The Author and Protagonist in *Demons*: Similarities in Communication Style and Functions

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To Eleonora Proiaeva, my first teacher of Dostoevskii

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Abstract

Fedor Dostoevskii and Petr Verkhovenskii, the author and one of the main protagonists of the novel *Demons*, exhibit the same communication style and pursue similar propagandistic purposes in their public communication. Both figures function in the framework of public relations, employing mass communication for the sake of publicizing their political messages to broad audiences. In the process of their public communication, the author and the hero of the novel merge literature and journalism, fictional and factual discourse, subvert a critical analysis of their respective messages and encourage an unconditional, if unwarranted, acceptance of their communication. Relying on the theoretical findings of John Austin, Jurgen Habermas, as well as using the theoretical models of mass communication, the present study shows the underlying bond between Dostoevskii and Petr Verkhovenskii in terms of their communication style despite the ideological gulf that separates the two seemingly irreconcilable sides.

Résumé

Fedor Dostoïevski, l'auteur, et Petr Verkhovensky, un des principaux protagonistes du roman les Démons, s'expriment avec le même style de communication et poursuivent des objectifs propagandistes similaires dans leur communication publique. Tous deux agissent dans le cadre de relations publiques, en employant la communication de masse dans le but de faire passer leurs messages politiques à une large audience. Au cour de leur communication publique, l'auteur et le héros du roman combinent la littérature et le journalisme, la fiction et la réalité, pervertissent l'analyse critique de leurs messages respectifs et encouragent l'approbation inconditionnelle de ce qu'ils avancent sans fondement. En se basant sur les découvertes théoriques de John Austin et Jurgen Habermas et en utilisant les modèles théoriques de la communication de masse, le présent texte montre la relation sous-jascente entre Dostoïevski et les nihilistes en termes de style de communication, malgré le golfe idéologique qui les sépare de manière apparemment irréconciliable.

Introduction

Fedor Dostoevskii's novel *Demons* (*Besy*) appeared in monthly installments in the journal *Russian Messenger* in 1871-72. This is Dostoevskii's most overtly political novel and, in his own words, "almost a historical study" (29.1: 260). Political, cultural, and literary events of the 1860s are brought together so that the novel "is almost a compressed encyclopedia of the Russian culture of the period it covers" (Frank, *Years* 453). In the novel, the narrator tells the story of a 27-year-old revolutionary, Petr Verkhovenskii, who arrives at a provincial town and turns upside down the conventional order of life by weaving intrigues, spreading rumors, confusing the local authorities, creating an underground group of revolutionaries, and ultimately committing a murder before his final escape. While Petr Verkhovenskii is the main catalyst of events in the novel, his activities occur against the background of intellectual and spiritual musings of his father Stepan Verkhovenskii. The father and the son represent the two historical generations of revolutionaries, the so-called men of the forties and the men of the sixties. Though the political aspect of the novel does not nearly exhaust the range of its possible interpretations, we will limit ourselves to the political reading in the present paper.[1]

In studying the novel, critics point out the ideological gulf that separates Dostoevskii from radicalism. However, interpreting Petr Verkhovenskii as an incarnation of the moral evils that Dostoevskii finds in nihilism overlooks the tacit bond and connection between the author and hero of *Demons*. We suggest reading the novel

[1] *Demons* is also a metaphysical-religious work. Even though Dostoevskii referred to it as a "political pamphlet" at times, the novel in fact took on the religious ideas that Dosteovskii kept for other novels he planned, namely (the titles are very telling of their projected content) *Life of the Great Sinner* and *Atheism*. Virtually every major critic points out the novel's political/religious dual theme. The novel is said to contain "two main ideological-compositional components" (Evnin 222) and "two centers of gravity" (Wasiolek 111). To the extent that *Demons* contains two themes, "one political, the other metaphysical" (Peace 172), it may be even said to "really contain two novels" (Rahv 108).

against the grain of accumulated criticism, so to speak, to recognize that Dostoevskii and Petr Verkhovenskii are not that far from each other in terms of their communication methods and tactics. We will argue that the author and the hero are in fact one in the way they accomplish their task of convincing their audiences to accept their messages uncritically and unconditionally.

Dostoevskii writes the novel with an unmistakable sense of antipathy and near hatred of nihilists as expressed in his comments on the work in progress. Accordingly, critics have unearthed extensive connections between Petr Verkhovenskii and the historical radical figures of the 1860s. Dostoevskii explicitly and intentionally modeled Petr Verkhovenskii on Sergei Nechaev, the radical activist who organized a group of followers among St. Petersburg students in the late 1860s. Nechaev led this group to murder one of their own, named Ivanov, who rebelled against Nechaev's tyrannic and manipulative methods. The group was rounded up and put on trial which was dubbed "the Nechaev affair." Dostoevskii was long considering an idea of writing about nihilism, and the Nechaev affair provided him with a necessary impetus to write a novel about radicals. He closely followed press reports on the trial of Nechaev and recycled them in *Demons*. The way Petr Verkhovenskii and his clique execute Ivan Shatov in the novel is verisimilar to Nechaev's murder of Ivanov down to the minute details.[2]

Criticism accumulated to date largely treats Petr Verkhvoenskii as a one-dimensional figure, an impersonation of a typical radical revolutionary from the era of the 1860s. In this regard, Petr Verkhovenskii has fared far worse than other characters in the novel whom critics perceived to be more complex and interesting. Stepan

[2] For similarities and differences between Sergei Nechaev and Petr Verkhovenskii, see Joseph Frank, *Years,* 443-46; Evnin 226; Peace 146-50; and Mochulsky 417-18.

Verkhovenskii, Stavrogin, Shatov, Kirillov and the narrator, among others, all have been subjects of separate studies and analyzed from a variety of philosophical, linguistic and religious viewpoints.[3] Most importantly, the connection between this character and his creator has passed unnoticed.

In order to reveal the bond between Dostoevskii and Petr Verkhovenskii, we suggest focusing on *how* the author and the hero communicate their ideas rather than the ideas proper. It is in the world of ideas where the two figures differ but in their communication style they are one. Therefore, we will examine Dostoevskii's and Petr Verkhovenskii's communication in the novel from inter-personal to mediated levels. Inter-personal communication refers to personal spoken address of one person to another. Mediated communication uses some form of a technical channel (medium) of communication (for example, a newspaper or journal).

In the first chapter, we will show that Petr Verkhovenskii's as well as Dostoevskii's description of the revolutionary organization and its activities should not be taken as *referring* to an actual organization that exists beyond the given discourse. The author's and the hero's communication is performative rather than constative in the sense that it enacts its own message rather than pointing to an external referent. We will rely on the theoretical findings of John Austin and his speech-act theory to make the distinction between performative and constative statements.

The second chapter builds on the performative aspect of communication and concentrates on the specific literary tropes that are used by Dostoevskii and Petr

[3] We are aware of only one study that is devoted to Petr Verkhovenskii and which also happens to analyze this figure beyond the confines of Russian radicalism. Richard Pope argues in his article "Petr Verhovensky and the Banality of Evil" that the simplicity of Petr Verkhovenskii's plans and motifs remind "of all the various terrorists and killers of our own day" (47).

Verkhovenskii to create the illusion of a reality behind their communication. These tropes are metaphor and synecdoche: they allow the communicators to merely hint at their message instead of telling it in full. Such an evasive communication is a gimmick to avoid taking full responsibility to account for the full story instead of presenting circumferential details of the whole.

In chapter three, we will transfer the performative aspect of communication to the plane of mass communication. Using mass communication models we will analyze how Dostoevskii and Petr Verkhovenskii aim to secure the audience's attention rather than transmit a message. According to the publicity model of mass communication, the author and the hero use mass media to control their audience's attention by tailoring their messages to suit the audience's tastes and needs.

The fourth chapter describes how the author and protagonist use mass media to practice public relations. Public relations provides a public communication framework to explain the process of Dostoevskii's and Petr Verkhovenskii's propaganda of their respective ideas. Dostoevskii's communication in the novel exemplifies the structure of public relations in that he gives an interpretation to the facts reported in contemporary media. Petr Verkhovenskii also acts like a public relations practitioner by using a typical range of public relations techniques, from news leaks to media events.

In the fifth chapter, we rely on the theoretical findings of Jurgen Habermas to explain how Petr Verkhovenskii's and Dostoevskii's public relations are detrimental to a critical public opinion and help them impose their ideas on their audience. The publicity generated by the author and the literary character helps them pursue their own interests rather than those of their audience.

The last, sixth, chapter deals with a mix of factual and imaginative communication. Continuing to rely on Habermas' framework, we will show that the mix of history and fiction enhances the propagandistic effect of both the hero and the author of *Demons*. They blur the distinction between journalism and literature to present their art as factual material and create an unconditional consent on the part of their audience.

It is difficult to talk about the characters of *Demons* without drawing upon their historical prototypes. The novel is so deeply immersed in the historical context that its characters acquire their fullest meaning only against the historical background. We will often switch from the literary to the historical plane of the novel, especially to discuss the historical development of Russian journalism in the 19th century. Conclusions reached and pertaining to the figure of Petr Verkhovenskii will beg to be applied to the radical writers of the sixties. Nevertheless, we have taken effort to limit ourselves to the literary plane of the novel for the sake of consistency and clarity. At the same time, we drew on historical material when we saw it necessary for discussion of Petr Verkhovenskii and Dostoevskii.

Finally, a couple of technical notes. We have used the US Library of Congress transliteration system to spell Russian names and localities. The names of the novel's characters are used as they appear in the novel.

Chapter 1

Performative-Constative Divide

There are various ways to describe how exactly Dostoevskii and his literary creation, Petr Verkhovenskii, engage in the same type of communication – one by creating the novel and the other within the novel. This chapter describes the performative aspect of the author's and the character's communication. The two figures communicate to their audiences in order to enact and perform an idea rather than describe and explain it. We will begin our analysis first by juxtaposing Petr Verkhovenskii's and Stepan Verkhovenskii's communication in the novel. Afterwards, we will examine how the novel could be seen as Dostoevskii's own performative communication.

Comparison and contrast between Petr Verkhovenskii and Stepan Verkhovenskii as representatives of the two historical generations is valid and fruitful. However, we would like to qualify such a comparison by analyzing not only their ideas but how they communicate them. As John Austin argues, the meaning of a message often lies not in its direct and literal denotation, but in the role and function that it fulfils in relation to the speaker and the audience. In the framework of Austin's speech act theory, Petr Verkhovenskii's and Stepan Verkhovenskii's messages differ in their modes and functions. Stepan Verkhovenskii communicates in the demonstrative-constative mode while Petr Verkhvoenskii operates in the performative mode.

Austin explains that the demonstrative mode corresponds to the type of communication which contains statements having "the property of being either [true or false]" (23).[1] Constative statements point to a certain state of an object, or assert a

[1] In our extrapolation of Austin's constative-performative communication framework, we are relying on his article "Performative-Constative." In our opinion, this article alone succinctly presents his main ideas

relationship between objects. Constative statements make up the foundation for any rational argument based on premises (which could be true or false) and a logical structure (which states a logical relationship between concepts). Constative utterances call for an objective evaluation of their truth by experience and their structural validity by the laws of logic.

On the other hand, a performative statement is not, strictly speaking, a statement in the sense of an assertion of a fact or a relationship between facts. "The performative utterance... has its own special job... to perform an action" (Austin 22). Examples of performative utterances are statements such as "I apologize. I welcome you. I advise you to do it" (ibid). "[T]o issue such an utterance *is* to perform the action" described in the utterance (ibid). Performative utterances cannot possibly be true or false because "it makes no sense" to ask if "commands, questions, and exclamations... have 'truth value'" (Halpern 174-5). While performative utterances are irrelevant to establishing an argument's truth or fallacy, they may be used to create a non-rational impression and effect.

Stepan Verkhovenskii in *Demons* communicates in the constative mode as he "fulfill[s] the high duty of the propaganda of ideas" (30, 33).[2] His utterances are rational judgments on the various social issues such as the condition of "the Russian peasant" (31, 35) or the Russian "nationhood" (32, 36). Stepan Verkhovenskii's circle fosters talks which produce constative conclusions: the circle "prophesied doctrinarily that after

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which are otherwise explained in details in his two books, namely *How To Do Things With Words* and *Philosophical Papers* (published posthumously).

[2] All citations from *Demons* contain two sets of page numbers. The first number refers to the Russian version of the novel in volume 10 of the Academy Edition of Dostoevskii's complete works. The second number refers to the English translation by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky which is used throughout this paper.

Caesarism France would fall at once to the level of a secondary state" and reached other such historical verdicts (30, 34).

Contrary to Stepan Verkhovenskii, Petr Verkhovenskii's communication consists not of constative, but performative statements. He shuns arguments and debates altogether (debates are the breeding ground for constative statements) and reveals that he "really didn't come here [to the town] for discussions" (314, 406). His subversive leaflets consist of purely performative utterances such as appeals and orders to action: "Quick, lock the churches, destroy God, break up marriages, destroy the rights of inheritance, grab your knives" (212-13, 269).

Austin stipulates that the differences between constative and performative utterances are not clear-cut. There are various difficulties with defining, once and for all, what constitutes a constative or a performative utterance. Austin admits that "in a more general theory of these speech-acts... our Constative-Performative antithesis will scarcely survive" (31). Nevertheless, the constative-performative divide is useful in showing that some statements do not necessarily have a referential function but allow the speaker (or writer) to enact a certain role and identity.

Petr Verkhovenskii is clearly playing a role whenever he talks about his fictitious organization. His role is that of an agent of the Russian revolutionary movement which supposedly has covered all of Russia with an infinite number of secret cells. He also assigns a role to Stavrogin to help him dupe the group of revolutionary sympathizers at Virginskii's by instructing him that "[he is] a founding member from abroad who knows the most important secrets – that's [his] role" (299, 386).

Petr Verkhovenskii's performative utterances do not constitute communication at all if by communication we mean transfer of information from sender to recipient. His communication is a show and display in its own right, like a staged play, rather than a reference to an objective and external object. By this token, to identify Petr Verkhovenskii as a liar does not do justice to the performative aspect of his communication even though it is legitimate (to call him a liar) by the standards of constative communication.[3]

Petr Verkhovenskii's communication must be studied on its own, performative grounds. When Stavrogin points out that Petr Verkhovenskii's words are not true, the latter responds with a partial quotation of an Italian saying, "If it is not true, it is well invented" (300, 386).[4] Petr Verkhovenskii is not concerned with the truth in the constative sense but with the performative credibility of his communication. In other words, the reality that Petr Verkhovenskii depicts in his communication is fictional as in imaginative literature. Just as an author of fiction, Petr Verkhovenskii is concerned not so much with the objective truth but that the audience agrees to the imaginary credibility of the story. Gene Moore observes that "[w]hether Petr Stepanovich's revolutionary quintets 'really' exist does not matter; what matters is only that they be *thought* to exist" (60).

While it is generally true that Stepan Verkhovenskii and Petr Verkhovenskii communicate in different modes, there are some features of Stepan Verkhovenskii's personality which speak of his political liberalism as a kind of performance. An

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[3] Richard Pope expresses the opinion of the majority of critics when he says that Petr Verkhovenskii achieves his objectives "out of guile and deceipt" (42).

[4] To be precise, Petr Verkhovenskii says only the first half of the saying in Italian. The complete saying is "Se non e vero, e ben trovato." See Pevear's and Volokhonsky's comment to their translation of *Demons* (note 18 on p. 727).

unmistakable veneer of irony covers the narrator's description of "the talented and much esteemed Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovenskii" (7,7). Throughout his chronicle, the narrator describes Stepan Verkhovenskii's sobs, hysterics, fears, and various other emotional moments as all stemming from the latter's imaginary involvement with the contemporary revolutionary movement. In fact, on the very first page of the novel the narrator confesses:

> I will say straight off: Stepan Trofimovich constantly played a certain special and, so to speak, civic role among us, and loved this role to the point of passion – so much that it even seems to me he would have been unable to live without it. Not that I equate him with a stage actor: God forbid, particularly as I happen to respect him. It could all have been a matter of habit, or, better, of a ceaseless and noble disposition, from childhood on, towards a pleasant dream of his beautiful civic stance. He was, for example, greatly enamored of his position as a "persecuted" man and, so to speak, an "exile." (ibid)

While Stepan Verkhovenskii certainly has his ideas regarding politics, art and history which he communicates in a constative way, he is also using his political communication to perform his imaginary position of a liberal haunted by government. This mix of constative and performative communication that we find in Stepan Verkhovenskii does not necessarily undermine the distinction between the father and the son Verkhovenskii in terms of constative-performative divide. In Dostoevskii's philosophical and literary conception, the radicals of the sixties inherited and further developed the ideas entertained by the liberals of the forties, most importantly, the ideas concerning religion and atheism. The fact that Petr Verkhovenskii further enhances the performative aspect of his father's communication is symbolic, in my opinion, of the similar extrapolation of the atheistic ideas of the men of the forties by the nihilists of the

sixties. In other words, the performative-constative divide helps to draw a separating line between the two Verkhovenskiis while also allowing to establish a sense of continuity between them which the author wished to convey in his work.

By creating Petr Verkhovenskii, Dostoevskii ridicules the radical publicists of the 1860s such as Dmitrii Pisarev.[5] The latter's journalism is written in the performative, as opposed to constative, mode. Pozefsky argues that Pisarev's writings should be analyzed in terms of their effect on the contemporary audience rather than as an isolated set of ideas. Pisarev's journalism should not be reduced to philosophical ideas since "Pisarev was neither a philosopher nor a scientist" (Pozefsky 180). Pozefsky essentially argues that Pisarev's journalism is not constative but performative, even though Austin's speech-act theory is absent from Pozefsky's analysis. Pozefsky warns that we must not approach radical publicity in terms of "synopses, summarizing the ideas" of the radical publicists (17). In analyzing Pisarev's writings in particular and the radical publications in general, we must consider "their emotional impact on readers as well as their content" (ibid). This is because Pisarev "constructed his writings around images rather than ideas" (ibid).

Petr Verkhovenskii also communicates through imagery as seen from his speech during the clandestine meeting at Virginskii's. When speaking of the necessity of revolution, Petr Verkhovenskii uses the images of "roasted hunks," "a hundred million heads," an "incurable patient" and a "swamp" (315-16, 407-408). Granted, images may be used even in constative communication to illustrate concepts by way of examples and analogies. However, in Petr Verkhovenskii's speech there is no idea to be illustrated, only the illustration. There is much effect and impression but no constative

[5] Dmitrii Pisarev figures both in the notebooks and the final text of the novel (Dostoevskii 12: 215, 311-12, 314, 334)

communication on the methods and goals of revolution. Thus, Petr Verkhovenskii declares "that the incurable patient is not going to be cured anyway, no matter what prescriptions are given it on paper, and, on the contrary, if there's a delay, it will so rotten that it will infect us as well, and corrupt all the fresh forces which can still be counted on now, so that we'll all finally go under" (316, 408). Petr Verkhovenskii's talk is not a rational explanation of why a revolution is necessary but a direct appeal to action in which images replace rational justification.

Contemporary critics from the era of the sixties also observed that the radical publicity worked by images and non-rational appeals to its predominantly young readership. It did not lead its followers by conveying a social truth in a constative way, but rather instructed the audience in their daily lives: what and how they should eat, drink, wear, and speak. A journalist and social critic N. V. Shelgunov notes in 1870: "[The radical youth] would like to be drawn a complete picture of practical behaviour. They want to be given all of the external marks of realism. They want to be told when they should wake up in the morning and what they should drink for breakfast: tea or coffee? And what should they do after breakfast? [etc.]" (qtd. in Pozefsky 193). Such instructions describe the radical lifestyle rather than radical ideas and, therefore, help the audience act like radicals in their daily lives as opposed to understanding the radical ideas.

In many ways, radicalism was a fashion expressed by young people's behavior and appearance rather than by their rational convictions. This idea of radicalism as fashion of young people is developed by another 19th century critic, V.V.Rozanov: "An adult needs to know the *truth*, while an adolescent needs to *deify* the instructor, without

which faith in him is lost and the teaching itself dissipated" (qtd in Moser *Antinihilism* 26). Here Rozanov speaks of the deification that conceals the performative communication of the "deities," i.e. the radical publicists. Their power lies in the effect and the impression they produce and not in the rational strength of their argument (the "truth" in Rozanov's quote). In *Demons*, Petr Verkhovenskii explicitly wants to construct such a deity whom people would obey and whose image will guide the masses. Petr Verkhovenskii wants to position Stavrogin as a claimant to the Russian throne, the folkloric Ivan-the-Tsarevich.[6] Petr Verkhovenskii wants to surround Stavrogin with a religious halo of a deity and otherwise uses religious imagery and allusions extensively in describing Stavrogin's role.[7]

Dostoevskii is well aware that radicals' statements must not necessarily be taken at their face value. Speaking of the notorious radical publicity in the early sixties, he feels that one should differentiate between "what is said and what is actually meant" (Frank *Stir* 195). In the midst of the journalistic battle between the radical publication *The Whistle* (*Svistok*) and the conservative journal *The Russian Messenger* (*Russkii vestnik*) Dostoevskii thinks that the latter misinterprets the performative language of the former. In 1861 *The Whistle* ignited the rage of *Russian Messenger* by a series of extreme statements on Russian politics. Dostoevskii perceives *The Whistle*'s articles to be "a mere sign of temperament, a play of young litterateurs" (Kirpotin 116).

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[6] In the Russian folklore, Ivan the Tsarevich is an underprivileged heir to the throne bullied by his older brothers and other ill-wishers. He typically overcomes various obstacles, often of a magic nature, to claim his legitimate power.

[7] The religious and spiritual dimensions of Stavrogin are a staple theme in the scholarship on *Demons*. See, for example, Harriet Murav's "Representations of the Demonic: Seventeenth-Century Pretenders and *The Devils*."

Dostoevskii "[can]not understand why Katkov [the editor of *Russian Messenger*] attache[s] political meaning to *The Whistle*" (ibid).

Dostoevskii gives a similar evaluation to the radical leaflets spread in St. Petersburg in the early sixties. These manifestos called for the destruction of government by way of a violent uprising.[8] Dostoevskii doubts the seriousness of these manifestos just as he doubts the constative meaning of radical articles in *The Whistle*. In fact, the authors of some of the manifestos were associated with the writing staff of *The Whistle*'s founding organ, the leftist journal *The Contemporary* (*Sovremennik*) (Frank *Stir* 137). This is not to say that Dostoevskii thought such leaflets were harmless. To the contrary, he feared that the leaflets would result in a negative public opinion and a governmental reactionary crackdown on the liberal developments officially and legitimately underway in Russia (Frank *Stir* 158).

Dostoevskii was not merely aware of the differences in performative and constative communication, as is seen from his criticism in journalism and his literary creation Petr Verkhovenskii – he also actively puts to use the performative mode of communication in *Demons*. Dostoevskii's performative, as opposed to constative, description of nihilists in the novel explains the peculiar effect that it leaves upon the reader. Petr Verkhovenskii emerges as an emotional image with various connotations that stir up feelings of aversion, disgust and horror. This horror results not so much from knowing Petr Verkhovenskii's theories but from seeing him in action and his usual behaviour. *Demons* does not contain a clear message about the nihilist movement and therefore defies the standards of constative communication: "the novel is not a loose vehicle for a number of truths which Dostoevskii wanted to give to the public" (Meijer

[8] For a list of historical leaflets from the sixties featured in *Demons* see D. C. Offord, p. 71.

141). *Demons* is written in the performative mode where the nihilists are shown in dynamic action and, therefore, create "an image or images" (Meijer 142). These images are similar in their function to the ones used by Petr Verkhovenski to agitate his audience. Dostoevskii's images work at the basic emotional level by invoking the associations with the dark forces in the religious sense as well as purely social aversion to those without honor. As Karmazinov notes in *Demons*, "the whole essence of the Russian revolutionary idea consists in a denial of honor" (288, 371). The novel drives home its message that radicalism and socialism unleash devilish forces in society by showing the demonic in action and performance. Dostoevskii does not describe his characters as static entities but reveals their character through their actions and responses to the fast-paced events. Instead of the "statics of descriptions," Dostoevskii's novel asserts "the dynamics of events" (Mochulsky 353). Evnin observes that the "fast dynamics of the plot" far outweigh any "static 'descriptions'" in *Demons* (258).

We must admit that showing instead of telling is a sign of a literary talent in general and many a non-ideological writer does precisely that. Speaking of Dostoevskii's literary skill, Malcolm Jones observes that performing ideas, as opposed to describing them, is a mark of literary marksmanship:

> A sign of a great imaginative writer is that the philosophical questions which his literary work contains are not simply raised verbally by his narrator or his characters. They seem to be grounded in, to arise from and to be expressed by the very texture and structure of the fictional world itself. (7)

Jones' observation that artistic communication is by its nature performative is appropriate to verbal art in general. However, in this particular instance such an observation must consider the fact that *both* the author and the hero communicatie in the

performative mode. Moreover, as we will show in the next chapter, Petr Verkhovenskii is an artist on par with Dostoevskii in their common use of certain literary tropes.

The fact that Dostoevskii communicates in the performative mode is not simply a "sign of a great imaginative writer" but suggests that he functions in the same propagandistic mode that he assigns to his character. This propagandistic mode will become more evident in the course of this paper. The performative mode of communication should be evaluated in the entirety of other communicative similarities between the author and the hero in *Demons*.

Chapter 2

Literary Tropes

The author and the character of *Demons* use the same literary tropes of synecdoche and metaphor to communicate their ideas. According to Edward Brown, the technique of synecdoche is a central feature of verbal art in general. Synecdoche allows artists to present only a fragment which stands for the whole. The audience is thus lured into imagining a bigger picture of which the given fragment is a part. Drawing on the works of Andrei Siniavskii and Roman Iakobson, Brown identifies synecdoche as "the poetic mechanism" used by "verbal artists" to "create the impression that everything is covered and nothing left out" (365). This impression is illusory because artists merely give "superfluous, unimportant, accidental items" to create an effect of wholeness of representation so much that the artistic work may seem like an "encyclopedia" (366).

Petr Verkhovenskii makes full use of the "poetic mechanism" of synecdoche in his communication. He tells Kirillov that one must communicate by giving only a hint and not the whole picture. The latter will be constructed by the audience itself:

> So that they'll believe you, you must be as obscure as possible, precisely like that, with just hints. You must show only a little corner of the truth, exactly enough to get them excited. They'll always heap up more lies for themselves, and will certainly believe themselves better than us, and that's the best thing, the best of all! (473, 620-21)[1]

Petr Verkhovenskii avoids any discussion of the big picture of the revolution but offers instead various secondary features. He has a time frame for the revolution: "It will

[1] Gene Moore compares this passage to Henry James' comment on *The Turn of the Screw*: "Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough [...] and his own experience, his own imagination, his own sympathy (for the children) and horror (of their false friends) will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars. Make him *think* the evil, make him think it for himself, and you are released from weak specifications" (qtn 61-62).

begin by the beginning of next May, and be all over by the Protection [October]" (289, 372). He shows off a poem supposedly written by Gertsen, the biggest revolutionary authority of the time based in London. The poem is titled "A Luminary Persona" and gives a vague description of a revolutionary who is soon to arrive in Russia and to lead the masses to a revolt. Petr Verkhovenskii creates the impression that he cannot tell more about his organization so as not to endanger it: "I have no right to declare my ways to you" (419, 548). In fact, he reveals so little about the organization that one of his followers confesses that Petr Verkhvoenskii is "a representative of the central – but hitherto completely unknown and, to us, almost fantastic – committee" (418, 547).

Dostoevskii uses the literary technique of synecdoche just as he made synecdoche a major literary and propagandistic device of Petr Verkhovenskii. When it comes to intuiting the audience's reactions, Dostoevskii is just as shrewd for capturing his audience's attention as Petr Verkhovenskii. In a letter to A. N. Maikov in 1870, Dostoevskii laments that the editors of *Zaria* announce beforehand the complete list of writers they are going to feature in the forthcoming issues.[2] Dostoevskii thinks the journal should intrigue its readers by giving an impression that there is going to be more and better writers than could possibly be mentioned. Dostoevskii argues that the truthful list of names in this case is going to be less attractive than the imaginary list that readers will invariably surmise in their minds: "So why did they expose all the names and articles in this year's publication? If they'd keep silent, people would think they are rich. Otherwise, having read the list of announced articles, everyone would say: 'Oh, that's all

[2] The reason why Dostoevskii closely follows the development of this journal is because it represents his views. "For me *Zaria* is my darling. She is about the only journal that stands for those opinions which I now value higher than my life and which, I believe, are the future" (29.1:152).

they've got!'" (29.1:106). This marketing ploy that Dostoevskii would recommend to the publishers of *Zaria* is similar to the quoted advice given by Petr Verkhovenskii to Kirillov. Both Dostoevskii and Petr Verkhovenskii want to take advantage of the riches of readers' own imagination.

Dostoevskii also uses synecdoche in the process of writing *Demons*. He reveals Petr Verkhovenskii, and indeed the whole plot of the novel, by seemingly peripheral details, seemingly accidental flashes that illuminate the characters' intentions. As Dostoevskii explains his own creative logic in *Demons*, "the whole atmosphere and all of Nechaev's movement lies in the fact that at first nothing at all is evident to the reader except certain foolish... traits" (qtd in Mochulsky 422). The author intentionally "conceal[s] and disclose[s] [Petr Verkhovenskii] only gradually, by strong artistic features" (ibid). Wasiolek observes that in *Demons*, Dostoevskii does not give a broad picture and description, but concentrates instead on details and specific events which are supposed to illuminate the whole (Wasiolek 433). By showing Petr Verkhovenskii through fragmentary details, Dostoevskii forces the reader to construct his own evil version of the radical. Dostoevskii stimulates the reader to imagine the complete picture of protagonist and encourages a negative view by showing those details about him which characterize him as an immoral and cruel person.

To draw an analogy with performative communication discussed previously, synecdoche allows a fragment to perform the role of the whole. It may seem that since synecdoche is an attribute of art in general, Dostoevskii, as an artist, is perfectly entitled to use this technique in creating his characters. While we generally admit that synecdoche is a basic principle of verbal art in general, we would argue that

Dostoevskii's use of synecdoche has its own distinctions. His novel has a strong ideological and political streak. *Demons* is Dostoeskii's statement which is supposed to fully express his argument against nihilism. Here is how he describes this project:

> For that which I am now writing for *The Russian Messenger*, I greatly hope, not from artistic but tendentious side; I would like to express a few thoughts even if it would ruin my artistry. I am drawn to express my heart and my mind; let it be even a pamphlet but I will speak out. (29.1:111-112)

Dostoevskii uses synecdoche not only for artistic but also political purposes in a manner similar to Petr Verkhovenskii's use of the same literary trope. The whole period of the mid-19th century was characterized in Russia by an unprecedented interrelationship between literature and politics. This intermingling of fiction and factual reporting occurred for a number of reasons, most notably due to government censorship of the press. The fact that Dostoevskii and Petr Verkhovenskii employ the same techniques in their communication is indicative of the overlap of political and literary communication that occurred in the 1860s (we will say more on the mix of literature and journalism in *Demons* and the historical/literary period in chapter six). Therefore, we believe it would be inaccurate to explain Dostoevskii's use of synecdoche merely in terms of verbal art in general without considering the author's literary milieu.

Another literary trope shared by Dostoevskii and Petr Verkhovenski is metaphor. It allows Petr Verkhovenskii to evade a direct description of his organization while Dostoevskii uses it to bypass a comprehensive description of Petr Verkhovenskii. Petr Verkhovenskii's talk about the revolution consists of metaphorical images rather than proper names of political activities and concepts. When arguing for the superiority of a revolution by violence over following Tsarist reforms, Petr Verkhovenskii likens the

issue to crossing a swamp: "Which is more fun to you: a snail's pace through the swamp, or full steam across it?" (316, 408). Needless to say, the "snail's pace" refers to the speed of reforms in the sixties while "full steam" ahead could only mean the revolution. Petr Verkhovenskii creates the impression that he is part and parcel of the organization which sent him "here with communications" (316, 408). However, his "explanations" to potential recruits contain nothing but metaphors piled up one over another:

> I ask you which is dearer to you: the slow way which consists in the writing of social novels and the bureaucratic predetermining of human destinies on paper for thousands of years to come, with despotism meanwhile gobbling up the roasted hunks that are flying into mouths of themselves, but that you let go past your mouths; or do you hold with a quick solution, whatever it may consist in, which will finally untie all hands and give mankind the freedom to organize socially by itself, and that in reality, not on paper? (315, 407-408).

Petr Verkhovenskii's description of the revolution is at root a poetic, not political, overview: "And the earth will groan a great groan: 'A new, just law is coming,' and the sea will boil up and the whole showhouse will collapse, and then we'll see how to build up an edifice of stone" (326, 422). When Petr Verkhovenskii wants to pair up Stavrogin and Liza Tushina in a romantic relationship and make them both a part of his revolutionary scenario, he describes his plan to Stavrogin using a popular image from a Russian folk song: "you know, we shall board our bark, and her oars will be of maple, and her sails of silk, and in the stern there sits a beautiful maiden, the fair Lizaveta Nikolaevna..." (299, 385).

Talking in metaphors allows Petr Verkhovenskii to evade a direct description of the revolution that he propagandizes. For example, a provincial intellectual confronts him on the idea of "a hundred million heads" that have to be sacrificed for the success of

revolution according to a proclamation (314, 405). This opponent of Petr Verkhovenskii argues that such a mass murder is an impossible feat which would be met with staunch resistance by those fighting for their lives. At this point, Petr Verkhovenskii conveniently asks his listeners to look at the notion of "a hundred million heads" figuratively because "maybe that's just a metaphor" (315, 408). This shows that metaphors are convenient tools to talk about the revolution which is difficult to describe in precise detail and with due justification without meeting some rational objection.

Dostoevskii also uses a metaphor to communicate his religious interpretation of nihilism in *Demons*. As he explains the idea of this novel in a letter to A.N.Maikov, the Russian radicals are contemporary incarnations of the New Testament story about demons possessing a man. Jesus purges them from the man's body whereby the demons enter a herd of swine. Possessed by the demons, the swine jump from a cliff killing themselves. Dostoevskii transfers the story to 19th century Russia: "Exactly the same thing happened with us. Demons left the Russian man and entered a herd of swine, i.e. Nechaevs, Serno-Solov'evichs [radical revolutionaries], etc." (29.1:145). The novel's epigraph recites the Biblical passage of the Gaderene swine which is then retold, roughly at the end of the novel, by the dying Stepan Verkhovenskii. The Biblical story and its metaphor opens and closes the novel outlining Dostoevskii's interpretative framework of the revolutionary radicalism.

By portraying the radicals as demons, Dostoevskii follows on the beaten path of the antinihilist literary genre of the 1860s in which radicals are typically presented as demons with all the physical attributes of the demonic (Gregory 447). In what seems to be a tribute to the antinihilist genre, Dostoevskii introduces Petr Verkhovenskii in the

chapter titled "The Wise Serpent." Accordingly, his description befits that of a serpent in human disguise: "His head is elongated towards the back and as if flattened on the sides, giving his face a sharp look. His forehead is high and narrow, but his features are small – eyes sharp, nose small and sharp, lips long and thin" (143, 179). Most importantly, "the tongue in his mouth must be of some special form, somehow unusually long and thin, terribly red, and with an extremely sharp, constantly and involuntarily wriggling tip" (144, 180).

The above graphic description of Petr Verkhovenskii as a serpent is balanced by the deeper religious interpretation of his significance. Gregory argues that Dostoevskii succeeds in transforming the antinihilist "metaphor of nihilists as devils" into an interpretive framework "beyond the level of mere vindictiveness" (444). Dostoevskii's contribution to the genre lies in the fact that he "infuse[s] the antinihilist novel with a new metaphysical significance. The antinihilist elements in *Demons* become part of a biblical allegory" (Gregory 455). Dostoevskii expands the religious metaphor of the demonic in relation to radicalism "to brand nihilism as nothing more than rationalized chaos" (Gregory 454).

The above metaphor of the demonic tells us a lot about Dostoevskii's vision of his epoch. However, it leaves the very figure of Petr Verkhovenskii in the dark: we know little about him as a human being off the revolutionary stage, so to speak. True, we do see him eating and sleeping, but such scenes are mere conventions of realism and the breaks the character takes to regain his energy in order to continue pursuing his ambitious political goals. The readers have little access to the inner stirrings of this man's soul with the exception of Stepan Verkhovenskii's casual comment that his son, as a child, was "a

nervous boy, you know, very sensitive and...fearful" (75). Dostoevskii's use of the Biblical metaphor to describe Petr Verkhovenskii is akin to the latter's own description of the revolution by way of metaphors. Both the author and the character exhibit their own biases and interests by such a "description" without shedding light on the matter under discussion.

Chapter 3

Mass Communication Models

In this chapter, we analyze Petr Verkhovenskii's and Dostoevskii's public communication in the framework of mass communication theory. Both figures' communication style, tactics, and purposes correspond to the attention-gaining model of contemporary mass communication theory, also called publicity model. [1] In order to explain this model in detail and to show how it relates to the author and the hero, we will compare and contrast the publicity model and the transmission model of mass communication. Such a juxtaposition will highlight the unique features of Petr Verkhovenskii as a journalist and publicity specialist and set him apart from Stepan Verkhovenskii whose public communication follows the prescriptions of the transmission model. In as much as the figures of Petr Verkhovenskii and Stepan Verkhovenskii represent the historical generations of the sixties and forties, respectively, we will extend our analysis to include the historical prototypes of the characters in the novel. Dostoevskii's own comments on his contemporary journalism will further solidify the media-centric reading of *Demons*.

Recently, scholars have begun to look at the historical period of the 1840s-60s in Russia in terms of *how* revolutionary ideas were communicated as opposed to *what* was communicated. In this regard, Peter Pozefsky's study of one of the most striking radical publicists of the era of the sixties, Dmitrii Pisarev, in *The Nihilist Imagination* (2003) is exemplar for its approach. Pozefsky finds that scholars "have done little to explore in any systematic way the impact of the medium on radical intellectuals" (16). Pozefsky

[1] Publicity refers to the combined public awareness that is based on current reports in mass media about a particular issue, personality, event, or organization.

argues that understanding the circumstances in which the radical ideas were publicized helps clarify the meaning that such ideas had for the contemporary audiences as opposed to the modern readers of Pisarev's texts. While Pozefsky occasionally refers to the "medium" of radical journalists, the word should not be taken in its literal sense of the channel of communication. Rather, he means the intellectual and psychological connections that these publicists were able to establish with their readers. In the present study, however, we explore the media of the period precisely as channels of public communication.[2]

Joseph Frank points out the significance of media in relation to *Demons* in his now classic multivolume biography of Dostoevskii. Frank notes that "Dostoevsky's zealously regular scrutiny of the Russian press... is highly relevant to the problem of the origins of *Demons* " (*Years* 371). Frank's comment on mass media as a key to Dostoevsky's conception of the novel, nevertheless, boils down to an observation of Dostoevskii's thorough use of newspapers during the process of writing the novel. In the process of writing *Demons*, Dostoevskii boldly recycled in the novel the details of the Nechaev affair that was widely publicized by the press.

We would argue that contemporary journalism illuminates not merely the plot and the characters of *Demons* but the novel's very structure. The novel shows that newspapers and journals were the foundation and the birthplace of the nihilist movement of the sixties. It reflects upon the history of print journalism in the politically charged era of the 1840s-60s to such an extent that the novel may be called a history of Russian

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[2] We prefer to use the word "public" instead of "mass" when referring to communication through mass media. This is because "mass" denotes a relatively homogeneous and also a very large audience. In a strict sense, "mass" audience has developed in the second half of the 20th century. Therefore, "public" is more suitable for the Russian audiences in mid-19th century.

journalism of this period. In the world of the novel, the historical emergence of mass-scale print journalism in mid-19th century Russia is intertwined with the appearance of nihilists.

Dostoevskii of course was as much a participant as an observer of the journalistic scene of the 1860s. Charles Moser in his article "Dostoevskii and the Aesthetics of Journalism" pays close attention to Dostoevskii's journalistic activities. Moser states that "of all the great nineteenth century Russian novelists, Dostoevskii was the most closely bound to the world of journalism" (40). Moser further shows how Dostoevskii strongly reacted to what he perceived as distortion of facts, intellectual conformity, and socially irresponsible selection of news in his contemporary journalism. Moser concludes that Dostoevvskii's literary talent "launched itself from journalistic reality, ascended into the higher realms of aesthetics, and then sought again to confirm its intuitions through journalistic reality" (ibid).

In our opinion, an analysis of Dostoevskii's journalistic activities should take into account the connection between Dostoevskii's purely professional criticism of his contemporary journalistic scene and his ideological opposition to political radicalism. Dostoevskii expresses his disagreement with the radicals at the same time as he criticizes journalists for their sloppy reportage or their choice of topics. In fact, Dostoevskii's criticism of the journalistic practices he observes is part and parcel of his criticism of the political ideologies, both radical and conservative.

The journalism of the 1860's in Russia is not a mere vehicle for transmitting political ideas to broad audiences. The view that journalism serves the purpose of a transfer of information to audience is described in mass communication theory in the

framework of the transmission model of communication. Russian journalism of the sixties had purposes other than transfer of political messages: the writers aimed to garner attention and prestige to the causes and issues they represented. The attention-gaining model of mass communication adequately describes this particular aspect of public communication. The two communication models are indispensable for discussing the way Petr Verkhovenskii and other characters in *Demons* communicate their ideas.

In order to discuss how communication models can be used to interpret the figure of Petr Verkhovenskii, we must explain the relevant features of the transmission and publicity models of mass communication.[3] Transmission model is among the earliest and most basic conceptualizations of the communication process. The term "transmission model" was coined by Shannon and Weaver, who first described this model of communication in 1949 within the larger framework of information theory. The model was initially used to describe electronic communication between hardware devices in the telephone industry. The transmission model quickly gained acclaim as a "versatile way of conceiving many human communications processes, despite its original non-human applications" (McQuail 43). In its rudimentary form, the model consists of the following components: sender, receiver, message, code, and channel. The sender is anyone who initiates communication. It could be a journalist, a speaker, a teacher, or any other kind of an addresser. The sender communicates a message in the form of a text, visual or audible. The message contains a meaning intended by the sender and which is to be understood by the receiver. The proper understanding of the meaning is based on a code, i.e. language and symbols shared by the sender and receiver. Communication occurs

[3] In our discussion of the transmission and publicity models, we rely on Denis McQuail's and Sven Windahl's *Communication Models for the Study of Mass Communication* and Denis McQuail's *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction.*

over a channel which serves as a medium. Examples of media are books, newspapers, and other carriers of information. Transmission model "describes communication as a linear, one-way process" (McQuail 17). The success of transmission is measured by the extent to which the message is transmitted intact, without a loss or distortion of meaning. In other words, the sender and receiver should have a nearly identical understanding of the message as transmitted and received. This somewhat mechanistic model may be likened to the process of transportation of goods from point A to point B.

This seemingly simple framework of the transmission model has its own cognitive implications as to the content of messages. The model presumes that the audience does not alter the meaning of messages that it is exposed to. It also implies that senders and recipients share the same code in interpretation of messages. This shared cognitive code is logic or reason. Because of these implications, transmission model is best suited for a rational-critical discourse the value and meaning of which is self-evident to anyone who uses logic in interpreting the given information. Not surprisingly, this model has been used to describe electronic communication where strict symbolic logic guarantees a successful coding and decoding of messages sent and received. The model is also suitable for describing an educational process which prioritizes an undistorted transfer of knowledge from teacher to student. The academic setting of educational communication uses scientific principles as its common interpretive code. The logical and rational basis of communication as transmission presupposes that the subject of messages is objectively given. In other words, the content of such communication relates to objective reality of which both sender and recipient are aware.

Transmission model can be applied across a wide array of settings, from inter-personal (person to person) to mass communication, from electronic to poetic communication. Roman Jakobson's famous conception of poetic texts as messages sent from an addresser to an addressee essentially uses the transmission model without naming it as such. Jakobson's analysis is a blend of approaches to language held by "the Prague linguistic circle and, to a certain extent, by the Russian formalists" coupled with notions "appropriated from the then relatively new science of communication theory or information theory" (Reid 74).[4] William Todd in his *Fiction and Society in the Age of Pushkin* also uses the same transmission model (he cites Jakobson as its source) in his analysis of the Russian literary salons and circles in the first half of the 19th century. Todd uses the model's basic components to describe their qualitative and quantitative changes that occurred in Russian literature and society during the designated period.

While the transmission model has been used to study different types of communication, the publicity model is used strictly in the context of mass communication. The publicity model operates with large audiences which give their attention and time to various mass media. The two models differ, among other ways, in the sheer size of audience and the extent to which mass media are used. Publicity model is concerned with large numbers of people as audience while the transmission model can be used to describe inter-personal communication between two people. The two models are the opposites of each other in numerous other ways. Publicity model prioritizes gaining the attention of audience and is not concerned with transfer of meaning. In fact, the publicity model is often referred to as the attention-gaining model, which is indicative

[4] Reid observes in 1990 that a "comparison of Jakobson's model with Shannon and Weaver's is very suggestive, although [Reid is] not aware of any studies in which the two models are confronted" (note 69, 114).

of its emphasis upon securing attention rather than transmission of information (McQuail and Windahl 56). Such a communication "is rarely communication at all, in the sense of ordered transfer of meaning" (ibid).

In the framework of the publicity model, securing the audience's attention is the first and foremost goal of communication. Audience's attention easily translates into money that customers pay for the given media product (journal subscription fees, retail price of books and newspapers, etc.) and political power to influence public opinion. While the transmission model depends on the audience's use of reason and logic, publicity model appeals to emotions, personal and social identity, and fashion. Such appeals are centered around desired images and individual tastes and preferences. In our age of omnipresent mass media, the publicity model explains why important political issues are oversimplified and brought to the level of emotional images, or why politicians' personal identities have become just as important as their political platforms.

When *Demons* is read against the backdrop of the two communication models, it becomes clear that Stepan Verkhovenskii communicates according to the transmission model while Petr Verkhovenskii follows the publicity model. Stepan Verkhovenskii's public communication is, above all, transmission of the "idea of eternal beauty" (25, 27). Stepan Verkhovenskii is a former university scholar and reasons logically. His former position as the tutor of Nicholas Stavrogin further reinforces his role as transmitter of knowledge. In general, Stepan Verkhovenskii transmits the liberal ideas of the forties in accordance with the "high duty of the propaganda of ideas" (30, 33). The content of discussions in the circle that gathers around Stepan Verkhovenskii points to the rational nature of their communication and, therefore, to the transmission model of

communication. Stepan Verkhovenskii's circle "sternly discussed the future destiny of Europe and of mankind, prophesied doctrinarily that after Caesarism France would fall at once to the level of a secondary state..." (30, 34). Even when discussing the town's gossip, the group "sometimes reached the point of stern and highly moral verdicts" (30, 34).

The most important single feature of Stepan Verkhovenskii's communication is his persistent need to transmit his ideas despite numerous signs that his contemporary public finds his ideas outdated and ridiculous. He does not follow the taste of the crowd at the literary fete but challenges them all with his talk on the significance of beauty as humanity's ideal. He is repeatedly told by Petr Verkhovenskii and Varvara Stavrogina that his ideas are outdated and no longer in vogue. The fact that he clings to his beliefs and wants to communicate them despite their unpopularity places his communication in the framework of the transmission model and far apart from the publicity model. In the latter model, the audience's demand is the primary criterion of selection of content. Stepan Verkhvoenskii is obviously going against this criterion and against his son's practices.

In as much as Petr Verkhovenskii is the opposite of his father in his morals and political views, the two also communicate to their audiences according to opposite communication models. Petr Verkhovenskii's purpose and style of communication exemplify the publicity model. While Stepan Verkhovenskii has an idea and an ideal to transmit to others, Petr Verkhovenskii's communication has no such foundation and reason for existence. Petr Verkhovenskii spreads the idea of a revolution but he has no solid idea of what will follow such a revolution. Nevertheless, in his public

communication he wishes to create the impression that a long term plan exists for the revolution and its aftermath. He says: "But we need the people also to believe that we know what we want" (325, 421). The very revolutionary organization that Petr Verkhovenskii supposedly represents and which consists of numerous secret cells – it simply does not exist. However, this does not prevent Petr Verkhovenskii from capturing the interest of potential followers. He recruits new members and gets the whole town gossiping about the revolutionary movement. What matters the most for Petr Verkhovenskii is that there exists a publicity for his organization, not that such publicity is accurate.

Petr Verkhovenskii is concerned not so much with what meaning he may convey to others but how much attention he may gain as a public communicator. He feels the public interest for certain type of information and is ready to take advantage of public attention. Petr Verkhovenskii is a publicity opportunist and, in his own words, a "crook" (325, 420). He would like to position Stavrogin as the mythical Ivan the Tsarevich because people are "weeping for" him and expecting his appearance (325, 421). In other words, Petr Verkhovenskii would like to fill the public information demand for an Ivan the Tsarevich by furnishing him in the person of Stavrogin.

The difference between Stepan Verkhovenskii and Petr Verkhovenskii is the type of communication media that they use. Stepan Verkhovenskii is a communicator who addresses his public in person. Petr Verkhovenskii is a publicity specialist who relies on a wide array of media from rumors to print proclamations. The extent to which mass media are used explains some of the differences in their ideas as well as the scope of their

reach; it also places them in different communication models. Journalism and mass media are the foundation of the phenomenon of Petr Verkhvoenskii as a revolutionary.

The fact that Petr Verkhovenskii communicates according to the publicity model of communication helps interpret Dostoevskii's vision of this character and of the whole radical movement of the sixties. According to the publicity model, the content of communication is shaped not so much by the sender but by the receivers, the audience. The audience's interests and fears, anything that may stimulate its attention to a certain type of message – all will result in greater stimulation of this demand in order to extract more attention from the audience. In this regard, the message and the audience are really part of the same continuum, the same component of the mass communication process. With publicity model at work, public communication conveys messages that represent not necessarily an objective reality, but interests and fears of the audience. This is true for the era of the sixties in Russia and the phenomenon of nihilism.

Dostoevskii, by his own admission, knew nothing about the Nechaev affair, "except from the newspapers" (qtd in Frank 400). This is not only because he wrote the novel in Germany where he fled from his debtors in Russia. The radicals' identity, intellectual outlook, and the whole character was found primarily in journals and literature of the time. Upon analyzing governmental and press reports about the nihilists in the 1860's, Pozefsky concludes that "it is often difficult to distinguish between the reality of the radicals and their fictional representations" (212). Even before Dostoevskii left Russia after the closure of his journals, he strongly doubted that the radical publicity in the form of leaflets, rumors, government reports, and journal articles reflected a solid

and strong movement. Those who worked with Dostoevskii in his journal *Time* "denied the seriousness of the revolutionary proclamations" (qtd in Frank *Years* 160).

Dostoevskii's most important statements on the exaggerated and confused public perception of radicals are found in his journalism. He criticizes the contemporary Russian journalism, and especially the newest organs, for acting like a "frightened hen [which] exaggerates everything" (Dostoevskii 20: 61). He objects to those writers who weave together the subversive proclamations found in the streets, the fires which ravage St. Petersburg and the progressive social tendencies. For Dostoevskii, such statements are "mixing facts" and "false": "What is there in common between a progressive movement of society in general and the street leaflets of an unknown group?" (20:61). In separating the street leaflets from the liberal changes as such, Dostoevskii is also drawing a distinction between the two models we discussed. In terms of mass communication theory, Dostoevskii essentially acknowledges that the leaflets and similar radical publicity do not represent a revolutionary movement in a constative sense, as it would in a transmission model. To the contrary, he feels that the nihilist publicity reflects the public attention given to it and fulfills a different, namely publicity model of communication.

In Dostoevskii's understanding of nihilism, the latter is primarily a publicity phenomenon more than a movement of flesh-and-blood people. This is not to say that the radical young people who wanted a revolution in society did not exist – to suppose this would be to oversimplify Dostoevskii's views. Again, Pozefsky's observations on the "antinihilist discourse," or criticism and reactions to nihilism in journals and newspapers,

help explain the relationship between the nihilist representation in publicity and the radical movement as such:

> ... the image of the nihilist in antinihilist discourse was a cultural construct whose resonance stemmed as much from its ability to refract widely shared social fears and aspirations as it did from its ability to account for the social and political realities of radicalism in the 1860s. This is not to suggest that the nihilists of antinihilist discourse had no empirical basis but that their relationship to an actual movement was dynamic and complex. (Pozefsky 102)

Dostoevskii strongly feels that the radical revolutionary movement depends excessively and overwhelmingly upon its representation in publicity. This is why in *Demons* all of the characters associated with political radicalism are also deeply involved in public communication. Their description either contains references to the actual radical journalists of the sixties or these characters are involved in public communication within the world of the novel. Thus, Shigalev figures in the notebooks to the novel under the name of Zaitsev, a contributor to the radical journal *The Russian Word* (*Russkoe Slovo*). In Dostoevskii's creative conception, Petr Verkhovenskii is associated with the ideas of Dmitrii Pisarev who also wrote for *The Russian Word.*

Aside from historical references to contemporary journalistic scene of the sixties, the revolutionaries in *Demons* are heavily involved in public communication in the novel. Ignat Lebiadkin spreads incendiary proclamations. Aleksei Kirillov prepares an article for publication on the growing suicide rate in Russia. Shigalev publishes an article in a "progressive" journal and is writing a book on the new social principles he discovered. Liza Tushina intends to publish a book, an annual collection of facts and events culled from newspaper reports. Stepan Verkhovenskii and Varvara Stavrogina operated a

liberal journal in their past. Even Stavrogin wants to publicize his personal confession in the form of leaflets. Other characters are associated with publishing activities indirectly. Ivan Shatov operates printing presses, his wife Maria intends to open a book-binding shop.

Dostoevskii's portrayal of nihilists in *Demons* with their deep involvement in public communication and their following of the publicity model of communication – all shows that Dostoevskii perceived nihilism to be a publicity phenomenon as much as it was a social movement. Through his resemblance of the historical radical writers and his own journalistic activities in the novel, Petr Verkhovenskii appears as a ghost, part human and part an agglomeration of social beliefs and fears that he propagates. Pozefsky's comment points out the ghost-like features of nihilists:

> To borrow a metaphor from Dostoevskii, the nihilist was a double similar to the double in the novella of that name. He was a specter embodying the anxieties of the individuals who conceived him. The nihilist, in this particular sense as a product of his adversary's malaise, was not so easily found, described, defined or eliminated. (18)

In light of the publicity model of mass communication, Petr Verkhovenskii's public communication reveals its foundation in opportunistic seizure of public attention in media. Such attention reflects the irrational and emotional interests and fears of the audience, rather than a logical and objective transmission of verifiable facts of the transmission model. While Dostoevskii was certainly not aware of the two scientific models, his practical experience in journalism allowed him to sense the difference in purposes and styles of public communication. Communication models therefore provide a rational and journalistic explanation for the very title of the novel. The radicals are

presented as ghosts, as demons who possess public attention and exploit it to their own ends. Without recourse to supernatural powers, these publicists take advantage of purely journalistic aspects of the public communication process.

Having described how the publicity model relates to Petr Verkhovenskii, we would now like to show that Dostoevskii also follows the publicity model in his concern with how much audience *Demons* would gain, aside from its transmission of the intellectual and political ideas. Dostoevskii describes the subject of *Demons* as a "rich idea... [o]ne of those ideas that have an undoubted effect in the public" (29.1:107). Dostoevskii well realizes that in the business of publishing the technique and the delivery matters just as much as the content of publication. He criticizes *Dawn* (*Zaria*) for making numerous small mistakes in that aspect of journal's production which today we would call marketing. For example, he points out the tardiness of *Dawn*'s issues and argues that such seemingly little details define a journal's success. "But they might think in *Dawn* that this is all trifles and the important thing is the direction. But I'm not talking about the direction but publishing skill" (29.1:107). Dostoevskii's preoccupation with securing the audience for this journal places him in the context of the publicity model of communication. He definitely has strong beliefs concerning religion and politics which he wants to convey through his writing. However, he is not the least anxious that these ideas have "success of subscription" (29.1:108).

Dostoevskii values publishing success immensely. He retorts with notable animation to a casual comment in one of the Russian journals that his journal *Time* (*Vremia*), published and edited by the Dostoevskii brothers in the early 1860s, was not a successful venture. Dostoevskii refutes such claims as to lack of success by pointing out

that *Time* was one of the most successful journals ever in the Russian history of publishing. In fact, he argues that *Time* was read nearly by all Russians who could possibly read and afford a journal subscription (29.1:177, 79).

The Russian public sphere of journalism and literature was undergoing profound transformations in the period of the 1840-60, associated mainly with the rise of professional journalism. In this regard, the publicity model of communication is fruitful to show that publicity as such is a goal of both Dostoevskii and the radical protagonist in *Demons*. However, it cannot answer questions concerning the consequences of such publicity-driven communication. The communication model merely describes the general pattern of public communication but not its political meaning. To uncover the political potential of publicity model and to place it in the context of 1840-60s Russia, we shall take on a slightly different framework of public communication analysis in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Public Relations

Dostoevskii's art in *Demons* exhibits the same features of communication that we have identified in Petr Verkhovenskii's communication. This proximity between Dostoevskii and Petr Verkhovenskii, the author and the hero who stand in ideological opposition to each other, is indicative of their underlying bond. This bond stems from the fact that both Dostoevskii and the nihilists occupy the same information field of public relations and both sides fight for the same trophy: the audience's hearts, minds, and attention.

The term public relations, or simply PR, refers to a set of activities by an organization to create favorable publicity and public awareness of the organization's goals and functions. PR is a part of a general marketing approach to present and "sell" the company to its actual and potential clientele as well as other publics who are affected by the organization or who may, in turn, influence the organization. The publics may include the local or national community, the government, the shareholders and other groups.[1]

We would now like to place the author and the protagonist of *Demons* in the framework of PR. In his criticism and attack on nihilism, Dostoevskii pursues the same goal that many a modern PR practitioner does which is to create a certain kind of public opinion or public disposition towards an issue. Just like PR practitioners, Dostoevskii uses the realm of public communication, or mass media, to attain his goal – he is using the medium of novel to bring his interpretation of nihilism into public consciousness.

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[1] Obviously, there is a great variety of books describing public relations. We chose to consult Dennis Wilcox et al, *Public Relations Strategies and Tactics,* 6th edition. This textbook gives a comprehensive overview of contemporary PR tools.

In *Demons*, Petr Verkhovenskii notes that "nowadays nobody's mind is his own. Nowadays there are terribly few distinct minds" (322, 417). In saying this, Petr Verkhovenskii voices Dostoevskii's own assessment of the contemporary publicity in journalism and literature:

> What a shallow tone there is in current literature! Disorder and confusion of ideas, by God, were bound to occur. But this tone is all-pervading! What a shallowness, what a boulevardness! And not a single appropriated, strong thought, just any kind, even if a false one! What philosophers they are, what feulletonists they are! Complete rotter. But there are however, single-handed people who think and exert influence – and it always happens in such a disorder. If only these few would overwhelm the chaos of the public, and you will see, the public will yield to their tone (29.1:125).

Here Dostoevskii talks about the predominant and vulgar tone of journalism on the one hand and the coherent and thought-out tone of the few thinking individuals. He believes that these few thinkers can redirect the crowd out of the intellectual vulgarity and disorder. Dostoevskii perceived his novel *Demons* to be precisely such an attempt to guide the public by making it see what he believed was the true face of radicalism. The novel is Dostoevskii's tool in his public relations campaign against nihilists not only because it carries his political message. The novel reenacts certain structural features of communication that we observe in public relations.

Any public relations campaign must be based on facts. What PR practitioners contribute is their "spin" or interpretation of facts which must be brought to the attention of audience. Dostoevskii's use of factual historical material in *Demons* is such that a reader must admit the two seemingly opposite truths at once. *Demons* contains historical references to people and events of the 1860s with the most minute and accurate details.

At the same time, one cannot deny the fictitious and propagandistic nature of this work which makes the novel a vehicle for Dostoevskii's own beliefs rather than a historically valid observation. Frank's comment, it seems to us, is characteristic of the critical recognition of the novel's historical and fictional aspects. After listing the historical facts that he identified in the novel, Frank points out the purely fictitious nature of the novel: "All this should be enough to illustrate on what a solid *historical* foundation Dostoevskii constructed what seems to be his most extravagant *fictional* edifice" (*Years* 452, italics added).

In our opinion, any discussion on history and art in *Demons* is based on the implicit duality of the two. In other words, history is perceived as a given, as facts recorded and considered true. Art, on the other hand, is manipulated by the creator, in this case Dostoevskii, and expresses his own convictions and wishful thinking. In many ways, this duality is the same as the duality of art and reality in the radical ideology of the 1860s. The radicals argued that art was inferior to reality. A work of art was only good to the extent that it reproduced reality. The radicals admitted that the esthetic ideal was not yet found in reality. However, at the same time they asserted that the ideal was the real. This contradiction is "the kernel of the entire esthetic controversy of 1855-1870" (Moser *Nightmare* 7). This real/ideal dichotomy of artistic portrayal has rather unfairly earned, albeit in the context of Socialist Realism, the title of "modal schizophrenia" (Clark 37).

Rather than perceiving the radical esthetics of the 1860s as a vulgar esthetic monstrosity, we suggest looking into ways in which this formal split into the domains of the real and ideal can actually be bridged. This would allow for evaluation of radical

esthetics on its own terms as well as for a better appreciation of the mix of history and fiction in *Demons*. We suggest that the field of public relations is the proper context for evaluating both radical esthetics and Dostoevskii's own esthetics in *Demons*.

PR specialists define their activity as interpreting and presenting facts in a certain light which makes the given organization look favorable. PR establishes the bond between an organization and its various publics (consumers, shareholders, employees, government, local community, etc) in order to ease understanding and collaboration to ensure success of the organization's projects. Public relations function in a dualistic temporal mode in its positioning of the present as leading to a brighter future in which the consumers and other publics of the organization shall benefit. In other words, public relation links the real (present) with the ideal (future) in a single continuous timeline where the promoted organization plays the key role and brings about the advertised benefits to people. One of the goals of PR is "public understanding and patience" (Wilcox et al 3). The patience allows the audience to project the present state into the future shaped by the organization. PR constructs an ideal world positioned from the viewpoint of the company which, nevertheless "must be based on facts" (Wilcox et al 14). This mix of facts and fiction serves the same function in PR and in *Demons* alike.

In many ways, *Demons* is a work of PR in which Dostoevskii marshals the historical data at hand from his own point of view. Critics generally admit Dostoevskii's bias and tendency in portraying the radicals in *Demons*. Evnin argues that Dostoevskii distorts the events and persons involved in the Nechaev trial to an unrecognizable degree (227). Of course, Soviet critics had their own political agenda in interpreting Dostoevskii's views on radicals; nevertheless, in this particular aspect they are in

agreement with their Western counterparts. Moser and Peace, among others, point out the distance between historical facts and their representation in the novel (Moser, Antinihilist 79, Peace 437).

Dostoevskii admits that in this novel he did not intend to reproduce facts but aimed to create the human type which was capable of such crimes as committed by Nechaev (qtd in Wasiolek 136). Dostoevskii is not concerned with facts as they are known in the press and to the police but rather with facts of human nature and psyche which cause such crimes:

> My Nechaev is not, of course, like the real Nechaev. I wanted to pose this question, and as clearly as possible in novel form give an answer to it: In our surprisingly progressive and contemporary society how do not only a Nechaev but Nechaevs come into being, and in what way does it happen that these Nechaevs are able to gather followers? (qtd in Wasiolek 136)

As the quotation above indicates, Dostoevskii was concerned with Nechaev not as a particular individual, but as a social phenomenon revealing the underlying social trends. Dostoevskii's portrayal of Nechaev is the reverse of Nikolai Chernyshevskii's portrayal of "new men and new women" in his *What Is To Be Done?*. Both approaches attempt to reveal an implicit and higher reality behind the reality that can be historically and journalistically documented. Both authors attempt to reveal the true motifs and desires behind the radicals, or the "new men."

In *Demons* Dostoevskii satirizes the events and characters of Chernyshevskii's *What Is To Be Done?* (12:215). In his novel, Chernyshevskii is concerned with material overlooked by his contemporary literature yet inherently present in the social reality of the times (Paperno 10). *What Is To Be Done?* is an illustration and an explanation of how

a socialist organization of labor and personal life is beneficent to the moral and economic development of men and women. The novel promotes socialist principles by showing how they work out successfully in the lives of the novel's characters. Chernyshevskii believes that the type of human relations he describes in the novel was perfectly possible in reality and that in fact many people have reached a point where they could enter this new world of socialist ideas and make them part of their daily lives. In the novel, Chernyshevskii presents a hypothetical situation as real, as something already developing in his contemporary reality. Chernyshevskii indulges precisely in that type of mixing of facts and fiction that attracted critics' attention. He highlights the fact that the ideal, i.e. the new people, is in the process of emerging – they are thus caught between present and future, not quite actualized but having started to appear and develop in Russian society. Chernyshevskii addresses the new people in *What Is To Be Done?*:

> If you already formed the reading public there would be no necessity for me to write; if you did not yet exist, it would not be possible for me to write. But you do not yet constitute a public, though you are already amongst the public – therefore it is still necessary and already possible for me to write (qtd in Zekulin, "Forerunner" 470).

In the above passage one can see how Chernyshevski bridges the present and the future, the real and the ideal. Understanding how Chernyshevskii and other radicals perceived this link is a key to Dostoevskii's art in *Demons*. Dostoevskii essentially does the same, albeit with a different purpose. Chernyshevskii uses his novel to describe and praise the new people, to show their dignity and honor in their lifestyle and behavior. Dostoevskii, on the other hand, shows the same new people, i.e. nihilists, with the purpose of showing their lack of honor and corrupt morality.

In as much as Chernyshevskii's novel *What Is To Be Done?* is a work of PR for the "new people," so Dostoevskii's novel is also a work of PR only with an opposite purpose: it is "black PR" which intentionally portrays the radicals in the most dark and ridiculous tones. According to Dostoevskii, one must "write with a whip in hand" when writing about nihilists because they deserve a "decisive lashing" (29.1:113). Such comments reveal that Dostoevskii turns the radicals' own weapon – public relations – against them.

In *Demons*, history and art are the equivalent of the reality and ideal. Only the ideal in this case is not the bright future to which one strives, as radicals would have it, but the horrible warning of what socialism would lead to. Naturally, this ideal of socialism as a "right to dishonor" is Dostoevskii's own creation just as much as Chernyshevskii's idyllic conflict-free socialist working communes are a product of his fiction (288, 371). Both Chernyshevskii and Dostoevskii weave together the reality that they observe and the (anti-)ideal they create into a single whole where the two are inseparable. This interdependency of art and history in *Demons* is a result of the publicity function that the novel fulfills: public relations. In public relations, the future/ideal is directly linked to the present/reality by the efforts of the organization publicized. However, in public relations this link is presented in a positive light to garner public support for the organization (*What Is To Be Done?* is a case in point). Dostoevskii does the reverse: he still employs public relations techniques and performs public relations, but they are negative. *Demons* elicit aversion and dislike toward revolutionaries.

This proximity between Dostoevskii and Chernyshevskii in terms of their common use of public relations methods to argue for their respective causes explains why

Dostoevskii describes Petr Verkhovenskii as a PR practitioner. Petr Verkhovenskii employs a classical gamut of PR techniques. Public relations practitioners use media events, also called news event or "pseudoevents," to draw public attention and attain some publicity in the media (Wilcox et al 28). Petr Verkhovenskii "control[s]" Iulia Lembke and inspires her to organize a literary fete (354, 462). For the purposes of Petr Verkhovenskii's propaganda, this fete serves as a news event. According to Webster's New World Dictionary of Media and Communications, a news event is "an occasion usually conceived and set up by a public relations practitioner and designed to attract attention" (Weiner 369). One month prior to the fete, Iulia Lembke "babble[s] about her fete with whoever happen[s] along, and ... even send[s] a notice to one of the metropolitan newspapers" (356, 464). She hopes that the toasts to be proclaimed during the fete would be "passed on in the form of reports to the metropolitan newspapers ... [and] go winging over all the provinces" (356, 464). The preparations for the fete and the expected publicity in its aftermath point to its news-generating function in the eyes of the organizers, Iulia Lembke and Petr Verkhovenskii who works behind the scenes. While Iulia Lembke's naïve hopes for the fete did not materialize, nevertheless the fete served well to advance Petr Verkhovenskii's revolutionary propaganda. The aftermath of the event reverberates with an image of social disorder and chaos.

An ethically controversial technique in public relations is a news leak, by means of which a PR practitioner may use discreet channels to provide information to a mass media outlet and make the information known to broad publics. "[A news] leak may appear to occur by accident, but the intent of the leaker may be to convey information that would otherwise not have been made public" (Weiner 388). Petr Verkhovenskii

leaks news by dictating to Kirillov the latter's suicide note. The note points to the existence of an underground revolutionary movement which is functional enough – such is the impression to be made – to cleanse its own ranks. Petr Verkhovenskii knows that this note would become an object of public attention as soon as it is revealed.

PR practitioners have to control rumors as they recognize the power of rumors to influence people. PR professionals admit that "informal conversations among peers and friends influence our thinking and behavior more than TV commercials or newspaper editorials do" (Wilcox et al 533). Petr Verkhovenskii also points out the power of rumors or "legends" as he calls them which, coupled with clandestine activities of revolutionary quintets, can surpass newspapers: "The main thing is the legend!... These crews, these fivesomes – no need for the newspapers!" (326, 422). He wants to position Stavrogin as an Ivan the Tsarevich to start a massive wave of rumors.[2] "[I]t's even possible to show [Stavrogin/Ivan the Tsarevich], for example, to some one person out of a hundred thousand. And it will start spreading all over the earth: 'We've seen him, we've seen him'" (326, 422). Petr Verkhovenskii's reliance on rumors may be historically accurate as per the spread of nihilist publicity in the 1860s. According to the modern interpretation of the origins of rumors by publicity specialists, rumors flourish when certain conditions are ripe:

> People spread rumors by word-of-mouth for a number of reasons: (1) they are advocates of conspiracy theories and distrust all institutions of society; (2) they feel victimized by a complex, uncaring society and have

[2] In the aftermath of Russian serf emancipation, the serfs spread the rumor that the true and more generous terms of the Great Reform have been swapped by the cunning gentry. A mythical Ivan the Tsarevich, so the rumor went, was going to announce the true text of the law. See Joseph Frank *Years* 452.

> high anxiety; (3) they seek recognition from peers by claiming to have "inside" information; and (4) they find the rumor somewhat plausible. (Wilcox et al 525)

All of the above criteria are well applicable to the nihilist-oriented youth and the advocates of radicalism in the sixties. Moreover, as Pozefsky argues, the very image of nihilist was based on social fears and was a magnet for public speculations. Similarly, social psychologists explain that "[r]umors validate the world view of those who believe them" (ibid). To top it all off, Dostoevskii appears as someone extremely sensitive to the slightest alterations in public mood, in rumors, and public opinion. His characters are usually obsessed with what other people think about them or about their beliefs. Take for example the underground man who recurs in various form in most of his novels and is most explicitly described in *Notes from Underground.* This character shows an extreme sensitivity to other people's opinion of him to an extent that borders on malaise.

Public relations is present in *Demons* in the form of the PR techniques used by Petr Verkhovenskii. Dostoevskii puts these techniques in the hands of Petr Verkhovenskii as a token of his recognition that nihilism drew its strength from publicity in the forms of rumors, proclamations, and journalism that it generated, not to mention nihilist representations in the literature of the time (Chernyshevskii's novel *What Is To Be Done?* and Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* being the best known examples). Dostoevskii turns the radicals' own weapon of public relations against them in *Demons*. The novel denounces radicalism by its depiction of the ruthless and amoral persona of Petr Verkhvoenskii. However, the novel also enacts the structural features of public relations such as merging future and present, or an ideal and the real. Dostoevskii, like a PR

practitioner, takes the known facts reported in the press and reworks them into a vision of radicalism that explains how such facts as the Nechaev affair come into being. Public relations, as a method and as a structure of communication, pervade the fabric of *Demons* both in terms of the novel's functions and in its thematic composition. Most importantly, the field of PR helps to identify the author and the hero of *Demons* as competitors on equal ground who engage in the same type of propagandistic activity to achieve opposite goals. Dostoevskii and the radicals whom he attacks in the novel share the same cultural and literary milieu which explains this and other similarities between them. Looking into this cultural environment from which Dostoevskii and nihilists spring will further illuminate and explain their bond.

Chapter 5

Manipulative and Critical Publicity

Jurgen Habermas' theoretical framework of publicity presented in his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* helps explain how and why Petr Verkhovenskii's as well as Dostoevskii's public communication in *Demons* is inherently manipulative and detrimental to a critical public opinion. For the purposes of his argument, Habermas divides publicity into two types: a critical publicity and manipulative publicity. Habermas' discussion of the two types of publicity has a normative underpinning, with the norm being the freedom of private people to engage in a public debate unrestrained by private, organizational, corporate, or governmental interests. This norm draws a dividing line between the critical publicity as "critical public debate of private people" (210) and the manipulative publicity "achieved with the help of the secret politics of interest groups" (201). The difference between these two types of publicity is the extent to which public communication is "emancipated from the constraints of survival requirements" (160). In other words, in critical publicity communicators put forth their messages uninfluenced by their political and commercial interests, or any other "dictates of life's necessities" (ibid.). On the other hand, manipulative publicity is a direct result of the pursuit of one's "private business affairs" (ibid.).

Habermas's division of publicity into the two types – critical-rational debates and manipulative public relations – essentially corresponds to the previously discussed division of public communication according to the two communication models: transmission model and publicity model. Habermas describes critical publicity as "transmission and amplification" of critical debates on public issues thus placing critical

publicity in the context of a transmission model (189). Communication as "staged display" is not only a sign of the manipulative publicity discussed by Habermas but is also a central feature of a publicity model of communication (206). However, Habermas' argument goes further than the communication models because the latter describe the general pattern of communication but not its political meaning. Habermas' framework allows the explanation of how the type of communication used by the author and protagonist of *Demons* is manipulative and detrimental to a critical public opinion.

For rational-critical communication to occur, it is necessary that a communicator is able to separate abstract reasoning from immediate selfish interests. This allows for an unbiased consideration of ideas and the taking of sides on issues out of their universal logical appeal rather than their specific consequences to particular individuals. Habermas finds such a critical publicity in private gatherings in Western Europe in the 18th and the first half of the 19th century. "The rational-critical debate of private people in the salons, clubs, and reading societies was not directly subject to the cycle of production and consumption, that is, to the dictates of life's necessities" (Habermas 201). Such circles also existed in Russia in the period from 1800-1850. Russian nobility met in salons and circles to discuss monarchic policies and debate various political issues of the day, most importantly serfdom (Lotman, *Pushkin* 25-26).

The separation of one's intellect and abstract reasoning power from one's need to procure daily living is embodied, with an unmistakable touch of irony, in the figure of Stepan Verkhovenskii in *Demons*. He delivers speeches on the most lofty and abstract matters without considering how such communication reflects upon his financial well-being. While he is guiding Varvara Stavrogina in her development, he is also living on

her estate at her expense. If it later appears, in Stepan Verkhovenskii's own words, that he has been "grudging off" of Varvara Stavrogina, it happens accidentally, "just so, by itself" (266, 341). Stepan Verkhovenskii explains that "grudging off has never been a guiding principle of his life" and that "something higher than food" united him and Varvara Stavrogina (ibid). Despite the ambiguity of Stepan Verkhovenskii's relationship with Varvara Stavrogina, he nevertheless sincerely wishes to relate to her "disinterestedly" (ibid). In doing so, Stepan Verkhovenskii strives for the ideal described by Habermas, namely, "a separation inside the private realm between, on the one hand, affairs that private people pursued individually each in the interests of reproduction of his own life and, on the other hand, the sort of interaction that united people into a public" (160).

The radical characters in *Demons* summarily deny the possibility of separating public and private domains. To Petr Verkhovenskii, his father's relationship with Varvara Stavrogina is based on "mutual profit" (239, 305). In Petr Verkhovenskii's terms, Stepan Verkhovenskii "needed money just like everyone else" and has been "milking [Varvara Stavrogina] like a nanny goat" (239, 305). Petr Verkhovenskii's comment shows the essential trait of radical ideology of not making a distinction between one's intellectual and spiritual aspirations on the one hand, and one's material interest on the other.

Even though Dostoevskii launches the novel as an attack on radical ideology, ironically, he is like radicals in that he does not make a distinction between his ideological and material interests. While he uses literature and journalism to speak out on the philosophical and political issues of the day, his writings are also his sustenance

which explains why he does not forget to consider their material aspect. By writing *Demons*, for example, Dostoevsky hopes "to make as much money as [he received] for *Crime and Punishment*" (29.1:107). As Strakhov characterized Dostoevsky's journalism, "here were his main intellectual interests, and here as well were his material interests" (qtd. in Saraskina 211). Dostoevskii shares with the radical writers their position in the history of Russian journalism and literature in that they were among the first *professional* writers for whom writing was the sole source of income.

A consideration of Dostoevskii's professional milieu calls for certain comments on Habermas' description of critical publicity. According to Habermas, public communication is most critical when ego and reason are kept separate so that people communicate and examine their own or others' public communication objectively, on the basis of logic rather than personal benefits incurred by backing one or the other side in an argument. Habermas finds such critical communication in private salons and circles which were formed by nobility, or in other words, fairly wealthy people. What remains unsaid and implicit in Habermas' discussion of private gatherings as the loci of critical publicity is that their participants were able to *afford* to put aside the pressures of practical life and engage in debates that had no direct and immediate bearing on their business lives. To illustrate it with an example from *Demons*, Stepan Verkhovenskii spends nights talking about the idea of eternal beauty because Varvara Stavrogina pays for his living expenses. Moreover, Stepan Verkhovenskii's historical prototype, Timofei Granovskii, was also someone unburdened by worries of financial security.[1] Granovskii grew up in a noble home and enjoyed a guaranteed income in addition to his university

[1] Dostoevskii intentionally modeled Stepan Verkhovenskii on Granovskii. This is discussed by D.C. Offord, pp 75-76, Peace 144, Evnin 236.

teaching post.[2] On the other hand, another prominent figure of the forties, Vissarion Belinskii, was of humble origins and, therefore, could not afford to give himself completely to distinterested abstract social thought.[3] In the midst of abstract discussions on such topics as the "Absolute" and "the eternally beautiful and sublime" in the circle of Mikhail Bakunin, Belinskii kept thinking about his "apartment, the corner store, frockcoats and trousers, debts, and all the loathsome things in life" as he admits in his letters (11: 177-78). Therefore, Habermas' definitions of "critical" and "manipulative" publicity should not be taken as irreconcilable opposites but rather as different degrees of the same selfish pursuit of one's business interests. These interests are latently present as accomplished acts of proprietorship of nobility or explicitly evident in the process of active pursuit in case of professional writers and journalists. When Stepan Verkhovenskii addresses a crowd at the literary celebration, he goes into his characteristic speech on the importance of beauty. A radical seminarian in the audience points out the inappropriateness of hearing about humanistic values from someone who once sold his serf into the army to pay his gambling debt. This former serf of Stepan Verkhovenskii's is Fed'ka, a prisoner on the run who haunts the town's vicinities. The seminarian's comment points toward an inherent connectedness rather than separateness of the manipulative and critical communication. Therefore, to compare Dostoevskii to Petr Verkhovenskii is not to label Dostoevskii as a manipulative communicator but rather to draw an analogy between the two figures on the basis of their common sociological

[2] See Priscilla Roosevelt's *Apostle of Russian Liberalism: Timofei Granovsky* for a biography of this figure.
[3] Dostoevskii rather spitefully notes that "Belinskii was not at all a gentilhomme, [sic] – oh, no. (God knows what his roots were. His father, it seems, was a military doctor.)" (21:9-10). See Richard Freeborn's *Furious Vissarion: Belinskii's Struggle for Literature, Love, and Ideas* for details of Belinskii's professional and personal life.

environment that they share as writers, artists, and communicators (across the fictional divide, since one of them, after all, is a literary creation).

The historical period of the 1840-60 reflected in *Demons* is not only a period when the Russian liberal tradition was turning towards socialism but also a period of transition from private circles to commercial print media for dissemination of political ideas. *Demons* can be seen as an illustration of this transition through the figures of Stepan Verkhovenskii and Petr Verkhovenskii. The former is a man of private gatherings, of salons and circles. William Todd refers to salons and circles in Russia as "familiar associations" in his study of how literature was produced and disseminated in Russia. Familiar associations developed in Russia in the late 18th century supported by noble hosts who could afford to have guests with literary and intellectual interests gather at their homes. Such evenings were held on a regular basis until the late 1840s when they started to lose their central role in the upbringing of writers due to the rise of mass scale commercial publishing. Circles typically were a place for political and philosophical discussions and were less artistic compared to salons. Stepan Verkhovenskii enacts various characteristics of the liberal circles of the forties in his outlook, his speeches, and his whole personality. To the extent that he voices the liberal ideas of the forties, especially of such figures as Timofei Granovskii, he is firmly grounded in the very culture of circles where ideas and opinions are exchanged for the sake of discussion and little beyond that. In the novel, Stepan Verkhovenskii hosts his own circle where participants engage in "jolly liberal chatter" (30,33).

Not only does Stepan Verkhovenskii host his own circle but he is also an attribute, as a literary critic and a thinker, of Varvara Stavrogina's salon. Moreover,

Stepan Verkhovenskii has various features that place him in salon culture just as he may be said to belong to the culture of circles. To gain an idea about the culture of salons one may look at I. I. Panaev's "Boudoir of a Woman of Society (An Episode from the Life of a Poet in Society)," published in 1834, where a poet is presented as a Stepan Verhovenskii type. The poet lives off the graces of his patron woman who is sophisticated enough artistically to appreciate the poetic talent and has adequate resources to support the artist financially (Todd 69). This idyllic relationship between an artist and a rich artistic connoisseur is strengthened by mutual love (ibid). F. M. Ioffe writes Panaev's "Boudoir" is just one of the many works of this period which address the relationship of artist to society in a highly romantic fashion: N. V. Kukolnik's "Torkvato Tasso" (1833), N. A. Polevoi's "Zhivopisets" (1833) and "Abadonna" (1834), A. V. Timofeev's "Improvisator" (1832), and V. F. Odoevsky's "Zhivopisets" (1839) (5). It is not surprising then that the presence of a romance is intuited and expected, according to the literary genre and the perceived romantic intrigue of salons, by Stepan Verhovenskii. Before dying, he makes his feelings explicit to Varvara Stavrogina, and of course he does so in French, the language of Russian nobility: "Je vous aimais!" (Dostoevsky 10: 501). When Stepan Verhovenskii uses French to address his audience at the grand literary celebration organized by Iulia Lembke, formally he treats the uneducated mass of workers as a noble salon gathering. The lower classes of society were neither the context nor the intended audience for the salon artists who could talk about "nongentry groups" only in terms of the "comic" (Todd 57). Likewise, the narrator of *The Devils* does not tire to point out how comic and ridiculous, albeit unintentionally so, were Stepan Verhovenskii's ideas about the lives of Russian peasant masses.

In the course of the novel, all of the members of Stepan Verkhovenskii's circle, except for the narrator, leave Stepan Verkhovenskii and join Petr Verkhovenskii's clique. This is symptomatic of the large scale changes that were occurring in the media of publicity. Aronson and Reiser trace the gradual transition of literary influence from aristocratic circles and salons of the forties to professional collectives of journals in the 60s. The loose and blurry membership of salons and circles in the 1840s was replaced by editorial offices of journals with "renumeration of literary labor [and] division of labor" by the 1850s (Aronson and Reiser 81). Journals from the 1850s and onwards were operated "on material basis" with ensuring financial agreements between editors and contributors (Aronson and Reiser 297). The commercially operated journals often had their origins in the free associations, the circles of the 1840s. However, with commercialization they also severed their ties with the circles and replaced them (Aronson and Reiser 297): "With the development of the book industry and journalism it became possible for writers to unite beyond the confines of a single time and space. This allowed for propaganda among readers who had no access to this or that salon. A journal replaces a circle" (Aronson and Reiser 81).

The fact that Petr Verkhvoenskii spreads the ideas of Pisarev, Dobroliubov, Chernyshevskii and other radical journalists links them all not merely in terms of the content of their ideas but also their medium. Petr Verkhovenskii is able to capture everyone's attention with his revolutionary publicity that he orchestrates through rumors and proclamations. At the same time, Stepan Verkhvoenskii's own ability to generate publicity is on the decline. He feels "forgotten and not needed by anyone" (20, 21). He tries to write something but his projects never come to fruition. Varvara Stavrogina

scolds him, setting nihilists as an example to him by saying that "they all write" (51, 61). This publicity victory of the sons over the fathers is reminiscent of the radical publicity in the sixties which overshadowed whatever respect there was left for the men of the forties. The success of nihilists in winning the reading audience is linked, in Stepan Verkhovenskii's mind, with commercialization of public communication. As he proudly leaves Varvara Stavrogina following his defeat at the fete, he fears that he too will have no other choice but sell his knowledge and ideas by becoming a private tutor in a merchant's house (Dostoevsky 10: 262). Stepan Verkhovenskii's dreaded "ce marchand" symbolizes the material foundation of the public flow of ideas in the sixties (ibid). Membership of salons and circles was formed on the basis of personal ties of friendship and blood relations. Such is Stepan Verkhvoenskii's circle prior to its disintegration: the members share a similar ideological outlook which brings them together. The basis for Petr Verkhovenskii's audience is money. All those who attend the fete organized by Petr Verkhovenskii and Iuliia Lembke form an audience not so much because they share a similar ideology but because they bought an entrance ticket which cost three roubles.

In *Demons*, Liza Tushina points to the material base of print media when she says her intended book must sell and reach the widest possible audience: "We want everyone to buy it, we want it to be a book that will be found on every table" (Dostoevsky 10: 104). At another point, she clarifies her ambition to Shatov: "...I am very anxious that the book should circulate and should be very proud of making a profit" (Dostoevsky 10: 105). Liza's publishing project is similar to Dostoevskii's own plan to publish a collection of facts and events based on newspaper reports (Catteau 191). Like Liza, Dostoevskii also hoped that this venture would be a commercial success. In the

conditions where a dissemination of a media product was invariably tied to its *sales*, an author cannot help but consider the commercial success of a product when considering its ideological impact. This is the difference between the worlds of familiar associations and print journals. To be precise, some liberal thinkers who were members of familiar associations did attempt to spread their messages through published magazines in the 1810-30s. However, for them their publishing enterprise was not a professional activity but rather an add-on to their main channel of communication in the familiar associations. Not surprisingly, such attempts were not successful and were short-lived.

Aleksandr Gertsen, one of the prototypes of Stepan Verkhovenskii and the biggest revolutionary name to emerge out of the era of the forties, was an active member of salons and circles in the forties in Russia and founded an independent press in London in his exile in the fifties. So, he was in a position to assess the differences of both modes of communication – familiar associations and print – for propaganda purposes. In the programmatic article of the first issue of his journal *The Bell* (*Kolokol)*, Gertsen writes: "Propaganda becomes a real power only when it covers its own cost" (7: 87). In the same article, he tells the story of his earlier journal, *The Polar Star* (*Poliarnaia zvezda)*, which sold slowly in the beginning but gradually "the number of requests grew to such an extent that some issues are no longer available, others are issued for a second time, and of the third remain only a few copies" (Gertsen 7: 89). Gertsen proudly concludes that from *Poliarnaia zvezda* to *Kolokol*, "all *publishing expenses* are covered by the sales" (Gertsen 7:89, italics original). His comments on his journalistic activity show that Gertsen was aware of the logic of print media: one has to sell to communicate.

This historical equation of communication to sales prompts Habermas to point out its devastating effect on critical publicity. The point of transition from communication for the sake of conveying a message to communication for the sake of securing sales of a media product, for Habermas, is also a point at which critical communication gives way to manipulative communication. To the extent that public communication ceases to be an arena for critical debate and becomes just another tool to promote one's business interests, public communication is commodified and becomes a sphere of "consumption" (Habermas 160). Ideas and messages in public communication become objects for consuming much like consumer items. A critical value of communication becomes irrelevant to the extent that non-rational tastes and preferences define consumers' choices. Communicators make their messages "consumption-ready" to drive up the demand and increase their own influence over consumers (Habermas 166).

Commodification of public communication results in the simplification of complex social issues to "facilitate[...] access to broad strata *psychologically*" (Habermas 166). "To the degree that culture became a commodity not only in form but also in content, it was emptied of elements whose appreciation required a certain amount of training" (ibid). The leaflet that is distributed by Petr Verkhovenskii in *Demons* is an example of such "facilitation of access." Stepan Verkhovenskii examines the leaflet and finds it "stupid." The leaflet in the novel is drawn on the *Young Russia* leaflet that circulated in Russia in the early 1860s. Dostoevskii's own reactions to the historical leaflet were similar to Stepan Verkhvoenskii's reactions to the leaflet in the novel. Dostoevskii finds the *Young Russia* leaflet to be immature and a result of passion rather than intelligence. He feels the leaflet is symbolic of the general chaos of ideas that he

repeatedly points out in his letters and journalism. The whole nihilist publicity of the sixties, in Dostoevskii's view, owed its success to the low demand that it placed on the critical sense of the readers. Dostoevskii observes that "the level of critical sensibility and of all literary needs have been terribly lowered" (Dostoevsky, *Letters*, vol. 3, 351).

Dostoevskii is not only revealing commodification to be the force that drives nihilist publicity in *Demons*, but he also uses the forces of commodification to push forward his own argument against radicals. He cannot escape the hold of communication because he functions in the commercial sphere of publishing. Dostoevskii belongs to the same structural sphere of public communication as the radical writers he satirizes and attacks in the novel. As Dostoevskii exposes the manipulative aspects of the radical publicity, he invariably also lays bare his own tools since both sides, Dostoevskii and his ideological opponents, use the same channels of journalism to convey their ideas. The similarities in the structure of communication between the two sides can also be drawn in terms of the overlap between literature and journalism. Both Dostoevskii and his hero in *Demons* blur the boundary between journalism and literature and force their audiences to accept their seemingly rational arguments on the grounds of their esthetic appeal. We will discuss this in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 6

Literature Meets Journalism

Dostoevskii and Petr Verkhovenskii equally merge literature and journalism, or factual writing evaluated on the basis of factuality and imaginative writing which appeals to one's esthetic sense. In this chapter, we will continue relying on Habermas' framework of analysis to explore how the author and the radical character merge facts and fiction in their communication and what are the political consequences of such a mix. Habermas argues that blurring the boundary between literature and journalism makes it easier to manipulate audiences through mass media. When information that appears in the media has no definite tag of fiction or reality, the audience's critical assessment gives way to the evaluation of messages on the basis of "tastes and preferences" (Habermas 171).

> The integration of the once separate domains of journalism and literature, that is to say, of information and rational-critical argument on the one side and of *belles-lettres* on the other, brings about a peculiar shifting of reality – even a conflation of different levels of reality. Under the common denominator of so-called human interest emerges the *mixtum compostum* of a pleasant and at the same time convenient subject for entertainment that, instead of doing justice to reality, has a tendency to present a substitute more palatable for consumption and more likely to give rise to an impersonal indulgence in stimulating relaxation than to a public use of reason. (Habermas 170)

The quoted argument has two sides. One is that the sheer amount of coverage in the media replaces the rational strength of the argument. In fact, Habermas dwells on this topic of the relationship between volume and rational content of publicity throughout most of his work cited in the present paper. In as much as public relations aim to secure

public coverage in the media, its attempts to reach out to the public are also the attempts to control its thought processes.

The second thrust of the quoted argument is that a "mixtum compostum" of journalism and fiction is entertaining rather than informative. If a media product appeals to the readers' taste this may cause them to consume the product uncritically. Not only will such a consumer swallow the product (a book or an article) but also the political perspective contained therein.

Demons demonstrate just such a "mixtum compostum" of journalism and fiction. It is present in the very plot of the novel which repeats the Nechaev affair. In addition, the narrative technique of the novel is a mix of chronicle and novel. In other words, not only is the subject of the story based on a real event but the storytelling technique also mimics a factual journalistic reporting.

That *Demons* recreates the details of the murder of a student Ivanov by Sergei Nechaev has been extensively studied and documented.[1] The motifs guiding both the victim and the killers, as well as the way the murder is carried out are similar in the historical case and in *Demons*. The novel has other connections to factual reality: the fictional town in which the action is set in *Demons* reflects "real people and topographic features of Tver'," an actual provincial Russian town (Tunimanov 142).

The literary component of *Demons* lies in its narrative technique which has also attracted a fair amount of attention. Most relevant for our purposes are critics' observations that the narrator of the novel, Anton G-v, acts as a reporter of the events he observes while also being their inventor. In his notebooks for the novel, Dostoevskii refers to the narrator's "chronicle" as "novel" which already shows a mix of purported

[1] See, for example, Frank, *Years* 435-472 and Mochulsky 329-385.

novelistic facts with fiction (Alexandrov 253). On the one hand, the narrator acts like a "professional newspaperman" in that he gathers facts and news to present them to the reader (Tunimanov 160). Fitzgerald describes the narrator as "narrator-witness" (121). Incidentally, the duties that Fitzgerald attributes to the narrator also befit a journalist and a reporter: "[The narrator in *Demons*] can talk to the various people within the story and can get their views on matters of concern; particularly he can have interviews with the protagonist himself; and finally he can secure letters, diaries, and other writings" (ibid).

On the other hand, the narrator presents his "facts" in such a way that befits a novelist. "The Narrator is also an author and re-creator of his own chronicle-novel" (Fitzgerald 129). The so-called "chronicle" of the narrator has gaps which must be filled for the story to remain cohesive. In filling these gaps, the "chronicler invariably must turn into an inventor" (Tunimanov 135). Jones also notes that the chronicler functions as a novelist where "he may run ahead, mystify, foreshadow and even make judgments which are hardly borne out by his own narration" (147). Finally, "the narrator in *Besy* might perhaps be best seen as a self-conscious *author* figure, one who, moreover, himself employs novelistic techniques analogous to those Dostoevskij used in writing the novel" (Alexandrov 244). This mixture of novelistic and journalistic form allows the readers to assess factual material by the standards of literary esthetics. This is the uncritical and manipulative aspect of communication discussed by Habermas.

Dostoevskii's novel has been recognized time and again for its satire at the events and people of the 1860s. However, the presence of the entertaining element in *Demons* is not due merely to the author's intentions to satirize and discredit his ideological

opponents.[2] The humour of the novel is also a tool in the public relations campaign *of* the novel. By making the novel funny, Dostoevskii also makes it more attractive and memorable to the readers. What's more, the entertaining capacity allows Dostoevskii to bypass a rational discussion of *his* premises and go directly to the conclusion, to blaming the radicals and showing their moral and spiritual bankruptcy.

Jackson notes Dostoevskii's concern with the entertaining function of his ideological art (190). Dostoevskii believes that humor and fun help an author to convey his ideas to the audience. If the reader laughs while reading a story, then the writer's idea "has already acted upon" the reader (qtd in Jackson 190). Speaking of *Demons*, Dostoevskii remarks: "At least [*Demons*] will be entertaining [zanimatel'nyi] (and I have reached the point at which I place the element of entertainment above artistry)" (qtd in Jackson 190). Again, the entertaining function of Dostoevskii's art is part and parcel of Dostoevskii's manipulation of his audience to force them to accept his ideas.

Habermas argues that mixing literature and facts subverts a rational-critical debate and replaces it with a display of support: a rational "consent coincides with good will evoked by publicity" (Habermas 195). Like Dostoevskii, Petr Verkhovenskii elicits not so much a critical consideration of his revolutionary cause but evokes instead an attitude of support without a rational analysis. This is evident from the scene of Petr Verkhovenskii's visit to the house of Virginskii where he meets a group of sympathizers. This roomful of people expects "explanations," a critical-rational conversation on the subject of revolutionary activities (315, 407). Some of them, like Shigalev, came prepared to talk about their "own systems of world organization" (311, 402). Shigalev's

[2] Evnin argues that Dostoevskii satirized "all" political and social forces of his times, even those who could be considered his ideological allies (243).

theory is "based on natural facts, and extremely logical" (312, 404). Throughout the meeting, Petr Verhkhovnskii shows visible indifference to the conversation by trimming his nails, yawning, and asking for cognac. When at last Petr Verkhovenskii is drawn into an argument over the futility of advocating violence and mass killings, he responds not by any counter argument, but by questioning his opponent's allegiance.

Petr Verkhovenskii asks if his opponent would "really join a fivesome if [P.V.] offered it" (315, 407). Put this way, the debate becomes a matter of showing one's sympathies so that the opponent has no other choice but admit his sympathy to the revolutionary cause: "[e]veryone feels himself an honest man and will not shirk the common cause" (315, 407). Petr Verkhovenskii asks the audience to "declare directly and simply" what is their disposition towards revolution. Using the swamp as a metaphor for a stagnating Russia, he asks "which is more fun for [the audience]: a snail's pace through the swamp, or full steam across it?" (316, 408). Naturally, everyone agrees that a quick resolution of Russia's social ills is desired. However, no critical discussion follows of what exactly is the resolution proposed by Petr Verkhovenskii. Wasiolek argues that Petr Verkhovenskii convinces his audience at this meeting "not with an idea, or a bright image, but with force" (117). Petr Verkhovenskii forces his audience "to choose between loyalty to socialism and the existing moral order" (Wasiolek 117).

During the scene, Petr Verkhovenskii exhibits the manipulative nature of his communication which shuns a rational discussion of the goals and methods of the revolution. To use Habermas's terms, Petr Verkhovenskii suppresses critical publicity and replaces it with manipulative publicity. "Publicity once meant the exposure of political domination before the public use of reason; publicity now adds up to the

reactions of an uncommitted friendly disposition" (Habermas 195). In effect, Petr Verkhovenskii calls for such a supportive attitude when he asks everyone at the meeting: "Is it true that you are all ready?" (316, 409). He does not explain what should one be ready for and the question should be interpreted as an indication of one's goodwill towards a revolution. As the narrator slyly remarks in brackets, "Petr Verkhovenskii's question was a vague but terribly tempting one" (316, 409).

Critics have noted that Dostoevskii mixes art and factual material in *Demons*. However, the fact that Petr Verkhovenskii also resorts to art for his propaganda has passed unnoticed. We have already discussed the common literary tropes used by the author and the protagonist. However, the artistic parallels between the two go deeper and involve the literary structure of their communication and their historical-literary milieu. If Dostoevskii was reworking the extant literary genre of the antinihilist novel (as we have shown in chapter 2), Petr Verkhovenskii evokes the literary innovations of the radical writers. His communication betrays the same semantic density which characterizes works of art. According to Iurii Lotman, a literary text has higher semantic density, i.e. "it means more, not less, than ordinary speech" (21). This semantic complexity is intuited by the audience as soon as it realizes that it is dealing with a literary text. The recipient of information begins to "actively look for additional and hidden meanings, thus expanding the range of levels at which a literary text can communicate" (Lotman "O soderzhanii" 21-22). Petr Verkhovenskii's communication is loaded with double-meanings, hints, and understatements. His speech and writing, like all art, call for additional interpretation by the audience. In the novel, all characters look up to him for information on the revolutionary movement eager to see beneath the surface

meaning of his every word. In this regard, Petr Verkhovenskii's communication mimics the writings of the radical journalists of the 1860s. Written from under the press of government's censorship, the radical articles called on the audience to read between the lines for allusions to a revolution and socialist reforms. By communicating at once on several levels, the radical journalism called for an artistic and literary evaluation of its texts.

Petr Verkhovenskii shares with the radical publicists their opposition to esthetics and art. The utilitarian outlook of the radicals proclaimed that art should be useful in a practical sense. Pursuit of beauty and esthetic pleasure was for them an unnatural and unsocial activity. However, the radicals' opposition to art, paradoxically, is the first sign that they were developing new art forms. Lotman argues that there are periods in the development of a literature when the extant literary forms lose their informational density and become rigid to the extent that they can no longer offer new levels of meaning to the reader. "In this period the texts that serve the esthetic function attempt the least to resemble literature in their immanent structure. The very words 'art,' 'literature' acquire demeaning tint" (Lotman "O soderzhanii" 23). In such conditions, previously considered non-literary texts replace the official literary forms. Thus, the genre of essay essentially fulfills the artistic function in the 1840s-60s Russia being "the leading artistic genre" (ibid). Here we should recall that the genre of essay was the home turf of the radical critics of the 1860s whose writings appeared in the left-wing periodicals such as *The Contemporary* (*Sovremennik*) and *The Russian Word.* These writers focused their attention on interpreting contemporary literature in light of the existing socio-economic

and political conditions. In effect, the radicals' writings were a mix of social and literary criticism of facts and fiction.

The fact that Petr Verkhovenskii is an artist in his own right can be explained also by Dostoevskii's own vision of the radicals. Dostoevskii feels that nihilist publicity and political publicity in general in the 1860s stem from literary developments. He observes in 1861 that political sections appeared in Russian journals "simply due to the expansion of the field of influence of Russian literature" (19:106). Dostoevskii's hunch reflects the historical development of political publicity: both Slavophiles and Westernizers emerged as political entities out of literary circles (Aronson and Reiser 18). He feels that nihilism is a result of a general aesthetic crisis as much as it is a social and political phenomenon: "Dostoevskii always held that the contemporary crisis was at root a crisis of *aesthetic consciousness*" (Mochulsky 443). Dostoevskii further states that the era of the 1860s is "the most literary time possible" (p.19:109) and that it "is exactly [immenno] literary" (p.19:108). Dostoevskii perceives the work of radical writers to be a "play of young litterateurs" which shows the literary nature of their activity (Kirpotin 116).

The parallels between Dostoevskii and Petr Verkhovenskii in terms of their literary and propagandistic activity show that they used a literary and esthetic perception of their communication as a way of bypassing a critical assessment of their messages. According to Habermas, such communication that merges facts and fiction is manipulative of public opinion because it helps to propagate certain ideas on the basis of their appeal to esthetic tastes. The fact that Dostoevskii mixes art and history in his novel has been long recognized. However, the manipulative potential to impose his opinion upon his audience has largely escaped the attention of critics. Moreover, the mix of art

and factual reality allows the drawing of yet another parallel between the author and protagonist of *Demons*.

Conclusion

This thesis is written in the spirit of the 1860s, an era marked by a blurred boundary between literature and reality. Radical critics and government officials alike often interpreted the contemporary social reality through the literary characters of the contemporary novels. In our work, we have also departed from the figure of Petr Verkhovenskii in *Demons* to comment upon Dostoevsky's art and the writings of the radical critics. Such an approach helps to understand not only the affinity between Petr Verkhovenskii and Dostoevskii in the novel but also the historical and literary role of the radicals. For the most part, the radicals' approach to reality via its representation in literature has been touted as simplistic and narrowly utilitarian. But, as we have shown, such an approach can actually be fruitful and central to revealing the role of publicity and public communication in the spread of the phenomenon of nihilism.

Petr Verkhovenskii's communication style emphasizes the intricate relationship between publicity and nihilism. Questions such as whether nihilist publicity represents an actual social movement, or whether the discourse of this publicity is rational, are not relevant considering the nature and purposes of the nihilist publicity in *Demons*. It is a given that Petr Verkhovenskii's communication is not rational and does not represent an objective reality. His communication is artistic and creative: it employs literary techniques to generate a political perspective in public communication. This fictional and ideological perspective is then imposed upon the public through the mechanism of public relations.

The agglomeration of art, public relations and mass media in Petr Verkhovenskii's communication at once relates him to a number of key topics in Russian

history and literature. Our analysis suggests that the changes in the media and purposes of communication were definitive to the ideological split between the so-called men of the forties and the men of the sixties. Mass media are prominent both within the world of the novel and in Dostoevskii's creative conception of the novel. Mass media are the vehicle of Petr Verkhovenskii's public relations for his revolutionary organization. He is much like a modern day spin doctor who uses an array of media channels and tactics to generate publicity in the media and in gossip.

We have attempted here to reverse the habitual practice of analyzing Petr Verkhovenskii against the backdrop of historical and literary realities of the 1860s. Traditionally, our knowledge of the period of the 1840-60s was enough to discuss the role of Petr Verkhovenskii. However, Petr Verkhovenskii's communication style can actually *add* to our knowledge of the period if we begin to perceive and analyze this figure in light of its greater complexity than may be apparent at first glance. Such an approach is also at greater congruence with the way the Russian public perceived nihilism in the 1860s.

As we argue throughout this work, Petr Verkhovenskii embodies some of Dosteovskii's own literary and journalistic tactics. If we disregard temporarily the fact that one is a real person and the other is a literary creation, we can see an implicit bond between the two: they share the same field of publicity, wield the same weapons of journalism and public relations, and defend their respective ideals. Despite their ideological opposition, it is sometimes difficult to establish where exactly is the dividing line between Dostoevskii's methods and those of Petr Verkhovenskii – so intertwined are their techniques. In *Demons*, Dostoevskii intends and succeeds in showing Petr

Verkhovenskii as a manipulator of public opinion. Petr Verkhovenskii appears as a savvy publicity agent who can garner public attention around his organization which does not exist. With his ruthlessly tendentious portrayal of nihilists, Dostoevskii deals a blow to the public image of nihilists. At the same time, as we have demonstrated, his own publicity techniques are similar to those of nihilist writers.

Here lies the significance of Petr Verkhovenskii as a literary creation: this character illuminates Dostoevskii's media-centric perception of the nihilist movement of the sixties. Petr Verkhovenskii is very much like Bazarov from Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* in as far as both define nihilism. Bazarov's figure was immediately recognized for its power to capture the nature of nihilism, its beliefs, attitudes and goals. Petr Verkhovenskii has the same potential which remains undisclosed and hidden from the view of critics and general readers. This work is an attempt to bring out the full meaning of this enigmatic, dynamic and a truly revolutionary character in artistic and political aspects. As this character's hidden potential is revealed, it also illuminates a dark corner of Dostoevskii's art. When his novel is analyzed as an act of public communication, its structure reveals the very ideological and manipulative principles Dostoevskii attributes to the nihilists as impersonated by Petr Verkhovenskii.

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