When Nothing is Forbidden, Nothing is Permitted:

An Evolution of the Nihilist Hero in the

Russian Realist and French Absurdist Writings

By:

Evald Muraj

Presented to: Professor Svetlana Nikitina
Department of Humanities & Arts
Term C11

Submitted in fulfillment to

The Major Qualifying Project in Humanities and Arts

Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Worcester, Massachusetts

Abstract

Since its emergence in the mid-19th century Europe, the Nihilist movement transcended the literary realm and established itself as a significant ideology with philosophical and political valence. This paper traces the evolution of the literary nihilist hero from Turgenev's "Fathers and Sons" to Dostoevsky's "Demons" and Camus' "The Stranger." By comparing and contrasting each nihilist's attitude towards love, rebellion and death, this research demonstrates the hero's inability to bear the burden of responsibility in the world he negates but is unable to reconstruct.

Nihilism is the philosophy of negation that argues that life is without objective meaning, purpose or intrinsic value. The term was coined by Ivan Turgenev in 1862 and has been a widespread label in western culture ever since. Nihilist philosophy has had significant influence on and literary revolutions of the 19th and 20th centuries including but not limited to the Russian Nihilist movements of the 1860s, the Russian Revolutions of 1905, 1917 and even on the rise of Fascism and the Weimar Republic.

The purpose of this paper is to outline the literary evolution of the nihilist hero in the European literary tradition. It aims to do this by comparing the three key works in which nihilist doctrine and literary analysis are at play. The trace begins with the birth of nihilism in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (1862), the reinterpretation of nihilism as a political doctrine in Dostoevsky's *Demons* (1872) and the reincarnation of nihilism as a societal norm in the absurdist world of Albert Camus's *The Stranger* (1942).

The study presents nihilism as a literary movement capable of embodying philosophical and political views rather than as a philosophy itself. It aims to trace the nihilist hero in three principal areas of character development: his ability to love a woman, to rebel against societal norms and to face death. Each topic is a stepping-stone in the character development of the hero. Turgenev often wrote of love as a lawless state of mind in which an individual, drunk with self-sacrifice, drives oneself to self-destruction. Necessity may be the mother of invention – but it may also be the mother of rebellion. On such grounds, nihilism has organic roots in both realist and absurdist literature. This approach paints nihilist doctrine in human

terms, and goes so far as to make it a generational quarrel. The evolution of the nihilist hero highlights the central theme of negation, including the negation of one's responsibility for creation. The comparison therefore centers on the nihilist hero's inability to bear the burden of responsibility in the world he negates but is unable to reconstruct.

Nihilism in the 19th Century

Within a month of Turgenev publishing *Fathers and Sons*, Dmitry Pisarev, the soon to be imprisoned radical and literary critic of 1860s Russian tsarism, praised the work in his review. At the time, Pisarev, himself a nihilist, is twenty-two years old and strongly identifies with the novel's hero. Even though he observes Turgenev's poetics, he often empirically concludes them. Ironically enough, he suffers from the same pathologic denial of life's intrinsic values that afflicts Turgenev's hero, Bazarov. Pisarev writes:

> The Bazarovs have a bad time of it in this life, although they make a point of humming and whistling. There is no occupation, no love – consequently, there is no pleasure either.
>
> They do not know how to suffer, they will not complain, but at times they feel only that all is empty, boring, drab and meaningless.
>
> But what is to be done? Is it possible to infect ourselves on purpose just in order to have the satisfaction of dying beautifully and tranquilly? No! What is to be done? We must live while we are alive, eat dry bread if there is

> no roast beef, know many women if it is not possible to love a woman, and in general, we must not dream about orange trees and palms, when underfoot are snowdrifts and the cold tundra.[1]

Pisarev attempts to answer Turgenev's recurring question of *what is to be done?* – A question that, in the following year, titles Chernyshevsky's novel, (1863) in which Chernyshevsky harshly critiques what he deems Turgenev's attack on the modern youth.

However, Pisarev understands Bazarov much better than his older counterpart and goes as far as to defend Bazarov's conscious mistakes. "The capacity to consciously behave stupidly is an enviable virtue of strong and intelligent people"[2], he writes. Pisarev understands Turgenev better than he cares to reveal, which is evident in his praise.

> But we, the speaking and writing idealists, are now too carried away by the mental struggle of the moment, by this fiery skirmish with backward idealists, with whom it is not even worthwhile to argue; we, in my view, have gotten too carried away to maintain a skeptical attitude toward ourselves and to submit to rigorous analysis the possibility that we might have fallen into the dust of the dialectic battles… Our children will regard us skeptically, or, perhaps, we ourselves will learn our real value…[Turgenev] does not follow us, but tranquilly gazes after us and describes our gait. There is no irritation in the tone of his description. Turgenev himself will never be a

> Bazarov, but he has pondered this type and gained an understanding of it so true that not one of our young realists has yet achieved it.[3]

Like Bazarov, Pisarev, acknowledges his polemic imperfections, which often result from an overzealous sense of self-righteousness. He goes as far as to admit that someday his own children may debunk his convictions. All of these mildly self-deprecating assertions are Pisarev's way of supporting the youthful idealism of his time while respecting, at least as much as he can, the old romantics of Turgenev's generation; he gets away with this by commending Turgenev's literary style. But, as metaphysically as Pisarev approaches Turgenev, he concerns himself more with why one should praise the sociological insights of the author than with trying to understand his motivation. For Pisarev, the literary nihilist who shares so much with Bazarov, Turgenev is a social historian as much as he is an artist. Pisarev asks point blank, "Ivan Sergeevich, you do not like Bazarov, but which would you prefer [the fathers or the sons]?" He then claims, "[Turgenev] would not answer. He would not want the younger generation to share their fathers' ideas and enthusiasms."[4] Though this is perfectly accurate, it is unclear whether Pisarev highlights it because he is unable to locate Turgenev's literary objective or simply because he is unwilling to acknowledge it. Pisarev, who is himself the living, breathing and slightly worldlier version of Bazarov, either fails to see Turgenev's ethical positions or is too proud to concede to them. Like his fictional counterpart, the twenty-two-year-old radical thinker is self-deprecating just enough, which allows him to analyze Bazarov

without revealing Turgenev's psychological insight, which is not lost on the discerning reader.

Though it is unclear as to whether or not Pisarev does this on purpose, it is important to consider his admission as a young nihilist's direct evaluation of Turgenev's literary creation. To begin tracing the evolution of the nihilist it is important to begin where Pisarev's lucid but limited analysis ends.

In order to trace the nihilist hero's evolution through realist literature of the late 19th-early 20th centuries, it is crucial to define the genesis and motivations of nihilist youth, before the nihilist invades the pages of Dostoevsk'y novels To adequately unearth Turgenev's motives towards creating this hero, it is necessary to understand both his literary style and his worldview, which are inseparable.

Turgenev's pierces deep into his character's psyches. He builds his narratives in a stable universe of restraint and congruence. This composed reflection is the same intellectual composure that Pisarev admires, but fails (or refuses) to uphold. To better understand Turgenev's poetics, it is necessary to link his art form to the Apollonian tradition, which Nietzsche aptly summarizes in *The Birth of Tragedy*. The distinction that Nietzsche draws between the Apollonian and Dionysian traditions may prove the strongest theory for contrasting Turgenev and his literary peers. The Apollonian theory claims that our dreams entertain an "immediate apprehension of form, all shapes speak to us directly, nothing seems indifferent or redundant"[5]. This produces an illusory but fair art. Like Apollonian dreams, one can instantly discern and appreciate the visual forms of Turgenev's narratives due to their disruptive and,

more often than not, veiled significance. It so follows that Apollonian art has a tendency to deceive the critic of its turbulent human realities. Nevertheless, one must not be quick to deprive this narrative form of its ethical potential.

In 1875, Turgenev wrote to an admirer: "I shall say briefly that in the main I am a realist, and above all interested in the living truth of human physiognomy; to everything supernatural I am indifferent."[6] Five years later, he stated, "Reality should not be simply reproduced, but has to be transfigured and presented in *artistic images*."[7] In his works, Turgenev transformed these images into what he called their "concentrated reflection", that is, meticulous recreations of unaltered experience, unrefined reality. In altering this unrefined form of life experience, Turgenev alters its content and creates a harmonious sequence of collected images whose immediate essence remains objectively impervious to the original observation. Given Turgenev's motivations, it so follows that his narrative is an original abstraction of reality, an intentional fabrication that preserves only the immediate spirit of what is real. In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche himself claims "we have need of lies in order to conquer this reality…to solve it, man must be a liar by nature, he must be above all an artist."[8] In the face of insufferable reality, Turgenev's form strives to guide its readers to not only aesthetic but also ethical ends. In practice as well as in theory, it denotes the methods by which human resolve can create meaning and rescue us from the insignificance of a frightening reality.

In *Fathers and Sons,* Turgenev employs exquisite poetics to disguise his narrative voice and to infer a communal view of narrated events. The narrative

begins *in medias res,* in the apperceptive form. The narrator introduces Nikolai Petrovich Kirsanov and his servant as they wait for Nikolai's son Arkady and his friend Bazarov who are returning from university. Though Turgenev commences in the past tense, within a paragraph's space he switches to the present and states "Let us acquaint the reader with him while he sits with his feet tucked under him and pensively looks around" and begins a detailed synopsis of Nikolai Petrovich. Turgenev depicts his characters' fictional history in a very conversational manner. Nikolai Petrovich's son, Arkady, "grew 'n' grew". After he was born Nikolai's wife "planted flowers and looked after the poultry; every so often he went hunting and busied himself with estate management."[9] Turgenev's monologs paint him as an amicable conversationalist. He does not force a unique point of view, rather he employs a first-person plural tense that suggest a more general position. "Let *us* introduce him" merges the two perspectives (the narrator's and the reader's) into a unified consciousness. The narrator continues to employ this tense throughout the work. "And here we see him in [Nikolai Petrovich] in May of 1859," later he continues "our acquaintances" or when commenting or Arkady and Katya's relationship, "their faces have changed since we last saw them." These are not simply Turgenev's views, but also our views. The narrator distracts us from himself and gains not only our confidence but also our voluntary subscription to this communal worldview.

Though Turgenev's narrator befriends the reader and guides him during the narrative, one must not assume that he is not omniscient. In fact, Turgenev's mastery resides in his ability to subtly layer the investigative and apperceptive

modes. At times, the narrator will utter omniscient facts such as "that self-assured Bazarov did not even suspect that in [some peasants'] eyes, he was nonetheless something of a buffoonish joke" and for Pavel Petrovich, Arkady's practical and romantic uncle, the narrator declares that "life for him is hard…harder than he himself suspects."[10] The narrator omnisciently asserts these facts for the reader to consume. Having established camaraderie between the narrator and the reader using plural voice and having declared the narrator's omniscience, Turgenev employs the most important tool at the narrator's disposal – refusal to elaborate. When Pavel Petrovich inquires about his brother Nikolai's melancholy rumination over his late wife, Turgenev denies Nikolai a spoken response, rather the narrator asserts, "Nikolai Petrovich explained his state of mind briefly, then moved on." We then follow Pavel Petrovich to the garden where "[he] also grew thoughtful, and also raised his gaze to the sky. But nothing was reflected in his handsome dark eyes except the stars."[11] The narrator indicates that he cannot portray the characters' internal purpose. He conceals their mental drives, the very kinetics of their souls remain intimate and sealed away.

This approach is of paramount importance in the development of Turgenev's nihilist character. The formation of the nihilist hero begins with his predecessors; this is why the fathers bear equal significance to the sons in the novel. In order to understand Bazarov and the radical generation of mid-19th century's Russian intelligentsia, one must understand his forebears, the romantic elders who bestowed the century upon their nihilist progeny. It so follows that Turgenev must unite the aesthetics of romanticism and realism in order to expose the gap between

the two generations. He creates a duplicate universe of reality where autonomous characters govern their will, where they are prey to their truths and conceal from us their thoughts. Rightfully so, for their intimacies are none of our business; but, fortunately, a sympathetic speaker often points us in the direction of their innermost thoughts.

Thus, Evgeny Vassilievich Bazarov storms Turgenev's world with the sole intent of expressing his boredom of it. Evgeny Vasilich, informally called Bazarov, is by definition the first literary nihilist. Turgenev invents the term in *Fathers and Sons* and Bazarov defines it. Formalities and ceremonies do not interest him. At dinner, Arkady informs his uncle, Pavel, that Bazarov is a nihilist. Though his father and uncle draw educated guesses from the Latin roots of the term, Arkady informs them that a nihilist is someone "who approaches everything from a critical point of view" and "doesn't bow down before authorities, doesn't accept even one principle on faith, no matter how much respect surrounds that principle." We soon find that Arkady does not do Bazarov's convictions justice. "You don't acknowledge any authorities? You don't believe in them?" Pavel sardonically asks Bazarov at dinner. "Why should I acknowledge them?" Bazarov responds with a short yawn that irritates Pavel Petrovich's aristocratic courtesy. "So you believe only in science?" Pavel continues in inquiry, to which Bazarov replies "I've already explained that I don't believe in anything; besides, what is science – science in general? There are sciences, just like there are trades and vocations; but science in general does not exist." [12]

Turgenev's characters brim with life; indifferent responses to sardonic inquiries create a chasm between the two generations. It is important to note that while four individuals dine (Arkady, his father Nikolai, his uncle Pavel and his friend Bazarov) only two of them engage in discourse. Turgenev draws our attention to an assertive, older moralist (Pavel) and a dismissive, younger nihilist (Bazarov). Both of the men are arrogant, both are equally stubborn and have little if not zero respect for one another. Pavel Petrovich stands and announces his leave from the table,

> It's unfortunate to have lived these last five years out here in the country, far away from such great intellects! You become a fool in no time at all. You try not to forget what you've been taught, but then – all of a sudden – it turns out all to be nonsense; you're told that sensible people don't bother about that stuff anymore and that you are, so to speak, an old fogy. What's to be done? It's obvious that young people really are cleverer than we are.[13]

Bazarov wastes no time in displaying his contempt for Pavel Petrovich's authoritative irony. "[I offended him] Yes, and am I supposed to pander to them, these provincial aristocrats?" [14] Bazarov coolly demands by way of making his rebellion against the status quo official and unequivocal.

The Adolescent Rebel

This theme of adolescent rebellion is picked up and played out much stronger in Dostoevsky's writings. In Fathers and Sons, it is the old struggle between the old and the young. It may prove constructive to reveal Turgenev's intentions on conflict early, as Pisarev does in his review. The two characters act with strong hostility towards one another and witnessing their confrontations reminds us of the struggle between consecutive generations. Arkady's father is no more capable of oppressing the youth than Arkady is capable of rebelling against domestic autocracy. However, the knowledgeable, unmarried, heirless and aged moralist, Pavel Petrovich, unwittingly rebels against the norms of his aristocratic life. Rebellion is a central theme of nihilism given that, at its core, it seems to deny all of society's conventional institutions. Convention denotes the old while denial embodies the new. Thus, the genesis of first generation nihilism has human origins in the quintessential conflicts of adolesence.

In the interest of constructive comparison, it is important to juxtapose Bazarov and Pavel Petrovich in their most basic enthusiasms. Only after we gain a complete understanding of Bazarov's origins can we trace his evolution through the rest of 19th century Russia. Arkady acquaints Bazarov with a widowed and slightly older aristocrat named Anna Sergeevna Odintsova and her younger sister Ekaterina Sergeevna. A romantic affection grows between the four and thus provides another basis for comparing the young and their elders.

Turgenev's narrative suggests that Romantics (the older generation) begat Realists (the younger generations) along its nihilist tendencies (the extremist

intellectuals of the younger generation). Dostoevsky also implies this; in *Demons*, the revolutionaries are young while the ones who lay claim to their ideals are old. Turgenev meticulously illustrates the shared struggles of the two, seemingly polar opposites. While thinking of his late wife, Nikolai Petrovich grows shameful of his sentimental impressions. "He [Nikolai Petrovich], a forty-four year old man, with tears welling up in his eyes, senseless tears; this was a hundred times worse than playing the cello."[15] Later, the narrator claims, "'I wasn't playing [the piano].' Arkady began and then fell silent. He felt tears welling up in his eyes and didn't want to cry in front of his sarcastic friend."[16] The comparison with the other characters is even more obvious.

Pavel Petrovich & Princess R.	Bazarov & Anna Sergeevna
From childhood [Pavel Petrovich] was distinguished by his good looks. He was self-assured, somewhat sarcastic and amusingly acrimonious – he couldn't help being liked. He was fond of inactivity, liked to read, had five or six French books, and shunned society. He fell in love with Princess R. who would sporadically travel abroad and lead a strange life.	Odintsova was a strange creature. There was a great deal of fuss over her marriage to Odintsov and all sorts of unbelievable stories circulated about her; that she had good reasons for going abroad. Odintsova was a strange creature. There was a great deal of fuss over her marriage to Odintsov and all sorts of unbelievable stories circulated about her; that she had good reasons for going abroad.
She had a reputation as a frivolous coquette and devoted herself eagerly to all sorts of pleasures, laughing and joking with young people whom she received in a dimly lit drawing room. But, at night she	She traveled abroad with her sister but soon grew bored and returned …Odintsova didn't receive him in the room where he'd abruptly expressed his love for her, but in the drawing
~~She had a reputation as a frivolous~~ coquette and devoted herself eagerly to all sorts of pleasures, laughing and joking with young people whom she received in	~~She traveled abroad with her sister but~~ soon grew bored and returned …Odintsova didn't receive him in the room where he'd abruptly expressed his

Pavel Petrovich met her at a ball, danced the mazurka, in the course of which she uttered not one sensible word and he fell passionately in love with her.	[At the governor's ball, Arkady asked Odintsova] for the mazurka.
He spent four years in foreign parts, first pursuing her, then deliberately losing sight of her; he was ashamed of himself, indignant of his own weakness.	His blood caught fire as soon as he thought about her. When left alone he acknowledged with indignation the romantic in himself.
Pavel Petrovich walked to the end of the garden, also grew thoughtful, and also raised his gaze to the sky. But nothing was reflected in his handsome dark eyes except the stars. He hadn't been born a romantic, and his fastidiously dry and passionate soul, with its touch of French misanthropy, didn't even know how to dream.	She kept pacing her room, arms behind her back. The colors of the rainbow would sometimes dance before her eyes, but she was always relieved when they faded. Like all women who never managed to fall in love, she longed for something without knowing precisely what it was.
Pavel Petrovich returned to his *elegant study, its walls covered with attractive wallpaper, an oriental rug.* He threw himself onto the sofa put his hands behind his head and sat there motionless, staring at the ceiling almost in despair.	*She thought while lying on a magnificent bed on lace cushions under a silk coverlet*. [She] had inherited from her father a penchant for *luxury*. She put her hands behind her head, then ran her eyes over a few pages of a silly French book and fell fast asleep.

Turgenev's use of identical nouns and adjectives serves to highlight the apparent repetition of these similar events, such as where the couples meet, what they feel, the lavish conditions they inhabit and even what they dance and read. The

narrator makes sure to paint Bazarov and the young Pavel Patrovich as arrogant and lovelorn individuals. He then draws extensive parallels between Anna Sergeevna and Princess R., the two indifferent yet impassioned women with whom the two men respectively fall in love with.

Turgenev implies that love is of the few basic sentiments, which proves detrimental to a character's conscience because of its unstable nature. Energy that one would normally expend on self-preservation, when in love, one extends to self-satisfaction or self-enhancement. Turgenev exposes a psychological human frailty when in love. For Turgenev, there appears to be one noble form of romance – both short-lived and exceptional; this is a Don Juan attitude, the pledge of a hopeless romantic. Turgenev further suggests that love's distress runs counter to a transient romance, that its ailments are everlasting; the elders continue to secretly suffer from their romantic histories.

Love's Labor's Lost

Love, second to rebellion in Dostoevsky and Camus, is the second quality that our nihilist heroes share as well as a founding point that will compare and contrast them. Its effect on the human psyche and its ability to mold characters are crucial in defining said characters' origins and motives, especially in rebellion.

Upon meeting Anna Sergeevna, Bazarov often struggles with his ideals, a symptom amplified in Dostoevsky's heroes, who embody psychological torment. Unsure of the origins of his affection and hesitant of his once unshakable convictions, Bazarov's impulses grow rampant and unpredictable. In a fit of passion,

he proclaims his love for Anna Sergeevna, thus renouncing all of his certainties. When rejected by her he grows inconsolable. Love momentarily exposes Bazarov, who must now reengage his convictions and regain his composure.

Turgenev paints Bazarov as youthful and arrogant in his ways. Though he may be well learned and well spoken, his arrogance easily cowers in the face of affection. In Odintsova's presence, he grows lightheaded, warm blooded and overzealous. In a sudden declaration of love, he grabs her hands and pulls her close to his chest – the behavior of a passionate romantic. Odintsova's rejection is a complex refusal of love, reason and apprehension; this unquenchable thirst for something she herself cannot declare damns her to inability to commit.

Thus, Bazarov, the arrogant, all-knowing youth rejects all societal conventions only to succumb to the sappiest one of them all, romanticism. Bazarov is much more than a revolting young man in revolt against the world; he is indeed tragic. His lot is a recurring phenomenon relived by each new generation. Sons mature to adopt paternal roles; a cycle which then repeats itself. Turgenev's nihilist notions follow a very linear pattern. Ironically, in rejecting conventional norms Bazarov falls into a rather traditional pattern, thus confirming that generational quarrel is on going.

It is difficult not to view Bazarov as a quintessential adolescent. Bazarov's arrogance and self-confidence with respect to his elders resonate all too well with anyone in his/her formative years. Bazarov embodies a deep fear of insecurity and

rejection when in Anna Sergeevna's presence. In such scenes, Turgenev paints Bazarov as romantically underdeveloped rather than powerfully assertive.

This may very well lead the reader to question Bazarov's overall credibility. Although Bazarov Byronically claims to be a philanderer, he does not possess true Byronic fortitude because he has yet to romantically mature.

> He imagined those chaste arms wrapping around his neck, those proud lips responding to his kisses, those clever eyes coming to rest on his with tenderness….He caught himself having all sorts of "shameful thoughts" as if the devil were teasing him. Sometimes it appeared to him that perhaps a change was also taking place in Odintsova , that something special had appeared in her expression, that perhaps…but at this point he usually stamped his foot or clenched his teeth and shook a fist at his own face.[17]

Because Bazarov is not self-aware of his tragedy, he cannot fulfill his ultimate nihilistic potential. He does not know how to properly pursue Odintsova and does not trust his senses with her.

> "I'm to blame" she muttered allowed. "But I couldn't have foreseen it". She became pensive and then blushed, remembering Bazarov's almost savage face as he threw himself at her…She looked at herself in the mirror; her head thrown back, a mysterious smile on her half-closed, half-open lips, and at that moment her eyes seemed to tell her something she found

> embarrassing…."God knows where it might have led; one mustn't fool around with this kind of thing; serenity is still better than anything else on earth."[18]

Odintsova also entertains thoughts just as flagrant as he does. However, Bazarov, like a rejected teen at a middle-school dance, puts pride before his ambitions, vanity before desire. He removes himself from her presence and finds sanctuary in his convictions. This repudiation is one of many building blocks that help mold the true nihilist he must become. Like all negations that fail to achieve positive catharsis, Bazarov's repudiation of love can lead to the destruction/loss of everything he encounters. With his nihilism growing, Bazarov is ready to age and act. His tragedy is ready to blossom in his future exploits. However, with our best interests and possibly his own in mind, Turgenev reveals his ethical stance.

We encounter Bazarov's salt of the earth, God-fearing parents and realize the love and care with which he was raised. Bazarov's upbringing was far from aristocratic and though he shares in amusements with aristocracy, his domestic habitat is barely above middle class. That Bazarov should die so soon after the narrator acquaints us with his nostalgic mother and tenderhearted father proves harrowing. After three years of being away, Bazarov stays three days at home before growing weary and seeking catharsis with Odintsova. "What's to be done, Vasya? A son's a piece cut off, he comes and goes whenever he likes"[19], claims Bazarov's father while blowing his nose. The final highlight of adolescent ingratitude that Turgenev exposes is towards one's parents. Like with most arrogant adolescents, there is an inability to appreciate the given affection one grows up with.

Soon after, Bazarov performs an autopsy on a corpse at the local morgue as part of his medical studies and accidentally cuts himself in the process. He contracts typhus from the dead man and is instantly aware of his condition. Though this mortifies his parents, Bazarov remains calm and composed. An apt medical student, he knows his fate. Days later, an informed Anna Sergeevna arrives with a foreign doctor to Bazarov's aid. The once rebellious youth rests on his deathbed; already reconciled with his condition and confronted by the single individual he permitted himself to love. Here, Turgenev gives Bazarov one final soliloquy that reveals his attempts and failure to reject love outright.

> "Oh, magnanimous one! How near, how tender, death's an old story, but new for each person. Up to this point I haven't been afraid. Well, what do I have to tell you? …I did love you! It didn't mean anything then and it means even less now. Love's just a form, and my own form's going to piece already. I'd rather say how lovely you are! And now you stand here looking so beautiful…"[20]

A brief kiss on his forehead from Odintsova and Bazarov never wakes up again. Turgenev's mastery rests in his ability to enkindle the autonomy of his characters. He grants Bazarov the opportunity to determine his final legacy. Bazarov's final words are those of hopeless romantic's. His admission is one of acceptance and remorse.

Dead-end Death

The first recorded nihilist prematurely dies both remorseful and indifferent. Turgenev's mastery rests in two aspects, at least one of which Dostoevsky finds insufferable. First, Turgenev shows us Bazarov's genesis and demise, but deliberately denies us his development. He grants us a commonplace youthful obstinacy and a subdued romanticism. Bazarov dies, as would an old, lovelorn Byron; as would Pavel Petrovich, the unmarried, woebegone aristocrat with whom Bazarov endlessly quarrels. Turgenev refuses us whatever substance and consequence Bazarov's advanced nihilism would have brought. He expedites the process, skips over Bazarov's life and into his death.

> Can it really be that their prayers and tears are futile? Can it really be that love, sacred devoted love is not all-powerful? However passionate, sinful, rebellious the heart buried in this grave, the flowers growing on it look out at us serenely with their innocent eyes: they tell us not only of that eternal peace, that great peace of "indifferent" nature; they tell us also of eternal reconciliation and life everlasting.[21]

For the time being, Turgenev's poetics will serve the purpose of accentuating the forlorn conclusion of a young rebel. Bazarov's apathetic death, his reconciled and enlightened self conclude in an indifferent balance of love and scorn, of revolt and order. To understand Turgenev's narrative motivations, it is necessary to first understand Dostoevsky's disdain for Turgenev's conclusion. Where Turgenev

denies us traumatic means in exchange for despairing ends, Dostoevsky's tormenting search begins.

Whereas rebellion for Turgenev takes the form of adolescence, Dostoevsky is interested in the effects of psychology and philosophy on society as a whole. Turgenev's nihilist foundation provides the origins of the hero but neglects to offer that path towards maturity. Dostoevsky picks up where Turgenev left off. His hero is slightly older than Bazarov is and, given that Dostoevsky has allowed him to age and to develop his convictions, grants us a version of a more mature nihilist.

Nihilism as a Political Movement

It is 1869 and a twenty-two year old Sergey Nechayev has formed the Narodnaya Rasprava (The People's Retribution). He has written the *Catechism of a Revolutionary* and has adopted nihilist principles to their utmost coherence. By adopting negation as the revolutions sole condition, the young nihilist leader chooses that *everything is permitted*. The catechism's most famous line claims, "The revolutionary is a man condemned in advance. He must have neither romantic relationships nor objects to engage his feelings. He should even cast off his own name. Every part of him should be concentrated in one single passion: the revolution."[22] For the first time, Nechayev will separate revolution from love and friendship. His only originality lies in justifying the violence incurred upon one's brethren. He distinguishes between categories of revolutionaries, with those in the higher ranks reserving the right to consider the lower ranks expendable. He is truly the first to ever state that man could be an possession. Skeptics could be

blackmailed and terrorized and the oppressed, since the revolution would save them, could be oppressed even more to achieve those ends. He claims that governments must be driven to take repressive measures and that the secret society must employ all of its resources to increase the suffering and misery of the masses.

Nihilism, which has its genesis in negation and revolt, under extenuating circumstances, evolves a different type of rebel. Ivan Ivanov, a student and member of Nechayev's secret society, publicly disagrees with Nechayev and denounces the organization. On November 21st of 1869, Nechayev murders Ivanov and with the help of four other conspirators disposes of the body. When questioned by one of his comrades on the right they had to take a man's life, Nechayev boldly answers "it is not a duty of right, but of our duty to eliminate everything that may harm our cause."[23] Thus, the aristocratic nihilists of the 19th century accept but one standard – revolt – and under such a unique value system, duties replace rights.

The event struck the popular imagination of the time so hard that it prompted Dostoevsky to immortalize it in *Demons.* In it, a group of young, aristocratic nihilists who are bound by a single ideal form a secret society and plan to start a revolution at all costs. The secret architect of this coup is Pyotr Stepanovich, whom Dostoevsky based on Nechayev. But, Dostoevsky undermines Pyotr's nihilist tendencies by granting him purpose. Because his ends become synonymous with the anarchist ends of the revolution his negation represents a strive towards the destruction of all that's conventional and nothing more. The narrative does not indicate that he was ever a hopeless romantic, nor that he was

torn between remorse and obligation. His character proves for the most part to be singularly driven and one-dimensional.

It is for this reason that Dostoevsky invents Nikolai Vsevolodovich Stavrogin, a character that critic Mochulskii calls Dostoevsky's greatest artistic creation. Stavrogin is in one sense Pyotr's stepbrother and in another, firmer sense a passive member of Pyotr's secret society.

Stavrogin is beyond Byronic pining and he surpasses the traditional indifferent, Russian Romantic hero (e.g. Onegin, Pechorin). Though he may be soft-spoken, he is brilliant, strikingly handsome and a complete failure. This notion fascinates Dostoevsky who occupies his creativity with answering how an exceptional individual can bring about unwarranted evil.

At first, Stavrogin seems to suffer from a type of personality disorder, a Jekyll-Hyde syndrome. He warns Pyotr's innocent target, Shatov, of his impending danger. After leaving a birthday party, he exclaims to Pyotr that he won't let him kill his opposition. He continues to warn other targets of Pyotr's scheme. When Stavrogin and his lover Liza part ways after an affectionate night, he shyly and fearfully takes her hand. Upon realizing that she will leave him he falls into despair. There is a human aspect to Stavrogin that makes him an amiable character.

However, like the roots of his name suggest (Stavros: Greek for cross/Rog: Russian for horn) there is another side to him. The second Stavrogin is a savage who keeps the company of the basest individuals in his community. When drunks make fun of a disabled girl he nonchalantly grabs one by the collar and throws him out of a

window; many would soon dismiss this as chivalrous but Stavrogin laughs while he does it.

Stavrogin represents the nihilist's progressive detachment from reality. Unlike his destructive counterpart, Pyotr, Stavrogin truly negates all things. He is indifferent to everything, bored with life and frequently tires of people. Furthermore, he suffers emotional bouts as a result of his detachment from reality; an agitation he shares with Bazarov.

Stavrogin chooses no sides; rather he acts as spontaneity directs him to. At one instance, Stavrogin, who associates with common dregs, defends Maria, the mentally ill sister of a base acquaintance.

> They generally laughed at her, but before she didn't notice it. Nikolai Vsevolodovich never paid the slightest attention to her, and rather spent his time playing old greasy cards. But once when she was being mistreated, he without asking why, grabbed one clerk by the scruff of the neck and chucked him out of the second story window. There wasn't any chivalrous indignation in favor of offended innocence in it; the whole operation took place amid general laughter, and Nikolai Vsevolodovich himself laughed most of all.[24]

Stavrogin later states to one of his colleagues that he would not laugh at her because he respected her more than anyone in the room, because the lame Maria was better than all of them combined. One must then conclude that Stavrogin was laughing at the event. For him, there was something comical to be found in the fact that one

moment a man could be laughing at an ill girl and the next he could be falling out of a window. Stavrogin subscribes to the comedy of chaos. Upon first glance, his actions transcend both purpose and social norms. The only thing that guides them is an impulsive and impulsive need for spontaneity.

Rebellion

At one point Dostoevsky states, "If Stavrogin believes, he does not believe he believes. If he does not believe, he does not believe that he does not believe."[25] This seemingly impractical statement suggests that Stavrogin constantly lies to himself about his convictions. He never truly adopts new notions or abandons present ones. He is a perpetual and flawed character beyond repair and salvation. It is a striking parallel to Bazarov, who denies his convictions in exchange for a different state of mind.

Salvation is the great struggle in which Dostoevsky's characters engage. They themselves do not know what they rebel against. It is similar in its expression to adolescent rebellion. Dostoevsky's lasting experiment is an attempt to create or hypothesize a world devoid of God; nihilism – universal rejection is just that. This proves to be the lasting question of 19th century literature: can man live without grace? Stavrogin embodies this struggle. In a world devoid of spiritual salvation, Stavrogin represents the soul that bears sin without consequence.

The chief difference between Bazarov's and Stavrogin's rebellion is the extent of nihilism. That they both rebel against convention is negligible when considering the consequences of each of their actions. On the one hand, Bazarov's

death is of little or no consequence to anyone. On the other hand, the quixotic suffering that does take place on his deathbed stresses that his mental anguish is as insufferable as physical pain is.

But, upon review, Bazarov only rebels in theory. His rebellion is as active as having a heated argument may be. He wishes nobody harm and equally does not wish anyone well, or at least, does not lose sleep over it. His position resembles that of a spectator's and his revolt that of an insolent youth's. Bazarov revolts to everything established. He feels no need to follow in anyone's footsteps or to live in another's shadow. His studious self-confidence resembles that of any knowledgeable young man's, one who develops contempt over the standards of his forbearing elders.

Stavrogin is a few years older than Bazarov, and thus, he has had some time to summon his rebellion. He is known as both a philanderer and an uncaring usurer. Stavrogin rebels on principle. For Dostoevsky, nihilism's central consequence is the negation of order. Where Bazarov negated his elders' opinions, Stavrogin completely negates everything the world deems rational. Stavrogin acts more as an agent of chaos than as a virtuous rebel. Unlike the young Bazarov, he takes no pride in his defiance. Having negated all convention, Stavrogin knows that even though he could act in a uniform and pleasant manner, even though he could always present his discourse in a civilized form, he doesn't have to. Spontaneity is as valid a reason to act a certain way as any other. Acting friendly with a stranger is no more credible than being cruel to a friend. "Didn't I marry your sister then, when I wanted to, after a drunken dinner, on a bet of wine, and why should I now not proclaim it aloud…if it

so amuses me?"[26] Stavrogin callously proclaims to his brother in law. When Pyotr Stepanovich informs him that the revolution is ready and that all that remains is for someone adored to lead it, a maliciously smiling Stavrogin replies, "So, you've really been counting on me this whole time?"[27] No matter how serious a situation, Stavrogin fails to treat it with gravity.

Stavrogin rebels for the sake of rebellion rather than for a rebellious cause. Negation for him does not surmount convention but seeks to defeat the notion that any societal order can be rational. Rebelling out of necessity shows the pathological maturity of Bazarov's rebellious nature. Like a disobedient youth, Stavrogin's mature defiance similarly rebels, only on a larger scale.

Where Bazarov boasts stern convictions, Stavrogin fully carries out rebellious actions. In a petty act of complete dismissal of authority, Stavrogin grabs the mayor of a town by the nose and lowers him to his knees. When asked to apologize, Stavrogin affectionately approaches the man and bites his ear. Where Bazarov may have offended his counterpart's opinion and refused to apologize, Stavrogin highlights the absurdity of any intellect, civility, and argument and even of contemplation. Though he is proficient in all these abilities, he refuses to exercise them. Bazarov's convictions arise from his philosophy of negation, whereas, Stavrogin's actions reach at a point where a character is unable to follow through with negation.

Love's a thing of the past.

Inability to follow through negation stems from the nature of love, which these characters experience. One can view Stavrogin as a slightly older and cynically developed Bazarov. Stavrogin claims an eternal struggle between what he knows and what he chooses to do. In Bazarov, these are actions are of an adolescent discovering affection for the first time, of a cocky realist ironically falling in love after having ridiculed romanticism. Stavrogin sacrifices love to the exercise of negation time and again. The fact that his actions are sometimes charismatic and self-sacrificial, that he can be a philanthropist as well as a murderer, proves that he is fully aware of his duplicitous conscience. It is out of the absence of self-responsibility that Stavrogin suppresses his better half.

Searching deep within the romantic confines of his heart, Stavrogin's reveals in his final letter to Dasha that he is a secret romantic. "Dear friend, tender and magnanimous being whom I divine!" begins his plea. The two characters' concluding appeals bear striking similarity. "Oh, magnanimous one! How near, how tender…you stand here looking so beautiful!" admires the dying Bazarov.

Their attempt to deify the romantic sides of their souls is an attempt at salvation. Bazarov's claim to romance is an adolescent claim to unfulfilled desire. It is especially heart-wrenching because of his age and unrealized potential. If Bazarov were not condemned to die of typhoid, one could envision him exercising such romantic notions to their bittersweet end. It is clear that salvation for each individual rests in seeking another being who can care for him/her. For this

individual, none are more caring than those affectionate others with who they were once infatuated and whom they negated for whatever reason.

Stavrogin refers to Dasha as his "nurse" while she offers "nursing" to him at any point he should need it. It is a close comparison to Bazarov's ailment and Odinstova's coming to his aid with a doctor in an attempt to nurse him back to health. For these negators, conventional norms and divine salvation are not enough; in fact, they are not even an option; the only is hope to have a caring soul that might assuage their affliction.

It so happens that this affection arrives too late. Upon receiving the letter, Dasha arrives at Stavrogin's location only to find that he has hung himself. Odintsova's attempt to bring a doctor to Bazarov's aid is far too late since his infection is too advanced.

However, even though one character commits suicide and the other dies of disease, their mental processing of death offers multiple parallels. They are both accepting of the fact that they are going to die. Bazarov's is clear on the account due to his medical knowledge; he knows his abrasion has led to infection and will soon lead to his death. Having no belief in the divine, Bazarov passively accepts his sentence, though at times he sincerely struggles with his fate.

Stavrogin's death proves slightly more complex. Stavrogin's actions have not only negated conventional norms but also divine purpose. Because he have negated all divine values, Stavrogin knows that he has no redeeming chance of salvation, although he desperately seeks it (as is evident in his letter to Dasha). Dostoevsky thus returns to the scenario of man in a graceless world. For him, nihilism is the

desire to despair as well as to negate. What does Stavrogin despair of? The fact that he is a rebel – and one without a cause, it seems.

> "I am as capable now as ever before of wishing to do a good deed, and I take pleasure in that; along with it, I wish for evil and also feel pleasure. I looked upon our negators with spite; envying them their hope. But your fears were empty: I could not be their comrade, because I shared nothing…I have not been able to detest anything!" [28]

Stavrogin is the instrument, the very incarnation of negation. Seeing no divine order, no overall meaning to life, he acts arbitrarily. The fact that he has not come to hate anything in particular Dostoevsky's claim to the indifference with which a graceless individual approaches the world, its pleasures and its horrors. This is the meaningless rebellion. In order to live in it, Dostoevsky claims that one must follow it to its bitter end. Having reached this end, Stavrogin realizes that he has no salvation given that his offenses have condemned so many guilty and innocent people alike.

Stavrogin comes face to face with his creation, the horror of committing crime. Dostoevsky claims that negation deprives the world of any divine will and thus, of universal unity. Having no standards by which to be judged, Stavrogin has only his actions – which prove his only lasting creation after having negated the world. Being the creator of terror proves too much for a graceless soul to bear. "Everything indicated premeditation and consciousness to the last minute. Our

medical men, after the autopsy, completely and emphatically ruled out insanity." [29] Claims the narrator.

Self-Affliction and Death

The narratives closing lines suggest that Stavrogin actively chose his fate. In a graceless state, filled with his atrocities and void of meaning, Stavrogin is beyond forgiveness and beyond despair. He chooses his fate and accepts his perceptive end rather than blind action.

Dostoevsky and Turgenev vastly differ in their use of death as the end point of their characters' evolution and rightfully so, since they differ in their views of salvation. Dostoevsky was openly critical of Turgenev's inability to witness man's inhumanity to man. But it is not elitism or cowardice that guides Turgenev's poetics.

On the contrary, Bazarov's expedited death is Turgenev's refusal to deform and destroy life. This stems from a deep moral obligation to preserve self-control and to persist with self-affirmation. Unlike Dostoevsky who may suggest divine submission in a moment of horror, Turgenev recollects unrealized ambitions and succumbs to a conscious acceptance of death. Turgenev creates his own order in absence of the divine and thus prevents complete psychological ruin. Bazarov, in the end, is in control of his fate and fully aware of the tragedy of his negation. Turgenev has spared us the traumatic details of what may have been Bazarov's life. Bazarov is not given the few formative years necessary to become Stavrogin.

In this absence of faith, Dostoevsky gives us the fate of the nihilist who faces spiritual ruin. Completely conscious of his crimes and burdened with a relentless

moral memory, Stavrogin is unable to find salvation. Dostoevsky condemns the human spirit as much as he claims it can be saved. On the contrary, Turgenev partakes in the aesthetic invention of a character and instead of divine deliverance offers him secular salvation.

Thus, our nihilist follows a common human trajectory. His genesis puts him at odds with the older generation. At times of great intellectual and social stress, a nihilist denounces everything that exists. Turgenev deniesus the terror that Evgeny Bazarov may someday bring to Russia, but Dostoevsky offers no such reprieve. The older and developed Nikolai Stavrogin exercises nihilism to its ultimate potential. The world is in a state of rebellion, of negation and of despair – unable to act in the name of anything. There is no immortality, no reward or punishment. Deprived of a divine will, the nihilists abolish consensus, harmony and certainty. It is the existence that Turgenev refused to show in Bazarov and the condition that drove Stavrogin to his death.

In a world devoid of values, where full-fledged nihilism proclaims nothing to be true, Dostoevsky claims that *everything is permitted.* In a graceless world, vacant of consequence, personal perdition proves too grave for the nihilist. If he is fortunate, he will die of typhoid or otherwise will kill himself to avoid a meaningless and absurd existence.

State Terror

Modern revolutions reinforce the power of the State. Napoleon reigned in 1789, Napoleon III in 1848, 1917 brought Stalin, 1920s Italy brought Mussolini and that Weimar Republic, Hitler. All these revolutions, especially those that took place on the eve of the 20th century, dissolved all relics of divine right and glorified building the world of man. This terrifying growth of the State was the conclusion of unwarranted technical and philosophical insights that endangered rebellion and irrational states, both of which were based on terror.

The key difference between Hitler and the classical revolutionaries is that Hitler deified the irrational instead of the reasonable. Making vast use of Nietzsche and other German thought, the Nazi movement is both a case of rebellion and of nihilism. It was the first crusade truly based on the principles that everything was meaningless and that history propagates through the hazards of force. As Ernst Junger pointed out in National Socialism's nihilist sentiment: "The best answer to the betrayal of life by the spirit is the betrayal of the spirit by the spirit, and one of the great and cruel pleasures of our times is to participate in the work of destruction."

However, there lay a paradox in this movement – in its quest for stability and order in the midst of negation and destruction. Rauschning, in his *Revoluton of Nihilism,* identified the Hitlerian revolution as one of "unadulterated dynamism"[30]. With Germany's foundations withering under a disastrous war, by defeat and by economic stagnation, values swiftly faded. The pandemic of civilian suicides that swept Germany between the two wars (e.g. 7,000 in 1945 in Berlin alone)[31] speaks

to the state of mental incertitude. One may suggest that struggles the absurdity of life devoid of order, which was so difficult on the conscience of the literary nihilists, proved to be a similar burden for 20th century European citizens.

In destroying everything, the Hitlerian revolution aroused nothing but a passion for nothingness. This unique example presents history, perhaps for the first time, with a tyrant who left nothing to his own credit but suicide and murder. Lofty aims of the Aryan race and the Third Reich were not only abandoned as Russian panzers slowly crumbled Berlin's walls, but also collapsed into their basic philosophy. "If the German people are incapable of victory, they are unworthy to live."[32] States Hitler and obstinately drags countless to their grave. Under the *Führerprinzip,* a false nihilistic deity replaces nothingness and commits itself only to more negation – its only success. If a basic conclusion can be drawn from nihilism's historic responsibilities, it is that negation of everything is in itself a form of servitude and that real freedom is an inner submission to a value that defines history and its aftermath. With this in mind, the nihilist hero emerges disoriented from the dispassionate mists at the onset of the 20th century.

Albert Camus contributes to the final piece of the nihilist portrait with his literary character Meursault in his 1942 novel *The Stranger.* Intimately involved in the resistance newspapers during the war and the philosophy that reduced the center of western civilization to chaos, Camus writes with a brutal honesty and brings us to the final coda of the nihilist movement.

Meursault, unlike his slightly younger predecessors, is a French-Algerian living in Algiers and at upon first glance he is a dispassionate and detached member of conventional society. The first person narrative, spoken entirely by him, opens with,

> Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know. I got a telegram from the home: "Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Faithfully yours." That doesn't mean anything. Maybe it was yesterday.[33]

Meursault speaks with an unforeseen emotional indifference towards what is normally seen as a dramatic familial matter. He expresses no sorrow, no remorse and above all no reaction whatsoever toward the tragic telegram he receives. After methodically stating the telegram's concise facts and adding no personal feeling, he seems more concerned with being unable to discern on which day his mother died, which is hardly the standard beginning of a mourning period. While with the caretaker at the funeral home, Meursault diligently focuses on trivial details.

> I like milk in my coffee, so I said yes, and he came back a few minutes later with a tray. I drank the coffee. Then I felt like having a smoke. But I hesitated, because I didn't know if I could do it with Maman right there. I thought about it; it didn't matter. I offered the caretaker a cigarette and we smoked.[34]

Meursault's social interactions inform only on events rather than emotions. Thus, the first substantial difference between Meursault and his nihilist predecessors is his sincere emotional detachment.

Rebelling against Desire to Rebel

Where Stavrogin and Bazarov falter in their emotional disinterest, Meursault shows no variance in emotional tone. Generational quarrel is modified; rather what prevails is generational influence. Meursault suggests that his indifference is an inherited or implanted quality. "Anyway, it was one of Maman's ideas, and she often repeated it, that after a while you could get used to anything."[35] Camus suggests that such nihilist bias is an inherited trait and that society is a collection of amplified biases. It proves a powerful epilogue for the nihilist hero who attempts to negate his roots by rebelling, first as an adolescent, then as rebel who negates because rebellion has become a part of life and finally as an individual devoid of any original qualities of inner dynamisn.

Furthermore, Meursault is exceptionally apathetic to the women in the novel. He constantly objectifies and passively acts to their mistreatment. This is a common trait he has with Stavrogin, a philanderer and rapist and to a lesser extent with Bazarov too, who objectively dismisses Anna Sergeevna after she rejects his offer.

> I ran into Marie Cardona in the water, a former typist in our office whom I'd had a thing for at the time…I helped her onto a float and as I did, I brushed against her breasts…She turned toward me. He hair was in her eyes and she was laughing. I hoisted myself up next to her, It was nice, and, sort of joking around, I let my head fall back and rest on her stomach. She didn't say

> anything so I left it there…She had her leg pressed against mine…Toward the end of the show, I gave her a kiss, but not a good one. She came back to my place.
>
> When I woke up, Marie had gone…I rolled over, tried to find the salty smell Marie's hair had left on the pillow, and slept until ten.[36]

The objectification of everything sensual is blatant, but Camus is careful to inject seemingly sentimental tendencies. Though for the majority of his time with Marie, Meursault focuses on her sexual appeal, in a semi-dormant state he finds comfort in the scent of her hair – a sanctuary that one might deem somewhat romantic.

As passive as Meursault may appear, his mistreatment of others, especially women, though unintentional is resolute. After returning with a wounded Raymond from a confrontation with the Arabs, Meursault exclaims, "Madamme Masson was crying and Marie was very pale. I didn't like having to explain to them, so I just shut up, smoked a cigarette and looked at the sea." And later when returning to the bungalow with Raymond, it is in avoidance of the women that he finds himself back on the beach for his fatal meeting with the Arab, "I just stood there at the bottom, my head ringing from the sun, unable to face the effort it would take to climb the wooden staircase and face the women again…A minute later I turned back toward the beach and started walking again."[37]

Absurdist Love

This negation of emotion is a significant difference from Meursault's predecessors, who always remorsefully ponder on their actions afainst the opposite sex. One might say that the nihilist character progressively loses his capacity for open adoration and gains in his prowess for open scorn. Pining for feminine salvation proves a hyperbola. Bazarov's unfulfilled, adolescent plea peaks with Stavrogin's request for a nurse and Meursaults mild reverie of Marie's beauty. "But the face I was looking for was as the bright as the sun and the flame of desire – and it belonged to Marie. I had searched for it in vain."[38] Meursault's ideas on marriage are passive at best, "She asked if I loved her. I told her it didn't mean anything but that I didn't think so. She looked sad."[39] His final affection remains with her alone. There is an idolatry that takes place however minute it may be.

Stillborn Rebellion

Meursault's rebellion against society takes the form of his sensless murder of an Arab on the beach. In possession of his friend's revolver, Meursault is suddenly afflicted by the physically unbearable weather. The searing sun and bright sand cause a burning sweat in his eyes. At the moment of utmost vexation, the Arab reveals a knife whose glaring shine in Meursault's face prompts him to pull the trigger and shatter "the harmony of the day, the exceptional silence of a beach where [he had] been happy." With the Arab dead, Meursault indifferently fires four more rounds at the motionless body, which he describes as "knocking four quick times on the door of unhappiness." [40]There is no question that although Meursault

culminates in spontaneous murder, for which the sun of all things is to blame, he is condemned for not being affectionate towards society's standards. "Gentlemen of the jury, the day after his mother's death, this man was out swimming, starting up a dubious liaison, and going to the movies, a comedy, for laughs."[41]

Meursault's prosecutor is so effective in assassinating his character that the members of the jury focus more on his indifference, which they find foreign and monstrous, than on his actual crime. Meursault's rebellion is an exercise to show that he negates society's norms, which from a moral perspective are just as arbitrary and absurd reasons to convict him as his own explanation. Sartre writes that Meursault is one of those "terrible innocents who cause scandal in society because they do not accept the rules of the game. He lives amidst outsiders, but for them too he is an outsider." [42] Meursault's negation renders him a stranger to convention. Though he may be responsible for taking the life of another man, given the negation of everything that exists, he is not guilty; responsibility and guilt are in this case not synonymous.

Ultimate Indifference of Death

The most striking comparison of the three literary nihilists is found in their attitudes towards death. All three characters die fully aware of their deaths. Bazarov dismisses his as insignificant, Stavrogin's forensic analysts declare that he was sane and aware and Meursault finds himself open to the gentle indifference of the world that is to execute him. There is a striking similarity between the three ends. Bazarov boldly claims, as Turgenev concludes his narrative,

> "Up to this point I haven't been afraid…unconsciousness will come and that's that! ...Now [my] task is to die in a decent manner, even though no one really cares about that either."
>
> …However passionate, sinful, rebellious the heart buried in this grave, the flowers growing on it look out at us serenely with their innocent eyes: they tell us not only of that eternal peace, that great peace of "indifferent" nature; they tell us also of eternal reconciliation and life everlasting.[43]

Dostoevsky likewise certifies that Stavrogin's suffering was real and his conclusions were valid,

> The strong silk cord upon which Nikolai Vsevolodovich had hanged himself, evidently prepared and chosen beforehand, was heavily soaped. Everything indicated pre-meditation and consciousness to the last minute.
>
> Our medical men, after the autopsy, completely and emphatically ruled out insanity.[44]

And Camus adds that, having negated everything, his character finds death trivial, life listless and society much less human than we can identify with.

> I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world. Finding it so much like myself – so like a brother, really – I felt that I had been happy and that I was happy again. For everything to be consummated, for me to feel less

alone, I had only to wish that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of hate. [45]

The similarities between the final narratives are quite apparent. All three characters are accepting of their deaths; as if they are above them. Yet, not one of these characters fully accomplishes anything of significance in his life. On the contrary, their surroundings are a disappointment of empty ambitions crime, lechery and negligence.

This is the final and most striking commonality between not only these characters, but also their authors. All three authors state (whether directly or indirectly) that living is acting. Yet, in the name of negation action is done in the name of nothing. Dostoevsky specifies that if there is no immortality then there is no reward or punishment – and hence no virtue. The rebellious state of nihilism then can only be endured to its own bitter end. But, deprived of divinity the world has no common ground or finality. This is why in Meursault's case, in the absurdist world, it is impossible to pass judgment on anything.

Summary

The central paradox nihilism presents is that judgments are passed on what is with reference to what should be. The 20th century's culmination of nihilist philosophy consists in reaching the conclusion that the world cannot be judged in the name of nothing. One can see the refusal to act throughout the development of the nihilist hero. In fact, the refusal to act augments directly with the acceptance of

death. Dostoevsky thrusts Stavrogin in a world of turmoil. Everything has been negated and negation reigns. As he will later claim "If nothing is true, everything is permitted." This could instinctively drive one to action. Action requires reason whether it is spontaneous or not, trivial or premeditated. Action always has a result and the result will always be to some extent pre-conceived by the actor prior to the action. Thus, for conscious beings, cognition has premeditative tendencies – it is synonymous with intuition. Inaction and action are also synonymous seeing as how not acting requires decision making as acting would. The only true negation is inexistence – or suicide. Apart from suicide, action is necessary and unavoidable. Camus replaces Dostoevsky's claim of "If nothing is true, everything is permitted" with "If nothing is true, nothing is permitted." To deny that something is forbidden is to renounce that everything is permitted. This is Meursault's central conflict – certain murders are forbidden but other murders are permitted in an absurdist society.

Thus, if everything is permitted then nothing is forbidden; this includes forbidding. To forbid means to have a standard and standards must be created. In a negated existence of nihility only man is available to create standards after all else has been denied – therefore man is the Creator. This is the responsibility Turgenev refuses to bestow on Bazarov, and this is what allows Dostoevsky to kill Stavrogin. The nihilist hero does not create but rather illuminates. Thus far, his literary evolution has been one of destruction rather than of responsibility. Nietzsche voiced Dostoevsky's fears in saying "If we do not claim responsibility for the death of God then we will pay dearly for that omission."[46] The true nihilist is not a destroyer but a

reformer of standards. With convention negated, with tradition dead, the responsibility to create the standard of values on which everything is to be permitted and forbidden falls on the nihilist's shoulders. It is this burden, this loneliness that the hero cannot endure. Upon realization of this great paradox, the only true escape in the face of the horrors he's committed is death.

Turgenev spares us Bazarov's maturation and brings us to his lovelorn end. Dostoevsky reveals Stavrogin's madness in having negation an ideal rather as liberation; devoid of morale, the burden of unquestionable sin is too much to bear. Nihilism develops such historic responsibility that Meursault finds himself in a loveless and indifferent world. He is a mirror of his society, incapable of judging it based on its crimes any more than it is capable of judging him for his. Meursault's freedom is at a point where he realizes that everything has been permitted in the name of negation. "The gentle indifference of the world" is so much like "my brother," he says. His freedom in a world where all has been negated, one in which he leads by example, becomes a voluntary prison. Enlightened by its futility, he gives us a final reflection of his peers – a large crowd that greets him with cries of hate.

The evolution of a literary nihilist is rooted in human nature and in social history of the century that produced him. The character's ability to feel affection proves crucial in his journey of rebellion. Passion for nothing but the act of rebelling proves detrimental. It opens one to a world without standards in which one may act as one pleases. Because in this free world, one's actions have constructive value, the rebel becomes a creator. It is in this aspect that the nihilist hero accepts death and negates to create his standards for living His indifferent life amounts to an

indifferent death. Nihilist movement reaches its dean end in the absurdist literature, which presents us with a portrait of a rebel who negates without the desire to forge a new life.

Bibliography:

1. Turgenev, Ivan. *Fathers and Sons*. New York: Norton &Company, 1996. 205. Print.
2. Allen, Elizabeth Cheresh. *Beyond Realism: Turgenev's Poetics of Secular Salvation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992. 1. Print.
3. Camus, Albert. *The Rebel*. New York: Vintage International, 1991. 178. Print.
4. Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Demons*. New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 2000. 234. Print.
5. Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Demons*. New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 2000. 234. Print.
6. Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. New York: Vintage International, 1988. 1. Print.
7. Viggiani, Carl A. Camus' *L'Etranger*. PMLA, Vol. 71, No. 5 Modern Language Association (December 1956), pp. 865-887.
8. Kornilov, Alexander. Modern Russian History: From the age of Catherine the Great to the end of the nineteenth century. translated by John S. Curtiss. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. 1917, 1924, 1943. Vol. II, p.69.
9. Carr, K., *The Banalisation of Nihilism*, State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 25
10. Heidegger, Martin (1982), Nietzsche, Vols. I-IV, trans. F.A. Capuzzi, San Francisco: Harper & Row.
11. Nietzsche, Friedrich (2005/1886), Beyond Good and Evil, trans. Helen Zimmern.
12. Nietzsche, Friedrich (2008/1885), Thus Spake Zarathustra, trans. Thomas Common.

Index

[1] Turgenev, Ivan. *Fathers and Sons*. New York: Norton &Company, 1996. 205. Print.
[2] Ibid. p.208
[3] Ibid. p.198
[4] Ibid. p197
[5] Allen, Elizabeth Cheresh. *Beyond Realism: Turgenev's Poetics of Secular Salvation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992. 1. Print.
[6] Ibid. p.4
[7] Ibid. p.58
[8] Ibid. p.52
[9] Ibid. p.79
[10] Ibid. p. 81
[11] Turgenev 54
[12] Turgenev 35
[13] Turgenev 36
[14] Turgenev 37
[15] Turgenev 47
[16] Turgenev 120
[17] Turgenev 75
[18] Turgenev 84
[19] Turgenev 134
[20] Turgenev 152
[21] Turgenev 157
[22] Camus, Albert. *The Rebel*. New York: Vintage International, 1991. 178. Print.
[23] Ibid. p181
[24] Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Demons*. New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 2000. 234. Print.
[25] Ibid. p551
[26] Ibid. p349
[27] Ibid. p576
[28] Ibid. p675
[29] Ibid. p678
[30] Camus 159
[31] Camus 165
[32] Camus 170
[33] Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. New York: Vintage International, 1988. 1. Print.
[34] Ibid. 12
[35] Ibid 15
[36] Ibid. 21
[37] Ibid. 56
[38] Ibid. 119
[39] Ibid. 62
[40] Ibid. 59
[41] Camus, *The Stranger, 110*

[42] Camus, *The Rebel,* 57
[43] Turgenev 157
[44] Dostoevsky, 678
[45] Camus, *The Stranger,* 123
[46] Camus, *The Rebel,* 72