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## The Topography of Terror: The Real and Imagined City in Dostoevsky's *Besy*<sup>1</sup>

*James L. Rice, 1938–2011: In memoriam*

For all his ability to create a dark and frequently ominous atmosphere, Dostoevsky often provides surprisingly few details about his characters' surroundings. In an article whose title could be translated as "the ecstasy of Dostoevsky," Iurii Ivask comments on many of the characters in the novel *Besy* (*Demons*, 1871–72), and then observes that for Dostoevsky the *byt*, the everyday life, is of secondary importance. "In his world nobody works: the engineer Kirillov does not build bridges, students do not study, and generals do not wage war."<sup>2</sup> And indeed, even though his characters are identified by profession, only very few, such as the provincial governor, fon Lembke, are ever seen at work. We know, for instance, that the narrator, Anton Lavrent'evich G-v, the chronicler of the events, has a job, but just what he does or where he works is never explained.<sup>3</sup> And he declares his intention to avoid discussing certain topics: "I have no need, and indeed do

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<sup>1</sup> A portion of this article was read at the 2010 ASEES conference in Los Angeles. I am grateful for comments on earlier versions by Gene Fitzgerald, James Rice and the referees for *Dostoevsky Studies*.

<sup>2</sup> Iurii Ivask, "Upoenie Dostoevskogo," *Novyi zhurnal*, no. 107 (1972), pp. 68–9. Ivask ranks characters in *Besy* on a six-point scale in terms of their emotional intensity (see pp. 65–7) and the novel figures prominently throughout this article (pp. 64–75).

<sup>3</sup> V. A. Tunimanov, "Rasskazchik v *Besakh* Dostoevskogo," in *Issledovaniia po poetike i stilistike*, ed. V. V. Vinogradov, V. G. Bazanov and G. M. Fridlender (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972), p. 118. Liudmila Saraskina similarly notes that nearly all those characters who presumably have jobs do not appear within their work environments. See her *Besy: Roman – preduprezhdenie* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990), p. 265.

not dare, to talk about some things.”<sup>4</sup> In Dostoevsky’s drafts for *Besy* the narrator is more specific regarding the matters that he will not discuss:

Let the reader accept my apologies from the very start. I am not depicting the city, the environs, the everyday life, the people, their work, nor the relationships – and the curious vacillations in these relationships – that characterize the essentially personal, provincial life of our town [...] And I do not have time to deal properly with describing our little corner. I consider myself the chronicler of one particular curious and unexpected event, which suddenly occurred in our town not long ago and took all of us very much by surprise [...] Since this event occurred not in the sky but indeed in our town, I can’t help but sometimes touch upon the everyday aspects of our provincial life in a purely descriptive manner, but I am giving notice that I will be doing so only insofar I am forced to by unavoidable necessity.<sup>5</sup>

To a large extent the chronicler adheres to these intentions. While he offers some background information on many of the characters, he fails to say much about their physical environment, providing few descriptions of buildings, rooms, or the city as a whole. And yet, despite a paucity of descriptive passages, the setting provides a vital complement to the action of the novel.<sup>6</sup> The nature of these surroundings that the chronicler purports not to describe and the reasons for their effectiveness comprise the main topics of this investigation.

Perhaps most strikingly, the chronicler never identifies the city in which most of the action takes place. The general assumption has been that Dostoevsky places the action in Tver<sup>7</sup>, where he lived for four months in 1859, immediately after his return from Semipalatinsk and before he received permission to live in St. Petersburg. However, Anne Lounsbery, in a perceptive article on the opposition of center and periphery in *Besy*, notes the lack of any reference to topographical features or manmade

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<sup>4</sup> F. M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972–90), 10: 364. Further references to this edition will be abbreviated to PSS, followed by the volume and page number.

<sup>5</sup> PSS, 11: 240–41.

<sup>6</sup> Ralph Matlaw, “The Chronicler of *The Possessed*: Character and Function,” *Dostoevsky Studies*, 5 (1984), 43.

structures that can clearly be identified with Tver', and so concludes that for Dostoevsky what is important is not so much the specific qualities of that city, but a kind of "Tver' in quotation marks," broadly representative of the provinces.<sup>7</sup> In Part I, I will explore in some detail the vagueness of the allusions to Tver' and provide further evidence that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to link the novel to physical features of the city with any certainty. However, In Part II I will show that Tver' represented to Dostoevsky not so much a geographical point on a map as a state of mind: his hatred of Tver' was sufficiently intense (despite not seeming to be all that well grounded) that it is entirely plausible to assume that the vexation, dread and isolation he associated with that city provided him with the atmosphere he needed for the novel's setting. The third part contains an analysis of the city's features in *Besy* and of how the characters behave within their environment. Figures sometimes appear mysteriously, as if out of nowhere, while individuals occasionally seem unaware of where they are within the city. In particular, Dostoevsky divides the city into the center and its "edge," with his characters often transgressing certain social as well as physical boundaries. All this helps create a sense of chaos, against which the intense and often violent deeds associated with that "curious and unexpected event" play out. In Part IV, I discuss how Dostoevsky combines seeming specificity with indeterminateness in regard to both setting and time in the novel.

### I: A Roundup of the Usual Evidence

The most thorough compilation of the indications that Tver' serves as the setting for *Besy* comes from Moisei Al'tman, who both referred to the work of predecessors and added findings of his own.<sup>8</sup> The editors of the definitive *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* essentially accept his claims and quote Al'tman's writings about the references to Tver' at some length.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Anne Lounsbury, "Dostoevskii's Geography: Centers, Peripheries, and Networks in *Demons*," *Slavic Review*, 66 (2007), no. 2, 212.

<sup>8</sup> M. S. Al'tman, *Dostoevskii: Po vekham imen* (Saratov: Izdatel'stvo Saratovskogo universiteta, 1975), p. 74–77. The material on Tver' also appeared in his article "Etiudy o romane Dostoevskogo *Besy*," *Prometei*, 5 (1968), 442–43.

<sup>9</sup> *PSS*, 12: 226–27.

And yet the direct proof for locating the novel in Tver' turns out to be rather thin. Al'tman himself cites three sets of confirming data, of which the first is the "precise and detailed topography of the city in *Besy*," but then the topographical examples he offers turn out to be neither precise nor detailed. In fact, as Lounsbury comments, there are just two. A river divides the city in the novel into two parts, linked by a pontoon bridge. The area across the river is identified as the "Zarech'e" when fires are set there late in the novel. Tver' has its "Zavol'zhe," which in Dostoevsky's day was also connected to the rest of the city by a pontoon bridge, possibly the bridge that Dostoevsky describes when Stavrogin meets Fed'ka on the way both to and from the Lebiadkins. Also, the Shpigulin factory in *Besy* has a possible analogue in the Kaulin textile factory, which was similarly located on the outskirts of the city. Al'tman further remarks in a footnote that the similarity in sound between the names, Shpigulin and Kaulin, may be more than a coincidence.<sup>10</sup> At least one earlier researcher, though, was much more cautious in his attribution, noting only that that the Shpigulin factory and the division of the city by a river that "could have been" prompted by what the writer observed there.<sup>11</sup> And indeed, while Tver' might well have inspired both features of the unnamed town in *Besy*, certainly other cities had their own districts "beyond the river" along with an industrial enterprise or two outside the center.

Nor do Al'tman's other two sets of evidence offer convincing proof. In terms of the characters in the novel who may have been based on residents of Tver', he states that the governor of the city when Dostoevsky was there, Pavel Trofimovich Baranov, and his wife could have served as the prototypes for the fon Lembkes. Here Al'tman again puts forth some interesting linguistic evidence. Besides noting that Lembke contains hints of the German Lamm or English lamb (*barashek* in Russian, with its hint of Baranov), he makes a connection between Levental' (the name of Baranov's special assistant in real life), Rozental' (which the distraught Stepan Verkhovensky thinks is the name of the official who carried out the search), and then Blium, the actual name of fon Lembke's assistant. Since Blume is the German for flower and Rozental' means a valley of roses,

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<sup>10</sup> Al'tman, *Dostoevskii: Po vekham imen*, p. 256, note 124. Others have seen the action of the Shpigulin workers as reflecting the first industrial strike in Russia, which occurred at a St. Petersburg cotton mill in 1870. *PSS*, 12: 217.

<sup>11</sup> K. Emel'ianov, "Dostoevskii v Tveri," in *Pisateli v Tverskoi gubernii* (Kalinin: Kalininskoe oblastnoe knigoizdatel'stvo, 1941), p. 76.

Stepan's leap in thinking becomes understandable, if not fully logical.<sup>12</sup> However, the characters depicted in the novel bear almost no biographical similarities to the Baranovs. Fon Lembke comes across as a person unable to deal with the administrative pressures of the position to which he has advanced, while his wife has been pushing him forward in his career in no small part to advance her own position in society. According to Varvara Stavrogina, Iuliia fon Lembke is older than her husband and had come from a relatively poor background.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, the real-life Anna Alekseevna Baranova, née Vasil'chikova, who was about a dozen years younger than her husband, belonged to a financially secure and prominent family.<sup>14</sup> A cousin of the writer Vladimir Sollogub, she had actually met Dostoevsky in St. Petersburg before his 1849 arrest. As for Baranov, his family was close to the tsar's court, and he appears to have had a reasonably successful career.<sup>15</sup> In letters to his brother and some of his acquaintances, Dostoevsky has nothing but praise for both of them, stating that he liked her even upon that first meeting years earlier and calling her husband, who vigorously supported Dostoevsky's requests for permission to live in St. Petersburg, a "most excellent person, the rarest of the rare."<sup>16</sup> He found himself invited to their house in Tver' and became a regular visitor. Any similarity between the fictional and actual governor and his wife remains quite superficial at best.

Al'tman mentions two other individuals who had some association with Tver'. Tikhon Zadonskii (1724–83), the model for the monk Tikhon, spent much of the 1760s in local monasteries.<sup>17</sup> And Mikhail Bakunin (1814–76), who some have mentioned as possibly inspiring certain aspects of Stavrogin's depiction, was born in the Tver' province. But the parallels

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<sup>12</sup> Al'tman, *Dostoevskii: Po vekham imen*, pp. 79–80.

<sup>13</sup> PSS, 10: 49.

<sup>14</sup> Sergei Golitsyn, "Dostoevskii na puti k slave," *Ogonek*, 1977, no. 52, p. 27. Gogol tutored one of her brothers; another became director of the Hermitage.

<sup>15</sup> On Baranov's governorship see G. M. Dmitrieva, V. N. Sereda et al., *Tverskie gubernatory: K 200-letiiu obrazovaniia Tverskoi gubernii* (Tver': Tverskoe oblastnoe knizhno-zhurnal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1996), pp. 21–23.

<sup>16</sup> See his letters of 4 October 1859 to A. E. Vrangeli' (PSS, 28 [part 1]: 344), and of 23 October to A. I. Geibovich (Ibid., p. 363), and also the letter to his brother Mikhail on October 1 (Ibid., p. 341). Many years later the Baranovs' daughter, Iuliia, remembered seeing Dostoevskii when she was a ten-year-old, and recalled that he "constantly" spent evenings at her parents' house in Tver'. Golitsyn, "Dostoevskii na puti," p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> In letters written while he was working on *Besy* Dostoevskii states directly that Tikhon Zadonskii was the model for the figure in his novel. PSS, 29 (part 1): 118 and 142.

between Bakunin and Stavrogin are not especially strong, and Tikhon Zadonskii spent most of his active career elsewhere, a century before the novel's events: that he inspired Dostoevsky's character does little to confirm that the work is set in Tver'.

Al'tman's final category, "other indications and hints," provides equally tenuous evidence. A possible and yet hardly definitive connection between the city in *Besy* and Tver' occurs when the narrator briefly compares his town to Saltykov-Shchedrin's fictional Glupov, a name that stood for a composite Russian city in more than one of that writer's works. Saltykov-Shchedrin was born in Tver' province and, among his other administrative posts, served as the city's vice governor in 1860-1862 – not long after Dostoevsky resided there. Not surprisingly, therefore, elements of Tver' can be discerned in Glupov. Still, it is hard to see a specific connection between Tver', Glupov and the city in *Besy*. Al'tman also cites a sentence by the narrator in *Besy* to the effect that those in the capital were paying special attention to the province's zemstvo, but the same no doubt could have been said about other provinces as well.<sup>18</sup>

To the extent that Dostoevsky may have had in mind certain aspects of Tver' as he was creating his fictional city, it appears he did not so much reproduce them precisely as take individual features and reassemble or reposition them to create his novel's geography. Of the items mentioned by Al'tman, the most important may be the "long, wet pontoon bridge"<sup>19</sup> that divides the central part of the town from the Zarech'e district. As it turns out, Tver' is divided not only by the Volga but also by two tributaries that flow into it, the T'maka and the Tvertsa; as a result the city has a Zat'mach'e and a Zatverech'e to go along with its Zavol'zhe. If Dostoevsky had any actual bridge in mind, though, it was probably the long floating structure across the Volga. As for the district, it could have been the Zavol'zhe, which was on the whole was not a prosperous area.<sup>20</sup> However, the sense of Stavrogin's walk toward the Lebiadkins' house, which seems to be through a more nondescript part of the central area, would have more likely taken him toward the T'maka, which had a smaller floating bridge of its own and was the home to quite modest houses. Thus, if he indeed had

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<sup>18</sup> Al'tman, *Dostoevskii: Po vekham imen*, pp. 76–77.

<sup>19</sup> PSS, 10: 204.

<sup>20</sup> A. I. Subbotin toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century referred to the area across the Volga as the poorest part of town. See Volkova, "Tver' davno minuvshikh dnei," Available online: <<http://www.veche.tver.ru/index.shtml?news=4805>>.

Tver' in mind, he creates a composite topography, with a bridge from one part of town and the remaining details from other sections.

The church from which Fed'ka steals an icon (and where Liamshin places a mouse beyond the broken glass of the icon) may at least in part be based on the Skorbiashchenskaia church, which was located several blocks to the south on the street where Dostoevsky stayed. The actual church was closely associated with a miraculous icon (*chudotvornaia ikona Bozhiei Materi "Vsekh Skorbiashchikh Radost"*), was located on the edge of Drovianaia (Wood-Store) Square (the church in *Besy* is by the entrance to the market square), and, according to old photographs, was surrounded by a railing, as is that in the novel. Not everything is identical: he gives it a rather generic name (tserkov' Rozhdestva Bogoroditsy, which happened to be the name of a different church in Tver'); and the church in the novel is said to be ancient, while this church was only about a century old at the time Dostoevsky was writing, with the only truly ancient church in Tver' located across the T'maka River.<sup>21</sup> In a handful of other instances as well Tver' possibly provided the initial source for places described in the novel; thus the railroad station, which is well outside the city's center, recalls the location of the actual station in Tver'.<sup>22</sup> However, Dostoevsky's imagination and artistic needs caused him to reimagine whatever places he may have had in mind, creating a cityscape in which specific traces of Tver' remain elusive.<sup>23</sup>

Thanks in part to this lack of definite proof tying the novel to Tver' or to any other city, researchers have often focused more on the importance

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<sup>21</sup> PSS, 10: 252–53. For an old photograph of the Skorbiashchenskaia church and information about its history, see E. G. Kir'ianova et al., *Progulki po staroi Tveri* (Tver': Izdatel'stvo Aleksei Ushakov i ko., 1998), pp. 148–49.

<sup>22</sup> While not described in detail within the novel, the station is located near Erkel's apartment, which is itself on the edge of town: PSS, 10: 415 and 464. Earlier, it seemed to take some time for Stavrogin and Petr Verkhovensky to make their way into town from the station. Dostoevskii said in one letter that the station in Tver' was three versts (two miles) out of town: PSS, 28 (part 1): 367.

<sup>23</sup> This technique, while carried out to an extreme in *Besy*, resembles that used by other writers. For instance, in the final version of *Doktor Zhivago* Pasternak blurred some of the details that clearly would have identified Iuriatin with Perm'. He made the structures and landscapes in the novel more general and symbolic, not wanting them closely identified with a specific city. See V. V. Abashev, "Permskie realii v proizvedeniakh Borisa Pasternaka (materialy dlia kommentarii)," in *Liubov' prostranstva...: Poetika mesta v tvorchestve Borisa Pasternaka*, ed. V. V. Abashev (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2008), p. 391.

of the general provincial setting, a trait that the novel shares with several other works by Dostoevsky, including *Diadiushkin son (Uncle's Dream, 1859)* and *Selo Stepanchikovo i ego obitateli (The Village of Stepanchikovo and Its Inhabitants, 1859)*, both composed at the end of his period of exile. Lounsbery suggests that Dostoevsky in *Besy* uses a locale outside the capitals in order to emphasize not just the provincialism of the novel's milieu but to work toward a broader statement about Russia's provincial quality vis-à-vis Europe.<sup>24</sup> The Russian scholar Vladimir Tunimanov contrasts the provincial setting of *Besy* to that of Petersburg in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie (Crime and Punishment, 1866)*, with the alienation and loneliness that characterize life in the city giving way to the intense scrutiny of neighbors in the provincial town, where no place seems safe from prying eyes and the slightest event can release uncontrolled rumors and gossip.<sup>25</sup> In certain regards, of course, the predominant mood in Dostoevsky's works seems similar no matter what the surroundings. The sense of looming chaos, the psychological battles that take place between characters, the focus on extreme states that often bring his works to the very edge of what could be described as "realistic" – all these traits may be found whether the action takes place in St. Petersburg or somewhere in the provinces. Indeed, the seeming oppositions between these two settings frequently bleed into each other.<sup>26</sup> Still, in the case of *Besy* some specific aspects of the unnamed city as well as some direct contrasts between it and the capitals suggest that the provincial setting is indeed significant.

## II: The Persistence of Tver'

While I would argue that the connections to Tver' cited in the critical literature fail to convince and agree with those who have pointed to the importance of the work's generalized provincial ambience, I nevertheless want to suggest that the aura of the novel's city could well owe much to the emotions inspired by Tver'. Although Dostoevsky lived there only briefly more than a decade before he began to write the novel, he expressed his

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<sup>24</sup> Lounsbery, "Dostoevskii's Geography," p. 213.

<sup>25</sup> Tunimanov, "Rasskazchik v *Besakh* Dostoevskogo," pp. 113–14.

<sup>26</sup> M. S. Shtern, "Tekst provintsial'nogo goroda v tvorchestve F. M. Dostoevskogo," Available online: <http://www.omsu.ru/page.php?id=1079>



feelings about it with such vehemence that they no doubt remained with him for many years afterward.

Living in Tver' had not been Dostoevsky's first choice. During his enforced military service in Siberia he constantly expressed a desire to come back to European Russia. Indeed, early in 1854, just a week after he was freed from prison and while still in Omsk, he sent a long letter to his brother, in the course of which Dostoevsky pleaded for assistance in gaining permission to move to the Caucasus within the next year or two, which at least would be in Russia proper.<sup>27</sup> Once he was settled in Semipalatinsk, he undertook constant efforts to be freed from his military obligations so that he could return to familiar environs. Shortly after his marriage to Mariia Isaeva early in 1857 he wrote to his brother about his need to get back to Russia.<sup>28</sup> Later that year his letters focus on a strong desire to get to Moscow, which offered the promise of better medical treatment for his epilepsy and where the lively literary world, with its many journals in which he could publish, also attracted him.<sup>29</sup>

However, the decree he had been awaiting, which finally came out in April of 1858, granted him permission to live anywhere in the Russian empire, except for the capital cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, in letters to several correspondents he continued to express some confidence that he would be allowed to live in Moscow.<sup>31</sup> These hopes were not totally unreasonable: his fellow "Petrashevets," Aleksei Pleshcheev, wrote him in April 1858, stating that he was on the way to the capitals.<sup>32</sup> But the terms of Dostoevsky's amnesty did not change. In February 1859 Pleshcheev wrote to Dostoevsky from St. Petersburg that he had "heard you've been ordered to choose a place of residence. You'll probably settle in Tver'. It's closer to your brother and to everything."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *PSS*, 28, (part 1): 172.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 286 (letter to D. S. Konstant, 31 August 1857), 287 (letter to V. M. Karepina, 7 September 1857), 288 (letter to Mikhail Dostoevskii, 3 November 1857).

<sup>30</sup> L. P. Grossman, "Grazhdanskaia smert' F. M. Dostoevskogo," *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, 22–24 (Moscow: Zhurnal'no-gazetnoe ob'edinenie, 1935), 731.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, *PSS*, 28 (part 1): 308 (letter to M. N. Katkov, 8 May 1858), 312 (letter to Mikhail Dostoevskii, 31 May 1858), 287 (letter to E. N. Iakushkina, 12 December 1858).

<sup>32</sup> A. S. Dolinin, ed. *F. M. Dostoevskii: Materialy i issledovaniia* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1935), pp. 440–41.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 443.

An official document indicates that Dostoevsky indeed decided on Tver' as his destination.<sup>34</sup> He left Semipalatinsk on 2 July 1859 with his wife and her son from a previous marriage. After making several stopovers along the way, they arrived in Tver' on 19 August.

Travelers describing Tver' during the nineteenth century on the whole expressed positive opinions, citing its clean air, the picturesque setting above the Volga, some notable churches and public buildings, the elegant houses that lined the main thoroughfare (Millionnaia ulitsa), nicely-laid out streets in a downtown that was essentially rebuilt after a devastating 1763 fire, and the initial impression that Tver' bore a visual resemblance to St. Petersburg. Some remarked that Tver' was quiet, perhaps to a fault, but the director of a theater troupe from St. Petersburg stated that an 1855 tour there was quite satisfying and wrote positively about both the city and the theater building.<sup>35</sup>

On the surface, Dostoevsky's life in the city would seem to have been reasonably pleasant and productive. Although he was under secret surveillance because of his conviction for political activities, the only real restraint on his activities appears to have been the ban on travel to Moscow and St. Petersburg. He found rooms at the Gal'iani Hotel, where some decades earlier Pushkin had stayed more than once when visiting the city.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Grossman, "Grazhdanskaia smert' F. M. Dostoevskogo, p. 734.

<sup>35</sup> Nonna Volkova, "Tver' davno minuvshikh dnei," Available online at <<http://www.veche.tver.ru/index.shtml?news=4805>>. Her article contains many quotations about Tver', primarily by 19<sup>th</sup>-century visitors. For information on specific streets and squares (many of which have been renamed, some more than once), see A. A. Korliakov, *Ulitsy goroda Tveri: informatsionno-spravocnoe izdanie* (Tver': GERS, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> The hotel was near the intersection of Skorbiashchenskaia (then named for the church; now Volodarskaia) and Gal'ianov (now Pushkinskaia) Streets. Fittingly, Dostoevskii stayed not on Millionnaia ulitsa (the city's major roadway, later renamed Sovetskaia), but on a street whose name could be translated as "our sorrows." In Pushkin's day the hotel and its restaurant were among the city's best. He mentions the Gal'iani in the opening stanza of a poem that he included in an 1826 letter to his friend Sergei Sobolevskii: У Гальяни иль Кальони / Закажи себе в Твери / С пармазаном макарони / Да яишницу свари. (At Gal'iani's or Kalioni's / Order for yourself in Tver' / Parmesan and macaroni / And some eggs you should prepare.) A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Moscow: Nauka, 1962–66), 2: 353 and 10: 215. The hotel was later sold to a merchant; it became a bank from the end of the nineteenth century until the Bolshevik Revolution. After World War II the building was home to a music teachers' school, and since the early 1990s it has again housed a bank, which has restored the structure's original external appearance. See Nata

While Dostoevsky complained about the expense, an acquaintance who visited him in Tver' later wrote that he occupied three nice rooms.<sup>37</sup> Others came to visit from various cities, including his brother Mikhail, who, seeing him for the first time in ten years, reviewed literary and other matters with him. And there were people in Tver' to converse with as well, such as Matvei Apostol–Murav'ev, one of the Decembrists, who had settled there after his return from exile.<sup>38</sup> Dostoevsky spent much of this time deeply immersed in his writing and in efforts to publish his works. The novella *Diadiushkin son* had appeared in March of 1859, and now, needing money, he worked to get *Selo Stepanchikovo i ego obitateli* into print. He also undertook editing his collected works, which appeared only in 1860. And he began new projects. During the months in Tver' he worked intensively on *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* (*Notes From the House of the Dead*, 1859–62), and he made rough plans for a never written trilogy, aspects of which likely found their way into *Unizhennye i oskorblennye* (*The Insulted and the Injured*, 1861).<sup>39</sup>

Although Tver' by most objective measures offered a reasonable temporary home, from the very start he undertook prodigious exertions to obtain permission to settle in St. Petersburg, which had replaced Moscow for him as the desired place of residence. In virtually every letter from the Tver' period he at least mentions this topic, while in several missives it is his sole concern. His frantic compulsion for resolving the matter resulted in his submitting a petition to Tsar Alexander II through the offices of the governor, Baranov, at the same time that requests to officials were being made on his behalf by acquaintances in St. Petersburg. All this finally delayed matters: the chief of police in St. Petersburg was ready to grant his approval, but once he learned that a petition had been sent directly to the Tsar he had to wait it reached the sovereign's desk.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, during

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Kurochkina, "Gostinitsa Gal'iani v Tveri," *Nashe nasledie*, no. 34 (1995), pp. 130–31. On Pushkin's link to the hotel see V. F. Kashkova, *Pushkinskii putevoditel': Moskva, Tver', Sankt-Peterburg* (Tver': Knizhnyi klub, Suvenir, 1994), pp. 60–61.

<sup>37</sup> The comment appeared in an 1884 letter from Sergei Ivanovskii to Dostoevskii's widow. L. R. Lanskii, "Dostoevskii v neizdannoi perepiske korrespondentov (1837–1881), *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, 86 (Moscow: Nauka, 1973), p. 377.

<sup>38</sup> On Apostol–Murav'ev and Dostoevskii, see S. V. Belov, *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar': F. M. Dostoevskii i ego okruzhenie* (Moscow: Aleteia, 2001), I: 568.

<sup>39</sup> Extensive information on Dostoevskii's literary activity during this time can be found in Emel'ianov, "Dostoevskii v Tveri," pp. 59–71.

<sup>40</sup> See the account of these matters in Emel'ianov, "Dostoevskii v Tveri," pp. 71–73.

early November Dostoevsky spent several days visiting relatives in Moscow during what appears to have been an unauthorized visit. On November 25 he finally received permission to live in St. Petersburg; after several delays he and his family left for that city on December 19, precisely four months after coming to Tver'.<sup>41</sup>

Dostoevsky had his problems while in Tver': he was in constant need of money, he faced challenges in trying to deal with publishing matters from afar, his attacks of epilepsy were continuing, and the relationship with his wife, Mariia Isaeva, was already deteriorating.<sup>42</sup> In a meeting with an old friend, who was also a doctor, he particularly highlighted these last two matters.<sup>43</sup> Still, this was hardly the only time that Dostoevsky faced difficulties. His real problem with Tver' appears to have been his obsession with living in the capitals. As a result he was predisposed to dislike the city. On 11 April 1859, while still in Semipalatinsk, he replied to a remark in a letter from his brother as follows: "You write about Tver' and say that I'll have to live there for two years. But, my friend, that's awful. On the contrary, I hope to request permission to live in Moscow immediately. Of course, I'll begin to ask as soon as I arrive in Tver'."<sup>44</sup>

This initial comment foreshadowed the sharply negative feelings that he expressed from the moment he reached Tver' – feelings that seem disproportionate to the reality of life there. Only a few days after his arrival he wrote to his brother Mikhail that "Tver' is the most detestable city in the world."<sup>45</sup> Complaints about the inability to write there drew a sharp retort

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<sup>41</sup> For a chronological account of the appeals process and of Dostoevskii's other activities while in Tver', see *Letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva F. M. Dostoevskogo v trekh tomakh 1821–1881, I: 1821–1864* (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1993), pp. 263–80.

<sup>42</sup> For a concise summary of Dostoevskii's difficulties while in Tver', see Kenneth Lantz, *The Dostoevsky Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), pp. 446–47.

<sup>43</sup> See the letter by Sergei Ianovskii (cf. note 37 above) to Apollon Maikov, written on 17 February 1881 (that is, shortly after Dostoevskii's death) and published almost immediately afterwards in *Novoe vremia*, no. 1793 (24 February 1881). The letter, which contains the assertion that Dostoevskii suffered from epilepsy for several years before his arrest, includes an account of Ianovskii's visit to Dostoevskii in Tver', where the latter spoke frankly about his illness and indicated problems in his relationship with Mariia Isaeva. I am indebted to James Rice for providing me with a copy of this publication.

<sup>44</sup> *PSS*, 28 (part 1): 323.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331.

from Mikhail, who wrote that if that is the case, "you will never be able to work, in Petersburg still less than in Tver". There will always be worries."<sup>46</sup> However, Dostoevsky's opinion of the city did not improve. He wrote to his Siberian acquaintance Aleksandr Vrangeli as follows:

Now I am locked up in Tver', and it's worse than Semipalatinsk. Semipalatinsk may have completely changed recently (not a single sympathetic person or good memory is left), but Tver' is a thousand times more repulsive. The gloom, the cold, the stone buildings; there is nothing happening, no interests, not even a decent library. It's a real prison!<sup>47</sup>

Just a couple of weeks later he again writes to Vrangeli, saying that his situation in Tver' is most oppressive, that it is unbearable for him there, and he is suffering both morally and physically.<sup>48</sup> After two months in the city, writing to another friend from his Siberian days, Artemii Geibovich, Dostoevsky asserts that he visits only those few people whom he finds pleasant. Meanwhile, the city is unbelievably boring: it has few conveniences, a worthless theater – presumably the same theater that the director of the visiting troupe had warmly praised in 1855 – and high prices.<sup>49</sup>

His sense of Tver' as a prison, as a place where nothing happens, where a talented person would suffocate from boredom, and where there is hardly any person worth talking to (despite Dostoevsky's actual experiences) may well have inspired the atmosphere that pervades the town in which the events of *Besy* occur. However fine Tver' might have been to any neutral observer and for all that it provided a decent way station for Dostoevsky, his fierce yearning to be elsewhere colored his view to an inordinate degree. It is only a step from his writings about Tver' to the dreary locale of *Besy*, with its muddy streets, indeterminate layout, and a polite society unable to keep a disturbance from threatening the entire civil order.

Tver' is also, as we have seen in Dostoevsky's correspondence, the quintessential "non-St. Petersburg" for him. People, publishing, and power are all in the capital; living in Tver' remains a form of exile. The provincial city in the novel similarly evokes a sense of virtual banishment. Once

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<sup>46</sup> *Dostoevskii: Materialy i issledovaniia* (1935), p. 517.

<sup>47</sup> *PSS*, 28 (part 1): 337; a negative comment to his brother about Tver' is on p. 336.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 367.

Stepan Verkhovensky moves there those in St. Petersburg largely forget him. When he travels back to the capital with Varvara Stavrogina after his name resurfaces in the press, it turns out that he no longer really understands the events that are going on and has been left behind. Everything stems from St. Petersburg: Stavrogin carries out his various incidents of debauchery there, including his marriage to Mariia Lebiadkina, while Kirillov and Petr Verkhovensky both spend time with Stavrogin in that city. When Liputin tries to escape after the murder of Shatov, he goes to St. Petersburg, where he initially tries to find Stavrogin and Petr Verkhovensky; the latter, when we last see him, is himself getting on a train to St. Petersburg. As Dostoevsky makes clear in his letters, he saw Tver' as a backwater, while the source of ideas and activity is the capital. In the "non-Petersburg" people do not originate anything themselves but only respond to what comes from without, to forces whose source is often vague and to concepts that they do not fully comprehend.

### III: A City of Chaos and Transgression

If Dostoevsky's virulent dislike of Tver' helped inspire the depiction of the city in *Besy*, his sketching the physical setting in only the briefest of detail and with a lack of overview imparts to it an amorphous quality. Despite the comment by the narrator in Dostoevsky's notebooks, the issue was certainly not a lack of time to portray the surroundings. He clearly made a purposeful decision to offer so little information and to make the places he does describe general rather than particular.

As a result he not only conveys the broad sense of provincialism mentioned earlier but also establishes an undercurrent of fear and disorder. The familiar, the known, offers the comfort of recognition. Dostoevsky creates an environment which lacks identifiable landmarks for his readers, and which for that matter offers plenty of confusion for the characters, who often seem lost, not knowing where they are headed, or simply unaware of their own surroundings. Thus three days after the writer Karmazinov has arrived in town he still needs to ask the narrator for directions to Bykov Street, where he is staying.<sup>50</sup> Stavrogin, as he heads to the Lebiadkin

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<sup>50</sup> PSS, 10: 71. On p. 284 Petr Verkhovensky is going along Bykov when he stops in at the house where Karmazinov is staying.

residence, finds his way "without thinking much about it" and "suddenly, coming out of a deep reverie, found himself virtually in the middle" of that pontoon bridge.<sup>51</sup> The day before the disastrous fête takes place, fon Lembke orders his driver to take him to the Stavrogin estate, Skvoreshniki, but then inexplicably has him turn back. On the way, he has the carriage stop, jumps out, and seems lost in thought amidst the fields.<sup>52</sup> Stepan Verkhovensky sets out on his last pilgrimage without knowing where he is going or how he is going to get there; the narrator describes him going along in "self-oblivion," not noticing when he reached the highway, which was all of a third of a mile from Skvoreshniki, and unaware of the intermittent light rain in which he was walking.<sup>53</sup> Mar'ia Shatova confuses Bogoiavlenskaia (Epiphany or "Appearance of God") Street – the location of the Filippov House, where both Shatov and Kirillov live – with Voznesenskaia (Ascension) Street, resulting in an extra hour of riding in a cab along the city's muddy roads.<sup>54</sup> Places are at various times unknown, unrecognized or unidentifiable; characters, in turn, find themselves without direction, in an environment that appears alien.

The eminent geographer Yi-fu Tuan has remarked that cities, like other human constructs, exist in part to impose order and structure on nature, helping to contain chaos and thus overcome fear. Yet these same cities can eventually give rise to the very anxieties they were meant to allay. The sprawl of an urban area may result in a labyrinth of streets and buildings that can prove disorienting, while the concentration of other people, among whom criminals and other threatening figures might lurk, induces foreboding. His analysis of fear in the city focuses on this struggle between a city's stability and threats that arise through both human and natural

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 341.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 481.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 433. Richard Peace offers an interesting commentary on the various names in this passage, noting the very name of the Filippov House may add to the religious connotations: Petr Verkhovensky earlier mentions Ivan Filippovich (PSS, 10: 326), a leader of the Flagellant sect. See his *Dostoevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels* (Cambridge, Engl.: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 171–72. Al'tman, though, believes that the name Filippov comes from that of a member of the Petrashevskii Circle, Pavel Filippov. See his "Toponomika Dostoevskgo," *Dostoevskii: Materialy i issledovaniia*, 2 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1976), 54.

forces, with an emphasis on the anxieties induced by confronting strangers and those of a different background.<sup>55</sup>

And indeed the setting in *Besy* epitomizes what Yi-fu Tuan terms a “landscape of fear.” The city seems both spread out and suddenly filled with the “other.” Many critics have commented on the manner in which characters materialize in the town without warning, often seeming to come from nowhere.<sup>56</sup> While both Petr Verkhovensky and Stavrogin have had a previous connection to the town, they arrive unexpectedly in Chapter 5 of Part I (and Petr is described as having dropped from the sky). The young artillery officer, who “suddenly turned up” with a pencil in his hand during the meeting at Virginsky’s house turns out to be Erkel’, whose devotion to Petr Verkhovensky makes him the most cold-blooded of the conspirators. Shigalev had arrived in the town two months previously; the narrator does not know where he came from, only that he had published an article in a progressive Petersburg journal. The person who comes on stage after Stepan Verkhovensky at the literary portion of the fête turns out to be “some sort of a professor” (*kakoi-to vrode professora*), who had resigned from some (*kakogo-to*) institution after some (*kakoi-to*) incident and had arrived in the town just a couple of days earlier, producing an unpleasant effect on those who had seen him. Lebiadkin appears in the town as “some outsider” (*kakoi-to zaezzhii*), while the narrator initially describes Kirillov as an “unknown person who had no doubt just arrived”.<sup>57</sup> The rash of abrupt and inexplicable appearances hints at a breakdown in authority, and several of the new arrivals, not least of all Fed’ka Katorzhnyi, pose direct threats to the existing order.

For all that it would be impossible to create even a rough map of where the various events take place in the unnamed city, Dostoevsky implies a contrast between the center, which is home to the more respectable citizens in the town, and the “edge,” where many of the newcomers live and which seems a source of the disorder and fear. Such a contrast, of course, is not atypical of actual cities, including Tver’.<sup>58</sup> Thus the Filippov House, located

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<sup>55</sup> Yi-fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear* (New York: Pantheon, 1979), pp. 6–9 and pp. 145–74 (ch. 12).

<sup>56</sup> See for instance Lounsbury, “Dostoevskii’s Geography,” p. 224, and Saraskina, *Besy: Roman – preduprezhdenie*, p. 10.

<sup>57</sup> PSS, 10: 148 (Petr Verkhovensky) 304 and 415 (Erkel’), 109–10 (Shigalev), 364–65 (the professor), 29 (Lebiadkin) and 74 (Kirillov).

<sup>58</sup> As noted earlier, the Zavol’zhe and Zat’mach’e housed the less well-off denizens of Tver’. Yi-fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear*, p. 166, describes a similar “spatial segregation”



"on the edge of town," shelters a large set of characters, all of whom are dead by the end of the novel: Kirillov, Shatov and at first the Lebiadkins live there; Fed'ka later takes refuge in Kirillov's rooms; and Mar'ia Shatova comes back to her husband. Erkel', Petr Verkhovensky's most unquestioning follower, lives in Fomin Alley, similarly characterized as being "on the edge of town." When the Lebiadkins move across the river they are, of course, even further away from the center, and the narrator describes the area as "literally at the very edge of town."<sup>59</sup> If this "edge" seems deserted and ominous, then even the areas beyond the city proper remain linked to it and witness their own intense moments. Skvoreshniki, the Stavrogin estate, is characterized as *podgorodnoe* (literally, suburban) and turns out to be the place where Shatov's murder occurs. Dostoevsky uses the same adjective to describe the Brykovo grove – located still further from the city, between Skvoreshniki and the Shpigulin factory – which serves as the site where Stavrogin and Artemii Gaganov fight their duel.<sup>60</sup> The uncomfortable scene with the Holy Fool takes place at the house of a merchant that is "beyond the river," and requires a little time to ride to, given the way that the journey there and back is described.<sup>61</sup>

The omitted chapter "U Tikhona" describes Stavrogin walking from his house to the Spaso-Efim'evskii Bogorodskii Monastery, which is again "on the edge" of town, on the river. He comes across the workers from the Shpigulin factory, who are on their way to the demonstration that is described in Chapter 10 of Part 2. This is one of the many moments where the chronicler is very precise about the time, and in this case that information offers a notion of the distance. We learn that Stavrogin had gotten up at "exactly half-past nine," had drunk his coffee quickly, left the house, and then arrived at the monastery's gates at "about 10:30" after a couple of brief delays along the way. This would suggest that he was walking for perhaps 45 minutes, and likely a little less, so that the distance he covered was probably no more than roughly two miles. Similarly, at the end of Chapter 2 in Part 3, the narrator comments that it was no more than two and one-half versts (a mile and two-thirds) from the fire across the river

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in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Philadelphia, where the poor congregated in subpar housing on the outskirts of the city.

<sup>59</sup> PSS, 10: 28, 415 and 206.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 11, 26 and 222–23. Brykovo was the name of a birch forest on the estate of Dostoevsky's parents (PSS, 12: 299).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 254 and 261.

to Skvoreshniki, and a little while later Petr Verkhovensky says to Liza that it is three versts (two miles) from that estate to Liza's house.<sup>62</sup> The location of this country estate in relationship to the downtown and what takes place there is significant. It is both separate and close, just as its two key inhabitants, Stavrogin and Stepan Verkhovensky, albeit in very different ways, on the one hand stand apart from others in the town but on the other come to exert an influence on both the inhabitants and the events.

In addition to the "edge of town" and the places just outside the city, Dostoevsky describes a few sites that appear to be in or close to the center. Thus Varvara Stavrogina not only has her estate, but she spends winters in the town, at a place "very near" to the cathedral from where she brings Mar'ia Lebiadkina to the gathering that provides the climax for the first part of the novel.<sup>63</sup> Praskov'ia Drozdova similarly has a "magnificent estate" outside the town and a "large house" in the city, where she settles after her return from abroad. The wealthiest landowner in the province is Artemii Gaganov, son of the person whom Stavrogin literally "led by the nose," and he too was a home in the city.<sup>64</sup> The Governor's house, with the open area where the Shpigulin workers gather, is also somewhere near the center, as is the home belonging to the wife of the Marshall of the Nobility, with its enormous White Hall where the fête takes place. Like these two houses, the "club," where a surprising number of events occur, while located somewhere centrally, cannot be placed precisely in regard to other buildings. It in particular seems to stand for the society that is threatened with chaos. There, of course, Stepan Verkhovensky plays cards, and always loses. The young man who commits suicide after squandering money entrusted to him had gone to the club in search of a card game immediately upon his arrival in the town. It is where Stavrogin leads the elder Gaganov by the nose, and much later in the novel Stavrogin and Petr Verkhovensky

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<sup>62</sup> *PSS*, 11: 5 and 10: 397, 408. Dostoevskii invented the name, though the constituent parts can be found in the names of actual monasteries. Tikhon Zadonskii, the model for Tikhon, spent the last years of his life in a Bogorodskii Monastery (in Zadonsk). There was a Spaso-Efim'evskii Monastery in Tver', but if anything Dostoevskii may have had in mind the Uspenskii Otroch Monastery, where Tikhon was archimandrite (see *PSS*, 12: 298). It was located in the Zavol'zhe district, at the point where the Tvertsa flows into the Volga. If Dostoevskii was thinking of Tver' as he specified the various distances, then the Stavrogin estate was located to the north of town, roughly equidistant from the Zavol'zhe and the Otroch monastery, and a little further from the town center.

<sup>63</sup> *PSS*, 10: 26 and 126.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46 on Drozdova; pp. 224 and 413 on the Gaganov estate and house.

run into each other in the club after not seeing each other for several days. Artemii Gaganov sets loose vicious rumors about Stavrogin there, while Petr Verkhovensky is the topic of conversation by its members months after the novel's central events. After the duel with Gaganov a nameless general at the club turns public opinion in favor of Stavrogin, and, in the chapter that Dostoevsky omitted from his novel, a member of the club calls Tikhon virtually insane and doubtlessly a drunkard. Most tellingly, the general collapse of order in the town occurs when the former dregs of society are said to have somehow gained the upper hand over those who patronize the club.<sup>65</sup>

The physical descriptions of the city and its environs thus comprise a center and at least two rings of a "non-center": the disreputable "edge of town" and the outer environs. The outlying areas contain the estates, but they are also the locale of the Shpigulin factory and of towns from which people filter into the city during the course of the novel. The central core exudes intimations of affluence, prestige, stability, and continuity. It represents the world of the aristocracy, with much of its wealth and stature inherited from previous generations. That center then begins to break down when those whom the society has kept at bay in the outlying or even outer districts come to infiltrate the center.<sup>66</sup> The Shpigulin workers' peaceful march to present a petition to the governor serves simply as the most public, and among the least pernicious, of these invasions. Even that event, so difficult for the complacent citizens to comprehend, sets loose a batch of rumors and misperceptions, which the chronicler spends time refuting, using the word "nonsense" (*vzdor*) three times in the course of a single paragraph.<sup>67</sup> But the Shpigulin workers at least stay on the street. A greater danger to the stability of the core comes from those forces that violate the interiors. The gathering at Varvara Stavrogina's city house at the end of Part I is disrupted not just by the abrupt arrivals of her son and Petr Verkhovensky, but even more by the presence of Mar'ia Lebiadkina and her disreputable brother, Captain Ignat Lebiadkin. Numerous strangers (*neizvestnye lichnosti*) from outside the town who are described as savages

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 12 and 26 (Stepan's card playing), 255 (the suicide), 38–9 (Gaganov), 237 (Petr and Stavrogin), 168 (the rumors about Stavrogin), 512 (talks about Petr), 232 (the general), 11: 6 (Tikhon), and 10: 355 (dregs of society gain the upper hand).

<sup>66</sup> Nancy K. Anderson remarks that the city is easily destabilized because its leading members are so little aware of reality that its seeming solidity was only a mirage. See her *The Perverted Ideal in Dostoevsky's "The Devils"* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), p. 15.

<sup>67</sup> PSS, 10: 336–37.

(*dikari*) make their way into the White Hall during the fête. Petr, of course, makes himself at home in the governor's house, helping to sow the disturbances that will lead to fon Lembke's downfall.

As Yi-Fu Tuan emphasizes, the city is meant to impose order over both nature and human activity, to keep chaos at bay. Thus elements that are most likely to cause disruption, the "others," remain segregated from more polite society. In *Besy* those barriers break down, as those "on the edge of town" enter the social world from which they had been excluded. Pierre Bourdieu has made the point that the social order depends on a set of perceptions peculiar to each class or subclass so that people do not question their position in the world. Put very simply, "tastes" and desires tend to be similar within each group, and this shared sense of the world leads to an acceptance of the established order.<sup>68</sup> Of course, there are those who may object to or disrupt the system. Tim Cresswell, in part following on Bourdieu, discusses the concept of "transgression," which occurs when certain actions become noticed because they seem "deviant" or "out of place" whether or not the actors so intended. Thus to transgress means "to have been judged to cross some line that was not meant to have been crossed."<sup>69</sup>

With these notions in mind, *Besy* can be defined as a novel of transgression.<sup>70</sup> The worlds that were once safely separated come to flow into each other, with that of the "other" now entering freely into the once sacrosanct environs of the privileged. The resulting sense of boundaries violated contributes enormously to the atmosphere of fear and foreboding.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 169–75.

<sup>69</sup> Tim Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology and Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 23.

<sup>70</sup> Peter Sallibrass and Allon White approach transgression using Bakhtin's notion of carnival rather than geographical concepts; however, their focus on high/low relations as a "governing dynamic" ultimately involves some of the notions discussed here, and also includes reference to Pierre Bourdieu. See their *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 19–20, 43 and 88.

<sup>71</sup> Other aspects of the novel of course further contribute to the novel's atmosphere. As Harriet Murav has detailed, references to the seventeenth-century Time of Troubles are accompanied by instances of imposture and the demonic, which help lead to a breakdown in the social hierarchy: *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky's Novels & the Poetics of Cultural Critique* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 102–16. On the relationship of the demonic to the novel's socio-political themes, see W. J. Leatherbarrow, "The Devil's Vaudeville: 'Decoding' the Demonic in Dostoevsky's

A paucity of external description and lack of firm landmarks in the novel work toward Dostoevsky's purpose: the very inability to identify locations or get one's bearings helps create the aura of chaos that replaces the former stability.

In addition to the city's immediate surroundings, the chronicler also refers to a number of other places, both inside and outside Russia. Among those within Russia, St. Petersburg is by far the most prominent location. As already mentioned, it is the city where certain characters come from and to which some flee. Petersburg provides the background for much that occurs: Stepan Verkhovensky achieved his very modest level of prominence there, and some of his deeds result from believing that he is remembered in the capital; it is the locale for some of Stavrogin's worse behavior as well as the place where he initially crosses paths with the younger Gaganov, who will challenge him to a duel. In contrast, the other cities to which the narrator refers largely remain nameless, thereby strengthening the sense of a chaotic void out of which people suddenly materialize. Petersburg stands in concrete opposition to the novel's city, while the remaining towns are simply part of an amorphous but nonetheless threatening expanse, home to the shadowy "other."<sup>72</sup>

Beyond Russia, the novel contains references to a curious mix of places that emphasize on the one hand the exotic and on the other the materialism and lack of spirituality in Western culture. America, where Kirillov and Shatov had spent some unhappy months, offers a little of both; in a way Dostoevsky's view of the country seems epitomized in Lebiadkin's reference to the wealthy American who not only left his money to science and his skeleton to students, but also his skin to be made into a drum on which the American national anthem would be played day and night. Stavrogin's earlier travels take him not just to Europe but also to Iceland – a country that in the mid nineteenth century had an air of the unusual and

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*The Devils*," in *Russian Literature and Its Demons*, ed. Pamela Davidson (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), pp. 279–306.

<sup>72</sup> Linking Russia's expanse to a frightening vastness is of course a commonplace in Russian literature and figures prominently in the works of Gogol, one of the writers Dostoevskii most admired. On what might be termed "geographical fear" in Russian literature, see Mikhail Lotman, "O semiotike strakha v russkoi literature," in *Semiotika strakha*, ed. by Nora Buhks and Francis Conte (Moscow: Evropa, 2005), pp. 13–35. As Lotman notes, "Russia is first of all land – moreover, not so much earth as space" (p. 16).

distant<sup>73</sup> – as well as to Egypt and Jerusalem. If far away and unusual lands do not offer him fulfillment, neither does the familiarity of Europe: he recognizes the hopelessness of his plan to settle in the Swiss canton of Uri. While the places outside the country are usually named, they turn out to represent as much a void as the nameless Russian cities referred to within the novel. In addition, unnamed (and unknown) Russian and foreign sites serve as the source for the various proclamations and pamphlets that materialize in the novel and similarly help destabilize the town's fragile order.<sup>74</sup>

Meanwhile, an atmosphere of confinement (the same feeling that Dostoevsky experienced in Tver') embraces those who live in the city. Beyond the center lie the fearful and the unknown, so that the inhabitants seem entrapped. Moving outside the immediate environment comprises a notable event. And so Stepan Verkhovensky's last journey, when he makes it to the fictional Ust'evo (with its reference to the mouth of a river hinting at embarkation) but not to the salvation promised by the aptly named Spasov, offers a sense of release. He travels not by a carriage or by the railroad that at one point he perceives in the distance, but instead on foot and then on a peasant cart: for the first time in his life he is getting to know the real Russia. Even the scene of the duel between Stavrogin and Gaganov, which takes place on a damp and gloomy afternoon, seems to provide a moment of relief by bringing the participants and their seconds out of the stifling atmosphere of the city and into a wooded area.

In a sense Stepan transgresses from his world into the world of the real Russia, but Petr Verkhovensky serves as the novel's chief transgressor, both as a figure who seems to be adept both at finding his way into all the worlds represented in the novel and at letting loose the forces that cause the

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<sup>73</sup> Saraskina, *Besy: Roman – preduprezhdenie*, pp. 61–63, notes that Iceland at the time of the novel's events was still a little-known and little-visited country.

<sup>74</sup> Anne Lounsbury comments that in *Besy* “ideologized words and texts circulate not just freely but wildly”: “Print Culture and Real Life in Dostoevsky's *Demons*,” *Dostoevsky Studies*, XI (2007), 28. Saraskina links this phenomenon to all the writing that takes place in what she terms a “most literary” novel, where a significant number of characters write or discuss publishing projects: *Besy: Roman – preduprezhdenie*, p. 124; the literary theme is discussed on pp. 115–29. (Fon Lembke had been collecting political pamphlets “since '59” [*PSS*, 10: 245], and this reference to the year when Dostoevskii was in Tver' might hint at the novel's setting.) Interestingly, Gospels turn up almost in the same way as political tracts, when a bookseller simply appears in town; much later she turns out to be Sof'ia Ulitina, who accompanies Stepan Verkhovensky on his final journey).

established order of the city to dissolve into mayhem. He drives the conversation during the gathering at Varvara Stavrogina's city home, insinuates himself into the fon Lembke household, visits his father at Skvoreshniki, drops in to see Karmazinov, and visits Shatov and Kirillov at the Filippov house; it is as though he were in perpetual motion and has entrée everywhere. He also exerts a kind of demonic control. Providing misinformation and setting loose many of the rumors that swirl around the city, he not only has managed to get into Iuliia fon Lembke's good graces and drive a wedge between her and her husband, but he is somehow entrusted by several figures (Karmazinov, fon Lembke, Stepan) with items that they have written and takes advantage of their naïveté.<sup>75</sup> The demonic eventually passes into outright violence. While Fed'ka, whom Petr manipulates into killing the Lebiadkins, is associated with a knife, the younger Verkhovensky is associated with the pistol that he brandishes more than once in the novel and uses to kill Shatov.

Shatov, significantly, is killed at Skvoreshniki, in the usually more sheltered world of the estate – albeit an estate close to that ominous edge of the town. The murder takes place in the depths of its deserted park, more than a verst (2/3 of a mile) from the main house and a total of some three and a half or four versts from the Filippov house. Thus the park is further away from the town, abutting a pine forest: it is as though Shatov goes from the edge of town into the estate world and then out of it, into a seemingly far-off and impenetrable realm. This scene, like other memorable moments in the novel (note especially the two long chapters at the beginning of Part 2, as well as the fire in the Zarech'e quarter) takes place at night, heightening the aura of mystery and fear.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, some of the characters (Stavrogin, Kirillov, Petr Verkhovensky, Fed'ka) appear to be semi-nocturnal beings, spending many of their nights awake. The very lack of visibility becomes disorienting in the same way as the absence of topographical coordinates. As in other works of Dostoevsky, *Besy* contains striking contrasts between the dark and patches of light.<sup>77</sup> Earlier, Stavrogin, visiting Kirillov, walks through a dark passage and by two dark rooms before he

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<sup>75</sup> On Petr's role as the figure who most avidly follows the literary activities of others, see Saraskina, *Besy: Roman – preduprezhdenie*, pp. 121–26.

<sup>76</sup> The fire not only occurs at night but also represents a phenomenon that inspired great fear in cities until very modern times: hence the panic it causes in the novel. On fire and the city, see Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear*, pp. 153–55.

<sup>77</sup> On the interplay of light and dark, see Donald Fanger, *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens, and Gogol* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 224–25.

sees a light shining in the last room, and when Stavrogin returns from the Lebiadkins late at night Fed'ka pulls out a knife that gleams in the dark. In a later scene, Petr holds a candle up to Kirillov's face, illuminating it from all points. Here, just before the murder and as though prefiguring the scene with Kirillov, Petr holds up his lantern to examine his fellow conspirators, making the faces stand out against the gloom of night. The patches of light only emphasize the surrounding darkness.

#### IV: Of Place and Time

This scene as much as any other exemplifies Dostoevsky's use of topography in the novel and at the same time reveals a key similarity between the novel's spatial and temporal elements. Both exhibit an odd combination of precision and vagueness. We have already seen that when Stavrogin sets off to see Tikhon the narration contains frequent references to the exact time. The chronicler similarly keeps an eye on the clock when describing the murder and its aftermath. The conspirators are all at the park by 6:20 pm, and later Petr informs Kirillov that Shatov was murdered after 7 pm (*v vos'mom chasu*).<sup>78</sup> After the murder, Virginsky arrives home between 10 and 11, while at about 1:00 am Petr sets off to see Kirillov, and at 5:50 am he is at the railway station with Erkel', about to get on the 6:00 am train. These examples could easily be multiplied; Dostoevsky often gives us nearly a minute-by-minute account of the action.

It is also possible, albeit with more difficulty, to trace many of the intervals between events. Thus two scholars, independently of each other, both assign the large gathering at Varvara Stavrogina's house to the second Sunday in September.<sup>79</sup> They agree as well that the scenes at the beginning of Part II take place on the Monday and Tuesday of the following week, and they both have Petr's departure on that 6:00 am train occurring three weeks to the day from the gathering at Stavrogina's house. The two occasionally differ slightly: for instance, one has the death of Stavrogin

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<sup>78</sup> PSS, 10: 456 and 466.

<sup>79</sup> Gene D. Fitzgerald, "The Chronology of F. M. Dostoevskij's *The Possessed*," *Slavic and East European Journal*, 27 (1983), no. 1, 19–46 (the events of that Sunday are described on pp. 29–30); and Saraskina, *Besy: Roman – preduprezhdenie*, pp. 20–22 (the chronology of the novel is the topic of Chapter 1, pp. 9–57).



occurring eight days after Petr leaves the town, the other nine days after. Still, the degree to which the two correspond shows just how much evidence the narrator provides about the passage of time. And yet, with so many plot lines intersecting, for the sake of thematic continuity the narrator sometimes rushes ahead in his narrative and presents events out of sequence, thereby complicating matters for the reader.<sup>80</sup> Further muddling matters, the chronicler never reveals the year in which the events take place; as a result, one of the scholars, after weighing the arguments, assigns the main action to 1870 and the other to 1869, which leads to discrepancies between them in the timing of many events that occur in prior years. Thus Dostoevsky, for all the seeming exactness in the narrator's statements about time, nonetheless cuts his novel loose from precise historical chronology.<sup>81</sup>

He confuses matters to an even greater degree with place. While seemingly providing his readers with a precise set of locations, Dostoevsky in fact blurs the relationships among them. On occasion, he creates a virtual spatial montage. In depicting his fictional landmarks Dostoevsky not only seems to take aspects of different places within Tver' and reassemble them, but his provincial town is itself a kind of mosaic, comprising places and events associated with a variety of cities. The park at Skvoreshniki accurately reflects the layout of the grounds at the Petrovsky Agricultural Academy in Moscow, where Nechaev murdered Ivanov; the fire that brings the fête to a riotous close seems to have been inspired by fires that took

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<sup>80</sup> Roy Davison, "Aspects of Novelistic Technique in Dostoevskii's *Besy*," in *From Pushkin to Palisandriia: Essays on the Russian Novel in Honor of Richard Freeborn*, ed. by Arnold McMillin (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), pp. 84–85. The abundance of characters and activities also means that certain events happen concurrently, making it even more challenging for readers to follow the sequence of all the plot lines: Fitzgerald, "Chronology of F. M. Dostoevskij's *The Possessed*," pp. 20–21.

<sup>81</sup> The murder of Nechaev took place in November 1869, but the references to specific days favor 1870, which is when Dostoevskii began his serious work on the novel. Fitzgerald (*Ibid.*, pp. 21–22) chooses that year, citing as well a scene seemingly inspired by the war between France and Germany that began in July 1870 as well as Shigalev's reference at one point to "the current year 187-" (*PSS*, X: 377). Saraskina (*Besy: Roman – preduprezhdenie*, pp. 43–46) notes these points as well as others (including a reference to the "deceased Herzen," who was still alive in 1869), but also remarks that a reference to the end of the Franco-Prussian War would move the novel's intrigue to 1871. She contends that Dostoevskii places the references to actual events within an arbitrary "artistic" time frame rather than the historical timeline. She prefers 1869 as a point that better accounts for events in the past of the novel's characters (pp. 50–51).

place in St. Petersburg. Dostoevsky creates these physical settings in a manner not dissimilar to that in which he portrays characters. In the early stage of his work on *Besy* he wrote a letter to Mikhail Katkov, the editor of *Russkii vestnik*, where the novel was eventually published. He stated that although Nechaev's murder of Ivanov will play a major role in the work, he knew about the case only from the newspapers – and even if he knew the circumstances directly he would not have copied them. He was only taking the accomplished deed and then letting his imagination create the kind of person who could commit such an act.<sup>82</sup> In other words, as with place and time, Dostoevsky in other regards as well starts with a specific item which he then reworks artistically for his purposes, possibly leaving the real model far behind.

Time and place converge in yet another way. Dmitrii Likhachev once commented on the similarities between Dostoevsky's narrative and the medieval chronicles. In both, significant and insignificant events may receive equal billing, and there is more than one point of view provided rather than a single narrative perspective. But Dostoevsky, Likhachev noted, also produces a "rapid chronicle," in which his narrator seems to be chasing after facts, much like a reporter, and jotting them down on the fly soon after the incidents he describes. Dostoevsky "emancipates time," letting it flow on by itself, seemingly without authorial control. And so events take place suddenly, unexpectedly, without the passage of an interval during which the narrator can comprehend them.<sup>83</sup> As a consequence, the chronicler in *Besy* does not provide a perspective on time: all the precise indications of time in a way simply emphasize that he lives in the instant, he is not able to offer an overview. Let us recall part of the quotation from Dostoevsky's notes, in which he had the chronicler state "I do not have time to deal properly with describing our little corner. I consider myself the chronicler of one particular curious and unexpected event, which suddenly occurred in our town not long ago and took all of us very much by surprise." That is, Mr. G-v does not have time to make sense of time, and so the occurrences rush on, while he can only chronicle the precise hour and is just as astonished and overwhelmed by what happens as any of the characters.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> PSS, 29 (part 1): 141.

<sup>83</sup> Dmitrii Likhachev, *Poetika drevnerusskoi literatury* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1967), pp. 319–34, especially 329–30, 332–33, and 320–22.

<sup>84</sup> Murav, *Holy Foolishness*, pp. 117–23, discusses the resulting fragmentariness of the chronicle produced by the narrator and the accompanying sense of incompleteness.

Similarly, the chronicler lacks the vantage point from which to deal with space. He specifies distances between places in only a handful of instances; he gives the names of a few streets but little sense of where they are in relation to each other; he describes characters going from place to place but not whether the direction is north, south, east or west. He keeps his readers constantly off balance, never providing landmarks that would allow people to know just where they are. The city, whose locale within Russia remains similarly unspecified, seems to be an endless maze, with no way out, so that all are enclosed in a threatening, gloomy space, reflecting the chaos and disruption that threatens not just the town but the entire country. References to the damp and gloomy weather as well as to the narrow sidewalks – where Stavrogin forces Petr and later Petr forces Liputin to walk in the mud – further heighten the misery to which the environs give rise. The great majority of the scenes take place indoors, producing a sense of claustrophobia, especially when large groups of people gather.<sup>85</sup> There is no way to obtain a broader view, no possibility for orientation. If Dostoevsky seems to underdetermine place in his novel even as he overdetermines time, he uses both to mystify and disconcert the reader, adding to the oppressiveness of the novel's setting – inspired, I submit, to no small degree by his involuntary stay in Tver<sup>7</sup>, and evoking not just the feeling of entrapment he perceived while in that city, but also a sense of fear and ultimately terror.

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<sup>85</sup> On the descriptions of the city and the predominance of interior scenes, see Tunimanov, "Rasskazchik v *Besakh* Dostoevskogo," pp. 143–44.