DOSTOYEVSKY: A RESOURCE FOR
MODERN YOUTH

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DOSTOYEVSKY: A RESOURCE FOR MODERN YOUTH

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Many of the primary characters in Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoyevsky's major fiction are young people struggling to understand and survive in the world in which they live. Dostoyevsky examines these youths, their thoughts, emotions, problems, and philosophies, presenting the reader with a unique and penetrating view of the interaction of these young people with their society. As E. M. Forster says, however, "In Dostoyevsky the characters and the situations always stand for more than themselves; infinity attends them; though yet they remain individuals they expand to embrace it and summon it to embrace them..." ¹ In a sense Dostoyevsky's characters are all of us; ² "they convey to us a sensation that is partly physical—the sensation of sinking into a translucent globe and seeing our experience floating far above us on its surface, tiny, remote, yet ours." ³

Forster's praise is representative of the impact that Dostoyevsky's works have had upon the modern novel. Steinberg

²Ibid., p. 133.
³Ibid., p. 134.
states that "the modern philosophical novel may be claimed as his [Dostoyevsky's] progeny," and there is little, if any, room for denial that Dostoyevsky's works are great and universal creations. Indeed, Stanislaw Mackiewicz states that "Dostoyevsky's genius ranks with that of Shakespeare, Voltaire, and Cervantes." And Dostoyevsky's fame and importance is certainly indicated by Edward Wasiolek, who says that "we cannot neglect Dostoyevsky's ideas." Ernest J. Simmons states that Tolstoy considered Dostoyevsky's works among the best of their time, and Simmons, in his critical work Dostoyevsky, constantly refers to Dostoyevsky as a great artist.

Yet despite Dostoyevsky's literary significance and the almost universal recognition of the worth of his works, there is one area in which he is neglected; rarely does a high school or junior college curriculum include the study of his works. For example, the new Insight series of high school texts recently published by Noble and Noble, which are based on the Carnegie Curriculum Study Center's Project English,

7Ernest J. Simmons, Dostoyevsky (New York, 1940), p. xi.
contain works by many European authors, but Dostoyevsky is not among them. One might easily challenge Dostoyevsky's omission from study on the high school and junior college levels, however, because it seems logical that a study of his works on these levels might be most meaningful, appropriate, and relevant to the life of the student.

When one considers Dostoyevsky's characters, philosophies, and subject matter, it does appear logical that his works would be relevant and meaningful to young people, and the opinion that their complexity and difficulty must result in their omission seems ill-founded. Certainly the works are complex; and the instructor who uses them should expect his students to have some difficulty in reading them, especially in such details as Russian names, but first encounters with many authors' works are difficult—Shakespeare's, for example. Difficulty hardly seems an acceptable reason for not using a particular literary selection; indeed, the reverse could well be argued when one considers such evidence as that presented by Maslow in his studies on motivation. Maslow states that man is self-actualizing, a statement which can be interpreted in practical application to mean that man is internally motivated to be all that he is capable of being and that difficulty

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Further, Maslow lists curiosity and the need to know as internal motivations which would also tend to limit the importance of difficulty in selecting materials.

The challenge of reading Dostoyevsky is not so great as to be overwhelming for the average high school or junior college student, and the rewards to be gained from a study of his works make their challenge worthwhile. For example, if a curriculum is seeking relevancy, the characters in Dostoyevsky's major works are primarily young adults, most being under thirty. In *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *The Possessed*, and *The Brothers Karamozov*, the protagonists are all young adults, and the second half of *Notes from the Underground* is primarily concerned with the youth of the narrator. Another work, *The Insulted and the Injured*, a story of young love, is a precursor of the major works, but worthy of consideration for study. The fact that these six novels have as their primary characters young people, young adults just facing life and the world, indicates that the young reader would find in them much with which he could identify.

Further, and even more importantly, these young people, these creations of Dostoyevsky, are not only easily identified with by young adults because of their age but because

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they have the same problems, dreams, and struggles that today's youth are faced with. Raskolnikov is a university student plagued with financial problems, self-doubts, and ambitions, both for financial and intellectual success and recognition. Myshkin is an idealist carried to extreme limits, a youth plagued with the problems of maintaining his ideals and values in a world that does not share them. The underground man is baffled by the problem of adapting himself to his society, of finding his niche and fitting into it while maintaining his identity and freedom. In The Possessed, revolt, rebellion, the search for meaning and integrity in life, and the young adults' need to understand and be accepted by their society are all examined. The characters in The Insulted and the Injured are involved with the problems of young people in love and the problems attending a complicated love triangle. The Brothers Karamazov, the culmination of Dostoyevsky's work, involves all of the issues mentioned above: Ivan is an intellectual, confused and in revolt; Dmitri is an intense and passionate young adult, in love and in revolt; and Alyosha is the young man who seeks his place in life, his niche in which he can be true to himself and his God.

Dostoyevsky's novels, therefore, are on subjects which one would logically expect young adults to find appealing, and, therefore, logically, should be taught. There are, however, a number of problems attending their teaching. Which
of Dostoyevsky's works should be used, for example, and what materials in those works selected should one consider most necessary for emphasis in the actual teaching of the works? The answer to the first question is implied above: Crime and Punishment, The Possessed, The Idiot, The Insulted and the Injured, Notes from the Underground, and The Brothers Karamazov are about young people and the subjects with which young people are concerned. These works also represent Dostoyevsky's major and minor fiction, The Insulted and the Injured and Notes from the Underground being less important as great artistic creations than the others, which represent the best of Dostoyevsky's work.

The second question, i.e., what material in Dostoyevsky's works should one consider most necessary for emphasis in the actual curriculum and why, can be answered by the instructor only, for only the instructor can determine precisely what material should be emphasized in his classroom, although very often he needs help in determining just what material to use, when, and how. This thesis, then, may be considered a resource, a source from which the high school or junior college instructor may draw suggestions for selecting his texts and determining just what in those texts he should direct his students' attention to. Four standard components relevant to the study of any novel will be considered. Chapter Two will deal with biographical data, but only those data which apply to
Dostoyevsky as a young man, those data from his youth which might be included in a study of his works because they concern influences upon him and give some insight into his selection and treatment of materials. Chapter Three deals with Dostoyevsky's plots and the elements of plot in his work which the teacher preparing to use his works should consider, especially crisis and mystery. Chapter Four deals with Dostoyevsky's characters and his philosophies and themes. The chapter is divided into sections, each section dealing with a specific type of character and philosophy because Dostoyevsky's philosophies are embodied in his characters. Each major philosophy and the characters exemplifying it are grouped together and subtitles are used in keeping with the resource concept to make the unit more usable. The first order subtitles identify the group, and the second order subtitles identify specific characters. For the user's convenience the subtitles are listed in the table of contents.
CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY

In considering Dostoyevsky's personal background two interrelated factors will determine what biographical material is included. First, material is included which might help one understand Dostoyevsky's major works; second, material is included which might help the younger student identify with Dostoyevsky the man and thereby provide incentive for further study of his works. Basically, the material included covers Dostoyevsky's youth up to the time of his spiritual rebirth in prison.

Dostoyevsky was born in the Parish of Saint Peter and Paul at Moscow, October 30, 1821, the second son in a family of nine.\(^1\) His father, Michail Andreyevitch Dostoyevsky, was a staff-doctor at the military hospital in Moscow,\(^2\) and his mother was Maria Timofeevna Nechaeva.\(^3\) Dostoyevsky's parents were members of the intelligentsia and the landowning class\(^4\) in a Russia in which class distinctions were strongly marked.

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\(^3\)Sajkovic, p. 48.
\(^4\)Ibid.
and could be powerful determining factors in a novelist's career. The social standing of Dostoyevsky's family was dubious, however, as indicated by his father's constant striving for respectability and by the fact that "the family had no pretentions to culture." The Dostoyevskys were not wealthy, and might have been considered poor by the standards of the times. The family, nine members, lived in a two-room house along with their seven servants, and in those days of serfdom, when people were chattel, for a member of their class to have only seven servants was to be in a state of near penury.

Although Dostoyevsky's family was not highly cultured and their social standing was suspect, education was emphasized. In the Russian social system one had to be an officer or official to be a nobleman, and consequently, for Dostoyevsky the method of securing his social position was to enter the engineering college and become an officer. The choice was made for Dostoyevsky by his father; both he and Michail, his older brother, were to go to Petersburg to the Army Engineering College. The boys were appalled at the choice, as are young intellectuals and rebels of today whose parents make decisions

5 Ernest J. Simmons, Dostoyevsky (New York, 1940), p. 5.
6 Ibid., p. 4.
7 Mackiewicz, p. 15.
8 Ibid., pp. 13, 15.
9 Mackiewicz, p. 18.
for them, but they accepted it, for they were entirely dependent upon their father, who had so confined their boyhood with strict discipline that they had never had any money of their own and had no idea how they might make their own way in the world.11

Simmons states that "before he [Dostoyevsky] entered the engineering school, his education had been pitifully inadequate."12 Before he had learned to read, his mother read to him The Lives of the Saints, and she taught him to read in a collection of Bible stories.13 Dostoyevsky read Pushkin, Karamzin's History, and a few popular romantic writers, but most of the books that his father selected for his instruction were religious.14 Certainly Dostoyevsky’s early education did not compare with the polished existence which was offered to the more affluent and socially acceptable of his times,15 and certainly one can see many young rebels today who also had such early educations.

Dostoyevsky's early childhood, on the whole, seems to have been sad and unpleasant.16 Biographers differ about some of the facets of his early life and family history, but they all seem to agree that his father was unbearable and greatly contributed to making Dostoyevsky's youth unhappy. Mackiewicz.

11 Ibid. 12 Simmons, p. 4. 13 Magarshack, p. 26. 14 Simmons, p. 4. 15 Ibid. 16 Mackiewicz, p. 19.
states that Dostoyevsky's father was a drunkard, profligate, and tyrant.\textsuperscript{17} The children feared their father's uncontrollable temper, and although he never beat them,\textsuperscript{18} he did make their lives miserable. He was very much concerned with "proper" behavior, and such frivolities as ball games were forbidden as improper.\textsuperscript{19} The cramped conditions of the home made the situation almost unbearable,\textsuperscript{20} and, as is the case today with many young rebels, Dostoyevsky was provided many parental examples to rebel against.

Two examples of the harsh discipline and tyrannical nature of the father are often cited. When the boys were preparing to go to the engineering school, they were given Latin lessons at home by their father. The pupils did not sit down during these lessons or even dare to lean. The lessons often lasted an hour or longer, and the boys were terribly afraid of them because their father was strict, impatient, and short-tempered; at the slightest error he lost his temper and began shouting, calling them names such as blockhead.\textsuperscript{21} In the summer Dostoyevsky's father took a nap after the noon meal. Absolute silence was maintained during his nap, and when the flies were bad, one of the boys had to sit and keep

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 16
\textsuperscript{18}Magarshack, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., p. 27.
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., p. 17.
\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., pp. 15-16.
the flies from awakening him, all the time being absolutely silent and as still as possible themselves to keep from awakening him.\textsuperscript{22}

Dostoyevsky's mother died of tuberculosis in February of 1837; Dostoyevsky was sixteen.\textsuperscript{23} News of Pushkin's death arrived shortly after the funeral of his mother, and this news added to Dostoyevsky's grief, for Pushkin had become his hero.\textsuperscript{24} In the spring of the same year Dostoyevsky became ill and his voice, affected by the illness, was to have a subdued guttural tone ever after,\textsuperscript{25} which undoubtedly added to the problems that Dostoyevsky had in getting along with his classmates in the engineering college.

In May, 1837, Dostoyevsky and his brother Michail went to St. Petersburg to enter the Army Engineering College.\textsuperscript{26} They were to enter the preparatory school of Koronad Kostomorov to prepare for the entrance exams to the college.\textsuperscript{27} On the way they witnessed a scene at a posting station which was to remain with Dostoyevsky all his life, and which he considered his first personal insult.\textsuperscript{28} A government courier whom they

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 16.  \textsuperscript{23}Mackiewicz, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{24}Magarshack, p. 37.  \textsuperscript{25}Mackiewicz, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{27}Magarshack, p. 43.  \textsuperscript{28}Ibid., p. 40.
passed on their journey had been drinking and began to beat the driver of his carriage. The coachman in turn began to whip the horses; the event was considered a common occurrence, but Magarshack describes this incident as bringing Dostoyevsky "face to face with the terrible realities of Russian life," and Wasiolel quotes Dostoyevsky in The Diary of a Writer as saying, "This disgusting picture remained in my memory for the rest of my life."

On January 16, 1838, Dostoyevsky officially entered the engineering college, but the event was somewhat marred by the fact that Michail had failed to gain entrance to the school and was to go to Reval. The initial disappointment was but a prelude to the unhappiness that marked Dostoyevsky's term in the college. Here Dostoyevsky felt isolated from the other students, because he was silent, thoughtful, disciplined, and obedient. Simmons states that while in the college Dostoyevsky "received little else besides humiliating hazing, scientific studies, and endless dull drill, all of which he hated," and which too often describes the schooling against which modern youths rebel. The one good aspect of the school

\[29\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 41.\]
\[30\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 40.\]
\[31\text{Wasiolek, } p. \ 215.\]
\[32\text{Ibid.}\]
\[33\text{Mackiewicz, } p. \ 22.\]
\[34\text{Ibid.}\]
\[35\text{Simmons, pp. } 5-6.\]
was that books were available, and Dostoyevsky plunged into reading a wide variety, forming his life-long habit of reading half the night and taking multitudinous notes.36

Dostoyevsky's school days were very difficult ones. The isolation which he felt appears to have been real, for his schoolmates were derisive and spiteful of him, and he disliked them intensely, feeling them to be coarse and considering them his inferiors.37 Further, Dostoyevsky disliked military discipline, and bad marks in military subjects failed him his first year, keeping him in the same grade for another year.38 He seems to have made no friends in school and had teachers that he neither liked nor considered satisfactory.39

Financial problems also began to be troublesome to Dostoyevsky during his days in school. His father, who grudgingly and partially supported him, seems to have grown worse after the death of his wife and contributed as little as possible.40 In June, 1839, he was murdered at his small country estate by the peasants there, whom he had tyrannized and flogged mercilessly.41 In August, 1843, Dostoyevsky graduated from college and was appointed to work in the engineering department of the Ministry of War.42

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36 Ibid. 37 Magarshack, pp. 45-46. 38 Ibid., p. 48. 39 Ibid., p. 34. 40 Sajkovic, p. 54. 41 Wasiolek, p. 216. 42 Sajkovic, p. 55.
In 1844, one year after his graduation, Dostoyevsky obtained his longed-for release from the army and began to write as a career. He had long desired his release and had the intention of devoting himself to "solving the mystery of man," an idealism which parallels that of many modern young adults. His financial problems, always troublesome, were increased by his lack of employment, but somehow he managed. His debts grew and his income from his inheritance did not begin to cover his extravagances; once he received a thousand rubles from the estate and by the following day was again broke. The publication of Poor Folk in 1846 relieved his needs for a while, however. At this point Dostoyevsky strongly resembled those whom many call "hippies" and "free souls" today, living from day to day and considering only his ideals as important.

The publication of Poor Folk also gave Dostoyevsky the needed prestige and incentive to continue writing. The novel was accepted enthusiastically, and the praise of Belinsky, a prominent Russian critic of the times, launched the youthful writer on his career. All was not smooth going, however, for Dostoyevsky, who seems always to have had trouble getting

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43 Mackiewicz, p. 23.  
44 Magarshack, p. 52.  
45 Mackiewicz, p. 23.  
46 Sajkovic, p. 55.  
47 Simmons, p. 11.
along with others, was pushed into a society in which he did not belong. He was shy and awkward in behavior and ill at ease in the company of the elect, who fawned on him and sought the attention of the youthful genius. His illusions of social success quickly vanished, for his domain was not the glittering salons and impressive homes of the wealthy but the streets, slums, and filthy corners of the city where he observed the people who fill his works.  

Belinsky and his followers, considering him to hold similar views to theirs, had, no doubt, infected Dostoyevsky with the virus of social reform, and by 1847 he was attending the meetings of the Petrashevsky Circle. This group was an organization of liberals who met each Friday and discussed literature, the evils of poverty, abuses in matters of church and state, the peasant question, and "above all, Utopian schemes for the regeneration of society." It is not clear whether Dostoyevsky really identified with the concepts and goals of the group, but it is fact that "in Dostoyevsky's lifetime, and for generations before that, problems of religion, politics, and social thought were vivid realities to the majority of thinking people in Russia, for such problems had been thrust upon them by a despotic government and a reactionary church."  

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49 Simmons, pp. 50-51.  
50 Mackiewicz, pp. 45-46.  
51 Simmons, p. 48.
Dostoyevsky was also a member of the Durov Circle, which was made up of the hottest heads of the members of the Petrashevsky Circle, and which had as its purpose the promotion of revolutionary action to free the serfs; he was active in this group and was apparently very serious about his part in it.\(^2\) When many members of these groups, including Dostoyevsky, were arrested in April, 1849, Dostoyevsky apparently accepted that he was guilty; he had seen many abuses and had joined a revolutionary society to remedy those abuses by illegal tactics, and he never intimated that he felt his punishment for those activities to be unjustified.\(^3\) He was a youthful idealist and a rebel.

Nicholas I had been notoriously harsh in handling political crimes, and all of the offenders were sentenced to be shot.\(^4\) December 22, 1849, in the Semenov Square in Petersburg, the group was prepared for execution; a priest came and asked them to repent their sins, swords were broken over the heads of nobles, symbolically depriving them of nobility, and they were tied to stakes and had hoods placed over their heads. The commands of execution were given, but then were not carried out. All were given lighter sentences, Dostoyevsky receiving four years penal servitude and degradation to the ranks as a

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 51 and 53.  
\(^3\)Ibid., pp. 54 and 56.  
\(^4\)Ibid., p. 55.
common soldier. On Christmas Day, 1847, Dostoyevsky was sent to Siberia.  

The four years which Dostoyevsky spent in prison seem to have influenced him in only two areas—religion and his attitude toward the peasant. While he was in prison the only book allowed Dostoyevsky was the New Testament, which he read eagerly and which seems to have reaffirmed his religious beliefs; he rediscovered Christ and took the support offered by religion eagerly. The people around him in prison were primarily the poor and suffering about whom he had already written and, as he looked at them and saw their suffering and persecution, he came to the conclusion that Christianity was their one hope. He felt that only Christ could raise the sinner and only Christ held promise for a new life.

Dostoyevsky's youth was a time of rebellion and growth. He experimented with many of the ideas and concepts that he was to dramatize later in his works, and the convincing realism with which he portrays those ideas and concepts indicates his experiences with and understanding of the problems that they present. The experiences of his youth were similar to those which young people experience today in that he rebelled as they rebel, held many concepts that they hold, and suffered many trials and problems that are suffered by today's youth.

55Mackiewicz, pp. 37-40.  56Simmons, p. 59.
His works reflect the knowledge that he gained from his youthful days and should therefore be quite appropriate on the high school and junior college level.
CHAPTER III

DOSTOYEVSKY'S PLOTS

Detailed study and complicated analysis of plot are hardly suitable to the classroom occupied by high school or first or second year college students, if for no other reasons, because of lack of background and interest. There are, however, in every different work varying aspects of plot which the teacher must understand in order successfully to teach the particular work being used, and these aspects of plot are definitely important in any study of Dostoyevsky. This chapter will not deal with complicated plot analysis of Dostoyevsky's works, then, but with some factors of plot in those works which seem to have a direct bearing on the way that these novels might be taught. Several factors require consideration, primarily plot movement and Dostoyevsky's use of crisis and its implications for such classroom considerations as motivation and classroom discussion.

Dostoyevsky's plots might be said to move with the speed of the reader's ability to perceive just what Dostoyevsky is trying to do and say. This seems a rather tenuous statement, at best; however, it is an accurate one. Because the novels are primarily concerned with the mental actions of the
characters, i.e., their very souls, the physical action is almost unimportant, serving only as a means of entrance into the mental reactions of the characters to physical stimuli. The objection to Dostoyevsky's novels, that they move too slowly and become tedious, is not really a valid one, then, because the speed of the physical action is not an indication of the movement of the plot. The plot actually moves on the mental level of the characters and often progresses at such blinding speed that readers overlook the real suspense and mystery involved. The concept is more readily seen when one considers J. W. Beach's comment that Raskolnikov is the center of attention and interest in Crime and Punishment for the entire novel, and is actually present in approximately eighty-five per cent of the work.¹ Beach states that "the longer the author keeps to a single center of interest, the more it makes for drama."²

One would thus expect Crime and Punishment to be a highly dramatic work, and it is, but not in the expected manner, not physically. For example, one might consider the opening scene in Crime and Punishment, the scene in which Raskolnikov goes to the old pawn broker in a rehearsal of his planned murder. He intends to murder the old woman, to

²Ibid.
split her skull with an axe and rob her, but the reader is not actually informed of this fact until the end of the fifth chapter, almost sixty pages from the initial scene. The point is that Raskolnikov has been considering this murder for some time; through the scenes with the old woman, Marmeladov, the letter, the drunken girl, the dream, he has had this contemplated murder on his mind and influencing his actions, either subconsciously or consciously. The reader has been aware of the fact that Raskolnikov has problems, that he is agitated by some factor, but the extent of his agitation is not recognized until its cause is clear. Consequently, although tension is created by the mystery and suspense involved with Raskolnikov's problem, the tremendous inner agitation affecting him may be missed by a naive or unsuspecting reader; some of the drama, the intense inner friction which is evident to the experienced reader, may be missed and lost. Thus the teacher who expects to teach Dostoyevsky successfully must prepare his students for this factor of the plot movement, and the less experienced the reader, the greater the necessity for preparation. Further, the amount of preparation is probably going to affect the amount of success the teacher and student experience.

The primary drama in Dostoyevsky's works is mental rather than physical; the important occurrences are of the mind, not
the physical events. For example, the mental rationalizing that Raskolnikov goes through prior to murdering Alyona Ivanovna and her sister Lizaveta are of far more importance and interest than the physical movements, for they allow one to gain some comprehension of Raskolnikov's character and indicate how much he must grow in order to become a member of his society. Preparing the student for this fact is a simple matter, however. It should not be necessary to give away the plot or to go into lengthy explanations of the complications of such a plot structure. A simple explanation, for example, that Raskolnikov is in a highly emotional state, plagued by his doubts and fears concerning the results of a planned immoral act, will probably suffice, if the teacher indicates that the students should be aware that the emotions revealed through thoughts and actions are of primary importance. It might be necessary to go into further detail, but explaining that the book is a form of mental record of Raskolnikov's psychic aberration and growth should suffice. Ultimately, of course, the degree of preparation must be decided by the teacher according to his estimation of the ability of the students.

Related to Dostoyevsky's plot movement is the way his plots seem to move from crisis to crisis, rather than from incident to incident. This factor seems particularly important
in teaching Dostoyevsky to the young adult, for it is another area of identification. Young people in our modern society seem to live from crisis to crisis, their nervous systems a bundle of bruised ganglia resulting from their collisions with life, with the world and people they must adjust to and be accepted by. They proceed in their process of adjustment—growing up—by moving from one crisis to the next, gaining new experience in controlling their environment from each encounter until they reach the point where past experiences have made them competent to control their future experiences, thereby eliminating the element of crisis, and at that point they are adults. This progression is precisely the way in which Dostoyevsky's plots occur. The characters move from crisis to crisis until they either become true adults, have their movements restricted so that they cannot progress, or fail in their efforts. Thus the lovers in *The Insulted and the Injured* live from crisis to crisis but never grow, and all fail, doomed to a seemingly perpetual unhappiness. Stavrogin in *The Possessed* commits suicide because he realizes that his self-indulgence and self-will have stopped his growth and he can never really become a part of his world, and Ragozhin in *The Idiot* commits murder for the same reasons. Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov* does grow, however, and through his growth achieves happiness.
Young adults do seek to grow, and they do understand and perceive this desire in others and respond to it. For this reason the effect of the crisis factor in Dostoyevsky's works becomes important. It can be used as a means of promoting classroom discussion and as a motivational tool. No teacher should assign portions of a Dostoyevsky novel without considering it, for it is definitely one of the factors to be considered in maintaining the student's interest in reading the works. The first section of Crime and Punishment, for example, should be assigned together, because it constitutes one progression from point of initiation through the resulting crisis. If the material were assigned in parts, say by chapters, some of the tension and mystery would be lost and so would the over-all impression, because all of the unit fits together forming a whole which depends upon the crisis and mystery leading up to it. The same would apply for classroom discussion of the material. It should be discussed part by part, crisis by crisis, because the student's full interest in and appreciation for Dostoyevsky's purposes cannot be sharpened in a discussion of the material until the student fully sees what is taking place.

The following division of Crime and Punishment might serve as an example of the way that one of Dostoyevsky's novels might be divided for assignment. The purpose of the
division is to place the material in blocks which are based on the plot line rather than on volume or chapters. Thus all of the first part would be assigned as one unit. "Part II" would consist of four assignments: chapter one; chapters two, three, and four; chapters five and six; and chapter seven. The third part would also contain four assignments; chapters one, two, and three as one assignment and the remaining chapters—four, five, and six—would be assigned separately. In "Part IV" the first chapter would be one assignment, chapters two, three, and four another, and chapters five and six a third. The fifth part would contain three assignments, the first being the first three chapters and then chapters four, five, and six being assigned separately. The sixth part would be divided into assignments containing two chapters each with the "Epilogue" being added to the last assignment.

The above division would not always contain assignments from crisis to crisis, because of the expository and digressive material and the secondary plot involving the romance of Razumihin and Dounia, but is so divided where possible. The fourth part might serve as an explanatory example, however. The introduction of Svidrigailov is important enough to be treated separately, and thus chapter one is one assignment. Chapters two and three encompass the break with Luzhin, and the beginning of the romance of Dounia and Razumihin, and
this material is joined with chapter four in which Raskolnikov first goes to Sonia and talks to her, asking her to join him in his life. The three chapters are included together because of the parallel of the two "romances" and because of the suspense generated by Raskolnikov's promise to reveal his secret to Sonia while Svidrigailov is listening. Chapters five and six include one crisis-to-crisis situation with Raskolnikov suffering police interrogation, being almost trapped, being saved by the painter's confession, and apologized to by the stranger about to accuse him.

The assignment units suggested above are flexible in that the units could be combined to make longer assignments, but in most cases they should be broken only with careful planning. The individual teacher will, of course, have to make the final decision as to how material is assigned to his students. With Dostoyevsky's works, however, too much emphasis cannot be placed on making assignments with care and with consideration for his plot techniques.
CHAPTER IV
CHARACTERS AND PHILOSOPHY

The primary importance of Dostoyevsky and one of the primary reasons for teaching his works on the high school and junior college level is the philosophy that Dostoyevsky propounded as well as the fact that his characters become living examples of that philosophy. Berdyaev states that Dostoyevsky was "in fact a true philosopher, the greatest Russia has known."¹ The fact that Dostoyevsky's dialectic is remarkably pertinent today simply underscores Berdyaev's comments, for one can rarely find a philosophy so applicable to the needs of today's youth. And the philosophies that Dostoyevsky's characters explore, exhibit, and represent do indeed appear to be both pertinent and applicable for today's young people. Wasiolek calls Dostoyevsky's characters "satanic and holy, sacrificial and cynical, proud and humble, compassionate and cruel,"² and Mackiewicz adds to this by saying that Dostoyevsky's characters are not just human symbols but are complete and

¹Nicholas Berdyaev, Dostoievsy (London, 1936), p. 35.
living human beings, artistic, finished human entities.\(^3\) The picture is completed when one considers Simmons' statement that Dostoyevsky's novels are not concerned with social purposes and that Dostoyevsky was not interested in his characters as to their class or station or the economic reasons for their condition; Dostoyevsky "was interested in the souls of his unhappy creatures."\(^4\) Thus it is that when one speaks of a character in Dostoyevsky's works, one speaks of an idea and when one speaks of an idea, that idea is represented by a particular character. As Berdyaev says

The hero of the *Letters from the Underworld* is an idea, Raskolnikov is an idea, Stavroguin is an idea, Kirilov, Shatov, Verkhovensky, Ivan Karamazov--ideas; all these people are as it were submerged by ideas, drunk with them. They only open their mouths to develop their ideological dialectic; everything revolves around those cursed everlasting questions.\(^5\)

The everlasting questions which plague the characters in Dostoyevsky's works are the same questions that many young people are concerned with today. As stated above Dostoyevsky's characters are ideas; they exist as the embodiment of the ideas and philosophies which Dostoyevsky propounded and although these ideas and philosophies are many and varied, according to Beach they primarily revolve around theological

\(^4\)Ernest J. Simmons, *Dostoyevsky* (New York, 1940), p. 50.
\(^5\)Berdyaev, p. 35.
and moral questions. Ultimately they may be said to center on the relation of man and God and man's way to God or, stated another way, one might say that Dostoyevsky wanted to explain away the mystery of man's relation to God and show man the way to find salvation, to find the "peace that complete faith brings to the doubt-racked mind of man." Dostoyevsky was convinced that human nature in its very essence is made up of boundless moral contradictions which struggle with one another within each human being and do unceasing, furious battle within the human soul. Thus these moral contradictions, the mystery of man's relation to God, the solution to this mystery, and the explanation of these moral contradictions are the primary concerns of Dostoyevsky's works. As such, they do not necessarily provide the answers to the problems and questions of life which the young person must face as he matures and becomes an adult, but they do certainly contain enough suggested answers and proposed avenues for thought to justify their being a part of the curriculum which is or should be designed to help the young adult find his answers to life.

The power of Dostoyevsky's creations also adds to the reasons why they should be taught, for he held up few examples

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Simmons, p. 61.

Mackiewicz, p. 11.
of what might be considered successful characters, i.e., characters who did successfully find peace or the way to God. Instead, he took what might be considered a negative approach and wrote mostly about characters who sought but were unable to find their way. Thus the reader is not told that he should follow a certain moral highway or hold dear certain specific theological tenets; he is told that he must find the way himself, that way, perhaps, being suggested by Alyosha Karamazov and Sonia. More importantly, however, for the young adult who is experimenting and trying new ideas, many paths which lead to certain failure and disaster are carefully marked and dramatically personified in such a way that their dangers are apparent. Such seductive concepts as the superman-intellectual and the rebel-who-renews-civilization are powerfully exploded when one sees the consequences of such sophistry. Thus in Crime and Punishment Raskolnikov's rationalizations, suffering, and guilt are a powerful condemnation of the superman philosophy, to say nothing of his prison sentence, and in The Possessed Shatov's death immediately following his regained happiness speaks eloquently of the evils of rebellion for rebellion's sake. In The Idiot Ragozhin's self-will destroys his ability to love and Myshkin's desire to be good becomes so dominant that it regresses into self-will and his rigidity destroys him; the two characters,
opposites in moral temperament, both err in the same way, allowing their self-concepts, i.e., their self-conceived and deliberately adopted roles, to degenerate into self-will, and thereby destroy themselves. The underground man is destroyed by self-will, Ivan Karamazov allows intellectual pride to degenerate into rigidity and self-will, thus damning himself, and the lovers in The Insulted and the Insulted are examples of the satanic hero, the person who thinks "nothing exists but one's own rapacious self-interest," and these creations serve both as a reminder for and an admission to the young person that, regrettably, they do exist and survive by preying on the innocence and ignorance of others.

Dostoyevsky's major characters almost invariably embody one of the following concepts: they are either capable of love and therefore resurrection or they are alienated due to rigidity in self-concept or self-will. Resurrection might be called the ability to accept salvation, for Dostoyevsky's way

9Wasiolek, p. 32.
to peace is through Christ by means of love, repentance, faith, and the acceptance of both God and one's fellow human beings. To be resurrected is to accept Christ and by that acceptance be unbound or freed; alienation, both from God and man, and the resulting damnation therefrom is the opposite of resurrection. Love for others and the acceptance of love is the saving factor, for by means of love one may come to know both one's self and God and be regenerated. Intellectual rigidity and self-will are the destroying forces which result in alienation. The key word is freedom, for while suffering is necessary in a harsh world, the resurrected, the person who is free and at peace, is able to accept the love of others and the good in them and be regenerated by means of their goodness and love. The intellectual tries to save himself with his intellect; in effect he turns to his intellect rather than to God or his fellow man and tries to reason his way to peace and salvation. His dependence upon his intellect becomes rigid because he turns from God and man and has only his intellect left. The self-willed man differs little from the intellectual in that he too depends solely upon himself. Through his self-concept and pride he determines his role in life and refuses to depart from his conviction that he is right. His rigidity removes him from God and his fellow man also, and like the intellectual, he is alienated and lost.
Only, through resurrection can one find peace and, in Dostoyevsky's world, that peace is only attained when one chooses to serve God.

Wasiolek explains this doctrine by saying that in Dostoyevsky's conception of the will "the terror and freedom of the will are indissolubly linked. A freedom that is qualified is not freedom, and an unqualified freedom is a monstrous force unleashed on the world." Dostoyevsky accepts freedom of the will and the horror that accompanies it, and the great novels are thus a search for something that will limit the horror but maintain the freedom of will. "Every act of reason for Dostoyevsky is a covert act of will." then, for reason as an objective entity is non-existent; "there is no reason in Dostoyevsky's world, only reasoners." Thus "Dostoyevsky's moral world is dialectical: man is poised with every choice he makes between the self and God." The two poles are unqualified and absolute, man determines his own nature "by choosing his acts to serve one or the other." For purposes of organization and convenience of analysis, Dostoyevsky's characters can be divided into five major types or categories, and in keeping with the initial concept of this thesis, i.e., that it should serve as a resource for

\[10\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 55.} \quad 11\text{Ibid.} \quad 12\text{Ibid.} \]

\[13\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 56.} \quad 14\text{Ibid.}\]
the person planning to use one of Dostoyevsky's works in the classroom, the remainder of the chapter is divided into these five categories. The five categories—the intellectual character, the animalistic character, the self-willful character, the evil character, and the meek and successful character—are each discussed generally, and then the major characters from each of the works under consideration are discussed separately. In each category and for each individual character subtitles are used to make the thesis more easily usable as a resource. Little is stated in the analyses concerning the creation of the characters as rounded or credible, for, as E. M. Forster has said, all of Dostoyevsky's characters are rounded.¹⁵ The analyses are concerned, instead, with the particular philosophies that the characters represent, the ways that they exist within the realm of these philosophies, and their fates.

The categories into which the various characters are divided are, of course, simplifications, more for general ease in handling than for specific description. There is a great deal of overlapping between the categories, for one can hardly say, for example, that an intellectual who is rigid is not also self-willed or that an evil character is not also intellectual, self-willed, or animalistic. The

categories are not meant to describe fully or specifically any character but to indicate generally the primary factors in his personality. Some of the characters would fit almost equally in at least two of the categories, e.g., Stavrogin is both intellectual and self-willed, but most of the characters are not so complex, fitting only one basic descriptive area.

The Intellectual Character

It is interesting, first of all, to note that the intellectuals are, if not the least successful of Dostoyevsky's characters, certainly the most pathetic. They spout their philosophies, weaving syllogistic arguments that are flawless and that "prove" whatever point they wish to prove. Unhappily, however, their arguments and philosophies do not provide that peace of mind that they so desperately seek; the very intelligence which they are so proud of and which they depend upon so strongly is the trap that imprisons them. They seek to be free and to prove that they are free and in so doing become rigid, clinging to their sophistries and deceiving themselves as to their own value. Their fates are harsh. Ivan must live with the knowledge that he is at least partially guilty of parricide. Stavrogin commits suicide because his intellectual pride has made a disaster of his life and the lives of those around him. Raskolnikov suffers
the guilt of a murderer, cannot love Sonia, and must serve a prison sentence. The underground man cannot love and cannot remove the desire for love from his mind; he must live with and remember his own vileness—a worse fate is almost inconceivable. Kirilov is, perhaps, the most pitiful of the lot, for he is so enmeshed in his foolishness that he commits suicide to "prove" his beliefs. Certainly the intellectuals suffer, and their suffering is primarily due to their rigidity, their inability to see or accept any but their own concepts. They stand out boldly as a reminder to all whose self-concept involves intellectual pride and who choose to serve only their own concepts.

Ivan Karamazov

Ivan represents the concept of intellectual rigidity in its advanced stages. He refuses to accept the existence of anything that he does not judge, by means of reason and logic, to exist and uses his intelligence almost as a weapon to mock those who do not yield to their minds and accept his way. The concept of faith is meaningless to Ivan; however, one is led to feel that he wants to believe. His acceptance of the hallucination in which he speaks with the devil reinforces this feeling, for if the devil exists, so must God. Further, in Dostoyevsky's world love and the acceptance of and desire for the love of another are a highly redeeming force; Ivan
does love Katya and is loved by her, which gives hope. He is, however, typical of the atheistic intellectual who cannot accept the logical contradiction of a loving God who creates a world in which man is free to create injustice and suffering, and the evil which he sees around him, is perhaps, reflected by the Grand Inquisitor. The compassion which Ivan feels for humanity is also expressed in the narrative which involves the Grand Inquisitor, but so is the confusion to which his logic is reduced when it attempts to equate man's freedom of will with an evil world and a merciful and loving God.

The Underground Man

Notes from the Underground is considered by many to be the first of Dostoyevsky's works which approaches greatness, a type of prologue to the great works that followed it. Certainly, as Wasiolek declares, Dostoyevsky's craft does take mature form in its pages, and the narrator does exhibit the great themes of free will, the value of suffering, and human happiness. The narrator, the underground man, is, according to Wasiolek, hypersensitive, quick to take offense, terrible in his hurt, boundlessly vain, unforgiving, and delighting in his own pettiness. He is an intellectual introvert who loves only himself, who holds only his own counsel, and whose

16 Wasiolek, p. 53.  
17 Ibid., p. 54.
dependence on himself and his own logic has reached such a state that he can consider a toothache a lie that he has invented to oppose his own world; he tests his freedom by doing the opposite of his own will, rebelling against his own nature to prove his intellectual ramblings. Most frightening, however, is his emotional capability; his intellect, demanding to see all sides of a question, removes his ability to make an emotional decision. He feels emotions; Liza causes him to feel fear, anger, and maybe a type of love, but he cannot control, or react to, these emotions, and so he hides from them. His sensitivity and serious approach to life and, more importantly, himself cause him to fail in any relation with other people, and he is doomed to spend his life alone in his dream world wallowing in his own nastiness.

Nikolay Stavrogin

Stavrogin is a frightening picture of the intellectual unencumbered by any worldly problems. Like the underground man he "liberates himself from a fixed image of self by always doing the opposite." Unlike the underground man, however, Stavrogin has everything that any Russian of the period could want. He is an educated gentleman of noble birth, wealthy, handsome, and highly intelligent. He can have anything he wants, for there is nothing adverse in his environment, but

\[18\text{Ibid., p. 124.}\]
he lacks the one ingredient necessary to a successful life, and this is faith--faith in God, man, or anything besides himself. Stavrogin searches for a meaning to life on every plane, from the highest to the lowest, but he never goes outside himself or allows others to enter. He has faith in nothing but himself, trusts only himself, but is not able to resurrect himself. He is unable to love Liza or accept her love, which might have saved him, because he has married Maria. His marriage to Maria is an example of the way he traps himself by proving his "freedom."

In the end Stavrogin presents a detailed picture of the intellectual freedom that his philosophy expounds. He has had everything, rejected or lost everything, including the faith and love that might have saved him. He has left only himself, his intellect which has betrayed him into rigidity, and his guilt over his part in Maria's murder. Death is the only escape from his tortures: a terrible picture indeed of the consequences of undisciplined, sightless, and goalless intellectuality.

Rodion Raskolnikov

Raskolnikov is the young intellectual who is alienated by his obsession with his self-concept. Believing himself to be a superman, he commits murder to prove his theory; rather than proving himself a superman, however, he almost
succeeds in destroying himself. Raskolnikov is, nevertheless, an idealist and has not totally lost his faith in and compassion for man, as his relations with Sonia and the Marmeladovs indicate. His intense desire to become totally intellectual, however, is reflected in the encounter he has with the intoxicated young girl and older man who is following her for obviously immoral reasons. Raskolnikov saves the girl from the man only to berate himself for so doing. His intellect has corrupted his self-concept and value system to the point where the highly moral and unquestionably proper action seems an example of weakness to him.

Raskolnikov's relation with Sonia also indicates his alienation and the depths of his degeneration. He seeks out Sonia, confides in her, wants to love her, but cannot. His intellectual rigidity has forced him to renounce Christianity and God, and to love Sonia would be to accept her love and to become reunited with people and the "earth." This he cannot do, for his intellect--his self-will, his philosophy which he has proved by murder--has placed him above people in the realm of the superman. His intellect has corrupted every virtue, and he represents a valid picture of Dostoyevsky's thoughts about the dangers of the intellect and the concepts it may generate.
Kirilov

Kirilov might well be called a misguided intellectual, for he is actually given the philosophy that consumes him by Stavrogin rather than formulating or finding it himself. His self-deception is a result of his self-concept, however, and his pride is the primary force which continues the deception. He needs and wants nothing that any other human can give, and in his madness considers himself a god. By means of his "reason" he proves to himself that he can be a god and kills himself to "prove" his idea. Having withdrawn from life to the point where his life has value only as a means of proving his philosophy, Kirilov does indeed represent the ultimate in intellectual rigidity.

The Animalistic Characters

The term animalistic is used in describing old Karamazov, Dmitri Karamazov, and Grushenka because all three are primarily driven by what might be called biological demands. They are the simplest of Dostoyevsky's characters, propounding and expounding no particular philosophy but rather living from moment to moment on the basis of their particular desires. Their passion dominates their actions, and they must have their way. Their insistence on this results in a rigidity which forces them to resist anything that stands in their way. Thus Dmitri and his father are bound to oppose one
another because both are selfish and both become possessed by objects of their desires. Because of their closeness to the earth, however, they are not doomed as most of the other characters are; instead they can find the way to peace.

**Fyodor Karamazov**

Old Karamazov has only one primary goal in life, the satiation of his carnal appetites. He is an immoral old man who has no love for any but himself. He uses Alyosha to feed his ego, fears Ivan because he cannot control or understand him, and wants to cheat Dmitri. He is a greedy, lecherous old hedonist, thoroughly depraved, and Dostoyevsky treats him with the contempt he deserves. He is more animal than human, breeding with anything available, having no respect for the family unit or any real love for his offspring. He respects no one, including himself, and is respected by no one. It seems almost fitting that he is murdered by Smerdyakov, his bastard son whose mother was the village idiot.

**Grushenka**

Grushenka should, perhaps, be considered one of Dostoyevsky's more successful characters. She grows and expands during the process of *The Brothers Karamazov* changing from a capricious and stubborn girl ruled by her emotions to a woman who "like Sonya Marmeladova...is prepared to travel the prisoner's
road to Siberia with the man she loves." She matures and although she has been willful and ruled by her emotions, she is able to love and be loved. When she bestows her love on Dmitri and, realizing the consequences of her relations with Dmitri and his father, accepts the fact that she is partially responsible for old Fyodor's death, she is then capable of being resurrected, and one gets the distinct impression that she has found the way to peace.

**Dmitri Karamazov**

Dmitri seems to be midway between his father and Alyosha. He accepts God but cannot live by what he knows to be the proper moral tenets; he is a sensualist who seeks pleasure and engages in orgies but wants to be honorable and noble, and respects the values of Alyosha. He recognizes his guilt in connection with his father's death, for he wished him dead and threatened him but did not commit murder; when he has the chance to seduce Katerina, moreover, he resists his carnal nature. He is, in fact, representative of the boundless contradictions that exist in man, and the fact that he is willing to accept punishment for his sins indicates that he can find peace and that he can be resurrected. It is important to note that Dmitri faces his deeds, examines his errors, and is willing and able to say that he was wrong. This single factor

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19 Simmons, p. 341.
is the saving one; his pride and self-will are not stronger than his faith in himself, man, and God. His example offers hope.

The Self-Willed Character

The persons dominated by self-will have chosen to accept their own concepts above those of others and to serve themselves rather than the God that they cannot or will not accept. Their penchant for themselves is reflected in their being unable to accept the object or goal which they have set, for in making their demands, their self-will overcomes the meaning they attribute to the desired end. Thus Prince Myshkin desires to do good and be good, but his desire degenerates into self-will and his wanting and trying to be good becomes the end rather than the means, and salvation is lost. This is the typical end of the self-willed person; he becomes obsessed with doing or having his way and the reasons behind his goal are lost, the means becoming the end, because the self-willed person wants his way no matter what. Thus he has no hope of resurrection or peace because he is continually possessed by his own will. The self-willed person is also reduced to a state of rigidity by his will; he develops a desire for an object but becomes rigid or inflexible in his approach to gaining his end and cannot move out of the rut that he has forced himself into. He is both a warning and a reminder that
man too easily allows his own will to interfere with his acceptance of Christ.

Ragozhin

Ragozhin is an example of the character who allows his self-will such freedom that his passions become obsessions which dominate his every action, allowing no room for love or any other emotion. He is consumed by his desire for Nastasya and is willing to go to any lengths to have her. He does not, however, desire her out of love, which would be a saving grace, but out of pure self-will. His passion or "devil" is that she shall be his, and love has nothing to do with it; Nastasya must be his, on any terms. No action is so evil that it cannot be used to attain his ends. Myshkin is his friend, but he plans to murder him, and almost does, in order to prevent his interference. Further, to avoid losing Nastasya he is willing to murder her and does, thereby dooming himself. It is ironic that the saving grace of love is so perverted by his self-will as to become the agent of his damnation, but such is the power and ability of self-will to corrupt. Ragozhin is, indeed, a powerful comment on its evils.

Natasha

The Insulted and the Injured is not one of Dostoyevsky's major works and contains many flaws but, nevertheless, it is an interesting story and does contain some interesting
Natasha loves Valkovsky's son Alyosha hopelessly and inexplicably, forgiving him any vile thing he may do. Her love is so inexplicable in light of the treatment she receives from Alyosha that Wasiolek calls it "simply some kind of mysterious and inexplicable attraction." It seems more in keeping with Dostoyevsky's philosophy to call it self-will, however, and all of the evidence is there.

Natasha is a romantic who has a good home and family and the love of the devoted narrator Ivan Petrovitch, but she meets Alyosha and is captivated by him. She must have him, is willing to give up her home, honor, Petrovitch's love, everything for him. Afterwards her error is evident, but she has made her choice, and her self-will forces her to carry it through. Thus she loses everything, for the childish and foolish Alyosha soon leaves her.

Prince Myshkin

Myshkin was originally conceived by Dostoyevsky as an entirely good man and, as Simmons states in his introduction to the work, "the parallelism between Myshkin and Christ is everywhere apparent in the novel." Dostoyevsky was completely

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20Wasiolek, p. 34.  
21Ibid., p. 35.  
aware, however, that perfection in man is not possible, and Myshkin does turn out to be imperfect. Myshkin exists in an imperfect world, and his desire to be good and do good is ultimately corrupted by his association with that world, the desire becoming a passion that he follows to the point of rigidity. He borders on being inhuman because he seeks to have none of the faults and to do none of the things which give one human qualities. Thus he is not concerned with loving Nastasya but with saving her, and he never realizes the impossibility of saving her from herself. Blindly charging forth, he sacrifices his love for Aglaia—the one saving grace left him—and depends only on himself and his estimation of the situation. He would take Nastasya from Rogozhin on his own judgment, never realizing that he does not have the right. Consequently, his goodness becomes uncompromising and faithless, an extension only of his self-will, and he loses all contact with people and all chance of resurrection. The degeneration of his self-concept into self-will and the consequent loss of his ability to love and accept love destroys him, and he becomes insane. He is, in the end, the exact opposite of his initial status as the perfectly good man, having lost both his goodness and his humanity and descended to the status of a mindless animal.

\[23^{Ibid.}\]
The Evil Character

The evil character is a rational enemy of society, and as such he might well be considered the most dangerous and insidious of the characters that Dostoyevsky portrayed. He is evil and enjoys it, satanic and revels in the knowledge. He is deliberately amoral and lascivious and is self-willed by choice. He respects "no good, no ideal, no other person" and is a picture of boundless evil. Perhaps the primary difference between the evil character and other characters is that the evil character seeks no peace and searches for no truth or meaning for his life. He finds peace and meaning in his evil and glories in the pleasures he pursues; sadly, he is rarely defeated and then only when he allows himself to become too involved with the values of life which are held by a redeemable or virtuous person, e.g., Svidrigailov and Dounia.

The most dangerous and horrifying characteristic he possesses is his pride in his evil. Svidrigailov boasts to Rasholnikov about his ways and deeds as does Valkovsky to Ivan Petrovitch. Not content to be evil by himself, the evil character would convert the unaware to his ways, a quality which makes him truly satanic.

24Wasiolek, p. 33.
Prince Valkovsky

Valkovsky is the first of the truly satanic characters, and he is a master at his trade. His influence over his son is subtle but complete, and his intrigues are almost always successful. The fact that he exists indicates that Dostoyevsky's art is becoming mature, for Valkovsky and those like him are the ultimate in the realm of self-will. They also are testimony to the philosophy of free will, for only in a free world could they exist. Valkovsky's evil deeds are a horror to behold. He deserts his wife and child, causing his wife to walk the streets to feed the child, ruins his wife's father, causes two fathers to curse their children, and lives comfortably all the while unaffected by the results of his machinations. He plots to force his son to marry a wealthy girl so he can steal her dowry and feels no remorse at the thought of turning Natasha away, a woman ruined by that son. He is honorless and proud of it, and the reader longs to see him defeated. That he triumphs is both a comment on man, a warning for the young, and a dramatic verification of Dostoyevsky's belief in free will.

Svidrigailov

Svidrigailov, Raskolnikov's supposed double, might be said to represent the superman concept in its extreme form. He has carried his self-will to the point where nothing has
meaning, and he wallows in his pleasures and seeks no contact with anything that will not further his self-interests. He has lost all hope of being resurrected, but his boastful conversation with Raskolnikov indicates that he is somewhat aware of his loss. In his meeting with Dounia, Svidrigailov realizes that he has thrown away all that makes life worthwhile. His feeling for Dounia approaches love, and with the feeling comes the realization that he is incapable of real love and thus of resurrection. He is capable of controlling others, but when his attempts at control fail, he is lost and helpless. His world is, at this point, a void; he has nothing and he is nothing, and only through death can he escape this awareness of his nothingness. Thus he commits suicide, for life serves only to remind him of that which his self-will has demanded in sacrifice.

Peter Verkhovensky

Peter Verkhovensky is, perhaps, the most evil character in all of Dostoyevsky's works. He is godless and capable of anything; in fact, he is so evil and so devoid of any of the saving human qualities that one is tempted to look upon him as a device—the human incarnation of evil fortune, perhaps, for certainly he plays this role. However, he also represents another idea which is more in line with Dostoyevsky's thinking. He is the epitome of the self-willed intellectual, a self-conceived superman who holds himself above the laws of man.
Possessed by an atheistic philosophy, reveling in the freedom he gives himself, he is indeed a frightening figure.

Peter is more frightening and more horrible than any other Dostoyevsky character for still another reason: he has direction, a goal, a motivation. Unlike Svidrigailov, Valkovsky, or any other self-willed character, Verkovensky does not turn his realizations of life upon himself, but instead directs the hatred and guilt generated by his self-will towards others and their destruction; the creation of chaos in their lives becomes his goal. All mankind is in effect Peter Verkovensky's enemy, and the hatred he turns out of himself seems to emphasize his hopelessness. In turning on mankind Peter becomes a monster to be reckoned with, for he is a threat to all established order. His desire and goal is to destroy merely for the sake of destroying. One might well decide that he represents the worst of the philosophies which Dostoyevsky portrays and the only one to be truly feared.

The Meek and Successful Character

Dostoyevsky gives his reader few examples of what might be called a successful character, one who does achieve peace and is able to find and accept the way to God and Christ. These characters are interesting both as Dostoyevsky's answer to the demands of man for a way to peace and as human
representatives of that answer—representatives who must remain human when they are, in a sense, slightly above humanity. In describing the psychology of Dostoyevsky's world Wasiolek states that these characters are of another world because they refuse to enter the circle of hurt-and-be-hurt that exists; they are hurt but they refuse to pay back and therein lies the difference.\(^{25}\) The meek character simply accepts his hurt and suffers at the hands of the world. The meek characters are representative of Dostoyevsky's conception of a true Christian, and, as such, they are the only characters who have peace. Perhaps the best description that one can give of the meek characters is that they love, freely, openly, unselfishly, and the love they give expects nothing in return. They make no demands and have no pretensions in their love, and most importantly, they accept the love of others in the same way that they offer theirs. They offer hope for any who are willing to comprehend their message, for they are truly free, yet none of the horror of freedom attends them.

Shatov

Shatov is a successful but tragic figure. His association with the rebel group ironically helps him to mature and become one of the successful characters and then kills him.

\(^{25}\)Ibid., p. 54.
He is an intellectual and self-willed, but not to the point of rigidity. Shatov is able to overcome the tendency of the intellectual to demand logical proof to such a degree that his demands become rigid, forcing him to accept only logic and the proof of his own mind. Instead Shatov realizes, according to Wasiolek, that one must deny death and affirm life, that "God is the force that denies death, and he who affirms life carries in him the concrete attribute of God. Try to define that force, and the faith is destroyed. It is a force that is lived, and an unconditional acceptance of it is the condition of its existence." 26 Shatov does accept that condition and he does accept and return the love of his wife and, consequently, he is able to find peace. One wishes to see more of Shatov, for he is the only intellectual in the Dostoevsky canon who manages to subordinate his intellect to his faith and find the peace that all seek. Not all of the other intellectuals are pictured as lost or hopeless, but Shatov is the only one who finds the way, and, as such, he gives hope.

Sonia

Sonia is, perhaps, the simplest of all the characters encountered. She is a prostitute because she must be, but she is neither lost because of it nor adversely affected by

26 Ibid., p. 120.
it. Her faith in God tells her that she is forgiven her sins, and she believes. She not only believes, however, but she also accepts; she does not rationalize her position and she is neither destroyed by it nor rebellious against it. It is her fate, imposed upon her by her God, and she accepts that fate as she must. She suffers deeply, but that suffering gives her strength. Her love for Raskolnikov is like her faith. She accepts it as she accepts Raskolnikov, and her goal in life is to do what she can with what she has.

**Alyosha Karamazov**

Alyosha is the one character in Dostoyevsky's works who is not only resurrected and definitely on the proper path but who demonstrates the path to be followed by his life and the effect that he has on those around him. J. W. Beach's comments on Alyosha seem to sum him up well:

Alyosha alone is a great dramatic creation, a personality of radiant beauty whom he has succeeded in making thoroughly plausible, and whose simple goings back and forth among the hideous circumstances of this story constitute a way of life worthy of our most serious thought.  

Beach continues by stating that Alyosha understands the human heart but does not despise it and knows how to deal with the human disease known as an "inferiority complex." He states that Alyosha has a genius for getting along with

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27 Beach, pp. 100 and 101.
children, "whom he always treats precisely as if they were grownups, and thereby wins their confidence."28 Beach felt that a study in great detail of Dostoyevsky's handling of Alyosha would be worthwhile, for he felt that Dostoyevsky had accomplished in his portrayal of Alyosha "that well-nigh impossible feat of making goodness as real and as interesting as evil."29 Alyosha is the only fully developed example of Dostoyevsky's ideas on the results of resurrection and the actions and life of one who has been resurrected. As such he is the culmination of Dostoyevsky's philosophy, the final goal to be reached, and one wishes that there were more like him, for he represents the hope and peace that can be found.

Summary

In all of Dostoyevsky's major works, the reader is presented a philosophy that is profoundly Christian, and the fact that many of the examples set forth are negative detracts in no way from their greatness. Indeed, the only effective way to present much of the material is by means of the character who embodies that philosophy and suffers from the consequences. Further, one can hardly argue with the success that Dostoyevsky achieved by this means. His characters seem real and, more importantly, they give meaning to reality and to the truths which they represent. They are creations from


whom one may learn, and, as such, they are the embodiment of the greatness of their creator.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


