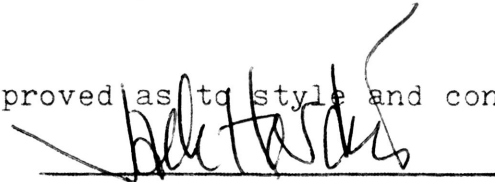


DEAD ENDS IN DOSTOEVSKY

A Paper
by Tim Pawelek

Approved as to style and content:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jack Hardie", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Jack Hardie, Advisor

Submitted to the
University Undergraduate Fellows Program

May 1976

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION: THE NATURE OF DEAD-END IMAGERY. . .	1
2. UNDER THE FLOORBOARDS: DEAD ENDS IN <u>NOTES</u> <u>FROM UNDERGROUND</u>	8
3. THE SPIDER-HAUNTED CORNER: DEAD ENDS IN <u>CRIME AND PUNISHMENT</u>	15
4. THE ENTOMBED SAINT: DEAD ENDS IN <u>THE IDIOT</u> . . .	24
5. DEVILS IN THE MADHOUSE: DEAD ENDS IN <u>THE POSSESSED</u>	30
6. DEAD ENDS AND OPEN VISTAS IN <u>THE BROTHERS</u> <u>KARAMAZOV</u>	41
NOTES	52
BIBLIOGRAPHY	53

1. INTRODUCTION: THE NATURE OF DEAD-END IMAGERY

The purpose of this paper is to examine those cul-de-sac images in Dostoevsky's major novels in which the villains-- principally Svidrigailov in Crime and Punishment, Stavrogin in The Possessed, and Smerdyakov in The Brothers Karamazov-- destroy themselves, dramatically illustrating what Dostoevsky saw as the meaning of human existence without God. Critics looking upon Dostoevsky as a philosopher, a religious prophet, a psychologist, or a social thinker, usually overlook the most obvious fact about Dostoevsky--the fact that he wrote novels. Therefore, as Ernest J. Simmons, Rene Wellek, and Edward Wasiolek maintain, Dostoevsky should be considered primarily as "a novelist, a supreme creator of a world of imagination, an artist with a deep insight into human conduct and the perennial condition of man."¹ My intention is to focus on this world of imagination, this labyrinthine universe of Dostoevsky's, and to show that this particular dead-end imagery--such as walls, sordid little rooms, corners filled with spiders--is a rich concretization of Dostoevskian themes, mirroring the nature of certain characters and intensifying the dramatic situations. In addition I intend to examine dead-endness as it applies on a higher level to the novels themselves. An evolving moral and spiritual vision characterizes Dostoevsky's novels. As he is a novelist of ideas, he can be seen implementing those ideas in

characters and dramatic plots, working with them, shaping and and expanding and exploring their consequences. Each novel, taken as a whole, is a larger statement; as a world of moral imagination each is either open-ended or closed. This means that Dostoevsky explores the solutions and/or the lack of solutions to the moral dilemmas of his heroes and villains. The particular dead-end images, then, are parts of a wider picture as the corner of a room is part of a mansion.

Recurrent imagery in Dostoevsky usually noted by critics involves insects, rodents, and other forms of lower animal life. As Ralph Matlaw points out, the image of the spider is associated with certain villains, and there is a general recurring image-pattern of insects, flies, beetles, lice, cockroaches, centipedes, worms, and mice which indicates certain concepts.² Indeed, what Dmitri Karamazov says of himself may be taken as a commonplace: "I loved vice, I loved the ignominy of vice. I loved cruelty; am I not a bug, am I not a noxious insect?" (BK, 112).³ However, another image-pattern complements the one of insects. Images of location, such as corners and "cupboards" of rooms, also recur with thematic significance. For example, Svidrigailov of Crime and Punishment conceives eternity to be a smoke-blackened room with spiders in the corners. This is a very powerful and haunting image, denoting spiritual sterility, hopelessness and no-way-outness. Spatial metaphors are obviously at work.

Where Svidrigailov's spiders are situated indicates other Dostoevskian themes besides that of Dmitri's insectlike lust and cruelty--those of the inevitable consequence of pure self-will, the absence of belief in God, and the impossibility of moral regeneration. Dead-end images are related primarily to Dostoevsky's conception of human will. The will is the fundamental nature of man. As the Underground Man explains, extinguishing the light of reason and aggrandizing the mystery and darkness of the will, "reason is nothing but reason and satisfies only the rational side of man's nature, while will is a manifestation of the whole life, that is, of the whole human life including reason and all the impulses" (NU, 147). And in order to give maximum expression of will "what man wants is simply independent choice, whatever that independence may cost and wherever it may lead" (NU, 146). In other words, man wants the freedom to follow his slightest whim. As the will is equated with whim, the implication is that the will is destructive. An individual per se is pure will, or self-will, and he seeks to express his will in sensuality or brutality. Edward Wasiolek elaborates that "the will or the self for Dostoevsky is limited by nothing; it is boundless in appetite; and it is universal in presence. It makes of social relations a relentless duel, and of the individual a monster who will set the world on fire to satisfy a whim. The terror and freedom of the will are indissolubly linked."⁴ But what precisely is the link between the will and

the dead-end image? By definition they are completely opposite: the will is boundless whereas the dead-end image is bounded. However, for Dostoevsky they are intimately related; the dead end is the consequence of the self-will principle. The terrible irony is that the unbounded will leads invariably to dead-endness, that the will, rushing outward in its rapacity, closes in upon itself and is destroyed, like a fire which quickly burns itself out. Thus the dead-end images of spider-haunted corners and little rooms are those final situations in which the self-willed villains find themselves. The self-will of these characters has led them into corners. They then resort to the exceedingly unpleasant finality of a rope about the neck or a bullet in the brain. But why is this self-destruction the grim ultimate consequence of self-will? Why does a self-willed villain, realizing his cul-de-sac situation, necessarily kill himself?

Two other themes are consonant with the one of self-will leading to a dead end. Reinforcing the spiritual isolation and hopelessness of the dead-end situation, these two themes show why suicide ultimately results. First, the will is Godless. Kirillov explains in The Possessed that if God exists then all is His will but that if He does not then all is the individual's will. Thus each Dostoevskian villain is a self-willed atheist. Raskolnikov, Svidrigailov, Kirillov, Stavrogin, and Smerdyakov--each admits that he does not believe in God. Secondly, the possibility of moral

regeneration does not exist for these characters since they deny God and live solely to satisfy their will. They obviously cannot turn to God in repentance, nor can they turn to other people for atonement and forgiveness. Thus their dead ends are spiritual cul-de-sacs as well as physical ones. In such situations these characters are truly and hopelessly alone. As Marmeladov asks Raskolnikov in Crime and Punishment, "Do you understand, sir, do you understand what it means when you have absolutely nowhere to turn?" (CP, 14). Such is the hell of the corner, of the little room, of the wall. And suicide is the only way to relieve the terrible burden.

There are, however, ways to arrest this movement of self-will before it stops in the dead end of despair and destruction. The two notions above, taken in a positive sense, are means of curbing the rapacious will. A belief in God and the action of moral renewal are, as Dostoevsky sees them, the only adequate leashes for the will. The will is ever-present in human nature and cannot be escaped. Thus it has to be stifled somehow, and religion serves to this end of escaping the dead end. This explains why the novels of Dostoevsky are permeated with religious ideas, why there is an apocalyptic glow as of heaven and hell surrounding his characters, why Christ and the Devil stalk the earth once more in The Brothers Karamazov, and why Dostoevsky himself was so haunted and tormented by the possibility of God's

nonexistence. For without God the anarchistic will is supreme, and man is lost. In The Possessed Kirillov speaks fervidly for this redeeming idea of God:

Listen to a great idea: there was a day on earth, and in the midst of the earth there stood three crosses. One on the Cross had such a faith that he said to another, 'Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise.' The day ended; both died and passed away and found neither Paradise nor resurrection. His words did not come true. Listen: that Man was the loftiest of all on earth, He was that which gave meaning to life. The whole planet, with everything on it, is mere madness without that Man. There has never been any like Him before or since, never, up to a miracle. For that is the miracle, that there never was or never will be another like Him. And if that is so, if the laws of nature did not spare even Him, have not spared even their miracle and made even Him live a lie and die for a lie, then all the planet is a lie and rests on a lie and mockery. So then, the very laws of the planet are a lie and the vaudeville of devils. What is there to live for? (P, 629)

Man's life without acceptance of Christ is merely the pointless expression of unleashed self-will, and the world is a chamber of horrors. As will be shown, the most eloquent example of the will being overcome by religious beliefs is the situation of Raskolnikov in Crime and Punishment. As a murderer Raskolnikov is a self-willed villain, and after his crime he experiences a growing, unendurable solitude. He is headed for a dead end. However, the gentle Sonia intervenes. Speaking for the love of God and of humanity she persuades Raskolnikov to affirm the traditional Christian tenets of moral regeneration--compassion, humility, and repentance.

And in complying Raskolnikov is able to rise above and escape the rushing, abyss-bound track of self-will.

These religious ideas, acting as a foil against the dead-endness of the will, open up the novels. For Dostoevsky, a creative artist with a profound moral imagination, the ideas are an opening of doors, an expansion of vision. To be sure, there are no final solutions for Dostoevsky. He is not content to say that the seemingly triumphant situation of any one character (such as that of Raskolnikov) is the answer. Rather, he explores the consequences of certain ideas, tracing them in one novel to a dead end and in another to a hopeful way-outness.

Thus the situations of the characters, the dead ends and possible escapes from dead ends, now require a more detailed examination. I have chosen for consideration the five novels generally conceded to be Dostoevsky's mature work--Notes from Underground, Crime and Punishment, The Idiot, The Possessed, and The Brothers Karamazov. In each of the following sections I will examine the specific nature of the dead ends found in each novel and their significance in the context of each novel's labyrinthine moral vision.

2. UNDER THE FLOORBOARDS:
DEAD ENDS IN NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND

Notes from Underground has been cited by critics as a seminal work, a springboard into the other major novels, both thematically and artistically. Such mature Dostoevskian themes as free will, irrationalism, moral obliquity, and suffering appear, and Dostoevsky's artistic craft--his dramatization of ideas coupled with intense psychological probings--also takes rudimentary shape. Yet the novel is so much rough lumber; it never finally assumes the structure of a well-built house. This is because the story of the Underground Man is told in two distinct parts: the first part is a psychological self-analysis, and the second part relates some of the Underground Man's earlier experiences which then are significant in the light of his self-analysis. Wasiolek correctly maintains that "the second half of the novel contains the living psychology which implies the metaphysic of the first half."⁵ This broken line of story, however, does not occur in the later novels, where ideas and dramatic action, metaphysic and living psychology, are masterfully integrated.

The first part of the Underground Man's story is ideational and confessional, presented in diary form. The Underground Man explains his eccentric character, his motivation and tangled ideas. He is a forty-year-old ex-government official who lives in the "corner" of his wretched, horrid room. At the very outset he admits that he is a sick

and spiteful man. He says that consciousness itself is a sickness, that he recognizes and oscillates between the kind/spiteful, the honest man/rascal, and the hero/insect elements swarming within him. Yet he tends toward spite, rascality, and insectness. He is ready to sink into the mire of self-consciousness at any time. As a result of this self-loathing he repeatedly refers to himself as a vile insect, a fly, a cockroach, a worm, a mouse. Everyone else, too, echoes this self-assessment. "I was a mere fly in the eyes of all this world," he explains bitterly, "a nasty, disgusting fly--more intelligent, more highly developed, more refined in feeling than any of them, of course, but a fly that was continually making way for everyone, insulted and injured by everyone" (NU, 164). The strange thing about his spite, however, is that he enjoys it. His enjoyment derives from a heightened sense of freedom: he chooses to follow his slightest whim no matter how vicious or loathsome it is in order to prove the freedom of his sweet, foolish will. As a result he attacks the scientific attitudes and the social environment of his day in which man's fundamental freedom of will is denied or overlooked. No matter how many social schemes replete with materialistic comforts are devised, he contends, man will always play a dirty trick, will always upset the system to indulge in his free will. As the Underground Man puts it, "man likes to make roads and to create, that is a fact beyond dispute. But why has he such

a passionate love for destruction and chaos also?" (NU, 150). Freedom is the terrible answer.

The second part of the Underground Man's story, involving his recounting of earlier experiences, illustrates his free will in action. "One longed for movement in spite of everything, and I plunged all at once into dark, underground, loathsome vice of the pettiest kind. My wretched passions were acute, smarting, from my continual, sickly irritability. I had hysterical impulses, with tears and convulsions" (NU, 161). Following one of these "hysterical impulses"--after seeing a fight in a tavern and one man thrown out a window--the Underground Man also wants to be hurled out of a window. Going into the tavern he blocks the way of a huge officer, but the officer merely takes him by his shoulders and sets him aside, brushing him away as if he were some bothersome insect. This ignominy the Underground Man cannot accept, yet he flees from the tavern. For months and even years he plans revenge which he finally does achieve. Mustering his moral courage after years of vacillation, he brushes shoulders with the officer on the street! Triumphant, he sings Italian arias. Another absurd illustration of the actual working of his will is the fiasco at the dinner party of his former schoolmates. Uninvited, actually despising these fellows, the Underground Man attends the party and makes a fool of himself. Afterwards he follows them to a brothel where he sleeps with Liza, one of the prostitutes. In compassion mingled with a

sense of power, he lectures Liza on her life of vice and ignominy. Later, when he realizes that he loves her and that she loves him, he turns completely around in sentiment and hates her. At the end of the novel the Underground Man is left as he is found in the beginning--in his corner, in his underground, stewing in his spite and the inertia caused by his whim-following, oscillating nature.

The eccentric character of the Underground Man, his nihilistic behavior, and his emphasis on free will are parts of the thematic machinery of which dead-end imagery is composed. However, the situation of the Underground Man never crystallizes in a dead end as found in the situations of the later villains. Indeed, the Underground Man cannot be considered a villain in the strict sense. Though he is sick and spiteful, "Dostoevsky approves of him. Even more, he [Dostoevsky] makes him his hero. For in this vain, petty, nasty, vicious, spiteful creature, indeed in the very marrow of that cold and malignant spite is a principle that is precious for him and for Dostoevsky: freedom."⁶

Fighting for this freedom, the Underground Man confronts his own peculiar cul-de-sacs. Two barriers--the wall and the Crystal Palace--oppose him. The wall symbolizes the immutable laws of nature, as the Underground Man understands such laws. He scowls at the wall of the laws of nature, the discoveries of natural science, and the deductions of mathematics. "Merciful heavens! but what do I care for the laws of nature

and arithmetic, when, for some reason, I dislike those laws and the fact that twice two makes four?" (NU, 137-138). The determinism of such laws denies man his sweet foolish freedom of will. The Crystal Palace extends the image of the wall; it symbolizes the structure built upon such laws of nature--rationalism and science. The Crystal Palace, a remarkable structure at the London World Fair (1851) which Dostoevsky had seen in his travels, symbolizes the impressive achievements of rationalistic science. But the Crystal Palace does not impress the Underground Man; rather, it depresses him. Science, he claims, will teach man that

he never has really had any caprice or will of his own, and that he himself is something of the nature of a piano-key or the stop of an organ, and that there are, besides, things called the laws of nature; so that everything is not done by his willing it, but is done of itself, by the laws of nature. (NU, 144-145)

Thus the Underground Man raves, sticks his tongue out, and kicks at the Crystal Palace. It is too clean and polished and rigorously structured, leaving no room for the rough-edged human soul. He passionately professes: "I believe in it, I answer for it, for the whole work of man really seems to consist in nothing but proving to himself every minute that he is a man and not a piano-key! It may be at the cost of his skin, it may be by cannibalism!" (NU, 149).

This final line concerning the terrible cost of freedom foreshadows the dead ends in the later novels. The characters in those situations act in accordance with the Underground

Man's ideas; they follow their will--too consistently. Thus the possibility of dead ends looms here, and Dostoevsky is very aware of it. In the very next novel, Crime and Punishment, he explores further the Underground Man's notion of free will in a social context. However, the final situation of the Underground Man and of the novel as a whole is one of qualified dead-endness. The Underground Man, rejecting Liza, rejects the possible escape from his mousehole, his underground situation. His relation to Liza elicited his compassionate response, and compassion, for Dostoevsky, is an emotion of salvation. Thus the Underground Man is in a dilemma. He has overcome the barriers of the wall and the Crystal Palace by asserting his will, by following his whims, but now he himself is overcome by the barrier of his own will. His unpredictable, oscillating whims have led him to his underground, psychological hell-hole. He is so filled with doubts, questions, and strange impulses that he cannot act decisively. He remains in his corner as a victim of this inertia of acute consciousness. Such is the Underground Man's "dead end"; it is one of psychological stagnation.

Robert Payne comments that the English translation of the title as Notes from Underground is actually incorrect. "More accurately it should be 'Notes from under the Floorboards.' There is a suggestion of vermin breeding in the darkness of a fetid cellar and preparing destruction."⁷ To extend this notion of the cellar, Notes from Underground may be considered

the cellar of Dostoevsky's labyrinthine mansion. Upon it rises the spacious rooms of the other novels. Dostoevsky understood the breeding darkness down there and consequently did not accept the Underground Man's "dead end" of psychological stagnation. This is why he interjected the following editorial device at the "end" of the Underground Man's story: "The notes of this paradoxalist do not end here, however. He could not refrain from going on with them, but it seems to us that we may stop here" (NU, 222). It is abrupt, like the closing of a door. Dostoevsky closes the door to the cellar Notes from Underground and enters the room of Crime and Punishment. Yet the echoes of that door closing, in themes and situations, persist, ringing throughout the Dostoevskian mansion.

3. THE SPIDER-HAUNTED CORNER: DEAD ENDS IN CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Dramatic situations in Crime and Punishment contain superb examples of dead-end imagery--sordid little rooms and spider-haunted corners. The two villains--Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov--are, in the course of the novel, on the way to a dead end. Raskolnikov is a brilliant but poor student who decides to murder an old woman pawnbroker, Alyona Ivanovna. Surprised in the act, he has to kill her sister, too. As his conscience painfully awakens, Raskolnikov re-examines his motives. Did he murder to relieve his poverty and that of his mother and sister? Did he murder to aid others since Alyona Ivanovna, in her money-lending policies, was sucking the fresh young lives of other people? Did he murder to prove himself a Napoleon? No, he murdered purely for self-interest; he wanted to see if he possessed the strength to do so. However, he lacks the strength to endure his mental anguish which follows. Feeling isolated from the rest of humanity like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, he advances toward the logical end of his self-willed life--Svidrigailov's spider-haunted corner. In the meantime Porfiry Petrovitch, the police inspector, possessing shrewd psychological insight, suspects Raskolnikov. This Raskolnikov knows, and his anguish increases, for Porfiry Petrovitch, while simply waiting for Raskolnikov to break down and confess, nonetheless badgers and probes Raskolnikov with maddening irony. But a way out

does present itself to Raskolnikov through his own compassionate impulses and the aid and encouragement of Sonia Marmeladov, a young girl forced into prostitution to support her drunken father, his ailing wife, and three small children. To Sonia he confesses his crime. Finally, at Sonia's insistence and his own realization that his life will end hopelessly like that of Svidrigailov if he does not act accordingly, Raskolnikov confesses his crime and is sentenced to Siberia. Thus he is able to avoid the dead end. Svidrigailov, on the other hand, is the "purer" villain; he is consistent in his self-willed behavior of debauchery. Lacking compassion, he destroys himself in his dead-end situation. Both villains, then, complement each other, and the spider-haunted corner, as a spiritual memento mori, looms darkly above both.

More closely considered, Raskolnikov's situation is an extension of that of the Underground Man. The Underground Man was left in his mousehole of a room, isolated and in mental turmoil. Raskolnikov, at the very outset of Crime and Punishment, emerges from his sordid apartment in St. Petersburg with the ghastly idea of murder in his equally sordid mind. It is as if Dostoevsky had taken the Underground Man, strengthened his spine and gave him a fixed idea upon which to act and express his self-will. Anticipating his moral cul-de-sac, Raskolnikov's apartment

was a tiny cupboard of a room about six paces in length. It had a poverty-stricken appearance with its dusty yellow paper peeling off the walls, and it was so low-pitched that a man of more than average height was ill at ease in it and felt every moment that he would knock his head against the ceiling. The furniture was in keeping with the room: there were three old chairs, rather rickety; a painted table in the corner on which lay a few manuscripts and books; the dust that lay thick upon them showed that they had been long untouched. A big clumsy sofa occupied almost the whole of one wall and half the floor space of the room; it was once covered with chintz, but was now in rags and served Raskolnikov as a bed...

It would have been difficult to sink to a lower ebb of disorder, but to Raskolnikov in his present state of mind this was positively agreeable. He had got completely away from every one, like a tortoise in its shell, and even the sight of the servant girl who had to wait upon him and looked sometimes into his room made him writhe with nervous irritation. (CP, 25)

Later, he tells Sonia: "I sat in my room like a spider. You've been in my den, you've seen it...And do you know, Sonia, that low ceilings and tiny rooms cramp the soul and the mind?" (CP, 375). These descriptions of Raskolnikov's quarters are important for two reasons; namely, enclosed space, this sordid little room, is equated with a psychological state, and it also foreshadows the ultimate significance of spiritual isolation.

Raskolnikov's explanation of his motive in murdering Alyona Ivanovna reinforces his solitariness and his spider-like rapacity of self-will:

I wanted to murder without casuistry, to murder for my own sake, for myself alone! I didn't want to lie about it even to

myself. It wasn't to help my mother I did the murder--that's nonsense--I did the murder for myself, for myself alone, and whether I became a benefactor to others, or spent my life like a spider catching men in my web and sucking the life out of men, I couldn't have cared at that moment. (CP, 377)

Immediately after the murder Raskolnikov's punishment by conscience commences. He experiences a despairing isolation:

A gloomy sensation of agonizing, everlasting solitude and remoteness, took conscious form in his soul...He had never experienced such a strange and awful sensation. And what was most agonizing--it was more a sensation than a conception or idea, a direct sensation, the most agonizing of all the sensations he had known in life. (CP, 94)

Coupled with this agonizing solitude, this foretaste of death, is a nausea of the world:

A new overwhelming sensation was gaining more and more mastery over him every moment; this was an immeasurable, almost physical, repulsion for everything surrounding him, an obstinate, malignant feeling of hatred. All who met him were loathsome to him--he loathed their faces, their movements, their gestures. If any one had addressed him, he felt that he might have spat at him or bitten him...(CP, 101)

Clearly Raskolnikov is working himself, like a spider, into a corner. His self-will, his crime, his pride, his spite and his incapacity to love force him to withdraw from the world. The low ceilings and tiny rooms become more cramping. He is haunted by the drunken Marmeladov's question: "Do you understand, sir, do you understand what it means when you have absolutely nowhere to turn?" (CP, 14). Yes, Raskolnikov understands--bitterly, despairingly: suicide

appears to be the only answer. Yet, watching a woman attempt suicide by jumping off a bridge, he feels indifference, apathy and disgust. Suicide, though it remains a possibility, is no answer to his dilemma.

Three things enable Raskolnikov to avoid a dead end--his own compassionate impulses, Sonia and Svidrigailov. The gentle Sonia encourages him to follow his compassionate impulses which contend with those of his self-will. She is like Liza in Notes from Underground, yet her role evinces a definite spiritual triumph: her compassion and religious beliefs successfully oppose the self-will of Raskolnikov. And it should be noted that Sonia, too, as a prostitute, is in a precarious cul-de-sac situation. As Raskolnikov asks her, "Tell me how this shame and degradation can exist in you side by side with other, opposite, holy feelings? It would be better, a thousand times better and wiser to leap into the water and end it all!" (CP, 291). Yet it is precisely these other, opposite, holy feelings--her quiet and firm belief in God and in resurrection as found in the biblical tale of Lazarus--which deter her from leaping into the cold, dark water. She encourages Raskolnikov to confess his crime and, in the Christian spirit of humility and repentance, accept his punishment. Her compassion, then, counters Raskolnikov's spiteful isolation; it brings new life and strength to Raskolnikov in such a way that it "might be compared to that of a man condemned to death who has suddenly been pardoned"

to the dead end.

The sordid hotel room in which Svidrigailov spends the night before his suicide is an accurate representation of his bleak eternity-room. After the failure of his design to seduce Dounia, Raskolnikov's sister, Svidrigailov realizes the futility of his life. In leaden despair he lodges for the night in a hotel, "a long, blackened wooden building" (CP, 451), which brings to mind his bathhouse. His sordid room there is like Raskolnikov's:

It was a room so low-pitched that Svidrigailov could only just stand up in it; it had one window; the bed, which was very dirty, and the plain stained chair and table almost filled it up. The walls looked as though they were made of planks, covered with shabby paper, so torn and dusty that the pattern was indistinguishable, though the general color--yellow--could still be made out. One of the walls was cut short by the sloping ceiling, though the room was not an attic, but just under the stairs.

...The room was close, the candle burnt dimly, the wind was roaring outside, he heard a mouse scratching in the corner and the room smelt of mice and of leather. (CP, 452-453)

His dreams in this cramping room heighten the horror of the place. In his first dream a mouse runs over his body as he is lying in bed. He confronts the coffin of a fourteen-year-old girl he had disgraced in a second dream. The third dream is about a little girl he finds in a dark corner, wet and cold and shivering. He puts her to bed, but then her face widens in a shameless grin, like that of a French harlot. Horrified, he asks, "What does it mean?" Then he awakens. What does it mean? It means that Svidrigailov realizes, in

the glowing, shameless face of the dream-drawn girl, his own sensual behavior. It is too much. He leaves the room in despairing resolution, walks to a nearby bridge, and shoots himself. And although he walks out into open space, Svidrigailov spiritually never departs from the hotel room of mice, of dream-harlots, of dead-endness.

Though Svidrigailov's situation closes in a dead end, Raskolnikov's, as has been shown, does not. The moral wasteland and hopelessness of Svidrigailov's dead end is evaded by Raskolnikov who confesses and is sentenced to Siberia for eight years (where he is followed by Sonia). Thus the religious ideas and consonant emotions open up the novel as a whole, for man's life is not fated for a Svidrigailovian dead end provided that he accept God, that he restrict his self-will in humility and compassionate concern for his fellow men. But at what price? For in so doing is not man giving up his terrible, precious freedom of will? Even in prison Raskolnikov has second thoughts about his crime.

It is impossible for him to accept either path as a solution: the path of blood and crime to power or the path of submission and suffering to a Christ-like salvation. He loves and hates both, the meekness and submission of Sonia and the self-will and desire for power of a Svidrigailov.⁸

His self-will still smoulders, suggesting that the price of total submission to God is too much for Raskolnikov--and for Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky will not commit himself to any final answer. True, religion serves to overcome dead-endness, but

what does this "solution" further entail? Ernest J. Simmons says of Crime and Punishment:

Over all radiates a spiritual glow, so characteristic of Dostoevsky's great novels, that illumines at once the darkest recesses of the minds of the proud and humble, of the criminal and morally debased and inspires them to seek a deeper meaning in life through suffering to ultimate salvation.⁹

But this spiritual glow, illuminating a way out, is not brilliant or unchanging; it wavers like the little light of a candle in a mournful wind. A draft blows through the Dostoevskian mansion. The self-will remains a fundamental problem to be further explored.

4. THE ENTOMBED SAINT:
DEAD ENDS IN THE IDIOT

Crime and Punishment, the disturbing but fascinating psychological workroom and laboratory of the Dostoevskian mansion, opens into the sitting room, The Idiot. In spite of the fact that The Idiot also involves a murder and contains telltale Dostoevskian ideas and character-types, it lacks that curious spiritual glow illuminating the dark recesses of a criminal mind, the moral urgency, the dramatic suspense, and the fine artistic concretization of dead-endness found in Crime and Punishment. It is as if Dostoevsky had set aside his tools for psychological probing, turned down the Bunsen burners of conscience-investigation, washed his hands, and went out into the parlor to enjoy an evening's conversation with friends. I, perhaps, do an injustice to The Idiot by comparing it disparagingly to Crime and Punishment. It may be rightly argued that The Idiot is another novel, a different novel, and should be considered as such. Nonetheless, pedestrian and slow-moving, The Idiot fails to excite the reader since he encounters humdrum dramatic situations--the tragedy of a walk down the street and in the park, the adventure of sitting and chatting in a parlor room, the exhilarating experience of a family argument, the Machiavellian intrigue of the next-door neighbors' doings, or the intellectually demanding mystery of a love letter.

The story of The Idiot is that of Prince Myshkin who is

of a meek, gentle, childlike and Christ-like nature. Returning to St. Petersburg from Switzerland where he had undergone treatment for epilepsy, Myshkin becomes the heir of a large fortune and is embroiled afterwards in St. Petersburg society. Because of his simple nature he earns the nickname of "the idiot." He befriends among others the Yepanchins and their three daughters (the youngest, Aglaia, falling in love with him); Parfyon Rogozhin, who is passionately in love with the enigmatic Nastasya Filippovna, a woman beautiful, proud, yet self-tormented by her shame of being brought up as another man's mistress; and the Ivolgins, in whose house he boards. Myshkin's primary interest is in Nastasya Filippovna. Her beauty and moral dilemma haunt him so much that, out of commiseration, he intends to marry her. However, Nastasya is emotionally unstable, and though appreciative of Myshkin's sentiments, she does not want to ruin him in marriage. She runs away with Rogozhin. In a climatic scene Myshkin finds that she has been murdered by Rogozhin. Emotionally shocked, he lapses into idiocy. Myshkin's erratic relationship with Nastasya serves as the connecting narrative thread, but the bulk of the novel is actually devoted to his digressions--his involvement in the petty intrigues and domestic problems of his other friends. Worked into the narrative, too, are discussions of religious and philosophical ideas characteristic of Dostoevsky and commentaries on Russian society, morals and manners.

These social twistings and turnings, ideational digressions, and even Nastasya's murder never lead into an authentic dead end situation involving self-will, spiritual isolation, and self-destruction. There are no spider-haunted corners in The Idiot. However, the climatic scene in which Myshkin and Rogozhin are with the body of Nastasya is a curious departure from Dostoevsky's usual model of dead-endness, and it is important to the novel's moral vision.

This scene takes place in Rogozhin's study. Myshkin, seeking Nastasya, is taken by Rogozhin into the study:

There was some change in the room since the prince had been in it last. A heavy green silk curtain that could be drawn at either end hung right across the room, dividing the alcove where Rogozhin's bed stood from the rest of the apartment. The heavy curtain was drawn so as to leave no opening at either end. It was very dark in the room. The white nights of Petersburg summer were beginning to get dark and, had it not been for the full moon, it would have been difficult to make out anything in Rogozhin's dark rooms with the blinds down. It is true faces could still be seen though very indistinctly. Rogozhin's face was pale as usual; his glittering eyes watched the prince intently with a fixed stare. (I, 548)

Myshkin discovers Nastasya lying in the bed, stabbed to death. She is covered with oilcloth and a sheet, and Rogozhin has put jars of disinfectant around the bed to hide the smell. In this room of death Myshkin and Rogozhin spend the night, and

when after many hours the doors were opened and people came in, they found the murderer completely unconscious and raving. The prince was sitting beside him motionless on

the bedding, and every time the sick man broke into screams or delirium, he hastened to pass his trembling hand gently over his hair and cheeks, as though caressing and soothing him. (I, 557)

Even though such a morbid scene elicits shudders, it does possess greater value. This dark, curtained, death-still room in Rogozhin's melancholy house is suggestive of dead-endness, but it is, indeed, only suggestive, vaguely reminiscent of that found in Crime and Punishment. Its cumulative effect is one of tragic waste: Nastasya is murdered, Rogozhin goes mad, and Myshkin becomes a hopeless idiot. The "dead end" is Nastasya's, but she cannot be considered at all villainous. The willful, egotistic and insanely jealous Rogozhin is the actual villain. Though he is not developed further than as a plot device, he does possess some of the spiritual significance of a Svidrigailov. Svidrigailov's eternity-room is echoed in the Holbein painting of Christ's descent from the cross. The painting, showing Christ as a victim of the laws of nature like all other mortals, hangs in Rogozhin's apartment for his moody contemplation. He tells Myshkin that it makes him lose his faith. If Christ cannot escape the laws of nature, what can man hope for but the pointless expression of his self-will? And the picture being located in Rogozhin's quarters reinforces the sense of tragedy and frustration of that scene in his study. Rogozhin has followed his self-willed nature, has caught and killed Nastasya in his web, and has drawn in Myshkin from the innocence of the periphery.

Myshkin's being drawn in from the periphery where he is a compassionate onlooker, his failure to prevent Nastasya's murder, and his final lapse into idiocy make the novel's moral vision tragic. Like an ineffectual angel he fails to come to grips with the devil of self-will. Sonia, as an angelic, saintly figure in Crime and Punishment, was able to oppose successfully (though not completely) Raskolnikov's self-will; amid a sea of darkness she was a secure island of light. But Myshkin--and he is obviously a Christ-figure in his meekness and religious notions--is frustrated by the society surrounding him. He is also equated with Don Quixote by Aglaia. This analogy is valid in that it is relevant to the failure of Myshkin's ideals. Too meek, too simple, too passive, Myshkin is drawn helplessly into the dark whirlwind of treachery about him. Is Dostoevsky suggesting that such purity and passivity of character is not enough to insure man's salvation? It would appear so, for Myshkin fails to negate Rogozhin's self-will, and he also fails as a foil to a similar ideological opposite in the person of Ippolit Terentyev. Ippolit, as a minor character in the novel, is a youth who, suffering from consumption, belongs to Myshkin's circle of eccentric friends. Like Raskolnikov before him and Kirillov and Ivan Karamazov after him, Ippolit is an intellectual rebel against God. He represents a different aspect of self-will than Rogozhin's sensual, range-of-the-moment lusts; he equips self-will with a ferocious

rationality. He argues against the acceptance of God, humility, and charity--those ideals embodied in and voiced by Myshkin. Ippolit, too, is affected by Rogozhin's Holbein painting, for as a consumptive he feels within him the inexorable, corrosive laws of nature. Like the Underground Man before him, he defies these laws but with a terrible difference: he wants to kill himself to prove proudly his self-will. His suicide attempt, however, fails, and he dies of consumption in the end. Myshkin cannot counter effectively Ippolit's rebellious attitude. Indeed, he remains silent and sympathetic to this pale, dying youth and his impassioned arguments.

What finally emerges is a kind of deadlock in this continuing war between man's self-will and his submissive acceptance of God. It is a deadlock of tragic frustration, for no one achieves triumph: the self-willed Rogozhin has destroyed the object of his desire and goes mad; the self-willed Ippolit has failed to prove his freedom by suicide, and Myshkin has become an idiot--a miserable "champion" of those ideals which ought to serve as way-outness to dead-endness.

5. DEVILS IN THE MADHOUSE:
DEAD ENDS IN THE POSSESSED

Like Crime and Punishment, The Possessed contains fine dead-end situations. Stavrogin and Kirillov--the first an enigmatic villain and the second an enigmatic fanatic--are vigorously self-willed, and they kill themselves as a result: Stavrogin hangs himself in a little attic room, and Kirillov shoots himself in a corner. As in Crime and Punishment, Dostoevsky takes his reader in The Possessed into his psychological workshop and laboratory, but instead of investigating relentlessly the motivation of a solitary criminal Dostoevsky preoccupies himself with the social phenomenon of nihilism. This was a Russian revolutionary movement of the latter half of the 19th century that employed terrorism to achieve its anarchistic program. But whether the object of investigation is murder or destructive revolution does not really matter, for Dostoevsky's psychological acumen and probings reveal that the end in either case is always the same--a dead end.

Because of its social scope the plot of The Possessed is complex, and in no other novel has Dostoevsky amassed such a curious collection of "oddball" characters. The story deals with the effects of nihilism in a provincial Russian town. Stepan Verkhovensky, employed by Varvara Stavrogin to tutor her son, Nikolay, forms a small discussion group of local progressives and liberals. His son, Pyotr, later comes to

dominate and twist the group for his own outrightly anarchistic schemings. Pyotr, whose ideas are consonant with those of Nikolay Stavrogin, seeks to use Stavrogin as a figurehead of his revolution. When Shatov, a member of Pyotr's group, breaks with the group, Pyotr plans his murder. He persuades Kirillov, a retiring though idea-crazed student who plans to kill himself, to leave a note explaining that he, Kirillov, had killed Shatov. Meanwhile Stavrogin, having previously married the cripple Marya Lebyadkin, now elopes with Lizaveta Tushina. Dissension and intrigue blossom after Pyotr's group holds a fete. Then Marya and her brother, Captain Lebyadkin, are murdered under the cover of a fire which rages in town. And Lizaveta, going to scene of the crime, is beaten to death by the townfolk who loathe her relationship with Stavrogin (Stavrogin is blamed for the murders). Later Shatov is murdered, and Kirillov kills himself after leaving the false confession. His group in dissension, the town in shambles, his ideas realized, Pyotr leaves the province, and Stavrogin hangs himself. This story summary is unjustly fragmentary, but it does serve to show the social disintegration which results when people turn away from moral and religious principles and live solely to satisfy their wills; they are like devils in a madhouse. Dostoevsky shows consummate skill in his ironic treatment of the nihilists. He knew their motives and goals and was a severe critic of them. Through the character of Shatov Dostoevsky

presents his opposing ideas. And an examination focusing upon the dead ends of Kirillov and Stavrogin will show further Dostoevsky's artistic and dramatic skill in carrying out the nihilism of self-will to its logical conclusion.

Kirillov is indeed, as Edward Wasiolek says, "one of Dostoevsky's immense creations."¹⁰ He is immense because he is tortured and haunted by the immense idea of God. Thus the very nature of such a preoccupation requires contemplation and solitude; he is an outsider, set apart from other people who pale before the great, glowing idea of God. "I know not how it is with others," he says, "and I feel that I cannot do as others. Everybody thinks and then at once thinks of something else. I can't think of something else. I think all my life of one thing. God has tormented me all my life" (P, 115).

Like Raskolnikov, Kirillov lives in anguished solitude. He lives in a lodge, paces the floor at night in impassioned thought, and drinks tea. Like Raskolnikov, too, he is obsessed with murder, but in his case it is the murder of the idea of God, not a woman pawnbroker. Yet the justification is the same: Raskolnikov murdered to express his self-will; Kirillov murders the idea of God to express his self-will. As he explains to Pyotr Verkhovensky,

"If God exists, all is His will and from His will I cannot escape. If not, it's all my will and I am bound to show self-will."

"Self-will? But why are you bound?"

"Because all will has become mine. Can it be that no one in the whole planet, after making

an end of God and believing in his own will, will dare to express his self-will on the most vital point? It's like a beggar inheriting a fortune and being afraid of it and not daring to approach the bag of gold, thinking himself too weak to own it. I want to manifest my self-will. I may be the only one, but I'll do it."

"Do it by all means."

"I am bound to shoot myself because the highest point of my self-will is to kill myself with my own hands." (P, 627-628)

He concludes with the passion of a madman:

...I've been seeking for the attribute of my godhead and I've found it; the attribute of my godhead is self-will! That's all I can do to prove in the highest point my independence and my new terrible freedom. (P, 630)

Such are the strange ideas motivating Kirillov. His death, the dramatic implementation of these ideas, is equally strange, even absurd. The spiritual stamina and tenacity required for the annihilation of God dwindles into the behavior of a child in a tantrum. Like a frustrated child, Kirillov stands in a corner. However, he does not pout in the corner; he blows his brains out.

On the night of his suicide Kirillov is visited by Pyotr, the leader of the revolutionaries. Pyotr persuades him to leave the note confessing to the murder of Shatov, who has been killed by Pyotr's group. Kirillov writes the note and then walks into the next room, closing the door behind him. Pyotr remains to see if Kirillov will follow through his suicide plan. Hearing after a while no shot, he snatches up a candle, goes to the door, opens it, raises the candle, and

peers within. Suddenly Kirillov roars in the darkness and rushes at Pyotr who quickly slams the door. Again he waits but hears no telltale shot. This time, brandishing his gun, he opens the door:

With his foot he flung the door open violently, raised the candle, and held out the revolver; but no shot nor cry came from within....There was no one in the room.

He started. The room led nowhere. There was no exit, no means of escape from it. He lifted the candle higher and looked about him more attentively: there was certainly no one. He called Kirillov's name in a low voice, then again louder; no one answered.

"Can he have got out by the window?" The casement in one window was, in fact, open. "Absurd! He couldn't have got away through the casement." Pyotr Stepanovitch crossed the room and went up to the window. "He couldn't possibly." All at once he turned round quickly and was aghast at something extraordinary.

Against the wall facing the windows on the right of the door stood a cupboard. On the right side of this cupboard, in the corner formed by the cupboard and the wall, stood Kirillov, and he was standing in a very strange way; motionless, perfectly erect, with his arms held stiffly at his sides, his head raised and pressed tightly back against the wall in the very corner, he seemed to be trying to conceal and efface himself. (P, 634)

Pyotr approaches him fearfully. When he raises the candle to see Kirillov's face, Kirillov smiles mockingly, strikes the candle from his hand, and bites his little finger. In understandable panic Pyotr strikes him and rushes headlong out of the room. Running away, he hears the fatal shot.

Kirillov's is a strange dead end. Like other villains he is motivated by self-will which ends in self-destruction. Unlike the others he is not active socially. He does not

lurk in the street like Raskolnikov with an axe, nor does he pursue women lustfully like Svidrigailov and Rogozhin. His revolt, his expression of self-will, is strictly spiritual. It is interesting to note that Kirillov is, for the most part, seen only in his room throughout the novel. Thus his dead end is ever-present. And the room in which Pyotr Verkhovensky finds him leads nowhere indeed. There is no exit.

Stavrogin, the enigmatic central figure in The Possessed, has the social aspect which Kirillov lacks, but Kirillov's explanation of his ideas illuminates Stavrogin's motivation. Stavrogin enjoys hurting other people. He has violated a little girl. He indulges in beastly sensuality. He marries the cripple Marya on whim. All this is a far cry from Kirillov's solitude.

Stavrogin obviously represents, as Wasiolek notes, "the totally free will, which in Dostoevsky's logic becomes the despotic will. The very act of 'freeing' is an act of 'emptying.'"¹¹ The key relation here is that of self-will to emptiness. Indeed, Stavrogin's behavior is the product of a terrible apathy; it doesn't matter to him what atrocity he commits. His marriage to Marya, for example, is "a new experiment of a blase man" (P, 189). He sees no distinction between good and evil. "Is it true," Shatov asks him, "that you declared that you saw no distinction in beauty between some brutal obscene action and any great exploit, even the sacrifice of life for the good of humanity? Is it true that

you have found identical beauty, equal enjoyment, in both extremes?" (P, 257). In a letter before his suicide Stavrogin answers affirmatively: "I am still capable, as I always was, of desiring to do something good, and of feeling pleasure from it; at the same time I desire evil and feel pleasure from that too. But both feelings are always too petty, and are never very strong" (P, 685). Here is the ultimate expression of the problem posed by the Underground Man--the creative man and the self-willed, destructive man; here is the grey moral dead end that the self-will leads to.

In his acute spiritual barrenness and indifference Stavrogin approaches his appointed dead end. His dream about the Golden Age painting is a foreshadowing of his suicide; it reinforces the idea of restriction, of spatial entrapment, of working oneself into a corner. In the dream the painting's spacious green and blue landscape of the Greek archipelago vanishes and is replaced by a tiny dot in the center of bright light. The dot assumes the shape of a tiny red spider. Like Svidrigailov looking horror upon his dream-harlot, Stavrogin gazes upon his essential despicable nature.

The final scene of the novel captures this sense of restriction. Stavrogin's mother, Varvara Petrovna, and her servant Dasha (with whom Stavrogin is in "love" after his fatal affair with Lizaveta) look for him in the Stavrogin house:

They went upstairs. There there were three rooms; but they found no one there.

"Wouldn't his honor have gone up there?" some one suggested, pointing to the door of the loft. And in fact, the door of the loft which was always closed had been opened and was standing ajar. The loft was right under the roof and was reached by a long, very steep and narrow wooden ladder. There was a sort of little room up there too.

"I am not going up there. Why should he go up there?" said Varvara Petrovna, turning terribly pale as she looked at the servants. They gazed back at her and said nothing. Dasha was trembling.

Varvara Petrovna rushed up the ladder; Dasha followed, but she had hardly entered the loft when she uttered a scream and fell senseless.

The citizen of the canton of Uri was hanging there behind the door. On the table lay a piece of paper with the words in pencil: "No one is to blame, I did it myself." Beside it on the table lay a hammer, a piece of soap, and a large nail--obviously an extra one in case of need. The strong silk cord upon which Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch had hanged himself had evidently been chosen and prepared beforehand and was thickly smeared with soap. Everything proved that there had been premeditation and consciousness up to the last moment.

At the inquest our doctors absolutely and emphatically rejected all idea of insanity.
(P, 687-688)

Stavrogin's dead end, the little room in the loft, once again illustrates in a grisly manner the ultimate consequence of self-will. His suicide is inescapable. In fact, this inevitableness permeates all dead-end situations. Svidrigailov putting the revolver to his head in calm despair, Kirillov shooting himself in his corner on conviction, and Stavrogin deliberately soaping the rope to go about his neck-- in each instance self-will never collapses; it endures to its necessary end, the dead end. The villains do not deceive

themselves. They are like sad men looking over the devastation and waste of a battlefield, saddened because they realize that the devastation and waste correspond to their own self-willed lives. Dramatically and symbolically, their dead ends are the finishing touches of futility.

This devastation, waste, and futility in the lives of the villains are all-encompassing, and the moral scope of The Possessed as a result assumes a dead-endness. There are few survivors, and as in The Idiot everyone (with the possible exception of that escaped scoundrel, Pyotr Verkhovensky) loses. The provincial town is in flames, and dissension is rife. Kirillov and Stavrogin are dead by suicide. Marya, her brother, Shatov, and several members of Pyotr's revolutionary circle are dead by murder. Lizaveta is dead by mob vengeance. Nihilism has worked itself out in mayhem and dead ends, and its destructive, whirlwind force draws in the two spokesmen of Dostoevsky's anti-nihilism--Marya and Shatov. These two, like Myshkin in The Idiot, are engulfed, and their ideals are trampled. Marya speaks for a mystical appreciation of life. Hers is a gentle serene joy. She remains at times for hours in a dreamy trance, achieving a harmony with nature which she equates with God. The damp earth, the glowing sun, the blue skies and lakes, and the towering mountains are her source of joy. (Myshkin, too, possesses similar feelings in his epileptic fits.) Shatov, on the other hand, endorses a spiritual nationalism.

Opposing the tenets of nihilism, he believes in Russia's mission to rejuvenate the world spiritually, in the Russian orthodoxy, and in the body of Christ. It is interesting to note that both Marya and Shatov possess a vision colored with mysticism, an opening-outness, which is clearly in opposition to the closing-inness of nihilism's dead ends. Significant also is the ill-treatment of Marya and Shatov. Marya is beaten and whipped by her cruel, drunken brother and eventually is murdered. Shatov is shot to death, and his stone-weighted body is hurled into a pond. Dead ends do not spare the peripheral innocent.

This over-all dead-endness of The Possessed, however, should be qualified. Dostoevsky emphasizes the consequences of nihilism, not the antidotal measures which he nevertheless offers through Marya and Shatov. In this sense The Possessed does not end on a note of tragic frustration as did The Idiot. Rather, it concludes on a retributive note, for the suicide of Stavrogin, the reader feels, is necessarily just. Dostoevsky, it has been mentioned, understood the nature of nihilism, and he has depicted it in its unavoidable dead-end consequences with a sure, satirical hand. The scene in which the nihilists gather to discuss their program of revolution is a marvelous example of satire. Having denied all rules and order, they are reduced to a noisy, ineffective mob since they cannot even vote to decide a general program! The upshot

of this anarchy is that a strong leader who pulls all strings, a Pyotr Verkhovensky, is needed. Thus unlimited freedom leads to unlimited despotism, as one nihilist phrased it. In his satirical treatment of nihilism Dostoevsky is not preoccupied with finding a viable harmony in the conflict between self-will and acceptance of God. The search for a synthesis is taken up once more, finally, in the next novel, The Brothers Karamazov.

6. DEAD ENDS AND OPEN VISTAS IN THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV

Dostoevsky's final novel, The Brothers Karamazov, is regarded as his greatest work. Ernest J. Simmons elaborates that Dostoevsky's

most matured art, his wisdom, ideas, faith, and doubts find their fullest expression in this book. Nowhere else has he so successfully and so characteristically abstracted mind and will and passion from their background of names and clothes and exhibited them in such pure, disembodied states of being. Nowhere else has the white-hot intensity of his ideological world glowed so brightly or has he spiritualized ideas so arrestingly and so profoundly. All that life meant for him--its experiences, symbols, and vision--is reflected in these extraordinary characters.¹²

The scope of this novel validates my use of the mansion metaphor in describing the Dostoevskian canon. The Brothers Karamazov gives the canon its mansion aspect; the other novels, had only they been written, would make but a respectable residential home. If The Brothers Karamazov be taken as the completed superstructure, then the previous novels could be the unfinished and incomplete blueprints, or the materials of construction, or the various rooms in the mansion (rooms, of course, making sense only in the context of the larger structure of a house).

The main plot of the novel involves Fyodor Karamazov and his four sons: Dmitri, Ivan, Alyosha, and the bastard Smerdyakov. An ugly, sensual man, Fyodor abandons his legitimate sons but retains Smerdyakov, whose half-wit mother he had raped, as his cook. Alyosha, a sensitive and saintly

youth, enters a local monastery where he becomes the pupil of Father Zossima, a reverend elder. The intellectual, cold-as-a-tomb Ivan attends a Moscow college, and the impetuous, sensual Dmitri serves in the army. Later they all meet again in their hometown and clash. Dmitri, seeking a legacy from his deceased mother's estate, is put off by Fyodor, and both vie for the affections of Grushenka, a local siren. Dmitri is also betrothed to Katerina Ivanovna who in turn is loved by Ivan. Dmitri and Fyodor quarrel, and Fyodor is murdered. Although Smerdyakov is the actual murderer, Dmitri is accused, brought to trial, and sentenced to Siberia. Complicating this main story line are subsidiary plots, including Alyosha's relationship with Father Zossima and Ivan's parable of the Grand Inquisitor which is an expression of his unbelief, countering the religious message of Zossima and Alyosha.

The ideological warfare between the atheistic Ivan and Alyosha's religious mentor, Father Zossima, forms the complicated moral vision of the novel. But as in the other novels the conflict of ideas in The Brothers Karamazov generates dead-end situations. The position of Smerdyakov is an obvious dead end. Smerdyakov is "the macabre study in the psychology of human degeneracy," and "with his foppish manners, low cunning, and pretensions to learning, there is little doubt that Dostoevsky designed him as a parody of Ivan."¹³ But in order to understand Smerdyakov's dead end and how he reaches it, it is necessary to understand Ivan

who, like Ippolit and Kirillov before him, is tormented by God.

As Ivan explains to Alyosha, he cannot begin to comprehend God with his Euclidian, earthly mind. Nevertheless he accepts God on faith, on the promptings of his heart without intellect or logic. He confesses: "I accept His wisdom, His purpose--which are utterly beyond our ken; I believe in the underlying order and the meaning of life; I believe in the eternal harmony in which they say we shall one day be blended" (BK, 244). However, he has his reservations and acidic doubts. He does not accept the world created by God. He does not accept all the suffering, crime and blood--"all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions" (BK, 244). If eternal harmony is to be obtained, why must it be attained at the price of suffering on earth? Thus Ivan demands: "I must have justice, or I will destroy myself. And not justice in some remote infinite time and space, but here on earth... Surely I haven't suffered, simply that I, my crimes and my sufferings, may manure the soil of the future harmony for somebody else" (BK, 253). In this stream of argument Ivan continues that a true faith based on the heart's free verdict of acceptance of God and His inexplicable order is nearly impossible. His parable about the Grand Inquisitor expresses his doubts. The tale relates how Christ, returning to the earth during the Inquisition, is imprisoned by the Inquisition leaders. The Grand Inquisitor, a bitter old man, visits

Christ in His cell and asks why He has returned. Christ says nothing, and then the Grand Inquisitor argues that the Church no longer needs Him, that He has not understood the true nature of man, and that He has burdened man with too much freedom. The Church, the Grand Inquisitor explains, has stepped in to relieve man's burden of religious freedom by instating the doctrines of miracle, mystery and authority. These relieve man's anguished needs for worship, for someone to keep his conscience, and for universal unity. Thus the Church tells men what and how to believe. And men, no longer burdened by free choice, attain happiness at the price of spiritual enslavement. Why this terrible freedom? the Grand Inquisitor asks Christ. Only a few men of spiritual stamina can endure this burden, and so what about the rest? Don't You love them? But Christ remains silent, and when the old man throws open the cell door and orders Him to leave, He kisses him, expressing His love even for the doubting, disbelieving ancient. (The situation brings to mind Myshkin's meek attitude toward the fiery argumentation of Ippolit.)

Sparks of disquieting ideas are bound to leap and fall from Ivan's struggle. Smerdyakov snatches up some of these spark-ideas and distorts them (his name pronounced does suggest the English "smear" and "smirk"). Ivan's self-willed, rebellious nature is mirrored in Smerdyakov who takes his ideas to their ultimate end, the dead end. Smerdyakov, then, is the projection of Ivan as Svidrigailov is the projection

of Raskolnikov. For example, when Ivan visits Smerdyakov after the murder of Fyodor, their father, Smerdyakov speaks of his debt to Ivan. Of Ivan's idea that "all things are lawful" (if God does not exist, then the world is, to use Kirillov's words, a vaudeville of devils, and all things are lawful), Smerdyakov says: "That was quite right what you taught me, for you talked a lot to me about that. For if there's no everlasting God, there's no such things as virtue, and there's no need of it. You were right there" (BK, 670). And for this reason, coupled with Ivan's cynical remark that Fyodor, as an old spiteful depraved fool, ought to be done away with, Smerdyakov has murdered Fyodor.

Also, Smerdyakov's anti-social behavior reinforces his depravity. He is unfriendly, taciturn, conceited, and seemed to despise everyone. Grigory, another servant of Fyodor's, asks Smerdyakov: "Are you a human being? You're not a human being. You grew from the mildew in the bathhouse" (BK, 129). This final remark, though a proverbial expression in Russia, assumes greater significance when one recalls what Svidrigailov had made of a bathhouse.

Depraved, Godless, isolated, Smerdyakov appears finally in only one situation--that of the dead end. After murdering Fyodor and speaking with Ivan, Smerdyakov commits suicide. He hangs himself on a nail in the wall of his room. Like Stavrogin he leaves behind an explanatory note. Smerdyakov writes: "I destroy my life of my own will and desire, so as

to throw no blame on any one" (BK, 690). Thus the self-will principle, even parodied by the person of Smerdyakov, ends consistently as it has done before--in the inevitable dead end.

Since Smerdyakov's dead end is the result of his implementation of Ivan's ideas, it would appear that Ivan, too, is destined for a dead end. Ivan's fate, however, is incomplete and uncertain; at the end of the novel the self-tormented intellectual is in bed with fever and delirium. But the dead end does loom as a fearful possibility for him. He is tortured by his guilt for wishing his father's death, his wishing having been acted upon by the depraved Smerdyakov. He also has hallucinatory conversations with a shabbily dressed devil. Ivan himself illuminates the nature of this haunting specter: "You are a lie, you are my illness, you are a phantom...You are the incarnation of myself, but only one side of me...of my own thoughts and feelings, but only the nastiest and stupidest of them" (BK, 676). The devil does mock Ivan his own ideas about God and immortality. In Smerdyakov and in his devil Ivan sees what Svidrigailov had seen in his dream-harlot--his essential, horrifying self-willed nature. Though he does not commit suicide, Ivan is left tossing on his bed in his room with brain fever.

The dead-endness of Smerdyakov and, in a qualified sense, of Ivan most fully expresses the darker side of Dostoevsky's moral vision, a vision that has been evolving since the

seminal ravings of the Underground Man. The tragic, bloody trail extending from the Underground Man, through Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov, through Rogozhin and Ippolit, through Kirillov and Stavrogin, and to Smerdyakov and Ivan marks the characteristic expression of the self-will. The dead-end spatial metaphors of walls, corners, and little rooms represent graphically the ultimate consequences of self-will-- isolation, spiritual barrenness, and self-destruction. In their insectlike sensuality or their destructive rationalism these self-willed characters have worked themselves into hopeless positions; having denied the life-enhancing vision offered in religion, they truly have no where to turn. As if to emphasize with finality the dead-end consequences of self-will, Father Zossima exposes the prevailing isolation and ferocious individualism of his day:

For every one strives to keep his individuality as apart as possible, wishes to secure the greatest possible fulness of life for himself; but meantime all his efforts result not in attained fulness of life but self-destruction, for instead of self-realisation he ends by arriving at complete solitude....he sinks into self-destructive impotence. For he is accustomed to rely upon himself alone and to cut himself off from the whole. (BK, 317)

Such isolated men, Zossima continues, actually live in hell, for hell is "the suffering of being unable to love" (BK, 338).

For them

hell is voluntary and ever consuming; they are tortured by their own choice. For they have cursed themselves, cursing God and life. They

live upon their vindictive pride like a starving man in the desert sucking blood out of his own body. (BK, 339)

And this hell of futile pride and torturing isolation burns in every dead-end situation. The ideas of the elder crystallize as corners and little rooms. The dead ends are the hell of self-will.

But these dead ends are the resolutions of only one related network of corridors in the morally labyrinthine Dostoevskian mansion. Many of the characters, as this paper has shown repeatedly, have followed certain twisting passages which in any labyrinth lead to dead ends. On the other hand, some characters tread corridors that do not end abruptly and hopelessly, that lead perhaps to a large window from which they are able to see the sun, and the lucid blue sky, and a spacious green landscape. The situations of Dmitri and Alyosha in The Brothers Karamazov offer excellent examples of this extension of Dostoevsky's moral vision. Their fates are incomplete at the novel's end, and the very open-endedness of their lives promises anything but the tragic futility of dead-endness. Through Dmitri and Alyosha, Dostoevsky offers once again the alternative of Raskolnikov which enabled that character to escape the Svidrigailovian dead end. Thus the views of these two characters are not restricted to a sordid corner haunted by an ugly red spider. Rather, in repentant hope their lives are open to an expanding sky, to a rejuvenated world, to a promising future.

Dmitri, though wrongly accused of his father's murder because Smerdyakov had planted evidence against him, is nevertheless sentenced to Siberia. Cheerless as his fate is, Dmitri does a strange thing: he accepts his punishment; he gladly and proudly "takes up the cross." At his interrogation Dmitri confesses:

"Gentlemen, we're all cruel, we're all monsters, we all make men weep, and mothers, and babes at the breast, but of all, let it be settled here, now, of all I am the lowest reptile! I've sworn to amend, and every day I've done the same filthy things. I understand now that such men as I need a blow, a blow of destiny to catch them as with a noose, and bind them by a force from without...I accept the torture of accusation, and my public shame, I want to suffer and by suffering I shall be purified. Perhaps I shall be purified, gentlemen? But listen, for the last time, I am not guilty of my father's blood. I accept my punishment, not because I killed him, but because I meant to kill him, and perhaps I really might have killed him..." (BK, 539-540)

Taking stock of his past debauchery, drunkenness, and sensuality, Dmitri recognizes his need for atonement. He characterizes himself as a man motivated by despicable insect lust which, he adds, is typical of all the Karamazovs. He is more like his father than any one of his brothers; both he and Fyodor, for example, vie for Grushenka's affections. But he differs from the dissolute Fyodor, for, as Alyosha describes him, he is "violent-tempered perhaps and carried away by his passions, but at the same time honorable, proud and generous, capable of self-sacrifice, if necessary" (BK, 717). He loves life, drinking it in gustily as he would

wine; he praises nature and chants poems by Schiller. His character possesses the sense of pulsing blood, of swinging arms, of vigorous inhalation of the open air. Simmons suggests that Dmitri

is one of the greatest of all Dostoevsky's characters. He has that broadness, that wide heart which Dostoevsky admired so much in real life. Dmitri must have appealed to him as one of the most typical Russians that he ever created. For many readers, too, Dmitri has come to typify the Russian nature--its expansiveness, generosity, impulsiveness, innate nobility, and capacity for suffering, a man whose offences are inevitably the defects of his virtues.¹⁴

Even the language of this passage--the use of "greatest," "broadness," "wide," "expansiveness"--reinforces the open-endedness of Dmitri's life which contradicts the moral dead-endness of Smerdyakov and Ivan.

But because his nature is broad and impetuous and not contemplative, Dmitri is often puzzled by life. "Too many riddles weigh men down on earth," he tells Alyosha. And "the awful thing is that beauty is mysterious as well as terrible. God and the devil are fighting there and the battlefield is the heart of man" (BK, 111). This final remark contains the essential idea of Dostoevsky's complex moral vision: man possesses a dual nature--his self-will aspect in its insectlike sensuality and depravity existing side by side with the religious aspect of those higher, holier feelings which characterize Alyosha.

Alyosha is one of those saintly characters of which

Dostoevsky is fond--Sonia, Myshkin, and Marya. He acts throughout the novel as the sorrowful and commiserate observer of his father and brothers, and at the novel's end, following the advice of the deceased Father Zossima, he leaves the enclosed space of the monastery and goes into the open world to work out his doubts and his Karamazov sensuality. The open-endedness of his fate is reinforced by his gentle nature. Dreamy and solitary, he prefers the simplicity of monastic life, and he adheres to Zossima's joyous, mystical teachings of loving humility and forgiveness. He, too, is a mystic, spiritually strengthening Dmitri's hot-blooded love of nature. And the following illustration of his mystical affirmation of life points to a dazzling universe far different from that of bleak, grey dead-endness; it is the ultimate counter-argument to the horror and entrapment of the self-will:

his soul, overflowing with rapture, yearned for freedom, space, openness. The vault of heaven, full of soft, shining stars, stretched vast and fathomless above him. The Milky Way ran in two pale streams from the zenith to the horizon. The fresh, motionless, still night enfolded the earth. The white towers and golden domes of the cathedral gleamed out against the sapphire sky. The gorgeous autumn flowers, in the beds round the house, were slumbering till morning. The silence of earth seemed to melt into the silence of the heavens. The mystery of earth was one with the mystery of the stars....
...There seemed to be threads from all those innumerable worlds of God, linking his soul to them, and it was trembling all over "in contact with other worlds." He longed to forgive every one and for everything, and to beg forgiveness. Oh, not for himself, but for all men, for all and for everything. (BK, 380-381)

NOTES

¹Rene Wellek, ed., Dostoevsky, A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1962), p. 14.

²Ralph E. Matlaw, "Recurrent Imagery in Dostoevskij," in Harvard Slavic Studies, ed. Horace G. Lunt (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), 3, p. 202.

³All my quotations from Dostoevsky's novels will be cited parenthetically in my text using simple abbreviations for each title. Here are my abbreviations, with the editions I have used: BK--The Brothers Karamazov, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: The Modern Library, no date); CP--Crime and Punishment, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: The Modern Library, 1950); I--The Idiot, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: The Heritage Press, 1956); NU--Notes from Underground, from The Short Novels of Dostoevsky (New York: Dial Press, 1945); P--The Possessed, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: The Modern Library, 1963).

⁴Edward Wasiolek, Dostoevsky, The Major Fiction (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1964), p. 55.

⁵Ibid., p. 44.

⁶Ibid., p. 39.

⁷Robert Payne, Dostoyevsky: A Human Portrait (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. 180.

⁸Ernest J. Simmons, Dostoevsky, The Making of a Novelist (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), p. 151.

⁹Ibid., p. 171.

¹⁰Wasiolek, p. 121.

¹¹Ibid., p. 130.

¹²Simmons, p. 324.

¹³Ibid., p. 338.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 337.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dostoevsky, Fyodor. The Brothers Karamazov. Trans. Constance Garnett. New York: The Modern Library, no date.
- . Crime and Punishment. Trans. Constance Garnett. New York: The Modern Library, 1950.
- . The Idiot. Trans. Constance Garnett. New York: The Heritage Press, 1956.
- . The Short Novels of Dostoevsky. Trans. Constance Garnett. New York: Dial Press, 1945.
- . The Possessed. Trans. Constance Garnett. New York: The Modern Library, 1963.
- Matlaw, Ralph E. "Recurrent Imagery in Dostoevskij," Harvard Slavic Studies. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957, 3, pp. 201-225.
- Payne, Robert. Dostoyevsky: A Human Portrait. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961.
- Simmons, Ernest J. Dostoevsky, The Making of a Novelist. New York: Vintage Books, 1962.
- Wasiolek, Edward. Dostoevsky, The Major Fiction. Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1964.
- Wellek, Rene (ed.). Dostoevsky, A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1962.