STEPAN TROFIMOVITCH VERHOVENSKY:

THE KEY TO THE POSSESSED

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STEPAN TROFIMOVITCH VERHOVENSKY

THE KEY TO THE POSSESSED

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Denton, Texas

June, 1970
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In February of 1870, engrossed in the beginnings of a new novel, Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote from Dresden to his dear friend, the poet and journalist Appolon Nikolayevitch Maikov, "I have a big idea in hand; I don't mean that the execution is big, but the idea as such. It ... deals with the most weighty question of our time." ¹ In August of the same year he wrote to his beloved niece Sonia of his current creation that "The idea is so good and so significant that I take off my own hat to it." ² This idea, which he found "almost too intense and thrilling," ³ materialized as his third major novel, The Possessed, but, despite his original optimism, the "execution" of it was an agonizing labor, and he wrote to Maikov in October of 1870 that "never has any work cost me so much work." ⁴

Written under the pressure of financial necessity, as a serial for Katkov's Russky Viestnik (Russian Messenger), the first chapters of The Possessed appeared in January, 1871, and the last ones were not finished until late in 1872, after Katkov

²Ibid., p. 205. ³Ibid., p. 184.
had given in to Dostoyevsky's pleas of homesickness and sent him the money to return to Russia. Financial stress and homesickness, however, were not the only pains Dostoyevsky was suffering. He was having more and more frequent epileptic fits, with increasingly long recuperative periods during which he was not only unable to write but often even to think clearly. And as if his epileptic condition was not trial enough, his Notebooks reveal various other health problems. Stefan Zweig calls Dostoyevsky a Job, whose continued writing despite each seemingly overwhelming adversity bore "fresh witness to his undying devotion."  

The devotion and unrelenting talent applied to The Possessed produced a novel limitless in its possibilities for discussion and dissection. There seem to be practically no restrictions upon the angles from which to view it; it is rich in theology, philosophy, psychology, imagery, symbolism, characterization, action, prophecy, and author-study. Resisting the temptations of these fascinating aspects, however, it seems crucial, instead, to discover and investigate the central idea or theme which gives life and structure to them. Dostoyevsky always began with ideas which his characters and actions then embodied. His gifted vision penetrated physical existence so that external reality to him was only the

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manifestation of the realism "in the higher sense," the spiritual happenings in the souls of men. "For Dostoievsky, the ultimate realities are not the external forms of life, flesh and blood men, but their inner depths, the destiny of the human spirit. Reality is the relations of man with God and with Satan, reality is the ideas by which man lives."7

Throbbing with life and action, The Possessed is, then, the incarnation of an idea, a theme which Dostoyevsky felt to be vital. For some time he had envisioned a crowning work to eloquently portray his great preoccupation with the soul's search for God. It would be called The Life of a Great Sinner, and would reveal the pilgrimage of an atheist through terrible crimes to discovery of God and salvation. For The Possessed he borrowed ideas from this projected study of atheism and combined them with his analysis of the recent revolutionary activities in Russia and his fear for Russia in the face of the exploding turmoil. The novel finally evolved (the pages of his lengthy Notebooks are fascinating studies of this evolution) into a frightening view of loss of God, of country, of brotherhood. The reason for these losses must be what Dostoyevsky considered to be "the most weighty question of our time," for The Possessed was his answer, and, more specifically, his answer was his creation of Stepan Trofimovitch Verhovensky.

7 Nicholas Berdyaev, Dostoevsky (Cleveland, 1957), pp. 25-26.
In the "metaphysical vacuum"\(^8\) of *The Possessed* Stepan is symbolic of a non-productive stewardship—a father who did not father, a teacher who did not teach, an elder who did not will wisdom and tradition to the dependent younger generation. It is puzzling how little critical notice has been taken of Stepan, and it is a lonely position to find in him the key to the teeming, chaotic world of the novel, but this is the thesis which will be pursued. As one descends into the maelstrom of revolutions, manifestoes, bitten noses, murders, suicides, sacrileges, and general mayhem, and searches about for some common denominator, he appears, in his

... long black frock-coat, buttoned almost to the top, but stylishly cut; a soft hat (in summer a straw hat) with a wide brim, a white batiste cravat with a full bow and hanging ends, a cane with a silver knob; his hair flowed on to his shoulders. ... tall and thin with flowing hair, he looked almost like a patriarch ... \(^9\)

As a should-be patriarch of Russia he failed to transmit love of God, of country, of fellow men; as a father, teacher, and friend he made no commitments and bequeathed no values. He betrayed his responsibilities to God and to the men and women whose lives he touched, and his betrayal was decisive in precipitating the awful events of the book. Dapper, seemingly harmless and even pitiable in his ineffectiveness, Stepan was responsible for his society's major losses, and thus he is the embodiment of the idea from which *The Possessed* takes life.

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This central idea or theme of The Possessed, then, is that one man, especially one representing paternity, authority, and learning, who ignores his obligation for commitment to God and men, who ignores also the responsibility for his influence upon individual men, which involves transmission of values, can send forth waves of disorder through society which will reverberate far beyond his own direct acquaintance. With Stepan as focus and guide, the exploration of this theme will begin with an analysis of Stepan himself, then his relationship with his son, his benefactress and friend, his pupils, and his group of devotees, and then proceed to study the effects which the principal bearers of his gospel of irresponsibility, Pyotr and Stavrogin, subsequently had upon others and one another, and, finally, the purification of Stepan.

Then went the devils out of the man and entered into the swine; and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake and were choked.

—Luke, ch. viii. 32-37
CHAPTER II

STEPAN TROFIMOVITCH VERHOVENSKY

AND HIS DIRECT INFLUENCE

The narrator of The Possessed begins his recounting of the "recent and strange incidents in our town"\(^1\) with an introduction and background biography of "that talented and highly-esteemed gentleman, Stepan Trofimovitch Verhovensky."\(^2\) With insight, and perhaps a bit of malice, despite his obvious attachment to the fine gentleman, the narrator humorously and ironically reveals Stepan's failings and idiosyncrasies. The man thus presented is one too human and recognizable not to evoke poignancy and elicit sympathy and understanding, even while causing laughter and criticism. And with the dire effects of his failings not yet seen, Stepan seems harmless enough.

Stepan preferred to think of himself as a "progressive patriot,"\(^3\) and the title was as vague as the danger which he imagined impending upon him because of his political views. He believed that each new governor of the province took office with "special and uneasy ideas"\(^4\) about him because of the far-reaching reputation of these views. With the magical self-proclaimed titles of "exile" and "persecuted" as his shields, Stepan managed to ward off any self-recriminations for failure.

\(^1\) Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 25.
\(^2\) Ibid.  
\(^3\) Ibid.  
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 26.
Besides being an excellent excuse, his pose as a progressive and influential thinker in exile provided Stepan with a feeling of relevance to the present, while, in fact, he was totally irrelevant. His learning took the form of university lectures on, not the Russians, but the Arabs and the "political and Hanseatic importance of the German town Hanau." When he lost his post as university lecturer, he planned to revenge himself upon the university by writing an important and timely work on the "causes ... of the extraordinary moral nobility of certain knights," but it was never finished. Stepan felt a security in the past and the far away because they required nothing of him.

Stepan did not burden himself with commitments any more than he did with self-reproach. As a Russian he was not committed to Russia—freely critical, but not helpful. He looked to Germany for Russia's tutelage and guidance. Calling the Germans "our teachers for the last two centuries," Stepan proclaimed that "... Russia is too big a tangle for us to unravel alone without the Germans ... ." Ernest Simmons sees Stepan as "a Europeanized Russian who is blind to everything real in Russian life." And in the novel his own former pupil, Shatov, told him that he looked at the Russian people

5 Ibid., p. 27. 6 Ibid. 7 Ibid., p. 55. 8 Ibid. 9 Ernest Simmons, Dostoevsky: The Making of a Novelist (New York, 1940), p. 245.
through his fingers, not knowing or loving them, with the result that "... he who has no people has no God."\(^{10}\)

Stepan professed to believe in God,

"... mais distinguons, I believe in Him as a Being who is conscious of Himself in me only. ... I'm not a Christian. I am more of an antique pagan, like the great Goethe, or like an ancient Greek. ... As for the bowings, fastings and all the rest of it, I don't understand what they have to do with me."\(^{11}\)

Bowing and fasting would have required too much involvement and exertion. In his Notebooks, Dostoevsky toyed with having Granovsk (the early name for Stepan) say, "'Leave me God, and art. You can have Christ.'"\(^{12}\) It seems to be a perfect statement of Stepan's religion of life—profess the lofty intangibles; avoid the concrete suffering and involvement. Abstract good, true, and beautiful were less exacting than patriotism and religion, and in his last, humiliating talk in Petersburg "he did not attempt to dispute the uselessness and absurdity of the word 'fatherland,' acknowledged the pernicious influence of religion, but firmly and loudly declared that boots were of less consequence than Pushkin; of much less, indeed."\(^{13}\) To be true to God and country required too much commitment, so he put the distance of many lofty words between them and himself, and

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\(^{10}\) Dostoyevsky, *The Possessed*, p. 57.  
\(^{11}\) Ibid., p. 56.  
\(^{13}\) Dostoyevsky, *The Possessed*, p. 43.
with neither God nor patriotism as a reason to feel responsibility for his fellow men, he had only a peripheral and selfish attachment to them.

Stepan spoke feelingly, with loud protestations of affection, about his son, Pyotr, his friends, his former pupils, his patroness, Varvara; he wrote terribly sentimental letters to Pyotr and especially to Varvara, but he knew nothing about the caritas love of involvement and self sacrifice. The brotherhood of man was but a lofty sentiment to him; his self-concern occupied all of his energies. He desperately needed other men; unable to keep his own counsel he always needed a confidant, but he never gave of himself in return.

Stepan wanted the resurrection without the cross. His life had been a series of substitutions. For a real assent to faith and Christian hope he substituted humanism; for Christian charity he substituted altruism; for love he substituted sentimentality; for kenosis he substituted selfishness; for resilience and strength of character he substituted weeping and gnashing of teeth; for personal reform he substituted talk of social reform; for political action he substituted criticism and vague liberalism; for learning and wisdom he substituted pedantry. Because of these substitutions of the artificial for the genuine, Stepan had accomplished nothing; his "activity ceased almost at the moment it began."\textsuperscript{14} According to Richard

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 26.
Curle,

What he lacks, above all, is strength of will, for he is one of those unfortunate beings who, having no initiative, gradually fall back on the line of least resistance, while, in his heart, rebelling against the slavery of which he appears to be, and in a sense is, so willing a victim.\textsuperscript{15}

If his sometime self-reproach was sincere and a symptom of this inner rebellion, it accomplished nothing, and meanwhile he betrayed God, country, and fellow men. He allowed the natural chain of authority to break at himself, not freeing the untrained children of the younger generation but prisoning them in the chaos of a valueless situation. He was their teacher, yet he undermined them by giving them no reason to respect the authority which he represented and which would have given moral order to their society and their world. The nihilists he so vehemently deplored were born of irresponsibility and betrayal such as his and, fittingly, the epitome of these iconoclasts was his own neglected son, Pyotr.

Dostoyevsky was

\textellipsis especially concerned with the role of the father. He conceived of the father as the center of a moral order extending outwardly from the family to the state and even further still to encompass the world: from father one should make the transition to tsar (\textit{batvishka}, 'little father') and then to God.\textsuperscript{16}

Pyotr never had a father upon whom he could build his moral structure of order to God. When his first wife died in Paris,

\textsuperscript{15}Richard Curle, \textit{Characters of Dostoyevsky: Studies from Four Novels} (Melbourne, 1950), p. 150.

Stepan morally orphaned their young son by shipping him back to Russia "by post," and completely abandoning his raising to relatives. Stepan emotionally referred to Pyotr as "'the fruit of our first, joyous, and unclouded love,'" yet he did not manage to see him again until the child had become a young man nearly ready to enter the university, and then only in passing. While Pyotr was growing up, while he was forming his character, his morals, his ideals, and his goals, his father was six hundred miles away at Skvoreshniki proclaiming exalted thoughts, indifferent to the most basic instinct of paternal responsibility and love.

"A natural orphan is not the most solitary of human beings; the metaphysically homeless is more desolate." Pyotr was metaphysically homeless, and by the time he was a man and able to take the reigns of the action of The Possessed he had filled the void in himself with his own religion of nihilism, intrigue, destruction, chaos. It is not remarkable that Pyotr would develop his own defenses and security in the form of cynicism, selfishness, self-will, Godlessness; and that with no God he would have no conscience. If, as Dostoyevsky laments in his Diary of a Writer,

... children are brought up without foundation, without natural truth, with disrespect for, and indifference to, their native land and with a scoffing contempt for the people, which has been spreading so fast, particularly

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17Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 232. 18Ibid., p. 30
in recent times—is it from here, from this wellspring, that our young men will draw the truth and faultlessness of their convictions during the initial stage of their lives?\footnote{F. M. Dostoievsky, The Diary of a Writer, translated by Boris Brasal (New York, 1949), p. 150.}

Stepan was not only no wellspring for Pyotr, but in Pyotr's own words,

"He's never spent a penny on me all his life; till I was sixteen he didn't know me at all; afterwards he robbed me here, and now he cries out that his heart has been aching over me all his life, and carries on before me like an actor."

Pyotr had no reason to love or respect his erstwhile father—the father who had totally relinquished his fatherhood; the father who for the short time they were together in Petersburg oppressed his son by waking him in the night to embrace and cry to him, as if Pyotr was the father and Stepan the child; the father who, insensitive to its impact on a young man, made complaining insinuations about his mother, so that, later, to taunt Stepan, Pyotr suggested that he may not be his son after all and devastated Stepan with, '"'I don't blame my mother; if it's you, then it's you, if it's a Pole, then it's a Pole, it's all the same to me.'"\footnote{Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 325. 22\textit{Ibid.}}

Long before his appearance in the province Pyotr had written Stepan letters concerning the management of his estate, of which Stepan was trustee, and which he had badly mismanaged. These letters showed clearly the perfunctory tone which Pyotr
intended to take with his father, for they "had a striking resemblance to the missives that used to be sent by landowners of the old school from the town to their serfs whom they had left in charge of their estates." The whole relationship between father and son was, even at a distance, backwards. Stepan was in the habit of striking poses, but the pose as loving father and magnanimous person of the older generation which he planned to assume when Pyotr appeared in his life failed completely. He claimed to be "ashamed of his treatment of ce cher enfant," but fear was at least an equal if not stronger motivation in his plan "warmly and with tears to press ce cher fils to his heart, and so to make an end of all accounts between them." Not only did this not happen, but Pyotr rebuffed him, and his manner to his father, far from being respectful, loving, forgiving, was cold and cruel. Instead of respect as a family patriarch, Stepan received humiliation as a fool.

Regardless of his own neglect, Stepan still had expected sympathy, devotion, emotion from Pyotr. When Varvara revealed her plan to marry him away, Stepan, in desperation, surely in blindness and erring judgment, looked to Pyotr: "'He is the only one left me now, the only one, my one hope!'" As always he could think only of his own needs, and the possibility of someone helping him. He even wrote to Pyotr as a

23 Ibid., p. 96.  
24 Ibid., p. 94.  
25 Ibid.  
26 Ibid., p. 142.
confidant, emotionally, revealingly baring himself to the writer of the earlier landowner to serf type of missives. And Pyotr used this confidence given by his father to humiliate him. What made Stepan expect better?

Ironically, Stepan was surprised and puzzled to hear of Pyotr's rumored involvement in a manifesto incident:

"Petrusha, c'est une si pauvre tete! He's good, noble-hearted, very sensitive, and I was so delighted with him in Petersburg, comparing him with the young people of today. . . . And you know it all comes from that same half-bakedness, that sentimentality. They are fascinated, not by realism, but by the emotional ideal side of Socialism, by the religious note in it, so to say, by the poetry of it . . . second-hand, of course. And for me, for me, think what it means! I have so many enemies here and more still there, they'll put it down to the father's influence. Good God! Petrusha a revolutionist! What times we live in!"27

Stepan's real concern was not for Pyotr's safety, much less his soul, but for his own image, and he saw no connection between himself and "the times we live in," although Pyotr was clearly Stepan's political son. "There is great subtlety in the contrast and the affinity between the 'liberal' generations of the forties and their nihilist descendants, from whom the parents turn away with horror. Yet . . . the destructive radicalism was a child of the former sentimental rationalists and liberals."28 As for their lack of patriotism, Pyotr's seemingly much more gross than Stepan's, in his Notebooks

27 Ibid., p. 95.
Dostoyevsky says they are the same westernizers—Stepan represents those of pure vintage, and Pyotr the nihilists.  

Though, overwhelmed and enraged by his heartlessness, Stepan finally cursed Pyotr, he could not disclaim him. Stepan grievously sinned against his son by omission, and left him metaphysically homeless, to search about for his own fulfillment. Incredulously Stepan asked Pyotr, "'You don't want to offer yourself just as you are as a substitute for Christ?'" The void which Pyotr filled with self was the one Stepan left. He revealed no God to Pyotr, instilled no love of his land; he gave Pyotr the child, Pyotr the teenager, and Pyotr the man no reason to cherish tradition, no magnanimity and love to imitate, no reason to respect his elders. Pyotr's father gave him no sense of a moral order to revere, and so he made an art of disorder, developing his monstrous talent into a satanic expertise. And Stepan had not even given Pyotr the one "'good, sacred memory, preserved from childhood'" with which, according to Alyosha a novel later, a man may be saved.

Stepan's relationship with his son was not the only one which was unfruitful; the strange and unyielding friendship between him and his patroness, Madame Varvara Stavrogin, was another. Richard Curle considers Varvara "Dostoyevsky's most

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29 Dostoevsky, Notebooks, p. 88.
profound portrait of a woman.\textsuperscript{32} It was she who provided Stepan with the material security to be a "poseur, bovard, and an ineffectual aesthete\textsuperscript{33}"—the "exchange of cash and culture,"\textsuperscript{34} as Philip Rahv calls it. But not only that; more importantly, she shared in his ultimate guilt, because she, by her erring judgment, opened the door for Stepan's influence over her own son, Stavrogin, and, though not as crucial for society, to other pupils—Liza, Darya, Shatov.

Varvara did not just open the door to her son; to Stepan she "confided his whole instruction and moral education,"\textsuperscript{35} and though she berated Stepan for his red tie, and the clutter of his house, and the company he kept, and various other irritations, he was never held accountable for his influence upon Stavrogin. Ralph Harper feels that Dostoyevsky "was abnormally preoccupied with the relationships between children and irresponsible parents,"\textsuperscript{36} and if Stepan is clearly irresponsible fatherhood, Varvara is surely errant motherhood. She did not abandon Stavrogin in the same way that Stepan physically and materially abandoned Pyotr, but though "... the

\textsuperscript{32}Curle, \textit{Characters of Dostoyevsky}, p. 142.

\textsuperscript{33}Edward Wasiolek, editor, \textit{Notebooks}, p. 79.

\textsuperscript{34}Philip Rahv, "Dostoevsky and Politics: Notes on The Possessed," \textit{Partisan Review}, V (July,1938), 30.

\textsuperscript{35}Dostoyevsky, \textit{The Possessed}, p. 59.

\textsuperscript{36}Harper, \textit{The Seventh Solitude}, p. 15.
boy knew that his mother loved him very much, ... She talked little to him and did not often interfere with him ... 37 and, worse, she gave him up to Stepan Trofimovitch.

His position as tutor for Varvara's son brought Stepan to Skvoreshniki, but that role seems to have had very little to do with the relationship which developed when "... this vacillating, weak theorist came under the dominance of his determined patroness, Madame Stavrogin." 38 She transferred her latent motherhood to Stepan, and created him in her image as "flesh of her flesh" 39 so that he "had become for her a son." 40

She would not let a speck of dust fall upon him, coddled him up for twenty-two years, would not have slept for nights altogether if there were the faintest breath against his reputation as a poet, a learned man, and a public character. She had invented him, and had been the first to believe in her own invention. 41

There had been a time, at the beginning, just after the death of Varvara's husband, when the relationship might have gone another way, a fruitful, productive, more natural way. She turned to Stepan for solace in that flowering May. "The two friends walked every evening in the garden and used to sit till nightfall in the arbour, and pour out their thoughts...

37 Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 57.
38 Curle, Characters of Dostoyevsky, p. 151.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., p. 34.
and feelings to one another. They had poetic moments."\(^{42}\) Varvara "clung to the heart of her friend,"\(^{43}\) until her friend, arrogant and cocky with the idea that she wanted him for a husband, "involuntarily began to express something capricious and ironical, something coquettish and at the same time condescending,"\(^{44}\) which was too much for the extraordinary pride of Varvara, and she hurled him a dire promise which she kept faithfully--"I shall never forgive you for this!"\(^{45}\) For Stepan's part, "... he seemed every day, all his life, to be expecting the continuation, and ... the dénouement of this affair. He could not believe that that was the end of it!"\(^{46}\)

Though frustrated undercurrents were always present between them, Stepan and Varvara were both extremely proud, and the possible relationship of mutual love and solace never materialized. Varvara assumed her position as the dominant power; Stepan took up his role as the daydream she had fashioned, wearing clothes designed by her to make him look like an engraving of a poet which she had fallen in love with in high school. She made it easy for him to be lazy and unproductive. She even assumed the support of his son. She hoped for results, but she required nothing of him in return for his comfortable life, nothing but slavishness. Stepan found it easy to

\(^{42}\) Ibid., pp. 35-36. \(^{43}\) Ibid., p. 36. \(^{44}\) Ibid. \(^{45}\) Ibid., p. 37. \(^{46}\) Ibid.
relinquish responsibility completely, including that which he should have felt toward her.

The communication between them, once promising, deteriorated into frequent arguments and Stepan's sending lengthy, emotional, usually confessional letters to Varvara. She never answered these, although she carefully read and annotated and filed them, and crushed his spirit by never alluding to the fights or the letters again, acting as if nothing had happened. "By degrees she broke him in so completely that at last he did not himself dare to allude to what had happened the day before, and only glanced into her eyes at times." 47 Of what passed between them "... she never forgot anything, while he sometimes forgot too quickly ..." 48 Varvara nagged Stepan and berated him, criticized him and almost completely subdued him, while Stepan frustrated her by not being the productive, impressive, famous, and respected man of letters she had envisioned. "An inexhaustible love for him lay concealed in her heart in the midst of continual hatred, jealousy, and contempt." 49 And Stepan admitted of her, "'... she is the one woman I have adored for twenty years!'" 50 Each loved and needed the other, but their own pride thwarted expression of their love,
and they succeeded in contributing nothing to each other and in cheating themselves.

The great importance of their relationship upon the chaos of *The Possessed* was that not only did Varvara maintain Stepan, allowing him the luxury of non-commitment and non-production of which he took full advantage and which stifled him as a man, but she jeopardized her own son, her treasure, Russia's hope, by placing him in the unsteady hands of an unproved teacher—unguarded, unsupervised, unchecked. She betrayed her responsibility to Stavrogin by relinquishing him without enough care to such a negative influence as Stepan, and must share the guilt for the results of such ill-advised total surrender.

In his *Diary of a Writer*, Dostoyevsky says

... this is the most pathological and saddest trait of our present time—the possibility of considering oneself not as a villain, and sometimes almost not being one, while perpetrating a patent and incontestable villainy—therein is our present-day calamity!51

Stepan could never have thought of himself as a villain and yet he perpetrated a "patent and incontestable villainy" upon his innocent, indefensible student-victim, Nikolay V. Stavrogin.

Never having had a father's influence, and having a mother who withdrew herself and her guidance from his formation, Stavrogin was a prey to Stepan's own need for a

51 Dostoievsky, *The Diary of a Writer*, p. 149.
friend. Stepan took charge when Stavrogin was only eight years old, hardly able to defend himself against the adverse effects of such a person, probably eager to cling to anyone who would seem to be a guide and teacher.

Stepan, unfortunately, was not the leader Stavrogin badly needed, the father-figure, the teacher of virtues and values. He purposely relinquished the respect and awe he should have merited as teacher and guide, in favor of making a "... friend of this little creature as soon as he had grown a little older. It somehow came to pass quite naturally that there seemed to be no discrepancy of age between them." Unconcerned about the child's needs, Stepan filled his own need for a confidant. He felt no humiliation in waking up Stavrogin in the night to cry to him, to complain of his wounded feelings, to tell him some family secret. The effect of such surrender of position and reversal of roles on the security of the child bothered him not at all. What security could Stavrogin have had with a tutor who forced him, the child, to provide consolation, reassurance? "One can't help believing that the tutor had rather a bad influence on his pupil's nerves." It would be unnerving for a child to spend eight important years of boyhood being wept upon and confided in by his elder, a so-called learned man who was supposed to be mother and father and teacher to him.

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52 Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 59. 53 Ibid.
The situation left Stavrogin no one to turn to. He must have yearned for Stepan to reveal to him something concrete in the way of values and goals to base his life upon, some reassurance of final triumph, instead of doubts and fears. Stepan completely betrayed his pupil; he unburdened himself by placing the burden on Stavrogin.

At sixteen Stavrogin left Stepan's influence, "none too soon," to go away to school, and for the first two years he came home for holidays. While Stepan and Varvara were in Petersburg he was sometimes present at their literary gatherings where "his manner to Stepan Trofimovitch was as affectionately attentive as ever, but there was a shade of reserve in it," and "he unmistakably avoided distressing, lofty subjects or reminiscences of the past." His first social successes thrilled his mother, but when strange, disturbing reports of his activities began filtering back to Skvoreshniki, the mother turned to Stepan for assurance and he consoled her that "... this was only the first riotous effervescence of a too richly endowed nature..." and he compared Stavrogin to Shakespeare's young Prince Harry. Certainly he did not search his own soul as to possible responsibility for his pupil's "savage recklessness."
Stepan's betrayal of Stavrogin would have been less serious if Stavrogin had been less a person—if he had not had a special potential, a gift of charisma and boundless will power. Stepan "had aroused in him a first vague sensation of that eternal yearning which some elect souls can never give up for cheap gratification when once they have tasted and known it," but he left it at that. He left Stavrogin with a vague sense of the existence of some good worth striving for, worth spending his energies on, but without direction to fulfillment of the yearning for it. Without commitments himself, Stepan was unable to transmit definite attitudes on God, on Mother Russia, on the life of men and its real meaning and destination. With wise guidance Stavrogin's gifted nature could have become a power for great good, for great personal satisfaction. Without direction, his thrashing about for a goal as worthy outlet for his talent wreaked havoc upon the persons who came into his wake, and he himself was a "total misfit."

As a tutor in Madame Stavrogin's house, Stepan had access to pupils other than Stavrogin. Lizaveta Nikolaevna Tushin came under his sway from age eight to eleven. Stepan "fell in love with the charming child and used to tell her poems of a sort about the creation of the world, about the earth,

59Ibid., p. 60.
60Curle, Characters of Dostoyevsky, p. 126.
and the history of humanity." Liza loved these stories, as any child would have, but perhaps she had some intuition even then of Stepan's sham, for she would "very funny" mimic him. Strangely, Stepan did not mind when he discovered this mockery; he "wept ... with delight." He probably considered it a compliment. At eleven, Liza became ill and was taken to Petersburg. She called for Stepan in her illness, but he did not see her again for twelve years, though he kept a picture of her on his wall.

Unfortunately, Liza, like Stavrogin, had been victimized by Stepan's lack of inner strength and need for sympathy. Instead of providing for her the security to build her life upon, he took security from her for himself. She, too, contributed a listening ear and a shoulder for Stepan to cry on. She reminisced to him as a woman, "'And do you remember how you threw yourself into my arms in the garden and I comforted you ... ." Somewhat tauntingly it seems, she offered Mavriky, her escort, as her present-day substitute: "'... you can weep on his shoulder as long as you like, and he'll stand there as long as you like!'" It seems that, although she felt affectionately toward her old tutor, Liza was quite aware of the extent of his deception. "'And do you remember how you described to me how the poor emigrants were

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61 Ibid., p. 90.  62 Ibid.  63 Ibid.  64 Ibid., p. 125.  65 Ibid.
transported from Europe to America? And it was all untrue; I found out afterwards how they were transported. But what beautiful fibs he used to tell me then . . . ."66 Later she proclaimed that "... Varvara Petrovna and Stepan Trofimovitch both tell lies. And they all tell lies."67 Liza felt cheated, as she was; she was disillusioned and, like Stavrogin, groping for a direction. Her teacher had not been a teacher, but a child himself. Her "Auntie" Varvara was party to the hoax. Her mother was no counterbalance, for she "stood rather in awe of Liza,"68 and complained that Liza was not a friend to her. Mrs. Drozdov, like every person of authority, family or civil, in The Possessed, suffered from some form of Stepan-itis. The most alarming aspect of it in all cases was the blindness that accompanied it; it was guilt without guile, but guilt all the same.

When Liza did come back to the province at twenty-three Stepan was elated. He immediately thought of the possible good to himself of her presence, and "... he imagined for some unknown reason that he would at once find in her company a solace for his present misery, and even the solution of his more serious doubts."69 But Liza did not have enough strength to share; she, like Stavrogin, was morally crippled and limping.

... everything in her seemed perpetually seeking its balance and unable to find it; everything was in chaos, in agitation, in uneasiness. Perhaps the demands she made upon herself were too severe, and she was never able to find in herself the strength to satisfy them. Although Liza exerted much less impact upon the action of The Possessed than did Stavrogin and Pyotr, her story is further proof of the extent of Stepan's failure and blind villainy.

Of Stepan's relationship with his other pupils, Shatov and Darya, little is told. They were brother and sister, born serfs of Varvara Petrovna because their father was her valet. Nothing at all is related about the early relationship between Stepan and Shatov, though it can be assumed from Shatov's later development that at least Stepan's influence was not decisive. Shatov was able to form definite beliefs, to assent to faith, to have boundless hope and Christian love, despite whatever Stepan may have done or said and, ironically, he found his way thanks largely to Stepan's wayward pupil, Stavrogin. But that is a matter for later discussion.

Shatov came back into Stepan's life, after wanderings of the body, mind, and soul, to become part of his social group. There was not a deep bond between them, but they were obviously fond of each other. With his strength of feeling Shatov did not hesitate to criticize Stepan for his shallowness, and Stepan accepted his criticism graciously so that they were

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70 Ibid., p. 127.
always reconciled. Stepan must have respected Shatov, although his thorough commitment was, of course, incompre-
hensible to Stepan.

Shatov's sister, Darya, had been discovered by Stepan as a little girl, and when he began to teach her Varvara became interested in the child, "genuinely loved the girl from her childhood upwards," and determined that "'In that life there will be no mistakes.'" She decided to educate Darya as her own daughter, and thus Stepan became her official tutor. When Darya began to have other teachers, however, Stepan not only stopped her lessons, but "by degrees left off noticing her." His pupils were more to him than students; he wanted confi-
dants, and if his influence could not be complete he was uninterested.

His interest in her was reawakened, however, when at seventeen he was "struck by her prettiness." He talked with her, was pleased by her answers, and proposed to give her a course in the history of Russian literature. Darya was delighted and Varvara approved, so the course began, but after the first lecture, which went well, Varvara "... suddenly got up and announced that there would be no more lessons. Stepan Trofimovitch winced, but said nothing, and Dasha flushed crim-
son." It was only three years after this burst of jealousy

\[71\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 89.} \quad 72\text{Ibid.} \quad 73\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 90.} \quad 74\text{Ibid.} \quad 75\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 91.}\]
that Varvara, for complex reasons of her own, concocted the idea of a marriage between Stepan and Darya, and succeeded in unwittingly humiliating both of them.

As with Shatov, Stepan did not influence Darya to any appreciable degree. However, had she not had other tutors to discourage his interest when she was a child, he might have succeeded in disorienting her also.

A man with no family responsibilities, with a place and means to entertain, with a reputation, if ill-founded, for learning and superiority of some vague sort, it was logical that Stepan would have had a group of men from the province gather round him. As with each of his other relationships, this entourage filled a need in Stepan. He

... needed the consciousness that he was fulfilling the lofty duty of disseminating ideas. And finally he had to have some one to drink champagne with, and over the wine to exchange light-hearted views of a certain sort, about Russia and the "Russian spirit," about God in general, and the "Russian God" in particular, to repeat for the hundredth time the same Russian scandalous stories that every one knew and every one repeated.\(^76\)

This was not a creative, productive, nor even a very active group of men. In the early days the group was reputed to be a "hotbed of Nihilism, profligacy, and godlessness,"\(^77\) but they were hardly that organized or dedicated to anything. What they did was drink and talk, pass the time away, and give each other the feeling of action and vibrancy while there was none. Shatov, when he began coming, did have valuable thoughts

\(^{76}\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 52.}\) \(^{77}\text{Ibid.}\)
to contribute and the courage of his convictions, but Stepan, and probably all of those present, seemed to feel rather patronizing toward him, and they did not take him or his ideas seriously.

Besides Stepan and Shatov and the narrator, the regular members of this assemblage included Liputin, a scandalmonger, not respected in the community, but enjoyed by the group for his "wit, his inquiring mind, his peculiar, malicious liveliness."78 There was Virginsky, a self-educated and idealistic young clerk in the service, with family problems, but the determination that "I will never, never abandon those bright hopes,"79 and Lyamshin, a Jewish post-office clerk who, besides his piano playing, was able to treat his friends to imitations of "a pig, a thunderstorm, a confinement with the first cry of a baby."80

This motley crew came to Stepan's house, drank his champagne, ate his food, and listened to his words, and he drew from them a sort of comfort and reassurance, but they gained nothing of value from him. He did not turn their aimlessness toward a goal, so they were ready manpower for Pyotr to use when he arrived.

In all of his relationships Stepan remained irresponsible and uncommitted. He existed for himself, selfishly, blindly using others, but returning nothing. He abandoned responsibility

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78 Ibid., p. 48. 79 Ibid., p. 50. 80 Ibid., p. 53.
for his son, failed as a friend, misused his post as teacher and influence upon the young, and contributed nothing to his circle of cohorts or the community. Worse than useless, his influence was destructive, and the victims of its destruction were legion because Pyotr and Stavrogin, the demons released by his failure, spread chaos wherever they went.

Pyotr and Stavrogin both represent unleashed evil, but "two different masks of a single power that works in 'the sons of rebellion'—the power whose name is Satan."81 In his chapter on Daemonology, Ivanov discusses the general concept of Lucifer and Ahriman and his differentiation of these two characters of Satan revealingly describes Pyotr and Stavrogin. Stavrogin resembles "Lucifer shining in phosphorescent radiance,"82 "the archetype of isolation,"83 "all-confining."84 Pyotr resembles Ahriman, "all-disrupting, all defiling and malignant... the spectre of Evil in all the blackness of his shamelessly displayed vacuity and final nullity."85 Lucifer teaches man to withdraw into himself as the center of the universe, to distort the God-given principle of "I am" which gives him life, and if Lucifer has conquered then Ahriman, reveals to man that enclosed within his selfhood

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81 Vyacheslav Ivanov, Freedom and the Tragic Life (New York, 1952), p. 120.
82 Ibid., p. 123.
83 Ibid., p. 120.
84 Ibid., p. 125.
85 Ibid., p. 123.
he is within a vacuum, meaningless, and despair follows. Stavrogin seems to represent the glamour and the sadness of evil; Pyotr its grossness and horror.

It is essential to the case against Stepan to prove that these two characters, nurtured by him in the early development of their forms of depravity, did, indeed, disastrously affect the lives of others. The next two chapters will demonstrate the effects of first Pyotr, then Stavrogin, and the following chapter their relationship with each other.
CHAPTER III

THE INFLUENCE OF PYOTR

Ivanov's description of Ahriman describes Pyotr:
"... his elementary nature and quite fixed resolve [is] to rot and rend man's outer shell in order to deliver his inmost will to corruption, in order to destroy in man the image and likeness of God, in order to kill man's spirit."¹

To fill the void in himself Pyotr turned to a religion of nihilism. It gave him a purpose—to destroy what existed and re-create society in his own image. He found fulfillment in creating havoc, and felt no compunction about leaving a wake of ruined lives and dead bodies.

Immediately upon arriving in town Pyotr began "'to talk and talk and talk,'"² to plant the seeds of intrigue and disorder which he planned to reap. "One somehow began to imagine that he must have a tongue of special shape, somehow exceptionally long and thin, extremely red with a very sharp everlastingly active little tip."³ This ever-busy tongue was his weapon for destruction. In his own words,

"I made up my mind finally that it would be best to talk, but to talk stupidly ... to be in a tremendous hurry to explain things, and in the end to get muddled in my own explanations, so that my listener would walk away

¹Ibid., p. 122.
²Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 239. ³Ibid., p. 197.
without hearing the end, with a shrug, or, better still, with a curse. You succeed straight off in persuading them of your simplicity, in boring them and in being incomprehensible—three advantages all at once! Do you suppose anybody will suspect you of mysterious designs after that?"4

Pyotr was a revengeful person, and the fateful Sunday afternoon of his first appearance at Varvara's he immediately set about devastating his most certain victim, the victim against whom he had a genuine complaint of neglect and maltreatment—Stepan. Considering the original lack of filial concern and Pyotr's authoritative and haughty attitude toward his father from afar, it is not surprising that this first meeting in ten years was not a moment of mutual emotion and joy. Yet Pyotr's coldness wounded his father deeply; in his blindness he never expected to be treated that shabbily.

"Pierre, mon enfant! Why, I didn't know you!" He pressed him in his arms and the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Come, be quiet, be quiet, no flourishes, that's enough, that's enough, please," Petrusha muttered hurriedly, trying to extricate himself from his embrace.

"But it's ten years since I've seen you."
"The less reason for demonstrations."5

Stepan "... had certainly been deeply wounded at his first meeting with Petrusha, by the way he had embraced him. It was a deep and genuine grief."6

The disappointment of this reunion was trivial, however, compared to Stepan's horrible surprise and desolation when

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4Ibid., p. 239. 5Ibid., pp. 198-199. 6Ibid., p. 219.
Pyotr, in feigned innocence and carefully planned candor, cruelly humiliated him and destroyed the precarious relationship between him and Varvara by making public chatter of his father's letters to him concerning the possible marriage to Darya, his ambivalent feelings about it, his concern about possibly marrying ""to cover the sins of others,"" all the secret confidences which Stepan so inadvisedly made to his unsympathetic son. As Pyotr had calculated, Varvara became furious at these revelations. "Her face was yellow and distorted, and her lips were twitching."\(^7\) She announced to Stepan in front of the assembled group, "'Kindly leave us at once, and never set foot in my house again.'"\(^8\) Stepan's security, his whole life and life style, depended upon Varvara's patronage, and in one afternoon—less, in a few well-chosen remarks—Pyotr managed to undermine her loyalty and disrupt his father's world.

After his first triumph, Pyotr continued to flit between Varvara and Stepan, winning her trust and exploiting her confidences about Stepan to further humiliate him, taunting Stepan about his relationship with Varvara: "'Foo! What a flunkie's place you've been filling all this time.'"\(^9\) Understandably, his scenes with Pyotr had a terribly distressing effect upon Stepan. In the opinion of the

\(^7\)Ibid., p. 123. \(^8\)Ibid., p. 218.
\(^9\)Ibid., p. 219. \(^10\)Ibid., p. 326.
narrator Pyotr "calculated upon reducing the old man to despair, and so to driving him to some open scandal of a certain sort." 11 Whatever his plan, Pyotr had certainly shaken his father's world and brought him great misery.

Stepan, unfortunately, was not his son's only prey. In fact, Pyotr's personal vendetta against his father was minor compared to the magnitude of the upheaval he planned for the general community, and toward which he dedicated most of his satanic energies and enthusiasm. If he destined Stepan to play some ridiculous part in the chaos, it was only as one of many such pawns.

Yulia Mihailovna von Lembke, the new governor's ambitious wife, was a chief target of Pyotr's cultivation. It was important for his plot that he have friends in high places, and "her patronage partly explained Pyotr Stepanovitch's rapid success in our society." 12 Yulia had met Pyotr earlier in Switzerland and was now impressed with a letter of recommendation which he brought to her from a distinguished dignitary in the capital. "Yulia Mihailovna set the greatest value on her relations with the 'higher spheres,' which were few and maintained with difficulty." 13

Pyotr flattered Yulia; she valued his attention and forced her husband to tolerate him. Unfortunately, while encouraging Pyotr, she paved the way for the eventual

cataclysm which included the destruction of her husband's mental health, thus his career and life, and her life as well. Her blindness and conceit contributed greatly to Pyotr's effectiveness. She truly believed that Pyotr doted upon her.

She imagined that he was in communication with every revolutionary element in Russia but at the same time passionately devoted to her. To discover the plot, to receive the gratitude of the government, to enter on a brilliant career, to influence the young "by kindness," and to restrain them from extremes—all these dreams existed side by side in her fantastic brain.¹⁴

The first three months of Von Lembke's governorship had passed satisfactorily. After Pyotr's arrival troubles seemed to be brewing everywhere—sub-lieutenants defied superiors, ikons were defiled, manifestoes discovered; asiatic cholera and cattle plague were spreading and incendiarism and robberies were increasing. The problems which Pyotr had not specifically incited he exploited. But not the least of the governor's problems was his wife's fanatic attachment to Pyotr, though

... young Verhovensky, from the first step, had displayed a flagrant lack of respect for Andrey Antonovitch, and had assumed a strange right to dictate to him; while Yulia Mihailovna, who had always till then been so jealous of her husband's dignity, absolutely refused to notice it; or, at any rate, attached no consequence to it.¹⁵

Von Lembke, however, attached a significance to it. Whatever peace he had made within himself about his wife's authoritarian treatment of him did not apply to Pyotr. He

¹⁴Ibid., p. 364.  
¹⁵Ibid., p. 330.
"tried to defend himself, called him 'young man' before other people, and slapped him patronisingly on the shoulder, but made no impression."\textsuperscript{16} Von Lembke's quiet good nature was no match for Pyotr. Pyotr toyed with him, used him, humiliated him, and totally devastated him, while Yulia contributed to his downfall by failing to notice or care what was happening, busy with her dream of "uniting all and everything in the adoration of her own person."\textsuperscript{17}

The lofty dreams which Yulia cherished while her husband deteriorated were hardly compatible with the crude behavior of the relatively large circle which formed around her. Among this group ", . . . it was considered admissible to play all sorts of pranks, sometimes rather free-and-easy ones, and, in fact, such conduct became a principle among them. . . . People called them the jeerers or sneerers."\textsuperscript{18} Their rowdy and shocking antics said little for Yulia's success in her ambition to save "'them from perdition by guiding them into a new outlet for their ambitions.'\textsuperscript{19}

Meanwhile, the government was not governing; no steady hand directed the province. A stable leader could have controlled or unmasked rumors, investigated and appeased genuine grievances. The security of a well-controlled situation would have calmed the citizens, and the fete fiasco could have been avoided entirely, but Pyotr successfully

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p. 330. \hfill \textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 364.
\item \textsuperscript{18}Ibid., pp. 337-338. \hfill \textsuperscript{19}Ibid., pp. 334-335.
\end{enumerate}
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undermined and destroyed the government from within, the one
establishment with power and influence enough to maintain the
province's equilibrium. While Yulia gloried in her feeling
of importance and mission, and her husband brooded himself
into insanity, Pyotr was busy planning, plotting and arranging
the disasters which occurred.

At the scene of the fire Von Lembke cried, "'He worms
himself into the honour of families.'" 20 He was wiser in his
complete derangement than Yulia had been in her misguided
sanity when she boasted, "'Talkers are not dangerous, and I
will even go so far as to say that if anything were to happen
I should be the first to hear of it through him. He's quite
fanatically devoted to me.'" 21

While Pyotr was busy subverting the government from
within, he was also organizing a task force to implement his
plan for upheaval. The character of Pyotr had been suggested
to Dostoyevsky by an actual case involving a revolutionary
named Nechaiev, which came to light as he was conceiving the
idea for his novel. About The Possessed Dostoyevsky wrote
later in his Diary of a Writer:

I meant to put this question and to answer it as clearly
as possible in the form of a novel: how, in our
correspondance, transitional and peculiar society, are
the Nechaievs, not Nechaiev himself, made possible?
And how does it happen that these Nechaievs eventually
manage to enlist followers—the Nechaievtzi. 22

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20 Ibid., p. 533.  
21 Ibid., p. 335.  
22 Dostoievsy, The Diary of a Writer, p. 142.
That Pyotr himself became a "Nечаiev," professing discontent, disruption, nihilism, is understandable considering his background of neglect, his special need for self-reliance, self-direction and self-protection, and his resentment. The question of how he managed to enlist followers required an answer as complex as the various characters involved. It seems certain that even though Pyotr's cleverness was necessary, his "Nечаievtsi" joined him essentially because of inclinations which lay waiting in their own hearts for a summons. Whether they joined him because of discontent and genuine zeal for reform, or craving for adventure and heroism, natural rebelliousness, or "from a not ignoble feeling of shame, for fear people might say afterwards that they had not dared to join," they joined largely, also, because they had nothing equally attractive or exciting to devote themselves to, and no strong convictions to hinder them.

Pyotr appropriated three of the five members of his elect quintet from his father's inactive group. In addition to Liputin, the envious scandalmonger so like Pyotr in many ways, Virginsky the idealist, and Lyamshin the clown, the group included Shigalov, Virginsky's brother-in-law, a man who "looked as though he were expecting the destruction of the world, and not at some indefinite time in accordance with prophecies, which might never be fulfilled, but quite

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23Ibid., p. 409.
definitely, as though it were to be the day after to-morrow at twenty-five minutes past ten."\textsuperscript{24} And the fifth member was Tolkatchenko, "famed for his vast knowledge of the people, especially of thieves and robbers."\textsuperscript{25} These men cherished the belief that Pyotr was "a fully authorized emissary from abroad";\textsuperscript{26} it pleased and flattered them, for it enhanced their importance, and each one of them had the

fervent conviction that their quintet was only one of hundreds and thousands of similar groups scattered all over Russia, and that they all depended on some immense central but secret power, which in its turn was intimately connected with the revolutionary movement all over Europe.\textsuperscript{27}

Though they felt a pride in their vague cause and a yet formless devotion to it, and responded immediately to Pyotr's invitation to join him, these zealots resented their leader. He was "not at all inclined to satisfy their legitimate curiosity, and told them nothing but what was necessary; he treated them in general with great sternness and even rather casually."\textsuperscript{28} Despite his treatment of them Pyotr felt secure in their loyalty, to such a degree that he assured Stavrogin that "'I could make them go through fire.'"\textsuperscript{29} Their loyalty was not a tribute to Pyotr's personal magnetism and charm, but to his cleverness and unique talent for realizing and exploiting weaknesses. He explained part of his strategy to

\textsuperscript{24}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 154. \textsuperscript{25}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 409. \textsuperscript{26}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 408. 
\textsuperscript{27}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 409. \textsuperscript{28}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 409. \textsuperscript{29}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 403.
Stavrogin:

"... the first thing which has a tremendous effect is giving them titles. Nothing has more influence than a title. I invent ranks and duties on purpose; I have secretaries, secret spies, treasurers, presidents, registrars, their assistants ... Then, the next force is sentimentalism, of course. You know, among us Socialism spreads principally through sentimentalism. ... And the most important force of all—the cement that holds everything together—is their being ashamed of having an opinion of their own. ... They think originality a disgrace." 30

In the politically prophetic, sadly comic chapter, "A Meeting," these select henchmen came together with "the flower of the reddest Radicalism of our ancient town, ... [who] had been carefully picked out by Virginsky for this 'meeting.'" 31 Present ostensibly to celebrate a name day, the group included Virginsky's wife and her spinster sister, his sister—a "rosy-cheeked student and a Nihilist"; 32 teachers; officers; an idle divinity student; the mayor's son, an enthusiastic eighteen year old schoolboy revolutionary; a major, a very impressionable young artillery officer named Erkel, who worshipped Pyotr as his hero; Kirillov, who lent a mysterious air since he was unknown; and Shatov, who came only because of Pyotr's promise that his presence would facilitate his disentanglement from the "society." When Pyotr arrived he brought Stavrogin with him, and the presence of this notable person, of general if infamous reputation, of obvious power, was meant to be a reassurance of the reality

30 Ibid., p. 403. 31 Ibid., p. 408. 32 Ibid.
of the aims, if still a threat against squeamishness or
disloyalty. Since most of the guests had no clear idea of
the reason for the gathering or their presence, an air of
mutual distrust and suspicion pervaded, and the attendees
even found it necessary to vote as to whether or not they
were a meeting. The importance of this gathering from Pyotr's
point of view was evidently to give the idea of the "society"
a sense of reality, to inject a feeling of action to assuage
his followers' impatience, and, by forcing Shatov to draw
attention to himself in his evident disgust with the
proceedings, to prepare his quintet to believe Shatov
dangerous to them. Pyotr was getting all in readiness.

Pyotr manipulated the quintet into contributing its part
to the chaos of Yulia's fete, though they did not realize
that this ridiculous function and their pranks were planned
to be the diversion for crimes. When the fire broke out and
the murder victims were found, these men, misguided but not
evil, panicked. "The fire in the night, the murder of the
Lebyadkins, the savage brutality of the crowd with Liza, had
been a series of surprises which they had not anticipated in
their programme."33 They were to meet Pyotr at Erkel's home,
and they awaited him with feverish excitement and fear, with
anger and determination to demand explanations. They never
doubted Pyotr's connection with the crimes.

33Ibid., p. 560.
When Pyotr arrived, casually late, he turned their accusations back upon them, blaming them for all the disorder, the murders, the fire, claiming no knowledge or design on his part, berating them especially for acting so decisively on their own initiative. To these counter-accusations Shigalov replied,

"We've seen the disorderly scenes, we've seen the discontent of the people, we've seen and taken part in the downfall of local administration, and finally, we've seen with our own eyes the town on fire. What do you find amiss? Isn't that your programme? What can you blame us for?"\(^{34}\)

But Pyotr had no time to argue; he had a new and frightening knowledge to convey to them. He convinced them that Shatov was on the verge of betrayal and that his murder was their only security. Pyotr was anxious to leave town and follow Stavrogin, but ". . . he was detained by Shatov; he had to cement the quintet together once for all, in case of emergency,"\(^{35}\) and besides, he had a personal insult to revenge. He was determined upon Shatov as a victim.

At this time a wondrous, unbelievable resurrection of hope had occurred in Shatov's life. His wife, separated from him for three years, had returned to him. His intense joy eclipsed all political thought. "This strong, rugged man, all bristles on the surface, was suddenly all softness and shining gladness."\(^{36}\) His wife bore Stavrogin's baby and, far

\(^{34}\)Ibid., p. 564.  \(^{35}\)Ibid., p. 568.  \(^{36}\)Ibid., p. 584.
from resenting it, Shatov said, "'It's a great joy. . . . The mysterious coming of a new creature, a great and inexplicable mystery.'"³⁷ When he left to trade the buried printing press to Pyotr for his freedom, Shatov joyously assured Marie that "'... this is the very last step! And then for a new life and we'll never, never think of the old horrors again!'"³⁸ Then Erkel, pitifully callous in his absolute subjection to Pyotr's will, escorted Shatov to his death.

Shigalov had absented himself from the deed, not on ethical grounds, but claiming it was politically inconsistent with his plan. Virginsky had attempted to locate and convince the others that in his new joy Shatov would not be a danger, but he was unsuccessful. As they waited for Shatov, Virginsky tried again, but they all followed their leader instead of their better judgment. The strange power that Pyotr exerted over them sustained them through the horrible murder of the innocent victim, but no longer. When Shatov was dead they began to fall apart. Virginsky began shuddering and crying out that it was not the thing to do; Lyamshin began shrieking and attacking the others. When they had calmed down Pyotr made what was, unknown to them, his farewell address, in which he encouraged them that, "'We've got to re-educate a generation to make them worthy of freedom. We shall have many thousands of Shatovs to contend with.'"³⁹

The last one to see Pyotr was Erkel, who accompanied his hero to the train station. Pyotr had assured them all that he was going away for a time and would return, though in truth he had already shut his mind on the past, on the lives he had ruined, and was anticipating the future. Erkel "kept fancying that Pyotr Stepanovitch seemed anxious to get rid of him." Pyotr had no attachment to beings other than himself except as instruments of his will. In his total self-immersion he disinterestedly, destructively disposed of other people's lives.

As for the abandoned members of the quintet they were all arrested. Lyamshin broke down the day after the murder and confessed everything; Virginsky and his whole family were arrested, though all except him and Shigalov were soon released; Tolkatchenko was arrested; Liputin used a fake passport to leave the province, looking desperately for Pyotr and Stavrogin, but turned to drunkenness and debauchery and was arrested; Erkel was arrested and remained obstinately silent. All awaited trial in confinement, personal ruin, while the spirit of chaos to whom they had voluntarily released their fates moved forward to bigger and better exploits.

Pyotr possessed a special insight for divining weakness and for evaluating its possible use to him. The Von Lembkes and the members of his group, though carnage enough, were

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40 Ibid., p. 641.
not his only targets. Pyotr had somehow found Fedka, an escaped convict from Siberia, a former serf who had been lost by Stepan at cards. Pyotr offered to help Fedka, finding ""that inhumanity unjust."" Fedka had the sense not to believe in Pyotr's professed humanitarianism, but he responded to the leverage that Pyotr would help him get a passport to "'go all over Russia.'" Pyotr kept him waiting, telling him he might be of use to Stavrogin, planning for Fedka the performance of certain necessary crimes when the time was right.

Fedka had no illusion about Pyotr and his devices, and told Stavrogin,

"... he knows about me that I'm awfully sick to get a passport ... so he thinks that he's snared my soul. I tell you, sir, life's a very easy business for Pyotr Stepanovitch, for he fancies a man to be this and that, and goes on as though he really was."*

The commission for which Pyotr was saving Fedka was the murder of Captain Lebyadkin, a non-party member with enough knowledge of the organization to betray it, and his lame sister, Marya, the secret wife of Stavrogin, and the arson to cover the murders. While the fete was collapsing Fedka carried out the crimes, expecting to find a large sum of money on Lebyadkin. As Fedka, half drunk, prepared to leave

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 276.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 277.
\end{itemize}
town after these deeds, he met Pyotr:

"... you've been deceiving me from the first ... You've promised me a lot of money for shedding innocent blood and swore it was for Mr. Stavrogin, though it turns out to be nothing but your want of breeding. ... You are the chief murderer. ...

... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ...

Mr. Stavrogin stands at the top of the ladder above you, and you yelp at him from below like a silly puppy dog, while he thinks it would be doing you an honour to spit at you." 44

This tirade infuriated Pyotr and a fight ensued in which Pyotr was knocked unconscious by Fedka. When he awoke Pyotr wrathfully promised Liputin about Fedka, "... let me tell you it's the last time in his life he will drink vodka. I recommend you to remember that and reflect on it." 45 Pyotr was vengeful; a personal insult could not be ignored, for his own person was all he had. Not surprisingly, Fedka was found somewhat later, murdered, with his skull broken. There is no reason not to give Pyotr credit.

Kirillov, the "metaphysical rebel" 46 who had philosophically decided upon the necessity of suicide because he preferred "self assertion to life itself," 47 also allowed himself to be an instrument of Pyotr, though not a victim. He agreed to commit his planned suicide at a time which would be beneficial to the "society." This seems strange since he was not himself a member nor a sympathizer, but was a man of

46 Lavrin, Dostoevsky, p. 67.
strong convictions, and thoroughly disliked Pyotr. Kirillov is a fascinating character, and it is understandable that when critical attention is turned to The Possessed, he, next to Stavrogin, is the character most often discussed.

Whatever his reason for surrendering himself and his great act to Pyotr's use, it was not because he was blind to Pyotr's faults. He was amazed to hear from Stepan that his son

"... was a very nervous boy, you know, emotional, and ... very timid. When he said his prayers going to bed he used to bow down to the ground, and make the sign of the cross on his pillow that he might not die in the night ... ."48

The nervousness, the timidity, the fear had turned to fiendishness, and the strength of nihilism, and the prayers had disappeared entirely. This sniveling lad bore no resemblance to the demon who warned Kirillov, "'If you take it into your head to run away to-morrow like that scoundrel Stavrogin, ... I'll hang you ... like a fly ... or crush you ... if it's at the other end of the world ... do you understand!'"49 This threat was delivered despite the fact that Kirillov's suicide was a "gratuitous act."50 Kirillov told Pyotr, "'There's only one thing I hate, that at such a moment I should have a reptile like you beside me.'"51

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48 Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 111. 49 Ibid., p. 578.
50 Fayer, Gide, Freedom and Dostoevsky, p. 635.
51 Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 574.
When the moment came and he learned that the confession he was to sign included guilt for the murder of his friend, Shatov, Kirillov revolted, refused to sign and accused Pyotr, "'You've done this because he spat in your face in Geneva!'" And Pyotr admitted, "'For that and for other things too—for many other things...'" But Kirillov did sign; in his scheme it was not important one way or another because, "'I am bound to shoot myself because the highest point of my self-will is to kill myself with my own hands.'" After an excruciating and grotesque scene of waiting, during which he bit Pyotr's finger, Kirillov did kill himself. Pyotr left triumphant once again, with another dead body in his wake.

Lizaveta was a unique victim of Pyotr. Not part of his blueprint for chaos in the society, she was a victim of his desperation to please Stavrogin and win his favor. Pyotr several times suggested to Stavrogin the possibility of aiding him in effecting a liaison between Stavrogin and Liza. It is possible that the repetition of this idea worked upon Stavrogin, convincing him that the relationship held some hope for him. Meanwhile, Pyotr also worked on Liza, appealing to her idealistically and romantically. He was the catalyst who brought them together, and he actually took care of the mechanics of transporting Lizaveta to Stavrogin's carriage. Their meeting was a tragic failure for both of them, although

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Pyotr had not the understanding to fathom the extent of loss. When he saw that things had gone badly, he gaily told Stavrogin, "'I brought her to you simply to amuse you, and to show you that you wouldn't have a dull time with me. I shall be of use to you a hundred times in that way. I always like pleasing people.'"\(^55\) For Liza the result was desolation and death.

All of the society felt the ravages of Pyotr's Ahriman-activity. He fulfilled his own prophecy that "'We are going to make such an upheaval that everything will be uprooted from its foundation,'"\(^56\) and the specific personal consequences were unbelievably catastrophic. He rent the relationship between Varvara and Stepan, destroyed the mind of Von Lembke and the lives of him and his wife, ruined the lives of his select quintet and his protégé Erkel, caused the deaths of the Lebyadkins, Fedka, Shatov, and indirectly Marie and the baby, hurried the death of Kirillov, and caused the events which lead to Liza's death. Pyotr devoured people, as if it gave him the energy to go on. He stepped calmly over the dead bodies and ruined lives to begin somewhere else, himself unscathed.

In talking to Shatov about Pyotr, Stavrogin had said, "'Do you know how powerful a single man may be?'"\(^57\) Stavrogin could well have said it of himself also.

\(^{55}\)Ibid., p. 548. \(^{56}\)Ibid., p. 434. \(^{57}\)Ibid., p. 261.
CHAPTER IV

THE INFLUENCE OF STAVROGIN

Stepan's unfortunate pupil, Nikolay V. Stavrogin, "Lucifer shining in phosphorescent radiance,"¹ is usually considered the hero or central character of The Possessed. Most critical interpretation of the novel focuses upon him and yet, after reams of analysis, he remains a most perplexing, enigmatic character. Handsome, with the education and bearing of a gentleman, with wealth and a special charisma which he himself did not understand, Stavrogin was still lonely, bored, essentially discontent, disquiet. "Disquietude is the mark and the symptom of a creature unable to live up to the promise of eternity built in itself."² Stavrogin felt this longing caused by man's "promise of eternity," but he did not know how to satisfy it. He longed to dedicate himself, to feel responsibility, instead of his awful ennui. He tried immersing himself in debauchery, in brutality, in recklessness. He was compelled to the grotesqueness of literally leading an old man by the nose, and biting a governor's ear. "He hurts others without cause, hoping to find in evil some responsibility."³

¹Ivanov, Freedom and the Tragic Life, p. 123.
³Ibid., p. 53.
But he could not trick himself into a commitment or devotion to good or evil. As he said himself, "'My desires are too weak.'"4

Stavrogin's failure to find an application for his potential was caused by a previous commitment he had made; a soul-sapping assent to the Lucifernian doctrine of pride. This choice, by separating him from all that is real,

... brought him to a point at which every reflection or echo of reality seems to him, who has now become "like God," to be his own creation, a product of his self-awareness. ... But when man asked ... for a foot's breadth of firm ground on which he could station and support himself in order to apply the lever of his divine omnipotence—why, then, the seducer vanished, and man was left suspended in the void of that world within himself, that world created by his thoughts.5

Stavrogin's tragedy is the tragedy of freedom degenerating into self-will instead of finding fulfillment in God. "Unrestrained and objectless freedom, deprived of God and his grace and degenerating into self-will, ceases to be capable of making a choice and is bandied about in opposite directions."6 This self-will was perhaps the only thing Stavrogin valued.7

Because of his attractiveness, the impression of strength which his self-will radiated, his boldness and seeming fearlessness, Stavrogin exerted a charismatic effect upon people with whom he came in contact. He was admired because he

5Ivanov, Freedom and the Tragic Life, p. 127.
6Nicholas Berdyaev, Dostoevsky (Cleveland, 1957), p. 109.
7Curle, Characters of Dostoevsky, p. 129.
seemed perfectly self-assured. Although he attracted companions and followers, Stavrogin was not close to any one of them. He was a

... man who is surrounded by loneliness, not because he wishes to be alone, but because he is what he is, and cannot find his equal. ... Cut off from friends, God, traditional acceptances, he had only his own empty self to fall back on, a self yearning to be great but having nothing but denial to be great about.  

Dostoyevsky himself described Stavrogin as having a conscience and "making painful convulsive efforts in order to regenerate himself and start to believe again." His symbolic nocturnal pilgrimage to Kirillov, Shatov, and Captain and Marya Lebyadkin represents his quest for a new life. For a person as bold as Stavrogin the stealth of the quest seems strange. He wore the cloth coat which he usually saved for ceremonious occasions; he worried about whether the lantern would be seen, whether his mother would hear him leave, whether the gate would creak, and went out into the rainy night with the blessing of his servant, "May God's blessing rest on you, sir, but only in your righteous undertakings."  

Kirillov and Shatov seem to be personifications of the ideas which Stavrogin tried to adopt, but which he negatively 

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10 Ibid., p. 1932.  
11 Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 249.
"passed beyond," leaving himself in a vacuous state. They illuminate the fact that Stavrogin's "spirit is infinitely away." 

Kirillov was young and kind, but preoccupied with his "God-sickness," and resulting commitment to the self-assertion of suicide. Stavrogin respected and envied his unalterable dedication, and the peace of mind it seemed to bring him. Stavrogin had come to him, at least ostensibly, to request that he be his double in a duel.

Stavrogin asked Kirillov when he intended to commit suicide, to which Kirillov replied, "'That doesn't depend on me, as you know.'" Perhaps it was because of his admiration for Stavrogin that Kirillov originally agreed to donate his great act to the "society." Stavrogin seemed anxious to talk with Kirillov; he confided that "'I understand shooting oneself, of course . . . I sometimes have thought of it myself.'" He questioned Kirillov about his belief in a future eternal life, hoping for some inspiration for himself, but the answers he felt were "'the old commonplaces of philosophy.'"

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13 Ibid.
14 Ivanov, Freedom and the Tragic Life, p. 66.
16 Ibid., p. 253.
17 Ibid., p. 254.
Kirillov impressed Stavrogin as being very happy, and he questioned him about this happiness. Stavrogin was searching desperately for something to cling to in the ideas of Kirillov, ideas which he himself had been instrumental in implanting. As Shatov later accused him, "... you confirmed false malignant ideas in him, and brought him to the verge of insanity. ... Go, look at him now, he is your creation." 18 Stavrogin would be glad to believe in this creation and share the contentment and happiness of his dedication. He asked Kirillov, "'You don't say prayers yourself?' " 19 to which Kirillov replied, "'I pray to everything. You see the spider crawling on the wall, I look at it and thank it for crawling.'" 20 When Kirillov felt that Stavrogin had begun to ridicule him he warned, "'Remember what you have meant in my life, Stavrogin.'" 21

After the aborted duel, Stavrogin and Kirillov had a revealing conversation in which Stavrogin asked, "'Why does every one expect of me something not expected from anyone else? Why am I to put up with what no one else puts up with, and undertake burdens no one else can bear?'" 22 Kirillov answered, "'I thought you were seeking a burden yourself.'" 23 Stavrogin admitted that it was true, and that "'I know I'm a worthless character, and I don't pretend to be a strong one.'" 24

Stavrogin was honest with Kirillov, and Kirillov, although he had no banners for Stavrogin to wave, did not worship him or exaggerate his strength, still revered him; and when he committed suicide it was largely, if not totally, because of Stavrogin's tutelage.

After his visit with Kirillov, Stavrogin went to Shatov, warning him of personal danger from Pyotr, who had no intention of allowing him to withdraw safely from the "society." Shatov, the "principal bearer of ideas" in the novel, had met Stavrogin in Petersburg after joining the "society," and had talked at length with him about Christianity and the destiny of Russia. After their conversations Shatov went with Kirillov to America and while there meditated upon the ideas which Stavrogin had eloquently expounded and came to believe in them. He wrote Stavrogin a long letter about his conversion, which Stavrogin admitted he had not entirely finished, and, symbolically, Stavrogin sent Shatov the money to return to his fatherland. All of Shatov's hope came through Stavrogin (even the baby which signified his hope for new life with Marie) and he became a symbol of the truth he had preached. Shatov believed in Stavrogin as the prophet of his ideals, while Stavrogin did not even believe in them himself.

At his first meeting with Stavrogin since their weighty talks two years back, Shatov slapped his idol. He slapped

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25 Simmons, Dostoevsky: The Making of a Novelist, p. 259.
Stavrogin because of the rumors about him, because of Shatov's suspicion about Marya's connection with him, because "... at the very time when you were sowing the seed of God and the Fatherland in my heart, at that very time, perhaps during those very days, you were infecting the heart of that hapless creature, that maniac Kirillov, with poison," and because "... he secretly hopes that his idol will make the most of this act and reassert his immense power over him." The night of their visit Shatov explained the meaning of the attack: "'Because of your fall . . . your lie. . . . I did it because you meant so much to me in my life.'" He echoed the words of Kirillov.

Stavrogin envied the enthusiasm and dedication of Shatov as he did that of Kirillov. Why could he not have clung to those ideas himself instead of relinquishing them? Unlike Kirillov, who did not try to convert Stavrogin, who did not idolize him and thus was not disappointed in him, Shatov was thoroughly, painfully disillusioned. Stavrogin was amazed and mystified by this attitude: "'... you seem to look upon me as a sort of sun, and on yourself as an insect in comparison.'" Shatov, like Pyotr, envisioned Stavrogin as a leader, the standard bearer for Russia, but with different aims.

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26 Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 265.
28 Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 258.
29 Ibid., p. 260.
Shatov offered Stavrogin a plan for salvation. First he told him to "'... speak like a human being! Speak if only for once in your life with the voice of a man. I say it not for my sake but for yours.'" He wanted Stavrogin to join the brotherhood of man. "'You're an atheist because you're a snob, a snob of the snobs. You've lost the distinction between good and evil because you've lost touch with your own people. ... Attain to God by work; it all lies in that; or disappear like rotten mildew.'" The idea of achieving God by work seemed to interest Stavrogin, as if it were a new idea worth considering. He asked Shatov what kind of work. "'Peasants' work. Go, give up all your wealth.'" All the time, however, Stavrogin knew he had not the strength of humility to make such a commitment, to cast off his pride. His will was only strong when sustaining his pride. He rejected the possible hope in the pleas from his "'pupil who was raised from the dead,'" to "'Kiss the earth, water it with your tears, pray for forgiveness.'" He disregarded the pain of Shatov's disillusionment: "'Why am I condemned to believe in you through all eternity. ... I can't tear you out of my heart, Nikolay Stavrogin!'" Telling Shatov that he will come to him no more, Stavrogin, the fallen idol,

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30Ibid., p. 263. 31Ibid., p. 273. 32Ibid. 33Ibid., p. 265. 34Ibid., p. 272. 35Ibid.
left and, fittingly, "the darkness and the rain continued as before." 36

His spiritual influence upon Shatov was the only beneficial influence to Stavrogin's credit. He was attached to this cast-off self of his, longing to be able to assume it himself with faith. He told Pyotr, Shatov's competitor for Stavrogin's soul, "'I won't give up Shatov to you.'" 37 Knowing how attached Stavrogin was to Shatov, Pyotr offered Shatov's safety to Stavrogin as a bribe to reconciliation. Despite his feeling for Shatov, however, he allowed him to be killed. Shatov had recovered the fallen banner of Stavrogin, but it did not save him from death.

"In the middle of one long, wet, floating bridge" 38 between the house of Kirillov and Shatov and that of his demented wife and her brother, Stavrogin met the convict Fedka. Alerted to the possibility by Pyotr, Fedka offered Stavrogin a counter-offer to Shatov's, the offer of irresponsibility, of disposal of his problems with the Lebyadkins by permanent means. Although he sent Fedka away, the idea was implanted in Stavrogin's mind.

Captain Lebyadkin was usually drunk, always selfish; he mistreated his sister, and tried to exploit his secret relationship to Stavrogin to its utmost. He was deeply

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36 Ibid., p. 274.  
37 Ibid., p. 432.  
38 Ibid., p. 275.
afraid of Stavrogin as a "'subtle serpent,'"39 and he himself when with Stavrogin was "like a rabbit before a boa-constrictor."40

On this night Captain Lebyadkin anxiously awaited Stavrogin to hear what was in store for him. He wanted nothing less than all he could possibly get from Stavrogin, but at the same time he pitifully declared his independence of spirit, and begged, "'Don't take away from me this last possession!'"41 He reminisced about the days in Petersburg when they first met. "'You deigned to listen to me then, you read my verses. . . . They might call me your Falstaff from Shakespeare in those days, but you meant so much in my life!'"42 One of the tragedies of Stavrogin was the betrayal of such charisma as he radiated.

The Captain was greatly worried for his safety, for he had once, according to him inadvertently and innocently, assisted Pyotr and the "society" in the distribution of manifestoes and various such incendiary papers, and thus knew something of the workings of the organization. "'I have great terrors now . . . Pyotr Stepanovitch is treating me abominably!'"43 Stavrogin refused him the requested money to escape to Petersburg, and further shattered him by revealing his plan to announce his marriage to Marya. This announcement

39 Ibid., p. 120. 40 Ibid., p. 212. 41 Ibid., p. 281.
42 Ibid. 43 Ibid.
sounded to the Captain like a threat to a formerly lucrative arrangement—the money he had received before he had considered somewhat in the nature of a bribe to keep the marriage secret.

Stavrogin offered Captain Lebyadkin suggestions as to how he might manuever to save himself from Pyotr, but he did not save him, although all it would have taken was a word to Pyotr. In his particular situation and place because of Stavrogin, Captain Lebyadkin's death was another of Stavrogin's effects.

Kirillov had called Stavrogin's marriage to Marya Timofyevna Lebyadkin "'a new experiment of a blasé man.'" Merely for the sake of entertainment he had defended her against a tormenter in Petersburg "'but the injured innocent herself did not forget it.'" As a result of this feigned chivalry and Stavrogin's continued attention and disproportionately respectful treatment of her, Stavrogin cultivated a delusion in Marya which caused her complete madness because of its impossibility and unreality. As he told the Captain, "'I married your sister when the fancy took me, after a drunken dinner, for a bet.'" On the other hand, he told Kirillov that, "'I really do respect her, for she's better than any of us.'" Perhaps Stavrogin saw his marriage to

44 Ibid., p. 205.  45 Ibid.
this poor person, far beneath him in every endowment, mental and physical, as the burden he was looking for, or possibly as "the triumph of his will . . . over the innate sense of harmonious beauty which resides in all great souls." 48

Marya's ambivalent feelings toward Stavrogin of fear and "frantic ecstasy" 49 were evident at their meeting at Varvara's house. For his part, Stavrogin spoke to her ". . . in a caressing and melodious voice; and there was the light of an extraordinary tenderness in his eyes. He stood before her in the most respectful attitude, and every gesture showed sincere respect for her." 50

When he visited Marya at her house after his talk with her brother, Marya was expecting him, but she seemed to sense something strange and frightening about him. Stavrogin told her that he planned to make the wedding public. The interview did not proceed as Stavrogin had expected; instead of adoration she viewed him with growing resentment, mistrust, and anger. The Stavrogin she saw before her was not the man of her dreams, her Prince. Like Shatov, she was disillusioned, disappointed, and she sensed that he was a spiritual impostor:

"You're like him, very like, perhaps you're a relation . . . Only mine is a bright falcon and a prince, and you're an owl, and a shopman! . . . That alone kept me happy those five years that my falcon was living somewhere beyond the mountains, soaring, gazing at the sun. . . . Tell me, you impostor, have you got much by it?" 51

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48 Murry, Fyodor Dostoevsky, p. 165.
49 Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 201.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., p. 295.
Unfortunately, Stavrogin had not "got much by it." It had not provided him with either the shame or responsibility he might have desired. He was impatient with her, angry because she saw him as the total impostor he knew himself to be. She screamed at him to, "'Go away, impostor! . . . I'm the wife of my prince; I'm not afraid of your knife!'" Since Stavrogin had no knife it was as if she could see the knife for her offered by Fedka.

Stavrogin left angry, muttering about the knife, angry because in his conscience he felt the truth of her accusation. Again, with Marya, as with Shatov and Captain Lebyadkin, he allowed her death when he could have prevented it. She would have been infinitely better off back in a corner in Petersburg.

As Marya was the innocent victim of Stavrogin's perversion, Liza was the voluntary victim of Stavrogin's final hope to "find in her salvation, and be born anew by a belief in that which impelled her to him." Murry calls Liza the "keenest eyed, as she is the most poignantly beautiful of all Dostoevsky's women." She and Stavrogin must have known each other as children, since Stepan tutored them both. As adults they met again in Switzerland, and when Stavrogin left there he left her with the tortures of a compelling love-hate attraction to him, which was the ruin of her ever unsteady

52Ibid., p. 296.
53Murry, Fyodor Dostoevsky, p. 186. 54Ibid., p. 187.
nature. "With no spiritual center to hold on to, nervous collapse is a permanent threat."\(^{55}\)

Liza hated Darya because of her relationship with Stavrogin and felt toward her a "hardly disguised contempt."\(^{56}\) Vague rumors of Stavrogin's association with a lame girl affected her painfully because she could not find out what they meant; she was passionately anxious to see this girl and to know her connection with Stavrogin. The occasion for this meeting unexpectedly presented itself at Varvara's house, and to this gathering, with not only Darya and Marya but Stavrogin himself, Liza reacted with hysteria, and when Stavrogin was slapped, with screaming and fainting.

Liza and Stavrogin were a great deal alike. They were alike in their pride and in their loss as to a use for themselves. Liza tried to dedicate herself to the idea of a book compiling representative current events of each year, but it was only a ridiculous substitute for the spiritual dedication to the promise of eternity which she needed.

In her love-hate compulsion toward Stavrogin Liza taunted him in public about his association with Captain Lebyadkin, who had been writing her love poems. She was completely surprised and overwhelmed when he calmly announced that Marya was his wife. For Liza this was a welcome announcement,


\(^{56}\) Dostoyevsky, *The Possessed*, p. 186.
because it soothed her pride to think that Stavrogin left her because of the impossibility of their relationship, rather than a lack of reciprocation of her feelings. Pyotr had been busily encouraging her to offer herself to Stavrogin, and she made the decision to do it. At the fete, the day of her self-abandonment, the narrator noted that he did not understand why there was "so much happiness, such joy, such energy and strength in that face." Perhaps, like Stavrogin, she clung to a hope for purpose and salvation through this love, or resolutely traded her salvation for this liaison.

The alluring aura of forbidden fruit had evaporated by the next morning into cold reality because there was no love. Liza prepared to leave Stavrogin, telling him, "'I've lived my hour and that's enough.'" She asked if he remembered Christopher Ivanovitch. "'He bored you dreadfully. He always used to open the door and say, "I've come for one minute," and then stay the whole day. I don't want to be like Christopher Ivanovitch and stay the whole day.'" As always it is difficult to judge Stavrogin's genuine feelings—whether he was actually surprised and puzzled by her leaving him, or even truly disappointed—but he told Liza, "'How can I lose you now? I swear I loved you less yesterday. Why are you taking everything from me to-day? Do you know what it

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57 Ibid., p. 487. 58 Ibid., p. 538. 59 Ibid.
has cost me, this new hope? I've paid for it with life."\(^{60}\)
The life he spoke of was his own life; he and Liza had each
thrown themselves into this last desperate hope for love
knowing it was the final chance. Stavrogin told her,

"I knew I did not love you and yet I ruined you! . . .
I had a hope . . . I've had it a long time . . . my
last hope. . . . I could not resist the radiance that
flooded my heart when you came to me yesterday, of
yourself, alone, of your own accord. I suddenly
believed. . . . Perhaps I have faith in it still."\(^{61}\)

Stavrogin seemed sincerely concerned about Liza and the
effects of their failure upon her: '"Liza, poor child, what
have you done to yourself?'\(^{62}\) When Pyotr came with news of
the murders and Liza left in horror, Stavrogin sent Pyotr
after her, "'Take her home so that no one may know . . . and
that she mayn't go there . . . to the bodies . . . to the
bodies.'\(^{63}\) It was too late for protection, however; Liza
joined the murder victims at the scene of the fire and was
killed herself, but she had already died spiritually.

Liza had offered Stavrogin a passionate love; Darya's
approach was largely maternal. Tamira Pachmuss feels that
she is in a class with Sonia, Prince Myshkin, and Father
Zossima because "humility, sacrifice and love are their
marked characteristics,"\(^{64}\) but Darya's character is difficult
to analyze because she is presented rarely. Darya and

\(^{60}\text{Ibid., p. 539.}\)
\(^{61}\text{Ibid., p. 542.}\)
\(^{62}\text{Ibid., p. 541.}\)
\(^{63}\text{Ibid., p. 550.}\)
\(^{64}\text{Tamira Pachmuss, F. M. Dostoevsky: Dualism and Synthesis of the Human Soul (Carbondale, 1963), p. 154.}\)
Stavrogin must also have grown up in close proximity, but their meeting as adults took place when Varvara, the mother who had never mothered, took Darya, the new "mother," to Switzerland with her. Darya may or may not have been instrumental in disrupting the growing relationship between Liza and Stavrogin at that time, but she offered a comfortable, honest association. In his final letter to her Stavrogin told her, "'You are dear to me, and when I was miserable it was good to be beside you; only with you I could speak of myself aloud.'" She must have offered him a hope for faith in himself for he told her, also in that final letter,

"I've tried my strength everywhere. You advised me to do this 'that I might learn to know myself.' . . . But to what to apply my strength, that is what I've never seen, and do not see now in spite of all your praises in Switzerland, which I believed in.'"  

After Stavrogin's fateful night of quest for a new life, he spoke with Darya and seemed to realize clearly that he had refused all opportunities for salvation. He told her, "'Do you know, ever since last night I feel awfully inclined to laugh, to go on laughing continually for ever so long. It's as though I must explode with laughter. It's like an illness.'" He told her of Fedka's offer and that he had left the impression with the criminal of having an open account at his "shop." Darya told Stavrogin, "'I know that at the end I shall be the only one left you, and . . . I'm waiting for

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65 Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 687.
66 Ibid., p. 688.
67 Ibid., p. 311.
that."

Stavrogin accused her of being interested in him only "'as some veteran nurses get specially interested in some particular invalid . . . , or . . . like some pious old women who frequent funerals and find one corpse more attractive than another.'" They decided not to see each other for the present and Darya left him with, "'God save you from your demon, and . . . call me, call me quickly!'".

Stavrogin did call Darya at the end, and she was right that she was the only one left to him. He did not even believe in himself anymore, because of the tragedies he had allowed to happen. He called upon her, but he cautioned her:

"Dear friend! Great and tender heart which I divined! Perhaps you dream of giving me so much love and lavishing on me so much that is beautiful from your beautiful soul, that you hope to set up some aim for me at last by it? No, it's better for you to be more cautious, my love, will be as petty as I am myself and you will be unhappy.".

Darya would have gladly gone with him to Uri, but Stavrogin knew he could not give her love, and though he knew how spiritually sick he was, he was still too proud to bear the humiliation of her self-sacrificing nursing.

If Varvara, or Stepan, the teacher to whom he was relinquished, had taught Stavrogin how to love, to give, he would have made contact with the real world of living people, and not withdrawn into the nothingness of his own proud self-will. His pride atrophied him, absorbing all his strength.

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68 Ibid., p. 310.  
69 Ibid.  
70 Ibid., p. 311.  
71 Ibid., p. 688.
Stavrogin was not insensitive, just not sensitive enough; he had a conscience, just not loud enough; he had yearnings, but not passionate enough; he was not brave enough to risk the self-emptying of love and was afraid of the burden he sought. His problem was weakness, and with full realization of that weakness came the despair that his life would not improve. "'It's not through strength of will but through weakness that people hang themselves.'"

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72 Ibid., p. 87.
CHAPTER V

THE INFLUENCE OF PYOTR AND STAVROGIN

UPON EACH OTHER

Having each been betrayed by Stepan, and each himself a destructive influence on others, Stavrogin and Pyotr were also mutually influential. Somehow the son of Stepan who had never known him, and the pupil who had known him too well, met in "that strange city of Petersburg, which Dostoyevsky reveals . . . as like that chasm in the earth, the mundus where the old Romans communed with the awful spirits of the dead."\(^1\) As a man of leisure Stavrogin helped Pyotr plan the re-organization of his "society," and Pyotr, watching and studying his self-possessed and charismatic acquaintance in admiration, adopted him as the deity for the new society which he planned to construct upon the wreckage of the old.

On his death bed Stepan said that "'Even the stupidest man needs something great. . . . They don't know that that same Eternal, Grand Idea lies in them all!'"\(^2\) Stavrogin discovered nothing to satisfy his need for something great; Pyotr envisioned Stavrogin as the embodiment of his "'Eternal Grand Idea.'" While Stavrogin allowed Pyotr to flit about

\(^1\)Murry, Fyodor Dostoevsky, p. 158.
him, to speak for him, to arrange his affairs, even to use him as an "enigmatic and romantic figure" to dangle before his quintet, he did not realize the god-like role which Pyotr had destined for him, and he repeatedly asked Pyotr what he expected of him: "'Am I a sort of talisman for you?'"4

Pyotr was obviously possessive of Stavrogin. He wanted to know exactly what his idol was doing and planning at all times. The coronation of Stavrogin had become a passionate dedication for Pyotr, and he jealously watched his heir apparent. He became furious when events were beyond his control, or unknown to him. He felt that Shatov had no right to slap Stavrogin; he "turned positively green"5 when he heard of Stavrogin's duel, and told Stavrogin, "'You had no right to fight, you know.'"6 He did not approve of Stavrogin visiting Kirillov, Shatov, and the Lebyadkins without his presence or his knowledge, nor did he approve of Fedka approaching Stavrogin with an offer on his own. Pyotr became frantic when Stavrogin not only did not play his expected part at the meeting at Virginsky's house, but haughtily proclaimed to those present, "'What business is it of mine if you have compromised yourselves?'"7

Because of Stavrogin's behavior at the meeting, Pyotr was terrified that he would lose his "'America,'"8 and he ran

3Ibid., p. 243. 4Ibid., p. 434. 5Ibid., p. 320. 6Ibid., p. 321. 7Ibid., p. 429. 8Ibid., p. 437.
after Stavrogin, completely demeaned himself, "... besought, implored. He was a man from whom what was most precious was being taken or had been, and who was still stunned by the shock."9 He promised Stavrogin Shatov or Lizaveta as a bribe to reconciliation, and he finally revealed to the puzzled Stavrogin his consuming plan for the death of the old world and the resurrection of Stavrogin from its ashes as Ivan the Tsarevitch. Pyotr's proclamation of his love—"'Stavrogin, you are beautiful,'"10 and "'You are the leader, you are the sun and I am your worm'"11—and his kissing Stavrogin's hand completely dismayed the intended god, and "a shiver ran down Stavrogin's spine."12 He felt the oppression of evil's design upon his soul. Like Lucifer and Ahriman, they beheld each other, "like two empty mirrors confronting one another."13

Although Stavrogin called Pyotr's scheme madness, laughed at it and Pyotr's humiliation of himself, and seemed totally unimpressed by this envisioned future for himself, he did not stop Pyotr. All of the chaos which Pyotr caused, the deaths, the ruined lives, he mentally consecrated to his idol. As he told Stavrogin, "'I invented it all, looking at you. If I hadn't watched you from my corner, nothing of all this would have entered my head!'"14 All of his activities were planned

9Ibid., p. 434.  
10Ibid., p. 436.  
11Ibid., p. 437.  
12Ibid., p. 437.  
13Ivanov, Freedom and the Tragic Life, p. 120.  
14Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 441.
around his vision of Stavrogin, and at any time Stavrogin could have stopped them. As the goal, and because he did nothing to prevent these sacrifices to his godhead, Stavrogin was ultimately responsible for Pyotr's handiwork.

When Pyotr found that Stavrogin had left town, the "... flight had astounded and crushed him. ... He had never been so upset. And how could he give up Stavrogin all at once like this!"¹⁵ The suicide must have thoroughly stunned him. It seems probable, however, judging by Pyotr's previous powers of self-preservation, that he recovered from the shock of losing Stavrogin, readjusted his aims, and continued his nihilism as before, with no harmful after-effects from his once precious relationship to Stavrogin. Stavrogin, on the other hand, had suffered mortally from his association with Pyotr.

Stavrogin had always had confidence in himself. He had been bored and aimless, but not despairing; fettered by his extreme pride he had lacked the strength to risk commitment, but he still hoped for it. Stavrogin had been shut up in his selfhood, but had not given up his sustaining "'craving for immortality'"¹⁶ until the influence of Pyotr.

Pyotr was Stavrogin's Ahriman, who demonstrated to him the vacuum of his selfhood. He dramatically revealed to

¹⁵Ibid., p. 568.
¹⁶Ivanov, Freedom and the Tragic Life, p. 127.
Stavrogin his seemingly unconquerable weakness. Pyotr had Captain and Marya Lebyadkin killed, planned the death of Shatov who offered Stavrogin salvation, brought Liza to Stavrogin and her ruin, disrupted the society, and all for the greater honor and glory of Stavrogin, while Stavrogin languidly permitted it to happen, not willing it, but, worse, not much caring whether it happened or not. Only after the deeds were accomplished did Stavrogin seem to truly care; he felt guilt: "'I did not kill them, and I was against it, but I knew they were going to be killed and I did not stop the murderers.'"\textsuperscript{17}

In this feeling of guilt, in this realization of his immense apathy and atrophy of will was Stavrogin's hope for salvation. That could have been the turning point toward his redemption, but by that point his isolation within himself had caused him to "regard his 'craving for immortality' . . . as an empty and illusory claim,"\textsuperscript{18} and he could find no valid reason within himself to exist. His suicide was the final rejection of the idea of anything greater than himself.

\textsuperscript{17}Dostoyevsky, \textit{The Possessed}, p. 550.
\textsuperscript{18}Ivanov, \textit{Freedom and the Tragic Life}, p. 127.
CHAPTER VI

THE CLEANSING OF STEPAN TROFIMOVITCH

The Possessed dramatically demonstrates the importance of the influence of one man, any one man, upon the course of human events, and the special responsibility of a father, a mother, a teacher, a leader, to bequeath spiritual values and to merit the respect which validates their right to authority. By his failure to recognize his stewardship Stepan had blindly set in motion the overwhelmingly abysmal happenings of the novel, the destruction and despair. But Dostoevsky's art is "metaphysical,"¹ "the question of God is the question of all his works,"² and thus if there is despair there must be hope. As the progressively more dire events of the novel unfold, spiritual forces, dormant for all of his previous years, gather momentum in the possessed man himself, Stepan, and he begins to move toward "purification and release."³

Stepan was not a sinner by design or even conscious choice; his problem was selfishness, laziness, lukewarmness. He needed the initiative for action and commitment, and it

¹Murry, Fyodor Dostoevsky, p. 200.
³Berdyaev, Dostoevsky, p. 30.
began to build within him as a reaction to a series of self-
revelations and disappointments. The relationship most
essential to him and his security was his friendship with
Varvara, and a quiet reaction of defiance, very weak at
first, began in his heart when he acknowledged the pride-
wounding truth that, "'... je suis un simple dependent.'"\(^4\)

Stepan was wounded when Varvara left for Switzerland to
evaluate the situation between Stavrogin and Liza without
notifying him, without telling him good-bye, as if he were
totally unimportant to her. When she returned she brought
news of the impending arrival of the poet Karmazinov, and
-crushed Stepan by criticizing the way he dressed, what he
read, how he talked, how he sputtered when he laughed and
told him, "'Oh, my goodness, how you have deteriorated!'"\(^5\)
After this session of criticism Stepan realized the worse
epiphany of all, "'Mon cher, je suis un broken-down man.'"\(^6\)
Until that realization

\[\ldots \text{ he had always felt confident . . . that still he}
\text{had a fascination for her feminine heart not simply as}
an exile or a celebrated man of learning, but as a
handsome man. For twenty years this soothing and
flattering opinion had been rooted in his mind, and
perhaps of all his convictions this was the hardest}
to part with.\(^7\)

With Varvara's proposal that he marry his former pupil
and her protege, Darya, Stepan's pride was further devastated

\(^4\)Dostoyevsky, *The Possessed*, p. 46.  \(^5\)Ibid., p. 80.
\(^6\)Ibid., p. 82.  \(^7\)Ibid.
and he protested to Varvara, "'Excellente amie, . . . I could
never have conceived that you would make up your mind to
give me in marriage to another . . . woman.'"8 To his
confidant he asserted that "' . . . if I had not agreed she
would have been dreadfully angry, dread-ful-ly! But yet less
than now that I have consented.'"9 He was probably correct,
for Varvara was wounded by Stepan's apparent "excessive
readiness"10 and the extra carefully tied knot of his white
cravat. Perhaps because of this disappointment, Varvara
seemed willing to let Stepan suffer with the uncertainty and
the humiliation of not being allowed to see Darya or know
whether the marriage was to be or not. It insulted him that,
insensitive to his anxieties, she wrote to him of her uneasiness
that Karmazinov might fail to pay her a visit, and he declared,
"'She has the face to be excited about Karmazinov, and she
does not answer my letters.'"11 The indignation in Stepan
was increasing with each new affront to his pride and he
exploded with the words, "'Je m'en fiche, et je proclame ma
liberté!'"12 After the proclamation of his liberty Stepan
mentioned for the first time the idea which was growing in
his mind:

"Can you imagine that I, Stepan Verhovensky, cannot find
in myself the moral strength to take my bag—my beggar's
bag—and laying it on my feeble shoulders to go out at
the gate and vanish for ever, when honour and the great
principle of independence demand it?"13

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8Ibid., p. 93.  9Ibid., p. 101.  10Ibid., p. 97.
11Ibid., p. 107.  12Ibid., p. 108.  13Ibid.
The onslaughts to Stepan's self-contentment continued. He heard from Liputin that Varvara had consulted him, a man she had always despised, about Stavrogin instead of him. And the consolation he had joyfully expected from his former pupil, Liza, was instead disappointment and pain when he felt that she had invited him to her home only to interrogate him. It is important that Stepan seemed to feel a sympathy for Liza, to "'forgive her for laughing, for there's an ache in her own heart.'"\(^{14}\) And to be concerned about Varvara after hearing of her distress with her social situation and that "'... she's been putting vinegar on her head.'"\(^{15}\) He called her, "'Poor thing, poor thing, the friend of my whole life!'"\(^{16}\) and said of himself, "'Je suis un ingrat!'"\(^{17}\) Stepan himself was suffering, and out of his suffering was maturing a concern for the pain of others.

His next trial and crucial step in his journey toward initiative and salvation was his meeting with Pyotr for the first time in ten years. He was stunned by his son's cold, indifferent greeting, and worse, horrified by Pyotr's betrayal of his written confidences, and by the resulting command from Varvara to leave her house and not return. Those were substantial shocks, and the narrator confides,

What a complete surprise to me then was the wonderful dignity of his bearing under his son's "accusation,"

\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 139. \(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 138. \(^{16}\)Ibid. \(^{17}\)Ibid.
which he had never thought of interrupting, and before Varvara Petroynia’s "denunciation." How did he come by such spirit? Stepan was exhibiting the results of his new-found inner reserve, won by suffering, and "he had fastened upon a final and decisive idea which gave him tranquillity." Pyotr continued to be a source of great grief, irritation, and anger to Stepan. He delighted in antagonizing his father unmercifully about his age, his uselessness, his ridiculousness, and especially about his relationship with Varvara, and "after each interview he [Stepan] spent the whole day lying on the sofa with a handkerchief soaked in vinegar on his head. But he continued to remain calm in the deepest sense." In this one case Pyotr's fiendish influence was a blessing; he was goading his father into courage and commitment. He made Stepan feel "'like a patriot,'" and his relayed request for Stepan to read a paper at Yulia's proposed fete seemed to Stepan to be a clarion call "to come forth from his solitude and fight a last battle."

Before his final interview with Varvara, which he had been awaiting for some time, Stepan crossed himself because "... his fate was being decided," and this, perhaps unconscious, petition for strength was another important beginning. As he told the narrator about their meeting later,

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18 Ibid., p. 219. 19 Ibid., p. 232. 20 Ibid. 21 Ibid., p. 233. 22 Ibid., p. 322. 23 Ibid., p. 354.
he reported, "'I saw before me not the woman whom I had known for twenty years. An absolute conviction that all was over gave me a strength which astounded even her. I swear that she was surprised at my stoicism in that last hour.'"\(^{24}\)

Stepan's intuition of the finality of the occasion was correct for, after assuring him of substantial financial support, Varvara informed him that "'... we shall live henceforward entirely apart.'"\(^{25}\) She categorized their former relationship as a "'mutual exchange of sloppiness,'"\(^{26}\) and much to his dismay, Stepan recognized the words of Pyotr and realized that Varvara was craving to be part of the new activities of the town, the activities and thoughts led by Pyotr and Yulia. "'They've already put their uniform on you too. ... Chèvre, chèvre, for what a mess of pottage you have sold them your freedom!'"\(^{27}\) He declared to her that at the fete he would "'raise a storm that will either crush them or shatter me alone.'"\(^{28}\) Stepan then revealed to her his grand plan:

"... whether I shall be left vanquished or victorious, that very evening I shall take my bag, my beggar's bag, I shall leave all my goods and chattels, all your presents, all your pensions and promises of future benefits, and go forth on foot to end my life a tutor in a merchant's family or to die somewhere of hunger in a ditch."\(^{29}\)

\(^{24}\)Ibid., p. 354.  \(^{25}\)Ibid., p. 356.  \(^{26}\)Ibid.  
\(^{27}\)Ibid.  \(^{28}\)Ibid., p. 359.  \(^{29}\)Ibid., pp. 359-360.
Quixote-like, he proclaimed to Varvara,

"... I will end like a knight, faithful to my lady. Your good opinion has always been dearer to me than anything. ...

I always imagined there was something higher than meat and drink between us, and--I've never, never been a scoundrel! And so, to take the open road, to set things right. I set off late, late autumn out of doors, the mist lies over the fields, the hoar-frost of old age covers the road before me, and the wind howls about the approaching grave. ... But so forward, forward, on my new way."30

Varvara scoffed at her knight, and his valiant intentions, never believing Stepan capable of the required initiative, and he returned home, "almost dead with emotion."31

As if a providential boost to his increasing belief in himself as a man of action, Stepan's house was raided by Von Lembke's clerk, who felt that Stepan was the center of the manifesto conspiracy. Stepan was "unmistakably triumphant"32 at this tribute to his own self-image as a progressive and an exile, but he was also afraid of the disgrace, of what Varvara would think, and especially of being flogged. For the first time he had his servant put a light in front of his ikon and light it, and as he left to confront Von Lembke about this unjust infringement upon his person, Stepan crossed himself again, saying, "'I have never believed in this, but ... so be it, so be it!'"33 Forces were moving within Stepan that

30Ibid., p. 360. 
31Ibid., p. 361. 
32Ibid., p. 442. 
33Ibid., p. 451
he himself did not realize. He was exonerated by Von Lembke, on the verge of mental collapse from a grief of his own; and Stepan, seeing the depth of Von Lembke's suffering, "... suddenly bowed his head and in a voice pregnant with feeling pronounced: 'Your Excellency, don't trouble yourself with my petulant complaint.'" The old Stepan would have gloried in, and capitalized upon, his injured innocence.

Stepan prepared carefully for the fete, his great last stand. He told the narrator, "'My dear, I do this for the sake of a great idea ... I have been stationary for twenty-five years and suddenly I've begun to move--whither, I know not--but I've begun to move . . . .'" Meanwhile Stavrogin announced his marriage to Marya Lebyadkin and Stepan, concerned about Varvara's state of mind, tried to go to her to comfort her. Stepan was more and more often thinking of others, and with increasing understanding.

On the day of the fete, already a fiasco before he made his appearance, he spoke frankly of the manifestoes and proclaimed that "'The whole secret of their effect lies in their stupidity.'" He proposed forgiveness as the answer, and postulated that the whole problem between generations was a change of aim, the replacing of one ideal of beauty by another. "'The whole difficulty lies in the question which

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is more beautiful Shakespeare or boots, Raphael or petroleum?" 37 He told the audience that without beauty "... there will be nothing left in the world." 38 A divinity student in the audience accused Stepan of being guilty of the crimes of Fedka because "... if you had not sold him as a recruit fifteen years ago to pay a gambling debt, that is, more simply, lost him at cards, tell me, would he have got into prison? Would he have cut men's throats now, in his struggle for existence? What do you say, Mr. Aesthete?" 39

At first overwhelmed by the accusation, Stepan recovered himself and declared, "'I shake the dust off my feet and I curse you... It's the end, the end..." 40 and ran off the stage. He had not been afraid to speak his mind; he was, as he described himself, the one man who "'had the courage to stand up and, in spite of deadly menaces showered on him from all sides, to tell the fools the truth, that is, that they are fools.'" 41 Now he turned to his pilgrimage.

Taking a walking stick, what he imagined as a beggar's bag, an umbrella, and wearing high boots he could hardly walk in, Stepan Trofimovitch began his Quixotic quest for the great ideal, "'to seek for Russia.'" 42 In the first commitment of his life he quietly left his home, his servants,

37Ibid., p. 503. 38Ibid., p. 504. 39Ibid., pp. 504-505. 40Ibid., p. 505. 41Ibid., p. 510. 42Ibid., p. 556.
his security. "... he had not accepted her \( \text{Varvara's} \) charity and was not remaining!"\(^43\) In his pilgrimage Stepan had three symbolic meetings important to his redemption,\(^44\) and the first was with Liza.

Shortly after leaving home Stepan came upon Liza with Mavriky, just after she had left Stavrogin. At first Stepan's three carried items had been just troublesome, but even in this short distance from home they were getting heavy, heavy like his commitment and the fear and apprehension entailed in being true to it. Seeing Liza was like a new inspiration for Stepan, and he knelt down to her

"Because, taking leave of the world, I want to take leave of all my past in your person! ... I kneel to all that was beautiful in my life. I kiss and give thanks! Now I've torn myself in half; left behind a mad visionary who dreamed of soaring to the sky."\(^45\)

Then Stepan noticed the sad condition of Liza, that she was drenched to the skin in her lovely party dress, on foot in the fields, in the rain, and crying. He was genuinely concerned for her, and forgetting himself, a magnanimity new to him, he offered her his umbrella. To offer something he badly needed himself was a total selflessness. Liza refused it, but she blessed Stepan with the sign of the cross, a symbol of her forgiveness as representative of his past. They parted, each to his own destiny.

\(^{43}\)Ibid., p. 645.

\(^{44}\)Stenbock-Fermor, "Stavrogin's Quest in The Devils of Dostoevskij, p. 1934.

\(^{45}\)Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, p. 555.
As he walked on Stepan realized that he had no idea where he was going and that he was afraid to find the anonymous merchant for whom he planned to tutor. He reassured himself that for such an adventure he should not have a destination. "Vive la grande route and then as God wills." Suddenly the accusation of the divinity student came back to him, "'Did I really lose men at cards?'" He had never thought about it.

Stepan's second meeting was with two peasants, a man and a woman, traveling by cart. Earlier in his life Stepan had proclaimed loftily to the men of his social group, "'I would give all the peasants in Russia for one Rachel,'" and now nothing could have been more precious to him than the comfort of seeing them, fellow men, brothers, and he began to follow along behind their cart, unaware of the strange spectacle he was making. The peasants asked him the symbolically essential questions of who he was and where he was going, questions he had only begun to ask himself quite recently. They offered him a ride, and it pleased Stepan to realize that as he followed behind it had not occurred to him to ask for one himself. He was perplexed as to how he would get upon the cart, the brotherhood of man, but the peasants helped him in.

They stopped at a cottage where Stepan had his third crucial meeting. In his encounter with Liza he had hidden

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46 Ibid., p. 646. 47 Ibid., p. 647. 48 Ibid., p. 54.
farewell to his past; in his association with the peasants he had joined the brotherhood of man, and in his third meeting, with a gospel selling woman named Sofya Matveyevna Utilitin, he began to find God. Seeing her reminded him that he had not read the gospel for at least thirty years. He volunteered himself to Sofya as a companion who would expound the gospel to the peasants. He still believed in his role as a teacher. Somewhat muddled from the first of his journey, Stepan became increasingly disoriented, and it became apparent that he was really ill. He looked to Sofya for companionship and she stayed with him. He had, significantly, settled upon her as his hope. In his delirium Stepan was "like Lear in his madness," wise. He thought clearly in his infirmity. He told Sofya, "... we will forgive, first of all we will forgive all and always ... We will hope that we too shall be forgiven. Yes, for all, every one of us, have wronged one another, all are guilty!" For the first time Stepan saw the spiritual realities of life; he saw that spiritual values and virtues are the crucial ones; he saw his own guilt and worthlessness, and that was the beginning of wisdom.

Stepan bowed down at Sofya's feet, kissed the hem of her dress, and cried, "'My saviour, ... Oh, I've been dishonest

all my life..." With remembrance of the gospel, Sofya brought Stepan the revelation of who he was and where he was going. With the realization of his spiritual destiny, forgiveness became a joy and, speaking of Varvara, he declared, "'Oh, I wish her to smite me on the other cheek; it's a joy to wish it!... Only now for the first time I understand what is meant by... turning the other cheek. I never understood before!'"

Stepan realized his former shallowness and irresponsibility: "'Oh, where are those friends whom I have insulted with my friendship all my life?'" He asked Sofya to read him the gospel at some random page, and she fittingly opened to a verse from Revelation and read, "'So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.'" Hearing the words made an impression upon Stepan, who had the insight and honesty now to recognize himself. He asked Sofya to read him the passage "'about the pigs... I want to remember it word for word. I want it word for word.'" After he heard it, he excitedly proposed a comparison, an interpretation for these words which he said had been a stumbling-block to him all his life:

"... that's exactly like our Russia, those devils that come out of the sick man and enter into the swine. They are all the sores, all the foul contagions, all the..."
impurities, all the devils great and small that have multiplied in that great invalid, our beloved Russia. . . . But a great idea and a great Will will encompass it from on high, as with that lunatic possessed of devils . . . and all those devils will come forth, all the impurity, all the rottenness that was putrefying on the surface . . . and they will beg of themselves to enter into swine; and indeed maybe they have entered into them already! They are we, we and those . . . and Petrusha and les autres avec lui . . . and I perhaps at the head of them, and we shall cast ourselves down, possessed and raving, from the rocks into the sea, and we shall be drowned—and a good thing too, for that is all we are fit for. But the sick man will be healed and will 'sit by the feet of Jesus.'"56

After the self revelation of his inspired interpretation Stepan lost consciousness for three days. When he awoke Varvara had arrived, worried, perplexed, and, until she realized how sick her friend was, irritated. Stepan told his friend, "'I've learnt to know real life in Russia . . . et je precherai l'Evangile.'"57 He kissed her hand and uttered, "'Je vous aimais,' . . . She had never heard such words from him, uttered in such a voice."58 Cleansed of his selfishness he could truly love her. He repeated, "'Je vous aimais toute ma vie . . . vingt ans!'"59

Varvara called a priest, and Stepan "confessed and took the sacrament very readily," and made his crowning profession of faith:

"My immortality is necessary if only because God will not be guilty of injustice and extinguish altogether the flame of love for Him once kindled in my heart. And what

56 Ibid., p. 668.  57 Ibid., p. 670.  58 Ibid., p. 671.  59 Ibid.  60 Ibid., p. 675.
is more precious than love? Love is higher than existence, love is the crown of existence; and how is it possible that existence should not be under its dominance? If I have once loved Him and rejoiced in my love, is it possible that He should extinguish me and my joy and bring me to nothingness again? If there is a God, then I am immortal. Voila ma profession de foi."

Three days later Stepan Trofimovitch Verhovensky died, and he died triumphantly, despite his earlier failures. His salvation had been accomplished. The grace for his redemption was won by genuine suffering and humiliation. Out of his own agony he came to understand the pains of others, to sympathize with them, to care to the point of kenosis. With his new outward focus Stepan could judge his past, see his missing empathy with his fellow men, and his neglect of his God; acknowledging his own guilt he discovered the joy of forgiveness and the happiness of caritas. Stepan, like Russia in his interpretation, was freed of his devils and finally "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind."

In The Possessed Dostoyevsky explored the invisible realm of the spirit through the symbolism of external reality, concerned, as always, with the ultimate destiny of man. Despite its tragedies, The Possessed is essentially joyous, hopeful, and even glorious, because although the inadequacy of man alone is made painfully clear, so also is the magnificent promise of immortality inherent in his destiny with God.

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61 Ibid., p. 676.
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