dramas, Bakhtin assesses, remain essentially monologic in character. Such a critical assessment, I would suggest, greatly undervalues, even misinterprets, Shakespeare's art. To claim that individual protagonists in King Lear (c.1606) have no independent ideological status seems open to considerable dispute. Even a relatively

secondary character like Gloucester expresses what is surely a deeply personal philosophy, beyond any overarching authorial control. When Gloucester proclaims that men are merely toys for the gods' boyish entertainment, he is not simply enunciating the dramatist's beliefs; this, surely, is his own creed (see King Lear, 4,i,36). That Shakespeare's philosophical position is so difficult to gauge in many of his plays seems the strongest testimony of his polyphonic method. Indeed, his consummate ability to give all his protagonists their own valid discourse anticipates Dostoevsky's manner, rather than contradicts it, as Bakhtin would have us believe. Such an interpretation of Shakespeare's art might lead us to question Bakhtin's initial assessment of the monologic state of literature prior to the appearance of Dostoevsky. If a substantial polyphony can indeed be awarded to Shakespeare's dramas, Bakhtin's considerable claims for Dostoevsky's novelistic originality must be somewhat devalued.

Despite Bakhtin's formidable ingenuity, one does suspect a certain critical rigidity in his theory at times. He tends, I would argue, to brush over the work of other writers, in case they dilute his own singular vision of Dostoevsky's achievement. As David Lodge comments wryly, the tone of Bakhtin's text sometimes suggests he is on a "grand

cultural mission" (58). He must incontestably assert that Dostoevsky has redefined the parameters of the novel form, even if this leads to sweeping or reductive assessments of other authors such as Shakespeare, or Tolstoy. Despite even these reservations, however, Bakhtin's text remains arguably the most illuminating and perceptive single interpretation of Dostoevsky's originality. As I have commented before, however, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (1963) retains its theoretical stature not solely for the new light it casts on Dostoevsky, but for its wider critical value. With his definition of the polyphonic form, one critic states, Bakhtin "rewrote the history of western literature by developing a new typology of literary discourse" (Lodge 57). His theory, in these terms, highlights not only Dostoevsky's innovatory art - it can also be adopted as a vehicle to illustrate literary invention in the texts of other novelists. Indeed, it is from a Bakhtinian perspective that I shall now consider Conrad's originality.

If we were to take a major text like The Secret Agent (1907) and subject it, in isolation, to a Bakhtinian analysis, we might readily conclude that Conrad is an essentially monologic artist. His use of an ironic narrator, indeed, dictates the entire course of the novel. To adopt Bakhtin's own terminology, the narrator is the "single voice ... [the]

single accent" that filters, interprets, and comments on all the novel's characters and their psyches (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 43). Protagonists like Verloc and Winnie, for instance, are in effect never permitted to use their own independent voices. The narrator rigidly, almost jealously, guards their discourse. His ironic account, recalling the manner of nineteenth century fiction, provides what is a predominantly finalized picture of character and action. One can turn to Winnie Verloc to further illustrate this point. Except at the novel's conclusion, when she rebels against her narrative bonds, Winnie's entire emotional life remains in the controlling hands of the narrator, who allows only a secondhand account of her latent passionate nature. She has, in fact, no voice, and for much of the novel is merely represented by a wry formula. Her one feeling, we are assured, is that "things don't bear looking into very much" (The Secret Agent, Dent ed. 180). Like her husband Verloc, she submits entirely to the subjective treatment and singular interpretation of Conrad's omniscient narrator. In the strictest Bakhtinian sense The Secret Agent (1907), with the possible exception of its culminating chapters, might be defined as the work of a monologic author. Yet for Conrad, it must be recalled, the novel's form was conceived to serve very specific ideological ends, as his 'Author's Note' makes clear. Such a pronounced ironic

treatment of character is not, of course, a consistently typical feature of his other novels. To reach a conclusion regarding Conrad's monologic status based solely on The Secret Agent (1907), therefore, gives a false picture of his overall artistic achievement. If, on the other hand, we look at Lord Jim (1900) or Nostromo (1904), we encounter more complex, but perhaps more representative Conradian texts. Speaking of the fictional country, Patusan, in Lord Jim (1900), Marlow comments that it seems "motionless ... with its life arrested"; it exists in "an unchanging light" (36). His intriguing observation might be neatly adapted to illustrate some basic technical differences between Lord Jim (1900) and The Secret Agent (1907). In fact, Marlow's image captures Bakhtin's probable reaction to the narrative deficiencies of the latter work. In the strictest Bakhtinian sense, the ironic narrator's monologic vision does cast a static and single beam of light which fails to illuminate the full reality and living complexity of the novel's characters. One of Conrad's major artistic ambitions, as a late letter makes clear, was, however, to provide precisely an ever "changing light" which would bring "varied effects of perspective" to his novels. As he acknowledged himself, this generally meant using "unconventional" literary methods (Jean-Aubry 2 317). Any study concentrating on The Secret Agent (1907), therefore, tends to obscure Conrad's essential

artistic intentions. Indeed, in Lord Jim (1900) he deploys, as I will show, an ever-shifting narrative method to comment on characters and events from as many interpretive standpoints as possible. Rather than a monologic orthodoxy, the many narrative voices and angles of Lord Jim (1900) indicates an innovatory novelist striving after an essentially polyphonic view of man and his universe.

When considering Lord Jim (1900), critics regularly point to Conrad's abandonment of his omniscient narrator after only four chapters. The fact that he discards this monologic device so briskly is said to be indicative of Conrad's deep dissatisfaction with the orthodox form. The omniscient narrator is dropped because he cannot successfully render the complexity, or the true reality, of Conrad's character. In Ian Watt's judgement, the author of Lord Jim (1900) craved to develop "new techniques for immersing us [the reader] completely 'into the lives of his characters'" (Conrad in the Nineteenth Century 270). The first four chapters, indeed, show Jim filtered through the single consciousness of a monologic narrator who makes no intimate contact, establishes no notable bond, with Jim's actuality. One could unfavourably compare the narrator's vision to a long and unfocussed camera shot. In detailing his insatiable romantic aspirations, for example, the

narrator can only suggest that Jim's thoughts are "full of valorous deeds" (Lord Jim, Dent ed. 120). This does not embody Jim; it merely reports him, and does so inadequately. Conrad's narrator can detail facts, "features, [and] shades of expression", but he cannot render that "something else besides, [that] something invisible" which needs to be told about Jim (31). A more subtle method for artistically visualizing a human being is, quite literally, demanded. In Bakhtin's definition, it should be recalled, polyphony simply means 'many voices'. In searching for a new technique that will realize Jim, Conrad can be said to create a 'polyphonic narrative method'. After Chapter Four, in fact, he provides not just one voice to account for Jim, but uses many independent, individual commentators to supplement the character's own discourse. Foremost amongst these, of course, is Marlow.

With Marlow's introduction in Chapter Five, Conrad's narrative can be seen to advance closer to Jim's actual reality. From the outset, Marlow's personalized account tends to offer a sharper focus. It newly captures, for example, Jim's physical presence. The omniscient narrator had opened with the functional, if symbolic, detail that Jim was "an inch, perhaps two, under six feet, [and] powerfully built" (3). Marlow's narrative approach presents another view of the man, which stresses not only his physical actuality, but also suggests his underlying emotional torment. To Marlow, Jim appears an "upstanding, broad-



shouldered youth, with his hands in his pockets ... his back [turned] on the other two [the skipper and engineer of the 'Patna']" (43). It is a different, a more intimate first glance at the same man. Conrad's new approach - his second look at Jim from another narrative perspective and voice - might seem to subtly broaden our understanding. In terms of a novelistic strategy, an original method of character presentation is already being developed in these early pages. Furthermore, if we consider Marlow's narrative as a new interpretive angle, this casts a different light on the aim and relative success of Conrad's four opening chapters. Rather than the false start critics would claim, the omniscient narration can be retrospectively interpreted as simply one of many narrative angles adopted in Lord Jim (1900). In these terms, the opening chapters become a fully valid and integral part of Conrad's polyphonic narrative method. They form, indeed, an additional angle within his overall artistic design for the visualization of Jim's true nature.

Though there is no single voice in Lord Jim (1900), the critic Jakob Lothe rightly observes that Marlow remains the "primary interpreter" (135). As so much can be said about Marlow's impact on twentieth century narrative writing, I feel, for the purpose of this study, that I should restrict

my present analysis to just one, central aspect of his commentary. Marlow himself admits that his constant wish is to forever open "a new view" upon Jim (Lord Jim 76). His method regularly involves repeating information about Jim, scrutinizing the same feature or detail a number of times, but always from a different perspective. Marlow's narrative is in fact characterized by its attempt to debate thoroughly, almost wrestle physically with his subject. As a consequence, Marlow's commentary seems uniquely fragmented; it is full grammatical halts, breaks, sometimes open confusion. Its narrative structure testifies to a mind constantly engaged in the struggle to comprehend. Reflecting on his manner after the 'Patna' incident, for example, Marlow surveys all the possible reasons behind Jim's apparent composure. Characteristically, he reaches no clear-cut definition to explain Jim's emotions. Marlow firstly judges he is "of the right sort"; indeed, he is "one of us. He talked soberly, with a sort of composed unreserve, and with a quiet bearing". Yet, typically, Marlow's deteriorating self-assurance clouds even this initial narrative confidence. He continues, observing that Jim's composure "might have been the outcome of manly self-control, of impudence, of callousness, of a colossal unconsciousness, of a gigantic deception. Who can tell! ... My mind floated in a sea of conjectures" (78) (my emphasis).

Any notion of complete understanding is, of course, totally alien to Marlow's commentary. In a Bakhtinian sense, therefore, the narrative breaks with all orthodox monologic conceptions. Marlow's constant pursuit to discover and re-define Jim means that Conrad actively defies what are said to be traditional nineteenth century novelistic views on narrative function and form. Furthermore, there is not only this notable Marlovian hesitancy to consider. There is the added disruption and fragmentation of orthodox methods caused by Conrad's famous 'time-shifting'. Usual patterns of novelistic chronology are subtly overthrown and destroyed as Marlow's narrative constantly moves backward and forward in time, as part of his interpretive endeavour to understand Jim. Indeed, even a superficial analysis of the internal structure of Marlow's narrative proves it is an inventive and major departure from orthodox prose techniques. Whilst Marlow is certainly foremost in Lord Jim (1900), it should also be recalled that he is only one of the many voices commenting upon Jim in Conrad's overall design. Marlow's commentary is thus, per se, an innovatory narrative form existing within an even larger polyphonic framework.

Though Marlow's discourse provides us with its own autonomous and multi-levelled commentary on Jim, the so-called secondary interpreters can be seen to develop

Conrad's character with their own, and equally valid, voices. Brierly, the French lieutenant, the ship's chandler Egstrom, and of course, Stein, all add their own valuable insights, enabling a fuller realization of Jim's actuality. Conrad's narrative method, in effect, subjects Jim to the scrutiny of a host of independent consciousnesses. Jim's identity is filtered through the individual world perspectives of a spectrum of human experience, not just Marlow's subtle understanding. The diagnoses of Brierly, Stein, even the so-called 'guano entrepreneur' Chester, provide what are fresh views, new illuminations, on the same man. With such a framework, Conrad surely aims to construct the largest possible composite vision of his character. Brierly, for example, advocates that Jim should "creep twenty feet underground and stay there!" (66). His response, though it might at first seem commonplace, is clearly instrumental in extending our knowledge of Jim's psyche. Brierly's fresh perspective, and the new light of his particular consciousness, tend to reveal an aspect of Jim that Marlow's own narrative fails to unearth or sufficiently illuminate. Indeed, when Jim goes to Patusan he literally lives up to Brierly's unintentionally perceptive counsel. In fact, a new dimension of Jim is effectively observed and artistically realized by Brierly's own observations. The additional consciousness of Brierly (whose own suicide

alerts us to his true bond with Jim) plays a valuable role in Conrad's ambitious and inventive scheme to visualize and animate Jim's actuality.

Similarly, the French lieutenant, whose voice is termed "the mouthpiece of abstract wisdom", might be said to offer another valid angle (147). What Marlow terms the Frenchman's "international opinion" adds a further dimension and substance to Jim (159). Egstrom, too, provides his own independent commentary. "I told him", the Chandler reports, that "the earth wouldn't be big enough to hold his caper" (196). Indeed, Egstrom's discourse focuses instinctively upon Jim's deepest psychological reaction to his disgrace. His uncomplicated diagnosis tends to capture the precise nature and self-destructive course of Jim's grief. As such, Egstrom's voice might seem almost a new interpretive angle, its clear vision freeing us briefly from the tortured complexities of Marlow's own discourse. Stein's words, of course, demand special consideration. Apart from Marlow, he arguably makes the largest contribution within Conrad's ultimate scheme for the visualization of Jim. Marlow himself admits that his visit to Stein is rather like a "medical consultation" (212). Although many critics have commented on the shadowy quality of Stein's oracular pronouncements, there can be little question that he isolates Jim's most

central psychological drive. Stein's consciousness, indeed, casts a new and penetrating light on the extent of Jim's 'romantic' nature. A notable adventurer himself, Stein is well equipped to gauge a facet of Jim's personality that Marlow cannot adequately plumb or fully comprehend. Stein's discourse, therefore, adds a new dimension to our knowledge. His words, as Marlow admits, bring us one tentative step closer to the "absolute Truth" about Jim (216). In fact, Conrad's complex web of individual discourses constitutes an inventive new method for more fully rendering the true complexity of the human personality. The critic Dorothy Van Ghent speaks of Conrad's "exhaustive conscientiousness" in his investigation of Jim's psyche. His technique, she judges, proves "uniquely humanizing". As a direct result of it, Conrad is able to produce "one of the most living characters in fiction" (229).

In the light of such critical comments, I feel justified in recalling Bakhtin's words about Dostoevsky, and re-applying them to Conrad. The narrative polyphony of Lord Jim (1900), I would suggest, is equally a new method for "visualizing a human being in art" (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 58). Like Dostoevsky, Conrad can be claimed to have wrought an essentially new authorial position. The old author-character relationship, and that

traditional nineteenth century monologic dominance, are both toppled in Lord Jim (1900). Though Conrad still relies upon the dialogic power of Jim's first person 'confession' to Marlow, this is effectively eclipsed by the extensive use of other novelistic methods. Jim, of course, is far from being Conrad's mouthpiece or tool, in any orthodox sense. So much so that Conrad might even be said to be in the power of his character. In many respects, viewing Jim from every conceivable perspective means that the author himself is placed in the subordinate position. Conrad's "highly idiosyncratic narrative" allows Jim to attain a subtle degree of autonomy, even independence (Watt, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century 270). What Bakhtin calls "usual authorial subjectivity" is, I feel, effectively and inventively abolished by Conrad's narrative method (67). Indeed, it is precisely Conrad's 'narrative polyphony', I would suggest, which has so fundamentally influenced the course of much twentieth century European writing. Conrad's place as an innovative contributor to the modern novel, therefore, can be very satisfactorily interpreted and accounted for within Bakhtin's theoretical framework. A further ideological aspect of Lord Jim (1900), which I have not as yet touched upon, seems to give credence to this critical approach.

In Bakhtin's belief, it should be recalled, a key

feature of Dostoevsky's polyphony is its respect for that "internally unfinalizable something in man" (58). Dostoevsky's art, as I have pointed out, tends to reflect what might seem a particularly twentieth century literary concern, that of the ultimate non-resolveability of the human psyche. Indeed, Dostoevsky's characters can often be said to vocalize their author's objections to more traditional methods aimed at producing what Bakhtin calls "final" and "defined" protagonists (52). Underground Man, to take just one example, is so volatile and complex that his every word seems to affirm Dostoevsky's distrust of monolithic representations of humanity. In Notes from Underground (1864), the entire discourse rebels against ideas aimed at totalizing or quantifying the human personality. Mankind, Underground Man repeatedly argues, can and will be infinitely irrational, self-defeating, even perverse. He cannot in any way be "tabulated", and he stubbornly resists all attempts to be played with or manipulated. Human nature, in fact, will never willingly become the "piano keys" or "barrel organ" to some higher, all-knowing author (Notes from Underground, trans. Katz 38). Whilst Underground Man's words are specifically directed against Chernyshevsky's didactic and somewhat 'wooden' novel What is to be Done? (1863), they have a far broader weight and general significance. For they indicate Dostoevsky's



native hostility towards all novelistic methods which aspire to a complete knowledge of the human condition. To Bakhtin, of course, one of the foundations of Dostoevsky's unique polyphony lies in its willingness to acknowledge the complexity of the human personality, without seeking simplifying solutions. Dostoevsky, in Bakhtin's opinion, achieves not just an "independent [and] internal freedom" for his characters. Importantly, he honours man's essential "unfinalizability and indeterminacy" (63) (Bakhtin's emphasis). In the light of such important critical observations, I feel it becomes more than merely intriguing to find the same ideological concepts achieving prominence in Conrad's writing. I return again to Lord Jim (1900) to illustrate my point.

Despite the intricate commentary and diagnosis - all aimed at fathoming Jim's inner reality - Marlow's discourse is equally notable for its troubled speculations on the ultimate impossibility, even futility, of truly capturing Jim. As with Dostoevsky, Conrad's human personality is never regarded as a static entity. Man's ever-shifting, fluid identity means any comprehensive and fixed realization must, by definition, create difficult philosophical and ideological problems. Though Conrad's narrative successfully canvasses "every conceivable perspective and position",

Marlow still admits that one can only attain brief, lightning glimpses of the 'real' Jim ('Introduction', Nostromo, World Classics ed. ix). There can be moments of complete revelation, but these are soon clouded by a more usual state of uncertainty, confusion, even blind ignorance. Ultimately, therefore, the human personality must remain an unrealizable enigma. In a whole series of passages which use images of mist, fog, cloud, and darkness, Marlow voices what is certainly one of Conrad's deepest metaphysical beliefs. Though his aim is to make the reader "see" in the fullest sense, Conrad nevertheless acknowledges he can only achieve partial success. Contrary to orthodox nineteenth century literary tradition, the human condition cannot be quintessentially rendered in the Conradian universe. As with Dostoevsky, omniscience effectively becomes the equivalent of authorial naivety. In Chapter Six of Lord Jim (1900), Marlow draws a telling parallel which becomes typical of his comments on this issue:

'The views he [Jim] let me have of himself were like those glimpses through the shifting rents in a thick fog - bits of vivid and vanishing detail, giving no connected idea of the general aspect of a country'. (76)

Marlow, whose ultimate aim is to map all the psychological contours of Jim's human "country" is, by his own admission,

defeated from the outset. Furthermore, his reflections occasionally extend beyond Jim's specific case, to address what he feels is the universal difficulty of fully comprehending the human persona. In a significant passage, which seems to reflect Conrad's own opinion, Marlow speaks of "that side of us which, like the other hemisphere of the moon, exists stealthily in perpetual darkness, with only a fearful ashy light falling at times on the edge" (93). Such comments, when allied to Marlow's parallel statements, must make us question the ultimate success of Conrad's exhaustive narrative commentary. For if we accept Marlow's philosophy, we must also admit that it creates essential ideological barriers which are contrary to Conrad's ultimate aim in Lord Jim (1900). Indeed the novel, from this particular Marlovian perspective, can only succeed in casting spasmodic, "ashy light" on Jim's inner reality. Marlow himself acknowledges that, despite his efforts, he will always be divided from Jim by a deeply significant "three feet of space" (83). "When we try to grapple with another man's intimate need", Marlow confesses, "we perceive how incomprehensible, wavering and misty are the beings that share with us the sight of the stars and the warmth of the sun" (180).

At this stage, I feel it perhaps apposite to highlight the strong ideological unity existing between Conrad and

Dostoevsky on this fundamental issue. Dostoevsky's entire opus, as I have said, testifies to his rooted belief in the manifold difficulties of fully representing human nature. Dmitry Karamazov, of course, famously pays homage to the irrationality, complexity, and central contradiction of the human condition, when he compares man's inner being to the divided turmoil of a "battlefield" (The Brothers Karamazov, trans. Garnett 110). Though Dostoevsky's polyphony does allow him to plumb new novelistic depths in rendering man's psychology, he, like Conrad, continues to recognize the existence of fundamental ideological barriers effectively barring all comprehensive or absolute realizations of man's identity. Though he makes no explicit statements to qualify his position, Dostoevsky's actual method of realizing his protagonists tends to proclaim his central ethos. In Bakhtin's illuminating assessment, Dostoevsky is, quite simply, not a "presumptive" author (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 58). His technique of character representation deliberately respects the philosophical conception that man, in the last analysis, remains "unfinalizable and unpredeterminable" (73) (Bakhtin's emphasis). Dostoevsky's ideology, therefore, might be claimed to equate with, and even pre-date, the critically acknowledged modernity of Conrad's own vision of the human personality. Dostoevsky, like Conrad, undoubtedly honours the profound difficulties

involved in validly representing man's psyche within the novel form. Especially significant, however, is the fact that he achieves this at the height of nineteenth century literary omniscience. Many British writers, of course, were quick to acknowledge Dostoevsky's profound and original psychological skills. Uncharacteristically, it is Oscar Wilde who offers what might be called the standard assessment. Wilde simply states that "Dostoevsky's heroes always astound us by what they say and do". More importantly for our present discussion, however, he perceptively adds that Dostoevsky's characters uniquely "preserve within themselves to the end the eternal secret of [their] existence" (Quoted in Motyleva 32). Within the context of the nineteenth century, Wilde's neat, yet penetrating observation seems to strike at the ideological core of what is new and innovative about Dostoevsky's artistic vision.

While some critics might contest Dostoevsky's contribution to such a central ideology in the development of the modern novel, few would now question the impact of Conrad's parallel vision of man's unrealizability, and its shaping force throughout much twentieth century European writing. Indeed, bearing in mind Conrad's primary aim as a writer, it does seem a deeply telling moment when Marlow admits he has never, truly, "seen" Jim (Lord Jim 221). In a

way that effectively challenges the whole fabric and omniscient method of the nineteenth century, Marlow confesses that he is "missing innumerable shades" in his depiction of Jim's persona, shades that are "so fine, so difficult to render" (94). Much later, he claims that "no magician's wand can immobilize him [Jim] under my eyes (330-1). From one angle, the "magician's wand" of earlier European writing - the author's traditional dominating omniscience - might be said to be pronounced unsatisfactory, misguided, even dead, by Marlow's statement. In the final assessment, Jim remains "a cruel and insoluble mystery" (393). Without doubt, a new novelistic awareness of man's true nature is in the process of creation in Lord Jim (1900). The author's role as ultimate interpreter is not merely being brought into question by Marlow's words; it is being drastically re-defined.

One can clearly trace the immediate impact of Conrad's ideology on contemporary literature. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, a number of important writers in English experimented with narrators deliberately professing to no knowledge of the human condition, or consciously expressing questionable judgements on the protagonists surrounding them. In Ford Madox Ford's The Good Soldier (1915), for example, the narrator Dowell admits

significantly that he "know[s] nothing - nothing in the world - of the hearts of men" (14). Ford subtly, but extensively, manoeuvres his narrator's discourse, to the point where Dowell's words can be effectively claimed to document an acceptance of ultimate authorial ignorance. Dowell's naivety, his innocence, even his stupidity, all proclaim this new ethical perspective on the human condition. His central ideology, I would suggest, can be validly traced back to Marlow's statements on the difficulties of understanding another man's psyche. In American fiction, Nick Carraway's narrative in The Great Gatsby (1926) is similarly characterized by an admission of fundamental ignorance. Fitzgerald's character is actively denied any comprehensive understanding of Gatsby, or the human entanglements existing around him. In the words of the critic, Tony Tanner, Gatsby always remains indeterminable - he "looms and fades" within Fitzgerald's narrative in a manner that strikingly recalls Lord Jim (1900) ('Introduction', The Great Gatsby xix). To use Bakhtin's terminology, Conrad's respect for the "unfinalizability and indeterminacy" of the human condition is, I would claim, directly transmitted into the the mainstream of both English and American fiction (63).

Whilst Conrad's original contribution to the novel form

is not to be doubted, a specifically Bakhtinian approach does enable us to view his work from a fresh interpretive perspective. If I have restricted my debate to an extended analysis of the narrative polyphony of Lord Jim (1900), this is primarily a result of the novel's place at the head of the twentieth century, and the widespread critical consensus that it is perhaps Conrad's most inventive and elaborate text. One could equally argue, however, that there are notable elements of polyphony existing within Nostromo (1904). One influential critic, it should be said, does judge the method in Nostromo (1904) to be fundamentally monologic, arguing that the narrator actively speaks on Conrad's behalf. Ultimately, he concludes, the third person narrator is "in control of our judgements and our feeling ... directly and unambiguously" (Watt, Conrad: Nostromo 45). Although this thesis carries much weight, it does seem possible to contest its success in fully explaining the structural intricacies of Nostromo (1904). Unquestionably, there is a more orthodox Victorian omniscience surrounding this particular Conradian narrator. He is, to cite one telling example, in complete possession of even the meteorological and geographical details of Costaguana. It would be rash, however, to ignore the unusual force of those individual consciousnesses, those diverse ideological positions, existing within his narrative. Conrad, writing of



his novelistic strategy for Nostramo (1904), speaks of casting "a wide, a generous net, where there would be room for everybody; where indeed every sort of fish would be welcome [and] appreciated" (Jean-Aubry 1 328). When we consider the separate discourses and ideologies that comment on the silver and Sulaco's internal politics, Conrad's statement does tend to prove that his literary intention is certainly polyphonic in conception. Despite the existence of an authorial narrator, the philosophies of Charles Gould, Dr Monygham, Decoud, and Mrs Gould, all achieve a substantial degree of valid independence. They are important, and profoundly individual commentators. The highly innovative and complex structure of Nostramo (1904), therefore, might seem to yield profitably to a Bakhtinian interpretation. Indeed, the interplay of diverse and valid ideologies within Conrad's text significantly approximates to the complex hierarchy of personality and belief which exists between Ivan, Aloysha, and Dmitry in The Brothers Karamazov (1881).

Any critical debate concentrating on Conrad's narrative originality, and the anthropological concerns at the heart of his world, can, I would claim, benefit significantly from utilizing Bakhtin's theories. As a critical tool, they tend to unlock and illuminate the true identity of Conrad's profoundly original achievement. Bakhtin's pioneering text,

as I have already commented, achieves a more universal application beyond its purely Dostoevskyan context. At the same time, it must be remembered that Bakhtin's analysis of Dostoevsky's technical and ideological invention has gained its own unique place in the critical canon. Bakhtinian 'polyphony' highlights aspects of Dostoevsky's originality which much of the orthodox criticism simply fails to analyze or reveal adequately. Indeed, Bakhtin's text, despite my earlier-noted reservations, essentially offers itself as a thought-provoking, even radical re-interpretation of the modern novel. Most importantly for the purposes of this particular study, however, a Bakhtinian approach to both Dostoevsky and Conrad casts valuable new light on the deep literary and ideological unities existing between the two authors.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONRAD, DOSTOEVSKY, AND THE GOTHIC GENRE

In his work Dostoevsky and the Process of Literary Creation (1989), the critic Jacques Catteau refers to the novel as a "barbaric art"; it is an art form, he claims, that can readily assimilate both "civilised and elaborate genres". The novel, Catteau argues, is always "open to new forms, without worrying about ranks and rules" (52). Dostoevsky's central importance to the development of the novel, the

critic suggests, lies in his instinctive recognition of this innate malleability. In his major novels, indeed, Dostoevsky is able to unify what Catteau calls a vast "pluralism of forms" (53). In the typical Dostoevskyan novel, there is no "single triumphant highway"; there is, rather, a "maze of paths, a network of disparate forms" (53). Dostoevsky's creative achievement, Catteau urges, lies in his ability to synthesize divergent genres such as tragedy and burlesque, political writing and comedy, within single works. One has to only to consider a novel like The Devils (1871), which unites revolutionary anarchist politics with a comedy of provincial society manners, to recognize the validity and pertinency of Catteau's observations.

In the same connection, it is interesting to point to Peter Kemp's broad, yet detailed synopsis of Conrad's creative method. In a 1991 Times Literary Supplement review, Kemp defines Conrad's achievement in terms of his ability to weld divergent literary genres into an artistic whole. Many critics, Kemp argues, have found that Conrad's fiction is riddled with heterogeneity, a strange composite of romance and scepticism, action yarn and metaphysical obstruseness. Some of Conrad's narratives seem fashioned, as he said of 'Youth', 'Out of the boy's adventure story'; others derive

from sailors' talk heard in Far East harbour offices or amid the click of billiard-balls in waterfront saloons thick with the smoke of cheroots. Into such robust stuff, however, he infiltrates fine-spun strands of philosophical and psychological speculation ... Conrad's fiction characteristically oscillates between contraries.  
(Kemp)

In this persuasive account of Conrad's fictional world, Kemp identifies a number of literary forms - the adventure yarn, the romance story, the psychological and the metaphysical tale - all of which have been recognized as independent genres in the history and development of the novel itself. As with Catteau's appraisal of Dostoevsky, Kemp suggests that Conrad's primary achievement is his genius in unifying such diverse elements.

Though the critical establishment has long since labelled both artists as psychological, even political novelists, it cannot be denied that Conrad and Dostoevsky are also authors of what is usually called "popular fiction". Under this broad, notoriously problematic heading, are included such independent genres as 'adventure, thriller and detective writing'; 'romance' literature; and 'Gothic

fiction'. Each of these literary forms, I would argue, can be claimed to exist in Conrad and Dostoevsky's complex fictional worlds. As the genres of 'romance', and 'detective, thriller and adventure' have both been exhaustively researched in the canon of Conrad and Dostoevsky criticism, it is to the issue of 'Gothic' fiction that I shall now exclusively turn.

Whilst Dostoevsky's novels are indisputably Gothic in character, terming Conrad a Gothic artist might at first seem unusual, even perverse. By scrutinizing his shorter fiction particularly, however, I hope to show that Conrad is not only an expert practitioner of the Gothic form, but that much of his work refines, even extends, the original tradition. Firstly, however, it is important to identify the characteristic features of Gothic art, before establishing its significant place and function in each novelist's world.

The Gothic novel had its genesis in English fiction in the later half of the 18th century. It is generally agreed, of course, that Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (1764) represents the first Gothic text. Walpole's novel might be claimed to have established the general pattern the form was to take for many decades to come. The sensational popularity of The Castle of Otranto (1764) gave rise to its

group of imitators, and a literary movement that became known as the Gothic School. Foremost among the later Gothic writers were Mrs. Ann Radcliffe, whose novels The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) and The Italian (1797) are particularly important. Indeed, it might be noted that both Conrad and Dostoevsky remained great admirers of Mrs. Radcliffe throughout their literary careers. Other notable examples of the Gothic novel are Matthew Lewis' The Monk (1798), William Beckford's Vathek (1786), and of course, Mary Shelley's somewhat later Frankenstein (1818).

That the early Gothic novel was an extraordinarily popular form is quite indisputable. Writing in 1797, one observer comments that the "Otranto Ghosts have propagated their species with unequalled fecundity. The spawn is in every novel shop" (see Napier viii). Many leading literary figures of the day, however, adopted a deeply disdainful attitude towards the new literary sensation. In Waverley (1814), Sir Walter Scott makes a passing, yet barbed reference to the Radcliffe school of writers, with its debased taste for "bandits, caverns, dungeons, inquisitors, trap-doors, ruins, secret passages, soothsayers and all the usual accoutrements" (33) (my emphasis). Perhaps the single most scathing indictment of Gothic art, however, must remain Jane Austen's famous burlesque of the form in Northanger

Abbey (written 1798; published 1818).

Despite this sort of hostility, it cannot be denied that the Gothic novel was the truly popular form of its day. In her illuminating work, The Failure of the Gothic (1987), the critic Elizabeth Napier calculates that at least one-third of the novels published in Great Britain between 1796 and 1806 were Gothic in character. By 1805, she adds, the popular magazines devoted the greater part of their space to short or serialized Gothic fiction. This initial success, of course, has not proved to be a short-lived phenomenon. The form has remained immensely popular. The works of Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) amply testify to the reading public's continued, undiminished fascination with Gothic writing. Though still a distinct literary genre within twentieth century literature, it might be argued that the form has more recently found new and wider expression in the world of the cinema.

It may seem evident from the preceding discussion that the term Gothic has often been liberally, sometimes haphazardly applied. It would be accurate to comment, indeed, that many novels characteristically overstating or exaggerating their fictional events, are in danger of being included within the generous compass of the genre, at least



in some critical circles. Thus, works as intellectually and aesthetically remote as Bronte's Jane Eyre (1847) and Melville's Moby-Dick (1857), for instance, have both been claimed to be Gothic in conception and expression (see Napier 29). In the light of this, therefore, it becomes increasingly important to define the precise parameters of the form, and to clearly indicate Conrad and Dostoevsky's contribution to the genre.

In attempting to define the essential nature of Gothic art, Elizabeth Napier argues that it is in fact possible to dismantle, to deconstruct, the entire Gothic experience. "Gothicism", she writes, is "finally much less about evil .... than it is a standardized, absolutely formulaic system of creating a certain kind of atmosphere in which a reader's sensibility towards fear and terror is exercised in predictable ways" (29). According to Napier, a number of exact formulas, a number of characteristic elements, can be identified in all primary Gothic fiction.

The most important, single element of the Gothic novel, of course, is its overwhelming atmosphere of menace and brooding terror. This mood of dread and oppression is usually evoked before the appearance of the central protagonists, and characteristically achieved by creating

profoundly threatening landscapes. According to one critic, the early Gothic writers typically forged a landscape which became "a grotesque vision of hell (Joslin 87). Right up to Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897), Gothic novelists developed the initial sense of menace using an almost unvarying formula. Writers would traditionally invoke sublime mountainous landscapes; at the top of some wild, inaccessible pass, they would place a formidable half-ruined castle or crumbling abbey. By definition, creating these menacing landscapes meant locating the action in bizarre or alien settings. Indeed, it was typical for the early Gothic novel to remove the reader from the everyday and ordinary, and place him/her in strange locations, normally the high wildernesses of Spain or Italy. In the eighteenth century, as one critic has observed, this was done primarily to "capitalize upon the fear and superstition" usually associated with the "strangely alien ... Latin and Iberian temperaments" (Joslin 13). It was similarly vital, furthermore, to isolate, to insulate, the action from any possible interference from normal society.

In this specific context, it is perhaps surprising to find Conrad employing such traditional Gothic techniques to create an atmosphere of imminent terror. As Michael Joslin has shown, however, a short story like 'The Inn of Two

Witches' (1915) provides a "clear revelation of Conrad's acquaintance with and understanding of Gothicism in its most basic form" (72). In this striking tale, Conrad charts the story of Edgar Byrne and his search for a young seaman, Tom Corbin, who has disappeared in mysterious circumstances. Significantly setting his action in a remote region of early nineteenth century Spain, Conrad readily adopts a number of Gothic conventions aimed at creating a mood of initial terror. A sense of brooding oppression is achieved by Conrad's references to the "wild, gloomy sky" and the "rank", "stony", and "dreary" nature of the surrounding landscape (Within the Tides 138). As Byrne's search intensifies, the Gothic atmosphere heightens correspondingly. Stumbling on a remote hamlet, Conrad's narrative notes that it is "hidden in a fold in the ground", in a spot which "seemed the most lonely corner of the earth and as if accursed in its uninhibited barrenness" (139). In such passages, Conrad's language, with its heavy adjectival stress, is ideally suited to the Gothic form, which by definition demands linguistic intensification or exaggeration.

Developing on these early narrative sequences, Conrad slowly evolves his fictional world into the realms of true Gothic nightmare. His Spanish landscape, indeed, assumes an

increasingly hostile, evil character. Alone in the wild, Byrne is said to toil "against wind and rain, on a barren dark upland, under a sky of ashes. Far away the harsh and desolate mountains raising their scarped and denuded ridges seemed to wait for him menacingly" (145). In characteristic Gothic fashion, Conrad's landscape has become, in Michael Joslin's phrase, "a grotesque vision of hell" (87). When Byrne finally reaches his destination, it is significant to note the suggestion of supernatural terror implicit in Conrad's description of the Witches' Inn. The house, we are told, seems

as though it had risen from the ground or had come gliding to meet him, dumb and pallid, from some dark recess of the night. (Within the Tides 146-7)

Indeed, Byrne's first sight of the eponymous Inn closes this clearly defined Gothic prelude. In all respects, Conrad's opening narrative sequence in the 'Inn of the Two Witches' (1915) follows well-established Gothic formulas designed to create a mood of initial terror. In a number of ways, I would argue, Byrne's progress towards the Inn recalls the narrator's sinister journey towards the Usher estate in Edgar Allan Poe's celebrated tale, 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839).

Though a significant example, 'The Inn of the Two

Witches' (1915) is certainly not an isolated instance of Conrad's use of Gothic formulas. In many of his major texts, he exploits remote, hostile landscapes to create atmospheres of brooding terror. In some respects, in fact, Conrad might be claimed to have extended the original boundaries of the form, taking the Gothic novel out of its traditional Italian or Spanish setting, and relocating it in Central Africa or the Tropics. For Conrad's contemporary audience, of course, these exotic regions were as unknown as Southern Europe had been for the majority of the eighteenth century English readers. By turning from the traditional landscapes of earlier Gothic fiction, Conrad in effect creates a new stage for the world of menace and terror. In 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), for example, one critic, referring to the "powerful impact of the setting" with its "aura of nightmarish ... gloom" (Joslin 148), adds significantly that its effect is as "startling as any created in a recognized Gothic novel" (163). Indeed, to produce an atmosphere of growing menace prior to the appearance of Kurtz, Conrad exposes Marlow to an African jungle that seems peculiarly Gothic in its sense of brooding malice. At the Central Station, Marlow first acknowledges the power of the wilderness that surrounds him. The forest, he relates,

stood up spectrally in the moonlight, and through the dim stir, through the faint sounds of the

lamentable courtyard, the silence of the land went home to one's very heart - its mystery, its greatness, the amazing reality of its concealed life ... The moon had spread over everything a thin layer of silver - over the rank grass, over the mud, over the wall of matted vegetation standing higher than the wall of a temple, over the great river I could see through a sombre gap glittering, glittering, as it flowed broadly without a murmur. All this was great, expectant ... I wondered whether the stillness on the face of the immensity ... were meant as an appeal or a menace. ('Heart Of Darkness', Dent ed. 81)

Irrespective of the African location, Conrad's passage seems as essentially Gothic as any disquieting moonlit landscape we might encounter in Ann's Radcliffe's writing. As Marlow journeys further, Conrad develops this frightening aspect of the interior, creating a profound sense of fear and uncertainty. Fighting his way upstream, Marlow becomes aware of the "implacable", "brooding face" of the wilderness. In Conrad's narrative the jungle is realized as a living entity with an "inscrutable", even malicious "intention". The forest, Marlow admits at one stage, "looked at you with a vengeful aspect" (93). It is significant to note, indeed, how it is said to close over the shabby 'Eldorado

Expedition', "as the sea closes over a diver", leaving no trace (92). A large number of references to the "towering multitude of trees", to the rioting vegetation, all intensify the sense of suffocating oppression and gloom (101). Like many Gothic protagonists before him, Marlow comes to recognize his vulnerability, his human littleness, in the face of this immense, hostile and alien landscape.

In his so-called 'Eastern' novels and tales, Conrad's tropical landscapes perform a similarly Gothic function. Like the dark woods of the traditional folk or fairy tale, Conrad's tropical forests represent a world of sinister menace. Though works like Almayer's Folly (1895) and Lord Jim (1900) have long been admired for their detailed realizations of exotic landscapes, Conrad's lavish descriptions can never be claimed to be wholly realistic. Like his Africa, for example, Conrad's Eastern Islands are typically characterized as places of profound darkness. Even the briefest survey of his own 'Congo Diary', however, proves that Africa - like the Tropics - is of course a region of intense, blazing light. Conrad, in effect, consistently subverts reality to achieve atmospheric, often sinister effects. In the Eastern novels and stories, indeed, he typically evokes a dark underworld of tormented and twisted vegetation. In a representative early tale such as

'The Lagoon' (1898), Conrad's narrator is exposed to a hostile, even phantasmagoric world. Mooring his boat in a narrow creek, itself described as "tortuous, fabulously deep ... [and] filled with gloom" (188), the narrator details a scene of impressive menace:

Immense trees soared up, invisible behind the festooned draperies of creepers. Here and there, near the glistening blackness of the water, a twisted root of some tall tree showed amongst the tracery of small ferns, black and dull, writhing and motionless, like an arrested snake. The short words of the paddlers reverberated between the thick and sombre walls of vegetation. Darkness oozed out from between the trees, through the tangled maze of the great fantastic and unstirring leaves; the darkness, mysterious and invincible; the darkness scented and poisonous of impenetrable forests. ('The Lagoon', Tales of Unrest 188-9)

Subject to this intimidating environment, Conrad's narrator can be claimed to have entered a recognizably Gothic world, a realm where nature and landscape become palpable foes. Indeed, Conrad's stress on the reverberating darkness, the almost evil animation of the trees is strikingly Gothic in its whole conception. In this passage, furthermore, it is significant to point to what Ian Watt calls Conrad's



characteristic "inflation of language" (Conrad in the Nineteenth Century 46). His lavish imagery - so typical in his descriptions of Africa and the Tropics - creates an immediate sense of apprehension, and plays a major role in evoking a mood of fear and terror. "Descriptive extravagance", as one critic puts it, is the "hallmark" of all Gothic writers (Joslin 92).

In many essential respects, therefore, Conrad can be seen to manipulate his exotic landscapes to promote moods of dread and oppression. Yet, the innate Gothicism of Conrad's writing is not limited to these sinister evocations of the Tropics and of Africa. As one critic has commented, Conrad's sea "becomes as strangely mysterious and as powerfully moving as the magnificent castles and the sublime mountains of the conventional terror novel" (Joslin 126). In Conrad's novels, of course, the sea is never depicted as merely an inanimate body of water; from complete calm, it can rapidly assume the qualities of a raging beast, or become a brooding, malevolent foe. In The Nigger of 'Narcissus' (1897), for example, Conrad's lurid description of the novel's central storm is peculiarly Gothic both in its extravagance, and its evil animation of the sea:

A fierce squall seemed to burst asunder the thick mass of sooty vapours; and above the wrack of torn

clouds glimpses could be caught of the high moon rushing backwards with frightful speed over the sky, right into the wind's eye. Many [seamen] hung their heads, muttering that it 'turned their inwards out' to look at it. Soon the clouds closed up and the world again became a raging, blind darkness that howled, flinging at the lonely ship salt sprays and sleet. About half-past seven the pitchy obscurity round us turned a ghastly grey, and we knew that the sun had risen. This unnatural and threatening daylight, in which we could see one another's wild eyes and drawn faces, was only an added tax on our endurance. The horizon seemed to have come on all sides within arm's length of the ship. Into that narrowed circle furious seas leaped in, struck, and leaped out. A rain of salt, heavy drops flew aslant like a mist. (Dent ed. 55-6)

As in many of his novels, Conrad's tempests become hellish, even apocalyptic visions. Despite its effectiveness, however, it is significant to note how Conrad's core imagery in this passage is almost entirely derived. The "howling" gales, the sickly, "ghastly grey" sunrise, the enclosing horizon, are all, of course, well-

established Gothic formulas. With only a few alterations, one might easily transplant Conrad's storm from its original context, and have it harrowing the inmates of some mouldering, medieval monastery. Indeed, the extraordinary seastorms of Conrad's fiction - so central to works like The Nigger of Narcissus (1897) and 'Typhoon' (1903) - might be defined as essentially Gothic both in their language and their dramatic effect.

It is significant to observe, furthermore, that even Conrad's tranquil seascapes can assume distinctly Gothic identities. In The Shadow Line (1917), for example, Conrad's young Captain comes to regard the Gulf of Siam as a wily and malevolent force. Effectively imprisoned by its placid waters, he becomes increasingly aware that an evil adversary is blocking his ship's onward progress. "Mysterious currents", he muses,

drifted us here and there, with a stealthy power made manifest by the changing vistas of the islands fringing the east shore of the Gulf. And there were winds too, fitful and deceitful. They raised hopes only to dash them into the bitterest disappointment, promises of advance ending in lost ground, expiring in sighs, dying into dumb stillness in which the currents had it all their

own way - their own inimical way. (Dent ed. 83-4)

(my emphasis)

The Gulf, indeed, becomes an ideal Gothic location for Conrad's ship, haunted, according to Burns, by the dying curse of its former captain. In the words of one critic, the Gulf becomes an "animate agent of evil" (Joslin 93), a sinister region as "oppressive as frightening as any haunted graveyard" (150).

In some respects, this brief survey of Conrad's fiction tends to overturn a number of basic critical preconceptions regarding the novelist's innovatory artistic methods. Whilst Conrad indisputably remains a modernist writer, he can be clearly seen to employ a number of eighteenth century Gothic formulas in his fiction, summoning sinister land or sea scapes to create atmospheres of fear and uncertainty. Though Gothicism, I would argue, plays an important role in Dostoevsky's fictional world, it is not, of course, initially evoked through narrative accounts of bizarre or exotic locations. Landscape, in the traditional sense, plays virtually no part in Dostoevsky's fiction. Descriptions of the natural world are noticeably absent in his writing. When they do occur - as in the passages describing Stephan Verkhovensky's final flight in The Devils (1871)- they exist solely to mirror deeper psychological states within

Dostoevsky's protagonists. In essence, I would argue, Dostoevsky is a writer of the city; his landscapes are predominantly urban and human. Like Dickens's London, however, Dostoevsky's St. Petersburg can assume a fantastic, sometimes diabolical identity. His vast tenements, for example, with their twisting, unlit stairwells, cast a profoundly disturbing shadow over characters and events in novels like Crime and Punishment (1866) and The Idiot (1869). "'There are few places'", Svidrigailov comments in the former work, "'where you'll find so many gloomy, harsh and strange influences on the soul of man as in Petersburg'" (quoted in Fanger, trans. Fanger 198-9). In many respects, Svidrigailov's remark highlights the essentially Gothic identity of Dostoevsky's often nightmarish city. As the critic Donald Fanger has noted, the St. Petersburg of Crime and Punishment (1866) is the ideal Gothic backdrop for Raskolnikov's horrific crimes (207).

The St. Petersburg of The Idiot (1869), I would argue, clearly highlights the Gothic aspect of Dostoevsky's art. The opening paragraphs of the novel, indeed, suggests that Myshkin, Rogozhin and Lebedev are entering a recognizably Gothic world:

At about nine o'clock in the morning at the end of November, during a thaw, the Warsaw train was

approaching Petersburg at full speed. It was so damp and foggy that it was a long time before it grew light, and even then it was difficult to distinguish out of the carriage windows anything a few yards to the right and left of the railway track. (trans. Magarshack 31)

Dostoevsky's St. Petersburg, it should be noted, is not merely fogbound; it is blurred, unresolved. Though it is early morning, night still effectively shrouds the scene. This unnatural detail, of course, immediately defines a mood of uncertainty and oppression. It is significant to note, furthermore, that Dostoevsky employs a traditional Gothic formula towards the end of this opening sequence. "Everyone's face", the narrative notes, is "pale and yellow, the colour of fog" (31). The spectral, ghoulish associations conjured by this image needs little elucidation. In choosing to open The Idiot (1869) in this particular way, it seems that Dostoevsky's aim is to establish St. Petersburg as a place of fear and dread. Later in the novel, of course, the city does assume a profoundly nightmarish quality. As Myshkin wanders through the streets of St. Petersburg in Part Two, he is not merely followed, he is effectively haunted, by Rogozhin.

In addition to this atmosphere of terror, it is

possible to distinguish a number of peculiarly Gothic landmarks within Dostoevsky's urban landscape. The interior of Rogozhin's house, for example, closely resembles the interior of the archetypal castle or monastery of Gothic fiction, despite the city location. Following established Gothic traditions, the house is a veritable maze of chambers and twisting corridors. Myshkin, we are told, is led through a "number of tiny rooms, turning again and again round corners, going up two or three steps and going down as many" (242). Myshkin's immediate disorientation within the confines of the house produces a mood of intense apprehension, a mood not dispelled by the discovery of Rogozhin's gloomy quarters. Rogozhin's room, the narrative stresses, is particularly "dark and grimy", cluttered with heavy ledgers and imposing furniture. That most familiar of Gothic stageprops, the oil painting of the family elder, occupies a suitably prominent position. The canvas of Rogozhin's father, Myshkin notes, depicts an austere and menacing man, a man with "a yellow wrinkled face, and a pair of suspicious, mournful eyes" (244). In most Gothic novels, the gloomy, often dilapidated condition of the hero-villain's estate is itself an accurate reflection of the protagonists's tormented psychological state. In The Idiot (1869), I would argue, this same Gothic association between house and character is clearly intended. Indeed, Myshkin is

quick to draw a parallel between the gloomy house and Rogozhin's brooding nature. "'Your house!', the Prince reflects,

'has the appearance of the whole of your family and the whole of your Rogozhin way of life.... its so dark here ... you dwell in darkness'. (244)

Myshkin, of course, is not the only character to draw attention to the Gothic aspect of Rogozhin's house. Writing to Aglaya, Nastasya makes a melodramatic reference to its sinister nature. It is, she comments,

'sinister and gloomy, and there is a secret in it ... All the time I was in their house I could not help thinking that somewhere under the floor-boards there was a dead man hidden'. (502)

With horrible irony, Ippolit also draws a similar association, terming Rogozhin's house as a "'graveyard'" (453). In many respects, Dostoevsky creates an archetypal Gothic location for Nastasya's murder, right in the heart of his contemporary St. Petersburg.

In the same connection, it is worth pointing to the unnamed hotel Myshkin stays at on his return to St. Petersburg in Part Two. As the scene for Rogozhin's attempted murder of the Prince, it functions as an important



dramatic backdrop within Dostoevsky's narrative. Like Rogozhin's house, the hotel is characterized as a place of darkness; it is a building, indeed, that Myshkin finds entirely loathsome. Significantly, the hotel harbours that most characteristic of Gothic locations, the winding ill-lit staircase. The staircase hiding a murderous adversary, of course, had long been recognized as an established Gothic formula, a veritable cliché of terror fiction, by the time Dostoevsky completed his novel in 1869. Irrespective of this, the writer employs this stock item of Gothic mansionery to significant effect, substantially heightening the mood of terror in his scene. "As in all old houses", the sequence begins, "the staircase was of stone. Dark and narrow, it twisted round a thick ... column" (271). As Myshkin emerges from the storm outside and proceeds up the darkened stairwell, the scene, despite its urban setting, strongly recalls similar passages in works like The Castle of Otranto (1764). Rogozhin, in true Gothic style, hides in "something like a niche" in the stairwell, a cavity "not more than a yard wide and about eighteen inches deep" (271). One only has to consider the similar function darkened staircases perform in Crime and Punishment (1866) - they figure, for example, in all Raskolnikov's entrances and exits from the flat of the old pawnbroker - to realize that Dostoevsky's urban landscape has a significant Gothic

identity.

As well as the architecture of the Gothic novel, the Gothic storm might be claimed to feature in Dostoevsky's urban world. The storm, of course, has been long regarded, to use one critic's term, as a "generic characteristic" of the form (Napier 4). As I have already noted, Conrad's sea storms - particularly those in The Nigger of Narcissus (1897) and 'Typhoon' (1903) - have a descriptive extravagance that recalls Mrs. Radcliffe's pioneering method in novels like The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794). Although Dostoevsky does not make extensive use of the storm, his urban tempests do assume a distinct Gothic identity. The storm which forms the background to Rogozhin's attempted murder of Myshkin in The Idiot (1869), for example, achieves a familiar, almost apocalyptic quality. "The storm-cloud", Dostoevsky's narrative recounts, "covered the whole sky and blotted out the evening light." In traditional Gothic fashion, the storm bursts the moment the Prince approaches, "the rain com[ing] down in torrents" (270). Rather than a realistic detail, Dostoevsky's storm functions more as a dramatic decoration to the action, significantly heightening the mood of fear and terror. In Crime and Punishment (1866), Dostoevsky follows a similar Gothic strategy in detailing Svidrigailov's suicide, a St. Petersburg storm forming the

backdrop to Svirigailov's nightmares and final hours at the end of the novel. In this connection, it is valuable to highlight not only to the influence of the Gothic School on Dostoevsky's creative method, but also the more immediate impact of Dickens. The urban storm, indeed, plays an important role in many of Dickens's novels, heralding, for instance, Magwitch's dramatic return to London in Great Expectations (1861). Though the subject falls outside the boundaries of my current discussion, it is important to acknowledge that Dostoevsky's vision of the city owes much to Dickens's significant use of Gothic formulas.

Though I have concentrated on Dostoevsky's Gothicization of the city, it is valuable to remark briefly on Conrad's celebrated vision of London in The Secret Agent (1907). In his 'Author's Note' to the novel, Conrad uses a number of traditional Gothic formulas to detail his fictionalized city. As with Dostoevsky, the influence of Dickens is much in evidence here. In typical Gothic fashion, Conrad's landscape assumes a hostile, partly evil identity. London is seen as an "enormous ... monstrous town", a "cruel devourer of the world's light". At the close of the passage, Conrad employs what is clearly a sepulchral image. His fictionalized city becomes effectively an immense urban graveyard, a place where there is "darkness enough to bury

five millions of lives" (xii). The adjectival extravagance of Conrad's vision, indeed, seems almost enough to assure it an independent Gothic identity, irrespective of content.

From the preceding discussion, I hope to have shown that Conrad and Dostoevsky utilize Gothic models and archetypes to create oppressive or sinister effects in their fiction. As I have said, one can draw significant parallels between Conrad's exotic African and Eastern landscapes, and the European landscapes of the early Gothic writers. In many respects, Conrad effectively extends the geographical boundaries of the Gothic form beyond its traditional Iberian or Italian location. In the same way, his extravagant seastorms recall clearly the narrative hyperbole of the Gothic novel's Alpine or mountain storm. In Dostoevsky's fictional world, the architectural landscapes of the genre - its gloomy buildings, its darkened staircases and tortuous passageways - are much in evidence, only relocated to a modern urban setting.

Despite its paramount importance, landscape and setting could be regarded as essentially a cosmetic, even decorative aspect of Gothic fiction. The most central characteristic of the genre, many critics would argue, is the Gothic hero-villain himself. In his work Joseph Conrad and Gothicism

(1977), Michael Joslin argues that it is possible to identify a number of characterizing features in the archetypal Gothic villain. "Power, both of purpose and mind", he writes, is the "basic trait" of all Gothic protagonists (17). This positive characteristic, however, has been invariably perverted to evil ends. The true Gothic villain, Joslin argues,

has the capacity to benefit mankind greatly but because of his desires or because of some blighting check given to his moral development, he exerts his might only to achieve his selfish ambitions. (17)

The critic cites Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as a classic example of one such character. The vampire hunter Van Helsing, Joslin notes, makes particular reference to the Count's illustrious past. *Dracula*, Van Helsing reflects, was once "the cleverest ... as well as the bravest" of men, a "noble" individual with a "mighty brain" and an "iron resolution". Like Mrs. Radcliffe's Montoni and Schedoni in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797), however, his "natural superiority" has become entirely self-corrupted (Quoted in Joslin 132). It is this wilful perversion of extraordinary personal ability, Joslin argues, that is instrumental in creating the "terror and awe"

associated with both the Gothic villain and the genre itself (133).

By applying this critical interpretation, it is possible to draw a number of significant parallels between Joslin's archetypal Gothic villain and leading protagonists in both Conrad and Dostoevsky's fiction. In 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), for instance, Conrad's Kurtz might be validly defined as a major Gothic character. Like Stoker's Dracula, he possesses extraordinary personal abilities, abilities that might be directed towards entirely philanthropic ends. Conrad's narrative, in fact, consistently alludes to Kurtz's genius; he is a gifted painter, an inspired musician, a formidable writer. A natural leader, Kurtz possesses enormous oratorical skills; his unusual eloquence can, and does, convert others to his ideas and beliefs. In characteristic Gothic fashion, however, Kurtz abuses his profound natural abilities to perpetrate the most abysmal crimes.

A similarly powerful, yet distorted intellect can be observed in Dostoevsky's Stavrogin. As the critic Michael Katz comments,

many characters spout ideological convictions expounded by Stavrogin at some previous stage in

his life. The landscape [of The Devils (1871)] is strewn with disciples ... clinging to the vestiges of his thought. ('Introduction', World Classics ed. xi)

Shatov, Kirilov, and Verkhovensky, of course, all claim that Stavrogin has exerted a profound, shaping influence on their fundamental values and beliefs. Shatov's Slavophilism, Kirilov's Nietzschean individualism, Verkhovensky's pseudo-anarchist ideology, are all said to originate in heated debates with Stavrogin; he has, so each man claims, converted them to their respective causes long before the novel begins. Though Stavrogin's intellect easily embraces such diverse ethical systems, he cannot, and does not adopt them. Like the archetypal Gothic villain, he toys with philosophies, as if they are amusing playthings, finally distorting or subverting them to evil ends. Stavrogin abuses, for example, the sacred rite of Christian Confession, when he uses it as a platform to celebrate his depraved sexual proclivities at his meeting with Father Tikhon. Like Kurtz, his formidable natural abilities are perverted to entirely negative and destructive purposes.

Prior to the full emergence of this evil identity, the Gothic hero-villain, it should be noted, is initially

characterized as a profoundly enigmatic figure. The Gothic novelist traditionally feeds the reader with tantalizing bits of information designed to invest his or her villain with a sinister, darkly charismatic identity. Van Helsing's references to Dracula's enigmatic history, for example, are particularly instrumental in making Stoker's vampire a fascinating character per se. This enigmatizing process, so central to the Gothic idiom, is clearly evident in Conrad and Dostoevsky's realizations of Kurtz and Stavrogin. In 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), an intense aura of mystery surrounds the character and motives of Kurtz. The central station, of course, is full of strange, often disturbing rumours regarding this "remarkable person" (19). As the critic Paul O'Prey notes, a "fog of insistent vagueness" circumscribes Conrad's antagonist ('Introduction', 'Heart of Darkness' 20). For Marlow, the name of Kurtz begins to exert a sinister fascination, a fascination that is naturally communicated to the reader. In The Devils (1871), strange, often contradictory rumours reach Varvara Petrovna regarding her son's bizarre lifestyle in St. Petersburg. Just prior to his return home, Stavrogin's unusual character becomes the topic of fevered speculation in Skvoreshniki high society. "The whole town", Dostoevsky's narrator tells us, is possessed by "the idea that his [Stavrogin's] soul might harbour a fatal secret"; some people, Govorov adds,



"positively relished the notion that he was a murderer" (trans. Katz 43). As with Conrad's Kurtz, Dostoevsky constructs a complex web of intrigue around his central antagonist, long before he appears in the novel. Stavrogin's actual arrival in Skvoreshniki, of course, merely intensifies the enigma. When he drags the elderly Gaganov round the room by his nose, the petty outrage seems far more than a mere school boy prank; Stavrogin's inexplicable behaviour, indeed, carries its own sinister resonance. With this action, Dostoevsky's narrator warns, "the wild beast" had "suddenly unsheathed its claws" (45). In many respects, Dostoevsky's realization of Stavrogin follows a well-established Gothic pattern. Like Conrad's Kurtz, Dostoevsky's character progresses from fascinating enigma to evil genius.

In his invaluable survey of the Gothic genre, Michael Joslin identifies a further important characteristic of the form. The archetypal Gothic protagonist, Joslin claims, typically has his "familiar", a grotesque, often comic foil who idolizes the hero-villain (139). In Stoker's Dracula (1897), for example, the Count has his slavish adherent in the lunatic Renfield. Stoker's madman, of course, insists that he is Dracula's servant. "'I have worshipped you long and afar off'", he tells the Count. This 'devil-disciple

relationship', so characteristic of the Gothic idiom, can be validly identified in Conrad and Dostoevsky's writing (see 139). Stavrogin and Kurtz, I would argue, both have their respective familiars. In an important passage in The Devils (1871) Peter Verkhovensky insists that Stavrogin is his "idol". "'You're my leader, you're my sun, and I'm your worm'", he informs Dostoevsky's antagonist in Part Two of the novel (trans. Magarshack 420). Though Verkhovensky is undoubtedly an accomplished manipulator, it does seem possible to interpret many of his actions as attempts to impress or gratify Stavrogin. In many respects, Verkhovensky is like an eager dog keen to please his master.

Though Rogozhin cannot be regarded as a genuine Gothic hero-villain, it is worth noting that Dostoevsky's brutal, sensual protagonist certainly has his clownish familiar. Particularly in Part One of The Idiot (1869), the civil servant Lebedev proves slavishly faithful, offering to "'walk upside down'" for Rogozhin (36). "'Thrash me and you shall have me'", he tells Semyon Parfyonovich. "'By thrashing me, you shall put your seal on me....'" (41). Rogozhin, of course, readily accepts the attentions of this avaricious buffoon, contemptuously terming Lebedev his "'leech'" (38).

In 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), it is the aptly named Harlequin who acts as Kurtz's familiar. Like the archetypal Gothic villain, Conrad's antagonist treats his disciple with complete contempt, threatening to shoot him should he so desire. As Marlow notes, however, the Harlequin idolizes Kurtz. In Marlow's opinion, "the man [Kurtz] filled his life, occupied his thoughts, swayed his emotions" (Penguin ed. 95). Conrad's comic figure, indeed, is as devoted to Kurtz as the lakeside savages who regard him as their deity.

In this section, I have endeavoured to show how one distinct, perhaps surprising, literary genre proves itself to be a common and significant factor in both Conrad and Dostoevsky's fiction. Though I have concentrated exclusively on the specific issue of Gothicism, many critics, like Jacques Catteau and Peter Kemp, have shown that other major literary forms are common to both writers' worlds. The genres of 'adventure', 'thriller', 'romance', and 'detective' fiction, indeed, are a prominent and readily evident feature in each author's novels. This innovative ability to successfully weld such widely disparate literary forms into their writing is, I would argue, another indication of the significant bond existing between Conrad and Dostoevsky's fundamental creative processes.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONRAD, DOSTOEVSKY, AND MATERIALISM

Any overall assessment of the canon of nineteenth century European literature is likely to reveal a central thematic concern with the rise of materialism in society, at the expense of declining moral, spiritual and religious values. In the opinion of Charles Lalo, for example, one of the greatest merits of Honore de Balzac's (1799-1850) sequence of novels collectively entitled La Comedie Humaine is the

attention it draws to "the increasing importance of economic life in the last century" (86). Balzac, it might be suggested, was the first European novelist to clearly define the materialist spirit rapidly becoming a ruling passion not only in his native Paris, but throughout the developing capitalist societies of Europe. Writing in the novel History of the Thirteen (1835), he insists that "Parisians ... [have become] stamped with the ineradicable signs of a breathless greediness"; in his vision, the lust for gold has become a dominating force in man (Quoted in Fanger 32).

In the second half of the century, it is appropriate to single out the work of Dickens (1812-1870), whose later novels are characterized by a profound concern with the power of money. Not only does he corroborate Balzac's vision of greed, but he extends the argument by drawing attention to the socially divisive effects of wealth on the individual. In Great Expectations (1861), for instance, the saddening, even tragic, disintegration of intimacy between Pip and Joe Gargery (following the former's rise to fortune) is indicative of the larger perverting strength of material values over common humanity. Money, symbol of man's materialist impulse, becomes synonymous in Dickens's world with what N.M. Lary terms "the breakdown of brotherhood" (36).

Both Balzac and Dickens, it can be claimed, have exerted a profoundly shaping influence upon a whole tradition of nineteenth and twentieth century writers who have offered their own responses to the rampant materialism they have felt to lie at the very core of Western society. In fact, early readings of Balzac and Dickens by both Dostoevsky and Conrad have been extensively recorded and judged instrumental in the development of their own respective visions. Dostoevsky's first literary endeavour in 1844, a Russian version of Eugenie Grandet, established ideological links with Balzac that continued to develop throughout his writing career. According to Joseph Frank, "it was Balzac who probably persuaded him that [Europe] ... was totally in thrall to Baal, the flesh-god of materialism" (Dostoevsky: the Seeds of Revolt 107).

In his Diary of a Writer (1873-1881), it is significant to note that Dostoevsky speaks of Dickens as "the great Christian", the champion of the "humble people", the "downtrodden folks" who are victims in a society where wealth rules (350). Particularly in his pre-Siberian writings, Dostoevsky presents us with a succession of poverty-stricken heroes very much at the mercy of unscrupulous high officials. Indeed the Dickensian theme of material power unquestionably dominates his novel The

Insulted and the Injured (1861), where a rich aristocrat Prince Valkovsky terrorizes a powerless and impoverished narrator, Ivan Petrovich, as well as an orphan child, significantly named Nellie Smith. Even in a late novel such as The Idiot (1869), as I will show in some detail later, this Dickensian view of a society divided and led by a financial morality, still occupies a central role in Dostoevsky's mature world-picture.

Although Conrad's debt to the French novelists Flaubert and de Maupassant is well recognized, interesting evidence also exists to suggest his extensive knowledge of Balzac. In a letter dated 7th June 1918, Conrad tantalizingly advises Sir Hugh Walpole that "one can learn something from Balzac" (Jean-Aubry 2 206). In his Preface written for Thomas Beer's book on the American novelist Stephen Crane, furthermore, Conrad records an 1897 meeting between the two authors when he spoke at length on the "contents ... scope ... plan ... and ... general significance" of La Comedie Humaine (Tales of Hearsay and Last Essays, Penguin ed. 176). Saturated as he was in nineteenth century French literature, there can surely be little question of the important role Balzac's vision played in the formation of Conrad's assessment of man's materialist instinct and nature. Nostromo (1904), after all, can be seen to share surprisingly common bonds

with Balzac's work; Conrad's probing analysis of character motivated by greed is, of course, typical of Balzac's method throughout La Comedie Humaine.

As with Dostoevsky, Dickens holds a place of central importance in Conrad's ideological development. Dostoevsky, as I have noted, called Dickens "the great Christian"; Conrad went further, terming him "the Great Master" (Karl, Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives 187). Indeed, as early as 1867, Conrad is known to have encountered Dickens in his father's Polish translation of Hard Times (1845) (66). The full extent of this early Dickensian influence can, of course, be charted in Conrad's most fundamental creative methods. In creating characters such as Madame de S- or Schomberg, for instance, one can readily detect a caricatural technique which is far more than superficially derived from Dickens. Specifically relating to my argument, however, it can be seen that Dickens's vision of wealth as a disuniting force within society finds a major place in Conrad's mature picture of materialism's tragic consequences. The critic D.R. Schwarz, in speaking of the Gould's marriage, observes that Nostromo (1904) "stresses [how] ... a fanatic commitment to economic goals ... can destroy the relationship between man and wife" (137). It might even be claimed that Mrs. Gould, standing as she does



in moral isolation against the tide of greed that sweeps Costaguana, shares fundamental similarities with a character like Dickens's Lizzie Hexam, herself fighting the spiritual corruption of a materialist environment.

Having briefly suggested this mutual debt to both Balzac and Dickens, writers deeply preoccupied with man's declining spirituality and his growing economic obsessions, I shall now consider in specific detail the theme of materialism - its manifestation, and significantly parallel treatment - in the writings of Conrad and Dostoevsky.

Although their fiction clearly demonstrates the debate, it is valuable in the first instance to consider both Dostoevsky's journalism and Conrad's letters, which can be seen to offer particularly uncompromising responses to the question of man's growing materialism. In The Diary of a Writer (1873-1881), Dostoevsky defines what he sees as the dominant urge of European Capitalism, noting his own profound concern at its rapid proliferation within Russia:

Everywhere there seems to be soaring some sort of a drug ... some itch for debauch. The people have become affected with an unheard-of-distortion of ideas and a wholesale worship of materialism. By materialism ... I mean the worship of money by the

people, their adoration of the power inherent in a bag of gold. (13)

Dostoevsky clearly indicates the obsessional, devotional, even narcotic qualities of this insidious social evil. In an argument centrally important to his Diary of a Writer (1873-1881), he continues to insist man's materialist passion has grown to the extent where it threatens to subvert the common standards of Christian morality. Ruled by this lust for material wealth, Dostoevsky warns that the people

have all 'grown flabby', and their hearts have grown fat; everybody is craving for sweets, for material gain. Essentially, they are all slaves, and they can't even conceive that a matter may be decided for the sake of truth and not for personal benefit. (112-3)

Under threat, clearly, is the shaping force of man's spiritual will. Swayed by the devouring influence of Capitalism, Dostoevsky implies, men return to mere flesh, become bestial slaves reduced to a level of "utter swinishness" (157).

In his non-fictional world, it has long been recognized

that Conrad's deepest, most personal philosophical reflections are to be found in his correspondence with R.B. Cunninghame Graham. Indeed, the long dialogue with Graham provides us with an intense and unrelenting account of Conrad's profoundly pessimistic world view. In an 1898 letter, warning against his friend's incorrigible idealism, Conrad offers his own interpretation of the rampant materialist spirit he feels is dominating contemporary man. Graham's "ideals of sincerity, courage and truth", Conrad insists, "are strangely out of place in this epoch of material preoccupations". Like Dostoevsky before him, Conrad suggests that at the heart of modern capitalist man lies the motivating question:

What does it bring? What's the profit? What do we get by it?

Where Dostoevsky accuses humanity of weighting personal benefit above the truth, Conrad similarly observes that material interests lie

at the root of every moral, intellectual or political movement. Into the noblest cause men manage to put something of their baseness. (Watts 68)

Without doubt, there are striking affinities in the intensity, approach and tone adopted by Conrad and

Dostoevsky here. Although both writers are certainly responding to extreme social forces at work within nineteenth century Western society, it is perhaps surprising to find the views of both authors in such fundamental accord. C.T. Watts, in his commentary to the Cunninghame Graham letters, briefly but significantly comments on the relationship between Dostoevsky's short story 'Bobok' (1873), and a Conrad letter of 1897. In the letter, Conrad imagines a hellish underworld - "a kind of malefactors' cavern" - crowded by human spirits who in death, as in life, are dominated by "unspeakable meanness ... baseness ... [and] rapacity". Denied any moral fortitude, these souls merely barter themselves as objects valued, in Conrad's words, "at about two-and-six" (49). The Dostoevsky story - a fantastic account of the narrator's eavesdropping experience on a conversation between corpses buried in a St. Petersburg cemetery - indicates a similar sense of spiritual lassitude governing the thoroughly material and corporeal values of the underworld characters. Following Watts's imaginatively informed association, I shall now extend the argument to consider how this major theme manifests itself in the actual novels, particularly referring to the similarities evident in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' (1899) and Nostromo (1904), and Dostoevsky's The Idiot (1869).

All three works, it might be firstly suggested, share a common and profound concern with what Dostoevsky termed the "seize and grab" mentality of modern materialist man (Diary of a Writer 430). In 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), where the emphasis is often placed on man as Group rather than man as Individual, Conrad is able to deliver an incisive and particularly uncompromising account of his overall vision. Underlining the strong primitive nature of the urge, he clearly demonstrates how what is "mean and greedy" in man quickly comes to dominate (Penguin ed. 110). Indeed in analyzing the impulse, Conrad insistently stresses that his ironically named 'pilgrims' are not conducting an orderly or methodical rape of the Congo's riches, but are preoccupied by an engulfing and frenzied scramble for gain. As Marlow remarks early on, it is an obsessional urge characterized by a striking lack of intellectual purpose; it is a greed for its own sake, and as such is merely a gratifying animal experience:

They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind. ('Heart of Darkness', Penguin ed. 31)

In The Idiot (1869), Dostoevsky expresses his own parallel conviction that greed may come to utterly dominate

the intellectual faculty, and so reduce man to the status of a grasping, insatiable beast. Lebedev, a minor but memorable character in the novel, illustrates this point fully. From the first, he is quick to grovel like a dog for Rogozhin at the slightest prospect of money, enthralled, as Dostoevsky remarks, by "the full significance of one million four hundred thousand in ready money and one hundred thousand in cash" (trans. Magarshack 180). Even a serious creation like Ganya Ivolgin becomes prey to the brutalizing attraction of material wealth, placing the acquisition of money above all other spiritual concerns. Rogozhin, speaking to Ganya in Part One, draws our attention to the true extent of an obsession which belittles man's humanity:

'Why, if I was to show you three roubles, if I was to take them out of my pocket right now, you'd crawl on all fours after them, you would, as far as Vassilyevsky Island - that's the kind of fellow you are! (135)

Indeed in the opening book The Idiot (1869) particularly, Dostoevsky punctuates his text with many instances of mankind's enslavement to material concerns. Rogozhin's brother, we are told, has cut the gold tassles from his father's coffin because it is "no use wasting them" (33). Even the sanctity of death, it seems, cannot hold back

the spirit of rapaciousness that grips the majority of the novel's characters. Konstantin Mochulsky, in a phrase that might equally apply to Conrad, judges that in Dostoevsky's world the "passion for gain" has in its essence become "murderous" (361). Mrs. Yepanchin, whose own naivety places her in a moral alliance with Myshkin, comments with authority that St. Petersburg society, like Conrad's Congo, has become "so obsessed with the lust for gold that [the people have] ... taken leave of their senses (The Idiot 183). Basic Christian morality, even brotherhood and friendship, have been overturned and the bonds holding society together broken. But it is arguably Rogozhin's story of two lifelong peasant friends which proves to be the most disturbing image in the novel, an image expressing Dostoevsky's fear of the absolute corrosive power of materialism. The simplicity, even the quiet objectivity of Rogozhin's tale describing a man's sudden and blind craving for his friend's silver watch, amounts to a modern parable of moral horror:

'[He] liked that watch so much and was so tempted by it that he could not restrain himself: he took out his knife and when his friend turned his back to him, went up cautiously to him from behind, took aim ... [and] cut his friend's throat at one stroke, like a sheep, and took his watch'. (237)

In Nostromo (1904), a more individualized world than the earlier 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), Conrad also directs our attention towards the idolizing attraction of material wealth, and its tragically desensitizing effect on the spirituality of his characters. Costaguana, indeed, is a battlefield where a predominantly incensed mankind fights over "a more or less large share of the booty" in the form of silver (Dent ed. 313). Not only the Europeans, but also the indigenous population, wage civil war against each other in the name of the materialist cause. Like Dostoevsky, Conrad seems determined to illustrate the obsessive, almost narcotic threat of wealth, and its ability to engulf all spiritual values. For example, Charles Gould, in Dr. Monygham's analysis, eventually becomes "hopelessly infected" (376) by his silver - it eats away at the union of his marriage and conquers as "the sole mistress of his thoughts" (365). Nostromo, of course, considers himself cursed at the novel's close. Indeed he is transformed into a "cowed slave" (528) by a force that so "fastens upon ... [his] mind" that he sees the treasure "every time he closes his eyes" (460). Like Ganya Ivolgin, he is both humiliated and belittled by material lust; indeed it is a lust that has him helplessly crawling about the Great Isabel, to be finally shot as a common thief.



The extent of Conrad's profound dismay at his era's passion for gain can be seen in that he, like Dostoevsky, significantly provides us with a harrowing example of materialism's essentially murderous nature. In the character of Sotillo, we have a beast who will automatically torture or kill without reflection. His greed, it is implied, renders him as blind and helpless as Rogozhin's unrestrained peasant in The Idiot (1869):

He [Sotillo] had no convictions of any sort upon anything except as to the irresistible power of his personal advantages.... The only guiding motive of his life was to get money for the satisfaction of his expensive tastes, which he indulged recklessly, having no self-control. He imagined himself a master of intrigue, but his corruption was as simple as an animal instinct. (285-6)

Indeed in Conrad's vision, contemporary man is so wholly "actuated by sordid motives of gain" (52) that his world has become enveloped in a "moral darkness" (354) as profound as the physical gloom of Sulaco's Placid Gulf. Mrs. Gould, very much the moral spokeswoman of the novel, realizes the full religious implications of this worship, this idolatry of material things. In her analysis, not

simply Costaguana, but the entire globe, is in the grip of a new force. International financiers, like Holroyd, have usurped the place of God and dethroned the saints - Mrs. Gould's own carving of the Madonna, for instance, is viewed by 'the great man' as an icon of mere "wood and paint" (71). In place of the old values, there has been instituted a new religion, the religion of material interests.

Dostoevsky, in The Idiot (1869), expresses a parallel unease at the growing ascendancy of materialism over morality in his society. It is readily apparent throughout the novel, in fact, that financial wealth has become the standard measure of a person's worth. The narrator's ironic introduction of Radomsky into the story typically underlines St. Petersburg's predilection for cash over all other spiritual concerns:

This was a certain Yevgeny Pavlovich Radomsky, a young man of twenty-eight, an aide-de-camp of the Emperor, an exceedingly handsome man of 'good family', witty, brilliant, 'modern', 'highly educated', and - quite fabulously wealthy. General Yepanchin was always careful about the last point.  
(204) (my emphasis)

Radomsky, himself the 'modern' man, later extends the

argument by suggesting that Christian morality no longer has a place in this world. There are new laws calling for "the satisfaction of individual egoism and material necessity!" (386). Like Conrad's moral universe, which in Nostromo (1904) has entered an almost Dantean darkness, Dostoevsky warns (through Lebedev) that his contemporary society has reached "the time of the third horse", a stage in St. John's Revelation which prophesies the eventual destruction of humanity (219). Even the compassionate Christianity offered by Myshkin is predominantly derided and considered foolish in a community which insists the Prince "doesn't know the way of the world and has no place in it" (513). Indeed, it is readily evident, as Joseph Frank argues, that Dostoevsky and Conrad fundamentally agree that

to adopt, as an ideal for mankind, the aim of the fullest material satisfaction is ... the equivalent of encouraging moral perversity and corruption. (Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation 1860-1865)

Whilst Conrad's mature vision is grounded in a belief that material gain is the primary, if not sole, impulse of man, it is important to note how Dostoevsky's views are additionally complicated by his well-known Slavophile sympathies. In Conrad's world, for instance, it is vital to

note that the spiritual figures of Mrs. Gould and 'The Garibaldino' are essentially impotent against the veritable whirlwind of greed that engulfs Costaguana. Though the 'first lady of Sulaco' might win the hearts of the town's citizens, she cannot redeem the inexorably bleak picture of human nature conveyed by the novel. In this absolute sense perhaps, Dostoevsky's vision has neither the remorselessness, nor the hopelessness, of Conrad's world-picture. Whilst Dostoevsky undoubtedly upholds the Conradian belief in West European man's spiritual demise and the death of his religious persuasions, he has more optimism regarding humanity in his native Russia. Indeed, in what is one of the most dominant themes of his writer's diary, Dostoevsky asserts his profound conviction that the Christian Orthodox faith remains a significant and living force in the Russian people. Though Europe may be a moral wasteland for both authors, Dostoevsky insists the Russian soul preserves its instinct to "invariably and eternally" seek "truth and honour" above all material concerns (The Diary of a Writer 381). Always an incorrigible and visionary patriot in later years, it is essential to respect the dual nature of many of Dostoevsky's deepest ethical positions. As I shall show in the following pages, much of what Dostoevsky sees as diseased in contemporary man - his materialism, his nihilism, his atheism - is considered to be peculiarly

European in origin. Godless rationalists like Ivan Karamazov and Stavrogin, for example, can be seen to express particularly Westernized ideologies, and as such corrupt the Orthodox purity of the Russian spirit. Most importantly for our present debate, however, is that where Conrad's "shiftless Europeans" tend to triumph, men like Ivan Karamazov are exposed and fail in Dostoevsky's world (Nostromo 45). Even the spiritual, essentially Slavic optimism of Aloysha Karamazov may be seen to prevail in the final pages of The Brothers Karamazov (1880), when Conrad's own moral torchbearers (like Mrs. Gould) remain defeated. It is appropriate therefore, in the light of these observations, to clearly distinguish the dual nature of Dostoevsky's vision, and note the greater idealism he reserves for those truly 'Russian' spirits existing in the vast human gallery of his novels.

## CHAPTER SIX

FIRST DESCENTS INTO THE INFERNO: PARALLEL IDEOLOGY AND  
EXPERIENCE IN 'HEART OF DARKNESS' AND NOTES FROM THE HOUSE  
OF THE DEAD

Few critics would dispute the profoundly shaping nature of Conrad's 1890 Congo voyage upon the mature writer. Frederic R. Karl, in Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives (1979), assesses the episode as "momentous in his later work" (301). A letter written from Kinshasa to his aunt and confidante Marguerite

Poradowska suggests the intensely harrowing psychological character of Conrad's journey:

Decidedly I regret having come here. I even regret it bitterly ... Everything here is repellent to me. Men and things, but men above all. (Collected Letters of Conrad 1 62)

Conrad's reaction registers not merely his revulsion, but his sense of profound isolation and alienation in this thoroughly hostile environment. When, nearly a decade later, Conrad came to fictionalize these emotions in 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), the deep unease suggested by this earlier letter had developed into an epic language evoking nightmare and other-world experience. Marlow, narrating his own voyage up the river, admits to feeling himself

bewitched and cut off for ever from everything ...  
[he] had known once -[he is] somewhere -far away -  
in another existence perhaps. ('Heart of Darkness'  
Dent ed. 93)

Dostoevsky, writing to his brother Mikhail in 1854, recalls a moment of similar uncertainty and isolation. As a political convict, Dostoevsky endured the interminable 3000 kilometre march from European Russia to Siberia. The Urals, traditionally viewed by Russians as the barrier separating a

civilized West from the relative barbarism of an Asian East, marked for Dostoevsky a significant departure point into an unknown, new world:

The moment of crossing the Urals was a sad one  
 .... There was snow and a snowstorm all around;  
 the border of Europe, Siberia ahead and an  
 enigmatic fate in it, all the past behind.

(Dostoevsky's Letters 1 185)

Later, in The House of the Dead (1860), Dostoevsky's fictional narrator Goryanchikov admits to feeling he has been transported, like Marlow, into another realm. The convict has left behind all that seemed familiar and reassuring, to enter a terrifying alien domain

unlike anything else; here were our own laws, our own dress, our own manners and customs ... a life like none other upon earth, and people who were special, set apart. (trans. McDuff 27)

It is significant to note the parallel positions of each narrator here. Both Marlow and Goryanchikov are perplexed, horrified and profoundly intrigued by their new environments. Like the Roman colonialists Marlow cites at the beginning of 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), living in "the midst of the incomprehensible" has a "fascination ... that



goes to work upon him" ('Heart of Darkness' 50). He becomes an observer trying to unravel and interpret the human (and inhuman) scenes before him, on what is a voyage of exploration in the fullest sense. Significantly, the Russian critic Konstantin Mochulsky sees Goryanchikov's narrative function in much the same way:

A new, peculiar world had been opened before ... [his] astonished gaze. But he is not confined by a description of its surface; he strives to enter it inwardly, to understand the 'law' of this world, to penetrate its mystery. (188)

In many respects Conrad's Marlow and Dostoevsky's Goryanchikov will finally attain, in their new worlds, knowledge which will lead them to draw surprisingly parallel conclusions as to the nature and evil potential of the human personality. Joseph Frank, in a passage equally applicable to Conrad, speaks of Dostoevsky's prison years bringing the writer "into firsthand contact with a terrifyingly extensive diapason of human experience" (Through the Russian Prism 126). The initial reaction of both fictional narrators, however, is not one of forthcoming illumination, but rather of profound terror. Marlow's overriding response to his journey is that it has taken him into "some lightless region of subtle horrors" (132). Goryanchikov, similarly,

typifies his early experience as " a hell, a dark night of the soul" (32). It is striking to note, in culminating passages of 'Heart of Darkness' (1899) and The House of the Dead (1860), how both Conrad and Dostoevsky make references to an existing body of imagery to intensify the record of their individual experiences. They create their worlds, as I will now show, using a language that strongly recalls, even aligns, their narratives with an earlier literary voyage - that of Dante's underworld journey through Hell in The Divine Comedy (c. 1308-1321).

In the celebrated 'Bath-House' scene of The House of the Dead (1860), Dostoevsky creates arguably his most extensive nightmare vision of the convict world. Opening the door into the prison baths in Part One, Goryanchikov suspects he has walked directly into hell:

Imagine a room about twelve paces long and roughly the same in width, into which were packed as many as one hundred, or probably at the very least eighty men at once ... steam swathed one's eyes, soot, dirt, the place so crowded that there was nowhere to stand ... a mass of humanity seethed. On the whole floor area there was not a space the size of a man's palm on which the convicts were not sitting huddled splashing themselves from

their tubs. (155)

The scene here is one of unbearable human constriction. R.L. Jackson, writing in The Art of Dostoevsky (1981), aptly describes the passage as evoking "a veritable hell of disfigured, fragmented, compacted humanity" (95). The visual thrust of Goryanchikov's narrative, I would argue, depends much on an imagery that can be traced back to Dante. Crossing the Acheron in the Third Canto, the Italian Pilgrim is awestruck at the sight of an "interminable train of souls" tightly thronged together, trailing off towards their respective punishments (Inferno, trans. Musa, Canto 3 91). Throughout the Inferno, Dante the Pilgrim continues to encounter such scenes. In 'The Circle of the Heretics', to take one example, sinners are thrust in unthinkable numbers into cramped, burning tombs. The image of a compacted damned is one that comes to colour the entire process of the Dantean underworld experience. Although it would be laboured to insist upon any direct derivation here, it is certainly significant to note the parallel imagery and tone of Dostoevsky's own evocation.

To counterbalance his visual scene, Dostoevsky creates an accompanying nightmare world of sound. Goryanchikov, now among the convicts, tells us that:

All was yammering and cackling, accompanied by the sound of a hundred chains being dragged along the floor ... Some men, wanting to get through, became entangled in the chains caught on the heads of those who were sitting lower down; they would fall cursing and dragging behind them those with whom they had become entangled. Filthy water poured everywhere. Everyone was in a kind of intoxicated, aroused state of mind; shrieks and cries reverberated. (The House of the Dead 156)

Despite its indisputable autonomous power, it is easy to see Dostoevsky influenced here by an earlier tradition of aural imagery. Depictions of the screaming damned have been prolific in all periods of Christian literature, starting with the Bible. It is arguably the visionary legacy of the medieval imagination, however, which has shaped more recent European conceptions of Hell. Dante offers what might be claimed as a primary model. Passing through the vestibule that leads to the underworld, Dante's Pilgrim receives what Mark Musa describes as "an acoustical impression of Hell in its entirety" ('Commentary', Inferno 94):

Here sighs and cries and shrieks of lamentation  
 echoed throughout the starless air of Hell;  
 ... tongues confused, a language strained in anguish  
 with cadences of anger, shrill outcries

and raucous groans.... (Inferno, Canto 3 90)

This early sound-impression develops into a recurrent image characterizing the Inferno, an image that has proved immeasurably fertile throughout Western literature. Its shaping influence on Dostoevsky's passage seems indisputable. Indeed, the sights and sounds invoked in the 'Bath-House' scene strongly suggest a possibly conscious decision on Dostoevsky's part to create a world of horror that will parallel Dante's earlier, consummate example. In concluding the episode, the narrator Goryanchikov pays oblique homage to this fact:

It occurred to me that if at some later date we should all find ourselves together in hell, it would be very similar to this place. (House of the Dead 157)

The journey into Siberia, to cite Dante, has taken the convict into a physical, and moral, landscape of "pain and ugly anguish" (Inferno, Canto 9 151). By applying this Dantean frame of reference, Dostoevsky is able to substantially intensify the mood of horror that initially overwhelms his narrator's senses.

Leaving Europe for Africa, Marlow admits to feeling

that "instead of going to the centre of a continent, I was about to set off for the centre of the earth" ('Heart of Darkness' 19). Throughout 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), he persistently reiterates the sense of "peculiar blackness" that characterizes the entire process of his journey (142). Like Dostoevsky, Conrad draws on the same early literature to intensify the nightmare sensation of Marlow's experience. Investigating Dante's influence on Conrad's text, one critic, Robert Evans, boldly suggests a "close structural parallel between 'Heart of Darkness' and [the] Inferno", elaborately equating the river trading posts with specific circles of Hell (59-60). Though such interpretations might seem too narrow, they do alert us to some important similarities. Nowhere, I would argue, does the conscious Dantean association seem stronger than in Conrad's central 'Grove of Death' episode.

Exploring the chaos of the first river station in the early stages of his journey, Marlow discovers a group of dying blacks, victims of the colonialists' futile efforts at railway building. His initial response to the scene is telling:

My purpose was to stroll into the shade for a moment; but no sooner within than it seemed to me I had stepped into the gloomy circle of some

Inferno. ('Heart of Darkness' 66)

From the outset, Marlow draws a parallel between his forthcoming experience and Dante's model. Through this introductory reference, Conrad subtly creates a nightmarish apprehension even prior to Marlow's narrative. The debt to Dante is further in evidence in Conrad's realization of the grove:

Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair. (66)

This landscape of pain boldly recreates Dante's example. It clearly summons the visual world of prostrated bodies met with throughout the Inferno. Furthermore, it is cast in a language of hyperbole traditionally associated with epic poetry. Conrad's "black shapes" are not only lying, they are crouching, sitting, leaning, clinging; their 'attitude' is not merely one of pain, but "pain, abandonment, and despair". The literary method encountered here is regularly encountered in Dante's text. Leaving the 'Wood of Suicides' in Canto Fourteen, to cite one contrasting passage, the Pilgrim builds a visual picture of

his damned using a language that similarly compounds and reiterates diverse physical movement:

Many separate herds of naked souls I saw,  
all weeping desperately ...

Some souls were stretched out flat upon their  
backs,

others were crouched there all tightly hunched,  
some wandered, never stopping, round and round.

(Inferno, Canto 14 197)

It is interesting that in developing the scene, Marlow, like Dostoevsky's narrator, also focuses upon the extreme human distortion and physical dislocation of the sufferers. The appalling nightmare world, in fact, most resembles a scene of torture. Dying blacks are described as "bundles of acute angles [who] sat with their legs drawn up"; all round they are "scattered in every pose of contorted collapse". The sight, Marlow judges, is akin to "some picture of a massacre or a pestilence" ('Heart of Darkness' 67). With this closing reference, the narrator in effect directs us towards an unspecified, but recognizable, tradition of visual imagery, in order to more clearly define and underpin the nature of his own scene. Classical literary 'pictures' of "massacre" and "pestilence", of course, are part of the normal mental furniture of the modern reader. One of the



primary sources for such an imagery, and perhaps Conrad's conscious point of reference here, is again Dante. Entering the 'Circle of Sorcerers' in the Twentieth Canto, in one notable instance, the Pilgrim observes a scene of human deformation that might be cited as a prototext for Conrad's own grove of twisted humanity:

I saw people in the valley's circle,  
 silent, weeping, walking at a litany pace  
 the way processions push along in our world.  
 And when my gaze moved down below their faces,  
 I saw all were incredibly distorted,  
 The chin was not above the chest, the neck  
 was twisted - their faces looked down on their  
 backs.

(Inferno, Canto 20 251)

The angular disfigurement suffered by the exploited blacks and Dante's sinners are in notable accord. Critics, indeed, have not been slow, particularly with this episode, to note the strong parallels with the Inferno. F.R. Karl, to take just one example, speaks of Marlow's "Dantesque ... journey underground", but does not pursue his point of contrast (Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives 800). For him, it is enough to say Conrad's narrator has walked "into the mouth of Hell" (418). Though the general validity of this

observation is indisputable, further investigation does profitably reveal just how close the links are between Conrad's text and the Inferno. Like Goryanchikov's Siberian world of "foul air ... clanking fetters ... curses and shameless laughter (House of the Dead 94-5), Conrad's use of Dantean imagery allows him to realize an environment of complete moral horror, a world where shocking insights into the evil capacity of the human spirit will be possible. It is to the nature of these insights, won in Africa and Siberia, that I shall now turn.

Concluding a scene of intense physical brutality in Part Two of The House of the Dead (1860), Goryanchikov reflects with disgust and incredulity how hard it is "to imagine the degree to which human nature may become distorted" (246). For narrator, and reader, the record of convict life is a shocking initiation into a realm where man is innately capable of the most "bestial proclivities" (244). Goryanchikov uncovers intrinsic moral depravity and lawlessness of spirit, a world where mankind is scrupulously observed taking the deepest pleasure in "gratuitous cruelty" (Jackson 75). Dostoevsky's vision of human perversity, indeed, is extraordinary, providing studies of individual convicts, even case histories, which chart examples of sometimes overwhelming human barbarism.

Like Goryanchikov, Marlow, in Jeremy Hawthorn's opinion, is similarly "unprepared for the levels of brutality ... he is to encounter" in the Congo (Hawthorn 173). Early on, he admits to feeling "secretly appalled" by the human scenes that confront him ('Heart of Darkness' 96). Later on, of course, the focus is turned exclusively towards an account of the "unspeakable" behaviour of Kurtz. Whereas Dostoevsky can frankly articulate the psychology and actions of his convicts, detailing their appalling homicidal and sexual drives, the sensibilities of a late Victorian audience made it difficult for Conrad to employ the same degree of openness. The record of Kurtz's barbarism, therefore, is less explicit, though more subtle, in its realization. As Marlow himself admits, it is "not so much told as suggested ... in desolate exclamations ... in interrupted phrases, in hints" (129). Despite this complexity, the account of Kurtz provides an alarming case-study of what man can become when freed from all inhibiting social restrictions. The principal concern of Marlow, and Goryanchikov, however, is not to signal just fear, but to define the actual nature of this human barbarism, to discover some of the primary 'drives' behind such brutality. It is significant to note how both narrators isolate similar characteristics, and offer parallel explanations, to account for this human descent into primeval savagery.

In The House of the Dead (1860), the first of Goryanchikov's close studies concentrates on the twisted nature of the convict Gazin. Introducing this "fearsome individual", Goryanchikov suspects "there could be nothing more violent and monstrous than this man". He highlights, indeed, the sensual pleasure, the barbaric relish, Gazin derives from his murderous acts:

There was ... a story that he [Gazin] had been fond of murdering little children, purely for pleasure: he would take the child away to some convenient spot; first he would frighten and torture it, then, delighting in the terror and quaking of his poor little victim, he would quietly and voluptuously slit its throat. (72)

What is perhaps the most striking feature of Gazin's murder is that it seems a routine expression, an accepted part, of the man's own nature. There can be no question of any moral guilt arising from his act; Gazin's mood is one of purely carnal and beast-like satisfaction at a kill. In a later episode, Goryanchikov turns to another convict, the bandit Korenyev, describing him as "just like a wild animal." As with Gazin, this man is motivated by the same brutal, sexual drives, but here the narrator isolates the reasons behind his disintegration. Korenyev's "savage desire

for physical pleasure, for sexual passion and carnal satisfaction" is traced to what Goryanchikov terms his shocking "spiritual indifference." He is a human example of the complete triumph of the body over the spirit - "the flesh" has gained, in Goryanchikov's words, supreme "ascendancy over all his [Korenyev's] mental qualities" (82).

The descent into primitive savagery is linked, therefore, to the complete breakdown of an inner spiritual code. Deprived entirely of his moral dimension, Goryanchikov implies, man's regression into murderous violence and complete sexual debauch becomes a real possibility. Though the connection is observed in Gazin and Korenyev, its clearest definition is reserved for Goryanchikov's later account of the aristocrat convict A-v. In him, the narrator depicts his "most revolting example" of human degradation (103); here is an individual who has become "a monster, a moral Quasimodo" (105). Goryanchikov points to "resolute depravity" and "complete moral collapse" on a scale even he finds remarkable (104). A-v is, in fact, no longer recognizable as 'human'; he is

a kind of lump of meat, with teeth and a stomach, and an insatiable craving for the coarsest, most bestial physical pleasures, to obtain the least

and most whimsical of which he was capable of knifing, of cold-blooded murder.

In this study, Goryanchikov very specifically defines the cause of A-v's total moral disintegration. In his analysis, such overwhelming depravity is created when "the physical side of man" is "unrestrained by any inner norm or set of laws" (105). Applying these observations on a more universal basis, Goryanchikov goes on to insist that within every individual there exists a "sacred limit", defined by the laws of society and personal prejudice. Should this fragile boundary be violated, man experiences the "irresistible longing to overshoot all ... to delight in the most unbridled and boundless freedom" (140). Such 'freedom', inevitably, expresses itself in the form of violence. In Siberia, in effect, Goryanchikov is able to closely survey what in 'normal society' remains a submerged, but primary human drive. The convict world is, in this sense, a microcosm where Dostoevsky's narrator observes in detail man's innate capacity for barbarism in an extreme, yet entirely valid, form. The scene Dostoevsky was exposed to in Siberia, in fact, convinced the mature writer that animal savagery formed a vital part of the human condition. In his The Diary of a Writer (1873-1881), the author refers to the "alluvial barbarism" he believes is one foundation of the

human spirit (202). The Siberian experience, in this respect, provides Dostoevsky with his first personal evidence that

in every man ... a demon lies hidden - the demon of rage, the demon of lustful heat at the screams of the tortured victim, the demon of lawlessness let off the chain. (The Brothers Karamazov, trans. Garnett 254)

At its bleakest, The House of the Dead (1860) is a chilling account of man's capacity to perform "superhuman inhumanities" against his fellow man (Owen, 'Spring Offensive' 53). Within this broad framework, however, Dostoevsky does point to a further dimension of this primitive drive. In close analysis, his narrator isolates man's intrinsic desire to exercise power, to assert his dominating influence over other weaker individuals. In some harrowing case studies, Goryanchikov highlights what he proves to be a strongly developed faculty; he depicts, indeed, individuals who derive an absolute relish from their "sense of mastery" over others (House of the Dead 244). At the centre of this interest is one man given full autocratic authority, the prison lieutenant Zherebyatnikov. In his official position, he is able to exercise his instinctual urge to dominate without fear of recourse. The brutalized

Siberian environment acts as a catalyst, and encourages the emergence of powerful, primary impulses, which might ordinarily be kept in firm check. Goryanchikov shows, indeed, how the human urge to power can result in truly barbaric tyranny. To support his thesis, the narrator details the unbridled sensual pleasure Zherebyatnikov derives from administering beatings. In his role as "executioner", the incensed lieutenant is clearly seen to revel in his power to inflict pain. In what is a compelling scene, the autocrat toys with his convict victim. At first, Zherebyatnikov hints at a merciful reprieve, plainly gratified by the man's helpless pleas. Having secured his naive trust, however, the inevitable about-face occurs, and the convict is subjected to severe corporal punishment. The whole process records a man intoxicated by his unlimited ascendancy over another individual. At the height of the scene, Goryanchikov details the lieutenant's wild, yet profound satisfaction at the exercise of his power:

'Mangle him!' Zherebyatnikov would bellow at the top of his voice - 'Burn him! Thrash him, flog him! Set him alight! More, more! Hit the orphan harder, hit the villain harder! Hammer him, hammer him!' And the soldiers would lay into the man as hard as they could, the poor wretch would see sparks, he would begin to yell, and Zherebyatnikov



would run along the line after him, laughing and laughing, bursting, holding his sides with laughter, unable to straighten up. (242)

A "craving for absolute power" becomes, in Robert Jackson's opinion, a clearly defined human value in Dostoevsky's mature world picture (82). The validity of Jackson's observation, in fact, is quickly substantiated by the important reflections which follow the Zheryatnikov episode. Raising the argument onto a universal level, Goryanchikov suggests that "the qualities of the executioner are found in embryonic form in almost every modern person". Should these primitive dominating impulses be allowed to develop, as in Zheryatnikov, they may entirely overwhelm "all a person's other qualities" (The House of the Dead 243). In Goryanchikov's assessment, should any man attain "unlimited mastery over the body, blood and spirit of another human being", or experience the "complete freedom to degrade another creature", he will, by a natural process, inevitably become "a fearsome monster" (242-43). The exercise of absolute power intoxicates and stupifies the individual, leading him into a brutish despotism. Though Siberia might provide examples of this primitive urge at its most extreme, Goryanchikov nevertheless insists that, in 'normal society', there do exist people who "are like

tigers, [people] who thirst for blood to lick" (242). The lust for domination, in his final assessment, is a fundamental driving force of the human personality.

In many respects, The House of the Dead (1860) can be viewed as a major anthropological document. The insights into human psychology achieved by Goryanchikov in Omsk go to form an essential base upon which Dostoevsky builds his mature vision of man and his motivating drives. The thirst for absolute personal power becomes, to take just one instance, a central part of Raskolnikov's intellectual dilemma in Crime and Punishment (1866). He strives, by the act of murder, to prove himself an 'extraordinary man', an all-powerful Napoleon figure able, and wanting, to trample on social convention, and even human life. All Dostoevsky's late novels, of course, are centred around acts of murder; man's elemental destructive energy is constantly a prime focus of the author's work. The prototype for Rogozhin, whose violent and consuming sexual passion for Nastasya plays such a vital role in The Idiot (1869), might easily be traced back to Dostoevsky's sketches of convict figures like Gazin and Korenyev, men equally unable to restrain their native homicidal and carnal impulses. The penetrating insights into the human personality recorded in the prison memoirs are, at a fundamental level, seen to colour all

Dostoevsky's mature writings. In famous passage from his diary, the author speaks memorably of his need 'to find the man in man'. An essential aspect of the human condition - what Emile Zola called "La bete humaine" (the beast in man) - is unquestionably revealed and documented in this early prison narrative.

I shall now turn to 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), a work I feel serves a similar function to The House of the Dead (1860). For it lays, as I will now show, the principal philosophical foundations for Conrad's own mature vision of mankind, a vision which approximates to Dostoevsky's world picture on several, important issues.

Writing in The Art of Dostoevsky (1981), Robert Jackson speaks of the "outer and inner landscapes of violence" that exist in Goryanchikov's prison narrative. In his opinion, "there is a steady descent", in The House of the Dead (1860), into "the misery and degradation" that is part of "man and human nature" (72). On a fundamental level, Marlow's 'tale' in 'Heart of Darkness' (1899) can be seen to follow a similar formula. The attempts to define the actions and psychology of Kurtz closely chart a process Marlow himself terms as "the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts" ('Heart of Darkness' 144). The process, indeed,

is all the more remarkable because of the seemingly extreme metamorphosis of Kurtz's personality. From the fragmentary evidence Marlow provides, one suspects a deeply cultured, 'civilized' spirit existing in Pre-African Kurtz. The man's initial idealism, for example, is discussed by company agents at the first river post. Each trading station, in their record of Kurtz's early vision, was to be "like a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing" (90). The statement, one feels, records his genuine commitment, and cannot be equated with the "philanthropic pretence" of the other 'pilgrims' (78). Kurtz, furthermore, is variously described as a gifted musician, a painter, and a talented political orator. By normal Western definitions, he is a man of remarkable intellectual and spiritual refinement. Like Siberia, however, Africa proves to be an environment where "the dissolution of all controls and norms" is possible (Jackson 86). "Out there", Marlow admits, "there were no external checks" ('Heart of Darkness' 74). There exist in the Congo none of the usual restraining social forces, what the narrator whimsically refers to as the butcher and the policeman round every corner to define the boundaries of so-called permissible behaviour. Isolated from such potent symbols of order, the 'civilized' face of man soon proves to be a fragile veneer thinly disguising

other dormant, but powerful, impulses. Alone and unchecked, quite a different human state begins to emerge. It is in solitude, indeed, that Kurtz first begins to make discoveries about his own real, inner nature. As Marlow tells us, the wilderness "had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception"(131). In this "region of the first ages", we are told, Kurtz discovers in himself an innate, even boundless capacity for brutal savagery (116). As with Goryanchikov's convicts, this urge would seem to be quantifiable as both murderous and carnal. As I noted earlier, however, Marlow's impressionistic account makes it difficult for us to define precisely the exact character of Kurtz's barbarism. Whereas Goryanchikov leaves us in little doubt as to his convict's animal depravity, Marlow tends, in Martin Mudrick's judgement, "to persuade the reader by epithets, exclamations, ironies, by every technical obliquity - into an hallucinated awareness" of Kurtz's psychology and actions. Despite this essential difference in authorial technique, Mudrick nevertheless feels that in Kurtz Conrad does achieve a complete picture of "unplumable depravity ... [of] primal unanalyzable evil" (Mudrick, 'The Originality of Conrad' 545-553).

At the Station, and during his extended sorties into

the wilderness, Kurtz's "soul", in Marlow's opinion, has become "satiated with primitive emotions" ('Heart of Darkness' 147). In a language that remains defiantly generalized, but retains its heightened, exclamatory quality, the partially scandalized, even numbed Marlow points to the "abominable" (151), "monstrous" (144), "unspeakable" (118) quality of Kurtz's passions. Pure, unrestrained brutality is of course perfectly symbolized by the row of heads on stakes which surrounds the river compound. That this primitive drive, as in Dostoevsky, also incorporates a powerful sexual dimension is strongly implied by further remarks. Kurtz's dissolution, we are told, has reached a "colossal scale" (156), to the point where he completely abandons himself to the "gratification of his various lusts" (131). He has surrendered himself entirely to base, primal instincts; he has become absolute victim to what Marlow terms "his vile desires" (156). In an infamous snapshot vision in 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), Marlow refers to Kurtz secretly presiding "at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites" (118). Various critics, most notably Stephen Reid, have attempted to explain the exact nature of these "rites" (45-54). Citing Sir James Frazer's study of West African civilizations in The Golden Bough (1890-1915) to support his thesis, Reid suggests these "rites" involve Kurtz in scenes of bestiality, human

sacrifice, and even cannibalism. Though his investigation is unquestionably illuminating, it nevertheless ignores, even denies, the enormous suggestive quality of Conrad's image. For without attendant detail, the image 'per se' masterfully conveys the chilling completeness of Kurtz's surrender to his native, savage impulses.

There is much compelling evidence to support the view that Marlow does not wish his listeners to consider Kurtz's degeneration as a purely isolated case. Kurtz's descent into animal barbarism (as with Dostoevsky's convicts) might represent an extreme example, but it is nevertheless indicative of a larger capacity for savagery that exists in all men. It is significant to note, in a 1903 letter to Kazimierz Waliszewski, how Conrad stresses the "great care" he took "to give Kurtz a cosmopolitan origin" (Collected Letters of Conrad 394). Marlow, as well, reminds us that "all Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" ('Heart of Darkness' 117). In this respect, indeed, the figure of Kurtz assumes the role of 'Everyman'. Allayed to this is Marlow's own recognition that a latent primitive barbarism exists in himself. In his work Conrad the Novelist (1958), Albert Guerard points to Marlow as a "secret sharer" in Kurtz's violent world (41). In his opinion, Marlow experiences an almost psychic identification with Kurtz's mental state.

Even before their meeting, I would argue, Marlow's encounter with what he calls "prehistoric man" cursing and howling at him from the banks of the river, proves him receptive to the primal savagery present in his own nature. In a telling passage, he admits to sharing a "remote kinship" with the scene of "wild and passionate uproar". In his brief glimpse of tribal mankind, Marlow forges subtle emotional and intellectual bonds:

if you were man enough [he argues] you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you - you so remote the night of first ages - could comprehend.  
(*'Heart of Darkness'* 96)

Marlow's journey along the river, and his encounter with Kurtz, are truly an initiation into the dark heart of man; man who, irrespective of modern society's so-called civilizing values, still retains his essentially primitive homicidal and sexual identity. In conversation with Raskolnikov at the end of Crime and Punishment (1866), Dostoevsky's character Svidrigailov reflects on man's vast appetite for violent, sexual "'vice'". Such "'vice'", in his belief, is "'something that is founded on nature ...



something that is always there in your blood, like a piece of red-hot coal'" (trans. Magarshack 482). The conclusion Svidrigailov draws, on this occasion, can safely be said to reflect Dostoevsky's own mature philosophy, a philosophy very much born out of the writer's passage through Siberia. Similarly, Conrad's fictionalized journey through the Congo is a learning process, what Ian Watt aptly describes as "a spiritual voyage of discovery" (Conrad in the Nineteenth Century 199). In this sense, it fulfills a similar function to Dostoevsky's prison narrative. Indeed Marlow himself admits that his experiences seem "somehow to throw a kind of light on everything" ('Heart of Darkness' 51). Like Goryanchikov's insights, Marlow's anthropological discoveries exert a profound shaping influence on Conrad's entire, mature vision of human nature.

Marlow's observations, however, also extend beyond a primary vision of innate human savagery. For Kurtz, like Dostoevsky's Zherebyatnikov, is seen to be motivated by a craving to wield absolute power. In his "unlawful soul", Marlow affirms, there exists the urge to assert a tyrannizing domination over others (144). It is to this aspect of Conrad's narrative that I shall now turn.

There are clear indications, in the final part of

Marlow's narrative, that Kurtz has assumed the status of man-god in the eyes of his adopted lakeside tribe. Indeed, writing in his 'pamphlet', Kurtz suggests that all white men must naturally appear to these "savages" as "supernatural beings". "We approach them", he insists, "with the might as of a deity" (118). Listening to the 'Harlequin's' account of Kurtz's activities, Marlow comes to recognize the particular truth behind this improbable claim; in the narrator's final estimation, Kurtz has indeed achieved a "power to charm or frighten rudimentary souls into an aggravated witch-dance in his honour" (119). Though Kurtz's 'pamphlet' envisages the use of such power for "practically unbounded ... Benevolence", the reality of its exercise proves to be quite different (118). His "ascendancy" neither manifests itself in acts of civilizing philanthropy or altruism, to adopt Marlow's ironic paraphrasing (131). For here, as in Dostoevsky's universe, absolute power inevitably realizes itself in tyranny.

From Marlow's oblique, yet evocative conversation with the young Russian trader, one is able to piece together a reasonable picture of Kurtz's recent conduct. The 'Harlequin' recounts that the man would disappear into the wilderness for weeks, where he would live in tribal villages. There he would "forget himself ... forget himself

- you know" (129). The Russian's brief dialogue is pregnant with those "unspeakable" hints, those hidden, yet loaded meanings, which are a characteristic feature of Conrad's text. Kurtz, he continues, "could be very terrible" (128); his "ascendancy" over the tribe was "extraordinary". They "adored" him, they are said to "crawl" before him (131).

The drying heads that surround the station, we are further told, are the heads of "rebels", men who have disputed Kurtz's right to absolute power. From these fleeting, but potent images, Marlow himself judges that Kurtz has indeed "taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land - I mean literally" (116). It must be clearly stressed that Kurtz's man-god status, through foisted upon him, is something he nevertheless accepts with profound gratification, in fact with relish. Such a thesis is supported by the 'Harlequin's' account of an argument with Kurtz over ivory. Recalling the scene for Marlow, the Russian reports:

He [Kurtz] declared he would shoot me unless I gave him the ivory and then cleared out of the country, because he could do so, and had a fancy for it, and there was nothing on earth to prevent him killing whom he jolly well pleased. And it was true, too. (128)

As with Dostoevsky's Zherebyatnikov, one recognizes the

element of almost breathless hysteria in this paraphrase of Kurtz's words. Kurtz is clearly wildly intoxicated by the exercise of his complete, anarchistic power. For Kurtz everything and anything is now permitted, and the experience proves to be profoundly, indeed sensuously, gratifying. In remote isolation, in fact, a latent human capacity for tyranny has come to the fore, a tyranny characterized by its frenzied, animalistic brutality. Marlow himself admits that, in his contacts with Kurtz, he must now "deal with a being ... [he cannot appeal to] in the name of anything high or low" (144). Away from the restrictions of normal society, in the apparent vacuum of Africa, Kurtz has been free to realize his inner, fundamental drives. Despite his genuine idealism, his belief that power might be put to purely philanthropic, civilizing ends, Kurtz's vision proves brittle and insubstantial when challenged by more rooted forces which exist as part of man's ancient psychological heritage. In many respects, the figure of Kurtz can be viewed as Conrad's first major anthropological statement; he is the prototype for a whole Conradian universe where man shows himself to be entirely egocentric. Indeed Kurtz's image can be traced to its full fruition in later novels such as Nostromo (1904), a work in which man is consistently exposed as brutally self-seeking, once he is possessed of power. In 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), the postscriptum

Marlow discovers attached to Kurtz's 'document' is itself a lasting testimony to the inevitable decline of the human spirit, should it be given the freedom to exert total dominance. Under such conditions, a brutal regime of tyranny - even Kurtz's insane call to slaughter weaker individuals, "to exterminate the brutes!" - becomes a real and horrifying possibility (118).

Essentially, Marlow observes in Kurtz not only one individual's fall, but a universal process of human disintegration to which all mankind is infinitely susceptible. In fact, from one perspective, the whole imperialist adventure recounted in 'Heart of Darkness' (1899) can be seen as the perfect collective expression of man's natural craving to dominate. Early in the text, Marlow speaks of the active "conquest of the earth, which mostly means taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves' (50-1). His statement, read on one level, reduces human experience to a power struggle, to a process where the strong seem almost impelled, by their very nature, to oppress weaker societies and individuals. In a famous passage from Nostramo (1904), the financier Holroyd, with facetious arrogance but perhaps also profound insight, speculates on a future world dominated by those now in power (Nostramo Dent ed. 77). The

leaders, Holroyd suggests, will be essentially at the mercy of their own deepest instincts. Ironically, they will be powerless to prevent their own eventual supremacy in a world where the natural human order is essentially one of oppression and dominance.

As in Dostoevsky's world, the lust for power is shown to extend very deeply into man's being. Even in the most minor incidents in 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), the 'pilgrims' consistently display an almost unconscious urge to assert their dominance. On the long land trek to the Station, for example, Marlow is accompanied by a sick agent being carried by natives on a stretcher. When this heavy man is abandoned by his exhausted carriers, his first cry is essentially tyrannic in character. Indeed Marlow reports that the man is "very anxious" for him "to kill somebody" at once ('Heart of Darkness' 72). Similarly, following the arson attack at the Central Station, Marlow focuses our attention on a powerless black, who has been falsely accused of being the perpetrator of the fire (76). He is subjected to what seems an almost habitually brutal beating. Though these incidents are specifically acts of colonial aggression, they can nevertheless be regarded as entirely valid outbreaks of a larger human capacity - that native urge to assert power which exists in all men.

Like The House of the Dead (1860), Conrad's novel can be regarded, finally, as a document charting the essentially violent and primitive character of man. For both writers, indeed, man remains essentially a victim of his own rooted homicidal and carnal identity. Not only this, he is seen to derive intense gratification from the brutal assertion of his own authority. From their respective observations and character studies, Conrad and Dostoevsky do distil a significantly common philosophy. It might seem surprising, in mature works particularly, to find both authors in such major ideological accord. If anything, Conrad can be said to deepen his initial responses into what is a profoundly fatalistic view of the human condition. Man, proven violent and despotic in 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), remains irretrievably corrupt in most of the later writing. The vast gallery of depraved humanity recorded by Nostromo (1904) only emphasizes this point. Figures like Sotillo and Pedro Montero are shown, as Kurtz was, to be wholly governed by their savage lust for power, by their brutally murderous capacity for greed. To the "violent men" of the Campo, to take just one example, Montero is said to appear as "little removed from a state of utter savagery" (Nostromo 385). Nostromo (1904), in fact, tends to augment, even darken, the quality of Conrad's earlier convictions.

Dostoevsky, similarly, continues to acknowledge the central importance of his belief in man's primitive character. In The Brothers Karamazov (1880), Dmitry Karamazov repeatedly draws attention to what he calls the "insect lust" active in himself (trans. Garnett 111). He knows he is irresistibly drawn to the "back alley"; that part of his nature demands that he should "sink in filth and stench at his own free will and with enjoyment" (120). Even Aloysha Karamazov, striving for religious and spiritual purity, pays homage to the degraded sensuality he feels living in his own spirit. He senses the real truth behind his brother's accusation that, "'Angel as you are, that insect lives in you, too, and will stir up a tempest in your blood'" (109). Though Dostoevsky, of course, insisted on the existence of a spiritual dimension in man, he nevertheless consistently paid tribute to the enormous strength of this underlying primitive personality. To further illustrate the importance of this point, it is profitable to cite Prince Myshkin. With his Idiot, Dostoevsky fought to create what would be his "wholly beautiful individual" (Quoted in Mochulsky 344). Despite Myshkin's Christ-like purity, however, Dostoevsky was forced to acknowledge his character's identification, indeed his dark bond, with the murderous world of Rogozhin. That Dostoevsky considered The Idiot (1869) a partial failure is perhaps attributable to



this fundamental conflict between the author's attempt to realize unalloyed spiritual beauty, despite an earlier acceptance of man's latent savage identity. The discoveries made in the convict world of Siberia proved, it seems, too potent to unlearn.

As I have attempted to illustrate throughout, Siberia and Africa were, ultimately, perhaps the most important emotional and spiritual experiences in the personal lives of both writers. These private descents into the veritable hell of the human psyche were to exert a profoundly shaping influence in the later formation of both men's mature philosophies. The semi-fictionalized accounts of each writer's harrowing psychological odyssey, therefore, deserve to be recognized as major first statements of their creed. As I have shown, a parallel analysis of 'Heart of Darkness' (1899) and The House of the Dead (1860), from this perspective, does provide some revealing insights into the strikingly similar nature of both author's views on the human condition. For the literary establishment, which has long since pronounced that Conrad and Dostoevsky reside at opposing ends of a literary and ideological spectrum, there is much to suggest a major re-appraisal is long overdue. As these two early works show, there are fundamental philosophical bonds uniting both writers, bonds which seem

both surprising and exciting.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONRAD, DOSTOEVSKY, AND THE BREAKDOWN OF SOCIETY

To the British public, both The Secret Agent (1907) and Under Western Eyes (1911) must have appeared deeply perplexing, even eccentric works. With their unfamiliar collection of foreign characters, and their preoccupation with radical politics, Conrad's two novels provide a stark contrast to the peculiarly domestic, insular worlds of popular contemporaries such as Arnold Bennett and John

Galsworthy. Indeed, apart from Henry James's The Princess Casamassima (1886), the English language novel of the period seems to have remained particularly impervious to rising political discord throughout Europe. It seems important to make the distinction that even James's novel, though it deals extensively with revolutionary and anarchist themes, is of course the work of an American born author. Whilst the political insensitivity of much English fiction remains surprising in retrospect, it is unwise to develop a disproportionate view of the impact of European revolutionary thought on British society between 1880 and 1910. As the historian George Woodcock points out, with the notable exception of the 1894 Greenwich Bomb Outrage, "English anarchism was never ... anything else than a chorus of voices crying in the wilderness" (370). Such an unequivocal statement naturally brings into question the origin of Conrad's unusually developed political awareness. It can, of course, be partly explained by his close association with Edward Garnett and Ford Madox Ford, whose enthusiastic patronage of notorious revolutionaries like P.A. Kropotkin (1842-1921) and S. Stepniak (1852-1895) is well documented. More significantly, however, it is in Conrad's Polish background that we find its essential basis.

Within Poland, Conrad's father, Apollo Korzeniowski, is

still widely regarded as an important translator, poet and nationalist figure. In Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle (1983), Zdzislaw Najder describes him as a leading activist in the anarchist movement for Polish independence, "a man of action ... in word and deed" (7). Korzeniowski, Najder records, remained "at the forefront ... of political agitation" against Russia (15), editing articles and pamphlets and, according to the autocratic authorities, organizing and "inciting disturbances" (16). Prior the unsuccessful 1863 uprising, Korzeniowski, his wife Ewa, and the five-year old Conrad, were all sentenced to exile in the central Russian provinces. Extreme hardship and privation followed for the whole family. Ewa was to die in 1865, Apollo in 1869. The lasting personal and psychological impact of this experience on Conrad is hard to overstate. In M.D. Zabel's lucid assessment, revolutionary politics was always to remain:

a part of ... [Conrad's] life and memory; it had conditioned his experience from his childhood; and no distance he put between himself and the country of his birth ... could possibly have effaced his memory [of it] ... Politics ... and rebellion were the first and deepest part of his inheritance.

(Mudrick, Conrad: Twentieth Century Views 125).

As Zabel rightly suggests, Conrad's tenacious perception of and reaction to the issues of radical politics are testimony

to an understanding and experience quite beyond the range of many, if not all, of his English language contemporaries. Though this literary concern with radical politics intimately reflects his early personal loss, we must not overlook the additional importance of Conrad's guardian-uncle on its further development. Tadeusz Bobrowski, his mentor until as late as 1894, was arguably instrumental in shaping Conrad's complex ideological response to the death of his insurgent parents. Unlike Apollo, Bobrowski was profoundly conservative, cautious, and pessimistic. He remained deeply cynical of the Polish revolutionary movement, and dismissed its aspirations as naive, utopian idealism. Indeed his memoirs even question the fundamental sincerity of Korzeniowski's motives, accusing Conrad's father of affecting anarchist fanaticism "in order to prove to himself and others that he was not a mediocrity" (Najder, Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle 14-15). If we consider many of Conrad's fictional revolutionaries, whose supposed beliefs inevitably prove corrupted by deeper personal vanities, we might validly build a case for linking the mature vision with Bobrowski's earlier tutelage. At the very least, Bobrowski's constant allusion to the tortuous ethics of violent political protest ensured that the issue became profoundly internalized for Conrad. The debate on revolutionary anarchism in The Secret Agent (1907) and Under

Western Eyes (1911), in fact, can be justifiably interpreted as Conrad's attempt to articulate a coherent and finalized response to what is extraordinary personal experience.

Significantly, Dostoevsky's early life is similarly characterized by its unique exposure to reactionary politics and ideology. His association with the Petrashevsky circle between 1846 and 1849 does, of course, form a notorious episode in the novelist's celebrated personal life. It seems important, however, to resolve some of the more obvious misconceptions that have formed regarding this circle. The Petrashevsky's, it should be stressed, were an outspoken, yet essentially pacifist group. They engaged in mildly subversive debate on the ideas of French Utopian thinkers such as Fourier (1772-1837), who had suggested organizing society into socialist communes. In a letter to his colleague Apollon Maikov, Dostoevsky significantly dismisses Petrashevsky (1819-1867) as a harmless "playactor and chatterbox" (Frank, Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-49 267). Although it was ostensibly Dostoevsky's seditious connection with Petrashevsky that led to his arrest, it was his more radical association with two satellite societies that initiated him into the more extreme forms of revolutionary thought and action. In Jacques Catteau's opinion, the Palm-Durov circle fostered active and "daring

plans ... to set up a printing press" for the dissemination of its ideas (67). A second circle, led by Nikolai Speshnev (1821-1882), was recognizably anarchist in its principles and conception. Whilst the Petrashevsky's favoured peaceable social reform, Speshnev (like Conrad's father Korzeniowski) implicitly believed that significant change could only be achieved through violent political action. According to Joseph Frank, Speshnev judged Petrashevsky's ideology to be "vacillating and cowardly". Wider success could only be realized "by the seizure of power and the ruthless application of terror to crush all the enemies of the new ideal order" (Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-49 260). The inflamed rhetoric of Speshnev's words, in fact, predicts much of the radical anarchist thinking that would be advocated across Europe after 1860. Rather than Petrashevsky, it was Speshnev who shaped Dostoevsky's entire conception of what "underground conspiracy really meant in practice" (257). The extent of Dostoevsky's immersion in radical ideology, indeed, is indicated by the sinister admission that Speshnev had become his personal "Mephistopheles" during this period (270). While the accepted, almost mythologized account of Dostoevsky's arrest portrays him as the innocent victim of autocratic paranoia, the reality of his revolutionary complicity is surely quite different. The private hardship that followed his arrest,



however, is not an issue requiring extensive debate. As with Conrad, involvement in revolutionary politics led directly to intense personal suffering. In 1850, he was sentenced to five years' Siberian exile as a political convict, followed by a further five year period as a conscript. Dostoevsky's unequivocal response to the issues of revolution and anarchy in The Devils (1871) is, like Conrad's own ideology, founded on the most acute personal experience.

It seems necessary to make the important distinction that Dostoevsky's concern with radical politics is not of course unique in a Russian context. Though The Secret Agent (1907) and Under Western Eyes (1911) handle themes peculiarly alien to much early twentieth century English writing, a significant body of political literature existed in Russia long before Dostoevsky completed The Devils (1871). What is surprising, however, is that while celebrated writers like Herzen (1812-1870) and Chernyshevsky (1828-1889) remained sympathetic to Russian idealism, Dostoevsky's own writing completely contradicts the orthodox thinking. Like both of Conrad's novels, The Devils (1871) is an unremittingly negative work which remains profoundly hostile to reactionary politics and its aspirations. That it was suppressed by the Soviet authorities after 1917, and is still viewed with widespread suspicion, indicates its

genuine political unorthodoxy. In 1879, indeed, Dostoevsky admitted that he considered it his "task", his "civic duty", to crush the forces of anarchism (Selected Letters of Dostoevsky 465). The remark does much to explain his often crude, deeply subjective representation of the revolutionaries and their beliefs. Extreme prejudice is, of course, a charge commonly levelled against Conrad's own unrelenting political vision in The Secret Agent (1907) and Under Western Eyes (1911). In a comment that seems particularly pertinent to both writers, the translator and critic David Magarshack highlights this subjectivity by insisting it is "absurd to take [Dostoevsky's] political views seriously" ('Introduction', The Devils xvii). Whilst it is possible to sympathize with Magarshack's frustrations, such a sweeping assessment seems quite untenable, even invalid, when we investigate both the weight of personal experience, and the subsequent research, that informs each writer's political ideology. E.M. Forster, referring to both Conrad and Dostoevsky, characteristically offers a more prudent evaluation. "The philosopher", Forster points out, will necessarily "moderate his transports, or attempt to correlate them". Dostoevsky and Conrad, however, are "not that type: [they] claim the right to be unreasonable when [they] or those whom [they] respect have suffered" ('Joseph Conrad: A Note', Abinger Harvest 136). Though Forster's

comment cannot excuse the notable excesses of their unyielding political visions, his criticism surely remains apposite in any sensitive account of Conrad and Dostoevsky's political beliefs.

That the narrative action of their novels depends so extensively on actual historical material is surely a further indication of each writer's almost obsessive concern with the revolutionary debate. Whilst Conrad and Dostoevsky's fictionalization of events from anarchist history certainly merits close attention per se, its very existence as a common creative process necessarily unites the worlds of both writers. In his 1920 'Author's Note' to The Secret Agent (1907), Conrad characteristically denies any knowledge of the 1894 Greenwich incident, beyond that gained from purely "casual conversation" (Dent ed. xxxiii). In Conrad's Western World (1971), however, the critic Norman Sherry successfully undermines this misleading remark. By exhaustive research, and a comparison of contemporary reports with Conrad's own narrative, Sherry is able to offer indisputable evidence of the author's intimate understanding of the Greenwich event. Similarly, the 1869 murder of the student Ivanov by the notorious anarchist Sergey Nechaev (1847-1882), provides Dostoevsky with the historical basis for Peter Verkhovensky's murder of Shatov in The Devils

(1871). Dostoevsky's scrupulous observation of historical detail has, as in Conrad's case, been extensively researched (see Grossman, Dostoevsky, 464-79). The novel's account of the disposal of Shatov's body, the weights attached to his legs, even his discarded cap, all derive from contemporary newspaper accounts of Ivanov's murder. As well as this important historical underpinning, there exists a parallel and equally developed perception of the whole anarchist milieu and its thinking. Irving Howe's suggestion that "Dostoevsky's conception of the Russian radicals is clearly limited" can, I feel, be readily discredited (60). Though The Devils (1871), The Secret Agent (1907) and Under Western Eyes (1911) might all be interpreted as "malicious slander[s] on the heroic struggles of the ... Revolutionary movement", the slander, in each instance, is far from uninformed (Frank, Through the Russian Prism 139).

As Mochulsky notes, Dostoevsky was present at the 1867 Geneva 'Congress of Peace', which was chaired by Michael Bakunin (1824-1876). Though the anarchists astonished him by the "poverty of their thought" and their "fire and sword" tactics, the experience enabled Dostoevsky to assimilate much of the radical ideology at first hand (329). In Leonid Grossman's opinion, the conference familiarized him with the "passionate and stormy doctrine" of a movement that readily

advocated a complete destruction of the existing social order (Dostoevsky 430). Bakunin, it should be stressed, was closely associated with Nechaev, the model for Dostoevsky's own Peter Verkhovensky. Indeed in an 1870 letter, Bakunin discusses Nechaev's methods and the ethics of his revolutionary party, 'The People's Vengeance'. Nechaev's strategy for producing maximum social disorder, Bakunin reflects, was to "get possession of the secrets of [an influential] person or his family", "to hold them in the palm of ... [his] hand", then use them to destructive, political ends (Frank, Through the Russian Prism 143). Verkhovensky, of course, follows precisely this authenticated anarchist strategy. He ingratiates himself with the provincial governor Von Lembke, then compromises and ruthlessly exploits him. The widespread social disorder, even the riot which follows Von Lembke's later mental collapse, are a direct result of Verkhovensky's campaign. Similarly, the more extreme forms of manipulation, such as Verkhovensky's use of Fedka for murder, accurately reflect Nechaev's recorded methods and his cast of thought (148). Despite Dostoevsky's rancorous hostility towards Verkhovensky throughout The Devils (1871), his overall representation of both the anarchists, and their doctrine, cannot be dismissed as uninformed "caricature" ('Introduction', trans. Magarshack xii). Indeed Joseph Frank

condemns the "numerous critics who have so insouciantly accused Dostoevsky of wilful ... distortion". He never, in Frank's reasoned assessment, "transgress[es] the bounds of verisimilitude", either in his portrait of Verkhovensky, or "the entire political intrigue of the book" (Through the Russian Prism 144). The historian James Joll, I would suggest, makes a further, significant observation. In his book The Anarchists (1979), he describes Nechaev as "part poseur, part fanatic, part idealist, part criminal" (76). By working many of these internal contradictions into his own fictionalized anarchist, Dostoevsky largely protects himself from the widespread critical accusation that The Devils (1871) unacceptably defames the revolutionary movement. Absolute caricatures, after all, demand monolithic representatives to achieve their effect.

Similarly, Conrad's novels cannot be claimed to ignorantly misrepresent the radical cause. Indeed Conrad's writing consistently displays an easy familiarity with the basic tenets of the anarchist movement. In this respect, his 1908 short story 'The Informer' proves particularly valuable in indicating the range of Conrad's knowledge. In this uncomplicated tale, an unnamed narrator is initiated into the Parisian revolutionary circle of a certain Mr. X. Significantly, his brief involvement introduces us to many

of the central precepts of anarchist thought. The systematic destruction of the existing political order, the "dissolution of ... social and domestic ties", the re-education of the proletariat through inflammatory leaflets, are all subjects raised by the narrator during his association with the radicals (A Set of Six, Methuen 1908 ed. 85). Despite some bitterly hostile conclusions, 'The Informer' powerfully and succinctly illustrates Conrad's extensive knowledge of the revolutionary ideology. Even his more notorious anarchist portraits are not without significant, intellectual foundation. Yundt's fanatical rhetoric in The Secret Agent (1907), for example, has a substantial historical basis. From a critical perspective, of course, Yundt's apocalyptic vision of carnage and wholesale human destruction seems particularly open to accusations of deliberate, authorial distortion. According to Norman Sherry's research, however, Yundt's "venomous spluttering" has its valid origin in the canon of anarchist literature (Dent ed. 58). Johann Most (1846-1906), also the prototype for Hyacinth Robinson in Henry James's The Princess Casamassima (1886), writes of the committed revolutionist's natural "night and day" obsession with "one thought ... [and] one purpose, viz., inexorable destruction" (Sherry, Conrad's Western World 255). Like Nechaev, Most was an important and fanatical figure, closely associated with

Bakunin. According to Sherry, he was noted (as is Yundt) for his insatiable love of revolutionary violence, and his craving to "extirpate the miserable [capitalist] brood" (431). On a superficial level, Conrad's political grotesques can remain sinister, darkly comic, even tiresome caricatures. As with Dostoevsky's figures, however, the extensive background knowledge that consistently informs Conrad's radicals makes it impossible to discredit his vision as a simple defamation of the revolutionary cause.

Having indicated the fundamental personal and intellectual basis of both Conrad and Dostoevsky's response to the radical debate, I shall now turn to a more detailed assessment of each writer's politics. In their moral reaction to the anarchist question, as well as their literary rendering of the radical character and mind, Conrad and Dostoevsky's writing can be seen to have significant and surprising parallels. At a compositional level, it is firstly important to distinguish how both novelists employ the same creative method to present, then alienate, their fictional radicals. In all three texts under discussion, the majority of revolutionary figures are subject to a dehumanizing process which actively subverts the credibility of their reactionary beliefs. Alienating physical oddity, even deformity, become characteristic in the anarchist



underworlds of both authors. In The Devils (1871), for instance, the narrative highlights Shigalyov's ears, which are said to be "of unnatural size, long, broad, thick [and] sticking out in a most peculiar way" (trans. Magarshack 145). Similarly, Peter Verkhovensky's introduction is marked by a series of references to his particularly abhorrent tongue, crimson, "exceedingly sharp" and possessed of an "uncontrollably active tip" (188). By directing initial attention towards his radicals' ridiculous or grotesque appearance, Dostoevsky suggests the existence of parallel abnormalities in all their subsequent discourse. In The Secret Agent (1907) and Under Western Eyes (1911), Conrad exercises a parallel technique to critically celebrated effect. Yundt, Ossipon, Michaelis, Peter Ivanovitch and Necator, are all figures noted for their unusually striking physical peculiarities or deformities. Yundt, for instance, has a "black ... and toothless mouth" and a "skinny, groping hand covered with gouty swellings" (The Secret Agent, Dent ed. 42). Both Ossipon's prominent "flattened nose" and Michaelis's considerable obesity similarly subvert the force of their professed political aspirations (44). Indeed the 'revolutionary grotesque', a combination of the comic, the ridiculous, and the innately repulsive, is a particular feature of both The Secret Agent (1907) and Under Western Eyes (1911). From the outset, Conrad denies the possibility

of any substantial empathy developing between his fictional anarchists and the reader. As with Dostoevsky, pronounced physical abnormality invariably constitutes the first stage in an established creative process aimed at discrediting the whole radical persona.

On a more political level, both writers can be seen to scrutinize critically the professed integrity and commitment of their radicals. In each novelist's world, it can be suggested, the revolutionary is unmasked and exhibited as a profoundly self-serving and hypocritical figure. Indeed Conrad and Dostoevsky characteristically expose the deep gulf existing between purported ideological belief and the reality of private conduct. In a 1907 letter to Cunninghame Graham, Conrad unequivocally responds to the question of anarchist virtue. "These people", he writes to Graham, "are not revolutionaries - they are Shams" (Watts 170). This negative interpretation of the radical character seems particularly pertinent to all his political novels. In his 'Author's Note' to The Secret Agent (1907), Conrad identifies the typical anarchist figure as a "brazen cheat exploiting the poignant miseries and passionate credulities of ... mankind" (xxxiii). Ossipon, indeed, precisely fits this unredeemable definition of the radical identity. He simply adopts anarchism as a convenient mask to disguise

essentially criminal impulses. His professed revolutionary values, Conrad indicates, are thoroughly bogus. Ossipon has no valid political aspirations; his 'cause' is identified as a purely avaricious desire to acquire money by systematically exploiting the vulnerable and the naive. The usual victims of his enterprise are "silly girls" with tempting "bank books" (53). Though Ossipon is arguably Conrad's most extreme anarchist figure, other radicals prove themselves to be similarly corrupted, or ideologically compromised. Writing of Peter Ivanovitch, for example, the critic Jacques Berthoud observes that "every one of his [political] aspirations is cancelled out by a contradictory reality" (168). Even the "inspired" man's feminist creed, it should be noted, is exposed as fraudulent. His brutally insensitive treatment of Tekla entirely discredits the validity of his ostensibly advanced ideas. Like many other Conradian radicals, Peter Ivanovitch proves to be both hypocrite and pretender. Yundt, of course, falls into the same category. Despite his ghoulish exhortations demanding blood, he has, ironically, never "raised as much as his little finger against the social edifice" (The Secret Agent 48). In Conrad's fiction, the typical radical is a deeply compromised figure, his professed reactionary values rendered invalid by contradictory personal conduct.

The Devils (1871) similarly suggests that revolutionary political pretensions are characteristically fraudulent. The movement, in even Verkhovensky's various assessments, is made up of hypocrites, incompetents, social parasites and "downright swindlers" (387). As in Conrad's fiction, the typical Dostoevskyan radical proves to be either pretender or impostor. Almost systematically, his motives are exposed as banal, self-seeking, and often non-political. Despite Verkhovensky's comparatively problematic status, Dostoevsky famously undermines his whole political integrity. In conversation with Stavrogin, Verkhovensky proudly declares that he is "a rogue, and not a Socialist" (421). In many respects, this alienating confession aligns him with Conrad's Ossipon, who similarly adopts the radical persona to manipulate and exploit others. Verkhovensky, of course, purposely fabricates the existence of an elaborate radical hierarchy to lure gullible victims into his partly criminal underworld. That Stavrogin proves to be the real author of his political manifesto is equally denigrating. Rather than a credible radical figure, he is, like Ossipon, exposed as a pretender. Any genuine doubt surrounding Verkhovensky's real identity is effectively dispelled by the murder of Shatov. This, Dostoevsky makes clear, can have no political justification. Despite Verkhovensky claims, it is neither a measure to rid the 'circle' of an informant, or a means to

bind the radicals in a violent, anarchist gesture. The murder is exclusively personal, its true origin being Verkhovensky's hatred of Shatov. "They had had some quarrel", the narrator dispassionately relates, "and Peter never forgave an insult ... that was his main reason" (548). In effect, an ostensibly political act is discredited as the work of an unbalanced and vicious fraud.

Beyond Verkhovensky, the 'revolutionary circle' closely resembles Conrad's own radical assembly in The Secret Agent (1907). Virginsky, Shigalyov, Liputin, and Lyamshin, all prove voluble figures when debating reactionary politics. Responding to Shigalyov's theory, for example, Lyamshin readily advocates destroying "nine-tenths of humanity", to ease the birth of the new utopian order (The Devils 406). As with Conrad's anarchists, however, there is a vast gulf between professed belief and actual conduct. As agents of effective political change, Dostoevsky's group is exposed as a "third-rate absurdity" (249). Invariably, the radical figure proves himself to be a sham and a hypocrite. Rather like Yundt, Dostoevsky's circle collectively demands complete social reform, but is not prepared to raise one finger in active protest. Their subsequent involvement in Shatov's murder, of course, is primarily a reflection of Verkhovensky's skilled manipulation, and the group's

irresolute terror. Characteristically, Dostoevsky subverts even the validity of the circle's fundamental ideological commitment. Rather than true revolutionary resolve, initial motivation is traced back to compromising personal impulses. For Shigalyov and Telkachenko, the radical cause is an opportunity for preserving social prestige. "They had joined the circle", the narrator records, "from a high-minded feeling of shame, so that people should not say afterwards that they had not the courage to join" (393). Personal frustration and injured vanity is similarly cited as a significant source of much radical thinking. Indeed, anarchists attending Virginsky's meeting in Part Two of The Devils (1871) are collectively discredited. Their radical principles, the narrator judges, are founded on "crushed self-esteem"; they have merely "become embittered" against existing society (394). In Dostoevsky's definition, their radicalism is the expression of petty personal frustration. Though he requires special consideration, Conrad's Professor in The Secret Agent (1907) might be viewed as similarly compromised. His fanaticism, Conrad implies, is partly the result of hurt vanity, rather than genuine ideological resolve. The sense that he is avenging himself on an unjust world raises serious doubts about his apparently unimpeachable integrity (75). That Conrad's revolutionaries are equally corrupted by their personal interests is a

further indication of the unity of vision which exists between both writers. In essential details, Conrad and Dostoevsky's fictional representation of the radical persona is remarkably similar.

This genuine unity is further emphasized by an anomaly in each writer's response to the radical figure. So far, my analysis has illustrated a systematic unmasking of the revolutionary. This invariably leads to suspicions that Conrad and Dostoevsky's core conception of the radical persona is both inflexible and prejudiced. Rather like General T- in Under Western Eyes (1911), both novelists might seem to constitutionally "detest rebels of every kind" (50). Though their unredeeming vision of the radical character does lend credibiity to this widespread critical belief, it is important to qualify such a totalizing view. For in both Conrad and Dostoevsky's world, genuine, purist devotion to an ideal continues to be recognized, even sensitively acknowledged. In The Devils (1871), for instance, Kirilov's fanaticism is entirely alien to Dostoevsky's own beliefs. His manic plan to achieve man-god status by suicide surely qualifies him as one of the novel's eponymous devils. Like other radical thinking, Kirilov's "poisonous exhalations" warrant immediate exorcism, if the sick Russian Gadarene is to recover (648). Despite this,

Kirilov's theory receives a complete and sensitive explication. Where Dostoevsky's narrative typically subverts the dialogue of other radicals, Kirilov's ideology remains 'fully weighted' in the Bakhtinian sense. Both Stavrogin and Verkhovensky's repeated attempts to smear his beliefs fall notably flat. Indeed in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (1963), Bakhtin refers to Kirilov's "maniacal conviction" (261). Essentially, it is this uncorrupted, insane depth of belief which explains Dostoevsky's sensitive response to an unacceptably alien ideology.

In Under Western Eyes (1911), Sophia Antonovna has a similar status. In his 'Author's Note', Conrad describes this active revolutionary as merely "wrong headed" (xxxii). Such remarkable mildness has led one critic to suggest that Conrad's portrait of Sophia Antonovna is a "fair and balanced one" ('Introduction', Oxford World Classics xix). With a notable absence of irony, the narrator insists she is "the true spirit of destructive revolution" (261). Her motives remain genuine and uncorrupted; her radicalism is the active expression of her pity for innumerable Russians crushed by autocracy. Though Conrad cannot sanction such revolutionary principles, Sophia Antonovna's absolute sincerity wins her a more objective realization. Importantly, she is portrayed as "curiously evil-less ...



un-devilish" (327). Even Razumov comments that he "cannot despise her as he despised all the others" (242).

Whilst it always seems difficult to offer any fully satisfying, conclusive evidence about Conrad's Professor in The Secret Agent (1907), I would argue that he achieves a curious, but distinct political credibility. Though I have previously indicated a characteristic radical failing in this problematic figure, the Professor is patently not a typical Conradian revolutionary. Unlike the other anarchists, he is uncompromised by benefactors; he lives according to his professed ideology, in a "small house down a shabby street" (62). As with Dostoevsky's Kirilov, Conrad's deeply ironic narrative rarely subverts the Professor's discourse. In contrast, of course, other anarchist dialogue is deliberately fragmented. The narrative of Chapter Three, for example, regularly commences or halts mid-sentence, a process which substantially devalues both Yundt and Michaelis's speech. Though the Professor's philosophy of destruction, like his appearance, is characteristically alienating, he is a model of pure, fanatical commitment, the "perfect anarchist" (302). Writing to Cunninghame Graham, Conrad admits that he "did not intend to make him [the Professor] despicable. He is incorruptible ... I wanted to give him a note of perfect sincerity" (Watts

170). As with Kirilov and Sophia Antonovna, the Professor's radical conviction wins him significant authorial recognition. Though the Conradian and Dostoevskyan revolutionary is typically an irredeemable, negative and compromised figure, it is important to qualify this much favoured critical formula. In each writer's world, it should be stressed, the genuinely committed radical achieves a partly empathetic identity.

So far, my discussion has been centred on the actual character and nature of Conrad and Dostoevsky's fictional radical. Having established a substantial unity of vision, it is important to turn to the wider moral philosophy underpinning each writer's rejection of the revolutionary cause. In both cases, the fundamental ethical objection must surely be the movement's ultimate lack of political direction and vision. In his celebrated account of anarchism, George Woodcock suggests that the violent revolutionary has been historically cast as a "mere promoter of disorder who offers nothing in place of the order he destroys" (11). Certainly in essential detail, both Conrad and Dostoevsky's novels confirm this hypothesis. In The Secret Agent (1907) and The Devils (1871), radicals advocate violent action without any valid agenda for political reform. In each writer's world, revolutionary anarchism

effectively promotes inexcusable and futile barbarities. Verkhovensky, for example, suggests curing the world by "the radical measure of chopping off a hundred million heads". As justification for such a holocaust, he blandly insists that the idea remains sufficiently "fascinating" in its own right (The Devils 407). In The Secret Agent (1907), the Professor expresses a similar philosophy. In conversation with Ossipon, he remarks, "'what's the good of what will be! ... [I support] the destruction of what is'" (306). In evaluating Dostoevsky's ethical response to revolutionary anarchism, Joseph Frank offers a critical formula that can be valuably applied to both authors. Violent radicalism, Frank suggests, is entirely unacceptable because of:

its total negativism ... [its] complete absence of any positive aim or goal that would justify the horrors it contemplates. (Through the Russian Prism 149)

Indeed such a core philosophy would explain Conrad's initial condemnation of the Greenwich bomb incident as a "blood-stained inanity" ('Author's Note', The Secret Agent xxxiv). Writing to A.A. Romanov (the future Tsar Alexander III), Dostoevsky strikes a similar note. The 1869 murder of Ivanov, he insists, is a senseless and "monstrous" act of revolutionary savagery (Selected Letters of Dostoevsky 369). Both statements clearly indicate each writer's primary

reaction to the absolute futility of revolutionary crimes which have no valid political foundation. Indeed for this reason, the destructive effect of anarchist violence on the individual becomes paramount. In The Devils (1871), of course, Shatov's wife Marie returns the evening before the planned murder. In the night scenes charting the birth of her child, Dostoevsky's narrative passionately responds to Shatov's joy. After such intense emotional rapture, his political execution seems doubly satanic, senseless and tragic. Dostoevsky's setting for the murder, Skvoreshniki Park, is not idly chosen. The scene is gothically oppressive; the park is "forlorn" and entirely isolated, its monuments "decayed and crumbled" (593). In all respects, it mirrors the inhuman barbarity and inexcusable shabbiness of Verkhovensky's act. In The Secret Agent (1907), the Assistant Commissioner significantly reflects that the Greenwich incident might be interpreted as a specifically "domestic drama" (222). His words effectively convey Conrad's concern for the destructive, purely personal ramifications of Stevie's death. Out of horrible and futile mutilation, indeed, comes profound human tragedy. To use Conrad's own terms, Stevie's death leads to "Winnie Verloc's story ... of utter destruction, madness and despair" ('Author's Note' xxxix).

At a basic humanitarian level, the impact of extreme politics on the individual is of course unacceptable. In each writer's world, no violent revolutionary action can bear moral contemplation. From a Conradian perspective, Under Western Eyes (1911) unassailably confirms this analysis. Where both Verkhovensky and Verloc's crimes are certainly compromised by personal issues, Haldin's assassination of Mr. de P- does have a substantial political justification. In the narrator's opinion, de P- is an "execrated personality", a loyal and merciless autocrat actively engaged in destroying the "very hope of liberty itself" (8). Despite this, Haldin is given an inflated and worn-out revolutionary rhetoric which can never justify his action. His banal discourse, to take just one example, refers to the necessity of removing de P- before he uproots "the tender plant" that is the Russian people (16). For Razumov, such "luridly smoky lucubrations" simply disguise an unacceptable political act (35). Alone with Haldin, he is in "the appalling presence of a great crime" (24). Irrespective of circumstance, murder can never be excused; the doctrine of violent, justifiable homicide has no force of argument in Conrad's moral universe. Though The Devils (1871) offers no precise fictional parallel for Haldin's situation, Dostoevsky responds to the same issue in his Diary of a Writer (1873-1881). In an uncharacteristic 1873

entry, he acknowledges that "Nechaevtzi" [anarchists] might not "always [be] recruited from among mere idlers who had learned nothing" (147). Among their ranks, there "may be", like Haldin, "highly developed, most crafted ... and educated people" who have substantial agendas for political reform (146). What remains inconceivable for Dostoevsky, however, is "the gloom and horror which is being prepared for mankind under ... [this] guise" (my emphasis). In the light of future Soviet history, his words carry an additionally sinister, even prophetic value. Continuing this important passage, Dostoevsky concludes:

The most pathological and saddest trait of our present time [is] ... the possibility of considering oneself not as a villain, and sometimes almost not being one, while perpetrating a patent and incontestable villainy.

Morally and spiritually, revolutionary violence is insupportable in the Dostoevskyan universe. As in Conrad's world, murder is "the filthiest ... act" and no political philosophy can ever validate or justify it" (149).

In discussing Conrad and Dostoevsky's wider philosophies, it is valuable to comment upon two significant authorial intrusions into The Devils (1871) and Under Western Eyes (1911). Though their respective fictional

radicals effectively dramatize the same debate, the broad, almost comprehensive character of these passages gives them a unique status. They can, indeed, be seen as essential statements of Creed. In the preamble to Part Three of The Devils (1971), the narrator offers some general observations on the historical identity of revolutions. His dry prose strongly recalls Dostoevsky's journalistic style in The Diary of a Writer (1873-1881), and gives the short chapter the quality of direct authorial discourse. Referring collectively to all "troubled times of uncertainty or transition", the narrator recounts how rebellions, by an inevitable process, fall into the hands of small groups of "progressives", often "utter idiots" whose aims are mostly "absurd". Invariably, these "progressives" will command "a rabble". In "every period of transition", the narrator continues, such a "rabble", generally without "the inkling of an idea", will rise to the surface like "scum" (The Devils 459). The entire episode is narrated as an indisputable historical truth, applicable to every radical movement without exception. The sweeping cynicism of this passage succinctly illustrates Dostoevsky's totalizing condemnation of radicalism. In Under Western Eyes (1911), we can isolate a parallel authorial intrusion. In conversation with Miss Haldin, Conrad's teacher of languages provides his own historical formula to cover all political rebellion.

Bearing in mind his normal role as passive observer, the narrator's flood of invective seems deeply incongruous. As before, it is reasonable to suggest that the sentiment is entirely Conradian. In all revolutions, we are told:

the best characters do not come to the front. A violent revolution falls into the hands of narrow-minded fanatics and of tyrannical hypocrites at first. Afterwards comes the turn of all the pretentious failures of the time. Such are the chiefs and the leaders. You will notice that I have left out the mere rogues.

Though Conrad concedes that there may be "just ... [and] noble" spirits, they are never the leaders in any revolution (134). As in Dostoevsky, the general, historical synopsis is profoundly negative.

Further to this fundamental ethical rejection, both writers indicate that violent rebellion may simply inaugurate its own new order of tyranny. In this connection, Conrad and Dostoevsky's established interest in the 1789 French Revolution becomes important. Beyond its obvious cultural impact on all Europeans, I would suggest both authors interpret the post 1789 period as the most heinous, most extreme example of revolutionary futility. That both Conrad and Dostoevsky were immersed in the history and



ideology of the French Revolution is indisputable. Jacques Catteau, examining Dostoevsky's literary heritage, records the author's scrupulous study of Louise Thiers' ten volume Histoire de la Revolution francaise (1823-1827) (19). In an 1876 entry in his Diary of a Writer (1873-1881), Dostoevsky pays homage to Thiers's work, and its important influence on his vision and writing (344). Conrad, in a 1903 letter to Roger Casement, suggests his familiarity with the same French historian, directly quoting from Thiers in his correspondence (Collected Letters of Conrad 3 96). In the fiction, it is interesting to add that the protagonists of Suspense (1925) are of course refugees from 'The Terror'. This uncompleted work, planned since 1904, significantly illustrates Conrad's lifelong saturation in French revolutionary history. In Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives (1979), F.R. Karl adds an important Polish dimension to this literary preoccupation. Post 1789 France, he assesses, was to have a lasting effect on Poland's own domestic politics. "In attempting to roll back the Revolution, the Alliance crushed all democratic movements, gave authority to Russian rule over Poland, and ensured decades of insurrection, revolution and rebellion" (29). For Conrad and Dostoevsky, 1789 did not mean the repression of the aristocracy. Indeed in Winter Notes on Summer Impressions (1863), Dostoevsky insists that 'liberte, egalite, fraternite' soon "collapsed

and burst like a soap bubble" (59). 1789 was, in fact, the start of an indiscriminate frenzy of bloodshed that inevitably gave way to the Jacobin Terror. With this historical precedent rooted in both authors' imaginations, the ingrained cynicism of their writing becomes more understandable. There is, I feel, a valuable parallel between Conrad and Dostoevsky's work, and Buchner's Danton's Death (1835). Like Buchner's Jacobins, indeed, the Conradian and Dostoevskyan revolutionary can only offer a "despotism of freedom" (26); corrupted by his initial bloodshed, the liberator invariably becomes, like Robespierre, a new "Nero" (78). In The Devils (1871), Shigalyov's revolutionary theory neatly illustrates this process. Dostoevsky's cynicism and fear are evident when a bewildered Shigalyov protests:

My conclusion is in direct contradiction to the original idea with which I start. Starting from unlimited freedom, I arrived at unlimited despotism ... There can be no other solution to the social formula than mine. (404)

Conrad, in his 1920 'Author's Note' to Under Western Eyes (1911), potently conveys the same observation. Referring to the revolutionaries and their plan to overthrow autocratic domination, Conrad comments:

These people are [simply] unable to see all they can effect is merely a change of names. (xxxii)

Though it lies outside the present discussion, the validity of these words is graphically realized in Nostramo (1904). In Conrad's Costaguana, each new revolutionary force invariably inaugurates its new form of barbarism. Ultimately, revolution might be said to culminate in the futile, indiscriminate terror of a figure like Sotillo. In both Conrad and Dostoevsky's universe, violent revolution corrupts its leaders and institutes new tyranny. It is arguably this core belief which accounts for much of the conservatism, cynicism and fear attached to each writer's vision of radicalism.

Indeed political conservatism might be said to be characteristic in both Conrad and Dostoevsky's writing. In many respects, any force threatening society's status quo is instinctively mistrusted. Dostoevsky, of course, was an adamant and lifelong supporter of the Tsarist autocracy. In his messianic vision of Russia's future role as world spiritual leader, autocratic rule remains vital for national unity. In The Diary of a Writer (1873-1881), Dostoevsky insists there is a "live organic bond" between the Russian people and their Tsar; the Tsar is, quite simply, a "father to the people" (1033). Despite his own ten-year Siberian exile, Dostoevsky's support for the autocratic regime never wavered. By definition, in fact, all radical assaults on the

existing government constitutes a threat to his colossal vision of future world harmony. Conrad, like his fictional Razumov, similarly supports the paramount importance of political "unity", and recoils from all forms of "disruption" or "destruction" (Under Western Eyes 66). An early letter to Spiridion Kliszczewski usefully illustrates his innate political conservatism. Fearing the rise of European socialism, Conrad nervously calls for solidarity against the "pressures of infernal doctrines born in continental back-slums" (Collected Letters of Conrad 1 16). Any force that might fracture or subvert national unity is viewed as a constant danger in Conrad's world.

Given this habitual caution and distrust of all political change, it is deeply paradoxical that the existing Establishment hardly seems worth preserving in the novels under discussion. Referring to The Devils (1871), Irving Howe judges that Dostoevsky's provincial town is "emblematic of ... smugness and ignorance" (58). Throughout the novel, indeed, the Establishment is consistently exposed as banal, trivial, and ultimately redundant. As governor, Von Lembke naturally has an important representative status. In this respect, Dostoevsky's satirical treatment of him becomes highly significant. Von Lembke, we are told,

was not without [his marked] abilities, he knew

how to enter a room and to show off to advantage, he knew how to listen to a person and keep silent with a thoughtful air, he had acquired a few highly decorous poses, he could even make a speech [and] had indeed some odds and ends of ideas. (The Devils 316)

Whilst his contemporaries discuss national politics, the young Von Lembke builds elaborate cardboard models, and dreams of marrying "a Minnie or an Ernestine" (315). In Part Two, the meeting of Stephan Verkhovensky and Karmazinov similarly reveals the crass banality of the Establishment and its values. Listening to the men vigorously debate the virtues of European drainage, Julia Von Lembke is said to be "triumphant; the conversation was becoming both profound and political" (452). Though Dostoevsky's provincial society is certainly comic, it is equally trivial and meaningless. In The Devils (1871), not only the radicals are contemptible - the society they aim to overturn barely warrants its continued existence. This impasse, I feel, partly explains what one critic has called "the atmosphere of violent negation" which hangs over Dostoevsky's novel (Howe 58). Though the radical alternative might be morally inconceivable, the existing Establishment patently requires absolute reformation.

The Secret Agent (1907) essentially suggests the same anomaly. At the start of Chapter Two, Verloc surveys the society that he effectively guards from radicalism. Through the railings of Hyde Park, he views an insular Establishment characterized by complacency and indolence. The ironic narrative isolates the "hygienic idleness of ... the whole social order" - even its "opulence and luxury" produce a "dull effect of rustiness" (12). Conrad's diction, indeed, tends to amplify an atmosphere of smug and vacuous ostentation. Verloc, for instance, observes "couples cantering ... harmoniously" along "the Row" (11). Later, at the Embassy, Vladimir watches "the gorgeous perambulator of a wealthy baby being wheeled in state across the Square" (23). Though unfocussed and brief, this early vision of the Establishment is highly significant. From the outset, the anarchists threaten a social order which seems trivial, moribund and wholly superfluous.

With the introduction of Chief Inspector Heat, the Establishment's cornerstone - its law and order - comes under close scrutiny. It is deeply paradoxical that this social structure should be peculiarly mediocre, and ultimately corrupt. By implication, the radical movement endangers a legal constitution that barely merits its own preservation. Inspector Heat, as a national symbol of the

law, is notable for his dearth of imagination and his strictly limited wisdom. Perversely, the Establishment admires, even prizes such remarkably lame attributes. Heat's "perfectly delightful" ability to sustain a uniform, but bland status quo results, of course, in his "very rapid ... promotion" (84). At a more sinister level, Heat might be said to favour convenient political remedies which distort true legal justice. This becomes particularly evident in his almost instinctive decision to charge Michaelis for the Greenwich bombing. To Heat, it seems more expeditious, more proper, to arrest an innocent victim, than to disturb anything politically unsavoury or insidious. In essence, Conrad's Chief Inspector graphically illustrates the Establishment's cosy and self-corrupting perversion of the law. In the political arena, Sir Ethelred has a similarly important representative status. Like Heat, he becomes symbolic of the Establishment's pompous, fossilized inertia. According to Toodles's ironic eulogy, the great man's remarkable zeal limits itself to the "revolutionary measure" of nationalizing the Fishing Industry (145). Throughout The Secret Agent (1907), the Establishment consistently offers a lamentable mediocrity, an unscrupulous lassitude, that seems little better than its radical alternative.

Whereas Conrad's London has a sinister, organic

presence, the Geneva of Under Western Eyes (1911) performs a more abstract, essentially symbolic function. Conrad's Geneva, I would argue, becomes an important historical and political emblem for the entire Western Establishment. In Razumov's significant assessment, Rousseau's city is the very "heart of democracy" (205). Paradoxically, however, this heart is "no bigger than a parched pea and [has] about as much value" (206). Conrad's narrative regularly alludes to the city's "inanimate ... marvellous banality" (288), its rigid orderliness that is "comely without grace, and hospitable without sympathy" (141). Even its shadowy, lifeless inhabitants are described as "colourlessly uncouth" and "placid" (175). Gazing at the city from the Chateau Borel, Razumov adds an important historical dimension to this epitome of blandness. Geneva's uninspiring sterility, he suggests, is the social and political result of "centuries of ... [interrupted] culture". Democratic ideology, "democratic virtue" (203), has perversely created an Establishment that is "the very perfection of mediocrity" and "puerile neatness" (290). Though the "ferocity and imbecility" of Russian radicalism remains unacceptable, this model of the Western Establishment hardly offers an exemplary alternative to political discord ('Author's Note' xxxii). In essence, the Geneva of Under Western Eyes (1911) is a redundant, spiritually extinguished wasteland.



In both Conrad and Dostoevsky's universe, the moral rejection of radicalism is repeatedly matched by this grave contempt for existing political hierarchies. Though both writers may be deeply conservative in their attitude to violent revolutionary protest, they are not uncritical supporters of the Establishment. In the light of this analysis, one critic's thesis, suggesting that The Secret Agent (1907) eventually backs "British values ... [and] tolerance", seems especially limited and unsatisfying ('Introduction', Oxford World Classics ed. ix). On a comparable level, scholarly assessments that claim Dostoevsky's radicals are the only 'devils' seem similarly flawed. In this particular respect, it is wise to recall a second, often disregarded biblical quotation in Dostoevsky's text. Comforting the dying Stephan Verkhovensky in Part Three, Sophia Ulitin relates a provocative passage from Revelation. Those who are "'neither cold or hot ... but lukewarm'", she recites, "'I will spue ... out of my mouth'" (The Devils 646). In the context, these words are directed at the mediocrity and complacency of the novel's Establishment classes. Like the radicals who infect the Slavic Gadarene, this lame social order equally merits its expulsion from holy Russia.

Though Conrad and Dostoevsky's texts remain crushing

attacks on radicalism, they are equally critical of existing social and political structures. Through this analysis, of course, the ideological and philosophical parameters of their fiction is substantially extended. At one level, there exists the moral and spiritual atrophy of an Establishment that has lost its direction, even its 'raison d'etre'. That world, to use Conrad's representative formula, has become "mediocre, limp [and] without force" (The Secret Agent 309). At the opposite end of the political spectrum, Conrad and Dostoevsky's radicalism can be equally diagnosed as a form of social and moral collapse. Indeed from this wider perspective, the murderous futility of anarchism becomes symptomatic of a larger disorder in society. By extending the debate to their other mature fiction, it will be possible to illustrate the widespread social and ideological chaos existing in both Conrad and Dostoevsky's universe. It is to the nihilism at the centre of each writer's vision that I will now turn.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

NIHILISM AND THE NIHILIST PERSONA IN DOSTOEVSKY,  
CONRAD, AND NIETZSCHE.

The term 'nihilism' has specifically Russian origins. Though there is still considerable critical dissent surrounding the source of the word, Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883) is now generally credited with its coinage. In Fathers and Sons (1861), Nikolai Petrovich Kirsanov questions his nephew Arkady about a visiting friend, Bazarov. During the

conversation, Arkady proudly asserts that his young companion is a "nihilist". To this, the puzzled, mildly offended elder reflects:

'A nihilist ... That comes from the Latin nihil - nothing, I imagine; the term must signify a man who ... recognizes nothing?' (94)

During the course of the novel, Nikolai Petrovich develops and refines this original definition. A man like Bazarov, he adds later, not only "recognizes nothing" (94), he surely "respects nothing", and perhaps even "repudiate[s] everything" (123). Arkady is quick to defend Bazarov's ideological position, and contradicts his uncle's hostile, essentially negative interpretation. "A nihilist", Arkady insists, is "a person who does not take any principle for granted, however much that principle may be revered" (94). In his alternative version, Bazarov's nihilism takes the form of a bold and rationalized protest. Where Nikolai Petrovich interprets the debate as essentially a negation of accepted values and beliefs, Arkady's formula proposes a positive re-appraisal of existing moral and ethical standards. In Turgenev's pioneering definition, therefore, Bazarov's nihilism is viewed as both a new and daring ideological concept, as well as a negative dismissal of established social values. Indeed on the novel's first publication, critical opinion was divided between those who

saw Bazarov as an original thinker, and those who viewed him as an 'enfant terrible'. Fathers and Sons (1861) became the focus of a major literary and ideological storm. Though Turgenev's novel is far more than a 'roman a these', leading intellectuals of the period were quick to interpret it as such. For the radical intelligentsia particularly, Bazarov became a potent symbol of defiance. In an enormously influential contemporary essay, the critic D.I. Pisarev (1840-1868) heralds Bazarov as an exemplary 'new' man, defining and evolving the character's nihilist credo far beyond Turgenev's original intentions. Though Bazarov is certainly a rebel who challenges existing values, Pisarev's essay exalts him into a titanic figure "psychologically immune to moral scruples of any kind". According to Pisarev, Bazarov's intellectual prowess, his indomitable individuality, means that he need not

recognize any regulator, any moral law, any principle ... nothing [for Bazarov] except personal taste prevents him from murdering or robbing ... [or] causes him to make discoveries in the field of science and social existence.

Where Arkady had essentially characterized him as a nihilist who questioned the validity of society's governing principles, Pisarev's definition places Bazarov above and beyond its normal rules and laws. From this basis, indeed,

the critic develops Bazarov into a distinct social 'type'. There is a clear division, Pisarev insists, between the majority of people who live "a customary, dreamily tranquil, vegetative existence", and a minority of "other people", men like Bazarov, who are "eternally alien" to the mass, and even "regard ... it with contempt". The uniquely gifted nihilist, Pisarev concludes, "unquestionably possess[es] the right to transgress the moral law" (Quoted in Frank, Through the Russian Prism 131). This deeply idiosyncratic interpretation of Fathers and Sons (1861), though not widely known outside Russia, is arguably central to the whole future development of nihilist ideology. In Joseph Frank's astute assessment, Pisarev's radical characterization of Bazarov makes him "monumentally proto-Nietzschean" (Through the Russian Prism 131). Furthermore, the classification of mankind into two groups - a "vegetative" mass and an elect minority - prefigures Raskolnikov's own division of man into "extraordinary" and "ordinary" beings in Crime and Punishment (1866). Dostoevsky, indeed, pays oblique homage to Pisarev's ideas, recording in his Notebooks that the critic had "gone further" with Bazarov than all his other contemporaries (Quoted in Frank Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation 174). As will become evident, however, Pisarev's debate evolves not only in Dostoevsky's writing; its core philosophy can equally be detected in both Conrad and

Nietzsche's conception of the nihilist persona. In many respects, Pisarev's essay can, and must, be considered as a significant and independent ideological prototext.

Despite this critic's importance in shaping the nihilist credo into a formal and essentially affirmative ideology, it is nevertheless vital to recognize the peculiarly dual nature of the concept. Pisarev's essay, of course, considers only one aspect of Turgenev's original idea. Where he sees Bazarov as a radical reformer of moral codes, Turgenev's Nikolai Petrovich continues to identify him as a man who simply denies society's values. From this perspective, nihilism is not a bold revaluation, it is rather a code of universal valuelessness. In Nikolai Petrovich's sense, nihilism signifies a belief in the ultimate futility and pointlessness of all actions and convictions. In 1888, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) neatly defined this "pathological" condition in his final, unfinished work, The Will to Power (published 1901) (14). The "philosophical nihilist", Nietzsche suggests, is "convinced that all that happens is meaningless and in vain" (23). For him, quite simply, "the world looks valueless" (13) (Nietzsche's emphasis). Though Nietzsche's analysis undoubtedly overshadows Nikolai Petrovich's tentative, even rudimentary observation, it does clarify the issue from a

more advanced historical and philosophical vantage-point. It is arguably Nietzsche, in fact, who most effectively formalizes the complete nihilist debate into a finished ethical system. For the purposes of this discussion, furthermore, he occupies a crucial position historically midway between Dostoevsky and Conrad's writing. Indeed in many respects, Nietzsche's work tends to illustrate, and underline, significant unities existing between Conrad and Dostoevsky's fictional treatment of nihilism. It is primarily for these reasons that I propose to explore his writing in detail here.

For Nietzsche, nihilism is the expression of mankind's essential metaphysical dilemma. In his analysis, nineteenth century European man was experiencing a complete crisis of religious and spiritual belief. In Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1885), Nietzsche's Zarathustra boldly asserts that "the old God in whom all the world once believed no longer lives" (271). Such a profound collapse of faith must necessarily bring into question the whole validity of existing Christian codes and ethics. The first consequence of this situation, Nietzsche suggests in The Will to Power (1901), is that man becomes aware of a "considerable reduction" in his own worth and self-esteem (38). There no longer exists any "grand unity in which the individual ... [can] immerse himself as



in an element of supreme value" (13). In this new and alien universe, mankind faces two choices. He can, as "philosophical nihilist", submit to a belief that the world has effectively become a meaningless void. Indeed Nietzsche exhaustively diagnoses this state, and labels it "passive nihilism" (17). It is, he judges, a modern, "psychological" condition (12), a crippling spiritual paralysis causing "deep heaviness and weariness" (47). Alternatively, man can regard his godlessness as a new opportunity. He can set about redefining, reinterpreting his place within a new world order. In Nietzsche's designation, this is "active nihilism", nihilism characterized by a significantly "increased power of the spirit" (17). The failure of Christianity, he argues in Ecce Homo (1888), has effectively devalued existing morality to the level of mere "idiosyncrasy" (79). The "active" nihilist, therefore, no longer sees "anything venerable" in "the most revered ... [and] canonized" of old values (133). He is, Nietzsche insists, profoundly sceptical regarding "everything that has been hitherto honoured and worshipped" (95). Like Pisarev's earlier theory, Nietzsche's analysis proposes startling ideological possibilities for this 'new' man. He is, in effect, offered the chance to liberate himself from a traditionally inhibitive system of values, and determine his own particular, individual law. Ultimately, he can become

the legislator and creator of his own morality, redefine "the bounds of what is permitted" (56).

Responding to these striking ideas and their subsequent realization in the figure of Zarathustra, the translator and critic R.J. Hollingdale dubs Nietzsche "a [European] pioneer in the demolition of ancient habits of mind and moral prejudices" (see 'Introduction', Thus Spoke Zarathustra 16). Whilst Hollingdale's observation is clearly correct, it does not indicate the significance of earlier Russian writing. Though I have identified Bazarov as an ideological prototype, it is vital to recognize the development of "active" nihilism in a second fictional character. As the narrative of Crime and Punishment (1866) makes clear, nihilist ideology becomes a "fascination", an "infatuation", for Raskolnikov (trans. MacDuff 96) - he is obsessed by its "outrageous and seductive daring" (35). Indeed in Part One, Raskolnikov openly challenges the validity of traditionally accepted moral principles. The old Christian interpretation of the world, he suggests, is "just a load of superstition, just a lot of fears that have been put into people's heads". Surely, Raskolnikov argues, there are no real "limits" and "that's how it's meant to be!" (60). In his essentially nihilistic interpretation, orthodox moral systems are merely an accumulation of senseless and

often destructive "prejudices" (546). The question of self-sacrifice, the most venerated Christian virtue, becomes a central issue in Raskolnikov's early debate. His sister's proposed marriage to Luzhin, like Sonya's prostitution to save her family, seem to amplify the redundant, even perverse nature of existing ethical standards. Debating the argument alone, Raskolnikov furiously accuses his absent opponents:

'Are you [Dunya and Sonya] completely aware of the size of the sacrifice you're making? Is it right? Is it being made under duress? Will it do any good? Is it sensible? (78)

Raskolnikov's discourse can be validly interpreted as a significant challenge to the moral world order. His subsequent murder of the old pawnbroker, I would suggest, simply extends this same fundamental nihilist debate. The translator and critic David McDuff, indeed, interprets Raskolnikov's act as essentially "an outright challenge to the fabric of society" ('Introduction', Crime and Punishment 16). By murdering the old woman, Raskolnikov attempts to assert his own alternative code of morality, his own system of values and ethics. His act is effectively a test, a test to discover whether he has the "right" to be the creator of his own law (Crime and Punishment 488). Analyzing his

motives in Part Five, Raskolnikov tells Sonya:

'I suddenly saw, as clearly as the sun, that in the past no one has ever dared, and still does not dare, to pick up all that absurd nonsense [morality] by the tail in passing and toss it to the devil! I ... I wanted to make the dare, and so I killed someone ... to make the dare - that was the only reason for it, Sonya!' (486-7)

By making "the dare", of course, Raskolnikov proposes to step over, to go beyond the existing moral code. Even in Siberia, he still pursues this first principle of "active" nihilism. Reflecting on the nature of his supposed crime, he continues to ask, "'What do they mean, those words: "An act of wickedness"'" (623). Despite imprisonment, there is little textual evidence to suggest that Raskolnikov fully abandons his intense examination of traditionally accepted Christian values. Though I cannot accept Konstantin Mochulsky's thesis that his eventual spiritual rebirth is a "pious lie", I would agree that Raskolnikov's ideas remain substantially unaltered up until his final dream (312).

It is in debating these fundamental nihilist issues, of course, that Raskolnikov arrives at his celebrated division of humanity into two distinct groups. The determination of one's own particular system of beliefs, he argues, is a

"right" open only to a small and select group of individuals, the so-called "extraordinary" men. The nihilist who actively discards society's accepted values and laws must be, by definition, a relatively rare phenomenon. Despite his deeply derisory language, Porfiry Petrovich neatly clarifies the substance of Raskolnikov's argument. Paraphrasing a recently published but forgotten essay by Raskolnikov, the Prosecutor explains that

'the whole point of [Raskolnikov's] article is that the human race is divided into the "ordinary" and the "extraordinary". The ordinary must live in obedience and do not have the right to break the law, because, well, they're ordinary, you see. The extraordinary, on the other hand, have the right to commit all sorts of crimes and break the law in all sorts of ways precisely because they're extraordinary'.

Raskolnikov's "extraordinary" men, Porfiry adds, are "not only able, but have a perfect right to commit all sorts of atrocities and crimes ... it's as if the law did not apply to them" (Crime and Punishment 311). Though these ideas echo Pisarev's earlier bilateral division of man into "vegetative" majority and exalted minority, Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov develops and, most importantly, dramatizes, the critic's essentially theoretical speculations. Raskolnikov

is certainly not, as one critic claims, merely the impressionable victim of "fashionable radical ideas" (Frank, Through the Russian Prism 129). On the contrary, his ideology crucially foreshadows Nietzsche's later philosophy of the "Superman". There are, I would claim, significant similarities between the beliefs and personalities of Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov, and Nietzsche's own fictional "Superman", Zarathustra.

In Ecce Homo (1888), for instance, Nietzsche observes that Zarathustra "feels himself to be the highest species of all existing things" (107). The unusual hyperbole of Zarathustra's mock-biblical narration, of course, lends credibility to this argument. Zarathustra certainly has an "ultimate lion's arrogance" (Thus Spoke Zarathustra 183), "a sovereign feeling of pride beyond compare" (Ecce Homo 117). There can be little doubt, to use Konstantin Mochulsky's words, that Raskolnikov similarly considers himself to be an "exalted ... personality" (282). At university, we are told, he had been "haughtily arrogant ... his fellow students had the impression that he had looked down on them from a certain height". He is said, indeed, to view their "convictions and interests" as essentially "something inferior" (Crime and Punishment 86). Even the timid Pulkheria Aleksandrovna calls her own son characteristically

"overweening" (291); "he would have stepped over every obstacle", she readily reflects in Part Three (266). This titanic egoism is naturally communicated to Raskolnikov's vision of the "extraordinary" man's persona. At one stage, for example, he speaks of his beings as "the lords of the future". They will "move the world and lead it towards a goal" (313). In a particularly exultant passage at the end of Part Two, Raskolnikov proclaims: "Now is the kingdom of reason and light ... freedom of strength" (236). Such words predict the consistently lyrical grandeur of Zarathustra's orations proclaiming the existence of the "Superman". Indeed the "Superman" similarly "stand[s] over everything as its own sky, as its round roof, [as] its azure bell and eternal certainty" (Thus Spoke Zarathustra 186). Both Raskolnikov and Zarathustra, furthermore, show a comparable degree of initial disdain, then scorn, for less exalted men. To Raskolnikov, "ordinary" men are "in general conservative by nature, sedate ... [living] lives of obedience". "In my view", Raskolnikov observes, "they have a duty to be obedient, as that is their function, and there is really nothing about this that is degrading to them" (Crime and Punishment 313). Significantly, Zarathustra characterizes his "man" (as opposed to his "Superman") in similar terms. In Ecce Homo (1888), Nietzsche refers to Zarathustra's belief that "man" is "formlessness, material, a ... stone

which requires the sculptor" (111) (my emphasis). He is, generally, "a good natured herd-animal" (129). At the other extreme, Raskolnikov and Zarathustra can pile contempt on a group which is effectively seen as a sub-species. In Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1885), Nietzsche's character uses the term "ultimate man" to describe his particular non-elect (46 et.al.). The "ultimate man" is merely "small and pitiable" (79), a creature who "hops" and "blinks" upon the earth (46). This majority is the "unclean" rabble (122), a brood as "inexterminable as the flea" (46). Though Zarathustra insists he has conquered his scorn for humanity, he frequently uses such language to describe the common man. Though Raskolnikov's discourse does not reach such Nietzschean excesses, there are recognizably significant parallels. He consistently uses the word "louse", for instance, to characterize his "ordinary" being, specifically applying the term to his own failure to become an "extraordinary" man (Crime and Punishment 487). In earlier conversation with Porfiry, he additionally describes the "ordinary" man as "human material" (313) (my emphasis). In many respects, this simple but sinister phrase corresponds with Zarathustra's openly derisive statements.

This contempt for the mass of humanity, coupled with an indomitable personal arrogance, is particularly pronounced



in both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche's protagonists. Indeed for Raskolnikov and Zarathustra, "active" nihilism begins to escalate into a recognizable form of self-divinization. To cite Nietzsche's apt words, each character sees himself as one of "a chosen people" (Thus Spoke Zarathustra 103). It is especially revealing, for example, to find Raskolnikov using the term "overlord" to describe his quintessential "extraordinary" man (Crime and Punishment 328) (my emphasis). In this particular connection, it is valuable to highlight a linguistic debate concerning Nietzsche's actual word "ubermensch". Though normally rendered in English as "Superman", the critic Walter Kaufmann significantly favours the alternative translation "Overman" in his celebrated 1968 study of Nietzsche (Kaufmann, see 307-333). In many respects, this neatly avoids the semantic confusion which has certainly developed concerning the phrase "Superman". For the purposes of this study, of course, the term "Overman" more favourably correlates with Raskolnikov's adoption of the word "overlord" to describe his "extraordinary" being. Despite the obvious interpretive hazards posed by all translations, Kaufmann's useful distinction certainly establishes tighter ideological bonds between Raskolnikov and Zarathustra. Continuing the same debate, it is intriguing to note that both writers cite Napoleon as their archetypal "Overman" or "Overlord". For

Raskolnikov, of course, Napoleon is his "extraordinary man" par excellence. He is the individual for "whom all things are permitted", whether it be the ransacking of Toulon, or the throwing away of "half a million men in his Moscow campaign" (Crime and Punishment 328). In his confession to Sonya, Raskolnikov openly acknowledges: "'I wanted to become a Napoleon and that's why I killed'" (483). In Ecce Homo (1888), Nietzsche similarly quotes Napoleon as a model figure, "a force majeure of genius and will". In Nietzsche's interpretation, Napoleon was a "Superman" who might have forged Europe into a "political and economic unity" capable of "ruling the earth" (121). Napoleon was a "miracle of meaning" - his untimely death effectively "deprived Europe" of "reason" and led her "into a blind alley" (122). Though a mutual fascination with Napoleon might not be unusual in a nineteenth century European context, such pronounced parallels raise serious questions concerning Dostoevsky's possible influence on Nietzschean philosophy. In his Twilight of the Idols (1888), in fact, Nietzsche famously hails Dostoevsky as "the only psychologist ... from who I had anything to learn: he is one of the happiest accidents of my life" (109). In a further letter to Franz Overbeck, he records that an "instinct of kinship ... spoke immediately, my joy was extraordinary" ('Glossary', Twilight of the Idols 200; also see Kaufmann 318). Despite these evocative

comments, it is important to remain cautious when interpreting Nietzsche's words. His accidental encounter with Dostoevsky's writing, indeed, occurred as late as 1887, two years after the completion of Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1885). As the critic Tony Tanner observes, Dostoevsky remained essentially a "belated discovery" (Twilight of the Idols, 1990 21). Current scholarship, furthermore, suggests that Nietzsche was familiar with only three major texts, all in French translations - namely The House of the Dead (1860), The Insulted and the Injured (1861), and Notes from Underground (1864). Though Walter Kaufmann additionally highlights Nietzsche's significant usage of the word "idiot" when referring to Jesus, he does stress that he probably became aware of Dostoevsky's Christ-like Myshkin "without reading the whole novel" (340). Most importantly for this discussion, there is little textual evidence to suggest that Nietzsche was acquainted with either Crime and Punishment (1866), or the nihilist ideology of Raskolnikov. Despite their profound similarities of thinking, it is critically agreed that Nietzsche's Zarathustra is an entirely independent creation. In this particular connection, it seems useful to cite R.J. Hollingdale's shrewd summary of the whole debate. "What suggests Dostoevsky in Nietzsche's writings", Hollingdale argues, "is not the product or influence of borrowing" - it is rather "a similarity in

psychological acumen" ('Glossary', Twilight of the Gods/ The Anti-Christ, 1968 200).

Despite the indisputable psychological and philosophical affinities between Dostoevsky and Nietzsche's work, it is vital to make one important distinction between Raskolnikov and Zarathustra. In Crime and Punishment (1866), Raskolnikov's intellectual and spiritual being ultimately revolves around one ideological dilemma: does he really have the 'right' to 'step over' existing codes of moral behaviour? (488) In this specific context, many English speaking critics have highlighted the importance of the Russian word for 'crime' - 'prestuplenie' - in the title of Dostoevsky's novel. As the translator David McDuff notes, 'prestuplenie' has a far wider semantic value than its English equivalent. It conveys not only the idea of "transgression"; it additionally suggests the concept of "stepping across", and thus reflects the identity of Raskolnikov's ideological and emotional predicament ('Introduction', Crime and Punishment, trans. MacDuff 16). Ultimately, Dostoevsky's character is still experimenting, still wrestling, with new and daring ideas. For Nietzsche's Zarathustra, however, this same debate has long been resolved. Zarathustra has not just 'stepped across', he has transcended the moral law. In his own words, he has

dispensed with what he calls the "false values and scriptures" of present society, and become a "destroyer and despiser of good and evil". In Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1885), Nietzsche's protagonist effectively preaches his own particular ethical system. Indeed in one sense, many of Zarathustra's notable exhortatory discourses seem specifically addressed to 'angst-ridden' personalities like Raskolnikov. An element of intertextual dialogue might even be said to develop between the pedagogic Zarathustra and the unsure Russian novitiate. Challenging his audience in Part One, for instance, Zarathustra asks:

'Can you furnish yourself with your own good and evil and hang up your own will above yourself as a law? Can you be judge of yourself? (89)

Such admonishing words significantly reproduce the substance of Raskolnikov's private and self-lacerating debate in Crime and Punishment (1866). At the conclusion of the novel, of course, Raskolnikov feels he has been ultimately defeated - he has not succeeded in realizing an "extraordinary" status beyond the accepted conventions of good and evil. Although this cannot devalue the significance of his credo, it does highlight the comparatively advanced nature of Zarathustra's nihilism. Indeed from such a strict perspective, Raskolnikov remains a "Superman" only in intellectual aspiration. In Crime and Punishment (1866), however, Dostoevsky does

provide us with another figure who has already 'stepped over' the accepted moral code, a protagonist who has already become the quintessential Nietzschean "Superman" - Svidrigailov. Raskolnikov's 'double', indeed, marks an important development in Dostoevsky's fictional representation of the "active" nihilist's persona. From Svidrigailov onwards, all Dostoevsky's "strong personalities" begin to profoundly resemble archetypal Nietzschean "Supermen" (see Mochulsky 270-313). Dostoevsky, I would argue, initiates a major literary genre of fictional European nihilists. A creation like Stavrogin in The Devils (1871), I will show, predicts not only Zarathustra - he ultimately looks forward to Conrad's titanic figure 'beyond good and evil', Kurtz.

Before considering Conrad's later evolution of nihilism, however, it is important to return to Svidrigailov in Crime and Punishment (1866). The critic Konstantin Mochulsky valuably identifies the essential difference between Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov. Svidrigailov, Mochulsky observes, has "already succeeded in completely curing himself of all moral prejudices" (306) (my emphasis). Where Raskolnikov agonizes about his 'right' to determine an individual code of ethics, Svidrigailov states that he has successfully "jettison[ed] certain prejudices", dispensed

with the "customary manner of dealing with persons and objects that surround us" (Crime and Punishment 546). At their first meeting in Part Four, Raskolnikov interrogates his uninvited visitor about his scandalous affair with Dunya, and the subsequent controversy surrounding the death of his wife. Svidrigailov's puzzled response powerfully indicates his complete disdain for accepted notions of Christian morality:

'I should be grateful [he asks Raskolnikov] if you would tell me what was so particularly criminal about my part in that matter, viewing it without prejudice that is.... (337)

Significantly, even Raskolnikov considers that Svidrigailov's attitude is "outrageously insolent". In the same conversation, indeed, Svidrigailov speaks of the distinction between good and evil as "some empty accepted convention" (349). Such words, of course, importantly prefigure Zarathustra's infamous dictum that good and evil are simply "old delusion[s]" (Thus Spoke Zarathustra 219). In fact in Beyond Good and Evil (1886), Nietzsche provides a useful alternative perspective on his "Superman". This "noble type of man", Nietzsche advocates, is not only a "determiner of values" - importantly, "he does not need to be approved of, he [just] judges" (195) (my emphasis). In many respects, this analysis offers an accurate evaluation

of Svidrigailov's personality. Firstly, he exclusively determines his own particular code of behaviour, satisfying all his compulsions without restraint. Svidrigailov, indeed, has lost all conception of traditional moral and ethical standards. As one critic says of him, "good and evil [have become] merely relative concepts; everything is permitted" (Mochulsky 307). Secondly, Svidrigailov is, like Nietzsche's "noble man", totally unperturbed by public opinion: "'I'm not really interested in what anyone thinks of me'", he blandly informs Raskolnikov in Part Four (Crime and Punishment 341). In Nietzsche's phrase, Svidrigailov has genuinely achieved a 'revaluation of all values'. From this perspective, he is the true "Superman" of Crime and Punishment (1866). Though the central ideological debate evolves in Raskolnikov, it is Svidrigailov who effectively lives the ideas that obsess Dostoevsky's student-hero.

Svidrigailov, of course, is a crucial figure in another important sense. He can be validly interpreted as a prototype for Dostoevsky's later, consummate "Superman", Stavrogin. Arguably, it is in this particular figure that Dostoevskyan nihilism reaches recognizably Kurtzian dimensions. In his so-called 'Confession', Stavrogin clearly outlines his advanced nihilist thinking:

'I formulated ... what appeared to be the rule of



my life, namely, that I neither know nor feel good or evil and that I have not only lost any sense of it, but that there is neither good nor evil (which pleased me), and that it is just a prejudice'.

(The Devils, trans. Magarshack 692)

For Stavrogin, existing Christian morality is not an obstacle, not something to be overcome, as it is for an aspiring nihilist like Raskolnikov. It is an irrelevance. In the fullest Zarathustran sense, Stavrogin has created and "formed" the world in his own "image", by his own "reason ... and will" (Thus Spoke Zarathustra 110). To this quintessential Nietzschean "Superman", accepted moral and legal codes do not apply. Stavrogin, for example, is said to be quite capable of killing "anyone who insulted him ... without the slightest hesitation" (The Devils 212). In Shatov's important assessment, he has entirely liberated himself from all traditionally accepted systems of values and beliefs. Indeed Shatov maintains that Stavrogin sees no notable distinction between a "voluptuous and brutish act", and a "heroic sacrifice ... for the good of humanity" (260). In a literal sense, Stavrogin has usurped God - he determines his own values as a self-elected divinity. In Part Four of Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1885), Nietzsche's character alludes to this final form of "active" nihilism,

where it is "better to produce destiny on one's own account ... better to be God oneself!" (274). There seems little doubt that Stavrogin has attained such a 'man-God' status. In words that evoke images of a pagan deity, the narrator characterizes him as "abominable and most terrible" (The Devils 213). Such comments, of course, notably recall the Harlequin's later statements about Kurtz. Stavrogin's arrogance, his sense of indomitable ascendancy, is equally familiar. The convict Fedka, for instance, neatly observes that "Mr. Stavrogin stands on the very top of the ladder"; other men, like Peter Verkhovensky, "bark at him from the ground like ... silly little cur[s]" (557). In a rare burst of sincerity, Verkhovensky himself refers to Stavrogin as his "leader", his "sun". In comparison, he is of a lower human order; he is a mere "worm" (420). Such images, portraying Stavrogin as a titanic, even inhuman figure, become characteristic in The Devils (1871). In an earlier passage, the lamentable Captain Lebyatkin is graphically described as like "a rabbit" in the presence of a "boa-constrictor" (202). Though Stavrogin's personal beliefs remain the object of conjecture throughout the novel, the narrative consistently emphasizes his archetypal "extraordinary" status. Any uncertainty surrounding Stavrogin, of course, is mainly attributable to the original banning of Dostoevsky's chapter 'At Tikhon's', which

includes the vitally illuminating 'Confession'. Though this section is now included as an appendix to The Devils (1871), the situation still seems far from ideal. Quite clearly, the chapter demands its rightful re-instatement within the body of the text. Ultimately, however, this issue does not mask the true identity of Dostoevsky's anti-hero. In Geir Kjetsaa's apt assessment, Stavrogin is, quite simply, an "ungovernable" and "superhuman" figure (255).

Though it might be critically unorthodox to extend this debate to Conrad's writing, such fundamental ideological similarities exist between Stavrogin and Kurtz that a comparison seems not merely valid, but essential. Conrad's protagonist, I would argue, represents the culmination of an identifiable fictional genre, a genre of nineteenth century European "Supermen". As with Dostoevsky's nihilists, furthermore, a powerful case can be made to suggest significant parallels with Nietzschean philosophy. Indeed Kurtz's character and core ideology make him a recognizably Zarathustran figure. Marlow, in an important passage in 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), introduces the now familiar debate. In a remark predicting Kurtz's views, he observes that "beliefs, and what you may call principles ... are less than chaff in a breeze" ('Heart of Darkness', Dent ed. 105). Marlow's bold statement, of course, proposes a fundamental

nihilist philosophy - the death of all conventionally revered moral and ethical standards. Significantly, his language, his actual diction, recalls both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche's terminology. In his 'Confession' in The Devils (1871), for instance, Stavrogin similarly dismisses good and evil as "just a prejudice" (692). In The Will to Power (1901), Nietzsche makes a parallel observation - quite simply, "principles have become ridiculous" (74). Indeed as Conrad's narrative develops in 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), it becomes increasingly evident that Marlow is invoking fundamental nihilist issues, as well as describing an archetypal nihilist figure. In the apparent vacuum of Africa, of course, Kurtz has stepped beyond society's enshrined ethical and legal systems. In Marlow's assessment, he has an "unlawful soul" - he has "gone beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations" ('Heart of Darkness' 144). Like Svidrigailov and Stavrogin, Kurtz recognizes no code of values. Nothing can validly prohibit his actions or conduct. He can, and does, completely indulge himself "in the gratification of his various lusts" (131). Marlow's important encounter with the Harlequin, of course, substantially develops his understanding and conception of Kurtz's ideology. Though the Russian's remarks are certainly naive, they accurately define Kurtz's status above and beyond the accepted moral and legal code. "You can't judge

Mr. Kurtz as "you would an ordinary man", the Harlequin advises Marlow. To illustrate his argument, he recounts an earlier dispute over ivory. Paraphrasing Kurtz's words for Marlow's benefit, the Harlequin recounts that he would have certainly been shot if he had not complied with Kurtz's request. The man, indeed, "had a fancy for it and there was nothing on earth to prevent him killing whom he jolly well pleased" (128). The statement powerfully illustrates Kurtz's advanced nihilist thinking. Quite clearly, his response indicates a belief in his unassailable 'right' to determine his own law. In this connection, it is interesting to recall the parallel remarks of Dostoevsky's narrator in The Devils (1871). Anton Lavrentyevich, indeed, similarly highlights Stavrogin's capacity to murder without either fear or hesitation (The Devils 212). In 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), Marlow himself comes to recognize that Kurtz's nihilism takes him beyond all conventional notions of good and evil; "I had to deal with a being to whom I could not appeal in the name of anything high or low", he acknowledges in Part Three ('Heart of Darkness' 144). Though he is by turns appalled, even bemused, by his excesses, he significantly concludes that Kurtz is a "remarkable man" (150). Back in Brussels, other people seem merely "commonplace individuals" (152). The distinction here is telling. It recalls Raskolnikov's celebrated division of humanity into

"extraordinary" and "ordinary" beings, as well as Zarathustra's differentiation between the "Superman", and other "small ... pitiable men" (Thus Spoke Zarathustra 79). In his essay 'Conrad and Nietzsche', Edward Said suggests that Conrad may have been "familiar with Nietzsche as the author of such ideas as the will to power, the Overman, and the 'transvaluation of all values'" (66). Without suggesting that 'Heart of Darkness' (1899) is a purely derivative text, I would certainly support Said's thesis. In an 1899 letter to Helen Sanderson, Conrad refers directly to the "mad individualism" of Nietzsche (Collected Letters 2 188). Subsequent correspondence to Edward Garnett (209), and a 1901 letter to Ford Madox Ford citing the term "Overman" (344), similarly indicate Conrad's awareness of Nietzschean philosophy. As in Zarathustra's case, in fact, Kurtz's nihilism culminates in a self-elected divine status. In the colonial context of 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), Kurtz becomes a genuine god to his lakeside tribe. They "adored him", they "crawl[ed]" before him (128); "his ascendancy [is] ... extraordinary", the Harlequin tells Marlow (131). Though ultimately elected by the tribe, of course, Kurtz's 'pamphlet' indicates a quite different interpretation of the situation. "We whites", Kurtz reflects imperiously, must seem like "supernatural beings" to these "savages". As a universal truth, Kurtz's smug words seem peculiarly

anomalous. His analysis, I would suggest, is primarily a personal synopsis, a celebration of his own, self-determined divine status. In many respects, the Europeans' response to Kurtz additionally confirms his successful nihilist self-glorification, his achievement of a "Superman" identity. Kurtz, I would claim, is a "presid[ing] personality" for natives and colonialists alike (118). In an early passage, the so-called "papier-mache Mephistopheles" variously characterizes Kurtz as "a prodigy", a "special being", a "higher intelligence" (79). The Harlequin, of course, suggests that he is "one of the immortals" (138). Like Dostoevsky's narrator in The Devils (1871), the Russian sees his mentor as almost a pagan king. Like Stavrogin, Kurtz is a figure who can be "very terrible" (128). Even in Marlow's analysis, there are recognizable elements of primitive reverence for Kurtz. Though he acknowledges he makes a "pitiful Jupiter", he nevertheless identifies him as a classical god (134). Kurtz's stentorian voice, Marlow suggests, hails as if through a "speaking trumpet" (143). Like Nietzsche's "mighty commander" Zarathustra (Thus Spoke Zarathustra 62), Kurtz speaks "thunder and lightning" to both native and European senses ('Heart of Darkness' 128).

Such ultimate nihilism, of course, indicates an immense, all-consuming pride. In one important sense,

Conrad's realization of Kurtz follows a characteristic pattern. As in Dostoevsky and Nietzsche's protagonists, Kurtz's "active" nihilism promotes a titanic sense of personal superiority. Marlow, indeed, is chilled, even faintly bemused, by Kurtz's overwhelming arrogance:

You should have heard him say, 'My ivory'. Oh yes, I heard him. 'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river my - ' everything belonged to him. It made me hold my breath.... ('Heart of Darkness' 116)

Like Zarathustra, Conrad's "Superman" surveys the earth, and the rest of mankind, from his own Olympian height. Almost inevitably, his nihilist arrogance expresses itself as a deep loathing for lesser men, what Raskolnikov terms the mass of "human material" (Crime and Punishment 315). Indeed Kurtz's titanic pride culminates in similar moments of intensely murderous disgust, both towards the natives, and the colonialists. Significantly, Marlow records that Conrad's "Superman" dies "condemning, loathing all the universe" ('Heart of Darkness' 156). Just before his death, for instance, Kurtz refers to the "little peddling notions" of the 'pilgrims' (137). The most celebrated instance of his disgust for common humanity, however, must surely be the "valuable postscriptum" to his 'pamphlet' dealing with the colonial question. Seventeen pages of moving altruism,



Marlow narrates, ends with a sudden outburst of withering contempt, a call to "Exterminate all the brutes!" (118) An illuminating parallel can be drawn here between Kurtz's scathing comments, and a similarly isolated remark made in Part Two of Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1885). In a section titled 'Of the Compassionate', Nietzsche's "Superman" adds his own striking proviso to an otherwise, mildly pedagogic passage. "Beggars", he states, "should be entirely abolished!" (113).

In many respects, Kurtz and Zarathustra extend nihilist thinking to its furthest and most unacceptable extremes. As many critics have pointed out, such thinking arguably anticipates the historical rise of Nazism, even the genocide of the Jews. Nietzsche, of course, insisted that his "Superman" philosophy was a jubilant affirmation of man's true identity. For his Zarathustra, it remains a "joyful ... [and] boundlessly exuberant yes to life" (Ecce Homo 80). In stark contrast, both both Conrad and Dostoevsky expose the negative and ultimately destructive nature of nihilist ideology. It is in this particular sense, I would claim, that a truly profound unity of vision is established between these writers. Before turning to this debate, however, it is necessary to indicate the importance of nihilism in Conrad's other mature fiction. Though Kurtz's is indisputably

Conrad's foremost "Superman", he is not the only nihilist figure in the writer's fictional universe. Edward Said, for instance, suggests that there are "a number of superficial resemblances between the Professor in The Secret Agent (1907) and what is often referred to as the extreme nihilism of Nietzsche's philosophy" (292). Though Said does not indicate what these similarities are, close analysis reveals more than simply "superficial resemblances". Significantly, Conrad's Professor demands "a clear sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life" (The Secret Agent, Dent ed. 73). Proclaiming his idea to Ossipon, he insists, "'My device is: No God! No master'" (306). Like Kurtz and Zarathustra, his self-ordained "Superman" status eventually expresses itself as a murderous contempt for lesser individuals. In his final conversation with Ossipon, the Professor proposes that "'the weak... be taken in hand for utter extermination'" (302). In a very literal sense, the Professor is the perfect incarnation of "active" nihilism. There can, surely, be no more potent denial of society's traditionally revered values than this walking human bomb. Conrad's "Perfect Anarchist" is equally a perfect nihilist (302). In Nostromo (1904), a valid case might also be made suggesting a significant "Superman" status for Conrad's eponymous hero. Nostromo's initial self-glorification, his idealized conception of his superior standing within the

Sulaco community, indicates a pronounced, if elemental form of nihilist thinking. As one critic has neatly observed, Conrad's fictional world is characterized by figures like Nostromo who are "wilful and deliberately egoistic over-reachers" (Said 65).

Though Conrad's nihilist thinkers are recognizably Nietzschean in conception, their ideologies cannot be considered to triumph. As in Dostoevsky's universe, "active" nihilism is ultimately seen as a negative and profoundly destructive creed. Nietzsche's "Superman", the supreme self-determining individual, is effectively dethroned in both Conrad and Dostoevsky's world. In Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1885), of course, Zarathustra is primarily characterized as a solitary, hermit-like figure. His isolation is seen as the inevitable, even desirable, result of his superior ideology. In Conrad and Dostoevsky's fiction, the same nihilist insularity is identified, but it is interpreted quite differently. In an important passage in The Brothers Karamazov (1881), Father Zosima warns that nihilism simply leads to complete "isolation", to effective "spiritual suicide" (The Brothers Karamazov, trans. Garnett, rev. R.E. Matlaw 292) (Dostoevsky's emphasis). This, of course, is certainly the case in both Kurtz and Raskolnikov's universe. An early image in 'Heart of Darkness' (1899) graphically

illustrates Kurtz's absolute alienation from the wider community of man. At the beginning of Part Two, Marlow recollects his first distinct mental picture of Kurtz. Significantly, he visualizes him as a

lone ... man turning his back suddenly on the headquarters, on relief, on thoughts of home ... setting his face towards the depths of the wilderness, towards his empty and desolate station. (90)

Kurtz's ideology transports him into a "lightless region of subtle horrors", into a dark metaphysical realm where he is entirely alone (132). In Marlow's assessment Kurtz, like Conrad's Professor, has essentially become a "wandering and tormented thing" (143). In the same respect, Raskolnikov becomes increasingly aware that his ideas have severed him from normal human society. Close personal contact with his family, with Razumikhin, is fraught with difficulties, and becomes eventually unbearable. In Konstantin Mochulsky's words, Raskolnikov experiences a sense of complete "estrangement from the human family" (303). As Raskolnikov notes himself, his ideology has "cut [him] ... off from everyone and everything", as if "with a pair of scissors" (Crime and Punishment 157). In Conrad and Dostoevsky's world, "active" nihilism leads to infinite isolation, to anguishing solitude.

For both novelists, of course, nihilism inevitably realizes itself in appalling acts of human destruction. Indeed Conrad and Dostoevsky's "Supermen" are effectively given a 'carte blanche' to murder. In The Brothers Karamazov (1880), Father Zosima predicts that the nihilists "will end by flooding the earth with blood" (trans. Garnett, rev. R.E. Matlaw 292). Underground Man invokes a similar scene of nihilistic devastation. "Just look around", he narrates, "rivers of blood are being spilt, and in the most cheerful way, as if it were champagne" (Notes from Underground, trans. Katz 16). Even Raskolnikov, indeed, recognizes this same, ultimate message in the nihilist credo. Responding to Luzhin's pompous interpretation of the current thinking, he observes:

'if you take those ideas you [Luzhin] were advocating just now to their ultimate conclusion, the end result would be that it's all right to go around killing people'. (Crime and Punishment 197).

It is, of course, this nihilist ideology which leads to Raskolnikov's eventual murder of the old pawnbroker, and her sister Lizaveta. In all respects, his appalling plight represents Dostoevsky's personal warning against such an abstract interpretation of the world. Indeed Crime and Punishment (1866) effectively charts the evolution of a

barbaric ideology to its logical fruition. In 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), Conrad provides essentially the same vision, the same interpretation. The staked heads which surround Kurtz's Inner Station reflect the brutal culmination of a similarly misshapen creed. Kurtz's metaphysical and ideological voyage has taken him into a world of casual murder, a realm of devastating "horror" (149 et.al.). The critic Joseph Frank provides a clear synopsis which can be applied to either writer's final vision. In Conrad and Dostoevsky's world, nihilism simply means "unending ... slaughter" (Through the Russian Prism 134).

Significantly, both novelists extend this argument beyond their individual protagonists, to create nightmare scenarios where Western society is governed exclusively by nihilist thinking. In each case, the philosophy is seen to devastate the community of mankind, to promote universal, even apocalyptic disorder. In Crime and Punishment (1866), this is achieved primarily through Raskolnikov's sequence of dreams. His first important nightmare transports him back to the rural community of his childhood. The town and its peasants, however, have become horribly transformed. At centre stage is the drunken figure of Mikolka, and his overworked draught-horse. The peasant, enraged by the mare's inability to pull his over-laden cart, begins to beat her

mercilessly with an iron crowbar. During the scene, Mikolka howls the same, almost litanic phrase, "'She belongs to me! ... She belongs to me!'" (93 et.al.). In one respect, the episode becomes a graphic metaphor for "active" nihilism. Mikolka loudly proclaims not just his property rights; he equally asserts his right to determine his own code of conduct. In effect, he challenges accepted conventions of Christian morality. It is, however, a purely senseless, barbaric protest. Mikolka proceeds to beat the mare to death. Significantly, Raskolnikov is the only figure troubled by this brutal spectacle. To the wider community, the beating is almost a festive occasion. It becomes a grotesque celebration of Mikolka's inalienable right to act according to his own law. Dostoevsky, indeed, provides a truly surreal vision of rampant egoism, of complete social disintegration. In Raskolnikov's dream, the world is quite simply turned upside down. The village peasants who flock around the murderous Mikolka are all vociferously drunk. There is "hoarse ... ugly singing", "frequent fighting". The helpless mare dies to a grotesque cacophany of "yelling, laughter and foul language" (89). Presiding over this scene is a "fat red-cheeked peasant woman" who continues to crack nuts and "laugh softly to herself" (91). In effect, normal society has collapsed into a distorted, anarchic chaos. In this nightmare world, traditional values are ridiculed by

manic laughter. Appalling violence is not merely permitted, it passes without censure. The individual riots in a frenzy of private gratification and destruction. In one sense, Raskolnikov's dream evokes a sort of nihilist bacchanalia, a bleak vision of complete, unendurable disorder.

Arguably his most significant dream, however, is reserved for the novel's closing 'Epilogue'. In many respects, Raskolnikov's final nightmare is crucial to Dostoevsky's whole artistic purpose in Crime and Punishment (1866). It indicates the consequences of a "Superman" philosophy applied on a universal basis. In Raskolnikov's dream, the entire world has succumbed to nihilist thinking. Each individual exercises his own private and supreme system of ethics:

Never had people considered themselves so intelligent and in unswerving possession of the truth ... Never had they believed so unswervingly in the correctness of their judgements ... their moral convictions and beliefs.

In this world, each man has effectively become his own self-elected divinity. In Raskolnikov's nightmare realm, however, this new race of "Supermen" does not represent the pinnacle of human achievement. On the contrary, mankind is seen to be gripped by a terrible disease. He is the victim of a



"strange ... and unprecedented plague". Nihilist ideology is identified as the source of this new scourge. Its credo is personified as a "microscopic creature" that lodges itself in people's bodies. These minute, intelligent "spirits" do not bring illumination, however. They make their human hosts "rabid and insane" (626). In an apocalyptic passage, the narrative recounts how the world is laid waste by this brood of infected men:

Entire centres of population, entire cities and peoples became smitten and went mad ... People killed one another in a kind of senseless anger. Whole armies were ranged against one another, but no sooner had these armies been mobilized than they suddenly began to tear themselves to pieces, their ranks falling apart and their soldiers hurling themselves at one another, gashing and stabbing, biting and eating one another. (626-7)

Raskolnikov's dream is a vision of global chaos, a vision of manic destruction and annihilation. In a world where each man determines his own law, normal relations between individuals becomes unthinkable. The concept of 'Society' is effectively abolished. Deprived of a common bond of values, the community of man entirely disintegrates. In Raskolnikov's nightmare vision, the result is complete anarchy, an anarchy that leads to mass human slaughter.

Applied universally, nihilist ideology becomes not only untenable, it becomes inconceivable. Nietzsche's new world, the ideal world where all men "impose ... their own law", is exposed, and effectively outlawed, in the final pages of Crime and Punishment (1866) ('Introduction', Ecce Homo 15).

In 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), of course, Conrad's Congo is more than simply a colonial province. From one interpretive perspective, I would claim, it is a quintessential nihilist state. "Out there", Marlow comments early on, "there were no external checks" (74). The whole colonial adventure, indeed, can be validly defined in nihilist terms. In Africa, the 'pilgrims' are entirely free to determine their own code of morality, their own particular laws. As the manager's unscrupulous uncle observes, "Anything - anything can be done in this country" (91). From this particular angle, Conrad's narrative effectively charts the results of nihilist ideology, applied within a closed, nearly virgin, environment. In these terms, the Congo becomes an arena where "active" nihilism can evolve to its ultimate conclusions. Marlow, of course, is the spectator, the interpreter, of this quasi-scientific process. Significantly, he characterizes his experience as a "dream-sensation" (82). Like Raskolnikov, Marlow observes what is a nightmare realm of chaos and destruction. In

adopting an ideology that advocates complete self-determination, the 'pilgrims' have created widespread havoc and disorder. The Congo has become an effective wasteland. Describing the Central Station, Marlow recalls that it is "a scene of inhabited devastation" (63). Everything, he narrates, is in chaos - "heads, things, buildings" (68). A railway truck, "lying ... on its back with its wheels in the air", becomes the potent symbol of a world clearly in total disintegration. Indeed Marlow encounters an insane environment where the normal world order, like the abandoned truck, has been literally turned upside down. As in Dostoevsky's world, the concept of a unified society, of a community of man, is effectively abolished by nihilist philosophy. In its place, there is disharmony, chaos, and senseless destruction.

In Conrad and Dostoevsky's universe, stepping beyond the conventions of good and evil is not the victory it is for Nietzsche's Zarathustra. Rather than achieving a new, and more valid system of ethics, Stavrogin, Kurtz, and Svidrigailov, are clearly unable to define a real meaning, a true direction, in their respective worlds. To adopt Conrad's important phrase, nihilist existence proves itself to be ultimately "hollow" ('Heart of Darkness' 147). Like the Pilgrim in The Divine Comedy (c.1308-1321), Conrad and

Dostoevsky's "Supermen" are effectively lost in Dante's symbolic "dark wood", the poet's bitter, metaphysical "wilderness" (Inferno Canto 1 67). Nihilist self-determination becomes an insupportable, personal purgatory. In The Devils (1871), Stavrogin's ideology is finally identified as a curse, as an intolerable burden. Dostoevsky's self-proclaimed man-God can find no spiritual fulfilment, no true direction, in his new world. Expressing this crisis in his final letter to Dasha, Stavrogin writes, "'But what to apply my strength to - that's what I've never seen and don't see now'" (666). For Dostoevsky's "Superman" 'nothing has come but negation, [there has been] ... no magnanimity and no force ... Everything has always been petty and lifeless'. (667)

Indeed Konstantin Mochulsky identifies a Dostoevskyan process of disintegration, from "Superman" to "hollow" man. In the basic nihilist credo, of course, "everything is permitted". From this first maxim, Mochulsky argues, the Dostoevskyan "Superman" decides that "all things" must be "one and the same". After this realization, all that is left, quite simply, is "universal boredom and banality" (307). In The Devils (1871), the narrator Anton Lavrentyevich confirms the validity of Mochulsky's critical appraisal. He observes that Stavrogin is "absolutely

indifferent, even bored" by life (204). In Crime and Punishment (1866), Svidrigailov is undermined by the same sense of purposelessness. In dispensing with traditional morality, he has gained neither liberation, nor freedom. Speaking to Raskolnikov, he characterizes his nihilist domain in images that evoke dankness and incarceration. Where Nietzsche's "Superman" surveys the universe from a mountain top, Svidrigailov's world has contracted into a "little room, something akin to a country bath-house, with soot on the walls and spiders in every corner" (346). For Dostoevsky's "Superman", existence is truly "a revolting business!" (582) As with Stavrogin, stepping over the moral code does not entail a positive, life-affirming reevaluation of all values, as it does for Nietzsche's Zarathustra. Significantly, nihilist transgression is identified as almost casual, and predominantly sexual, for both of Dostoevsky's characters. Indeed Svidrigailov and Stavrogin finally abandon themselves to lives of purely sensual and physical gratification. In each case, the experience proves to be ultimately degrading and hollow. In a significant passage in Crime and Punishment (1866), Raskolnikov acknowledges that Svidrigailov - the complete nihilist "Superman" - is really little more than a "shabby old lecher" (556). In Dostoevsky's universe, indeed, "active" nihilism can culminate in a purely worthless greed for

sexual satisfaction.

Of course, both Stavrogin and Svidrigailov ultimately recognize their essential valuelessness. Paradoxically, their "Superman" ideology produces a crippling, personal lassitude, what Nietzsche identifies as the "passive" form of nihilism (The Will to Power 17). In Dostoevsky's world, a self-proclaimed status beyond good and evil is literally unendurable. Stavrogin and Svidrigailov have both created private nihilist hells. Suicide is their only escape. Arguably, it is Stephan Verkhovensky who delivers Dostoevsky's final indictment of "active" nihilism. In Verkhovensky's terms, man simply cannot be his own divinity, he cannot become his own "guiding idea" (The Devils 662).

In 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), Conrad charts Kurtz's nihilist philosophy to an extraordinarily parallel apotheosis. In many respects, of course, Marlow's narrative describes Kurtz's disintegration from self-ordained "Superman" to "hollow sham" (147). As with Stavrogin and Svidrigailov, crossing the boundaries of conventional morality leads to a complete and debasing fall into sensuality. Marlow, indeed, refers graphically to the "colossal scale" of Kurtz's "vile desires" (156). Quite clearly, Conrad's "Superman" beyond good and evil simply

gratifies his most "primitive emotions" (147). In Marlow's forceful assessment, his "degradation" is "incredible" (144). The narrative alludes to both Kurtz's active participation in "unspeakable rites" (118), and his "insatiable greed" for "abominable satisfactions" (151). Like Dostoevsky's nihilist "Supermen", however, Kurtz's metaphysical torment becomes increasingly clear. Though he indisputably achieves his "moment of complete knowledge", the vision is profoundly unendurable (149). As the critic Ian Watt has observed, Kurtz actively symbolizes "inner emptiness" (Conrad in the Nineteenth Century 234). In the Conradian universe, his nihilist ideology leads him directly into a void. In what is effectively a damning censure of "active" nihilism, Marlow suggests that Kurtz is entirely "hollow at the core" ('Heart of Darkness' 131). His philosophy, indeed, has transported him into a Dantean realm of mental and spiritual purgatory; Conrad's "Superman" is beset by "abominable terrors" (151). In Marlow's opinion, Kurtz has become "lost ... utterly lost" (143); in this self-determined nihilist universe, his "abject ... soul" (156) is said to "struggle blindly with itself" (145). Like Svidrigailov and Stavrogin, Kurtz finally experiences complete disillusionment. Just before his death, Marlow speaks of his "intense and hopeless despair". For Kurtz, existence has become an intolerable "horror" (149).

In the final synopsis, "active" nihilism is proscribed in both Conrad and Dostoevsky's universe. Though Marlow's intellectual and emotional response to Kurtz is profoundly complex in 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), it is valuable to isolate his account of Kurtz's actual voice. The man, Marlow acknowledges, is really "little more" than "a voice". His philosophical and ideological discourse, therefore, is of paramount importance. Significantly, Marlow characterizes Kurtz's voice, and thus his words, as "like ... [the] dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage ... simply mean, without any kind of sense" (115). Though it is always dangerous to interpret Marlow's statements as valid authorial opinion, there can be little doubt that his narrative does represent Conrad's final, damning evaluation of nihilism's "Superman" philosophy. Dostoevsky, I would argue, provides a parallel, though more directly articulated overview. In his draft notebooks to Crime and Punishment (1866), he identifies "active" nihilism as "the lackeydom of thought" (634). Outlining his initial ideas for the novel in an 1865 letter to M.N. Katkov, he similarly alludes to Raskolnikov's "half-baked" thinking ('Introduction', Crime and Punishment, trans. Magarshack 12). The critic Joseph Frank, indeed, insists that Dostoevsky's principal artistic purpose in Crime and Punishment (1866) was to demolish nihilist ideology. The



novel, Frank argues, must be interpreted as a warning against what Dostoevsky considered to be a "misshapen birth" of ideas. Quite simply, the author's intention was "to abort ["active" nihilism's] existence" (Through the Russian Prism 123). Though Frank's thesis is convincing, it reveals a significant contradiction in both Dostoevsky and Conrad's writing. As with Kurtz, Dostoevsky's compassionate realization of Raskolnikov tends to eclipse this proposed ideological aim. Though Dostoevsky and Conrad certainly expose their protagonists' radically unacceptable beliefs, Raskolnikov, Kurtz, and even Stavrogin, are major tragic characters. Like Milton's Satan in Paradise Lost (1667), Conrad and Dostoevsky's demonic ideologists prove to be perversely empathetic figures. In an important sense, 'Heart of Darkness' (1899) and Crime and Punishment (1866) are unwittingly powerful proclamations of nihilistic individualism. That critics have questioned the credibility of Raskolnikov's final spiritual rebirth, for example, is a significant indication of Dostoevsky's failure to wholly refute nihilism's "Superman" credo. Marlow's consistently ambivalent response to Kurtz, his partial veneration of Conrad's "remarkable man", similarly prohibits any full condemnation of "active" nihilist thinking ('Heart of Darkness' 150). Though Conrad and Dostoevsky's texts hardly celebrate the new "Superman" - as Nietzsche's Thus Spoke

Zarathustra (1885) does - their novels certainly communicate, even promote, that sense of "outrageous and seductive daring" which Raskolnikov identifies in the creed (Crime and Punishment 35). From this interpretive perspective, 'Heart of Darkness' (1899) and Crime and Punishment (1866) do not entirely dethrone their respective nihilist thinkers. The illicit ideas, the impermissible longings associated with "active" nihilism, continue to be dangerously potent, dangerously intoxicating, in both Conrad and Dostoevsky's worlds.

At this stage in the debate, it is necessary to turn briefly to what Nietzsche calls the "passive" form of nihilism, the nihilism characterized by a complete "recession ... of the spirit" (The Will to Power 17). As I have indicated, Dostoevsky's foremost "Supermen" - Stavrogin and Svidrigailov - eventually arrive at this bleak ideological impasse. In the Dostoevskyan universe, "passive" nihilism becomes the inevitable consequence of a self-proclaimed man-God status. In The Will to Power (1901), Nietzsche identifies "passive" nihilism as a peculiarly characteristic feature of contemporary European consciousness. It is, he claims, a widespread "psychological state" (12) - it is a "sign of the modern age" (16). Nineteenth century European man's profound loss of religious faith has effectively

destroyed all "comprehensive ... concept[s] of 'aim', 'unity' or ... 'truth'". In Nietzsche's analysis, mankind lives in a new and hostile environment, a metaphysical realm where existence itself has no obvious "goal or end". The "passive" nihilist, he argues, "lacks any reason for convincing [himself] ... that there is a true world" (13) (Nietzsche's emphasis). In his late works, it must be stressed, Nietzsche sees this crippling form of nihilism as the first, but vital stage, in modern European man's ideological re-education. The profound "pessimism" of "passive" nihilism, he writes in 1887, is an essential "preliminary" (11). As the creed, by definition, involves abandoning existing values, it can lead directly to man's future adoption of a universal "Superman" philosophy (56 et.al.). In Nietzsche's early works, however, this positive interpretation of nihilism is notably absent. Indeed in Daybreak (1881) and The Gay Science (1882), Nietzsche's core philosophical interpretation of the world is fundamentally that of a "passive" nihilist thinker. In this particular connection, it becomes valuable to reconsider Conrad's own vision of futility in a work like The Secret Agent (1907). Writing as early as 1926, the Polish critic Stefan Napulski spoke of "the despair lurking behind [Conrad's] ... truly nihilistic books ('Introduction', Oxford World Classics ed. xi). A recognizably Nietzschean form of "passive" nihilism,

I would argue, can be identified not only in The Secret Agent (1907) - it is also evident in Conrad's celebrated letters to R.B. Cunninghame Graham.

In The Secret Agent (1907), indeed, it is the Professor who effectively summarizes the mood of "passive" nihilism that undercuts all human endeavour in the novel. In his final conversation with Ossipon, he declares:

'All passion is lost now. The world is mediocre, limp, without force'. (Dent ed. 309)

This universal sense of spiritual paralysis manifests itself in Conrad's principal character. Verloc, the narrator relates, appears to be "the victim of a philosophical unbelief in the effectiveness of every human effort". His profound domestic lassitude, his abstention from "every superfluous exertion", indicates far more than a simple, comic idleness (12). Verloc, indeed, symbolizes a world in complete stasis. He exemplifies a mankind that has effectively lost its guiding idea, and has no valid 'raison d'etre'. Early in The Secret Agent (1907), the narrative refers significantly to the "air of unfathomable indifference" (5), the "air of moral nihilism" (13), that presides over Conrad's fictional world. It is vital, of course, to recognize the importance of the narrator in creating this vision of "passive" nihilism. Indeed Conrad's

ironic narrative devalues the significance, even the fundamental validity, of all human emotions and actions. Verloc's death, for instance, is described in strikingly inappropriate terms; the narrative uses the word "leisurely" no less than six times in detailing Verloc's gruesome murder (262). Although Conrad insisted that "there was no perverse intention, no secret scorn for the natural sensibilities of mankind at the bottom of ... [his] impulses", it is difficult to defend his claim ('Author's Note' xxxii). Edward Said, to take just one example, refers persuasively to the deliberate, "cutting sarcasm" of Conrad's narrative technique (66). It is particularly hard to crush a suspicion that Conrad's aim in The Secret Agent (1907) is to expose the basic futility, the basic purposelessness, of all human endeavour. Despite his compassionate treatment of Winnie Verloc, Conrad's novel - to use his own words - "makes a grisly skeleton" ('Author's Note' xxxix). It offers, I would claim, an accurate fictional realization of Nietzsche's whole concept of "passive" nihilism. In essence, The Secret Agent (1907) presents a universe where everything has lost its fundamental "value, [and] seems 'meaningless'" (The Will to Power 10-11).

This same bleak vision, of course, informs Conrad's important correspondence to Cunninghame Graham. In a famous

1897 letter, Conrad refers to the world as "a machine", an "infamous thing" that has "evolved itself out of chaos and scraps of iron" (Watts 56). The complex society which has developed on this "merry planet" (57), he writes, is simply "a tragic accident". Man's world may appear to "knit" together, but it is an entirely false unity, a random and meaningless cohesion (56). In Conrad's opinion, "existence" (57) is a "horrible" (56) and "remorseless process" (my emphasis). The deepest human emotions, he argues, have a cruel, and wholly illusory significance. In the broadest metaphysical sense, he tells Graham, "nothing matters" (57). In an 1899 letter, Conrad acknowledges that his most private philosophy advocates "un desespoir plus sombre que la nuit" [a hopelessness darker than night] (117). The novelist's unrelenting "passive" nihilism, indeed, is arguably communicated by Marlow in a late passage in 'Heart of Darkness' (1899). For Conrad's narrator, life itself is ultimately a "droll thing", "an arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose" (150).

A profound philosophical bond becomes evident if we compare Conrad's important statements to similar passages in Nietzsche's early writing. In Human, All Too Human (1878), Nietzsche argues that Western man and his society is "worthy of Homeric laughter: it appeared to be so much, indeed

everything, and [it] is actually empty, that is to say empty of meaning" (Quoted in A Nietzsche Reader 198). The ostensible order, the "apparent permanence" of human existence, he reflects in The Gay Science (1882), is no more than an "aesthetic" fiction (Quoted in A Nietzsche Reader 201):

Let us beware ... [Nietzsche warns] of believing the universe is a machine; it is certainly not constructed so as to perform some operation, we do it far too great honour with the word. (200)

Though Nietzsche's "passive" nihilism certainly goes further than Conrad's philosophy, his synopsis strikingly reproduces the tone, the imagery, even the diction, of Conrad's 1897 letter. Both writers, furthermore, develop their respective "passive" nihilist visions using a similar, quasi-cosmological language. In The Gay Science (1882), Nietzsche insists that European man is "straying ... through an infinite nothing" - he now feels the "breath of empty space" in a universe that is "becom[ing] colder" (Quoted in A Nietzsche Reader 203). Conrad's early letters to Graham make essentially the same observations. Abandoned on this "vile ball" (Watts 87) called the earth, mankind must ultimately "perish" in a chill, interstellar wilderness. The "end", Conrad suggests melodramatically, will be "cold, darkness and silence" (65). Though Nietzsche's direct influence on

Conrad remains a matter of intense critical speculation, these striking parallels do indicate an important form of ideological unity. Nietzsche's early texts, like Conrad's letters to Graham, reflect both authors' profound internalization of Arthur Schopenhauer's (1788-1860) pessimistic philosophy. As one critic suggests, Conrad and Nietzsche can be validly claimed to share a common cultural and ideological heritage (Said 66). Zdzislaw Najder, in a simplistic but pertinent evaluation of The World as Will and Idea (1818), makes reference to Schopenhauer's overwhelming "scepticism", his rooted "cynicism... [and] indifference". In essential details, Najder proposes, his core ideology proclaims the true "meaninglessness of everything" (Joseph Conrad : A Chronicle 221-2). In Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1885), Nietzsche satirizes Schopenhauer as the mournful Prophet, the "sighing sackcloth" his protagonist encounters on his travels (256). Significantly, however, Zarathustra admits that he was formally this man's most committed "disciple" (156). Only now, as "Superman", can he overcome the Prophet's fatal "night-shade wisdom". The scale of Zarathustra's attack on the Prophet, of course, provides an accurate measure of the impact of Schopenhauer's thinking on the young Nietzsche. Indeed in Part Two of Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1885), Nietzsche's protagonist succumbs momentarily to the Prophet's still powerful, rudimentary



form of "passive" nihilism, his "death-intoxicated sadness" which insists, "All is vain!" (208)

Many critics, of course, have identified Schopenhauer's similar influence on Conrad's writing. In his Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle (1983), Najder suggests that Conrad "was particularly prone to use Schopenhauer's phraseology", especially when he was "gloomy and downhearted" (220). Though this biographical detail is appealing, F.R. Karl provides a more trenchant analysis. In the German philosopher's writing, Karl claims, Conrad found vitally important "metaphors for his own sense of doom" (Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives 194). The formative impact of Schopenhauer's ideology on Conrad is recorded by his colleague and close friend, John Galsworthy (1867-1933). In Castles in Spain and Other Screeds (1927), Galsworthy recalls that, "Of philosophy", Conrad "had read a great good deal. Schopenhauer used to give him satisfaction twenty years and more ago" (91). In this particular respect, Conrad's choice of a quotation from the Spanish playwright Calderon (1600-1681) for his epigraph to An Outcast of the Islands (1896) is particularly revealing. The couplet, which translates as, "man's greatest offence/ Is that he has been born", certainly conveys the despairing mood of Conrad's own "passive" nihilism. Significantly, this same quotation also

appears in Schopenhauer's The World as Will and Idea (1818), where the author uses it to support his vision of the essential misery and futility of the human predicament (Watt, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century 350). As with Nietzsche, indeed, Conrad's fundamental world-picture is radically influenced by Schopenhaueran philosophy, to the extent where it forges an important ideological bond between both writers' worlds.

This mutual immersion in Schopenhauer and the European philosophy of the early nineteenth century partly explains another parallel between Conrad and Nietzsche's writing. As in The Will to Power (1901), Conrad instinctively links his "passive" nihilist vision to the wider collapse of religious faith across Europe. Writing to Graham in 1898, indeed, Conrad describes his desperate sense of human valuelessness in a language that strongly recalls Matthew Arnold's seminal poem, 'Dover Beach' (1851). In this modern, nihilist wilderness, Conrad laments, "faith is [now] a myth and beliefs shift like mists on the shore ... we [no longer] know ... where God is" (Watts 65). Though Dostoevsky excoriates such a "passive" nihilist interpretation of the world, his writing certainly examines the inter-relationship between man's religious faith, and the alternative menace of nihilistic insignificance. In The Devils (1871), Stephan

Verkhovensky expresses Dostoevsky's fundamental conviction that Christian belief is vital to mankind's whole metaphysical well-being. Only through his religious faith can man preserve an effective 'raison d'etre'; Christianity, indeed, insulates mankind against an omnipresent, "passive" nihilist void. "The whole law of human existence", Stephan Verkhovensky exclaims:

consists merely of making it possible for every man to bow down before what is infinitely great. If man were to be deprived of the infinitely great, he would refuse to go on living, and die of despair. The infinite and immeasurable is as necessary to man as the little planet which he inhabits. (The Devils 656)

In a celebrated 1854 letter to N.A. Fonvizina, Dostoevsky continues this same, intensely personal argument. "If someone succeeded in proving to me that Christ was outside the truth", he tells Natalya Fonvizina, "and if, indeed, the truth was outside Christ, I would sooner remain with Christ than with the truth" (Selected Letters of Dostoevsky 68) (Dostoevsky's emphasis). Although the Christian debate in Dostoevsky's writing is well documented, the religious elements in Conrad's writing remain largely unexplored. Though this topic must remain outside the parameters of my present thesis, it is certainly a field that warrants

further extensive critical investigation.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been to prove that a significant bond exists between the literary, political, and ideological worlds of Conrad and Dostoevsky. In my first chapter, I investigated the cultural and ethical backgrounds of each writer. The existence of entrenched national and philosophical hostilities was soon established, and the evidence (both recorded and speculative) seemed to support commonly accepted critical formulae placing Conrad and Dostoevsky at opposing ends of the literary spectrum. Indeed the findings of Chapter One seemed negative and discouraging in terms of my proposed thesis. Rather than pursuing a predominantly biographical and cultural analysis, therefore, I felt that an alternative critical approach was needed to establish a significant degree of literary brotherhood. Consequently, I decided to investigate each writer's works in terms of their literary, political, and ideological content. From this new perspective, I felt that surprising unity could be shown to exist between Conrad and Dostoevsky's writing.

In my second chapter, I centred my debate on an analysis of Conrad and Dostoevsky's fundamental creative processes. Initially, this meant looking at each writer's

basic literary temperament. Such an approach, of course, involved investigating and questioning long-established critical opinion. The accepted view of Dostoevsky as a wild, 'Dionysian' writer was, I felt, both misleading and critically unsound. Conrad's established reputation as a purely 'Apollonian' artist seemed equally limited and unsatisfying. Firstly, therefore, I attempted to prove that the sort of view propagated by the Danish critic George Brandes was essentially fallacious and demanded major reconsideration. Brandes, like Henry James and many other critics before him, insisted that Dostoevsky "allowed all his writings to be printed as they flowed from his pen without revision of any kind whatever, to say nothing of recasting them" (Quoted in Krag 15). In my brief analysis of Book One of The Idiot (1869), I attempted to establish the view that Dostoevsky is, in the words of one discriminating critic, a "very deliberate artist" (Krag 15). In my debate on Conrad's literary temperament, I focused my argument on important statements recorded in his essays and correspondence. I uncovered many passages in which Conrad refers to the frenetic superhuman struggles that are necessary for the creation of a truly satisfying literary image. Such references strongly suggested that Conrad's creative temperament might be far from 'Apollonian' in character. These rudimentary findings, indeed, tended to

draw Conrad and Dostoevsky's literary worlds into closer proximity. From this new vantage point, I proceeded to look in greater detail at each writer's actual creative methods and processes.

In the first instance, I investigated Conrad and Dostoevsky's respective conceptions of reality itself. I endeavoured to prove that Dostoevsky's celebrated interpretation of a 'fantastic' reality could be significantly related to Conrad's primary creative methods and vision. In Chapter Three, I attempted to apply Bakhtin's critical concept of 'polyphony' to Conrad's literary world. Having debated Bakhtin's innovative interpretation of Dostoevsky's 'polyphonic' creative process, I tried to show how the critic's analysis could be validly extended to a Conradian context. Through a detailed analysis of Lord Jim (1900), I aimed to prove that Conrad's novel (in common with many of Dostoevsky's works) employed a fundamentally 'polyphonic' method and structure. By using this Bakhtinian framework, I sought to establish the existence of significant links between Conrad and Dostoevsky's primary creative processes.

Chapter Four continued to argue for this same literary and creative parallel, but addressed the issue from an

entirely different critical perspective. Here I sought to investigate the complex generic structure of Conrad and Dostoevsky's fictional works. Initially, I identified the existence of similar but widely disparate literary genres co-existing in each writer's novels and stories. As further research showed that many critics had already debated the important role of 'adventure', 'thriller', 'romance', and 'detective' elements in Conrad and Dostoevsky's work, I decided to focus my argument on one relatively unexplored region. I concentrated, therefore, on each writer's surprisingly parallel realization of the 'Gothic' form in their fiction. With this analysis, I concluded my investigation of parallels existing between Conrad and Dostoevsky's literary and creative worlds.

In Chapters Five and Six, I turned to the ideological content of each writer's work. My argument centred on Conrad and Dostoevsky's core vision of the human personality, and its essential motivating drives. In Chapter Five, I focused on each author's surprisingly parallel vision of man's insatiably materialistic spirit. Chapter Six aimed to draw a comparison between Conrad and Dostoevsky's experiences in the African Congo and Siberia, experiences later fictionalized in 'Heart of Darkness' (1899) and Notes from the House of the Dead (1860). Through a comparative analysis



of these texts, I endeavoured to expose the striking unities of Conrad and Dostoevsky's visions, their harrowing insights into mankind's quintessentially violent, carnal, and meglomaniac identity.

In Chapter Seven, I looked at Conrad and Dostoevsky's respective fictionalizations of the anarchist persona and his revolutionary cause. Through an extended analysis of The Devils (1871), The Secret Agent (1907), and Under Western Eyes (1911), I sought to identify a common political and emotional response to the anarchist movement, its representatives, methods, and aims. My ambition was to prove the existence of major political and ideological ties between Conrad and Dostoevsky's mature fictional worlds. Chapter Eight considered the related subject of nihilism, and its significant place in each author's work. Again I strove to establish links between Conrad and Dostoevsky's vision of the nihilist persona, and their realization of his ultimately destructive credo. This involved a comparative analysis of both writers' central nihilist thinkers, Raskolnikov, Svidrigailov, Stavrogin, and Kurtz. My debate also included an investigation of the nihilist ideology of Friedrich Nietzsche, most particularly the ethos of his fictional 'Superman', Zarathustra. Nietzsche's work, I felt, acted as a major ideological bridge between Conrad and

Dostoevsky's world, underlining the profound unities of thought and vision existing in their respective fictional worlds.

In a thesis of this scope, the limitations placed on time and space must necessarily result in a number of important omissions. Though I have attempted to cover all the major areas of critical interest, one significant omission deserves highlighting here, if only to justify the reason I have not explored the issue further. Many critics, of course, have pointed to the striking similarities between Conrad's Under Western Eyes (1911) and Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment (1866). F.R. Karl, for example, observes that

although we have no direct proof Conrad was familiar with the Dostoevsky novel, the first segment of his book [Under Western Eyes (1911)] does seem closely modelled on Crime and Punishment. (Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives 678)

Like many other critics, Karl goes on to identify a number of basic but fundamental unities between Conrad and Dostoevsky's texts. He observes:

[T]he Mikulin-Razumov and the General-Razumov interviews can be compared to the Porfiry-Raskolnikov interviews in Crime and Punishment; Razumov's mental playing with his secret is

similar to Raskolnikov's temptation to divulge his  
 crime; the need for spiritual cleansing is common  
 to both 'sinners'; the tensions of a pathological  
 condition effect the sanity of both men; and there  
 finally remains the fact ... that both Razumov and  
 Raskolnikov consider themselves superior to other  
 men and destined for some calling in which their  
 worth will be realized. Each tries to conduct  
 himself apart from the solidarity of mankind, and  
 each as a result has part of himself destroyed.  
 (678-9)

Though Karl's admirably succinct observations are pertinent  
 and provocative, the subject demands, I feel, a far more  
 rigorous analysis. Indeed I have not attempted to  
 incorporate this issue into my study because the results of  
 a thorough critical survey would seem to demand the space of  
 a full-length thesis. Furthermore, to investigate not simply  
 thematic, but linguistic, unities between these two novels,  
 it would seem essential to consider Dostoevsky's text in its  
 original Russian. For these reasons, I decided eliminate any  
 comparative discussion of Crime and Punishment (1866) and  
Under Western Eyes (1911) from my thesis.

Despite such an omission, my research has uncovered too  
 many major and unsuspected links between Conrad and

Dostoevsky's worlds to ignore the existence of a significant and surprising brotherhood. In this thesis, I hope to have convinced the reader that long-standing critical judgements segregating these writers' worlds may well be of limited value. It is time, I feel, to revise established critical opinion, and finally grant Conrad and Dostoevsky their deserved literary and ideological accord.

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