

The Master of Petersburg: Confession and Double Thoughts in Coetzee and Dostoevsky

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In times of intense ideological pressure like the present, when the space in which the novel and history normally coexist like two cows on the same pasture, each minding its own business, is squeezed to almost nothing, the novel, it seems to me, has only two options: supplementarity or rivalry.

J. M. COETZEE, "The Novel Today"

J. M. COETZEE EXPRESSED this opinion in an address at a book fair in Cape Town, in November 1987, at the mid-point of the worst years of the States of Emergency in South Africa (1986-89). At the time of the publication of his latest novel, *The Master of Petersburg*, in early 1994, the political situation had changed in ways unforeseeable in 1987. The option of the novel's "rivalry" to history, on the other hand, seems (to him) as important as ever. *The Master of Petersburg*, set in 1869, is a narrative about a Russian novelist coming out of self-imposed exile in Dresden and returning to St. Petersburg to collect the papers and other belongings of his dead stepson, and in the process becoming caught up in various aspects of the dead boy's former life. It is not until 33 pages into the novel that we are told that the novelist is none other than Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky,¹ but the alert (and well-read) reader will have guessed this long before.

As we might expect with a writer like Coetzee, this is no straightforward portrait of the artist. Although the fictional Fyodor is similar to the historical Dostoevsky—he has been residing in Dresden to escape his creditors; he suffers from epilepsy and a ruinous fondness for gambling; he has a second

wife, Anna Grigorevna Dostoevskaya, née Snitkina, and a stepson from his first marriage, Pavel Alexandrovich Isaev—there are vital differences between the two. Most notably, Dostoevsky's adopted son Pavel did not die in 1869 but actually lived on for 20 years after his stepfather's death in 1881. As far as we can tell, Dostoevsky did not return from his exile until 1871; and it was while he was in Dresden that he heard of the political killing of the student Ivanov by the revolutionary and terrorist Nechaev, an event which came to dominate his thoughts and finally resulted in the writing of *Devils* (1871).² In *The Master of Petersburg*, however, it is Pavel who dies, having committed suicide or having been murdered, either by the police or (as Fyodor gradually comes to believe) by Nechaev.

Before examining Coetzee's reasons for making these "historical" changes, it is necessary to clarify exactly what the novel's "rivalry" to history entails. David Attwell notes that the terms of Coetzee's argument are "unhappily Manichean"—supplementarity *or* rivalry, history *or* the novel—and that this has cost him "a great deal in terms of his relationship with other writers in South Africa and with readers whose form of politicization demands a realist documentation of life lived under oppression" ("The Problem of History" 592, 582). However, it must be borne in mind that Coetzee is *polemizing* here, and that what we find in the novels may be quite different and infinitely more complex than a dogmatic either/or. It is also important to realize that Coetzee's use of the word "history," at least in his polemics, does not correspond to the usual sense accorded to it, that of lived reality and experience, of accepted facts about the date of an election, or a battle, or a strike, or the contents of a certain piece of legislation. Instead, he uses the word to refer to historical discourse, thus adopting the position that, even if we know history to have happened, to have been the "Real" or lived reality, our only access to it now is textual, via discourse, and therefore through interpretation.

Coetzee's quarrel is with types of fiction that refuse to acknowledge this latter point, and simply provide the reader with "vicarious first-hand experience of living in a certain historical time, embodying contending forces in contending characters and fill-

ing our experience with a certain density of observation" ("The Novel Today" 3). On a different occasion, Coetzee has criticized the unthinking naturalism of novels like Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood* (1981) and Sipho Sepamla's *Ride on the Whirlwind* (1981), where there is "a failure, almost a refusal to create a structure in which there is some centre of intelligence" ("Grubbing for the Ideological Implications" 3). This is a type of fiction from which, in the words of Njabulo Ndebele, "little transformation in reader consciousness is to be expected since the only reader faculty engaged is the faculty of recognition. Recognition does not necessarily lead to transformation: it simply confirms" (45).

In contrast, the position of "rivalry," which Coetzee is clearly defining for his own fiction, would lead to

a novel that operates in terms of its own procedures and issues its own conclusions, not one that operates in terms of the procedures of history and eventuates in conclusions that are checkable by history (as a child's schoolwork is checked by a schoolmistress). In particular I mean a novel that evolves its own paradigms and myths, in the process (and here is the point at which true rivalry, even enmity, perhaps enters the picture) perhaps going so far as to show up the mythic status of history—in other words, demythologizing history. ("The Novel Today" 3)

It is questionable why Coetzee should find it necessary to employ such aggressive terms as "rivalry" and "enmity"—terms that imply a complete break between fiction and reality. If fiction is just fiction and has no effect whatsoever on reality, then why write at all? It is easy to imagine Coetzee wincing at the modifier in "just fiction," but he himself points toward it with statements about the "inevitability" of history's claims to "primacy," to being "a master-form of discourse" (4). Conversely, and to put it crudely, it is difficult to imagine people running to their copies of *Waiting for the Barbarians* to get the lowdown on the current state of affairs in South Africa. The point of Coetzee's fiction does not lie here, in this binary opposition between supplementing or rivalling history, and it is (to say the least) ironic that he should present it as the only choice in an address that attacks "the terms of class conflict, race conflict, gender conflict or any of the other oppositions out of which history and the historical disciplines erect themselves" (3).

In fact, as Attwell demonstrates very clearly, Coetzee's novels do "engage history-as-the-Real in quite specific ways" ("The Problem of History" 588). For example, each of the novels presents a particular consciousness engaged in a struggle to interpret and understand the people or the situation that surrounds them, often through the act of writing or narrating.³ Although Coetzee insists rightly that "making sense of life inside a book is different from making sense of real life—not more difficult or less difficult, just different" ("Grubbing for the Ideological Implications" 3), his determination to focus on particular instances of interpretation seems to gesture outwards to the ways in which all of us attempt to ascribe meanings to our lives and the differing languages, cultures, and histories in which we are caught up. Attwell quotes from Robert Siegle's *The Poetics of Reflexivity* (1986), which posits such reflexive, self-conscious elements in fiction as key elements of a "constitutive poetics," that is, a poetics directed at

the mechanics and assumptions of composing, interpreting, structuring, positing . . . [a poetics which is] a specialized application of a larger study of how a culture—whether in literature, cultural coding in general, science, or philosophy—composes its identity and that of its individuals and constitutes the world within which it takes place. (590)

In contrast to realist or naturalist fiction, which attempts to present itself as "pure" representation, unmediated by any controlling "centre of intelligence," Coetzee's metafictional, deconstructive novels actively and self-consciously challenge various modes of interpreting and ascribing meaning to one's surroundings. His novelistic project involves imagining a certain consciousness—which includes the body it finds itself in, the language it speaks, the politics and culture surrounding it and informing its point of view, the histories it is a part of—and then setting it in motion, trying to allow it to speak for itself at a certain distance from direct authorial intervention or opinion, but concentrating particularly upon the limits and the possibilities of its conditions, the boundaries of its thought.

Another way in which Coetzee's novels engage "history-as-the-Real" is through affiliation. Edward Said, in his essay on "Secular

Criticism," describes "the transition from a failed idea or possibility of filiation to a kind of compensatory order that, whether it is a party, an institution, a culture, a set of beliefs, or even a world vision, provides men and women with a new form of relationship, which [Said has] been calling affiliation but which is also a new system" (19). Attwell suggests that Coetzee's first two novels, *Dusklands* and *In the Heart of the Country*, "can be described as delivering a critique of the forms of filiation that must be felt as chains of imprisonment by any critical or reflective South African," and that while Coetzee never proceeds to affiliate himself with any particular political party, institution or set of beliefs, affiliative patterns do appear with regard to the various authors, types of fiction-writing and critical practice to which the novels allude:

The intertextual networks of literature itself seem to provide Coetzee with a kind of guarantee of the possibility of [qualified or partial forms of] freedom, even if this means only the freedom to rethink, as he puts it, the categories of dominance. This large movement through the sequence of novels cannot be discerned, however, without reference to the historical narrative which the fiction itself establishes, not only as a story to be told, but also as a field of authorial endeavour. . . . Another way of putting this is to say that against the historical narrative, using the materials of structure, Coetzee casts in relief configurations of language—conceived as subjectivity, self-representation, myth, and ideology—which contain different accounts of the limits and possibilities of life lived out in history.

(*"The Problem of History"* 601)

The affiliative relationships that Coetzee chooses to make in his fiction provide an indirect link with "history-as-the-Real," supplying a literary-ideological, literary-historical, and literary-critical basis against which he can explore and question various ways in which people have made sense of their lives, explained and justified themselves—a process always involving to greater or lesser degrees some form of plotting or narrativizing.

Bearing the above in mind, it becomes difficult to agree with Coetzee that "rivalry" to historical discourse is the best way to describe such novelistic enterprises. Attwell suggests a third option—"complementarity"—which is more helpful in explaining the dynamics of Coetzee's fiction, his attempt to rethink and expand the limits of specific forms of consciousness-in-history

(592). This brings us back to my original question—why has Coetzee changed various aspects of Dostoevsky’s biography in *The Master of Petersburg*? Why affiliate himself—if this is what he is doing—to Dostoevsky? What is the form of consciousness explored here, and what are its limits? How is history, or historical discourse, “complemented” or rethought by Coetzee’s alterations to the “real” life of the “real” Dostoevsky?

These are questions that baffled many of the reviewers of *The Master of Petersburg*. Michiko Kakutani, in the *New York Times*, complained that while “Coetzee’s manipulation of these facts and fictions is perfectly nimble, it also feels completely arbitrary,” and bemoaned “the waste of [his] copious talents on such an odd and unsatisfying enterprise” (C35). Patrick McGrath, in the *New York Times Book Review*, described it as “an obscure book . . . its plot labyrinthine, its tone relentlessly melancholy . . . dense and difficult, a novel that frustrates at every turn” (9); while Richard Eder, in the *Los Angeles Times*, claimed that “the substance is engrossing but it falls short” (11). Harriett Gilbert, in *New Statesman and Society*, accused Coetzee of “coyness” for waiting until page 33 to reveal Dostoevsky’s “true identity” (41), and, in the *Spectator*, Barry Unsworth felt “troubled by stirrings of disbelief throughout the novel” (31). Whatever Coetzee’s aims are in *The Master of Petersburg*, they would appear to be quite obscure—or, at least, not quite as obvious as in *Foe* (1986), the first novel in which he used a concrete historical character who also happened to have been an author. There, he rewrote Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) to give voices to those silenced by history and literature. At first glance, there would seem to be no correspondingly apparent motivation behind the enterprise of rewriting Dostoevsky.

There are perhaps similarities between the positions of Coetzee and Dostoevsky: both authors live(d) in a time of political unrest in their respective countries (and wrote with the threat of censorship hanging over them); both chose voluntary exile abroad for a time before returning to their native countries; both have been accused of being reactionary, of displaying complicity in the oppression of certain groups in their societies. The workings of revolutionary organizations in both countries are also

comparable, consisting of “underground cells” utilizing terrorist tactics to attack the sections of society they see as subjugating them. A sizeable proportion of the opposition to white nationalism in South Africa has been Marxist—especially during the 1960s and 1970s—and Coetzee has been singled out by communist groups who have attacked his writing for its lack of concrete political engagement.⁴ Dostoevsky was strongly against the activities and propaganda of certain proto-communist and nihilist groups in pre-revolutionary Russia, modelling the cunning and murderous character of Pyotr Stepanovich Verkhovensky (in *Devils*) on the real life figure of Nechaev. Verkhovensky proclaims:

Those with higher abilities can't help being despots and have always done more harm than good; they'll either be banished or executed. Cicero's tongue will be cut out, Copernicus's eyes will be gouged out, Shakespeare will be stoned. . . . There's no need for education; we've had enough science! (442-43)

In *The Master of Petersburg*, Fyodor attacks the rigid inflexibility of this kind of anti-intellectualism, wondering at a world-view focused solely on destruction and chaos which rejects learning, art, and science as impractical. Fyodor asks Nechaev:

“What of me, what of my place in your utopia? Shall I still be allowed to dress up like a woman, if the spirit takes me, or like a young dandy in a white suit, or will I be allowed only one name, one address, one age, one parentage? . . . Shall I still have the freedom to pass myself off as whomever I wish—as a young man, for instance, who spends his idle hours dictating lists of people he doesn't like and inventing bloodthirsty punishments for them . . . ? Or should I bear in mind what I heard you say in Geneva: that we have had enough Copernicuses, that if another Copernicus were to arise he should have his eyes gouged out?” (185)

It is possible to imagine Coetzee's voice behind this speech, voicing his concern over the hidden tyrannies and hypocrisies of certain forms of communism and nationalism, perhaps hitting back at criticism of his refusal to declare his allegiance to and serve “the cause”—whichever cause it is—in South Africa. As is always the case with Coetzee, however, it is difficult to say where he stands in relation to his text—here, he is a shadowy figure

positioned behind a complex fictional/historical *mise-en-abîme*, as Fyodor accuses (the fictional) Nechaev of declarations which echo Verkhovensky's in *Devils*, while Verkhovensky's speeches echo those of (the real) Nechaev, filtered through Dostoevsky's critical consciousness to become a fictional representation.

It is also feasible to suggest a connection between the expansionist projects of the Soviet Union and those of European colonialism, especially considering the current problems of states like Chechnya and Georgia which are engaged in reasserting their independence from modern Russia. Again, Coetzee never makes the connection explicit—his narrative ends far before the October Revolution and the events which followed—but it looms over the book, colouring the reader's perception of the conversations between Fyodor and Nechaev, as a foreboding of what may accompany any form of political extremism, black or white, communist or colonial, nationalist or "democratic" (as for the latter, witness the portrayal of the US aggressions in *Dusklands* [1974]).

However, none of these similarities and connections properly explain Coetzee's choice of Dostoevsky as a protagonist, or the changes he makes to his biography. One way into the puzzle *The Master of Petersburg* sets may lie in an examination of its title. Petersburg, as Dostoevsky famously described it in *Notes from Underground* (1864), is "the most abstract and intentional city in the whole round world" (17). The Underground Man is plagued by abstraction and intention: his attempts at confession reveal to us the interminable labyrinths of consciousness as he tries in vain to explain his motives and actions, aware that even in his most persuasive moments he is simply "talking like a book" (100)—"I was on the point of tears, although at the same time I quite definitely knew that all of this came out of *Silvio* and Lermontov's *Masquerade*" (83). He is a prime example of a man who, to use Bakhtin's phrase, "has ceased to coincide with himself" (117); he cannot reason straightforwardly or act naturally, for he is self-conscious to such a degree that he is continually aware of dubious or fraudulent motives behind whatever he does or thinks or says. He not only preempts the reader's judgment of his story

("You think that now I'm making some kind of confession to you, don't you? . . . I'm sure you do . . . But I assure you it's all the same to me if you do think so" [16]), but he judges it himself, and then judges that judgement, and so on *ad infinitum*.

This association of Petersburg with (unsuccessful) confessional writing and with fraught dealings with the enigma of one's consciousness, impulses and reason is picked up by Coetzee,⁵ who discusses *Notes from Underground* at some length in his longest sustained piece of literary criticism to date, "Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky" (1985). This essay deals with the problem of secular confession, namely, how to achieve absolution from guilt and shame when there is no God (or at least, no reachable God) to absolve one. The problem is that of self-consciousness: with no absolute, external forgiveness, how is one to untangle the endless skein of questioning which throws into uncertainty all motives for confession? This is the ditch at which all (secular) confessions must stumble—the trap of the *dvoinaya mysl'*, the double thought. The phrase comes from Prince Myshkin, protagonist of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (1869), when he is confronted by a character called Keller, who has come to his rooms "overflowing with confidence and confessions":

"You didn't by any chance want to borrow some money, did you?" the prince prompted him very gravely and simply, almost a little shyly.

Keller gave a violent start . . . "Well, that's how you stump a fellow completely! . . . Of course, the whole object of my visit was to ask you for a loan in the end." (324)

It is not that Keller did not truly want to confess—he swears upon oath that what he wanted was to make "a full and heartfelt confession to you . . . to promote my own spiritual development" (325). But even as he lay sobbing, a "most fiendish thought" occurred to him: "'And why, after all, shouldn't I ask him to lend me some money—after my confession, of course?' So I prepared my confession like, so to speak, some 'spiced sauce laced with tears,' so as to pave the way with those tears and, having softened you up, make you fork out one hundred and fifty roubles. Don't you think that was mean?" (324). Coetzee glosses the passage thus:

We recognize that we are at the beginning of a potentially infinite regression of self-recognition and self-abasement in which the self-satisfied candour of each level of confession of impure motive becomes a new source of shame and each twinge of shame a new source of self-congratulation. . . . At the kernel of the pattern lies . . . “double thought,” [which] is perhaps better imagined as a *doubling back* of thought, the characteristic movement of self-consciousness.

(“Confession and Double Thoughts” 222)

It is therefore a double thought in Keller to want sincerely to confess and also to borrow money—and then to confess the ignominy of his ulterior motive with the same “self-satisfied candour” as the rest of his catalogue of sins. Prince Myshkin detects in “double thought” the malaise which renders all confession powerless to tell the truth and hence come to an end. Coetzee points out that “it is the doubling back of thought that undermines the integrity of the will to confess by detecting behind it a will to deceive, and behind the detection of this second motive a third motive (a wish to be admired for one’s candour), and so on” (222-23). Myshkin himself is trapped within the same syndrome: recognizing that “everyone is like that” itself becomes a double thought—“so that I even began patting myself on the back” (Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* 325).

All this may seem to be an abstract academic exercise unrelated to *The Master of Petersburg*, but in fact it has the greatest significance. In an interview with Attwell, Coetzee says that more and more he sees the essay on Tolstoy, Rousseau and Dostoevsky “emerging as pivotal” in his thinking about himself and his work (*Doubling the Point* 391).

What was going on in the essay? In the present retrospect I see in it a submerged dialogue between two persons. One is a person I desired to be and was feeling my way toward. The other person is more shadowy: let us call him the person I then was, though he may be the person I still am. The field of their debate is *truth in autobiography*. The second person takes the position [that] there is no ultimate truth about oneself, there is no point in trying to reach it, what we call the truth is only a shifting self-reappraisal whose function is to make one feel good, or as good as possible under the circumstances. . . . In the terms brought into prominence in the essay, the debate is *between cynicism and grace*. Cynicism: the denial of any ultimate basis for values. Grace: a condition in which the truth can be told clearly,

without blindness. The debate is staged by Dostoevsky [in *Devils*]; the interlocutors are called Stavrogin and Tikhon.

(392; emphases added)

Here Coetzee displays a firmly Dostoevskian grasp of his own consciousness, in dialogue with itself behind the objective veil of the academic argument. He believes that "all autobiography is storytelling, all writing is autobiography" (392). If Coetzee reads his essay on Tolstoy, Rousseau, and Dostoevsky as hidden autobiography, even as it explores the problems of autobiography in other writers, then it is possible to read into his novels a covert self-examination of his role (and perhaps duty) as a white South African author, even as he interrogates the guilt and self-doubt of his characters. Equally, if it is possible to read Coetzee's autobiography, or autobiographical confession, in his novels, then the reader can be sure that what he or she reads is "storytelling." The only thing which could resolve this paradox—the paradox of "cynicism"—is "grace," the granting of a condition in which the truth could be told clearly. In choosing to affiliate himself with Dostoevsky, Coetzee is tackling these preoccupations directly, in so far as the former was equally obsessed with the possibility of transcendence over self-doubt and the infinite regress of double thought.

Dostoevsky is known for his open, polyphonic novels; his characters act and think moment by moment, reacting to the chance contingencies life throws at them. Gary Saul Morson describes this open, contingent conception of how life is lived as "Kairova time," referring to a notorious case which Dostoevsky commented on in *A Writer's Diary*. Kairova was the mistress of a married man, Velikanov. On discovering that her lover was reunited with his wife, she purchased a razor, went to where the couple was sleeping, and attacked the wife with it. The couple awoke and restrained Kairova, who was put on trial for the attack and subsequently acquitted. Dostoevsky argued, in *A Writer's Diary*, that the jury had no choice but to acquit Kairova, since the question that they were asked—whether she had deliberately premeditated her act and fully intended to kill Velikanov's wife, but was prevented from doing so—was impossible to answer, because it was quite likely that Kairova herself did not know, even

as she entered the couple's bedroom, even as she began her attack.

Most likely she hadn't the slightest idea of [whether she would kill Velikanova] even when sitting on the steps with the razor in her hand, while just behind her, on her own bed, lay her lover and her rival. No one, no one in the world could have the slightest idea of this. Moreover, even though it may seem absurd, I can state that even when she had begun slashing her rival, she might *still not have known* whether she wanted to kill her or not and whether *this was her purpose* in slashing her. (Qtd. by Morson 143)

In "Kairova time," the state of mind "responds unpredictably to evolving circumstances. Time and intention exhibit multiple potentials changing from moment to moment" (Morson 145).

Dostoevsky's novels are suffused by "Kairova time." In *Crime and Punishment* (1865-66), right up to the point at which he swings the axe, Raskolnikov does not believe he will murder the moneylender. When he learns that the moneylender will be alone the following night, he is shaken by this knowledge, but still does not make up his mind to commit the crime. In fact, as Morson points out, "Raskolnikov *never* decides to commit the murder, which is one reason he later has so much trouble in ascertaining *why* he decided to do so" (225; first emphasis added). The murder may be vital in terms of the plot of *Crime and Punishment*, but Dostoevsky goes to great lengths to show us that Raskolnikov is not "fated" in any way—things *could* have turned out differently at any stage.

Likewise, in *The Idiot*, Rogozhin, armed with a knife, conceals himself in the stairwell leading to Myshkin's apartments, intending to kill him. Myshkin sees his would-be assassin and cries out. He has an epileptic fit, his face becoming "horribly distorted," his body seized by "spasms and convulsions" and "a terrible, quite incredible scream" (252) breaking from his chest. The chance occurrence of Myshkin's fit foiled Rogozhin's intention at the last moment; the "blow of the knife" was not "inevitable" after all. Contingency and coincidence suddenly conspire to change the course of events in a quite unforeseeable manner.

There are many examples like these to be found in Dostoevsky's works. Opposed to this open, contingent time, however, there is a drive toward closure, toward a state in which

transcendence over the mutability of “Kairova time” would be possible. Morson calls this state “vortex time” (162). Unlike “Kairova time,” which is the way in which real life with all its possibilities is experienced, “vortex time” is a *mental* state in which “time speeds up . . . until a moment of *apparently infinite density* is reached” (165). Myshkin is obsessed with such mental states—the moment before an epileptic fit, for instance, or the last minute of a condemned man’s life. The experience of this sort of time is linked to a final, truthful knowledge; the soul can finally twist itself free of self-consciousness and double thoughts. For a man about to be executed, Myshkin thinks

the brain, tremendously alive and active, must . . . be working hard, hard, hard, like an engine going at full speed. . . . all the time he knows everything and remembers everything; there is one point which one can never forget, and one can’t faint, and everything goes round and round it, round that point. And to think that this goes on to the last fraction of a second when his head already lies on the block and he waits, and he—knows, and suddenly he hears the iron come slithering down over his head! He must certainly hear that! (88)

In the moment before one of his fits, Myshkin experiences “an intense heightening” of awareness: “at that moment the extraordinary saying that *there shall be time no longer* becomes, somehow, comprehensible to me. I suppose . . . this is the very second in which there was not time enough for the water from the pitcher of the epileptic Mahomet to spill, while he had plenty of time in that very second to behold all the dwellings of Allah” (244). The “extraordinary saying” is, of course, from the Book of Revelation (10: 6), and it is characteristic of “vortex time” that it is an *apocalyptic* mental state. In *Devils*, Kirillov commits suicide in an attempt to experience it, this feeling of “eternal harmony, completely attained” (662), but in his final trance, working himself up to take his own life, he becomes more like a wild animal than a superman, biting Verkhovensky’s finger:

Terrible shrieks came bursting out of the room after [Verkhovensky]:
 “Now, now, now, now . . .”
 Ten times. (700)

Even Myshkin is aware that “all those gleams and flashes of the highest awareness and, hence, also of the ‘highest mode of

existence,' were nothing but a disease, a departure from the normal condition, and, if so, it was not at all the highest mode of existence, but, on the contrary, must be considered to be the lowest" (Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* 243). Nevertheless, Myshkin finally decides that he "could give [his] whole life for this moment" (244)—"What if it is a disease?" (243). The experience of "vortex time," of harmony and complete knowledge, is valued and sought after by many of Dostoevsky's characters, even though, finally, it is merely a state of false consciousness.

Dostoevsky's juxtaposition of "Kairova time" and "vortex time" in his novels can be seen as analogous to Coetzee's struggle between the two positions of "cynicism" and "grace." The very title "The Master of Petersburg" becomes a metaphor for the struggle for insight and grace, implying as it does mastery or authority over the ramifications of self-consciousness and double thought which "Petersburg" suggests. Coetzee's Fyodor is a hybrid creature, a construction containing these recurrent preoccupations of Dostoevsky combined with a certain interpretation of Dostoevsky's character or identity. Dostoevsky is "history" now, and so we cannot access his real, complex identity apart from the traces he has left of it in his novels and letters. Coetzee takes these traces and fuses them with received interpretations of Dostoevsky's identity, such as might be found in biographies, in the potted histories introducing his novels, even in psychoanalytic explanations like Freud's essay "Dostoevsky and Parricide" (1927). He then places this hybrid consciousness, this "mythic" version of Dostoevsky, in a typically Dostoevskian "threshold situation"—having to face up to the suicide or murder of a stepson—and tracks its progress, attempting to gauge its reactions given the specific construction of its identity.

Fyodor's identity is constructed on the basis of rebellion against a cruel and tyrannical father, a figure so disliked that the impulse to parricide possibly enters into the relationship. This is true to what we know of Dostoevsky's life: for him, the rebellion was against his own fearsome father (a tyrannical man who was murdered, possibly by his own serfs, in 1839); against the Tsar (by way of his involvement with the Petrashevsky circle of conspirators); and against God (although Dostoevsky was fascinated by

the figure of Christ, and venerated him, he found the idea of an all-powerful Godhead disturbing, even horrifying). In *The Master of Petersburg*, Fyodor is often questioned or reminded of these father-figures and his rebellion against them. He thinks of his writing as “a trap to catch God” (249); he gambles “to make God speak” (237). Maximov remarks:

“Not easy to be a father, is it? I am a father myself, but luckily a father of daughters. I would not wish to be a father of sons in our age. But didn’t your own father . . . wasn’t there some unpleasantness with your father, or do I misremember?”

He then enquires

“As for Petrashevsky and his friends, what is your opinion? Were Petrashevsky and his friends in the grip of demons?”

Petrashevsky! Why does he bring up Petrashevsky? (45)

Coetzee’s literary device of killing off Fyodor’s stepson, Pavel, turns everything on its head. This device, this rewriting of the real Dostoevsky’s biography, is the crux of the novel, the point about which everything else turns.⁶ *Fyodor* now is the tyrannical father who has mistreated his son. The son has been in rebellion, both against the Political Father, the Tsar (in his involvement with the Nechaevite conspirators), and against his stepfather, Fyodor, as the latter discovers when he reads Pavel’s (plainly autobiographical) story:

“I have no parents,” says Sergei to Marfa. “My father, my real father . . . died when I was seven. My mother married a second time. Her new husband did not like me. As soon as I was old enough, he packed me off to cadet school. . . . Later they moved back to Petersburg, set up house, and sent for me. Then my mother died, and I was left alone with my stepfather, a gloomy man who barely addressed a word to me from one day to the next. I was lonely; my only friends were among the servants; it was from them that I got to know the sufferings of the people.” (151)

Pavel’s death and these subsequent revelations destroy Fyodor’s identity with a single blow. His reaction is one of anger toward Pavel mixed with guilt—guilt at being angry, and guilt at the way he has behaved. In one review of the novel, Zinovy Zinik notes with puzzlement the portrayal of a “mysterious . . . bond between Dostoevsky and his stepson,” commenting that “in real-

ity, such a bond never existed, for . . . in real life Pavel Isaev was nothing but a source of embarrassment for the author, sponging on his money and reputation, a pathetic poseur—Dostoevsky referred to him as ‘a fop’ in his notebooks” (19). But this is exactly the point: Fyodor attempts desperately to forge such a bond, trying to identify himself with Pavel and tie himself to him in some way in order to avoid facing up to the consequences of his despotic behaviour—that is, the threat of a complete breakdown of his identity. The attempt fails. As the novel progresses, Fyodor’s suppressed rage at and dislike of his stepson—for doing this to him, for revealing to him the bogus constructs of his perception of himself—becomes increasingly apparent, slipping out in his more emotional or honest moments. He complains to Anna Sergeyevna about Pavel’s laziness and over-sleeping as a child, and she remarks with surprise “how angry with him you *still seem* to be” (27; emphases added). He dreams of swimming down through water to kiss Pavel’s submerged body, “but when he touches his hard lips to it, he is not sure he is not biting” (18). By the end of the book he becomes aware that to relieve his “paralysis” and his writer’s block he must “let his own rage loose . . . like a genie from a bottle, against the impiety and thanklessness of the sons” (239). The “mysterious bond” Zinik talks of is a bond which Fyodor requires in order to reassert his shattered identity: it amounts to a need to identify completely with the Son, the subject-position he feels is his own but which Pavel has robbed him of—both by his death, and by intruding himself on Fyodor’s attention so forcibly and finally when he has been trying for most of his life to forget his very existence. To this end Fyodor tries to assert that it is *he* who has died, not Pavel (19, 124).

The desire for death also signifies the desire for punishment—punishment to relieve the guilt suffered due to Fyodor’s parricidal impulses (a punishment which the real Dostoevsky did receive in his lifetime as a death which “failed to arrive” in the mock-execution ceremony he underwent at the hands of the Tsar, and also, as Freud would suggest, in the form of “neurotic” epileptic attacks); but more importantly, to relieve the guilt attendant on his realization of his dislike of his stepson and his

abandonment of him—an abandonment carried out to reinforce his identity (that is, his identification with the Son) but which he now sees has undone his identity by making him play out the role of the tyrannical Father.

Fyodor's guilt is emphasized by Coetzee by identifying him at certain points with characters in Dostoevsky's novels, namely Raskolnikov and Stavrogin. When Fyodor arrives at the police station for his first interview with Maximov, he has a premonition of a fit

and in the same movement recognizes that an attack would be a device, and the most childish of devices at that, for extricating himself from a fix, while somewhere to the side falls the nagging shadow of a memory: surely he has been here before, in this very ante-room or one like it, and had an attack or a fainting fit! But why is it that he recollects the episode only so dimly? And what has the recollection to do with the smell of fresh paint? (31)

The recollection is of course that of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* who, sick with fever and guilt, is summoned to the police station where he has a fainting fit—"it was very close, and, in addition, the place was pervaded by the nauseating smell of fresh paint and stale linseed oil from the newly painted rooms" (113). Fyodor is also identified with Stavrogin: the room which he rents from Anna Sergeevna (Pavel's former room) is a model for that of Stavrogin in *Devils*⁷ and his relationship with his landlady's daughter, Matryona, bears many similarities to Stavrogin's power games (which culminate in an unspecified sexual assault and the girl's suicide) with *his* landlady's daughter—also called Matryona. Although Fyodor does not (physically) sexually assault Matryona, thoughts of it do enter his head (76). The violence of such imaginings has a force which, though not the force of an actual act, perhaps begins to blur the boundary between thought and action, hinting at the possibility of real violation. This is something that Matryona's mother, with whom Fyodor is conducting an affair of sorts, recognizes and accuses him of using her "as a route" to her child: "I would never have gone so far if I weren't afraid you would use Matryosha in the same way" (232).

Fyodor's desire for both mother and daughter seems to have as its source a desire to usurp Pavel's place in their affections. When

Anna Sergeyevna tells Fyodor that “[Matryona] and your son were very close. If he has left a mark behind, it is on her,” he demands querulously, “And on you?” (142). He feels jealous of the youth of Pavel and Nechaev: he attempts to talk to Matryona but she “barely hears him. What an unequal contest! How can he compete with these young men who come from nowhere and vanish into nowhere breathing adventure and mystery?” (161). At the same time, he feels a sense of exultation that he is alive and Pavel dead, that he is the one enjoying Anna Sergeyevna’s sexual favours—“The festival of the senses that would have been his [Pavel’s] inheritance stolen away from him! Lying in Pavel’s bed, he cannot refrain from a quiver of dark triumph” (135). Again, Fyodor’s desire is to wrest from Pavel the position of the Son. The attempt is doomed to failure, as Pavel is irrevocably gone; despite all of Fyodor’s manoeuvres, his son’s death has branded him as a tyrannical father. He cannot escape his guilt, as Raskolnikov and Stavrogin could not escape theirs.

There is also an imputation of a more universal type of guilt. The recurrent images of Pavel plunging to his death—plunging to water—and Fyodor’s failure to save him (even though he was in Dresden, hundreds of miles away) are surely an intertextual reference to Albert Camus’s *The Fall* (1956) and the watery death which that novella’s anti-hero, Clamence, failed to prevent.⁸ Clamence is a master of Dostoevskian “double thought,” explaining to his acquaintance that “the confession of my crimes allows me to begin again lighter in heart and to taste a double enjoyment, first of my nature and secondly of a charming repentance” (104). He also shares with Coetzee and Dostoevsky an understanding of the impossibility of truth in autobiographical confession:

I have ceased to like anything but confessions, and authors of confessions write especially to avoid confessing, to tell nothing of what they know. When they claim to get to the painful admissions, you have to watch out, for they are about to dress the corpse. Believe me, I know what I’m talking about. (89)

Clamence’s monologue, as it progresses, begins to sap the reader’s complacency, drawing him into the “circles of hell”—the power games, the passive criminality, the arrogance—which

he describes. *The Fall* is thus a complex examination of non-specific universal guilt, pointing the finger out of the page to demonstrate mankind's murderous complicity in all sorts of outrages (most significant for Camus was Europe's willed blindness and lack of resistance to the Holocaust).

We are now nearing the heart of Coetzee's project. *The Master of Petersburg* is a novel about guilt and the desire for grace—confession, absolution, and an end to guilt. This sense of guilt is not limited to Fyodor, but extends to Coetzee himself. It is the guilt of his background, of the unfair privileges and powers of his position as a white South African; and it is a guilt which incapacitates, thwarting his craving to speak or write the truth clearly, "without blindness." That this is so is suggested by the self-reflexive and metafictional elements of the novel, the fact that it is about a writer who is trying and failing to write (until the final chapter, "Stavrogin," where his writing is a "perversion of the truth" [236]); and, more importantly, by the fact that Coetzee has already affiliated himself to Dostoevsky in "Confession and Double Thoughts," linking his aims to those of Dostoevsky in his interview with Attwell, and claiming that "all writing is autobiography." *The Master of Petersburg* is a working-through of these ideas of cynicism and guilt, and an attempt to track down grace, the elusive truth about oneself. We return to the idea of "complementarity" to history or the Real—Coetzee's project points outward to the real problems of real people, even as it inwardly dissects the experiences and thoughts of the hypothetical figure of Fyodor.

The Master of Petersburg is pessimistic about the possibility of confession. "Double thought," the skein of self-consciousness, cannot be unravelled: all confession is "confession without end" (222). Fyodor cannot grieve in peace; his thoughts always become troubled, taking on multiple meanings which gnaw at his heart and make him question his motives again and again, with no firm result (125-26). He feels he is wandering around "in a moral trance;" he is "surprised at his own passivity" (197). "Everything is collapsing: logic, reason" (202). The collapse of his identity is accompanied by a growing sense of abjection (14).

He remembers Maximov's assistant and the question he asked: "What kind of book do you write?" He knows now the answer he

should have given: "I write perversions of the truth. I choose the crooked road and take children into dark places. I follow the dance of the pen." (235-36)

Perversion, Julia Kristeva suggests, is the father's account, "*verse au père—père-version*" (2): Fyodor writes the tyrannical, authoritarian words of the Father, the Superego. Pavel's death by falling threatens him with a loss of self by becoming a "corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall)," that which he must but cannot "permanently thrust aside in order to live" (3).

The metaphor of the novel's title therefore becomes ironic—there can be no "mastery" of the self, of the endless convolutions and hidden motives of consciousness, only double thought and abjection. Barry Unsworth neatly misses the point when he declares in his review of the book that "[Coetzee] does not need to convince us that Dostoevsky was a master; we know this already" (31). Fyodor's view is closer to the truth:

Master. It is a word he associates with metal—with the tempering of swords, the casting of bells. A master blacksmith, a foundry-master.

"I am far from being a master," he says. "There is a crack running through me. What can one do with a cracked bell? A cracked bell cannot be mended." (140-41)

The term "master" also implies oppression—once more we return to guilt. The title sums up these two meanings: Fyodor possesses the mastery which enables tyranny over others (Pavel, Matryona, and, he claims, those he "betrays" and "sells" in his books [250, 222]), thus causing guilt; on the other hand, he totally lacks the mastery over self-consciousness (represented by "Petersburg") which would allow sufficient confession of that guilt, sufficient self-knowledge, to enable absolution and peace. The mystery of Fyodor's identity for the first 33 pages of the novel is hence a dramatization of the impossibility of ever really knowing oneself and one's true motives, and not "merely coyness" as one of the novel's reviewers claimed (Gilbert 41).

"Grace" is singularly lacking from *The Master of Petersburg*. Attwell discusses Coetzee's use of time, using terms borrowed from Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*. He demonstrates that, up to and including *Foe*, two modes of temporality are employed: *kairos* (the man-made understanding of events and

crises which is History) is opposed to *chronos* (the cycle of the seasons) in order to destabilize the former as part of Coetzee's project of "rivalry" to history. With *Age of Iron*, Attwell suggests that a third term has entered the writing, that of *pleroma*, the "fullness of time."

Coetzee's *pleroma*, it seems, would be the restoration of judgment, or at least the creation of conditions in which judgment would become possible once again. Such a moment is projected negatively in *Age of Iron* in the dramatization of the *failure* of reciprocal judgment before scenes of cruelty. (*Coetzee* 123)

In *The Master of Petersburg*, the "fullness of time" becomes "time out of time," "vortex time"—the moment before an epileptic attack. In *The Idiot*, Myshkin describes the feeling of the last moment of clarity before the darkness descends:

His heart and mind were flooded by a dazzling light. All his agitation, all his doubts and worries, seemed composed in a twinkling, culminating in a great calm, full of serene and harmonious joy and hope, full of understanding and the knowledge of the final cause. (243)

Fyodor has the same sensation:

He awakes full of surprise. Though it is still dark, he feels as if he has rested enough for seven nights. He is fresh and invincible: the very tissues of his brain seem washed clean. He can barely contain himself. He is like a child at Easter, on fire for the household to wake up so that he can share his joy with them. . . . Joy breaking like a dawn! [Then] he hears nothing, he is gone, there is no longer time. (67-68)

"The epileptic knows it all," he says, "the thinking that thinks itself crazily over and over like a bell pealing in the head: *Time shall have an end, there shall be no death*" (118). In *The Master of Petersburg*, there is no grace to be found in these moments; there are death, disease, nothingness—"not even a memory of darkness" (69).

Kristeva notes that "the time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth" (9), but for Fyodor there is only abjection and oblivion, and no sign of revelation. His epilepsy, which he calls "the falling sickness" (226)—"the approach to the edge, the

glance downward, the lurch of the soul" (118)—is linked to Pavel's death by falling; Fyodor fears that Pavel, unlike himself, *did* experience revelation (he wants to "etherize himself against the knowledge that Pavel, *falling, knew everything*" [21; emphases added]). The only "restoration of judgment" in *The Master of Petersburg* is Pavel's judgment of his father, which is a curse on him. Fyodor is desperate for Pavel's forgiveness—reading his last letter to his son, stung by the pettiness of his words to Pavel, he feels he "would like to burn the letter, to erase it from history" (150), much as he would like to erase his tyrannical behaviour. He has a vision of Pavel in a casket, clutching a telegram at which he peers "until his eyes swim, looking for the word of forgiveness that is not there. The telegram is written in Hebrew, in Syriac, in symbols he has never seen before" (223). He has seen the symbols before though in another vision:

He has a vision of Petersburg stretched out vast and low under the pitiless stars. Written in a scroll across the heavens is a word in Hebrew characters. He cannot read the word but he knows it is a condemnation, a curse. (19)

At the end of the novel, Fyodor finds that there is no absolution, only make-believe resurrection. He thinks of his indiscretions and gambling, and the subsequent "voluptuous urge to confess" to his wife:

Falling, but never an irrevocable falling. No: to fall and then come back from the fall new, remade, virginal, ready to be wooed again and to fall again. A playing with death, a play of resurrection. (63)

The problem, Fyodor realizes, is that this solution is merely "playing," another form of self-deceit, and of no help when double thoughts take over one's consciousness. That grace only comes in "time out of time" or in death is profoundly pessimistic, suggesting that the restoration of judgment will only be permitted to those who are somehow (impossibly) outside of time, outside of history, or suffering the disease of false consciousness which is "vortex time." For ordinary mortals living in "Kairova time," God, judgment, will not speak.

All of this has consequences for Coetzee's project of "rivalry" or complementarity to history. I have shown the ways in which he affiliates himself to Dostoevsky, but it should be noted that

the novel itself deals with the hazards of affiliation—Pavel is Fyodor's *adopted* son. Fyodor has made the choice to "affiliate" Pavel to himself, but has behaved in an increasingly authoritarian manner towards him. It is possible to see this as a dramatization of the third stage of affiliation in Said's model, where we find "the deliberately explicit goal of using that new order [of affiliation] to reinstate vestiges of the kind of authority associated in the past with filiative order" (Said 19). Fyodor's reinstatement of authority in his relationship with Pavel has quite disastrous effects, plunging him into abjection and guilt. Fyodor presents himself to Anna Sergeyevna almost as a martyr to Pavel: "I was the one who had to bring him up day by day. I made him my son when everyone else had left him behind" (137). She retorts sharply:

Don't exaggerate. His own parents didn't leave him behind, they died. Besides, if you had the right to choose him as a son, *why had he no right to choose a father for himself.* (137; emphases added)

Fyodor denies that Pavel had any such right. Sounding more and more despotic, and conveniently forgetting that he could be describing himself, he declares:

It has become a sickness in this age of ours, young people turning their backs on their parents, their homes, their upbringing, because they are no longer to their liking! Nothing will satisfy them, it seems, but to be sons and daughters of Stenka Razin or Bakunin! (137-38)

In fact, Pavel has chosen his own affiliative relationships with the Nechaevites—which have been even more disastrous than Fyodor's, leading him to his death.

In *The Master of Petersburg*, Coetzee is facing up to the realization that his longing for grace, for transcendence over contingency and eternal confession, is finally a longing for authority. As such, it is a dangerous longing, implying the possible tyrannies of monologic closure—an end to debate, death to thought itself. Fyodor's attempts to "make God speak" mirror Coetzee's own desire for grace, and both end in a sense of betrayal (250). In the final chapter, "Stavrogin," Fyodor is still suffering from what Coetzee calls "cynicism"—"the denial of any ultimate basis for values" (235). He is presented both as Orpheus (his identity torn into pieces and scattered) and as the person who must put

Orpheus back together (salvaging his own identity as well as trying to bring Pavel back to life). He exhibits a weariness at the failure to achieve grace (152-53), but it is in the acceptance of the fall—acceptance of contingency, of double thought, even of cynicism—that creation finally comes. The authoritarian power of Fyodor's "affiliation" to his son and his hardened, tyrannical identity must be destroyed in order for the process of recreation to begin. He has to accept Pavel's death, his guilt, his fall, before he can begin to write once more:

... he is a man caught in a whirlwind. Torrents of paper, fragments of an old life torn loose by the roar of the upward spiral, fly all about him. High above the earth he is borne, buffeted by currents, before the grip of the wind slackens and for a moment, before he starts to fall, he is allowed utter stillness and clarity, the world opening below him like a map of itself.

Letters from the whirlwind. Scattered leaves, which he gathers up; a scattered body, which he reassembles. (245-46)

Grace is not to be found apart from in the human, fallible, contingent creations of "Kairova time," in life lived as we all live it. After calling himself "a cracked bell," Fyodor recalls that "one of the bells of the Cathedral of the Trinity in Sergiyev is cracked, and has been from Catherine's time. It has never been removed and melted down. It sounds over the town every day" (141).

Coetzee's writing may not reach "the truth," but it is truth-directed. Cixous says of truth:

Of course, I circle "the truth" with all kinds of signs, quotation marks, and brackets, to protect it from any form of fixation or conceptualization, since it is one of those words that constantly crosses our universe in a dazzling wake, but is also pursued by suspicion. I will talk about the truth again, without which (without the word truth, without the mystery *truth*) there would be no writing. It is what writing *wants*. But it "(the truth)" is totally down below and a long way off. And all the [writers] that I love . . . are beings who are bent on directing their writing toward this truth-over-there, with unbelievable labor. (6)

This could be a description of J. M. Coetzee's writing, of the realization that actually to reach grace is betrayal and closure, that the longing for grace must remain a desire, something to *feel his way towards*. In *The Master of Petersburg*, the search for truth leads to gloomy waters: into the underground labyrinths of con-

sciousness, guilt and doubt; toward illness and death. But to read the book is not itself a gloomy experience—there is a sense of hope and of life. The effort of truth-directed writing brings new life in itself, holding off death: Fyodor tenses the power of his willed thoughts to “keep Pavel alive, suspended in his fall”:

Sitting at the table, his eyes closed, his fists clenched, he wards the knowledge of death away from Pavel. He thinks of himself as the Triton on the Piazza Barberini in Rome, holding to his lips a conch from which jets a constant crystal fountain. All day and all night he breathes life into the water. The tendons of his neck, caught in bronze, are taut with effort (21).

NOTES

- 1 In order to distinguish between the historical Dostoevsky and Coetzee's fictional character, I shall refer to the former as “Dostoevsky” and to the latter as “Fyodor” throughout this essay.
- 2 Bibliographical information about Dostoevsky is taken from Frank and Goldstein, *Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoevsky* xxiii-xxvi, 244-45, 328n, 519-26. For a more detailed description of this part of Dostoevsky's life, see Frank's *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-1871*, chs. 19-25.
- 3 Eugene Dawn explores the contrasts between the American and Vietnamese psyches in his report for the New Life for Vietnam project, and Jacobus Coetzee narrates his account of his expedition to the lid of the Great Namaqua (*Dusklands* 18-30, 123-25); Magda is “a spinster with a locked diary” who later attempts to communicate with the “sky-creatures” by forming words with painted stones (*In the Heart of The Country* 3, 132-34); the Magistrate tries, and fails, to write some kind of history or memoir (*Waiting for the Barbarians* 58); the Medical Officer imagines writing a letter to Michael K (*Life & Times of Michael K* 149-52); Susan Barton writes to Daniel Foe, describing her experiences as a castaway and begging him to turn her memoirs into “the substance of the truth” (*Foe* 51); the whole of *Age of Iron* is a last letter written by the dying Elizabeth Curren to her daughter in America; and in *The Master of Petersburg*, we see “the Real” being transformed into a work of fiction as Fyodor begins to write *Devils* (234-50).
- 4 See, for example, the review of *Life & Times of Michael K*, by Z.N., in *African Communist*: “Frankly, Michael K is a bore and it is difficult to sustain interest in his non-activities. He is too negative to comment on or even interpret what is going on around him. . . . Certainly those interested in understanding or transforming South African society can learn little from the life and times of Michael K” (102-03).
- 5 There are explicit references to *Notes from Underground* in *The Master of Petersburg* itself—note especially the similarity of Fyodor's judgment of himself in a conversation with Anna Sergeevna, his landlady: “I am behaving like a character in a book, he thinks” (27).
- 6 It is a peculiarity of *The Master of Petersburg* to rely so heavily upon the reader's prior knowledge of Dostoevsky's life in order for this crucial device to work. Without such knowledge, the novel reads as bad realism—neither the writing nor the character of Fyodor are particularly “Dostoevskian,” excepting the attention given

to some of Dostoevsky's themes and obsessions (through the "mythic" or "hypothetical" Dostoevsky I have been outlining). This peculiarity, together with the complete lack of clues in the text which might alert the reader to Coetzee's project, make the novel strangely introspective and may explain much of the reviewers' unease. One possible explanation for this introspection may lie in the fact that Coetzee's own son, Nicolas, died in 1989 (Gallagher 194); it is difficult to forget such knowledge when reading the novel, and one often has the uncomfortable sense of intruding on the private grief of another.

- ⁷ In *Devils*, Stavrogin's apartment was "in a large building on Gorokhovaya Street": "I had only one room there, on the fourth floor, rented from lower middle class Russians. They themselves lived next door in another room that was even more crowded, so the door separating the two rooms always stood open" (460-61). He was frequently left alone with the daughter, "aged fourteen, I think, and still a child to all appearances. Her name was Matryosha. . . . She was fair-haired and freckled" (461), and he took great pleasure in not talking to her, sitting in silence while she "was lying on her mother's bed in her room behind the screen" (467). In *The Master of Petersburg*, Fyodor's room is at 63 Svechnoi Street, not far from the Hay Market and Gorokhovaya Street (5, 138, 213). It is "really only a cubicle partitioned off from the rest of the apartment" (3). Fyodor is often left alone with Matryona, "a girl with fair hair and striking dark eyes" (2), who sleeps in her mother's bed in an alcove curtained off from the rest of the apartment (55, 57, 207).
- ⁸ There is also a specific link between Camus, Dostoevsky, and the Nechaev episode—Camus discusses Nechaev and Dostoevsky's *Devils* in the chapter on "Individual Terrorism" in *The Rebel* (122-33).

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