

Rado Pribić

Bonaventura's "Nachtwachen"
and Dostoevsky's
"Notes from the Underground"

A Comparison in Nihilism

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RADO PRIBIĆ

BONAVENTURA'S "NACHTWACHEN" AND
DOSTOEVSKY'S "NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND"

A COMPARISON IN NIHILISM

VERLAG OTTO SAGNER · MÜNCHEN

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INTRODUCTION

At the first glance, Bonaventura's Nachtwachen and F. M. Dostoevsky's Notes from the Underground seem to have little in common. The plots are different; the novels were published more than half a century apart; they grew out of different geographical regions with different cultural developments, and were written by authors of different nationalities and characters. Yet, as soon as one penetrates deeper into the structure of both novels, one discovers a remarkable interrelatedness of thought, and notices a striking similarity of formal principles and narrative techniques used by both authors to mediate these thoughts. Most of all, one is astonished by the nihilistic concept which underlies both novels.

Nachtwachen appeared as No. 7 of the third year of the rather obscure Journal von neuen deutschen Original Romanen which was edited by the small publishing house of F. Dienemann and Company in the little known German town of Penig in Saxony. The title page of the journal bears the year 1804, whereas the title page of the novel itself points at the year 1805. One part of the eighth night watch called "Prolog des Hanswurstes zu einer Tragödie: der Mensch" was already published on July 21, 1804, in the journal Zeitung für die elegante Welt.

Notes from the Underground was printed in 1864 in two issues (January/February and April) of the new journal Epokha, which was edited by Dostoevsky's brother Michael.

Ever since Nachtwachen appeared in print and was later listed by Rudolf Haym among the "geistreichsten Productionen der Romantik",¹ literati and literary critics tried to lift the veil of anonymity surrounding Bonaventura. This was not at all an easy undertaking, because ideas, views and problems broached by the author of Nachtwachen were common stock of that time; furthermore, fragments, vigils, confessions, literary quotes and analogies were frequently applied structural devices of the times. Thus, neither the content nor the form of the novel provided sufficient information about the writer hiding under the pen name "Bonaventura". The authorship of the novel was ascribed to several writers, among whom are F. W. J. Schelling, his wife Caroline, Cl. Brentano, E. T. A. Hoffmann, and F. G. Wetzell.

In 1973, Jost Schillemeit once again approached the question of authorship and, adducing ample circumstantial evidence, proved rather convincingly that the author of Nachtwachen was August Klingemann (1777-1831).²

Klingemann, in 1798 a law student at the University of Jena, was not only known as a novelist and playwright but also as a prolific literary critic whose articles appeared mainly in the above mentioned Zeitung für die elegante Welt. In 1800 Klingemann began publishing his own journal called Memnon. In

¹Die romantische Schule (Berlin, 1870; rpt. Darmstadt, 1961), p. 636.

²Bonaventura. Der Verfasser der "Nachtwachen" (München, 1973).

1813, he was appointed director of the theater in Braunschweig which under his management soon became one of the leading German theaters.

The data about the author of Nachtwachen shed new light on the content of the novel and the entire atmosphere which had produced it. The information explains the protagonist's profound knowledge of juridical matters, makes the aesthetic criticism which pervades the novel understandable, and elucidates the recurrence of the theater motifs, especially the pungent attacks on Kotzebue and Iffland.

Likewise, we are well informed about the circumstances under and the mood in which Dostoevsky had created his underground man. The foundation for the novel was prepared by Dostoevsky's penal servitude in Siberia which destroyed his belief in man's perfectibility and revealed the idleness of the Schilleresque highminded dream of the "sublime and beautiful". After his return from Siberian exile and two journeys to Western Europe (in 1862 and 1863), Dostoevsky also turned away from the radical utopian utilitarianism, advanced by N. Chernyshevsky and the radicals of the sixties, and repudiated even I. Turgenev's moderate liberalism.

Some of the gloomy and agonizing mood of the novel may be attributed to Dostoevsky's personal experiences during the sixties, such as his unhappy love affair with the actress Apollinaria Suslova, his mania for gambling, his permanent lack of financial means, his poor health, the alarming illness of his brother Michael, and, last but not least, his rather

strange relationship to his dying wife.

There is no evidence whatsoever that Dostoevsky might have read Bonaventura's Nachtwachen. In any case, Dominique Arban does not mention Bonaventura among the authors read by Dostoevsky.³ To the author's knowledge no French or Russian translation of Nachtwachen was available by the time Dostoevsky wrote the Notes. However, Walter Rehm comparing Jean Paul's "Rede des toten Christus vom Weltgebäude, dass kein Gott sei" with Dostoevsky's "Grand Inquisitor" in the Brothers Karamazov, suggests that Dostoevsky might have known the French translation of Jean Paul's work.⁴ That, of course, would explain the affinity of thought in the two novels under investigation, for, as Herman Michel demonstrated, Bonaventura adopted and carried on many of Jean Paul's ideas and motifs.⁵ There is also, at least, a theoretical chance that Dostoevsky heard about Bonaventura's Nachtwachen.

As the historian Karl von Hase, a friend of the Dienemann family in Penig conveyed in his memoirs, the Dienemann publishing house maintained a book store in St. Petersburg. This

³Les années d'apprentissage de Fiodor Dostoievsky (Paris, 1968).

⁴Jean Paul - Dostoevsky: Zur dichterischen Gestaltung des Unglaubens (Göttingen, 1962).

⁵Hermann Michel, ed., Nachtwachen von Bonaventura, Deutsche Literaturdenkmale des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts, No. 133 (Berlin, 1904), pp. XIX-XXXIV. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text. Bonaventura will be henceforth quoted as B, followed by Roman numerals for the nightwatch and arabic numerals for page.

branch establishment was closed by the Russian police for political reasons sometime after November 1806 and F. Dienemann was deported to the border of Finland. The large holdings of the book store were later sold in order to cover the expenses of the establishment.⁶

It is therefore, within the bounds of possibility that some of Dienemann's publications and holdings were still available in the sixties and accessible to Dostoevsky who at that time was deeply involved with the aestheticism of E. T. A. Hoffman and Schelling.

Literary scholarship soon began to expend its ingenuity on the two novels, though for different reasons: Nachtwachen attracted the attention of the literary critics, for it was considered the gloomiest work of German Romanticism; Notes from the Underground was usually interpreted as the link to Dostoevsky's major novels anticipating the ideas of consciousness and will, negation, alienation, and suffering which results from presumptuous individualism, pride, and unrestricted assertion of one's will.

The Nachtwachen scholarship, which is up to 1965 exhaustively treated in the first chapter of Jeffrey L. Sammons' study of Bonaventura,⁷ deals predominantly with the unresolved question of authorship, with literary sources and analogies, with the complex structure of the novel, and the investigation of

⁶Schillemeit, pp. 11-12.

⁷The Nachtwachen von Bonaventura: A Structural Interpretation (The Hague, 1965), pp. 11-32.

motifs.

Sammons' list may be supplemented by the unpublished dissertation by R. Russel Neuswanger dwelling upon some central motifs in Nachtwachen.⁸ Furthermore, one should mention the excellent introduction to the first English translation of Nachtwachen written by Gerald Gillespie⁹ as well as his article "Bonaventura's Romantic Agony: Prevision of an Art of Existential Despair," which places emphasis upon the existential aspect of the novel.¹⁰ Finally, one has to add the most recent study by Jost Schillemeit which, for the present, has resolved the pending question of authorship.¹¹

No exhaustive study of Bonaventura's nihilism has been available until now, although beginning with Fritz Strich¹² and Hermann August Korff,¹³ all literary critics and literary historians did stress the nihilistic aspect of early Romanticism, and Bonaventura's Nachtwachen has been quoted as the

⁸"Investigation of Some Central Motifs in Die Nachtwachen of Bonaventura," Diss. Ohio State 1970.

⁹Die Nachtwachen des Bonaventura, Edinburgh Bilingual Library, 6 (Austin, 1971), pp. 1-26.

¹⁰Modern Language Notes, 85 (1970), 697-726.

¹¹See footnote 2.

¹²Deutsche Klassik und Romantik oder Vollendung und Unendlichkeit (Bern, 1949).

¹³Geist der Goethezeit (Leipzig, 1949).

most blatant example of it.¹⁴

Dostoevsky scholarship, which is up to 1955 covered in Vladimir Seduro's book, Dostoyevski in Russian Literary Criticism, 1846-1955,¹⁵ treats Notes from the Underground predominantly in connection with his later major novels.¹⁶ Of the more recent studies, the man from the underground has been dealt with as the archetype of all underground men¹⁷ and has been investigated as the precursor of modern Existentialism.¹⁸

The concept of free will which pervades Dostoevsky's novels was dealt with by Karl Hermann,¹⁹ whereas Ralph Matlaw's

¹⁴Dieter Arendt, ed., Nihilismus: Die Anfänge von Jacobi bis Nietzsche (Köln, 1970). Walter Hof, Pessimistisch-nihilistische Strömungen in der deutschen Literatur vom Sturm und Drang bis zum Jungen Deutschland, Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte, No. 3 (Tübingen, 1970).

¹⁵(New York, 1957).

¹⁶Edward Wasiolek, Dostoevsky. The Major Fiction (Cambridge, Mass., 1964).

¹⁷Robert L. Jackson, Dostoevsky's Underground Man in Russian Literature, Slavistic Printings and Reprintings, No. 15 (The Hague, 1958).

¹⁸Walter A. Kaufmann, Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre (New York, 1956). William Hubben, Four Prophets of our Destiny: Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Kafka (New York, 1952).

¹⁹Das Experiment der Freiheit: Grundfragen menschlichen Daseins in F. M. Dostojewskis Dichtung (Bonn, 1957).

article concentrates on the complex structure of the Notes.²⁰ The only study which, to the best of this author's knowledge, largely dwells on the underground man's nihilism is Joseph Frank's article "Nihilism and Notes from the Underground."²¹ However, this study does not cover all aspects of nihilism, for its main stress lies on the radical nihilism which is still absent in the Notes.

It is the aim of this study to present from a comparative point of view those aspects of nihilism which were detected in both novels, and to inquire into their roots, circumstances, and effects. A concise historical survey of nihilism will outline various phases of world negation and ego worship pertinent to our novels (Chapter I). This will be followed by the presentation of the circumstances which conditioned the two novels (Chapter II). Furthermore, the study will elaborate on the nihilism inherent in the character of the protagonists (Chapter III), and it will deal with the protagonists' relationship to their fellowmen (Chapter IV) and to society (Chapter V). In addition, the study will treat the narrative techniques employed by the authors in order to illustrate the interaction of subject and form (Chapter VI). Finally, it will explore nihilism as an aesthetic principle (Chapter VII).

²⁰"Structure and Integration in Notes from the Underground," PMLA, 73 (March 1958), 101-109. Gene D. Fitzgerald, "Antithetic Stylistic Elements in Dostoevskij's Narrative," Diss. Univ. of Wisconsin, 1971.

²¹Sewanee Review, No. 69 (1961), 1-33.

CHAPTER I

NIHILISM

1.

In his book on Bonaventura's Nachtwachen Richard Brinkmann writes: "Nichts von dem hochgemuten Emporsteigen, dem Aufbau einer höchstwürdigen Individualität und einer idealen Welt, die sich durch die Macht der Liebe und der Poesie zum goldenen Zeitalter wandelt; nichts von geläutertem Priestertum des Dichters, der das bewirkt und hervorbringt. Im Gegenteil -- die 'Nachtwachen' sind ein höchst negatives, zerstörendes Buch, das den Verwesungsgeruch aufsucht und dessen letztes Wort 'nichts' lautet."²²

A similar definition could also be applied to Doestoevsky's Notes from the Underground. Dostoevsky presents us with a protagonist who wallows in self-contradictions, who craves for the sublime and beautiful but panders to depravity, who constantly annihilates rational considerations with his whimsical will. There are no positive attitudes and values whatsoever in the entire novel. The answer the underground man receives while looking for the prostitute Liza, is the squeaking of the heavy glass door of his apartment and a bang. This is

²²Nachtwachen von Bonaventura: Kehrseite der Frühromantik, Opuscula aus Wissenschaft und Dichtung, No. 31 (Pfullingen, 1966), p. 3.

the last sign of life, for the street into which he bursts to find Liza greets him with dead silence and darkness: no wind, no people, and not a sound to be heard. (D, 242)

This absolute silence is even more depressing than the theatrical threefold "nichts" which tops the last vigil of Bonaventura's watchman and answers his ontological and metaphysical quest. It is the expression of the underground man's fall into the abyss of nothingness.

The term "nihilism" was first employed in 1799 by the philosopher F. H. Jacobi in his letter to J. G. Fichte in Jena (March 21, 1799). In this letter Jacobi contrasted his own system which he humbly called "Philosophie des Nicht-Wissens" with Fichte's concept of "Wissen des Nichts". He concluded his argument in the following way: "Wahrlich mein lieber Fichte, es soll mich nicht verdriessen, wenn Sie oder wer es sei, Chimärismus nennen wollen, was ich dem Idealismus, den ich Nihilismus schelte, entgegensetze."²³

Jacobi was not the only one who charged Fichte and the representatives of Idealistic philosophy with nihilism. During the last days of the eighteenth century, Cl. Brentano in his "Philister-Rede" launched an ingenious attack against Fichte's nihilistic views.²⁴ Somewhat later, Jean Paul in the witty satire "Clavis Fichtiana seu Leibgeberiana" (1799/1800) twitted

²³ Reprint of this letter in Arendt, pp. 107-133.

²⁴ Brentanos Werke, ed. Max Preiz (Bern, 1970), III, 261-318.

Fichte's extreme individualism, calling it "philosophischer Egoismus".²⁵

In Russian literature the term "nihilism" first occurred in I. Turgenev's novel Fathers and Sons (1862). However, nihilistic elements may be detected in A. Pushkin's Eugene Onegin (1825-1832) as well as in M. Lermontov's A Hero of our Time (1841) and in most of Dostoevsky's early stories, especially in "White Nights" (1848).

In order to comprehend the nihilism which permeates the two novels under investigation, this "Anti-Existence" as Werner Kohlschmidt calls it,²⁶ one has to catch an insight into the nature of nihilism and trace its development and manifestations during various periods and in various spheres of human thought.

Nihilism is a perennial phenomenon which has its origins in the nature of man, not in historical events. It is man's reaction to certain crucial changes which at a certain point of his existence and development affect his self and his views of the objective and spiritual world. At the root of all nihilism lie intellectual curiosity, man's growing consciousness, and the unrest of freedom. As long as man's intellect does not destroy the union of the objective and spiritual world, as long as he does not ponder over the mystery of life and death, the meaning of the world and his own existence, i.e. as long

²⁵Wolfgang Harich, Jean Paul's Kritik des philosophischen Egoismus (Frankfurt a.M., 1960), pp. 10-11.

²⁶Form und Innerlichkeit: Beiträge zur Geschichte und Wirkung der deutschen Klassik und Romantik, Sammlung Dalp, 81 (Bern, 1955), p. 173.

as he accepts the "that it is" categorically, and does not quest for the "what it is" or "why it is", doubts, uncertainty, anxiety, and general confusion do not obscure and disintegrate his world view. Therefore nihilism remains a latent power. For man's awareness of absolute values constitutes an ordering principle providing security and leading his life toward an ultimate goal.

Yet, as soon as this unity under the impact of the inquisitive mind had grown brittle and had fallen apart, man's world turned incoherent and absurd. The old values were shattered, but new were not found yet, for whenever man thought that he had breached the invisible wall which separated him from the ultimate truth, he discovered somewhere in the corner of his system something quite different, inaccessible. Thus the quest began anew; man kept revolving in a circle.

This is precisely the moment when dormant nihilism crops up and manifests itself with more or less intensity either in active denial and annihilation or in a wide array of negative feelings, such as sadness, despair and anxiety, boredom, hopelessness, meaninglessness, loneliness, alienation, etc. Other concomitant symptoms of nihilism are atheism and heresy.

Thus, nihilism is actually an accompanying phenomenon of man's attempt to unveil the world and, at the same time, his answer and reaction to the incompatibilities which each process of transformation brings along. In order to carry out, to participate in or just to witness the transformation of the old world, man repudiates the past for the sake of an unknown future

without finding security in the present. He loses the firm ground and begins hovering over an abyss of nothingness. For this situation the art historian Hans Sedlmayr coined the catchword of the lost center, "Verlust der Mitte."²⁷

2.

This chapter is not intended to become an exhaustive historical survey of nihilism; it shall be restricted mainly to those phases and forms of world negation which are referred to or exhibited in our two novels.

Both Nietzsche and Heidegger blamed Plato for the emergence of nihilism in the Western world.²⁸ As a matter of fact, Plato was successful in clarifying, systematizing and synthesizing to a large extent the principles of his precursors, i.e. the principles of form, flux, the divine agent, and the principle of goodness as motive; yet, instead of holding together the changing particulars and permanent forms, he separated them into two distinct worlds, thus creating a dualism which he in vain tried to bridge.²⁹

²⁷Verlust der Mitte; die bildende Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts als Symptom und Symbol der Zeit (Frankfurt a.M., 1966).

²⁸Stanley Rosen, Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay (New Haven, 1969), p. 144.

²⁹E. L. Allen, From Plato to Nietzsche: Ideas that Shape our Lives (New York, 1959), pp. 13-32.

Bonaventura as well as Dostoevsky was versed in Plato. In the madhouse the watchman broods over plans to restore Plato's Republic (B, XIV, 122); also he refers to Plato's concept of poetry (B, II, 11). There are no direct references to Plato in the Notes from the Underground. However, it was confirmed that Dostoevsky's library included Plato's work.³⁰

Werner Kohlschmidt discovered that medieval mysticism, too, bore nihilistic elements, for immortality often functioned as the correlate to nothingness.³¹

The utterly complex development of man's thought from the second half of the fifteenth through the first half of the eighteenth centuries provided an apt ground for all nuances of nihilism. Renaissance and Humanism, a period of fragmentation and fermentation rather than synthesis, crushed the harmony between reason, divine faith, and supernatural revelations advocated especially by Thomas Aquinas. They forced man out from the medieval amorphousness and anonymity, restored his individuality, dignity, and pride, and taught him freedom of mind. At the same time mathematics and natural sciences began to extend man's knowledge and understanding of the physical world, thus accelerating the separation from the past.

Yet the world which the Renaissance and Humanism bequeathed to man was ripped apart; it was split between religious faith and reason, between intuitive and speculative

³⁰A. S. Steinberg, Die Idee der Freiheit. Dostojewskij-Buch (Luzern, 1936).

³¹Kohlschmidt, pp. 157-176.

thinking. There was hardly an escape from this dilemmatic dualism, for man's nature was already disintegrated to such a degree that he could no longer rely on God nor could he find reassurance in natural sciences, for too many things remained indistinct and hidden.

The feeling of insecurity which man was tormented with explains why serious thinkers and scientists began to adhere to such pseudosciences as astrology, alchemy, and black magic.³² It also accounts for the new wave of mysticism which reaches its climactic point with Jacob Böhme. Bonaventura had this split world in mind when he presented his protagonist sitting on Hans Sachs's farces while reading Jacob Böhme's Aurora.

Both Bonaventura's Nachtwachen and Dostoevsky's Notes from the Underground open with the nihilistic concept of superstition. The watchman stepping into the night makes the sign of the cross to protect himself against the evil spirits. Since the first two night watches sufficiently prove that the watchman does not believe in the existence of the devil, the sign of the cross becomes a purely mechanical act substituting for true religious belief.

Dostoevsky's man from the underground, complaining about his poor health, confesses that he is so morbidly superstitious that he respects medicine, although he knows that with his

³²Virgilius Ferm, ed., A History of Philosophical Systems (New York, 1950), pp. 227-238.

education and intellect he should suppress this inclination.³³

By the end of the sixteenth and at the beginning of the seventeenth centuries man became fully aware that the intelligible structure of his world was an interaction of forms and rules of mathematical order and measure. Sir Francis Bacon had discovered the causality of natural phenomena and had pointed out its practical impact on man's desire to subject nature. Later, Thomas Hobbes complemented these causal laws and, incorporating them in his own system, maintained that everything in nature is matter in motion according to deterministic laws.³⁴

The knowledge of the laws of nature corroborated man's self-consciousness, gave him the feeling of power, and opened new vistas, for now man saw himself in the position to generate and predict natural phenomena, i.e., submit nature to his own will. Yet, on the other hand, it also resulted in a further reduction of the mastery and power of God and finally led to the belief that man himself was the creator of the universe.

Musing over man's progress in the realm of natural sciences Bonaventura's mad Creator says: "O das Sonnenstäubchen hat eine erstaunliche Vernunft, und bringt selbst in das Willkürlichste und Verworrenste etwas systematisches." (B, IX, 82) Yet the

³³Fedor M. Dostoevkii, Sobranie Sochinenii, ed. Goslitizdat (Moscow, 1956), IV, p. 133. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text. Dostoevsky will henceforth be quoted as D followed by the page number. All quotes are translated into English.

³⁴Parker, p. 171.

mad Creator does not conceal the nihilistic and atheistic consequences of this development either. Referring to man's intellectual arrogance he continues. "...ja es (das Sonnenstäubchen) lobt und preiset oft seinen Schöpfer eben deshalb weil es davon überrascht wurde, dass er eben so gescheut als es selbst sei." (B, IX, 82) And he concludes: "Zuletzt -- und das war das Ärgste -- dünkte sich das Stäubchen selbst Gott und baute Systeme auf, worin es sich bewunderte." (B, IX, 81)

This motif recurs again in a slightly modified form at the end of the novel. Visiting an art museum the watchman grieves: "Einst, als sie noch aufrecht standen, ... lag ein ganzes grosses Heldengeschlecht vor ihnen im Staube; jezt ist das umgekehrt, und die liegen im Boden, während unser aufgeklärtes Jahrhundert aufrecht steht, und wir selbst uns bemühen leidliche Götter abzugeben." (B, XIII, 110)

In Dostoevsky's Notes the religious aspect is not touched upon, yet the question God-man or man-God will become a matter of utmost concern in his major novels, The Possessed (Kirillov) and The Brothers Karamazov (Ivan).

Thus by the end of the seventeenth century, reason had completely destroyed the vigor and purity of religious faith. The paradise was definitely lost; all that was left now was man alone. He had learned to judge, to deny and affirm, to doubt and will. And making use of these faculties, man begins forming a new world view which is marked by Descartes's "Cogito, ergo sum" and a growing solipsism.³⁵

³⁵Parker, pp. 177-201.

The knowledge of the causality of natural phenomena entailed still another negative aspect which became a major issue during the eighteenth century. Man became aware that the ruthless sequence of cause and effect annihilated his decision making faculty, for whatever he did was triggered by some uncontrollable antecedent causes. But if man's actions were not the manifestations of his free will, then he was not responsible for them either. Thus the determinism of the laws of nature dehumanized man, demoted him to a marionette or an organ key, enhanced the feeling of powerlessness and meaninglessness, and finally drove man into inertia.

Both novels provide ample evidence to support this concept. In Bonaventura's Nachtwachen the marionette and related motifs, such as role, mask, stage, and madness occupy a central position, for each of them illustrates the lack of individual freedom and personal responsibility.

Since man does not see the interaction of cause and effect, he usually mistakes one for another. The watchman complains that people's minds pivot upon the existence and not upon man himself "als ob das Leben das Höchste wäre, und nicht vielmehr der Mensch, der doch weiter geht als das Leben."

(B, IV, 29)

Searching for the primary cause for man's actions in order to break the vicious circle of determinism, Dostoevsky's underground man meditates: "Where are the primary causes for my actions, the justification for them? ...I deliberate, but the result is that every primary cause drags along another cause

that seems to be truly primary, and so on and so forth, indefinitely... The same thing over again." (D, 146) And later he concludes: "The best thing is to do nothing at all! Conscious inertia is the best. A toast to my mousehole!" (D, 164)

During the first half of the eighteenth century thinkers continued to be concerned with the problems which had arisen from the bifurcation of knowledge into reason and sensation. Yet neither Rationalists nor Empiricists were successful in finding the absolute solution both were striving for; for each group concentrated merely on one aspect of man's understanding of the physical world.

The Rationalists considered reason the only vehicle to relate man with the objective world. Yet by restricting knowledge to rational perception and by cutting out sensation and experience, they transmitted a rather incomplete and often fallacious knowledge of the object itself. The world of the Rationalists was the objectified world of the reasoning subject.³⁶

Bonaventura mocks the extreme rational approach in the scene with the cuckolded judge. The latter is so caught in the toils of his subjective reason and, therefore, so remote from reality that he does not grasp what is happening around him. He does not realize that his wife is betraying him, although he surprises her with her lover in the middle of the night, for

³⁶Ferm, pp. 240-250.

faithfulness and its opposite cannot be perceived rationally. He does not understand the watchman's insinuations, because his tough reason excludes imaginative thinking. Finally, he identifies the watchman with the statue of Justice, for that is what, according to his mind, has to stand on the pedestal. (B, III, 19-24)

At the same time, the young rake who has an affair with the judge's wife connects the watchman with Don Juan, the fearful guest of stone, to whom he had appealed to prove the sincerity of his intentions. (B, III, 21)

In both cases the watchman on the pedestal was real, yet his reality did not coincide with the knowledge of the object which existed in the mind of the judge or the young seducer. Thus, the connection which they established between their subjective knowledge and the objective world was erroneous. Actually, their minds annihilated reality.

In opposition to the Rationalists, the Empiricists declared that the most reliable source of knowledge was sensation and experience. Nothing is real, if it cannot be attested to by the senses and experience. The reduction of man's knowledge of the objective world to sensory perception eliminated the rational concept of causal connection, for the latter could not be seen in experience. David Hume, the most ardent advocate of this theory, explained the objective world as a bundle of different perceptions which succeeded each other and were in a perpetual flux.³⁷

³⁷Allen, pp. 153-154.

Both systems were inadequate and defective. They did not find the ultimate springs and principles of knowledge, nor did they satisfactorily solve the problem of man's relation to the objective world. Thus the gap between the reality of a given case and the principles of reasoning, between life itself and reasoning about life remained. Moreover, both systems failed to convey information about man's own existence as well as the wide array of moral, ethical, and personal values which cannot be proven rationally or by experience.

The nihilistic tension which results from such partial truth is best illustrated in Bonaventura's "Lauf durch die Skala." Witnessing the burial alive of a nun who had given birth to a child, the watchman's heart was little affected; rather he began to reason about various emotions and life.

Das Leben läuft an dem Menschen vorüber, aber so flüchtig dass er es vergeblich anruft ihm einen Augenblick Stand zu halten, um sich mit ihm zu besprechen, was es will, und warum es ihn anschaut. Da fliehen die Masken vorüber, die Empfindungen, eine verzerrter wie die andere. Freude steh mir Rede--ruft der Mensch--weshalb du mir zulächelst! Die Larve lächelt und entflieht. Schmerz lass dir fest ins Auge schauen, warum erscheinst du mir! Auch er ist schon vorüber. --Zorn, warum blickst du mich an--ich frage es, und du bist verschwunden. Und die Larven drehen sich im tollen raschen Tanze um mich her--um mich der ich Mensch heisse--und ich taumle mitten im Kreise umher, schwindelnd von dem Anblicke und mich vergeblich bemühend eine der Masken zu umarmen und ihr die Larve vom wahren Antlize wegzureissen; aber sie tanzen und tanzen nur--und ich--was soll ich denn im Kreise? Wer bin ich denn, wenn die Larven verschwinden sollten? Gebt mir einen Spiegel ihr Fastnachtsspieler, dass ich mich selbst einmal erblicke--es wird mir überdrüssig nur immer eure wechselnden Gesichter anzuschauen. Ihr schüttelt--wie? Steht kein Ich im Spiegel wenn ich davor trete--bin ich nur der Gedanke eines Gedanken, der Traum eines Traumes--

könnt ihr mir nicht zu meinem Leibe verhelfen,
 und schüttelt ihr nur immer Eure Schellen, wenn
 ich denke es sind die meinigen? --Hu! Das ist ja
 schrecklich einsam hier im Ich, wenn ich euch zu-
 halte ihr Masken, und ich mich selbst anschauen
 will--alles verhallender Schall ohne den ver-
 schwundenen Ton--nirgends Gegenstand, und ich
 sehe doch---das ist wohl das Nichts das ich sehe!
 (B, X, 92-93)

Everything in this macabre vision is in flux, nothing is
 real, nothing can be rationally identified or sensorially per-
 ceived, and behind the masks lurks the void.

In the second half of the eighteenth century Immanuel
 Kant made a vigorous attempt to create a system in which every
 aspect of man and his world would be included and all differ-
 ences could be overcome. First he integrated the systems of
 the Rationalists and Empiricists postulating that knowledge
 must combine rational and sensory perceptions, for every ob-
 ject consists of form and matter. Then he declared that the
 mind does not merely conform to the object; rather it is the
 creative self which constructs the objective world. This, of
 course, was a strong stimulus to subjectivism and solipsism.

In his letter to Ophelia the watchman plays with Kant's
 idea that the world is a mere product of man's mind: "...so
 sehr liegt alles in uns selbst und ist ausser uns nichts Reelles,
 ja wir wissen nach der neuesten Schule nicht, ob wir in der
 That auf den Füßen, oder auf dem Kopfe stehen, ausser dass
 wir das erste durch uns selbst auf Treu und Glauben angenommen
 haben." (B, XIV, 118)

Dostoevsky's underground man too alludes to this concept
 of Idealistic philosophy. Musing about his life, he draws the

conclusion that he loathed and despised his colleagues because of his furious discontent with himself, and then ascribed the same negative feelings to everyone he came across, thus creating a world without positive values. (D, 168)

Yet, after having restored the unity of knowledge, Kant introduced a new division of the world into phenomena, i.e., objects of forms and matter, and into noumena, i.e., things-in-themselves which are independent of the mind's organizing activity. Only phenomena may be experienced in space and time, and are subject to the mechanism of the laws of nature, whereas noumena are beyond the spatio-temporal and causal connections.

The noumenal world provided room for moral and religious faith, personal values and commitments, aesthetic revery, human freedom and will, responsibility, etc.³⁸

The watchman gives a rather ironic interpretation of Kant's new dualism in which time and space represent "blosse Formen der sinnlichen Anschauung." In the speech announcing the Day of Judgment, Kreuzgang asks his audience.: "...jezt bitte ich euch, die ihr nur allein in der Sinnlichkeit lebt und webt, wie wollt ihr Raum finden, da wo es keinen Raum mehr giebt?-- Ja, was wollt ihr gar beginnen, wenn es mit der Zeit zu Ende geht? Selbst auf eure grössten Weisen und Dichter angewandt, bleibt die Unsterblichkeit zuletzt doch auch nur ein uneigentlicher Ausdruck, was soll sie für euch arme Teufel bedeuten..." (B, VI, 54)

³⁸Parker, pp. 266-295.

The nihilism of Kant's dualistic system may be traced in Bonaventura's Nachtwachen as well as in Dostoevsky's Notes from the Underground. The watchman, for instance, staggering between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds loses contact with the former without finding a satisfactory answer in the latter. Seeking for the things-in-themselves, the watchman alienates himself from his fellowmen; trying to stimulate higher morality and responsibility, he ends up in the madhouse, and is finally demoted to an automaton.

Dostoevsky's man from the underground opposes the objective world and its determinism with his foolish will and, at the same time, he destroys his feelings with rational arguments.

Nihilism results not only from the dual concept of Kant's system; it is inherent in his world-in-itself as well. Since the noumenal values cannot be checked in experience, each of them may be proven and, at the same time, annihilated by a counter-proof. Thus everything leads to contradiction.

In Bonaventura's fourth night watch Hanswurst explains "dass alles in dem Leben, sowohl der Schmerz wie die Freude, nur Erscheinung sei, wobei nur blos das ein böser Punkt, dass die Erscheinung selbst nie zur Erscheinung käme." (B, IV, 35-36)

The first half of the nineteenth century did not come up with new revolutionary ideas. Rather the thinkers continued pondering over the fundamental problem of how to bridge the gap between the subject and the object. They all took their

starting point from Kant, yet they challenged his dualism and rejected his things-in-themselves concept. Instead, philosophers postulated the absolute supremacy of the creative self.

Despite the differences in their individual systems, J. G. Fichte as well as F. W. J. Schelling, G. W. Hegel, and A. Schopenhauer adhered to the idea that no objective reality exists other than that which the self-conscious subject creates. The self is now the measure of all things. This, of course, is solipsism at its highest. It explains the reproach of atheism to which Idealism and, especially Fichte, were exposed.

In Nachtwachen Kant's thing-in-itself is referred to and ridiculed in the story of the mad Spaniard who is told by Hanswurst to forget the stone which had hit his head "weil es keine Dinge an sich gäbe." (B, IV, 36)

In the prologue to the tragedy Man Hanswurst alludes to the atheistic concept of Idealism which confuses men so completely, "dass sie gar nicht mehr klug aus sich werden, und der Mensch sich zuletzt für Gott selbst halten, oder zum mindesten wie die Idealisten und die Weltgeschichte, an einer solchen Maske formen soll." (B, VIII, 76)

Fichte's subjectivism is jeered at in Bonaventura's madhouse scene. Introducing the mad Creator to the doctor the watchman says: "Sehen Sie nur, Herr Doktor, ...er hat eben so gut sein konsequentes System wie Fichte, und nimmt es im Grunde mit dem Menschen noch geringer als dieser, der ihn nur von Himmel und Hölle abtrennt, dafür aber alles Klassische

rings umher in das kleine Ich, das jeder winzige Knabe ausrufen kann, wie in ein Taschenformat zusammendrängt." (B, IX, 83)

Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel considered reason the main spring of man's creativity and moral actions. Hegel stated that the real is the rational and the rational is the real. There is no reality beyond the reasoning self.³⁹ He called this complete unity of thought the "Absolute Idea", the "Absolute Spirit", the "Idea thinking itself".⁴⁰

The watchman demonstrates the nihilistic isolation which results from the "thinking itself": "Ich bin mit mir allein... und hasse oder liebe eben so wenig als möglich! Ich versuche zu denken, dass ich nichts denke, und da bringe ich's zuletzt wohl so weit auf mich selbst zu kommen!" (B, X, 94)

In the thirteenth night watch Bonaventura's protagonist seeks the identification of the self in nature. It was Schelling who had maintained that one could advance through nature to find one's self.⁴¹ Admiring the beauty of the spring nature and listening to the sound of a shepherd's alphorn, the watchman senses that this must be the absolute harmony of man and his objective world. Yet, as soon as he mentions the name "man", the alphorn suddenly grows mute. Kreuzgang wails: "Ich blättere und blättere in dem grossen Buche, und finde

³⁹Parker, pp. 301-320.

⁴⁰Ferm, pp. 292-293.

⁴¹Ferm, pp. 293-297.

nichts, als das eine Wort über mich, und dahinter den Gedankenstrich, wie wenn der Dichter den Charakter, den er vollführen wollte, im Sinne behalten und nur den Namen hätte mit einfließen lassen. War der Charakter zu schwierig zur Ausführung, warum strich der Dichter nicht auch den Namen aus, der jetzt allein dasteht, sich anstaunt, und nicht weiss, was er aus sich selbst machen soll." (B, XIII, 108) And the only answer to his anxious question "Am I then alone?" is the spiteful echo of his own voice.

In opposition to Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, Schopenhauer rejected the supremacy of reason. For him the world is the manifestation of the will which is above the laws of cause and effect. Yet Schopenhauer's will is also the source of his pessimism, for life now alternates between the pain of unsatisfied desire and the boredom which ensues when the desire is satisfied.⁴²

Thus, nihilism, uncertainty as to whence or where, sadness, and fatigue remain the pervasive mood of the first half of the nineteenth century. As Hölderlin's Hyperion formulates it, the only thing man knows for sure is, "dass wir geboren werden für Nichts, dass wir lieben ein Nichts, glauben an's Nichts, uns abarbeiten für Nichts, um mäßig überzugehen in's Nichts."⁴³

During the second half of the nineteenth century various

⁴²Ferm, pp. 300-302.

⁴³Friedrich Hölderlin, Sämtliche Werke, ed. Friedrich Beissner (Stuttgart, 1946), III, 45-46.

attempts were made to overcome man's nihilistic attitude and mood and to restore the harmony between man and his world. Søren Kirkegaard preached the return to Christian faith; Karl Marx expected a salvation from the revolution of the proletariat; Friedrich Nietzsche prepared the arrival of the Superman who would conquer the animal nature, organize the chaos and sublimate the impulses.

3.

As may be seen from the above, nihilism is not a system by itself. "Er hat kein eigenes Wesen und keine Gestalt, aber er kann hinter jedem und allem wirken," says Hermann Rauschning.⁴⁴

In the course of its development nihilism manifested itself in various domains and adopted various forms. From antiquity to the seventeenth century, nihilism remained restricted to the sphere of speculative philosophy. During the eighteenth and in the first half of the nineteenth centuries, nihilism gradually shifted to aesthetics. Cl. Brentano's Godwi, F. Schlegel's Lucinde, F. Tieck's William Lovell and his comedy Prinz Zerbino, W. H. Wackenroder's Phantasien über die Kunst⁴⁵, A. Pushkin's Eugen Onegin, M. Lermontov's A Hero

⁴⁴Masken und Metamorphosen des Nihilismus, Sammlung: Die Universität (Frankfurt a.M. and Wien, 1954), p. 7.

⁴⁵Arendt, pp. 12-62.

of Our Time, I. Goncharov's Oblomov, I. Turgenev's Fathers and Sons and most of Dostoevsky's works abound with nihilistic concepts.

It is therefore not mere accident that Jean Paul's Vorschule der Aesthetik which appeared in the same year as Nachtwachen has a chapter called "Poetische Nihilisten."

In all these works nihilism occurs in two forms: it is either the mood by which man is overtaken when his search for absolute values and truth fails, when he discovers that everything is meaningless and incoherent (passive nihilism); or it is man's negative reaction to certain situations and his conscious annihilation of existing values and truth which he disapproves (active nihilism).⁴⁶

To illustrate these two forms, one only has to compare Bonaventura's watchman with Dostoevsky's underground man or with Turgenev's Bazarov in Fathers and Sons. The watchman reveals the incoherence of his environment and is forced by society into the underground. The underground man too is dissatisfied with his environment, but retires voluntarily into his mousehole. Bazarov, finally, wants to destroy the social order of the past without having a definite plan for the future.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century nihilism assumes a more radical form and encroaches upon social life. It ceases to be a psychological state and becomes programmatic.

⁴⁶See Hans-Dieter Balser, Das Problem des Nihilismus im Werke Gottfried Benns, Abhandlungen zur Kunst-, Musik- und Literaturwissenschaft, 29 (Bonn, 1965), pp. 1-13.

In the twentieth century nihilism becomes the expression of man's existential crisis.

To all centuries, however, applies Dieter Arendt's definition of nihilism as the "Loslösung des subjektiv-emanzipierten Geistes von den objektiven Konditionen und ihrer Relevanz in der vergangenen und gegenwärtigen Geschichte."⁴⁷

⁴⁷Arendt, p. 63.

CHAPTER II

CONDITIONING CIRCUMSTANCES

1.

As has been shown in the previous chapter, nihilism is the concomitant symptom of transition periods in which old concepts and values disintegrate and undergo various revaluations.

Although separated by many decades, both novels are the product of such interim periods. The ground of which each of the novels grew out was pregnant with political unrest and ideological fermentation. The European revolutions, beginning with the French Revolution of 1789, had strengthened man's demand for personal freedom and equal opportunity in public affairs; yet, at the same time, the social and professional mechanism, and the material necessities of life implemented a serious impediment for the development of man's potentiality.

The influx of reason and analytic thinking, which was triggered by the natural sciences and reached its summit in the doctrines of Idealistic philosophy, inhibited creative imagination, crippled emotions and spontaneity, and destroyed religious belief. Schiller's vision of an absolute harmony and balance which would eventually lead to the perfect state and ideal man, his dream of the beautiful and sublime, i.e., of

moral freedom and man's power to rise above nature, did not materialize. Intellect and feelings, reality and ideals did not counterpoise each other, rather they continued acting one at the expense of the other or developing in diametrical oppositions. Thus, the rational man did not progress in the direction of the ideal man, rather he reached only a more heightened individualism.

This fragmentation brought along a substantial deterioration of moral, ethic, and aesthetic principles and laid the base for all kinds of nihilistic feelings as well as active annihilation.

2.

Nachtwachen was written after the French Revolution of 1789 which did not nearly satisfy man's hopes and expectations. Referring to this event the watchman criticizes the monstrous bloodshed which botched the Republic into a despotism and diluted the concept of brotherhood. He calls the Revolution "die grosse Tragikomödie, in der ein König unglücklich debütirte und der Hanswurst, als Freiheit und Gleichheit lustig Menschenköpfe, statt der Schellen schüttelte." (B, XV, 129) Thus, instead of leading man toward the ideal state of liberty, equality, and fraternity, the Revolution unleashed man's cruelty, viciousness, his desire for power, and revealed an alarming lack of mutual understanding. The lofty ideas of the Revolution lost their meaning and diverted into a farce.

Whereas the author of Nachtwachen only witnessed the political turmoil of 1789, Dostoevsky became a direct victim of the reprisals following the revolution of 1848. Because of his affiliation with the socialist circle of Petrashevsky, Dostoevsky spent eight months of confinement in the Peter and Paul Fortress. Then, after the cruel mock execution in December of 1849, he was sent for nine years to Siberia, four of which he endured in penal servitude. The stay in Siberia had a drastic impact on Dostoevsky's entire life; it disrupted the continuity of his literary work and brought along fundamental changes in his ideological views and political outlook. Till 1849 Dostoevsky sympathized with the radicals, he was well versed in Fourier's utopian socialism, and he adhered to western culture and civilization.

The first thing of which Dostoevsky became aware in Siberia was that goodness was not an essential feature of man's nature. He learned that there was nothing beautiful and sublime in man's endeavors. Rather man was inclined to hurt, dominate, and humiliate. Thus, as E. Wasiolek says, Dostoevsky did not discover the "golden heart" of the Russian people in prison, "what he really discovered was the soundless irrational depths of destruction."⁴⁸

The life in the prison camp and the involvement with Kant and Hegel after the transfer to the garrison in Semipalatinsk at the beginning of 1854, changed Dostoevsky's views on

⁴⁸ Dostoevsky: The Major Fiction (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), p. 23.

materialism, socialism, and utilitarianism, and turned him into an extreme individualist. In March of 1854, shortly after the transfer, he writes to N. D. Fonvizina: "...not one hour alone with myself...in that kind of concentrated communion one becomes a whole-hearted enemy of mankind...The constant companionship is like a plague." He then continues confessing that he hates every man, whether good or evil, and regards him as a thief who is robbing his life. He knows that he is unjust, malignant and evil, but does not have the power to control his feelings.⁴⁹

The content of this letter already hints at the train of thought which we will encounter in Notes from the Underground.

The only book Dostoevsky was allowed to read during the four years in the labor camp was the Bible. This had a rather strong effect on his attitude toward religious faith.

After his return from Siberia, Dostoevsky went on two trips to Western Europe (1862 and 1863) only to discover that the West was rotten and corrupt. Thus, he condemned the civilization of the West and became together with Apollon Grigorev an advocate of a sort of mystical populism (pochvennik).

The underground man relates to this populism. Describing the strident and perverse moaning of an alienated nineteenth century intellectual suffering from toothache, he says: "His moaning is quite unlike the moaning of a coarse peasant, for

⁴⁹ Ethel Colburn Mayne, ed., Letters of Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky to his Family and Friends (New York, 1917), pp. 66-69.

he has been affected by education and by European civilization. He moans like a man who, as they say nowadays, 'has lost contact with the soils and the people'." (D, 144)

3.

Both authors were involved in literary criticism and therefore particularly sensitive to the aesthetic problems of their time. In both cases the aesthetic decline originated in the same source, namely, in the lack of harmony between intellect and feeling which entailed leveling and perversion of the aesthetic norms.

Bonaventura's watchman calls his era a "heartless time" (B, XIII, 109), a "vacillating era" (B, III, 18) in which everything is leveled and in a state of confusion. He gives the following description of the general dilemma: "In einem schwankenden Zeitalter scheut man alles Absolute und Selbständige; deshalb mögen wir denn auch weder ächten Spass, noch ächten Ernst, weder ächte Tugend noch ächte Bosheit mehr leiden. Der Zeitkarakter ist zusammengeflikt und gestoppelt wie eine Narrenjakke, und was das Aergste dabei ist -der Narr, der darin steckt, mögte ernsthaft scheinen." (B, III, 18) The leveling and the decay are already so advanced that man is scrupulously cultivating petty things, whereas the greatest objects are so remote that they can be recognized only unclearly in the distance through magnifying glasses. (B, VIII, 67) He considers the wig more immortal than the man who wore it, and

the imitation of Goethe's walk is more appreciated than the newest edition of his works. (B, XII, 101) Soon man will worship nothing but the grotesque and will strive for an ideal of ugliness, because beauty will be declared insipid. (B, VIII, 69)

Bonaventura's most acid criticism is directed against Kotzebue and Iffland who prefer "statt eines absoluten bösen Prinzips lieber die tugendhaften Bösewichter, ...in denen der Teufel vermenschlicht und der Mensch verteufelt erscheint." (B, III, 18) He demands genuine gravity and genuine jest, and detests "die kleinen Witzbolde und gutmüthigen Komödienverfasser ..., die sich nur bloss in den Familien umhertreiben und nicht wie Aristophanes, selbst über die Götter sich lustig zu machen wagen." (B, IV, 29) He demands "die grosse klassische Würde im Menschen, die viel Worte hasst, wo viel gethan werden soll," (B, IV, 31) and he reproaches the actors because they do not even know how to die properly, rather they retreat with powerful tirades. (B, XII, 101)

The lack of feeling and imagination accounts for the decline of poetry. The period is so cold and prosaic, and everything has become so reasonable that poetry is no longer considered a gift from heaven but a matter of fools. (B, II, 11) Nobody pays for poetry (B, XVI, 135), thus one cannot live from it. (B, I, 6)

The author of Nachtwachen is so disgusted with the aesthetic decline of his time that he would like to deprive all these mediocrities of the privilege of immortality. "Nur alle

dürften sie mir nicht erstehen wollen; alle nicht! - Was wollten so viele Pygmäen und Krüppel in dem grossen herrlichen Pantheon, in dem nur die Schönheit thronen soll, und die Götter! O man schämt sich dieser Gesellschaft ja oft schon auf Erden, wie könnte man den Himmel mit ihnen gemeinschaftlich theilen!" (B, XVI, 143)

Likewise Dostoevsky's man from the underground complains about the leveling and decline of all values. He refers to his age as a "negative century" in which laziness and gluttony are considered a vocation, a career, and men are judged by their bellies, tripple chins and ruddy noses. True feelings are replaced by tearful sentimentalism, every rubbish under the sun is admired as good and beautiful, and every mediocre artist and writer is greeted with exuberance, because he had done something to everybody's liking. (D, 147-148)

4.

Both novels are born from the conflict of aesthetic and ideological views. Nachtwachen points to Jena where the representatives of Idealistic philosophy had failed to answer man's eternal existential cry. Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling had postulated the absolute supremacy of reason and had raised the creative self to the highest pedestal. Yet, by eliminating Kant's thing-in-itself they had carried their systems to a dead end. The philosophers themselves grew rather intolerant of each other. We recall that in 1799 Fichte was charged with

atheism and nihilism and was forced to leave Jena. In 1802 Schelling again turned against Fichte, and in 1803 Hegel and Schelling parted because of conflicting views.⁵⁰

In a letter of September 11, 1814, Henrik Steffens, a member of the Jena circle, described the mood of this time in the following way to his friend L. Tieck: "So gewiss wie es ist, dass die Zeit ... reich an Keimen mancherlei Art war, so lag dennoch etwas Ruchloses im Ganzen. Ein geistiger Babel-turm sollte errichtet werden, den alle Geister aus der Ferne erkennen sollten. Aber die Sprachverwirrung begrub dieses Werk des Hochmuths unter seine eigenen Trümer."⁵¹

Another conflict upon which Nachtwachen is based is that between the pro-romantic group to which the author of our novel belonged, and the anti-romantic group whose main representatives were Kotzebue and Garlieb Merkel. The former concentrated around the journal Elegante Welt, the latter used Merkel's journal Der Freimüthige as their mouthpiece.

Likewise Dostoevsky's Notes from the Underground arose from two conflicts. After his return from Siberia, Dostoevsky faced two generations which had been unable to receive new ideas in the sense of being fructified by them and creating a new life. The generation of the forties dwelled in the ivory tower of aestheticism, it dreamed about the "sublime and beautiful" without putting its principles into practice. The main

⁵⁰Harich, pp. 10-11.

⁵¹Karl V. Holtei, ed., Briefe an L. Tieck (Berlin, 1864), IV, 65-66.

representative of this generation was A. Grigorev.

The generation of the sixties adhered to a social utopian utilitarianism without translating their revolutionary enthusiasm and humanitarian ideals into reality. The main representative of this group was N. G. Chernyshevsky with his very popular novel What's to be done? (1864).

The man caught up in the toils of these conflicts was so remote from reality that he became unreal, a test-tube product rather than a child of nature. (D, 140) He was begotten and nurtured by ideas which he failed to bring into harmony with life. He did not know what and where real life was, he was so entangled and lost that he did not know what to join, what to keep up with, what to love, what to hate, what to respect, what to despise. He even found it painful to be a man, a real man of flesh and blood, with an individual body. Thus the underground man thinks of an entire generation which is stillborn by parents who are dead themselves. (D, 244).

The integration of aesthetic concepts with materialistic views is demonstrated by Dostoevsky in a sarcastic description of the Russian romantics. In opposition to the foolish starry-eyed European romantics, the Russian romantic is practical, intelligent, yet roguish. His hallmark is:

...never to take anyone or anything for granted, but, at the same time, not to reject anything either; to give way; to take everything into account; to be diplomatic with everyone; never to lose sight of the useful, practical goal (such as rent-free housing, pensions, decorations); to keep an eye on this goal through all the enthusiasms and slim volumes of lyric poems, while preserving,

to the hour of their death, their allegiance to "the sublime and the beautiful," and also preserving themselves like jewels wrapped in cotton--if only in the name of the "sublime and the beautiful." (D, 170-71)

Dostoevsky had Turgenev in mind whose moderate liberalism he rejected and whom he also disliked personally, when he wrote about the few stupid romantics who turned into Germans and settled in some place like Weimar or the Black Forest.

(D, 171)

\ The second conflict underlying the novel is that between reason, feelings and will. The underground man's entire existence is determined by this conflict. His reason corrodes his feelings whereas his will annihilates the acts of reason, until he finally reaches a dead end where there is nothing to feel and nothing to will. Then the underground man retires into his mousehole and continues with his destructive self-analysis until he derives a perverse pleasure from his self-punitive attitude.

Justifying the existence of his protagonist, Dostoevsky adds in a footnote to the Notes: "...people like the author of these notes may, and indeed must, exist in our society, if we think of the circumstances under which this society has been formed." (D, 133)

CHAPTER III

PROTAGONISTS

1.

It has been pointed out in Chapter I that nihilism builds up when man realizes the conflict between his inner world and the outward reality. The protagonists of our novels are caught in the toils of such a conflict. Since both are about forty years of age at the time of their confessions, they have had ample opportunity and time to experience and observe this conflict in all its facets.

In both novels the protagonists' nihilistic dilemma originates in the same sources. Neither protagonist was of noble birth, thus his position in society was from the very beginning tied down to a lower stratum which did not grant full development of his intellectual capacity and activity.

Neither protagonist was raised by his own family, but grew up with foster parents. Thus both were deprived of one of the fundamental pillars upon which a harmonious society should be based. The lack of family and parental love account for the protagonists' uprootedness and lie at the core of their split personalities.

To make their human detachment more conspicuous neither protagonist has a real name. Kreuzgang is called after the

place where the shoemaker had found the boy. The underground man remains anonymous throughout the entire novel. He introduces himself as a collegiate assessor, thus referring to himself as a rank rather than an individual. (D, 135)

To be sure, Kreuzgang's relation to his foster father was more agreeable than that of the underground man to his foster parents. Yet the shoemaker, who has found the infant instead of a treasure, accepted the boy as a mere inevitability without getting too emotionally attached to him. Also, the shoemaker was too simple to understand the boy's sophisticated thoughts and did not contribute considerably to the development of his personality; nor had he enough financial means and influential connections to secure the boy's future position in society. The watchman certainly refers to his own predicament when he conveys the epigone's complaint: "...was soll ein Mensch, der nicht schon im Mutterleibe eine Krone auf dem Haupte trägt, oder mindestens, wenn er aus dem Eie gekrochen, an den Aesten eines Stammbaums das Klettern lernen kann, in dieser Welt anfangen, wenn er weiter nichts mitbringt als sein nacktes Ich und gesunde Glieder." (B, XII, 100)

The underground man's most hideous and oppressive dreams were those of his childhood. He was an orphan, raised by distant relatives whom he despised because of their nagging. His embitterment was enhanced when they dumped him in a boarding school. In the new environment, he gradually grew silent, brooding, and distrustful. His schoolmates disliked him because he was different and teased him cruelly. Since the

underground man could not cope with them, he began to hate them and withdrew into himself. (D, 188-89) The underground man is fully aware that the lack of love is responsible for his entire development. To the prostitute Liza he explains it in the following way: "...if I had a home when I was a child, I would have turned out quite different from what I am today. I often think about that. However bad things may be at home, at least they are your father and mother, and not enemies or strangers. At least once a year, they will show their love for you. Anyway, you have the feeling that you are at home. But I grew up without a family, and that's probably why I have turned so--without feelings." (D, 212)

The protagonists' uprootedness intensifies when neither of them marries nor has children of his own. The missing human contact constitutes a serious impediment to love and turns every positive feeling into its opposite. The brothel becomes the symbol of this emotional detachment; it is the substitute for family life. "Ein Kerl wie ich, der aus Hass und Grimm zusammengesetzt ist, und nicht wie andere Menschenkinder seiner Mutter Leibe...entbunden zu sein scheint, hat für Liebe und dergleichen wenig Sinn," says the watchman plaintively. (B, XIV, 114)

Three times in his life Kreuzgang felt some kind of sympathy and even love for his fellowmen. The first time happened when he took charge of the infant of the Ursuline nun who was buried alive. (B, X, 94). The last time occurred when he kissed the wooden Hanswurst farewell. (B, XV, 131) Between

lies Kreuzgang's love affair during his stay in the madhouse where he had met a former colleague, Ophelia.

Kreuzgang's first reaction to the possibility of love was rejection and fear, for he equated hatred with freedom, health with sickness, and love with slavery. For him love was not the gift of the divine spirit but the invention of the devil to conceal the true nature of the world. (B, XIV, 118) Kreuzgang was driven to Ophelia and, at the same time, he hated her: "Zorniger, wilder, menschenfeindlicher hat es in mir seit meiner Geburt nicht ausgesehen, als in diesem Augenblicke, wo ich es dir aufgebracht hinschreibe, dass ich dich liebe, dich anbete, und dass ich nach dem Wunsche dich zu hassen und zu verabscheuen, keinen sehnlichern hege als das Geständnis deiner Gegenliebe zu vernehmen." (B, XIV, 119)

As time went on, Kreuzgang's resistance melted and the love affair began. It was a rather strange love, for the watchman's emotional life was so disintegrated by his intellect that he spent most of the time in sentimental sighing, meditations about the moon, and reflections about love. He finally indulged in a highly philosophical letter exchange dealing with ontological and metaphysical problems. Moreover, in order to communicate with the mad Ophelia, Kreuzgang also had to give up a part of his sovereignty, alienate a part of himself, and assume the role of Hamlet. The affair ended with the death of Ophelia and her child, plunging the watchman into precarious loneliness. (B, XIV, 122)

The isolation of the underground man was even deeper.

He never loved anyone. Thus, from time to time, he made up stories to create at least an illusion of love. He played the game so well that he really suffered and became extremely jealous. (D, 145)

In the brothel he raved about a daughter whom he would love more than anybody in the world. For the prostitute Liza he invented stories about the beauty of married life, he spoke about the mystery of love, the purifying power of family quarrels, the union of souls that follows when physical attraction diminishes, and he dreamed of the rosy little cheeks and the miniature nails of babies. (D, 214-15)

Later, while waiting for Liza, he daydreamed about rescuing her and turning her into a fine intelligent woman who, of course, would fall in love with him. (D, 227)

None of these lofty ideas reflected the underground man's true feelings; they were borrowed from literature. Like Kreuzgang the underground man could not love, because he did not want to commit himself to anybody and did not want to restrict his freedom. The sentimental stories, which were in diametrical opposition to Liza's deplorable situation, were made up to humiliate and dominate Liza, to acquire absolute value in her eyes, to make the underground man appear as a hero. Thus, when Liza finally unexpectedly arrives and finds the underground man in an absolutely anti-heroic situation, the latter suffers a nervous breakdown. He shouts at Liza in blind rage that he has lied to her, because he was after power and a role to play; that he hates her for catching him in his poverty snapping like

a vicious dog at his servant. He reveals his perverse and selfish character and, at the same time, screams that he will never forgive Liza for having witnessed his nervous collapse and having listened to his confession.

When the underground man realizes that, out of all he had said, Liza has intuitively understood that he was a very unhappy creature, he first did not know how to react. There was no pattern for such a situation in his twisted mind. He hated Liza because he feared for his freedom; on the other hand, he was drawn to her. But his feelings were so crippled and corrupted by spite and vanity that he could not appreciate her love and compassion. A devilish idea flashed through his mind; he made love to Liza and then, sending her away, slipped five rubles in her hand. This was so cruel that even the underground man was embarrassed and called his act "bad literature." It goes without saying that he lost Liza forever. (D, 233-243)

Both love affairs were doomed to failure, for the protagonists had lost the habit of human relationship. A newborn baby, a dead beggar, the mad Spaniard, the mad Ophelia, the wooden Hanswurst, the prostitute Liza, are hardly appropriate targets of human communication. Moreover, both protagonists lack passion; they indulge in reflections about love, but do not experience it intuitively and emotionally. Thus both end up in absolute loneliness, for only the man who loves needs companionship, whereas "...wer hasst, ist sich selbst genug, und bedarf nichts weiter als seinen Hass in der Brust und keinen

dritten." (B, XVI, 137)

Still another source of the protagonists' uprootedness is the stagnant and oppressive life in large cities. The city severs the protagonist from nature, it corrupts his morale, creates social discrepancy, but most of all, it destroys all human contact and makes the protagonist indifferent. Kreuzgang's favorite places are graveyards, old churches and monasteries. Strolling through the sleeping town, he feels like a prince in an enchanted town in which an evil spirit had changed every living being into stone. (B, I, 5)

The underground man also experiences the negative influence of the city life. He calls Petersburg the most abstract and premeditated city, he knows that the climate in Petersburg is bad for his health, that life there is too expensive for his small income (D, 135-136), nevertheless he prefers not to move to the countryside but to remain in his mousehole and to continue in his self-destruction and self-centered suffering.

2.

The most conspicuous source of nihilistic tension is the protagonists' acute intellect and heightened consciousness. These faculties make the protagonists extremely sensitive and critical, they intensify their individualism, corrode their emotional life, and inhibit their decision making ability by revealing the innate duality of every manifestation of life.

Both protagonists already reveal an unusual intellectual

curiosity during their childhood. The shoemaker's diary informs us about the strange interests of young Kreuzgang (B, IV, 27-28) who was constantly searching for the mystery underlying the phenomena of the objective world as well as for an answer to questions which lie beyond knowledge and proof. He wondered about the sunrise and tried to comprehend the language of the stars, flowers, and flies. He often embarrassed his foster father asking about the most ordinary things and then carrying the discussion from the objective reality into the sphere of metaphysics. Kreuzgang's favorite authors, the witty Hans Sachs and the mystical Jacob Böhme, illustrate the double aspect of Kreuzgang's interests.

It goes without saying that neither the shoemaker nor his apprentices could follow Kreuzgang's train of thought. They were puzzled or laughed at him, thus creating a gulf between the intelligent and abnormally susceptible boy and their own dull reality.

To acquire the highest degree of knowledge Kreuzgang apparently tried to earn a doctoral diploma in three different fields. He planned to become a physician in order to relieve the ailment of the patient and discuss his illness in learned dissertations. He wanted to study law in order to settle the legal affairs of the dying. Finally, he intended to become a theologian in order to ease man's anxiety and show him the path to heaven. (B, IX, 84-85) Yet the universities did not satisfy Kreuzgang's striving for perfection and truth; rather, as he explained it to Ophelia, they taught him all kind of

"fingierten Wahnsinn" and "metaphysische Spitzfündigkeiten". (B, XIV, 117-118) This explains why throughout the novel these three fields are the target of Kreuzgang's most pungent criticism and sarcasm.

The underground man also impressed his teachers and schoolmates with intellectual superiority. He was reading books which were beyond the understanding of his mates, he was familiar with subjects that were not included in the curriculum and of which the other boys had never heard. He worked hard and became one of the best students whom the teachers began to single out. Yet, it was not merely intellectual curiosity which stimulated the underground man's endeavors; rather he wanted to pay back his schoolmates for having loathed and jeered him. The boys leered at him in bewildered sarcasm and continued to dislike and to rebuff him. (D, 188-189)

There is no indication that the underground man ever attended the university after graduation from high school.

Both protagonists are well versed in literature and science and often critically refer to the aesthetic and ideological principles and problems of their time.

The watchman reveals a sound knowledge of classical literature and mythology. He repeatedly adduces painters to illustrate his presentations. Thus, for instance, Corregio represents the union of the physical and metaphysical worlds, (B, I, 7) Rubens stands for versatility (B, VII, 62) and Raffael for beauty and youth, (B, VIII, 70) Michelangelo (B, VI, 50) and Höllenbreughel (B, I, 7; VIII, 70) demonstrate

infernal confusion, and W. Hogarth, finally, stresses Kreuzgang's own satirical vein. (B, IV, 32; VII, 62; XVI, 133)

The watchman's favorite composition is Mozart's Don Juan (B, II, 11; IV, 33; VIII, 68). Furthermore, he alludes to Dante, (B, I, 7; VIII, 71) Shakespeare, (King Lear, B, IV, 29; Macbeth, II, 11, 13; Hamlet, XIV, 113 ff) Voltaire (B, I, 6) Hans Sach's Fastnachtspiele, (B, IV, 26) Jakob Böhme's Morgenröte, (B, IV, 26) Goethe, (B, VIII, 75; XII, 100, 104) Schiller, (B, XII, 100) Lessing, (B, XII, 100) Bürger's Leonore (B, X, 89) Tieck, (B, XII, 100) Kotzebue, (B, III, 18; IV, 32; XII, 100; XV, 126) and Iffland. (III, 18)

In his introduction to the Nachtwachen Hermann Michel lists a considerable number of passages which have been inspired by Jean Paul. (B, pp. v-lxix) Yet curiously enough, Jean Paul's name does not occur at all in the text.

Of the philosophers Kreuzgang mentions Plato, (B, II, 11; XIV, 122) Kant, (B, IV, 54) A. W. Schlegel, (B, IX, 83) Fichte. (B, IX, 83)

Finally, he refers to the monkey theory of E. Darwin (B, VIII, 72 ff), to Gall's research on the human skull (B, III, 17), and to the jurist A. D. Weber. (B, VII, 65)

Kreuzgang's criticism is mainly directed against the dilution of the aesthetic principles by Kotzebue and Iffland. (B, III, 18; IV, 29) Also he deplores the decline of poetry (B, I, 6; II, 11; XVI, 135) and histrionics (B, IV, 29-31) and jeers at the absurdity of certain doctrines of Idealistic philosophy. (B, IV, 35-36; VI, 54; IX, 83; XIV, 118) He

finally ridicules some scholarly methods which he feels are wasting too much effort on futilities. (B, IX, 84)

Like the watchman, the underground man too reveals a high proficiency in literature. Yet, in contrast to the watchman, the underground man did not only apply literature to illustrate his presentation. For him, reading was the only available way to overcome isolation, drown out accumulated feelings, and substitute for reality. It both delighted and tormented him (D, 172) and satisfied his need to live.

In his Notes the underground man refers to Shakespeare; (Manfred, D, 181; 199) he quotes Heine's judgment on the sincerity of Rousseau's Confessions in order to stress the truthfulness of his own autobiography; (D, 166) he borrows ideas from Pushkin, Lermontov, (D, 203-204) and George Sand (D, 227) in order to establish a fictitiously sublime and beautiful relationship to his former classmate Zverkov, whom he despises, and to the prostitute Liza; he also alludes to Gogol (D, 170-171; 174) and Goncharov. (D 170)

The underground man's criticism turns against some ideas and neat systematisations which were very popular in Russia. He ridicules Chernyshevsky's theory that man will not act deliberately against his own interest and, therefore, has no other choice but to become good. (D, 148 ff) He refers to Darwin (D, 142); he refutes H. T. Buckle's theory that man mellows under the influence of civilization and becomes good, noble, and less bloodthirsty, and he adduces as glaring examples the American civil war and the recent war in Schleswig-

Holstein. (D, 150-151) Finally, he revolts against everything restricting man's free will and desires; against the utopian crystal palace where everything would be regulated by outside laws; against rationalism which only satisfies man's rational needs but neglects his desire for life itself; (D, 151-163) against the anthill as the ultimate goal of man's endeavors. (D, 160)

3.

A heightened sensitivity toward themselves emanates from the protagonists' acute intellects. The watchman and the underground man indulge in stifling self-analysis. They observe many incompatibilities of their character, they notice that they are absolutely unpredictable because of a striking disparity between their very nature and its realization under given circumstances.

This incoherence begins with Kreuzgang's first poetic product, the "Leichenrede" at the birth of a child, in which life is treated as a process of dying. (B, VII, 58-59) On the other hand Kreuzgang writes a plea for life while witnessing the suicide of an actor. (B, XII, 102-103)

The tendency to turn everything upside down intensifies during Kreuzgang's later activities and acquires rather grotesque forms. He considers himself more rational than reason itself, yet, at the same time, he declares everything rational absurd. (B, IX, 84-85) He prays in the brothel and

laughs in the church; (B, VII, 58) he weeps while watching comedies and laughs while attending solemn tragedies, for as he explains it "das wahrhaft Kühne und Grosse immer zugleich von den beiden entgegengesetzten Seiten aufgefasst werden kann." (B, IV, 33) He feels free and safe as long as he hates and turns into a sick slave the moment he loves. (B, XIV, 118)

Kreuzgang says about this ambivalence: "...wie andere gelehrte Knaben und vielversprechende Jünglinge es sich angelegen sein lassen immer gescheuter und vernünftiger zu werden, habe ich im Gegentheile eine besondere Vorliebe für die Tollheit gehabt, und es zu einer absoluten Verworrenheit in mir zu bringen gesucht, eben um, wie unser Herrgott, erst ein gutes und vollständiges Chaos zu vollenden, aus welchem sich nachher gelegentlich, wenn es mir einfiel, eine leidliche Welt zusammen ordnen liesse." (B, VI, 48) And he continues:: "Dieser verdammte Widerspruch in mir geht so weit, dass z.B. der Papst selbst beim Beten nicht andächtiger sein kann, als ich beim blasphemiren, da ich hingegen wenn ich recht gute erbauliche Werke durchlese, mich der boshaftesten Gedanken dabei durchaus nicht erwehren kann." (B, VII, 57-58) He finally compares himself with a "widersinnig gestimmten Saiten spiele, auf dem daher niemals in einer reinen Tonart gespielt werden kann." (B, X, 92)

Trying to untangle the enigma of his personality Kreuzgang draws a rather whimsical conclusion: "Da bin ich denn über mich verwirrt geworden, und habe als den letzten Grund

meines Daseins hypothetisch angenommen, dass eben der Teufel selbst, um dem Himmel einen Possen zu spielen, sich während einer dunkeln Nacht in das Bette einer eben kanonisirten Heiligen geschlichen, und da mich gleichsam als eine lex cruciata für unsern Herrgott niedergeschrieben habe, bei der er sich am Weltgerichtstage den Kopf zerbrechen sollte." (B, VII, 57)

The underground man experiences a similar state of mind. He considers himself intellectually superior to his fellowmen, yet he immediately develops an inferiority complex when he has to face normal men. He always makes room for normal men and retreats into his mousehole. There he plunges into cold, poisonous, never-ending hatred, thinks up additional humiliations and prepares vengeance, knowing all the time that there is nothing to revenge and that he will hurt himself more than those against whom his alleged revenge is directed. (D, 140-141) In the government service the underground man was nasty and rude with the petitioners, he snarled at them and was happy when he managed to make them feel miserable. But, at the same time, he was aware that he was not really wicked nor embittered. He noticed that there were many elements in him that were just the opposite of wicked. "I might be frothing at the mouth, but if you had brought me a doll or had given me a nice cup of tea with sugar, I would have calmed down. I would even have been deeply touched, though probably I would gnash my teeth later and be unable to sleep for several months. But that's the way it was." (D, 134)

The underground man longed for the "lofty and beautiful", but just when he was most conscious and capable of every refinement, he lost awareness of it and behaved abjectly, knowing full well that it was wrong. (D, 137) In the brothel the underground man praised true love and family life, but he put off Liza's sincere compassion with a five ruble bill. He was longing for Liza, he wanted to go down on his knees before her, sob with remorse, kiss her feet, and beg for her forgiveness, yet, at the same time, he knew that tomorrow he would hate her for that. (D, 242) The underground man dreamed about a worthwhile life, useful and sublime, yet the first thing he did when he left school was to give up his special position in order to break all ties with the past. (D, 190)

At the end both protagonists are so confused that they can no longer distinguish what is right from what is wrong. The watchman does not know whether he or his fellowman is upside down. (B, VII, 58) He begins to doubt whether "vielleicht nicht gar Irrtum, Wahrheit, Narrheit, Weisheit, Tod, Leben ist." (B, IX, 85-86)

The underground man, too, is not sure whether he believes in what he is saying, writing and doing, or not, "... perhaps I do believe, but at the same time I cannot help feeling and suspecting for some unknown reason that I am telling a pack of lies...." (D, 164) He has the feeling that this state is not accidental, that it is intended to be that way, as if that were the normal state rather than a sickness or

depravity. At the end he almost believes that it is the normal state. (D, 137)

Both protagonists are fully aware that their intellect is responsible for the complexity and incoherence of their personality. Kreuzgang's state of mind is diagnosed in the madhouse as "übertriebene intellektuelle Schwelgerei" and the doctor prescribes "wenig oder gar kein Denken." (B, IX, 86) The underground man assures us that "too great a lucidity is a disease, a true, full-fledged disease" and he adds that a half or quarter of it would be sufficient for everyday needs. (D, 136)

The protagonists' inner complexity has its counterpart in their outer appearance. Both are handicapped and not very handsome. The watchman limps (B, III, 20), the underground man is puny, seedy, and has an ugly face. (D, 173, 176, 189) The cleavage of mind and physical impediments prevent the protagonists from attaining superhumanity and from becoming real heroes.

4.

Both protagonists try to refract the preponderance of reason and the incongruities emanating from their acute intellect. Kreuzgang is less successful in this attempt than the underground man, and does not free himself completely from the fetters of rational determinism. Thus, for him the world remains a comic tragedy in which man takes himself and his

drive for fulfillment too seriously and does not realize that he is only a puppet playing an involuntary role in the world theater. To Ophelia he explains it in the following way:

"Es ist alles Rolle, die Rolle selbst und der Schauspieler, der darin steckt, und in ihm wieder seine Gedanken und Pläne und Begeisterungen und Possen...Alles ist auch nur Theater, mag der Komödiant auf der Erde selbst spielen, oder zwei Schritte höher, auf den Brettern, oder zwei Schritte tiefer, in dem Boden, wo die Würmer das Stichwort des abgegangenen Königs ergreifen." (B, XIV, 120)

Kreuzgang, too, plays his role in this world theater. When he accepts the duties of a watchman and retires into the night, his decision is not free but forced upon him by society. When he suggests to the town poet to practice a craft in order to survive he tries to bring his concept of the free man back into the realm of the rational relation of cause and effect. Yet when he plays Hamlet, in order to convey to the audience his own hatred, contempt and loathing, he manifests his own will, for he is absolutely aware of what he is doing and is using the role and mask only as a convenient disguise. (B, XIV, 113) Not only when he tries to unmask the world and reveal what is behind the surface illusion, but also when he rebels against the spatio-temporal conditions which contrast with the bold human spirit, he again exercises his free will.

The watchman considers sarcasm and laughter, both products of reason, the only vehicle to combat the inanity of the

world and the only solution to his own predicament. If one apprehends the inconsistency of a situation, one can laugh at it and refract its vigor. Thus laughter also becomes the defense against illusion and an efficient means of maintaining one's identity. The significance Kreuzgang ascribes to laughter, which he regards a gift of his godfather, the devil, may be seen from his monologue:

Nichts geht doch über das Lachen, und ich schlage es fast so hoch an, wie andere gebildete Leute das Weinen. . . . Wo giebt es überhaupt ein wirksameres Mittel jedem Hohne der Welt und selbst dem Schicksale Trotz zu bieten, als das Lachen? Vor dieser satirischen Maske erschrickt der gerüstetste Feind, und selbst das Unglück weicht erschrocken von mir, wenn ich es zu verlachen wage!--Was beim Teufel, ist auch diese ganze Erde, nebst ihrem empfindsamen Begleiter dem Monde, anders werth als sie auszulachen--ja sie hat allein darum noch einigen Werth, weil das Lachen auf ihr zu Hause ist. (B, XV, 126-27)

It took the underground man twenty years, until he grasped the meaning of laughter. First he interpreted Liza's sarcastic remark about his bookish language as a personal insult and not what it really was, namely, an attempt to protect herself. Only later he realized "that sarcasm is a screen -- the last refuge of shy, pure persons against those who rudely and insistently try to break into their hearts." (D, 216)

The underground man's most powerful weapon against reason and determinism, against the stone wall of the laws of nature is his morbid will. His intellect tells him that these laws exist, that twice two makes four, yet the underground man tries to break the wall of reason and change twice two

into five. (D, 161) He invents all kinds of stories which contradict reality, he distorts historical events and shifts geographical places, he imagines himself a hero whom everybody admires and loves. (D, 180-181)

5.

Although both protagonists were highly intelligent and well-educated, neither was successful in his professional career. Kreuzgang was too sarcastic, the underground man too willful, thus neither conformed to the norms of society.

The underground man is aware of that when he states "the only reason I think I am an intelligent man is that in all my life I have never managed to start or finish anything." (D, 147)

Yet both protagonists are not wealthy and have to make a living. Thus, the watchman, addressing the starving poet, says: "...ich verstehe dich wohl, denn ich war einst deinesgleichen! Aber ich habe diese Beschäftigung aufgegeben gegen ein ehrliches Handwerk, das seinen Mann ernährt...." (B, I, 6)

And he suggests to the poet to become a watchman because "das ist noch der einzige solide Posten wo es (das Dichten) bezahlt wird, und man dich nicht dabei verhungern lässt." (B, I, 6)

The watchman began his career as a shoemaker and poet in his foster father's workshop. The "Leichenrede" at the birth of a child acquired general recognition for him and, soon,

the young man was earning more through his poetry than through repairing shoes. (B, VII, 59-60)

Yet, the critical Kreuzgang saw the limits of his poetic talent. Addressing the town's poet he states: "Ich erinnerte mich an ähnliche überpoetische Stunden, wo das Innere Sturm ist, der Mund im Donner reden, und die Hand statt der Feder den Blitz ergreifen möchte, um damit in feurigen Worten zu schreiben. Da fliegt der Geist von Pole zu Pole, glaubt das ganze Universum zu überflügeln, und wenn er zuletzt zur Sprache kommt--so ist es kindisch Wort, und die Hand zerreisst rasch das Papier." (B, II, 10)

Kreuzgang's attempt to become a prose writer also failed. He complains: "Was gäbe ich doch darum, so recht zusammenhängend und schlechtweg erzählen zu können, wie andre ehrliche protestantische Dichter und Zeitschriftsteller die gross und herrlich dabei werden, und für ihre goldene Realitäten eintauschen. (B, VI, 48) He finally gives up and becomes a humorist. (B, II, 11)

The satirical vein which was already noticeable in the "Leichenrede" was enhanced more and more, creating continuous inconvenience. The whimsical satire on the importance of the donkey was considered by an influential person as a personal insult, and Kreuzgang had to go to jail. (B, VII, 60-61)

After being released, Kreuzgang played Hamlet for a short time "aus Ingrim über die Menschheit" (B, XIV, 113) and acted as a singer of popular ballads. At first, he confined himself to cock-and-bull stories and then became bolder

and reported about different murders and crimes committed by church, government, tribunal, censor, etc. He was put on trial. In defending himself Kreuzgang turned everything upside-down. He suggested that the judges commit various crimes in order to become experts in the fields they were passing judgment on. He wanted them to attend brothels and join gangs of thieves to be able to indict the delinquents on the spot. He enumerated all kinds of terrible crimes committed in the name of the law. He relied on his right of free speech for poets, and referred, finally, to the newest theory separating justice from morality. This theory entitled him to call the judges immoral without insulting them. (B, VIII, 63-65) Kreuzgang was declared insane and sent to the madhouse where he met Ophelia.

When Ophelia and the child died, Kreuzgang was banned from the madhouse. This time he joined a puppeteer and mainly played Hanswurst. Yet, the tragedy Holofernes reminded the peasants of the French revolution and they began to revolt against their mayor. As a matter of fact, Kreuzgang succeeded in calming the rebellion by explaining to the rebels that the puppets are not responsible for their deeds, for they only do what the director wants them to do. Nevertheless, during the night, the mayor with the police confiscated the puppets, thus causing the suicide of the director and leaving Kreuzgang again without a job. (B, XV, 128-131)

With the support of some more or less important persons and due to his education, Kreuzgang finally ended up as the

town's watchman. (B, XV, 132)

Once again he clashed with society when he announced the arrival of Judgment Day and faced every stratum of society with its peculiar vices and crimes. (B, IV, 51-54) After this incident, Kreuzgang was deprived of the last symbol of personal freedom, his horn, and was demoted to an automaton. He became a rather passive spectator of the world's unfolding.

The underground man's career was less complex. He was a collegiate assessor in government service. He loathed office work and his colleagues, yet he had to enter the service to have something to eat. (D, 136) For unknown reasons he gave up his first job. (D, 194)

Only once did he have the idea to write a satirical story about an officer whom he hated, because he thought that the latter had insulted him. The story was written with exultation; he exposed and even slandered the officer. Yet, the journal Fatherland Notes rejected the manuscript. (D, 175)

Finally, after receiving an inheritance of six thousand rubles from a distant relative, the underground man immediately resigned and withdrew to his mousehole. (D, 136)

In conclusion one can say: Uprootedness, acute intellect, the missing balance between the rational and the emotional, as well as the uncertainty and the decay of the period in which the protagonists lived, were responsible for the protagonists' nihilistic attitudes. On the one hand, these factors triggered a cleavage of mind and lead to introspection

and painful self-analysis, thus alienating the protagonists from themselves; on the other hand, they became the agents of the protagonists' constant rebellion against prevailing values and concepts, thus further developing the protagonists' alienation from and negation of men and society. Neither protagonist succeeded in overcoming his predicament, for neither was able to restore the sound balance which is the prerequisite of a meaningful life. The watchman annihilated reason with reason, the underground man refracted it with his unrestricted and uncontrolled will.

CHAPTER IV

THE PROTAGONISTS AND THEIR FELLOWMEN

1.

A superficial glance at the two novels already reveals that Nachtwachen covers a wider range of human characters and situations than Notes from the Underground. Bonaventura adduces various social strata and professions, the grouping of which reminds us of a medieval speculum or a baroque Ständesatire (e.g., the scenes from the madhouse in the ninth nightwatch or the speech announcing the arrival of the Day of Judgment in the sixth nightwatch).

Moreover, Bonaventura presents man not only from Kreuzgang's point of view; there are also several other narrators who convey their experiences, e.g., the foster father (IV), the mad Spaniard (IV), the poet (VIII), Hanswurst (VIII), the porter of the Ursuline convent (X), the stranger in the cloak (XI), the epigone (XII). Most of them share Kreuzgang's macabre Weltanschauung. Their world, too, is deprived of love and consists of incompatibilities, uncertainty, loneliness, and despair. Like Kreuzgang most of these figures, too, try to refract existential perversity through black humor.

On the other hand, Notes from the Underground does not demonstrate such a variety of characters and social differentiations. In the first part of his notes the underground man presents an abstract interpretation of man's behavior in general. In the second part, the events of which took place sixteen years earlier, he confirms his views with examples drawn from his experiences with an officer, with the head of his department, with his schoolmates, with his servant Apollon, and with the prostitute Liza.

2.

Both protagonists classify men into two groups. In his speech on the last night of the century, Kreuzgang compares life with an absurd novel in which "es einige wenige leidliche Charaktere und eine Unzahl erbärmlicher gibt." (B, VI, 53)

The world, too, reflects this polarity: it consists of paradises and prisons, madhouses and learned republics. (B, VI, 51) Yet altogether it is merely "ein leerer abgeschmackter Tummelplatz von Narren und Masken." (B, XII, 105)

The underground man sees man in a similar way. There is a small group of intelligent men who by virtue of their intellect consciously perceive the inconsistency of the world. Yet the majority of society is composed of what the underground man calls spontaneous people or men of action. They are stupid and limited, and resemble one another like a flock of sheep. (D, 169) The man of action never questions anything,

he takes everything for granted, he is not tormented with doubts.

The polar presentation of man and his world is, actually, the reflexion of the protagonists' own distorted and complex experiences. The underground man recalls: "Now, it is absolutely clear to me, that because of my infinite vanity and, perhaps, due to the high standard I set for myself, I regarded myself with furious disapproval, bordering on loathing, attributing my own feelings to everyone." (D, 168)

The watchman senses his kinship with the gypsy woman merely because of her hatred for men. (B, XVI, 137) The underground man is surprised by Liza's reaction to his abject behavior because he is so egotistical and despises people so much that he cannot imagine Liza acting and feeling differently. (D, 242)

In their relationship to their fellowmen both protagonists discover that irrationality is one of man's most outstanding features. In both novels man does not always do things which lie in his real interest, he does not act reasonably, because reason only satisfies his rational requirements, whereas desires and wishes are the manifestations of true life, yet man wants to live and exercise all the aspects of life, not only reason. He wants to establish his right to wish for the most abstract things and not to be obliged to have only sensible wishes. Thus he does things which stubbornly disagree with reason. He dreams up his own world which is not restricted by the spatio-temporal order and is usually

incompatible with reality.

In Nachtwachen the old shoemaker meditates about eternity and immortality, and dreams of a treasure he is going to disinter with the help of some magic power. (B, IV, 25-26) The epigone raves of renown and hopes to attract the attention of the readers by dressing himself in garments of celebrities, and imitating their behavior rather than adopting their intellectual achievements. (B, XII, 100) The unknown poet plans to write a powerful poem which could resurrect dead. (B, XVI, 134-35) Even the beggar in his wretched existence, hiding a lock of his wife's hair under the rags of his coat, dreams of love and life. (B, X, 88)

The most pronounced representative of irrationality is the town's poet. He does not submit himself to any kind of restriction. He sits in his cloudy tower, dreaming about immortality while starving to death. When his last hope vanishes, because the publisher had rejected his tragedy Der Mensch, the poet hangs himself with the string that was used to tie together the manuscript of his tragedy. His suicide is the last assertion of his individuality against the restraining and hostile faculties of society. (B, VIII, 69)

Kreuzgang calls the whimsical, irrational wishes the "fixe Ideen" man is suffering from. They are often enhanced to such a degree that the distinction between idea and reality disappears and all values become interchangeable: laughter turns into weeping, jest into gravity, love into hatred, life into death, good into evil, loftiness into depravity.

In such moments man clashes with society and usually ends up in the madhouse as the only place where he can exercise his whims without regard to whether they are only "fixe Ideen" or real madness. Kreuzgang explains this state of mind to doctor Oehlmann in the madhouse: ". . . schauen Sie sich um, sind wir doch vor Gott alle gleich und laboriren bloss an verschiedenen fixen Ideen, wo nicht an einem totalen Wahnsinn, bloss mit kleinen Nuanzen." (B, IX, 84)

Because of their emotionality and heightened imagination poets are particularly prone to irrationality. They hover in higher spheres and usually have little to do with reality. "Die Dichter sind ein unschädliches Völkchen, mit ihren Träumen und Entzückungen und dem Himmel voll griechischer Götter, den sie in ihrer Phantasie mit sich unhertragen. Böartig aber werden sie sobald sie sich erdreisten ihr Ideal an die Wirklichkeit zu halten, und nun in diese, mit der sie gar nichts zu schaffen haben sollten, zornig hineinschlagen." (B, VIII, 66) They set themselves an ideal which lies beyond the spatio-temporal world, which reaches "über die Wolken hinaus und sie selbst können sein Ende nicht absehen und müssen sich nur an die Sterne als provisorische Grenzpunkte halten." (B, VIII, 66)

Bonaventura's surmise that the poets would cause no trouble "wenn man ihnen nur in der Wirklichkeit ihr freies Plätzchen ungestört einräumen . . . wollte," (B, VIII, 66) reminds one of the underground man's raging words that, if somebody had brought him a doll to play with or had offered

him a nice cup of tea with sugar, he would have calmed down. (D, 134) What the poets are actually longing for is a society which would interfere as little as possible with their individual freedom.

Irrationality entails alienation from men and society; it may have fatal consequences as well, as the case of the town poet illustrates. The same applies to the puppeteer who hangs himself, for life becomes meaningless to him, if there is no freedom of thought and speech and no meaningful communication between men. (B, XV, 131)

In Notes from the Underground irrationality is also one of man's conspicuous features which perverts all values. One may shower upon man all earthly blessings, drown him in happiness, give him economic security, but even then he will give up everything, just to inject into all the soundness and sense surrounding him some of his disastrous, lethal fancies. (D, 154-58) Man will never stop doing nasty things and acting like a pig only because it lies in his true interest. He will not become good and virtuous out of self-interest; (D, 148-49) and he will send reason to hell, just to demonstrate his whim. (D, 153)

Another feature which is shared by both novels and results from irrationality is man's aversion to the idea of reaching his goal, thus, seeing the fulfillment of his desires. Man likes his objective from the distance, he enjoys the achieving rather than the goal itself, he is instinctively afraid of the goal he is working for.

In Kreuzgang's version of the story of the mad Spaniard, Don Juan, while looking for Ines, experiences this feeling: "Angst und Liebe trieben ihn fort und wieder zurück, doch aber erschien ihm oft in einzelnen schnell vorüberfliegenden Sekunden der Augenblick in dem er sie finden würde ebenso entsetzlich als erwünscht." (B, V, 43) Don Juan cannot understand this feeling, he tries "die Ahnung nur ein einzigesmal festzuhalten um sie zu begreifen, aber sie rauschte jedesmal wie ein nächtlicher Traum schnell an ihm vorüber." (B, V, 43)

Likewise, man fears death and strives to conquer it, but he would hate life should he ever be successful in his endeavor. He would ban the physician for having found a treatment against death. (B, VII, 67-69) For man "liebt das Leben um des Todes willen, und er würde es hassen, wenn das, was er fürchtet, vor ihm verschwunden wäre." (B, IV, 40)

Kreuzgang takes up this idea several times. In the "Leichenrede" he states that "das Glück allein in der Hoffnung besteht, sobald es aber wirklich wird, sich selbst zerstört." (B, VII, 59) In the monologue about the dream of love it says that "es ist nur der Traum der Liebe der entzückt" whereas love itself is not beautiful. (B, IX, 88)

Notes from the Underground broaches the same idea. Life is presented as man's uninterrupted drive toward a goal. Yet man is afraid of bringing his plans to a successful end, because achievement means stagnation, it is the end of desires and wishes, i.e., the end of life. For this reason, man prefers chaos and destruction, and rejects the well engineered

anthill or the crystal palace which would terminate his endeavors. (D, 159-61)

The underground man clearly follows this path. He is desperately looking for a friend, but when he finds a naive and yielding boy and has full possession of him, he begins to hate him and finally rejects him because he wants his total friendship just for the sake of winning it. (D, 190)

3.

Both protagonists consider the majority of their fellowmen stupid and vain. Men have no inventiveness; they think and express themselves in patterns from literature or strive to copy renowned authorities. They do not understand that one can differ from his model, and loath everybody who tries to do so. Men do not hesitate to pronounce their fellowman insane and confine him to the madhouse whenever he attempts to manifest his individuality.

Both novels supply ample examples for this. The shoemaker's apprentices laughed at the boy Kreuzgang because he was different. Later, men misinterpreted Kreuzgang's "Leichenrede" and satires. The judges did not understand his defense speech, and none grasped the sarcasm and social criticism of the speech announcing the Day of Judgment.

The town poet and the puppeteer fall victim to man's stupidity; the epigone only meets with success, because he flatters man's stupidity.

The adulterer, trying to seduce the judge's wife, swears "nacheinander in zehn Charakteren aus den neuesten Dramen und Tragödien," and continues "gar noch in der Manier des Don Juan, dem er diesen Abend beigewohnt hatte." (B, III, 18) The honest shoemaker, after having found Kreuzgang, looks for the boy's dowry, because that is what he read in his books of charm. (B, IV, 28)

Man would never understand "dass grosse Poeten und grosse Helden ihre Stunden haben, in denen sie schlechtere Werke und schlechtere Handlungen ans Licht fördern als die schlechtesten anderer höchst alltäglicher Erdensöhne," (B, VII, 59) because he himself is too mediocre to attain brilliancy, and too hypocritical to admit his shortcomings.

In Notes from the Underground we encounter similar situations. The schoolmates of the underground man are stupid and narrow-minded, they are preoccupied with their pettiness, they dream only about nice, secure jobs; they scorn everybody who is helpless and oppressed or does not fit into their pattern. (D, 184-86)

The colleagues of the underground man meet him with reserve, because he is different and not very successful in his career.

Of the participants of the farewell party Zverkov is not only stupid, vain, and bragging but also presumptuous. Another participant, Trudoliubov, is moronic and the only thing he admires is success. The russified German, Ferfichkin, is an impudent little braggart who affects a super-acute sense

of honor, while being a coward at heart as well as a sycophant, mainly for financial motives.

In both novels men judge their fellowmen by their clothing and positions, they are impressed by success and wealth, but they have no true feelings for the man himself. Man covers himself "mit bunten Theaterlappen und nimmt die Masken der Freude und Liebe vor das Gesicht, um interessant zu scheinen...; dann schaut zuletzt das Ich auf die Kappen herab, und bildet sich ein sie machten's aus, ja es gibt wohl gar andere noch schlechter gekleidete Ich's, die den zusammengeflickten Popanz bewundern und lobpreisen," says Hanswurst in the Prologue. (B, VII, 75)

Since man does not perceive the principle of causality, he adapts himself easily to the most incompatible circumstances. He approves today what he rejected yesterday, and will change his mind tomorrow, not even noticing that he acts to his disadvantage: "Die Menschheit...findet sich leicht in das Entgegengesetztteste; ja ich glaube sie kann sich, wenn sie heute ein leichtes Band, das sie fesselte, zerrissen hat, morgen mit eben dem Enthusiasmus in Ketten werfen lassen." (B, IV, 130)

In Notes from the Underground the normal man surrounds himself with the laws of nature and reason like a stone wall. He does not challenge the wall; rather he respects it, because of its calming effect upon him. He may roar like a furious bull and this may add immensely to his prestige, yet he will capitulate at once before the impossible. (D, 142) Thus the

wall solves his moral problems, it is something final, perhaps even mystical. (D, 139) When, for instance, man has the desire to revenge himself, because, in his innate stupidity, he considers revenge as justice, he is drained for a time of every other feeling but his desire for revenge. He rushes straight ahead, horns lowered and nothing stops him until he comes up against the wall. (D, 139)

In his infinite vanity man becomes overwhelmingly proud and sets for himself impossible standards which he is unable to reach. He dreams wonderful dreams and thinks that "eben weil er so etwas träume, müsse es ihm werden." (B, IX, 82) He does not realize that soon the time will come when he is going to retire in a dark hollow where he has to wait "bis es dem Direktor gefällt eine neue Komödie anzusagen." (B, VIII, 74)

Man is so vain that he praises and lauds God not because of his almightiness and wisdom, but because he thinks that God resembles man and is as clever as man. (B, IX, 82) He sets up various systems in which he finally considers himself God. (B, VIII, 76; IX, 81) Kreuzgang explains:

...sehen Sie nur diesen Koloss der Menschheit an, wie alles sich an ihm regt und arbeitet und verkehrt, der erste klettert über den zweiten hinauf, und über diesen wieder ein dritter, wie die Aequilibristen, dieser trägt Erfindungen, jener Systeme mit sich in die Höhe, und es kann nicht fehlen, dass dies Menschengeschlecht, das auf seinen eigenen Schultern immer höher kommt, oder sich, wie Münchhausen, bei seinem eigenen Zopf emporzieht, zuletzt sich bis in den Himmel verklettert.... (B, XII, 103)

Yet man's systems are chaotic and everything is haphazard.

Thus it seems as if "der Schöpfer bald möglichst dazu thun müsse die Welt, wie ein verunglücktes System auszustreichen und zu vernichten." (B, VI, 48)

Men are absolutely incompetent. Their heads are everything but the shrine of mind and wit. They are "in doppelter Hinsicht nur als Surrogate von Köpfen anzusehen, und stehen da oben nur gleichsam wie die Knöpfe auf Thürmen, zum blossen Schlusse der Gestalt." (B, XIII, 111)

Man is an absolute failure, "ein satirischer Beitrag zu den Fehlgriffen des Genies." (B, IV, 26) He is always doing something he is not qualified for, or is in contrast to the given situation. "Es gehört zur menschlichen Grösse in der Nähe erhabener Gegenstände Nebengeschäfte zu betreiben, z.B. der aufgehenden Sonne mit der Pfeife im Munde ins Antlitz zu schauen, oder während der Katastrophe einer Tragödie Makkaroni zu speisen," complains Kreuzgang. (B, IV, 126)

Man's life is like "eine mozartsche Symphonie von schlechten Dorfmusikanten exekutirt." (B, IV, 33) And man is not only a poor player, he is the least talented one. (B, IV, 33)

In both novels man does not understand art, does not distinguish between the beautiful and rubbish, for he does not apprehend that art is not the copy of nature but the manifestation of an idea, (B, XIII, 112) the unity of the finite material with the infinite human mind and spirit.

There is no harmony in man's world, everything is distorted, the internal and external appearances of life dispersed

Thus man only knows "ein abscheuliches kreischendes Geschrei statt des Gesanges." In a thousand years he will display in the museum "nur noch das Frazzenhafte," he will look "nach einem Ideale der Hässlichkeit," and he will be so alienated from nature that he will teach "wie man eine Welt mit geringem Aufwande von Kräften vollständig zusammenstellen kann." (B, VIII, 68-69) He will construct a world in which there will be no love, no friendship and faithfulness; madhouses will be erected only for sensible people and everything will be upside down. (B, VIII, 67-69)

4.

Beside stupidity man's most repugnant features are immorality and viciousness. Men do not care for and do not love one another. Rather they despise and hate one another; they have no compunction to humiliate, hurt, and bully one another. They look down upon others and use them as doormats. The higher rank oppresses the lower rank, pushes him around while the latter always has to give way. Yet, the more arrogant people become the more others fawn at them despite their lip service to honor and dignity. (D, 184) Everything is mortgaged in life and conscience and pity have long ago disappeared. People are only concerned with material gains. "Der Mensch taugt nichts, darum streiche ich ihn aus," mourns the town poet in his farewell letter. (B, VIII, 70) In addition, his Hanswurst considers man so worthless that should he

disclose his real ego, "jedermann würde vor der Seichtigkeit und Nichtsnuzigkeit davon laufen." (B, VIII, 75)

Because of this viciousness, it is more likely that men descend from beasts rather than from monkeys. In no case does man resemble God's image, (B, VIII, 74) for behind every "Göttermaske" lurks the vicious beast. (B, XIV, 116)

In both novels viciousness already begins with the unconscious cruelty of parents and their allies to children. The gypsy mother abandoned Kreuzgang; the underground man suffered under the nagging of his relatives. Liza became a prostitute because of her father. The blind boy's mother dedicated a parentless waif to heaven, thus making her son unhappy and causing the death of the girl. Later men persecuted Kreuzgang, cut him off from society and a healthy life, and forced him into the underground. The town poet and the puppeteer were driven to death, because men failed to grant them an existential minimum. "...die Brüder haben den Joseph verstossen, und verschliessen tückisch die Gaben" which nature so lavishly allotted to them, Kreuzgang meditates. (B, X, 88) Another blatant case of viciousness is the burial of the nun in the cloister. Because they renounced life, the Ursulines took revenge on life by burying one of the nuns alive and exposing her baby. (B, X, 92-94) Out of vicious jealousy the mad Spaniard destroyed the life and family of his brother.

As a singer of popular ballads Kreuzgang gives a rather impressive list of immoral and malicious actions, such as "Seelenmorde durch Kirche und Staat," then trifling murders,

such as "der Ehre, durch den tückischen guten Ruf, der Liebe, durch kalte herzlose Buben, der Treue, durch falsche Freunde, der Gerechtigkeit, durch Gerichtshöfe, der gesunden Vernunft, durch Zensuredikte," etc. (B, VII, 62)

In the madhouse we find figures who have come to grief in their conflict with the senselessness of the world as well as victims of man's viciousness, and contrite evildoers. (B, IX)

Because of his wickedness man prefers the night, for everything in him shuns the light and is dangerous. (B, V, 46) Thus, night is not any more the romantic mystical time, it is the time of vices, crimes, and immorality.

Likewise, in Notes from the Underground men are immoral and vicious. They do filthy things, they wallow in mud and corrupt others. Yet, they are not even ashamed of it. Only the intelligent man is aware of his depravity, he gnaws at himself for it, and eats himself up. (D, 137) The others stand around like judges and dictators, laugh lustily at him till their throats are sore, and they spit at him. Nobody gives him a helping hand in his anxiety and doubts. (D, 140) But why? Simply because men are indifferent and consider their fellowmen something like a housefly. (D, 183)

It is self-deception to think that civilization made man less bloodthirsty and better. It only created a greater variety of sensation, nothing else. Through the centuries man only became more viciously, more horribly bloodthirsty. In the past, man saw justice in bloodshed and slaughtered

without any pangs of conscience those he felt had to be slaughtered. Today, he still practices it, even on a much larger scale, although we consider bloodshed terrible. (D, 150-51)

Kreuzgang depicted the same idea when he spoke about the helpers of death and the sovereigns "die den einzelnen Menschen wohltun und sie nur in ganzen Heeren würgen." (B, VII, 61)

In summary, man is so wicked and wretched that the only thing God can do is to destroy him and surrender to oblivion. For neither heaven nor hell would accept him: for hell he is too evil, for heaven too boring. (B, VI, 53)

The most pessimistic description of men, however, is given by the misanthrope of the Ursuline cloister. Addressing a black bird, he asks: "Kennst Du das Wesen, dessen Antlitz tückisch lacht, wenn die vorgehaltene Larve Tränen vergießt, das Gott nennt, wenn es den Teufel denkt, das im Innern, wie der Apfel am todten Meere, giftigen Staub enthält, indess die Schaale blühend roth zum Genuss einladet, das durch das künstlich gewundene Sprachrohr melodische Töne von sich giebt indem es Aufruhr hinein ruft, das wie die Sphynx nur freundlich lächelt, um zu zerreißen, und wie die Schlange bloss deshalb so innig umarmt, um den tödlichen Stachel in die Brust zu drücken." The bird responds with only a single word, "Mensch!" (B, X, 91)

5.

Men are hypocrites. They reveal an admirable versatility to camouflage their incompetence, stupidity, and viciousness. They are receptive to the most irreconcilable feelings, but will always succeed in hiding their true identity behind all kinds of masks.

Thus, for instance, the adulterer raves about true love and faithfulness; he confirms his words with examples from the fashionable literature. "Der Mann liess es sich recht angelegen sein im rhetorischen Bombast, und sprach in einem Athem von Liebe und Treue," Kreuzgang describes the situation. (B, III, 18)

It also applies for the judge's wife who, speaking in the jargon of popular Romanticism, "zweifelte gläubig und machte viel künstlichen Händeringens," (B, III, 18) although she was from the very beginning prepared to betray her husband.

In Nachtwachen, from the highest to the lowest stratum, everybody is wearing a mask. Even the devil is masked, yet the key to his mask got lost, (B, III, 17) thus, one will never disclose his real identity. The only case in which mask and identity really coalesce, is the clergyman. He speaks and acts like the devil: "...getreu seinem Charakter redete er jetzt, indem ihm das Beschreiben zu ohnmächtig erschien, in der Person des Teufels selbst, der ihm am

nächsten lag. Er drückte sich wie ein Meister darin aus, ächt teuflisch im kühnsten Style..." (B, I, 8)

There is no sincerity in man. Honor and dignity, joy and grief, anger and madness, everything is mask. Man's life is like a "schön gearbeitete Scheide" which hides the deadly weapon, or it resembles the "Blumenkorb der Kleopatra, unter dessen Rosen die giftige Schlange lauschte," says Kreuzgang. (B, IV, 30)

Man tears off his mask only when he is frightened to death. Then one discovers "in Bettlerkleidern Könige und umgekehrt, in Ritterrüstungen Schwächlinge und so fast immer das Gegentheil zwischen Kleid und Mann." (B, VI, 50)

But even in the hour of death man is not quite sincere and his remorse is more or less calculated. Kreuzgang gives an apt illustration of man's behavior in times of danger:

O man hätte sehen sollen was das für ein Getriebe und Gedränge wurde unter den armen Menschenkindern und wie der Adel ängstlich durch einander lief, und sich doch noch zu rangiren suchte vor seinem Herrgott; eine Menge Justiz- und andere Wölfe wollten aus ihrer Haut fahren und bemühten sich in voller Verzweiflung sich in Schaaf zu verwandeln, indem sie hier den in feuriger Angst umherlaufenden Witwen und Waisen grosse Pensionen aussetzten, dort ungerechte Urtheile öffentlich kassierten und die geraubten Summen wodurch sie die armen Teufel zu Bettlern gemacht hatten, sogleich nach Ausgang des jüngsten Tages zurück zu zahlen gelobten. So manche Blutsauger und Vampyre denunciirten sich selbst als Hängens und Köpfens würdig und drangen darauf, dass noch in der Eile hier unten ihr Urtheil an ihnen vollzogen würde, um die Strafe von höherer Hand von sich abzuwenden. Der stolzeste Mann im Staate stand zum erstenmale demüthig und fast kriechend mit der Krone in der Hand und komplimentirte mit einem zerlumpten Kerl um den Vorrang, weil ihm eine hereinbrechende allgemeine Gleichheit möglich schien.

Aemter wurden niedergelegt, Ordensbänder und

Ehrenzeichen eigenhändig von ihren unwürdigen Besitzern abgelöst; Seelenhirten versprachen feierlich künftighin ihren Heerden neben den guten Worten noch obendrein ein gutes Beispiel in den Kauf zu geben, wenn der Herrgott nur diesesmal es noch beim Einsehen bewenden liesse. (B, VI, 49)

In Notes from the Underground one finds ample examples of man's hypocrisy. Men pretend to be honest and sincere, but they are only diplomatic and never lose sight of the useful. They are raving about the sublime and beautiful but are rogues at the bottom of their hearts. They display a broad outlook and speak about ideals, yet they would not raise their little finger to achieve these ideals. They would never jeopardize their career by standing up; they would sooner go out of their mind than spit at the wall, unless they had some other objectives in reserve. (D, 171)

Zverkov, the underground man's former schoolmate, for instance, was boasting about the amorous conquests he would make and the duels he would fight, yet he did not dare to have anything to do with women until he got his commission. (D, 184)

6.

Man has lost his religious faith, he does not believe in miracles and mysteries any more and has no imagination. Yet life without fantasy and dreams is boring and dull. Therefore, man does all kinds of foolish and malicious things to beguile time and kill tedium.

Kreuzgang complains about boredom; (B, V, 41) so does the mad Spaniard. (B, IV, 38) Out of boredom the judge's wife betrays her husband who is so imbued with reason that he does not even comprehend the meaning of the word "fantasy." (B, III, 20) During Kreuzgang's speech announcing the Day of Judgment a satirist commits suicide, "um den Versuch zu machen, ob in diesem Indifferenzmomente zwischen Tod und Auferstehen das Sterben noch auf einen Augenblick möglich sei, damit er nicht mit der ganzen Übergrossen Lebenslangweile in die Ewigkeit ohne weiteres hinüber müsse." (B, VI, 50)

"Die Menschen sind, wenn sie handeln, höchst alltäglich, und man mag ihnen höchstens, wenn sie träumen, einiges Interesse abgewinnen," Kreuzgang summarizes his experiences. (B, III, 16) He calls life a "comédie larmoyante" and fears death because of the deadly ennui of immortality. (B, XIV, 121)

In his farewell letter the town poet states that "die Menschheit im ganzen so schlaff und boshaft geworden ist, dass sie...ihre heimlichen Sünden aus blosser Abspannung vollführt." (B, VIII, 72) Finally, in the monologue of the mad Creator God refuses to take "die Puppe" into eternity, "denn da sie sich dort unten mehr als zuviel langweilt und sich oft vergeblich bemüht, in der kurzen Sekunde ihrer Existenz die Zeit zu vertreiben, wie müsste sie sich bei mir in der Ewigkeit, vor der ich oft selbst erschrecke, langweilen." (B, IX, 81-82)

In Notes from the Underground, too, men are boring and bored. The underground man gives a fine illustration of this state of mind, describing a visit at his office chief:

The master of the house usually sat in his study on a leather couch in front of a table, in the company of some gray-haired guest....I never found more than two or three visitors there at any time, and they were always the same. The conversation was always about excise duties, business in the Senate, salaries and promotions, about His Excellency and ways of pleasing him, and so on and so forth. I sat patiently for four hours on end, like a fool, listening to these people, neither able nor daring to contribute to the conversation. My mind became stupified; again and again I felt I was perspiring heavily; a sort of paralysis kept coming over me. (D, 182)

In order to stand up against boredom, man does cruel things and enjoys them. He invents stories about himself, he tells lies about himself and others, and he tortures and torments himself and others. (D, 145) Thus, for instance, Cleopatra enjoyed sticking golden pins into the breasts of her slaves, delighting in their screams and writhings. (D, 151)

Because he fears boredom, man rejects the crystal palace, for the absolute order of it would eliminate his creative activity. In a world in which everything will be planned reasonably, life will become extremely boring: there will be no suffering, no doubts, no denial, no chaos nor destruction. (D, 161-62) In such a world even the golden pins will be welcomed to escape boredom. (D, 152)

7.

The uprootedness of both protagonists, the lack of love and family ties account for the minor roles women play in both novels. Like the male characters the female characters, too,

are imbued with negative features.

The judge's wife is stupid, hypocritical, and adulterous. (B, III, 18-20) The gypsy woman, Kreuzgang's mother, is a hypocritical rogue who defends the exposure of her child pretending that she wanted to give him a christian upbringing. (B, XVI, 137) Ines, the mad Spaniard's sister-in-law, who indirectly causes the family tragedy, is indifferent and cold. She is like a statue, lifeless and detached. (B, IV, V) Her isolation equals death, for she is unable to conquer it with love.

The two women who really encroached upon the protagonists' lives were the mad Ophelia and the prostitute Liza. Both are outcasts of society, both are irrational, but, at the same time, they are the only figures in the novels who are susceptible to true feelings and therefore capable, at least temporarily, to stand up against the pessimistic nihilistic Weltanschauung of their male counterparts.

Seeking her identity, which she lost while playing Shakespeare, Ophelia says: "Ich möchte gern mich auf einen Augenblick mit mir selbst unterreden, um zu erfahren, ob ich selbst liebe, oder nur mein Name Ophelia--und ob die Liebe selbst etwas ist, oder nur ein Name." (B, XIV, 120)

Dying, Ophelia finally rids herself of the role. Yet she keeps one sentence of it which leads to the self: "Ach, ich liebe dich! das ist die letzte Rede im Stücke, und sie allein will ich aus meiner Rolle zu behalten suchen--es war die schönste Stelle! Das uebrige mögen sie begraben!" (B,

XIV, 123)

And although Kreuzgang tries to convince her that there will be nothing after death, Ophelia now knows that her love is eternal.

Liza lost her identity when she entered the brothel and became a mere object dependent on the grace of the madam and her customers. To please the customers, Liza had to put on a mask to hide her true feelings. Yet the love letter she received from a medical student whom she had met at a party, and the underground man's touching speech nourished new irrational hopes in her heart and helped her, at least for a short time, to find her own self.

Her disillusionment with the underground man throws her back into the brothel. It actually equals Ophelia's death, yet the optimistic outlook is missing, for there will be only despair and anxiety in Liza's future life.

Neither protagonist was willing to identify himself with his fellowmen, nor were the latter willing to tolerate the protagonist's individuality. The lack of communication and mutual understanding evoked a train of tension which intensified the protagonists' isolation and uprootedness and lead toward total rejection and alienation.

CHAPTER V

THE PROTAGONISTS AND SOCIETY

1.

Man does not live in a vacuum; he depends both in his material and spiritual existence on the external world; he is not only an individual or a cosmopolitan, but also a member of a society and a citizen of a state. (B, XV, 132) As such, his self-expression is subject to certain restrictions, for he has to submit himself to the external norms of the social hierarchy in which he lives. Moreover, he is expected to contribute to the development and prosperity of his society. Should he fail to do so, society will reject him or treat him as an outcast.

Heightened individualism and conceptual instability, which produced the cleft between the protagonists and their fellowmen, also prevented Kreuzgang and the underground man from agreeing with their societies unquestioningly and from conforming to their postulations. The underground man, for instance, declares that he could not make himself nasty or friendly, crooked or honest, a hero or an insect just to please society. As an intelligent man he could not turn himself into anything, because only a fool can make anything he wants out of himself. (D, 135) Yet, there were moments when

he desperately longed for a vocation, a career, i.e. a position in society, so that he could be clearly characterized, with something to be said about him. (D, 147)

Both Kreuzgang and the underground man observed the imprint of incoherence, immorality, and cruelty in their societies and perceived that they could not exercise their personalities under the given circumstances. Neither of the protagonists was willing to take the state of affairs for granted or tailor the truth they saw to suit the conventions of those in academic and political ascendance. Rather both tried to adapt their own principles to their societies and act according to them. Not being able to reconcile the incompatibilities and to establish normal social relations with reasonable methods and moral integrity, both protagonists began to consider life in society meaningless and unbearable and began to develop rather hostile attitudes toward the existing social and political institutions. They became rebels who repeatedly pointed at the major cracks in the fabric of society; they indulged in hairsplitting criticism and began to detest and hate everybody and everything. "...may my right arm wither if I contribute a single brick to that apartment of yours," says the underground man referring to the structure of society. (D, 163)

2.

Both protagonists long for a society which would interfere

as little as possible with the freedom of its citizens. Yet what they discover is that society abuses and enslaves men. It does not tolerate bold actions and ideas nor does it permit deviations from the set up social patterns. If man does not integrate, if he tries to manifest his own will, if he dares to point at the immorality and absurdity of the existing social order, he soon will be expelled from society and doomed to inertia or even death, like the town's poet in his tower. (B, VIII, 68)

For centuries good and reasonable men, sages and humanitarians, tried to live constantly good and sensible lives, serving as human torches to light the path for their societies, to prove that it can be done. Yet, sooner or later, they faltered under the blow of society (D, 169) and had to give up. (D, 157) For society fears that "Menschen dieses Schlages, wenn sie empor kämen, würden feindseelig sich äussern, und als eine Pest, ein Erdbeben oder Gewitter unter das Volk fahren, und ein gutes Stück von dem Planeten aufreiben und zu Pulver verbrennen." (B, VII, 60)

To protect itself against these Titans, society throws mountains over them under which they can only shake themselves in fury, (B, VII, 60) without harming the social structure. Such a mountain is the madhouse where society is concentrating those whose ideas do not harmonize with its fundamentals. (B, IX) In the madhouse man may freely utter his ideas, he may rage against the social order, yet he will never endanger the existence of society, for nobody will take him seriously. Thus

one understands Kreuzgang's consternation about the verdict of the court delivering him over to the madhouse:

Hätten sie mir als Strafe das Wippen, das Trillhaus, den spanischen Mantel, Schmäuchen, Riem-schneiden oder gar das Aufreissen des Leibes, welches in Japan für sehr ehrenvoll gehalten wird, zuerkannt, mich würde es gefreut haben, gegen die Bosheit die der erste Rechtsfreund und Vorsizer verübte, als er den Ausspruch that, dass mir schlechterdings das Verbrechen nicht zugerechnet werden könnte, indem ich zu den mente captis zu zählen sei und mein Vergehen als die Folge eines partiellen Wahnsinns betrachtet werden müsse, weshalb man mich ohne weiteres an das Tollhaus abzuliefern habe. (B, VII, 65)

Also the ugly, miserable mousehole of the underground man may be regarded as a mountain imposed by society upon one of its inconvenient members.

Another mountain is the censorship and the indifference of laws which smother every flame which seeks to flare up. (B, XIII, 112) There are various edicts which are issued for the sole purpose to confiscate criticism in advance in the heads of the citizens. The puppeteer is the victim of such an edict. (B, XV, 131)

Thus, among its citizens, society prefers good, useful machines to bold spirits; it values hands and feet higher than heads, for the state has need only of one single head, but of a hundred arms. (B, XIII, 112)

Notes from the Underground broaches similar ideas. It turns against the crystal palace in which everything will be set up by mathematic formulas and men will be dehumanized and demoted to unmarked entities. Men would function like ants whose only goal and duty would be to build the anthill called

society. (D, 160) Although the ants sometimes form great assemblies and almost behave as if something were being settled by them, they are nothing else but the tools of society.

What is really bad is that most people do not notice that they are used as hammers and tongs and do in no way suffer any impairment in their immortality on this account. (B, XII, 103)

The social hierarchy, strictly observed by the state, is another means of dehumanization. Kreuzgang compares society with an onion in which one layer is inserted into another down to the smallest one, where man functions as the least important part of the social organism. (B, IX, 77) Or he likens society to Holland, traversed by canals and ditches, "worin alle menschlichen Fähigkeiten geschickt abgeleitet und vertheilt werden, damit nicht zu fürchten steht, dass sie auf einmal in zu grosser Vereinigung das Ganze überschwemmen möchten." (B, XII, 102)

Society organizes not only man's physical world; it breaks into his metaphysical sphere as well. It builds into the great temple of heaven "kleine Tempel mit kleinern Kuppeln und nachgeöffneten Sternen, und in diese wieder noch kleinere Kapellen und Tabernakel, bis sie zuletzt das Allerheiligste ganz en miniature wie in einen Ring eingefasst hat, da es doch ringsum gross und mächtig um Berge und Wälder schwebt, ...dass die Völker davor niederfallen." (B, IX, 77) Yet society is not satisfied with this boxing. It continues to pack religion into smaller folk and tribal religions which divide

themselves yet anew. (B, IX, 77)

In this well articulated society man cannot function as an individual, but merely as a member of a certain social stratum. He can act and perform only within the scope of duties and prerogatives granted to his stratum by the state and society. Profanation is not tolerated and entails rather unpleasant and often harmful consequences for the violator.

Kreuzgang's entire life consists of such violations and clashes with the social hierarchy. As a young man he insulted a high official with his satire and had to go to jail. (B, VII, 60-61) Then he interfered with the church, (B, II, 13-14) the courts of law, and the censorship, and was sent to the madhouse. (B, VII, 63-65) Here his experiment to establish Plato's republic with the fools and to confront society with a state of ideal values provoked the indignation of society, and he was told to quit his cubicle as punishment. (B, XIV, 114, 122; XV, 125) Finally, he tried his hand at a reform of the entire society. This attempt deprived him of the freedom of speech and demoted him to an automaton. (B, VI)

The underground man, too, is aware of the restricting role society plays in man's life. He is tormented by the mere idea of it and driven mad with rage. Nevertheless, for some time he, too, adhered to all external conventions. He stuck to the ordinary and abhorred all signs of eccentricity in himself. (D, 169) To prove his social status, the underground man boasted in a dissipated, nochalant air to the head of his department about the terrific time he had at the Hotel

de Paris, seeing a former classmate, a terribly spoiled rake, who came from a distinguished, wealthy family, and who was making a brilliant career, although we know that their farewell was a complete disaster. (D, 223)

At the end, however, the underground man admits that he cannot be good because society will not let him be good. (D, 238)

Man is caught up in his social stratum and it is extremely hard to achieve an advancement in social status. This requires good connections and strong support rather than knowledge, abilities, and courage. "Wohl dem der Konnexionen hat," says Kreuzgang after having succeeded in gaining entrance to the minister's servant and with his help to the minister himself. Only after that he was elevated higher and higher on the state ladder and passed from one hand to another, up to the top rank. (B, XV, 132) All these efforts and prostrations were necessary just to be given hopes for nightwatchmanship.

The underground man, too, notices that there is no success without connections, (D, 184) and he refers to a very important person by whom he had been strongly recommended. (D, 178)

To the societies of both protagonists applies the utterances of the epigone that offices, honors, decorations, and stars are all distributed even earlier than the man is born who will wear and occupy them. (B, XII, 100)

Only death disintegrates the social hierarchy and

assembles kings and beggars in a fraternal company. They lie peacefully side by side below in the earth, in a state of the greatest freedom and equality. (B, XVI, 133)

3.

In both novels, society does not protect and help its members; rather, it develops cruel attitudes toward them. "So liebt z.B. eine Affenmutter noch heutiges Tages ihre Kinder mehr als manche Fürstenmutter," says Hanswurst in the prologue to the tragedy Der Mensch. (B, VIII, 73)

Society tolerates and exercises all kinds of crimes. The law permits society "ungestraft erwürgen, mit dem Schwerdte um sich schlagen, mit Keulen niederhauen, verbrennen, säcken, lebendig begraben, viertheilen und foltern," all gross offenses which one would never take from anyone else except society. (B, VII, 63)

All social strata love blood beyond measure, "und wenn sie es auch nicht selbst vergiessen, so mögen sie es doch für ihr Leben überall in Bildern, Gedichten und im Leben selbst gern fliessen sehen; in grossen Schlachtstücken am liebsten." (B, VII, 61-62) All those who obviously work in death's cause, such as fencing masters, gun manufacturers, powder producers, ministers of war, doctors, etc., rank among the most useful members of the state. (B, VII, 62)

The underground man alludes to the bloodshed and cruelties which happened during the civil war in the United States

and during the Schleswig-Holstein conflict. The bloodthirsty tyrants are not even overly conspicuous, because there are too many of them and they practice on a much larger scale than ever before. Thus they have become too familiar to men. Their methods, however, have become so horribly bloody that the Attilas and Stenka Razins and all the cruelties of barbarous times have been pushed into the background. (D, 151)

In a pungent tone the underground man adds that life in society has become rather monotonous. For "they fight and fight and fight; they are fighting now, they fought before, and they will fight in the future." (D, 157)

The state does not hesitate to invent and apply cruel methods to attain the most splendid achievements from its members. Kreuzgang meditates: "Welche weise Einrichtung des Staats daher, die Bürger--wie die Hunde die man zu Künstlern ausbilden will--periodisch hungern zu lassen! Für eine Mahlzeit schlagen die Dichter wie die Nachtigallen, bilden die Philosophen Systeme, richten die Richter, heilen die Aerzte, heulen die Pfaffen, hämmern, klopfen, zimmern, ackern die Arbeiter und der Staat frisst sich zur höchsten Kultur hinauf." (B, XII, 104)

Society deprives man not only of his personal freedom, it also robs him of material values. It has usurped the natural law and has divided and carved up every handbreadth of earth so ultimately that one could find not even a little plot to settle on. (B, VII, 61) It has seized all the free common wealth of nature, including the birds below heaven and

the fish in the water, and is unwilling to grant a kernel of grain without good payment in cash. (B, VII, 61) The princes have taken the law of the jungle from the poor devils and exercise it on a grand scale, considering it their royal prerogative. (B, VII, 61)

Yet, nowhere else but in the madhouse is man permitted to deliberate about this injustice. (B, IX, 84) For in a society which consists only of thieves, the honest man is considered a rogue who deserves hanging, "in einem ganzen Lande von Hinkenden wird eine einzige Ausnahme als ein seltsames verschrobenes *lusus naturae* verlacht." (B, V, 68)

4.

Both protagonists share the opinion that society is immoral because it does not treat men as human beings. It is the rank, the career, the success that count, not man's personal qualities and values. There are ample examples in both novels which sufficiently illustrate that hats are more important than heads, and clothes worth more than the man who wears them.

Society does not promote morality; rather it stimulates egoism, for it forces man to seek for a higher career and better clothing, in order to demonstrate his success and impress others. Instead of helping man to develop his character and adhere to ethical principles, society transforms him into a hypocrite, lying and fawning to please his superiors, and

not daring to spit.

The underground man had already noticed this attitude among his schoolmates in the boarding school. They were stupid and did not grasp a damned thing, yet they already admired success and dreamed of secure jobs. The underground man realized that their attitude was largely due to the bad examples that they had had before their eyes from early childhood; (D, 189) in other words, he made society responsible for their depravity.

The underground man repeatedly revolted against the immorality, injustice, and corruptness of his society, but even he had sometimes to submit to the social order. Thus, preparing the encounter with the officer, who had allegedly insulted him, the underground man had no other choice but buying himself a fine shirt, new gloves and a beaver collar for his overcoat, for he knew that he had to be dressed well, in order to put himself on an equal footing in the eyes of the society. (D, 177)

The underground man also understood that his former schoolmates were bound to despise him for his mediocre career in the service and his poor clothes which in their eyes was a seal of limited abilities and lack of importance. (D, 183) He also suspected that they were afraid of exchanging greetings with him in the street, for it might have compromised them. (D, 185) He scorned people for this, he tried to disregard the social order; still at the farewell party for Zverkov he felt deeply embarrassed because of his filthy trousers and wretched career. He also felt embarrassed when

Liza caught him in the midst of his poverty, for his outfit as well as his mousehole was not the apt image of a hero he wanted to be even in the eyes of a prostitute. (D, 233-238)

The laws of society do not teach or protect morality; they are merely directed against bad consequences. Thus, for instance, the mad Spaniard could not be indicted for he had not commissioned the triple murder in definite and express words, and the death of his brother, his sister-in-law and her page was to be reckoned against him at the most as an intellectual action. (D, 38-39) Likewise Zverkov could not be indicted and did not harm his career when he declared that he would exercise his droit du seigneur and not leave a single virgin among the peasants of his estate without his attention. (D, 184)

Since the law did not assist morality, the young adulterer who had an affair with the judge's wife did not hesitate to dismiss morality entirely. (B, III, 21)

Kreuzgang's speech announcing the Day of Judgment is directed against the hypocrisy and immorality of society. It encompasses the whole range of society, all strata, from the highest to the lowest. And every single stratum and profession receives its share of sarcastic treatment. The princes and rulers are accused of paying with people instead of with coins, and are charged with engaging in the most shameful slave trade with death. (B, VI, 52) The statesmen are reproached for having reduced the human race to mechanical principles. "Wie wollt ihr, da wir jezt in einen Geisterstaat

überzugehen im Begriffe sind, jene ausgeplünderten Menschen-
gestalten placiren, von denen ihr gleichsam nur den abge-
streiften Balg, indem ihr den Geist in ihnen ertödtetet, zu
benutzen wusstet," asks Kreuzgang. (B, IV, 52)

Of all professions the watchman holds a rather acid at-
titude toward jurists and theologians. This already becomes
evident in the first three night watches where the case of
the dying atheist and the soldier who had killed the disguised
priest is broached. The priests are accused of stupefying
people, the jurists are presented as brainless officials, and
the entire affair climaxes in the ridiculous controversy "ob
man gegen den Soldat criminaliter verfahren, indem er einen
Todschatlag begangen, oder ihn vielmehr kanonisiren müsse, weil
der Erschlagene der Teufel." (B, III, 16) The cuckolded
judge signing death sentences is likened to a heartless mari-
onette, a mechanical death machine. Watching him Kreuzgang
exclaims: "Beim Himmel hätte ich die Wahl zwischen beiden,
lieber wäre ich der lebende Sünder, als dieser todte Gerechte."
(B, III, 19) In the seventh night watch Kreuzgang completely
dehumanizes the judges speaking about "ein halb Duzend mit
den Gerechtigkeitsmasken vor dem Antlize, worunter sie ihre
eigene Schalksphysiognomie und zweite Hogarthsgesichtshälfte
verbargen." (B, VII, 62)

In his speech Kreuzgang finally assails the theologians
for having instituted a "Mördergrube" and for having churned
apart and forever torn asunder the beautiful estate of brother-
hood and family. (B, VI, 52)

He then turns to both of them with the following criticism: "Ihr Juristen, ihr Halbmenschen, die ihr eigentlich mit den Theologen nur eine Person ausmachen solltet, statt dessen euch aber in einer verwünschten Stunde von ihnen trenntet um Leiber hinzurichten, wie jene Geister. Ach nur auf dem Rabensteine reicht ihr Brüderseelen vor dem armen Sünder auf dem Gerichtsstuhle euch nur noch die Hände und der geistliche und weltliche Henker erscheinen würdig neben einander!" (B, VI, 52)

Furthermore, Kreuzgang reproaches the philosophers with having not said anything more important than that they are capable of saying nothing; and the scholars with having disintegrated and dissipated the human spirit. (B, VI, 52)

Within the social hierarchy the higher stratum always oppresses the lower. But as soon as the lower stratum advances to a higher rank it will do the same thing. There is no fairness, no respect of each other's dignity. The underground man observed these attitudes while strolling along Nevsky Avenue following the officer he hates: "He went there too, mostly on holidays. And, although he scurried out of the way of high dignitaries and generals, as I did, he literally walked over people like me and even people who were quite a bit better." (D, 176) The underground man considers it his greatest triumph that he finally banged against his adversary without yielding an inch, thus, in public, putting himself on an equal social footing with the officer. (D, 179) However, the situation immediately changes when the underground man

deals with Liza or his servant Apollon. Now he is the higher rank and he loses no time in exercising his power.

To both societies applies Kreuzgang's comparison of society with a bad village concert in which merely from time to time, a Mozartian voice is engaged. (B, VIII, 68)

5.

In both novels the harmony between the protagonist and his society is disturbed, because the critical individualism of the protagonist clashes with the leveling and restricting forces of the society. In both novels the protagonists are aware of the discrepancies between their existential possibilities and their actual performance in society.

Yet what can an intelligent man do in a society which is corrupt, immoral, hostile, and cruel? The underground man delineates three objectives. First, he may, against his better judgment, accept society with its inanity and become a spineless creature (D, 135), a coward and slave (D, 169). Yet, since he cannot keep out conscience, he will loathe himself for this deliberate self-deception. (D, 103, 146) Secondly, he may continue in his never ending struggle for truth and evoke further clashes with society. Thirdly, he may realize that there is no remedy for his predicament and, as a result, indulge in absolute inertia. (D, 142-143, 145)

Of both protagonists only the underground man was able to free himself completely from the bondage of society because

of a small fortune he inherited from a distant relative. To put the finishing touch on his alienation, he quits his job, dismisses his valet, and retires into his mousehole where he remains in absolute inertia for twenty years.

On the other hand, Kreuzgang still tries to reconcile individual freedom with the life in the community. However, society gradually forces him into the underground. At the end, Kreuzgang's inner alienation from society is absolute, yet, in order to survive, he makes concessions and accepts a job which is far below his intellectual capacities. He turns into a passive spectator who refuses to assume responsibility for the happenings around him.

CHAPTER VI

NARRATIVES AND NARRATORS

This chapter does not aim at an exhaustive structural analysis of the two novels for a large part of the scholarship already deals with this question. Also a complete structural interpretation would go beyond the scope of this presentation. Rather, I shall restrict myself to pointing out the basic structural similarities and dissimilarities of Nachtwachen and Notes from the Underground, and stress those formal principles which underlie the nihilistic character of the novels.

The two novels will be approached from three angles: First, from the semantic point of view which shall include the objective contents of the novels, i.e., the semantically self-contained narrative situations which are used by the authors to build up the narratives. Thus, motifs will only be included if they function as self-contained units and sustain the dynamics of the narrative.

Secondly, the novels shall be examined from the structural point of view. The arrangement of the objective contents, the hierarchy of the self-contained narrative situations, their chronological grouping, and their functions within the flow of the narratives shall be scrutinized.

Thirdly, this chapter shall deal with the function of the narrators of the two novels, their relation to the author and to the given objective contents.

1.

From the semantic point of view we have to begin with a negative statement, namely, that neither of the novels has a really unifying, central plot. Both novels consist of various rather heterogeneous semantic narrative units which, at the first glance, reveal little coherence.

The only narrative situation in Nachtwachen which functions as a continuous central unit is Kreuzgang's biography. He was born on Christmas Eve. His mother was a gypsy woman, his father an alchemist, and his godfather was the devil himself. (B, XVI) A shoemaker found the boy buried in a casket and he brought him up as a shoemaker-poet with Jakob Böhme and Hans Sachs as his guides. (B, IV) Kreuzgang himself became a poet, yet his poetry was filled with satirical slander and provoked the dissatisfaction of society which finally forced him into the madhouse. (B, VII) There Kreuzgang fell in love with another inmate who died in childbirth. (B, IX, XIV) He was expelled from the madhouse and joined a travelling marionette show which was soon broken up because of supposedly subversive activities. (B, XV) Kreuzgang becomes a night watchman. Because he had alarmed the town with his announcement of

the Day of Judgment, his horn is taken away from him. (B, VI) Now he observes with varying degrees of involvement the happenings around the town.

Besides the protagonist's biography Nachtwachen encompasses two other lengthy narratives. The first one is the unhappy love story of the mad Spaniard Don Juan who causes the death of his brother, the brother's wife, and her page. This story is told in two versions. (B, IV, V)

The second narrative is the story of the blind boy's unhappy love. (B, XI) This is actually the complement and explanation of another self-contained narrative situation, namely, the burial alive of the Ursuline nun who gave birth to the blind boy's child. (B, X)

In addition to these three lengthy narrative situations, Nachtwachen includes a large number of shorter narrative situations and episodes which, as a rule, either complement Kreuzgang's biography or serve as illustrations of the general moral, ethic and aesthetic decline which the watchman reveals on his strolls through the nightly town.

There are three episodes involving different poets. The first poet is so remote from reality and becomes so frustrated with man and society that he hangs himself in order to maintain himself as an individual and to preserve his integrity. (B, VIII) The second poet moves in the opposite direction, he becomes the slave of public taste. Unsuccessful with his own poetry and unable to conceive the true artistic spirit of great poets, he seeks success by wearing Goethe's hat,

Lessing's wig, and in the evening Schiller's nightcap. He also learns to cry like Kotzebue and to sneeze like Tieck. (B, XII) The third poet takes the middle road. He raves about writing a powerful poem that would awake the dead and answer man's existential cry. Yet realizing his own limitations he decides to give up poetry and to try his luck in prose and drama. (B, XVI)

The decline of histrionics in an age without distinct feelings is referred to in the episode about the actor who at the cemetery practices suicide as a part of his new role. (B, XII)

The antithesis to this episode is the presentation of the tragic fate of the puppeteer who committed suicide after his show had been closed and his marionettes confiscated by the local police. (B, XV) In this true tragicomedy of life, in which the puppeteer plays the protagonist, role and actor coalesce into one inseparable unity.

Man's failure to understand art is broached in the episode in the museum which Kreuzgang calls "ein Invalidenhaus unsterblicher Götter und Helden." Since man lost contact with the spirit of the age which created these gods and cultures, he can admire merely the material relics. Thus Kreuzgang encourages the dilettante to kiss the bottom of the Venus of Medici, for in modern man's concept this part is perceived as the most artistic and the most precious one. (B, XIII)

The loss of religious belief and the functional decay of the church are best illustrated in the episode of the dying

atheist. (B, I, II, and part of III) He is surrounded by his grieving family and a raging priest who roars threats of hell and damnation into the dying man's ear. There is not a single word of love, of God's mercy and forgiveness. The scene gradually turns into a grotesque masquerade. Exploiting popular superstition, three priests disguised as devils try to kidnap the dead atheist's body in order to save the vanishing belief in the devil. They are confronted with the dead man's brother, a simple soldier, who guards the coffin. He is not affected by rational doubts; he believes in God and his own strength, and is, therefore, not afraid to fight the devil and to kill him, whatever his form may be.

The soldier is the counterpart to the atheist's children who are still innocent and do not discern between good and evil, life and death: "Sie können sich den Tod noch nicht denken in ihrem frischen Leben." (B, I. 7)

There is, finally, the young wife of the atheist who fears death, the priest, and the devil, but hopes in the redeeming power of her prayer and love. (B, II, 12)

The only calm person in this turmoil is the dying atheist. He faces death without fear, for he is convinced that there is no devil and that there will be nothing after death: "Er schaut blass und ruhig in das leere nichts, wohin er nach einer Stunde einzugehen gedenkt, um den traumlosen Schlaf auf immer zu schlafen." (B, I, 6-7)

The decline of moral values is broached in two episodes dealing with adultery and unfaithful love. The first is the

seduction scene of the judge's wife, (B, III) the second the burial-wedding episode in which the bride and the bridegroom pass by the casket of the groom's former sweetheart who had died of a broken heart. (B, X)

These episodes are in direct opposition to the one which deals with the beggar who freezes to death dreaming of a happy life and love, hiding a lock of his wife's hair under the rags on his breast. (B, X)

The social criticism of the novel reaches its high point in the episode in the madhouse (B, IX) and in Kreuzgang's speech announcing the Day of Judgment. (B, VI)

Besides the self-contained narratives and episodes we find a number of often repeated motifs. The most important are the storm, the dream, the theater, the mask, the marionette, the cemetery, the statue, and madness.

Notes from the Underground does not have such a unifying central semantic narrative situation as Kreuzgang's biography in Nachtwachen. This enhances the impression of fragmentation to such a degree that, at first, one might think that the two parts of the novel have nothing to do with each other whatsoever. However, looking at them closely one realizes that the first part is an abstract philosophical summary of the second part. In other words, the second part is the practical prerequisite of the first one. The first part is so highly condensed that it leaves no room for the development of true semantic narrative situations, not even short episodes. The conglomeration of motifs in the first part

pursues one single goal, namely, to demonstrate man's struggle against the predominance of reason. Here one finds rebellion against the restraining laws of nature and reason, the principle of causality, the order of a society symbolized by the crystal palace, the ant hill as the ultimate goal of man's endeavors, and against the utopian utilitarianism. Furthermore, Dostoevsky broaches the idea that man does not become more reasonable under the impact of civilization, rather he becomes more cruel and irrational, and repeatedly acts against his interests just to prove his whimsical free will.

The second part of Notes from the Underground consists of three semantically self-contained narratives. They are: (a) the underground man's struggle with the officer, (b) his encounter with his former schoolmates culminating in a farewell party for Zverkov, and (c) the underground man's relation to Liza.

In the first narrative situation the underground man meets a tall officer while pursuing his masochistic inclinations. After he has spent the night in lechery and depravity, he wants to be thrown out of a tavern window. Yet the officer moves him out of the way without even noticing him. This is the most humiliating thing that could possibly happen to the underground man. The situation may be compared with the watchman's transfer to the madhouse. In both cases the protagonists were dehumanized and treated like objects. Following this humiliating experience the underground man tries to start a quarrel with the officer every evening but at the

decisive moment he always backs out since he is actually a coward in action. Yet he does not give up. Through the years he learns the officer's name and he follows him to the place where he lives. He hates him more and more; he even writes him a letter demanding an apology and hinting at the possibility of a duel. But he never mails this letter, he only tortures himself to the point of insanity. Yet, after having decided to give up his plan, the underground man suddenly finds himself only a few steps away from the officer. With closed eyes he dashes against him as an equal. He finally gets his revenge.

In the second situation the underground man insists on participating at a dinner given by three of his former schoolmates for a fourth friend, Zverkov, who has belittled him ever since school because of his unsuccessful career. Again the underground man is trying to force his own will. He cannot really afford the dinner and, moreover, he despises Zverkov and the others deeply. At the dinner the underground man makes a fool out of himself. Failing to insult Zverkov in order to regain his self-respect, the underground man again succumbs to his own inability to act.

Finally, the underground man ends up in a brothel where he meets Liza. The underground man feels superior to her, but dazzles her with signs of compassion. He exposes to Liza the inanity of her present life and encourages her to change it at once. Liza is close to breaking down and crying. The underground man, panic-stricken by realizing the unexpected effect

of his words, asks her to visit him at his home which she promises to do. Yet the underground man is afraid of Liza's visit, for he is insecure. When Liza finally arrives, the underground man is at his lowest, shrieking hysterically at his servant because of the wages. The anticlimax to his high-flown speech in the brothel causes the underground man to be ashamed and confused but also furious, because Liza found him in such an antiheroic situation. After Liza had told him of her decision to leave the brothel the underground man tries to humiliate her for he himself has been humiliated. Liza, however, understands the situation and his state of mind, and both end up in each other's arms sobbing. At this point, the underground man suddenly shifts the ground and puts into action his evil, despicable will. In order to insult Liza he gives her a five-ruble note. He regrets his action when he discovers that Liza left the money on the table; but it is too late. The underground man ends up asking himself: "What is better-- cheap happiness or lofty suffering?" (D, 242)

Among the motifs of the second part the most conspicuous one is that of the wet snow which functions as the heading of the second part of the Notes. It is the symbol of moral decay and of the spiritual underground devoid of human relationship. Wet snow is falling in the underground man's story which describes the burial of a prostitute; wet snow is covering his path to the brothel; (D, 205) and wet snow, finally, is the answer to his search for Liza. (D, 242)

In both novels night functions as the temporal frame of

most of the happenings. Yet, night is no longer the mystical time of love and heightened perception. Rather it is the symbol of extreme isolation, the time of vices and moral turpitude, and also the time when strong truth can be told.

2.

Both novels are written in prose and in the first person. Since the narrators sell their own life stories and experiences, one would expect that the narrative situations and episodes center around the protagonists. However, reading the novels for the first time, one gets the impression that the semantic narrative units resemble a mosaic composed of tiny pieces, that there is no aesthetic unity at all and that the episodes and motifs are haphazardly juxtaposed.

Upon scrutiny of the critical studies by Michel, Schultz, and Sölle-Nipperdey⁵² about the structure of Bonaventura's sixteen nightwatches, Sammons summarizes their negative opinions in the following way: "...the materials presented in the Nachtwachen are a chaotic, uncontrolled potpourri; the author has written down anything that came into his head in the order

⁵²Michel, p. XVII. Franz Schultz, Der Verfasser der Nachtwachen von Bonaventura: Untersuchungen zur deutschen Romantik (Berlin, 1909), pp. 125-26. Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey, Untersuchungen zur Struktur der Nachtwachen von Bonaventura, Palaestra, No. 230 (Göttingen, 1959), pp. 12-13.

in which it occurred to him, and the division into night-watches, their order and indeed their number is a matter of chance and not of artistic intent."⁵³

A similar negative criticism was expressed by the Russian critic N. K. Mikhaylovsky about Notes from the Underground. He, too, thought that we have to deal with a score of scenes which failed to form a natural sequence, and that there is no coherence whatsoever between the first part of the novel and the second one.⁵⁴

Yet, as we look at the novels more closely, we discover that there is an organizing principle in the helter-skelter arrangement of the material. In Nachtwachen all narrative situations, episodes, and motifs are arranged in the manner that they gradually lead towards the protagonist's ultimate gloomy revelation, namely, that there is nothing behind the mask of life, that our existence ends in nothingness, and that all our endeavors are meaningless.

Sammons proved convincingly that the plot of Nachtwachen does not move linearly but that the semantic units occur in five cycles which are, however, "neither completely systematic nor rigidly consistent." Sammons further elaborates:

These five catastrophes--the Spaniard's tale of love and crime, the suicide of the poet, the young man whose beloved is buried alive, the tragic end of the watchman's moment of happiness in the madhouse, and the final outburst of total nihilism in

⁵³Sammons, p. 32.

⁵⁴A. A. Belkin, ed., F. M. Doestoevskii v russkoi kritike (Moscow, 1956), p. 317.

the cemetery--are the points of demarcation for the structure of the Nachtwachen. Each time the catastrophe is told, it is as though the author had taken a breath, and we find ourselves once again in the relatively harmless realm of satire, as the process begins anew, but each time we are increasingly in the shadow of the preceding horror, the satire becomes less occasional and more existential in impact, the comedy more hollow, until finally the responses of the reader are crushed under the increasing weight of the nihilism and he is able to comprehend the outburst in the concluding chapter.⁵⁵

In addition to these five circularly moving subplots, one cannot overlook the fact that there is a definite clustering of semantic units which pivot around merely physical circumstances, and those which disclose more serious problems, such as literary criticism, ontological, moral, and social questions.

In Notes from the Underground one detects a similar ascending order in the arrangement of the semantic units. The first part includes those motifs which the underground man needs to corroborate his reflections about free will. These are: the stone wall, the crystal palace, the ant hill, the piano key, inertia, the idea of utilitarianism, and the perfectibility of man.

The author skillfully adds one detail after another, gradually disclosing the seriousness of the situation, the consequences of which the reader faces in the second part of the novel. Here the happenings pivot around three main semantic narrative situations: the underground man's encounter

⁵⁵Sammons, p. 38.

with the officer, his humiliation at the farewell party given to the parting Zverkov, and the underground man's duel of will with Liza.

The sequence of the two parts of the novel is in psychological-rational interaction. Psychologically the narrative proceeds from the first part to the second; chronologically and rationally part two leads back to the reflections of part one.⁵⁶

As in Nachtwachen, the arrangement of the semantic units enhances the tension of the narrative flow leading to the climax of the novel and to the very bottom of the protagonist's existence, namely, the cognition that life is worth nothing, that it is a stinking hole in which man is caught by virtue of his nature, and that the only thing man can do is to reject and annihilate every manifestation of life and indulge in absolute inertia.

The graduation of the materials in both novels and the climax at the very end of each novel explain why the family backgrounds as the key to the understanding of the protagonists' characters are given only at the end of the novels.

Neither novel observes a chronological order. In Notes from the Underground the second part precedes the first part by sixteen years. The three pivotal events of the second part, however, are chronologically juxtaposed.

⁵⁶See also Matlaw, pp. 101-112.

Considering Kreuzgang's biography the central plot of the novel, the chronological arrangement of the sixteen night-watches, as proven by Sammons, is the following: XVI, IV, VII, IX, XIV, XV, VI, I, I, III, part of IV, V, VIII, X, XI, XII, XIII, and again part of XVI.⁵⁷

The above arrangement reveals a very interesting fact, namely, that the last nightwatch actually represents the unifying element of the entire novel. It points back to the very beginning of Kreuzgang's story and, at the same time, it progresses to the very end answering Kreuzgang's quest for the meaning and the essence of life with a threefold "nothing."

Neither of the novels gives a solution to the problems dealt with in the narrative situations and episodes. Nor do they suggest how to overcome the dilemma of modern man. Thus both novels produce the impression of a fragment, a torso. However, from a letter that Dostoevsky wrote to his brother Mikhail, (March 26, 1964) we learn that the author had deduced from the underground man's existence the necessity of faith. However, the censor deleted this passage.

3.

Both novels are first-person novels, thus the protagonists function as the narrators and reveal themselves to the

⁵⁷Sammons, p. 34.

reader as the figures experiencing most of the conveyed events.

In Notes from the Underground the underground man as the first-person narrator plays a central role in the actions of the second part, whereas in the first part he yields completely to reflection and functions more as a commentator.

In the first part of the novel the narrating self is precisely fixed in space and time, i.e., the narrating process and the narrative coalesce. In the second part the narrating self reconstructs events which are separated from the first part by seventeen years.

In Nachtwachen Kreuzgang as the narrating self plays a more complex role. He narrates events in which he functions in a central active role, e.g. the Day of Judgment; (B, VI) or acts in a more peripheral and passive role, e.g. the adulterous scene (B, III) or the scene with the dying atheist. (B, I-II) Furthermore, he comments on actions which he only witnessed or observed, e.g. the burial of the nun. (B, X) Finally, his narrating self presents itself in here-and-now actions as well as in recreated events, e.g. Kreuzgang's biography. (B, IV, VII, IX, XIV, XV)

Then there are cases in which Kreuzgang straddles the fence between the first-person novel and the authorial novel, i.e. he obliterates the identity of the protagonist and the narrator. This is the case when Kreuzgang, for instance, interrupts his biography by rendering the observations made about him by his foster father which are also submitted in the first person.

Kreuzgang's version of the mad Spaniard's story is a complete shift to an authorial narrative in the third person. The latter objectified his tragedy by referring to himself in the third person and disguising the whole event as a puppet show. Kreuzgang renders the story which the Spaniard confided to him once again in the third person.

Finally, some narrative situations and episodes are told by other first-person narrators. These include: the farewell letter of the town's poet, (B, VIII) the prologue of Hanswurst to the tragedy Der Mensch (B, VIII) the meditations of the mad Creator, (B, IX) the story of the stranger in the cloak, (B, XI) and the complaint of the epigone. (B, XII)

All these situations are, however, introduced by Kreuzgang. The phrases he is using for this purpose, such as "das was ich noch von dem Manuscripte mittheilen will, lautete so," (B, VIII, 72) or "dieser lautete so," (B, VIII, 70) or "ich liebe das Selbst--drum mag er selbst reden," (B, XI, 95) or "ich liess ihn beichten," (B, XII, 99) indicate that Kreuzgang still considers himself the narrator, yet wanted to avoid the objectifying shift to the authorial narrative.

In both novels the most common mode of submitting events and ideas is the monologue which, of course, stresses the isolation of the self.

Dostoevsky uses the stream of consciousness technique especially in the first part of his novel which includes the underground man's reflections. There is nobody to talk to, there is no outside action, thus the monologue becomes the

only possible form of expression. It projects the underground man's inner life and illustrates his blatant loneliness.

In order to refract his loneliness, the underground man repeatedly turns to some fictitious persons whom he addresses as "ladies and gentlemen." He argues with these invented listeners and tries to convince them. At one point he even confesses that he writes the Notes to escape loneliness. (D, 167)

The second part of the Notes has some outside action, yet this action, too, is mostly the projection of the underground man's inner life, it is like the icing on the cake.

The watchman uses a whole scale of monologues: "Der Traum der Liebe," (B, X, 88) "Lauf durch die Skala," (B, X, 92-93) "Dithyrambus über den Frühling," (B, XIII, 107) "An den Mond," (B, XIV, 115) "An die Liebe," (B, XIV, 116) a monologue about laughter. (B, XV, 126-27) They are based on the dialectical principle of thesis and antithesis, abound with black humor and paradox, and are the most blatant examples of his nihilistic Weltanschauung. Also a sort of monologue is found in the poet's "Absagebrief an das Leben" (B, VIII, 70) and Hanswurst's "Prolog." (B, XIII, 72-73)

In addition to the monologues the watchman frequently uses speeches to convey his thoughts and feelings. Twice he addresses the town's poet; (B, I, 6; VIII, 68-69) then he announces in a speech the Day of Judgment; (B, VI, 51) he writes a "Leichenrede" (B, VII, 58) and gives a defense

speech. (B, VII, 62-63) In the madhouse he introduces the patients in the form of a speech. (B, IX, 78-80) For the actor he composes the "Apologie des Lebens." (B, XII, 102-103) He tries to calm down the rebels with a speech, (B, IV, 129-130) and, finally, looking at the coffin of his father he addresses a worm. (B, XVI, 140-142)

Still another mode is applied in Nachtwachen, namely, the epistolary form which can be viewed as an extension of the first-person novel.⁵⁸ This is the letter exchange between Kreuzgang and Ophelia in the madhouse. (B, XIV, 117-121)

Since we now have concrete information about the author of Nachtwachen, we are able to dwell shortly upon the author-narrator relationship and judge how much of the mental baggage of the narrators may be ascribed to the authors themselves. Neither Bonaventura nor Dostoevsky convey real events; rather both authors demonstrate what could happen in human nature in an age of frustration, made abstract by growing rationality, science and bureaucracy, and marked by the cleavage between the development of the individual and the welfare of the community, between those who are too stupid to think and those who cannot make use of their intellect. For this purpose both authors absorbed and handled many motifs and ideas which had absolutely nothing to do with their own personalities and thoughts, but were in the air and were closely related to the

⁵⁸Franz Stanzel, Narrative Situations in the Novel: Tom Jones, Moby-Dick, The Ambassadors, Ulysses (Bloomington, 1971), p. 66.

historical processes of their periods. Thus, both novels are what may be called a "Zeitspiegel" of their time.

However Kreuzgang's aesthetic criticism which is noticeable throughout the novel, his acid attacks against Kotzebue and Iffland as well as histrionics, and his frequent ironic references to the development of Idealistic philosophy certainly reflect Bonaventura's own views.

Likewise the underground man's aesthetic and social criticism, his dissatisfaction with the achievements of the generation of the forties, his attack against the stupid Russian romantics "who turned into Germans and settled in some place like Weimar and the Black Forest," (D, 171) and, finally, his ardent rejection of utilitarianism and the crystal palace convey Dostoevsky's views after his return from Siberia.⁵⁹ On the other hand, the underground man's morbid manifestations of will have little relation with Dostoevsky's own personality, if one disregards his passion for gambling and his inclination to triangle love affairs.

⁵⁹See also Julius Meier-Graefe, Dostojewski: Der Dichter (Berlin, 1926), p. 142.

CHAPTER VII

NIHILISM AS AESTHETIC PRINCIPLE

1.

As has been demonstrated in Chapter II both novels under investigation grew out of periods which were marked by political tension, cultural and ideological changes and fluctuations, and a general decline of all values. The uncertainty which resulted from such ambivalent situations provided an apt ground for all nuances of nihilism, beginning with doubts and dissatisfaction and leading toward absolute rejection, alienation, and inertia.

Bonaventura as well as Dostoevsky were deeply involved in and affected by the problems of their time and extremely susceptible to the pros and cons of the period's rivaling ideas. In spite of the fact that both authors conveyed many of their own views and experiences, neither of them presented a real case, nor did he identify himself with the nihilistic concept of the novel and its protagonist. Rather both authors absorbed the historical materials life provided, forced them to their extremest intensity, exaggerated them to the point of absurdity, and made them an issue of general human concern.

Both novels strictly follow the dialectic principle of thesis and antithesis, one operating against the other and

finally annihilating each other, without ever reaching the synthesis which could serve as the starting point of new positive values and a meaningful life. Thus both novels end in the void.

The nihilistic sequence of thesis and antithesis determines the character of both protagonists, it functions as the ultimate truth of every manifestation of their inward and outward reality, it designates their relationship to their fellowmen and society, to God, nature, art, and literature. Furthermore, the nihilistic dualism underlies all narrative situations, episodes, motifs, and reflections without regard to whether they are directly related to the protagonists or merely refer to them. Nihilism, finally, documents itself in the mode of expression. Since both protagonists are isolated and have almost no contact with other people, they can only talk to or about themselves. Thus first person utterances, monologues, and stream of consciousness become the main forms of expression.

Being aware that heroism could only develop in positive times, when men identified themselves with their age and stood and fell with their actions, both authors created in accordance with their own oscillating historical reality two anti-heroic protagonists. Both are uprooted and confined within the walls of their individuality, physically handicapped, suffering from the contradictions and inconsistencies of their character, and estranged from their environment. Both protagonists develop a nihilistic tension within themselves and

then discover the same tension in their relationship with others.

Bonaventura's watchman deliberates about these inner and outer incompatibilities during his nightly walks through the town. He suffers and is sick from the inane conflict between ideas and reality, and the consequences deriving from this conflict. Yet he still looks for a medium and hopes that he will eventually find the solution to his problems; he hopes that there might be some ultimate truth and meaning behind man's endeavors, and that a remedy will be found to social inequity and injustice. Yet all his attempts to discover some order and meaning in life, all his efforts to unmask life and to find an answer to the ontological quest end in the void. There is no God, no immortality, there are no moral and ethic values; all of life is extremely boring and meaningless.

The watchman has a dreadful vision of this boring nothingness in which nothing but the isolated self is left which creates and destroys itself in an eternal cycle of nothingness:

Da sah ich mich selbst mit mir allein im Nichts,
 nur in der weiten Ferne verglimmte noch die letzte
 Erde, wie ein auslöschender Funken--aber es war nur
 ein Gedanke von mir, der eben endete. Ein einziger
 Ton bebte schwer und ernst durch die Oede--es war
 die ausschlagende Zeit, und die Ewigkeit trat jetzt
 ein. Ich hatte jetzt aufgehört alles andere zu denken,
 und dachte nur mich selbst! Kein Gegenstand war
 ringsum aufzufinden, als das grosse schreckliche Ich,
 das an sich selbst zehrte, und im Verschlingen stets
 sich wiedergebar. Ich sank nicht, denn es war kein
 Raum mehr, eben so wenig schien ich emporzuschweben.
 Die Abwechselung war zugleich mit der Zeit verschwun-
 den und es herrschte eine fürchterliche ewig öde
 Langeweile. (B, XIV, 122-123)

From time to time the watchman tries to refract the seriousness of this dichotomic situation with sarcasm and irony, thus turning tragedy into farce. Yet, irony is a nihilistic concept too, for it is the attitude of those who can play with everything because they are committed to nothing.

To be sure, the watchman does not create nothingness in order to arrest thought and will for a certain period of time and then precipitate new activities. He reveals nothingness step by step. He devotes himself to a cause, he hurries to the barricades, he turns orator, he seeks social truth, but he retreats as soon as he discovers the meaninglessness and hopelessness of the case he is pursuing. His final retirement into the night is forced upon him by society, it is not his own decision, not the cathartic crisis after which rebirth may begin. Moreover, the nothingness which the watchman reveals is not the majestic and terrifying spectacle which would unveil the meaning of the world's happenings; rather it is a petty, meaningless, and boring nothingness.

According to Thieliicke's definition of nihilism, the watchman is not yet a real nihilist but a "disillusioned idealist", for his nihilism is still repeatedly refracted by reality.⁶⁰

The underground man, too, realizes the inanity of his personality and the world, but he does not stop at this point.

⁶⁰Thieliicke, pp. 148-163.

He begins to create nothingness using his will as the most powerful instrument to pursue his goal. His encounter with the officer, the visits with his supervisor, the farewell party for the parting schoolmate Zverkov, the affair with Liza, and the quarrels with his servant are conscious will power duels with nothingness. The underground man is from the very beginning aware of the meaninglessness of his endeavors: the officer has not really insulted him; the visits with his boss are utterly boring; he hates Zverkov and does not want Liza's love; and he knows that he has to pay his servant. Still he challenges outward reality with his foolish will in order to prove that he is free and not subject to rational considerations, to the deterministic laws of nature. Thus, the underground man opposes nothingness with nothingness and at the same time he creates a new nothingness. He is virtually revolving on a carousel of nothingness.

This revolving, much like the watchman's nihilistic dream, is best demonstrated through the underground man's thinking pattern. According to him, the intelligent man cannot see any justice or virtue in vengeance; if he indulges in it, it is only out of spite and anger. Yet anger has nothing in common with reason; therefore it can overcome all hesitation. But when the intelligent man thinks, his anger vanishes because the reason for it evaporates. Nobody is responsible, the insult is no insult anymore. (D, 103, 146)

The underground man too suffers and is desperate. Yet his negation has already reached such a degree and is so

absolute that all values lose their content and become interchangeable; thus he derives the feeling of pleasure from pain and despair. This is the state of mind which Gottfried Benn will later call "Nihilismus ist ein Glücksgefühl".⁶¹

The underground man's withdrawal from the civil service and his final retreat into his mousehole were only indirectly caused by society. Rather it was another manifestation of his will, another act of creative nothingness. Thus the underground man is already the representative of pure nihilism. He shrinks from every commitment, he is completely absorbed in reflections about himself, wallowing in nihilistic self-contradictions, he forgets all given values in order to exercise his will, he makes his existence meaningless and complements this meaninglessness with the emptiness of his dreams. The absolute isolation which the underground man faces after the loss of Liza is described by the author in less mythical terms than that of the watchman although not less impressive. There is nothing in the street but a twinkling lamp and the lonely underground man who tries to soothe the pain of this void with fantasies and reflections about cheap happiness and lofty suffering, about the utility of insult and hatred, knowing all along that he is telling lies. (D, 242-243) Yet with the final retirement into the mousehole the underground man's life reached a crisis. The protagonist deprives his life of the outer reality, and, at the same time,

⁶¹Hof, p. 53.

he breaks down all walls which enclose him and gains absolute freedom of selfhood. This brings the underground man startlingly close to modern existentialism. He does not yet take the decisive step forward in order to create new values which could substitute for the lost past. However, he changes his attitudes toward himself; his diary opens new vistas towards a true horizon and, although the underground man denies it, it is the first timid attempt to restore human relationship and to assume some kind of responsibility. The underground man is ashamed of his moral disintegration, of his lack of contact with other men, and of his spite and vanity which made him think of real life almost as some kind of painful labor. He holds the mirror up to men and shows them that they should not feel better because they take their cowardice for reasonableness, and that they should not try to turn themselves into something hypothetical called the "average man." (D, 243-244)

2.

Bonaventura as well as Dostoevsky enveloped their protagonists with an engulfing stream of negative events which were in diametrical opposition to the character's longing for positive values. They surrounded the protagonists with double-faced people who, at the bottom of their hearts, were indifferent or endowed with all kinds of negative attitudes. The tension resulting from this situation triggered the protagonists' criticism and disapproval and accelerated their

alienation and plunge into inertia. Thus, both authors established a relationship between the protagonist and his environment which was based merely on mutual rejection and annihilation, and created a situation which Sölle-Nipperdey called "freier Spiel-Raum im Nichts".⁶²

Both authors pursued the development of this tension from the protagonists' childhood to their retirement into the underground. The watchman as well as the underground man came from nowhere and grew up without love and mutual understanding. Later they continued to live in an emptiness, for they failed to restore human contact, be it with friends, colleagues or through marriage. Professionally neither was successful, because their heightened individualism prevented them from living up to the order of their society. Thus, both protagonists began to hate people and reject life in the community. They gradually detached themselves from real life and became critical spectators who looked at the world as a kind of panorama lying below them and beyond the realm of their responsibility.

The social criticism which pervades the two novels is a weighty manifestation of nihilism, "ein bedeutsamer Aspekt der umfassenden Verneinung," as Richard Brinkmann calls it.⁶³

Both protagonists rebel against their society, because

⁶²Sölle-Nipperdey, p. 51.

⁶³Brinkmann, p. 27.

they see the disparity of the social organism and realize that society and professions disintegrate man morally. Society shouts for peace while disseminating destruction; it proclaims progress while descending deeper into barbarism. Both protagonists cannot accept the empty, meaningless mechanism which enslaves man, makes him a victim of social stratification and deprives him of his individuality and ideals.

The underground man's opposition is absolute; he not only revolts against the social mechanism, the crystal palace and the anthill, he completely annihilates it by resigning from his job and retreating into his mousehole.

The watchman, too, hates and opposes society. In his defense speech (B, VII, 62-65) and in the Day of Judgment speech, Kreuzgang tries to transcend the inanity of the society with irony. (B, VI, 51-55) While in love with the mad Ophelia, he dreams of inaugurating Plato's Republic which shall be governed by truth, beauty, and justice, all values which do not exist in the society in which he lives. This, of course, is a nihilistic dream, for it develops over an abyss of nothingness, i.e. in the madhouse where all values have lost their reality. Yet society is stronger; it annihilates Kreuzgang by sending him to jail, to the madhouse, and, finally, by banning him into the night. The nihilistic tension between the society and the individual also causes the death of the town poet and the puppeteer, and turns the epigone into a spineless creature.

By retreating from society the protagonists of both

novels have arrived at the top of their nihilistic awareness. They have cultivated the revolt against themselves, against their fellowmen and their society to such a state that they no longer can live in peace with either one and end up in a complete void.

3.

In both novels the protagonists' plunge into the void is accompanied and stressed by the shift of most of the events into the night. Yet night is no longer the mystical time of love, intimacy, and heightened sensibility; rather it is the time of crimes, moral turpitude, loneliness, it is the shadow of life. Dead silence, mud, wet snow, thunderstorms prevail in the night. The darkness of the night obliterates all distinctive features, it levels the good and the evil, the sublime and the depraved, the beautiful and the ugly. Thus, in both novels, night is perceived as a nihilistic concept.

Occasionally, Kreuzgang still interprets night in the romantic way, connecting it with poetry and day with prose. He speaks about the prosaic day, about the boredom in the midst of bourgeois life with its walking sleepers. After the nightly encounter with the mad Spaniard, he translates his "poetisch tolle Nacht in klare langweilige Prosa." (B, V, 41) Yet the conceptual change becomes evident in the ironic statement that the unfortunate town poet was awake only in the night, "weil dann seine Gläubiger schliefen, und die Musen allein

nicht zu den letzten gehörten." (B, I, 5) In all other cases night stresses man's negative attitudes. Kreuzgang enjoys the night because it complements his isolated self. For the mad Spaniard, the night is the time to hide his hatred; "Juan hasste den Tag und lebte jetzt nur in der Nacht." (B, V, 46) After he initiated the family tragedy, everything turned "todtenstill um Don Juan, er stand furchtbar einsam in der Nacht." (B, V, 47) "O Nacht, Nacht, kehre zurück! Ich ertrage all das Licht und die Liebe nicht," exclaims the blind boy after having regained his eyesight.

In Notes from the Underground, night and wet snow symbolize the underground man's depravity and isolation. It was night and snowing when the underground man went to the farewell party and endured insults and humiliation; wet snow was falling when he drove to the brothel where he took revenge on Liza for his humiliation at the party; (D, 205) and it was also night and snowing when he lost Liza. (D, 242)

The night is also a time of dreams which are in contrast with reality and symbolize man's hovering between ideals and reality. Dreams are nihilistic concepts, for when they cannot become reality, they evaporate and man again faces despair and void. (B, X, 90) The cuckolded judge experiences such a state of confusion during his encounter with the watchman and the lover of his wife. He no longer distinguishes whether he is awake or dreaming. (B, III, 23) Kreuzgang's monologue "Der Traum der Liebe" (B, X, 88-89) annihilates life and love in order to create the dream of love which is more beautiful,

because it reminds him of life and makes it desirable and precious. Thus, real life is replaced by dreams which themselves create a new fictitious life.

The underground man's dreams and fantasies are also a play with nothingness, for there was either nothing behind them from the very beginning, or they circled around ideas which could never materialize. The underground man invented them both to substitute for sullen reality and to exercise his will power, but he did not believe in them. The underground man annihilates and distorts true events, and replaces them with his fantasies. He writes a gentlemanly letter to his schoolmate Simonov apologizing for his bad behavior at the party. Pretending that his drinking caused the entire incident, he tells a few lies to get out of the whole affair, and he begins to admire himself for his fine style. (D, 224) He also invents sentimental stories for and about Liza, camouflaging the truth and putting himself in the role of a hero, although he knows that there is nothing heroic in him. (D, 227)

In both novels night is closely related to death and cemetery. "Die Nacht ist still und fast schrecklich und der kalte Tod steht in ihr, wie ein unsichtbarer Geist, der das überwundene Leben festhält," says Kreuzgang. (B, X, 87)

The motif of death recurs time and again in Nachtwachen. There is the death of the atheist and the forcible death of the priest; (B, I, II) the fratricide of the mad Spaniard (B, IV, V) and the suicide of a satirical fellow who shot

himself during Kreuzgang's false Last Judgment alarm in order to test, "ob in diesem Indifferenzmoment zwischen Tod und Auferstehen, das Sterben noch auf einen Augenblick möglich sei, damit er nicht mit der ganzen übergrossen Lebenslänge- weile in die Ewigkeit...hinübermüsse." (B, VI, 50). Then comes the suicide of the town's poet who dies for ideas and values which are valid for him but do not exist in the society in which he lives. (B, VIII) A beggar freezes to death, a young girl dies of a broken heart and a nun is buried alive; (B, X) the mad Ophelia dies in childbirth. (B, XIV) Finally, the puppeteer hangs himself for he does not want to live in a world of madness. (B, XV) The graveyard is the watchman's favorite place for meditation. (B, XVI, 133)

The underground man draws a dreadful picture for Liza of the Volkovo cemetery and the burial of a prostitute whose coffin is lowered into a grave filled with mud, snow, and dirty water. (D, 208-209) He describes how her own death will be: she will be carried out in a cheap coffin, the grave will be full of mud and slush, the men will fill up the grave with wet, gray clay and go off to have a drink. She will be forgotten, her name will be erased from the face of the earth as if she had never existed. (D, 219)

In both novels death is perceived existentially, it is the extinction of selfhood, the termination of life.

Life itself is a creeping process of self-disintegration, a journey through a field of corpses and graves, and behind the camouflage of life is nothing but dust and bones. Kreuzgang

tries to refract the despair which results from this gloomy world view with irony: "Ich will nicht lieben, und recht kalt und starr bleiben, um wo möglich dazu lachen zu können, wenn die Riesenhand auch mich zerdrückt." (B, XVI, 143) Only Ophelia is able to transcend this nothingness because of love. (B, XIV, 123) Her death is the step toward the self, whereas for Kreuzgang and the underground man death means a freeing from the self.

4.

Death raises a chain of questions, such as the question of man's existence in general, the metaphysical question of God and immortality, and the question of truth in religious faith. These questions are of paramount importance in Nachtwachen, but not in the Notes where the supreme order emerges from the antithesis between the creative will and the inexorable dependence on the laws of nature.

Bonaventura demonstrates the meaninglessness of life very impressively. At first he unmask's man's existence as meaningless, as a mere chance, for there are no absolute values and no goals toward which it could be directed. Thus life is shown as a sum of discontinuous moments which create the feeling of running idle. Kreuzgang states: "Es ist seit Adam her eine lange Reihe von Jahren--...was haben wir aber darin vollbracht? --Ich behaupte: Gar Nichts.!" (B, VI, 51)

Nothingness is the very essence of man's life; there are only some shattered values, and, at the end, life dissolves itself in nothingness. "Das Leben ist nur das Schellenkleid das das Nichts umgehängt hat, um damit zu klingen...Es ist Alles Nichts und würgt sich selbst auf und schlingt sich gierig hinunter, und eben dieses Selbstverschlingen ist die tückische Spiegelfechterei als gäbe es Etwas." (B, VIII, 75)

Nothing can resist the relentless decay, not even the autonomous spirit which built the world and created various systems. "O was ist die Welt, wenn dasjenige was sie dachte nichts ist ...die Behausung eines Wurmes," exclaims Kreuzgang watching a worm crawling from the grave of his father. (B, XVI, 141)

When Ophelia asks Kreuzgang: "Giebt es etwas an sich, oder ist alles nur Wort und Hauch und viel Phantasie," the latter answers with a double negation: "First one has to ask being itself about being, then one can tell something about non-being." (B, XIV, 121)

Kreuzgang assures the dying Ophelia that there is no eternal life. (B, XIV, 123) If there were such a thing as immortality, it would be extremely boring and dreadful, for man would have lost not only his individuality but also his capacity for spatio-temporal relationships. (B, VI, 50; XIV, 122-123)

Next Kreuzgang drains the concept of God by showing how God and man have annihilated each other. God is presented as a rather indecisive and heartless entity. He created man out of boredom, in order to have something to play with. On the

other hand, man forgot his divine origin and turned into a self-conscious, rational, immoral, vicious, vain animal. He reversed all values and soon considered himself the creator and his ego as the model for the entire universe. In doing so man became a lonely titan in a hostile world without God, without hope for a better life after death, and without help from anywhere. (B, XVI, 135) Kreuzgang does his bit to make this loneliness absolute: "O wie sie alle nach Liebe wimmern, und nach einem grossen Herzen über den Wolken, woran sie mit allen ihren Erden einst ruhen können! Wimmert nicht länger-- diese Myriaden von Welten saussen in allen ihren Himmeln nur durch eine gigantische Naturkraft, und diese schreckliche Gebärerin, die alles und sich selbst mit geboren hat, hat kein Herz in der eigenen Brust, sondern formt nur kleinere zum Zeitvertreib..." (B, XVI, 142)

Religion does not provide any relief, for it no longer establishes peace with God, rather it had become an outward appearance which must be upheld for the sake of tradition.[♥] This reduces faith to superstition. Thus the sign of the cross with which the watchman protects himself against evil spirits has become meaningless; it is an empty gesture which originates and dissolves in nothing. (B, I, 5) The old necromancer's folded hands, too, are an empty gesture. (B, XVI, 142) The clergy, the guardians of religious faith, turned from truth to expediency, from faith to strategy. Nihilism and faith occur behind the same facade. Thus the only truth at the tail end of this parade of questions is nothingness.

5.

The disintegration of all values, the worship and the isolation of the self, the lack of a goal all evoke boredom, the basic feeling of nihilism.

Brinkmann gives the following definition of boredom:

"Der Indifferenzpunkt, an dem sich Zeit und Raum und schliesslich die substanzielle Wirklichkeit des Ich auflösen, ist die Langeweile...in der alles seine Kontur verliert, in der die Zeit in einem, dem Mystischen entgegengesetzten, einem teuflischen Sinn stillsteht."⁶⁴

Both authors broach the feeling of boredom, although from different aspects. In Nachtwachen boredom encompasses both the objective and the spiritual worlds, the narrator and the subject of narration, space and time. Out of boredom, Kreuzgang runs over the pages of his book of life. (B, IV, 25 ff) In a dream he reaches the moment of indifference when space and time are annihilated and nothing is left but the horrible void. (B, XIV, 123) In the realm of literature Kreuzgang considers prose boring. (B, V, 41) Throughout the entire novel, life is considered monotonous and man is described as boring and bored. (B, III, 16; B, V, 41) Not even lovers are exempt from this feeling. (B, XI, 139) The mad Spaniard is bored with his immortality (B, IV, 38) and he distorts the chronological sequence of his life story to prevent

⁶⁴Brinkmann, p. 17.

boredom. (B, IV, 33) The young fellow who commits suicide out of ennui, leads the reader into the spiritual sphere.

(B, VI, 50) God is bored in his eternity and has created man in order to overcome eternal monotony. (B, IX, 80-82) And the terrifying natural force which creates everything including itself, forms "little hearts" for pastime. (B, XVI, 142)

Up to here boredom is predominantly connected with disdain and fear. Yet the nihilistic concept of boredom accounts for the feeling of pleasure as well. This interpretation of boredom occurs in both novels. In Nachtwachen the devil inspects the world for amusement; (B, XV, 127) the porter of the convent invites Kreuzgang to watch the live burial of the nun in order to pass the time; (B, X, 91) for distraction, the puppeteer shows Kreuzgang the dead body of his predecessor. (B, XV, 128) Out of boredom the underground man invents stories and adventures, torturing himself and others. (D, 145) He proves that both the tormentor and the tormented derive pleasure from the same experience. (D, 152)

Whereas no attempt to overcome boredom can be detected in Nachtwachen, the underground man makes a decisive step forward, confessing that he is bored with constantly doing nothing and that he, therefore, will write his diary. (D, 167)

Both novels are built upon nihilistic tension which emerges from the protagonists' split world and their distorted relationship with their environment. However, in both novels nihilism is not yet perceived existentially. Both protagonists

discover and create nihilistic situations, and interpret various concepts nihilistically. Yet they are neither great destroyers nor are they builders of a new world out of nothingness.

6.

In both novels only nature still resists the nihilistic dualism. It is calm and lovely, a harmonious cycle of fertility. Yet man's disharmonious character broke asunder the union with nature. Therefore nature remains silent to his despair. (B, XIII, 107-108) The underground man, too, sees the reason for man's predicament in the uprootedness from the soil. (D, 144)

On the other hand, art is already presented ambivalently. It still demonstrates the unity of material and human spirit, yet it also becomes the expression of man's shattering and horrifying experiences. (B, XIII, 109-112)

Literature, finally, is no longer life transformed into aesthetic terms. In Nachtwachen it reflects the general decay of its time, in Notes from the Underground it becomes the substitute for life. (D, 243).

CONCLUSION

Nihilism is a multifarious phenomenon which crops up in man's nature under certain circumstances and manifests itself either in a wide array of negative feelings, such as loneliness, despair, anxiety, doubts, boredom, and hatred; or in active rejection, annihilation, alienation, and inertia. Thus nihilism has outward sources and inward agents.

The main sources of the nihilism which underlies every aspect of Bonaventura's Nachtwachen and Dostoevsky's Notes from the Underground are the ideological conflicts of the time in which the novels were written, the protagonists' uprootedness, and the indifference of city life. The inner agents are the protagonists' heightened intellect and acute consciousness which make both protagonists extremely sensitive toward themselves and their environment.

The watchman as well as the man from the underground are sick with the malady of their intellect, they indulge in self-analysis and tormenting introspection, and finally question their own existence. Yet only the underground man enhances his suffering and self-destruction to such a degree that he no longer distinguishes between pain and pleasure, thus reaching a point where all feelings are interchangeable and pleasure can be derived from pain and despair as well.

Both protagonists are deeply disillusioned with their fellowmen and their society for the only thing they discover

is depravity, cruelty, vanity, and hypocrisy. Yet only the watchman hurries to the barricades to fight for some improvement; he does not shun obstacles, for he still hopes that there might be some meaning behind man's endeavors, that there might be some remedy to man's predicament. However, society forces the watchman to succumb to its norms. His resistance abates, he finds consolation in objectives more easily reached, and in order to survive, he finally ends up as an automaton in the isolation of the night. Kreuzgang had come to the conclusion that there is no God, no immortality, no meaning in the entire world whatsoever, yet he had not freed himself from the thing-oriented civilization as did the town's poet or the underground man. Out of the void the watchman does not create new values to make up for the loss of the past; he continues hovering over an abyss of nothingness for which he no longer feels responsible. The watchman's nihilism is therefore not yet existential, for he has not breached the wall of meaninglessness and taken the decisive step forward to the absolute freedom of selfhood.

Whereas the watchman discovers and unmaskes nothingness and meaninglessness, the underground man consciously creates them. His entire life is a continuous string of negations. He does not want love, friends, professional promotion, higher living standards, or wealth. He annihilates every rational act with his destructive will in order to prove that he is not a piano key, not an ant, and that he rejects the absolute order of the crystal palace. Passing from negation to negation the

underground man obliterates the world which man's reason and creative will have built up. Yet he does not add new obstacles and barriers to prove the void of the world. He overcomes the anxiety of his inner emptiness and alienation which from time to time had driven him to external action. In doing so, he completely detaches himself from all human activity, he even gives up his will and desires, and at the same time, he eliminates the assaults coming from the outer mechanized world. Thus, he retreats into nothingness because he wants nothingness, and nothing can stop him from pursuing this goal.

The underground man's inertia is not only the answer to the meaninglessness of life, it is also the first step toward the absolute freedom of the self. Somewhere in the corner of the underground man's heart grows the cognition that he, too, is responsible for the failures of his world, although he thinks that he cannot be called to account for them. Thus the relation between the underground man and the watchman is that of the titan who destroys and the petty bourgeois who accepts his fate.

The underground man does not yet attempt to create new values out of the void, he merely annihilates the existing norms in order to escape the impact of meaninglessness. Yet there is a noticeable change in his attitude toward himself; his turn to sincerity and truth, and his first timid step toward human communication already bring his nihilism into the realm of modern Existentialism.

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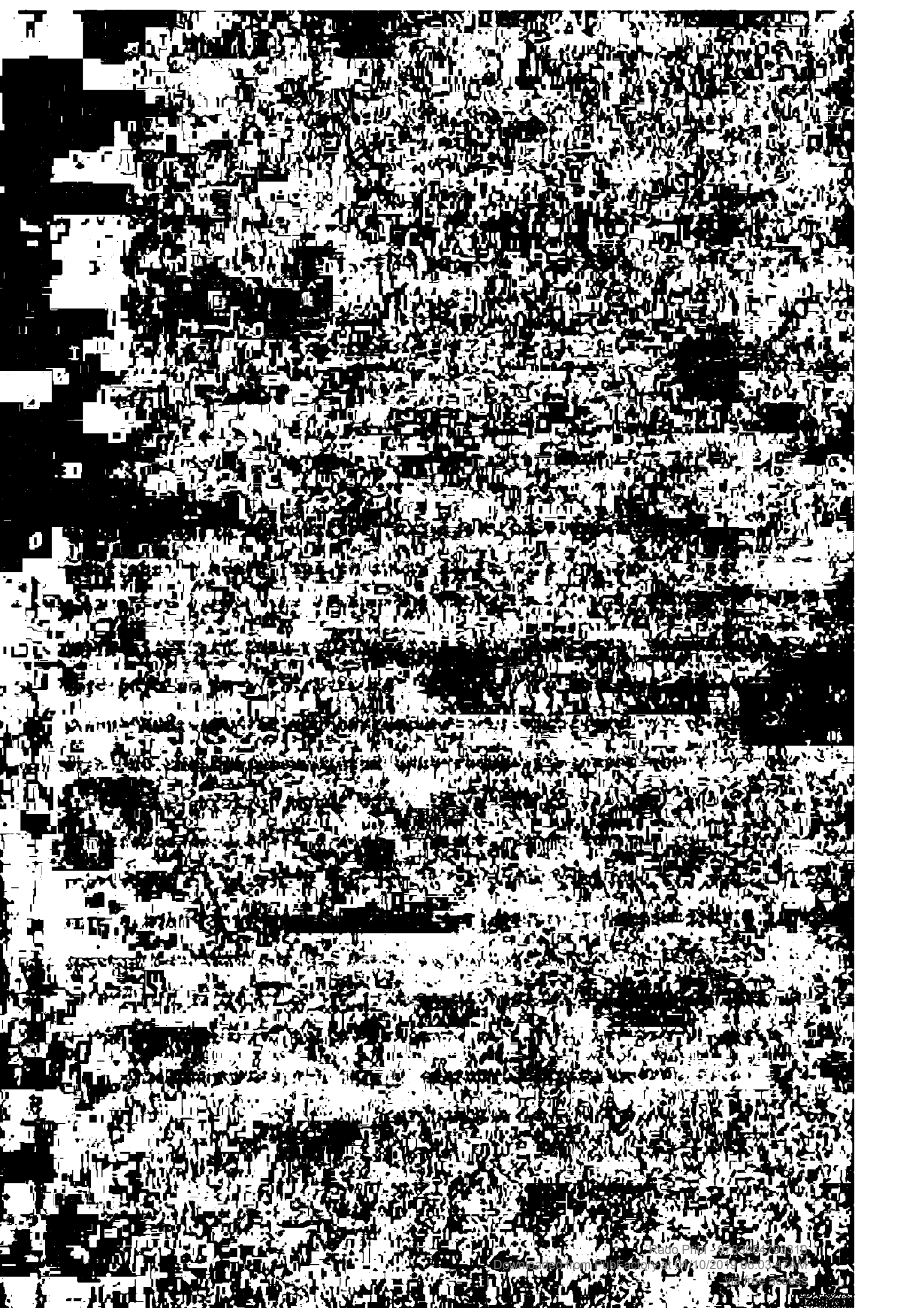
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