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Demons

Fyodor Dostoevsky

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PART THREE

About the Book

Based on a real-life crime which horrified Russia in 1869, Dostoevsky intended his novel to castigate the fanaticism of his country's new political reformers, particularly those known as Nihilists. Blackly funny, grotesque and shocking, *Demons* is a disturbing portrait of five young men saturated in ideology and bent on destruction, and a compelling study of terrorism.

See also: *Crime and Punishment*

About the Authors

Born in Moscow in 1821, Fyodor Mikhaylovich Dostoevsky is regarded as one of the greatest writers who ever lived. Literary modernism and various schools of psychology and theology have been deeply changed by his ideas. He died in 1881 in St Petersburg, Russia.

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Larissa Volokhonsky was born in Leningrad. She has translated the work of the prominent Orthodox theologians Alexander Schmemann and John Meyendorff.

Together Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky have translated Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and the *The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Other Stories*, available from Vintage Classics.

ALSO BY FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

The Brothers Karamazov
Crime and Punishment
Notes from Underground

Demons

A Novel in Three Parts

Fyodor Dostoevsky

Translated and Annotated by
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Larissa Volokhonsky

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Foreword

IN THE FALL of 1869, Dostoevsky was living in Dresden. That October, his brother-in-law, a student at the Petrov Agricultural Academy in Moscow, came for a visit. Dostoevsky had been following events in Russia through the foreign press, which often reported things that did not appear in Russian newspapers, and, guessing that there was going to be political trouble at the Academy, had invited the young man to stay in Dresden for fear he might otherwise become involved in the disturbances. In the course of their conversations, his brother-in-law told him about a fellow student at the Academy by the name of Ivan Ivanov, a man of intelligence and strong character, who had radically changed his convictions. The figure appealed to Dostoevsky, and he thought of writing a novel about the revolutionary movement of that time with Ivanov as one of the main heroes.

On November 21,1869, this same Ivanov was murdered in the park of the Petrov Academy by a group consisting of two students, an older writer, and their leader, a hanger-on in university circles with credentials from the anarchist movement abroad, the twenty-two-year-old nihilist Sergei Nechaev. Ivanov had protested against Nechaev’s dictatorial rule over their group and had eventually left the society. It was thought he might turn informer. Lured to an artificial grotto near the pond in the Academy park on the pretext of helping to recover a printing press hidden there, Ivanov was thrown to the ground, beaten, strangled, and finally shot in

the head by Nechaev. The body, weighted with bricks prepared beforehand, was shoved through a hole in the ice.

Dostoevsky was deeply shocked by the news of the murder, but in part it was a shock of recognition that confirmed his sense of what was happening in Russia. In December 1869 he began to make notes for a story based on the confrontation of Ivanov, who in his mind represented the “new Russian man,” with the nihilist Nechaev. This story, after three years of laborious transformation, became the novel *Demons*.

The events in the park of the Petrov Academy gave Dostoevsky the general outlines and many specific details for the characters we know as Ivan Shatov and Pyotr Verkhovensky (called “Nechaev” in the first sketches for the novel). Early in his work, however, in February 1870, Dostoevsky wrote to a friend in Russia asking for a recently published memoir on Timofei Granovsky, a historian and professor at Moscow University, who had died in 1855. “Material absolutely indispensable for my work,” he said. Granovsky was an embodiment of the liberal idealism of the 1840s, the perfect “Westerner” (as those favoring the progressive intellectual and social views of the West were known in Russia, in opposition to the “Slavophils,” who stood for the native traditions of tsar, Orthodox Church, and old Russian culture). “Nihilist sons are immediately linked . . . with idealist fathers,” in the words of Dostoevsky’s biographer and critic Konstantin Mochulsky. The theme of the two generations, of the moral responsibility of the men of the forties for the men of the sixties, had occurred to Dostoevsky at once. Taking details from the life of Granovsky, and from other leading liberals of the forties such as the critic Vissarion Belinsky and the publicist Alexander Herzen, Dostoevsky penned his composite portrait of the father of the nihilists—Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky.

The whole ideological nexus of the novel would seem to have been in place: the conflict of generations, the opposition of Westerners and Slavophils, dissent within the young revolutionary movement, the promising emergence of the "new Russian man," the sensational murder. At this stage in his work, Dostoevsky still considered the book a "novel-pamphlet," a topical piece on a contemporary theme, part documentary and part polemic, tangential to his real work. He spoke slightingly of it in letters to his friends: "What I'm writing is a tendentious piece, I want to speak out rather more forcefully. Here the nihilists and the Westerners will begin howling about me that I'm a *retrograde*! Well, to hell with them, but I'll say everything to the last word!" And so he would, though in a very different sense.

This urge to "say everything," even at the expense of art, came partly from Dostoevsky's deep concern for the fate of Russia, but partly also from more personal motives. He himself had been a liberal idealist of the 1840s. His first book, *Poor Folk* (1846), had been championed by Belinsky. He had made the acquaintance of other literary lights—Turgenev, Nekrasov, Herzen, Bakunin, Ogaryov. But he had never been at ease with them, and they soon began to treat him contemptuously, laughed behind his back, wrote doggerel verses in which they called him "a new pimple glowing on the nose of literature" (Turgenev and Nekrasov were probably responsible for this poem, entitled "Belinsky's Missive to Dostoevsky"). More significantly, it was under Belinsky's tutelage that Dostoevsky had gone from a lingering social Christianity to atheist materialism. "I have acquired the truth," he wrote to Herzen in 1845, "and in the words *God* and *religion* I see darkness, obscurity, chains, and the knout." This negative conversion out of love for suffering humanity was not an ideological affectation for Dostoevsky, it was the central crisis of his life and would inform all his later work.

When Dostoevsky broke with Belinsky's group in 1847, it was not to renounce the master's teachings, but to go deeper into revolutionary activity. He began to attend meetings of the Petrashevsky circle, a secret society of liberal utopians, and within it he joined the most extreme faction, a group intent on preparing the Russian people for a general uprising. The center of this group was a young man named Nikolai Speshnyov, a rich and handsome aristocrat who, as Mochulsky says, exercised "a vast and mysterious influence upon Dostoevsky." Speshnyov had lived abroad, had caused the suicide of a young woman, had been a great social success in Dresden. Ogaryova-Tuchkova, the wife of Herzen, described him in her memoirs: "He attracted universal attention by his sympathetic appearance. He was tall, had regular features; dark blond locks fell in waves to his shoulders; his eyes, large and gray, were clouded by some quiet sadness." Dostoevsky wrote of him: "The wondrous fate of that man; wherever and however he makes his appearance, the most unconstrained, the most impervious people immediately surround him with devotion and respect." But during the time of their acquaintance, just before Dostoevsky's arrest in 1849, the writer's friend and physician, Dr. Yanovsky, noted that he had become listless, irritable, and even complained of dizzy spells. He told him this gloomy mood would pass, but Dostoevsky said, "No, it won't pass, but will torment me for a long, long time, because I've borrowed money from Speshnyov. Now I am with him and am his. I will never be able to pay back this sum, and besides he won't take it back in money, that's the sort of man he is. You understand, from now on I have my own Mephistopheles." A striking confession, particularly in his unexpected use of the instrumental case—"he won't *take it back in money*." Dostoevsky had already begun to recognize the element of seduction in revolutionary behavior.

In 1873, when the final parts of *Demons* had been published, Dostoevsky returned to the question of personal responsibility and the link between generations in his *Diary of a Writer*: “I am an old ‘Nechaevist’ myself . . . I know that you, no doubt, will say in rebuttal that I am not a Nechaevist at all, and that I am only a ‘Petrashevist.’ All right—a Petrashevist . . . But how do you know that the Petrashevists could not have become Nechaevists, i.e. have taken the ‘Nechaev’ path, if things had turned that way? . . . Permit me to speak of myself alone: I probably could never have become a *Necbaev*, but a *Necbaevist* I cannot guarantee, perhaps I could have become one . . . in the days of my youth.” He knew the conspiratorial milieu very well, and he knew what it had led him to—not only ten years of prison and exile (which in retrospect he may have welcomed), but a state of inner servitude that might have made him an accomplice in murder. His point is that Nechaev and the Nechaevists were not an exception—a group of “idlers and defectives”—within the revolutionary movement, but were of its essence. History has shown that he was right.

The novel-pamphlet was going to “say everything” in Dostoevsky’s best (or worst) polemical style, settling some old scores, exposing the real nature of nihilism, and bringing forward the “new Russian man” in Slavophil trappings. Many elements of this proto-polemic remain in the finished novel, in its sharpness of tone, in its series of minor comic portraits, like a gallery of Daumier sculptures, and above all in the masterful caricature-parody of Turgenev as “the great writer Karmazinov.” (Dostoevsky even seems to have granted Lenin a precocious appearance as the unnamed final speaker at the disastrous fête—a man of about forty, bald front and back, with a grayish little beard, who, while delivering his incomprehensible harangue, keeps raising his fist over his head and bringing it down as if crushing some adversary to dust.) But the center has shifted significantly.

When he began writing *Demons,* Dostoevsky had already been at work for several months on plans for an immense novel to be entitled *Atheism,* which by the end of 1869 had grown into an even more immense conception, a five-book *summa* with the general title of *The Life of a Great Sinner*, a "religious poem" which he thought would be his last and most important work. But as early as May 1870, the novel-pamphlet began to intrude on the *Life,* taking over some of its material and growing in the author's mind into a full-scale novel on its own. In July, another creative upheaval occurred; Dostoevsky threw out all he had written and started over from page one. "A genuine inspiration visited me," he wrote to a friend in October. In a letter written at the same time to his publisher, Mikhail Katkov, Dostoevsky explained what had happened. The letter is worth quoting at length:

> One of the major events of my story will be the murder of Ivanov by Nechaev, which is well known in Moscow. I hasten to make a reservation: I do not know and never knew either Nechaev or Ivanov, or the circumstances of this murder, except from the newspapers. And even if I knew, I would not have started copying. I only take the accomplished fact. My fantasy may differ in the highest degree from the actual reality, and my Pyotr Verkhovensky may not resemble Nechaev in the least, but it seems to me that in my shocked mind imagination has created the person, the type, that corresponds to this evil-doing. No doubt it is not useless to present such a man: but he alone would not have tempted me. In my opinion, these pathetic freaks are not worthy of literature. To my own surprise, this character comes out with me as a half-comic character, and therefore, despite the fact that the event occupies one of the first planes of the novel, he is nevertheless only an accessory and circumstance for the action of another character, who really could be called the main character of the novel . . . This other character is also a dark character, also a villain, but it seems to me that he is a *tragic* character, although many will probably say upon reading, "What is this?" I sat down to write the poem of this character because I have long wished to portray him. I will feel very, very sad if it doesn't come out. I will be even sadder if I hear the judgment that this character is stilted. *I have taken him from my heart*.

This tragic character is Nikolai Stavrogin, the strongest of Dostoevsky's "strong personalities," handsome, rich,

aristocratic, intelligent, fearless—the supremely autonomous man. His emergence from *The Life of a Great Sinner*, and from Dostoevsky's memories of his own "Mephistopheles," Nikolai Speshnyov, entailed a total reordering of the novel and a deepening of its motifs. Instead of the ideological opposition of Shatov and Verkhovensky, the new Russian man and the nihilist, the central place was taken by the tragic struggle of the autonomous man with his demon, brought to the point of revelation in Stavrogin's meeting with another character taken from the unfinished *Life*—the retired bishop Tikhon.

"*Stavrogin is everything*," Dostoevsky wrote in a note to himself dated August 16, 1870. Once the true protagonist appeared, the materials of the novel began to compose themselves around him. The result, neither pamphlet nor religious poem but a blending and recasting of both, cost him another two years of work. This groping procedure —"slipshod," one displeased critic called it—may seem surprising in so great a novelist, the assumption being that a good writer knows what he wants to write before he sets about writing it. In fact, the opposite is true, as René Girard, one of the most perceptive readers of Dostoevsky, and one of the very few to see his work whole, has said in his essay *Dostoïevski—du double à l'unité*: "This work is a means of knowledge, an instrument of exploration; it is thus always beyond the creator himself; it is in advance of his intelligence and of his faith." The novelist's "operational formalism," as Girard calls it, is a search for the form that will reveal meaning, a testing of truth by artistic embodiment. The form achieved grants the artist, and thus the reader, a knowledge of the world which is also self-knowledge, for the penetration of reality goes both ways. (Bishop Tikhon applies this same "aesthetic" testing to Stavrogin's written confession, whereas Stavrogin expected and even hoped for the reassurance of moral condemnation.) No other means of knowledge works in

quite this way. And it is remarkable that Dostoevsky, constantly risking formal chaos, should arrive at such perfect formal unity as we find in *Demons.*

Stavrogin is everything. Yet *Demons* is the broadest and most multivoiced of Dostoevsky's novels before *The Brothers Karamazov*. The "possession" it describes affects not one man or a few families, but an entire provincial town and all levels of its society. We have mentioned Stavrogin's struggle with his demon. To avoid romantic misunderstandings, we had better consider who or what the "demons" of Dostoevsky's title are. The answer is far from obvious.

It would be simpler if the title were indeed *The Possessed*, as it was first translated into English (and into French—a tradition to which Albert Camus contributed in his dramatization of the novel). This misrendering made it possible to speak of Dostoevsky's characters as demoniacs in some unexamined sense, which lends them a certain glamour and even exonerates them to a certain extent. We do see a number of people here behaving as if they were "possessed." The implications of the word are almost right, but it points in the wrong direction. And in any case it is not the title Dostoevsky gave his novel. Discovering that the Russian title *Besy* refers not to possessed but to possessors, we then apply this new term "demons" to the same set of characters in the same unexamined way—a surprising turnabout, if one thinks of it. Which characters, however, are the demons? Varvara Petrovna and Stepan Trofimovich, the mother and spiritual father of Nikolai Stavrogin? No, hardly. Stavrogin himself? If the title were singular, it might be taken as referring to him, with those very romantic overtones we are trying to avoid, because Dostoevsky avoids them entirely. But there is no odor of brimstone about Stavrogin. He is not a demon. On the contrary, he has a demon of his own, as we have already said, the one he

sits staring at in the corner of his study, his “hallucination” (who finally becomes incarnate, not in this novel, but as Ivan Fyodorovich’s devil in *The Brothers Karamazov).* And, besides, the title is plural. Could it refer to the first rank of Stavrogin’s “disciples”? To Pyotr Verkhovensky, Shatov, Kirillov, all of whom claim him as the decisive force in their lives? Or to the second rank, to Pyotr Verkhovensky’s crew—Liputin, Virginsky, Lyamshin, Tolkachenko, Erkel? To Fedka the Convict and long-eared Shigalyov? But the contagion of evil does not originate with any of them. Who, then, are the demons?

Dostoevsky’s “expressive art,” as Mochulsky aptly terms it, is all drama. He suppresses narrative commentary on his characters’ words and feelings, explanation of their motives, examination of their thoughts, the broad “painting” of descriptive realism. All commentary comes from other characters, among whom is the narrator-chronicler himself. Dostoevsky renders only the words of his characters, their personal ways of speaking, facial expressions, gestures, in minimally detailed and often “naively” symbolic settings (mud, rain, mist, darkness). The absence of commentary intensifies the behavior of the characters and at the same time leaves it enigmatic. Hence the accusations of exaggeration and irrationalism often leveled at Dostoevsky, or, the same error in reverse, the praise bestowed upon his “mystical Russian soul.” This expressive art relies on bold compositional arrangement, verbal emphasis, and revealing contradictions to make itself understood. And it relies on the memory of the reader, who thus participates in the unfolding drama. Aware that his artistic method left his work open to misunderstanding, Dostoevsky tried to include directives for the reader through the heightening of contrasts, the multiplying of contradictions and confrontations, and, in this case, the “mechanical” pointing of his title, supported by two epigraphs.

Dostoevsky called the novel *Demons*, we would suggest, precisely because the demons in it *do not appear*, and the reader might otherwise overlook them. The demons are visible only in distortions of the human image, the human countenance, and their force is measurable only by the degree of the distortion. What this means for an understanding of demonic possession in the novel may be elucidated by a passage from *The Brothers Karamazov.* Alyosha and Ivan Karamazov are talking about the murder of their father. Alyosha suddenly turns to his brother and says: “It was *not you* who killed father . . . You’ve accused yourself and confessed to yourself that you and you alone are the murderer. But it was not you who killed him, you are mistaken, the murderer was not you, do you hear, it was not you! God has sent me to tell you that.” In fact, Ivan *was* their father’s murderer, if only in an “intellectual” sense. But Alyosha is talking about something else. He seems to mean that the evil in Ivan is *not him*, is not identical with him, is not his essence. Ivan is in danger of taking it for his essence, of “damning” himself and losing himself entirely. He is on the verge of madness. Alyosha’s message is truly meant to save him. The world of *Demons*—the provincial town with its society, its administration, its older and younger generations, its club members and revolutionaries—is in a condition similar to Ivan’s. The title is perhaps Dostoevsky’s message to us that “it is *not them.*”

Here, in what many consider the darkest of his novels, Dostoevsky inscribes the fundamental freedom of Judeo-Christian revelation—the freedom to turn from evil, the freedom to repent. His vision is not Manichaean; he does not see evil as co-eternal with good. Evil cannot be the essence of any living person. The “possessed” can at any moment be rid of their demons, which are wicked but also false. The devil is a liar and the father of lies. And the lie here is the same as in the beginning: “you will be like God . . .” It is what we have referred to as autonomy, embodied most fully

in Stavrogin and most purely in Kirillov. The assertion of human autonomy is finally a revolt against God; it is also the final lie, the mystification behind all the demystifying critiques of modern times. It was in this light that Dostoevsky saw not only the political movements of his day, but the ideas that nourished them—ideas that came a bit late to Russia, but developed there at an accelerated pace. That acceleration makes itself felt very strongly in *Demons.*

The two epigraphs form a sharp contrast of the kind Dostoevsky's expressive art often employs. The first, a pair of fragments whirled out of the snowy night of Pushkin's poem "Demons," calls up the realm of spirits, goblins, witches. It is a spooky poem, not very serious, a phantasmagoria that touches lightly on the strings of Russian folk memory. Nevertheless, it is suggestive of much that we find in Dostoevsky's novel—the bewilderment, the whirlwind of events, the grotesquerie, the uncanny atmosphere. Underlying which there is also a richness of folk memory, articulated mainly through the figure of the lame and half-mad Marya Timofeevna, with her "other reality" and her marriage to the prince-impostor. She brings a current of half-pagan piety into the novel's symbolism, about which the Russian poet and philosopher Vyacheslav Ivanov has written most perceptively in *Freedom and the Tragic Life, a Study in Dostoevsky* (1916; English translation 1952). On the one hand, then, the demons of the title belong to the folkloric realm of spirits; they are devilish misleaders of men, tricksters, whose presence is deduced from the question: "We've lost our way, what shall we do?"

The second epigraph, which in a sense answers the first, shows the demons in a different light. It is the eschatological light of all the Gospel accounts of Christ's miracles and healings, which are not supernatural or magical but prefigure the coming of the Kingdom of God. Luke's account of the Gerasene demoniac is considerably longer than the passage Dostoevsky cites. His selection emphasizes two

things: the self-destruction of the swine, and the healing of the man. This, highly abbreviated, is the plot of *Demons*.

In a letter to his friend Apollon Maikov, written when the design of the novel had finally become clear to him, Dostoevsky referred to the same passage from Luke in explaining his conception:

> The facts have shown us that the illness that seized civilized Russians was much stronger than we ourselves imagined, and that the matter did not end with Belinsky, Kraevsky, etc. But what occurred here is what is witnessed to by the evangelist Luke. Exactly the same thing happened with us: the demons came out of the Russian man and entered into a herd of swine, i.e. into the Nechaevs . . . etc.

Stepan Trofimovich repeats this comparison near the end of the novel, with small but significant changes:

> . . . you see, it's exactly like our Russia . . . But a great will and a great thought will descend to her from on high, as upon that insane demoniac, and out will come all these demons, all the uncleanness, all the abomination that is festering on the surface . . . and they will beg of themselves to enter into swine. And perhaps they already have! It is us, us and them, and Petrusha . . . and I, perhaps, first, at the head, and we will rush, insane and raging, from the cliff down into the sea, and all be drowned, and good riddance to us, because that's the most we're fit for. But the sick man will be healed and "sit at the feet of Jesus" . . .

The polemical, accusatory tone of the letter has given way to self-accusation and confession. The two impulses are always there in Dostoevsky; the former tends to predominate in his journalism, the latter in his artistic works. The penetration of his vision is linked to personal experience, to his recognition in himself of the forces at play in the world. The artist's struggle for adequate formal expression is at the same time a process of awakening. The "healing" of the sick man is, however, barely adumbrated in the novel; the intensity of the demonic paroxysm all but overshadows it; yet awakening does come *in extremis* to Stepan Trofimovich, whose end is the antithesis of Stavrogin's, but equally exemplary. On the other hand, the

Nechaevs of the novel, Petrusha Verkhovensky and the rest, turn out in both comparisons to be, not demons, not demoniacs, but the herd of swine.

The demons, then, are ideas, that legion of isms that came to Russia from the West: idealism, rationalism, empiricism, materialism, utilitarianism, positivism, socialism, anarchism, nihilism, and, underlying them all, atheism. To which the Slavophils opposed their notions of the Russian earth, the Russian God, the Russian Christ, the "light from the East," and so on. In his journalism and letters, Dostoevsky often wielded these notions himself. In *Demons*, however, they are given to Shatov. And, as René Girard has observed, "the character of Shatov destroys the hypothesis of a simply reactionary Dostoevsky . . . Shatov is Dostoevsky meditating on his own ideological development, on his own powerlessness to escape negative modes of thinking. And it is in this meditation itself that Dostoevsky goes beyond Slavophil ideology" *(Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque)*. The key to this meditation is that Shatov's Slavophilism, no less than Kirillov's "man-godhood" and Pyotr Verkhovensky's revolutionary nihilism, has its source in Nikolai Stavrogin. *Stavrogin is everything*. At first he may not seem so to the reader. He says little in the novel. His doings are almost all in the past, and without his written confession, in the suppressed chapter "At Tikhon's," he would be even more enigmatic than Dostoevsky intended. Stavrogin is not identical with the contradictory "idea-demons" that have come from him, which he scarcely recognizes. His own struggle lies at a deeper level; his "idea" is a more subsuming one.

Is it not an exaggeration, even a sort of mystification, to give the status of "demons" to mere ideas? But, in the first place, there are no mere ideas in Dostoevsky, there are what Mikhail Bakhtin, in his *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics*, calls "voice-ideas," "voice-viewpoints," "idea-images," "idea-forces," "idea-heroes." There is no neutral,

impersonal truth. “It is not the idea itself that is the ‘hero of Dostoevsky’s works’ . . . but rather the *person born of that idea*.” Bakhtin pretends to a scientific analysis and therefore avoids evaluation of the “ideological content” of Dostoevsky’s works, but implicit at least in his analysis is the possibility of an evil or alien idea coming to inhabit a person, misleading him, perverting him ontologically, driving him to crime or insanity. Dostoevsky portrays this phenomenon time and again. It even becomes a topic of discussion between two experts—Ivan Fyodorovich and the devil—in *The Brothers Karamazov.* We see it in almost all the characters of *Demons*. “It was not you who ate the idea, but the idea that ate you,” Pyotr Verkhovensky says to Kirillov. Later Kirillov notes, “Stavrogin was also eaten by an idea.” At one point Shatov cries out: “Kirillov! If . . . if you could renounce your terrible fantasies and drop your atheistic ravings . . . oh, what a man you’d be, Kirillov!” These unguarded observations imply that the person is not one with the idea; there is play here, a loose fit, a mismatch. Marya Shatov is a normal girl who has been invaded by a “voice-idea” totally alien to her, which leaves her quite suddenly once she has given birth. Stepan Trofimovich confesses in the end, after the book-hawker reads the Sermon on the Mount to him: “My friend, I’ve been lying all my life. Even when I was telling the truth.”

The person born of the idea may be distorted and even destroyed by it. But to make such a judgment, one must have some way of measuring the distortion, some image of the undistorted person. And, again, if Dostoevsky is to be true to his poetics, this cannot be an abstract idea or principle. Bakhtin acknowledges the existence of this “measure” in a passage that is rather obliquely worded, but is crucial for an understanding of his own concept of “polyphony,” not to mention Dostoevsky’s novel:

> . . . what unfolds before Dostoevsky is not a world of objects, illuminated and ordered by his monologic thought, but a world of consciousnesses mutually illuminating one another . . . Among them Dostoevsky seeks the highest and most authoritative orientation, and he perceives it not as his own true thought, but as another authentic human being and his discourse. The image of the ideal human being or the image of Christ represents for him the resolution of ideological quests. This image or this highest voice must crown the world of voices, must organize and subdue it. Precisely the image of a human being and his voice, a voice not the author's own, was the ultimate artistic criterion for Dostoevsky: not fidelity to his own convictions and not fidelity to convictions themselves taken abstractly, but precisely a fidelity to the authoritative image of a human being.

The openness of Dostoevsky's novels is an openness *to* this image; his polyphony has no other aim than the silent indication of its presence. Ideas that deface or distort this "authoritative image of a human being" in a person are indeed acting like demons, and are them.

In the second place, judging by their own consistency and the results of their realization in the world, these are ideas of a peculiar sort. They behave strangely. Their chief peculiarity is summed up by Shigalyov, the leading theoretician in *Demons*, commenting on his own system: ". . . my conclusion directly contradicts the original idea I start from. Starting from unlimited freedom, I conclude with unlimited despotism. I will add, however, that apart from my solution to the social formula, there is no other." Here we have the voice of the demonic idea in its pure state. Shigalyov is a doggedly honest man. He admits the contradiction in his thinking, but asserts that there can be no other solution. He is a man blinded by his own lucidity, in René Girard's terms. It is a lucidity produced by elimination; there is an absence at the center of his thought, a *golfo mistico* through which the demons enter, turning his idea into its opposite. And it is not just any idea, but the one dearest to us all—the idea of freedom. Dostoevsky was accused in his own time, and is often accused in ours, of producing only caricatures of revolutionaries in *Demons*.

Readers of the tracts written by Bakunin and Nechaev will recognize the voice of Shigalyov, as will readers of the works of Lenin. Or of their ideological opponents in the hollow rivalries that have continued throughout our century and spread to every corner of the world. Shigalyov's words are a paradigm of the operation of demonic ideas. As for the realization of these ideas in the world, historical examples are to be found everywhere, perhaps most appallingly in the sixty million victims of such ideas in Shigalyov's own country. "It was only towards the middle of the twentieth century that the inhabitants of many European countries came, in general unpleasantly, to the realization that their fate could be influenced directly by intricate and abstruse books of philosophy," Czesław Milosz wrote in the opening sentence of *The Captive Mind*. Books written by Shigalyovs, of course.

The opposite of blind lucidity was Dostoevsky's clear-sightedness about the historical situation of his time and its implications. Writing to his publisher some years after completing *Demons*, he spoke of the "blasphemy" he was then representing in "The Grand Inquisitor" as "the seed of the idea of destruction in our time, in Russia, in the milieu of the young people who have lost touch with reality," and he defined this blasphemy as the "denial not of God, but of the meaning of His creation. The whole of socialism emerged and began with the denial of the meaning of historical reality and went on to a program of destruction and anarchism." In another letter from the same time, he wrote: ". . . the scientific and philosophical refutation of the existence of God has already been abandoned, present-day *practical socialists* are not occupied with it at all (as they were for the whole past century and the first half of the present one), instead they deny with all their might God's creation, God's world, and its meaning. Here in this alone does modern civilization find nonsense." The "seed of the idea of destruction" is the revolt against God; but that is

over and done with, it is already forgotten, no one is concerned with it anymore. What follows is man's replacement of God and the correction of His creation. This amounts to a declaration of the absurdity and meaninglessness of history, of historical reality as the unfolding of God's will in time, but also as the lived life of mankind—that is, to a separation from the historical body of mankind. Reality itself, physical reality, begins to drain out of this radical "idea," leaving only the drab abstraction of materialism. This Dostoevsky felt and realized, and it is one reason why his heroes, when they begin to save themselves, kiss the earth and "water it with their tears." The third stage of the revolt in the name of unlimited freedom is destruction and anarchism, represented by Pyotr Verkhovensky. This whole "development" is a continuous fall, and its thrust is towards sheer fantasy, which our century has witnessed in its bloodiest and most senseless forms. Dostoevsky explored, tested, represented these three stages with extraordinary prescience in *Demons*.

Everything is inverted here: freedom ends in despotism, adoration turns to hatred, lucidity increases blindness, the first real act of the liberator of mankind—Nechaev or Verkhovensky—is the murder of his human brother. Seeking the greatest good, we do the greatest evil. The demons parody God's world and invert its ends, playing for its loss. And the source of all these inversions, the primordial parody, is the replacement of the "authoritative image of a human being" by the would-be autonomous human will. Demons are unoriginal. They cannot come up with anything new or real. Their lies are copied from sacred truths. They introduce a dreadful buffoonery into the world. This brings us to the question of humor and parody in the novel. Because if *Demons* is the darkest of Dostoevsky's novels, it is also the most hilarious. We have said that Dostoevsky's expressive art relies on heightened contrasts: the contrasts here are more extreme, the antitheses are more marked,

than in any other of his works. Alongside what one critic has called “the most harrowing scene in all fiction” (Kirillov’s suicide), there are scenes filled with wild laughter. The role of laughter is complex here, and that, too, is owing to the unseen presence of the demons.

The world reflected in the novel is already in a state of parody. The “great writer Karmazinov” did exist and was Turgenev. Turgenev did write his *Phantoms* and *Enough*, the models for Karmazinov’s *Merci*. The absurd “quadrille of literature” in *Demons* does represent the rivalries of various literary-political factions and their publications. The revolutionaries we are introduced to at Virginsky’s name-day party stepped into the novel from the transcripts of the trial of the Nechaevists, which took place in the summer of 1871, just when Dostoevsky returned to Petersburg and while he was still at work on the book. (This was the first public political trial in Russia; stenographic records of the proceedings were published daily in the official *Government Messenger.*) The issues, the passions, the oppositions, the polemics, the conspiracies are serious, all too serious. It may be said that this world is in a very serious state of parody (demons always want to be taken seriously). Dostoevsky unmasks this serious parodic condition by means of comic parody, that is, by reinserting it in the great tradition of irreverent laughter, overturning the inversion. But together with this sharp, flensing laughter there is a broader laughter that saves, a comedy that is the embodiment of true freedom, in the portraït of Stepan Trofimovich, who after standing as “reproach incarnate” for twenty years, finally begins to move.

A few words about this translation. With regard to the style of the original, we can do no better than quote Konstantin Mochulsky:

> Dostoevsky's verbal mastery deserves special study. *Demons* is built on the subtlest stylistic effects. Each of the dramatis personae is immersed in his own verbal element, and the comparing and contrasting of the characters permits the author to trace intricate designs in the fabric of his narrative . . . Each character inscribes himself in this chronicle by his personal manner of speech, his own peculiar diction. Stepan Trofimovich is characterized by his French-Russian speech, gentlemanly intonations, and elegant quips . . . The monomaniac and fanatic Kirillov, who has fallen out of human society, is defined by his odd, agrammatical speech. He talks in some abstract, universal Volapük. Marya Timofeevna is shown in the fairy-tale light of her folk-monastic speech; Bishop Tikhon in the stern splendor of Church-Orthodox language; Shatov in the fiery inspiration of a prophet; Pyotr Verkhovensky in the abrupt, deliberately rude and vulgar remarks of the "nihilistic style"; Shigalyov in the dead heaviness of scientific jargon; Stavrogin in the formlessness and artificiality of his "omni-human tongue." The clashing and interweaving of these verbal styles and rhythms form the intricate counterpoint of the novel's stylistics.

The narrator, too, though he claims that "as a chronicler, I limit myself simply to presenting events in an exact way, exactly as they occurred," is capable of all sorts of little jokes, as if language were mocking itself: someone, for instance, finds "a florin on the floor"; there is "Virginsky . . . overpowering the maiden"; there is the governor's wife "obliged to get up from her bed of rest, in indignation and in curlers"; there is "the fat but tea-bypassed monk from the monastery"; there is Officer Filibusterov, whose name alone sends the governor finally out of his mind. These voices and details make for the delight as well as the difficulty of translating Dostoevsky.

The terms "smooth" and "natural" are used almost automatically in praise of what are thought to be good translations. Their appropriateness is not self-evident. Dostoevsky's prose is all movement and life, it has great forward momentum, but there is nothing smooth about it. A smooth translation of Dostoevsky would be what Paul Valéry called a "résumé that annuls resonance and form." The question of "naturalness" is more complicated. Kirillov, for instance, does not speak in a naturally low-class or careless

manner. His speech is very deliberate, but precisely agrammatical. Language seems to be dying out in him. The result is totally unnatural in Russian, and in this case our translation actually reads more naturally than the original. Stepan Trofimovich speaks much of the time in French, but his Russian also often sounds like French, coming out in French word order or in words calked from the French. The mixture produces some memorable, but hardly natural, absurdities. Fedka the Convict has a peasant manner of speaking and a peasant love of long, biblical-sounding words, which he often uses incorrectly; some of his talk is also a special thieves' jargon. And so on. In each case, with each voice of this many-voiced composition, we have sought "natural" English equivalents for the richly unnatural languages of the original. The scholastic philosopher Duns Scotus thought that *baecceitas*, or "thisness," was the final perfection of any creature. So it is of any good book, and, it should follow, of any good translation.

—Richard Pevear

Translators' Note

RUSSIAN NAMES ARE composed of first name, patronymic (from the father's first name), and family name. Formal address requires the use of first name and patronymic; diminutives are commonly used among family and intimate friends; a shortened form of the patronymic (e.g., Yegorych instead of Yegorovich), used only in speech, also suggests a certain familiarity. Among the aristocracy, who spoke French at least as readily as Russian, the French forms of names were frequently used, such as Julie in place of Yulia. The following list gives the names of the novel's main characters, with their variants. Accented syllables of Russian names are italicized.

Ale*xei* Ye*gor*ovich, or Ye*gor*ych (no family name)
Droz*dov*, Mav*ri*ky Nik*ola*evich (Maurice)
—, Pras*ko*vya I*van*ovna (Droz*di*kha)
*Er*kel (no first name or patronymic)
*Fyo*dor *Fyo*dorovich, called "*Fed*ka the Convict" (no family name)
Ga*gan*ov, Ar*te*my P*av*lovich
—, *Pav*el *Pav*lovich
G—v, An*ton* Lav*ren*tievich
Karma*zi*nov, Sem*yon* Ye*gor*ovich
Ki*ril*lov, Ale*xei Nil*ych
Le*byad*kin, I*gnat* (patronymic "Timofeevich" never used)
—, *Mar*ya Timofeevna, or Timo*fev*na
Li*put*in, Ser*gei* Ye*gor*ovich (or Va*sil*yich)
*Lyam*shin (no first name or patronymic)

Matr*yo*sha (no patronymic or family name)
Sem*yon Yak*ovlevich (no family name)
*Sha*tov, *Dar*ya *Pav*lovna (*Da*sha)
—, I*van Pav*lovich (*Sba*tushka)
—, *Mar*ya Ig*nat*ievna (Marie)
Shigal*yov* (no first name or patronymic)
Stav*ro*gin, Niko*lai Vse*volodovich (Nicolas)
—,Var*v*ara *Petrovna*
*Ti*khon
Tolk*achen ko* (no first name or patronymic)
*Tu*shin, Liza*ve*ta Niko*la*evna *(Liza,* Lise)
U*li*tin, *Sof*ya Mat*ve*evna
Verkho*ven*sky, *Pyotr* Ste*pan*ovich (Pe*tru*sha, Pierre)
—, Ste*pan* Tro*fim*ovich
Vir*gin*sky (no first name or patronymic)
—, A*ri*na *Pro*khorovna
von Blum, An*drei* An*ton*ovich
von *Lembke*, An*drei* An*ton*ovich (also called "*Lembka*")
—, *Yu*lia Mi*kbail*ovna (Julie)

The name "Stavrogin" comes from the Greek word *stavros*, meaning "cross." "Shatov" comes from the Russian verb *shatat'sya*, "to loosen, become unsteady, wobble," and, by extension, "to waver, vacillate." The name "Verkhovensky" is rich in suggestions for the Russian ear: *verkh* means "top, head, height"; *verkbovny* means "chief, supreme"; *verkbovenstvo* means "command, leadership."

We include as an appendix the chapter "At Tikhon's," which was suppressed by M. N. Katkov, editor of the *Russian Messenger*, where *Demons* first appeared serially. Dostoevsky valued this chapter highly, but after efforts to salvage it, none of which satisfied his editor, he was forced to eliminate it. Since he never restored it to later editions of the novel, we have chosen, as most editors have, to print it

as an appendix, rather than put it back in its rightful place as Chapter Nine of the second part.

The chapter has survived in two forms, neither of which can be considered finished. The first version is in printer's proofs for the December 1871 issue of the *Russian Messenger*, corresponding to the manuscript Dostoevsky originally submitted to Katkov. The fifteenth page of these proofs is missing, however, and the proofs themselves are covered with additions and alterations made at different times and representing Dostoevsky's attempts to rework the chapter. The second version is a fair copy written out by Anna Grigorievna Dostoevsky, the author's wife, from an unknown manuscript. It differs considerably from the proof text, and essentially constitutes a distinct version. It, too, was never finished or published. Our translation of "At Tikhon's" has been made from the proof text, reproduced in volume ii of the Soviet Academy of Sciences edition of Dostoevsky's works (Leningrad, 1974), omitting later additions and alterations, and with the lost fifteenth page restored from the corresponding passage in Anna Grigorievna's manuscript.