

“Twice As Much a Son of Hell”: Stepan Trofimovich and the Menippea of the Pharisees

Bakhtin asserted that Dostoevsky’s most direct link to varieties of ancient Menippea was Christian literature, such as the Gospels or the Apocalypse. However, Bakhtin does not elaborate upon the Menippean aspects of these works which could have served as templates for Dostoevsky’s own. Whereas Bakhtin believed that, “The Menippean forms are based on man’s inability to know and contain his fate,” the case of the Pharisees in the Gospels was a bit more complex. The serio-comedy of the Pharisees was created by the ability of the God-man to know and contain their fate. In the end, what Bakhtin termed the “reduced laughter” of Stepan Trofimovich’s case comes from the same source. This paper examines Stepan Trofimovich as the embodiment of the Menippean elements of Jesus’ interactions with the Pharisees in the Gospels, focusing specifically on the journey of Stepan Trofimovich’s idea as it is introduced in “Instead of an Introduction” to its ultimate defeat in his “last peregrination.” Five specific aspects of the Menippea as defined by Bakhtin are employed in the analysis: 1) the absence of epic or tragic distance, with the subject presented on the plane of the present day, 2) the bold and unrestrained use of the fantastic and adventure devoted to a purely ideational and philosophical end, 3) insanity of all sorts, 4) no abstractly philosophical or religiously dogmatic resolution to ultimate questions, rather their embodiment in carnivalesque acts and images, and 5) the creation of an extraordinary plot situation or a provocative anacrisis.

Keywords: Dostoevsky, Bakhtin, Menippea, Pharisees, demons, Stepan Trofimovich

„Anwärter auf die Hölle“: Stepan Trofimowitsch und die Menippea der Pharisäer

Bakhtin behauptete, dass Dostojewskis direkteste Verbindung zu Spielarten der antiken Menippea die christliche Literatur wie die Evangelien oder die Apokalypse sei. Bakhtin geht jedoch nicht näher auf die menippeischen Aspekte dieser Werke ein, die als Vorlage für Dostojewskis eigene hätten dienen können. Während Bakhtin glaubte, dass „die menippeischen Formen auf der Unfähigkeit des Menschen beruhen, sein Schicksal zu kennen und einzudämmen“, war der Fall der Pharisäer in den Evangelien etwas komplexer. Die Komödie der Pharisäer entstand durch die Fähigkeit des Gottmenschen, ihr Schicksal zu kennen und zu zügeln. Letzten Endes stammt das, was Bakhtin als „reduziertes Lachen“ im Fall Stepan Trofimowitsch bezeichnete, aus derselben Quelle. Dieser Aufsatz untersucht Stepan Trofimowitsch als Verkörperung der menippeischen Elemente von Jesu Interaktionen mit den Pharisäern in den Evangelien, wobei er sich speziell auf die Reise von Stepan Trofimowitschs Idee konzentriert, wie sie in „Statt einer Einleitung“ zu ihrer endgültigen Niederlage eingeführt wird auf seiner „letzten Wanderung.“ Fünf spezifische Aspekte der Menippea, wie sie von Bakhtin definiert wurden, werden in die Analyse einbezogen: 1) das Fehlen einer epischen oder tragischen Distanz, wobei das Thema auf der Ebene der Gegenwart präsentiert wird, 2) der kühne und hemmungslose Einsatz des Phantastischen und des Abenteuers, das einem rein ideellen und philosophischen Ziel gewidmet ist, 3) Wahnsinn aller Art, 4) keine abstrakt-philosophische oder religiös-dogmatische Lösung letzter Fragen, sondern deren Verkörperung in karnevalistischen Handlungen und Bildern, und 5) die Schaffung einer außergewöhnlichen Handlungssituation bzw. einer provokanten Anakrisis.

Schlüsselwörter: Dostojewski, Bakhtin, Menippea, Pharisäer, Dämonen, Stepan Trofimowitsch

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Received: 11.3.2024

Accepted: 14.8.2024

In his „Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics” Bakhtin writes that, „Dostoevsky understood subtly and well all the generic possibilities of the menippea. He possessed an extraordinarily deep and well-differentiated feeling for this genre”. He also asserts that Dostoevsky’s most direct and intimate link to varieties of ancient Menippea was Christian literature, such as the Gospels or the Apocalypse (1984: 142). Bakhtin argues that the common thread in the Christian genres as in the Menippea is the fact that, “enormous organizing significance is allotted to the testing of an idea and its carrier...” (1984: 135). However Bakhtin does not expound upon the specific Menippean aspects of the Gospels or the Apocalypse according to which the idea is tested and which could have served as templates for Dostoevsky’s own. Whereas Bakhtin believed that, “The Menippean forms are based on man’s inability to know and contain his fate”, the case of the Pharisees in the Gospels was a bit more complex. The serio-comedy of the Pharisees was created by the ability of the God-man to know and contain their fate. In the end what Bakhtin termed the “reduced laughter” of Stepan Trofimovich’s case comes from the same source. Throughout the course of the novel Stepan Trofimovich goes from being someone wholly consumed with his own reputation to being someone who bows before the “Great Thought”. When the reader first encounters him, he is described as someone who imagines himself on “some sort of pedestal, rather lofty and gratifying to his vanity”, by virtue of his being a martyr for secular humanism. The publication of his epic Faustian poem which culminates with the successful triumph of the tower of Babel is credited with garnering him this honor. However, by the end of the novel, and by the end of his life, Stepan Trofimovich is chiefly concerned with quite another book and promoting its reputation.

What had Dostoevsky learned from this book about the potential contained within the menippea for, as Bakhtin phrases it, “testing an idea and its carrier”? This paper will examine Stepan Trofimovich as the embodiment of the Menippean elements of Jesus’ interactions with the Pharisees in the Gospels, focusing specifically on the journey of Stepan Trofimovich’s idea as it is introduced in “Instead of an Introduction” to its ultimate defeat in his “last peregrination”. To this end, we will perform a comparative analysis of Jesus’ interactions with the Pharisees in the gospels and the portrayal of Stepan Trofimovich as he interacts with his friend Anton Lavrentyevich G – v, Varvara Petrovna Stavrogina and other inhabitants of the town, according to five characteristics of the menippea enumerated by Bakhtin: 1) the absence of epic or tragic distance, with the subject presented on the plane of the present day (1984: 108), 2) the bold and unrestrained use of the fantastic and adventure devoted to a purely ideational and philosophical end (1984: 114), 3) insanity of all sorts (1984: 116), 4) no abstractly philosophical or religiously dogmatic resolution to ultimate questions, rather their embodiment in carnivalistic acts and images (1984: 134), and 5) the creation of an extraordinary plot situation, or a provocative anacrisis (1984: 144).

One of the most frequent tropes used by Jesus to describe the Pharisees was that of blindness. In the gospel of St. Matthew chapter 15 he uses the tragicomical image

of "one blind person leading another" and both ending up in a pit to expose the spiritual hypocrisy of the Pharisees. The comparison which Dostoevsky's narrator makes of Stepan Trofimovich with Gulliver in his opening chapter "Instead of an Introduction" is analogous in its function. It was the habit of thinking of themselves as being superior which had led the Pharisees to their blindness, to the dangers of pride. It was the habit of having lived among the Lilliputians for so long which blinded Gulliver to the reality of the normal world and his actual size in it upon returning to London. And it was the habit of assuming his intellectual superiority which led to Stepan Trofimovich's social and spiritual blindness and ultimately his failure as a father. Yet Dostoevsky's narrator immediately reduces the distance the reader, and indeed he himself, may be tempted to create between themselves and Stepan Trofimovich. The act of reading (and telling) the account might lead one to view him through a lens of condescending pity, but this snare is avoided by asking a question: "what will habit not do to a man?", making him seem relatable to us, so that the reader (and narrator) is at once laughing at Stepan Trofimovich and at themselves. The narrator goes on to describe Stepan Trofimovich's faults as being "innocent and inoffensive" in form, and affirms that „he was a most excellent man" (Dostoevsky 1995: 8). This echoes the natural inner human voice which tends to either overestimate or underestimate one's faults. However, whereas Dostoevsky's narrator reduces the distance between the reader and Stepan Trofimovich, as well as between himself and Stepan Trofimovich, Jesus' tragicomical indictment of the Pharisees increases the distance between them and himself. When the disciples voice their reservations about Jesus' harsh criticism of the religious leaders, Jesus invokes the authority of the heavenly Father (Matthew 15: 12–13). The Pharisees are presented on the plane of the present day, just as is the case with Stepan Trofimovich, yet they are presented not by an equal but rather by a transcendent narrator.

In the gospel of John we see another example of Jesus' interaction with a Pharisee where he uses irony to increase the distance between himself and a man who was otherwise considered to possess spiritual authority. This time Jesus draws on the image of birth to describe the process anyone who wants to follow him must go through. When Nicodemus, the Pharisee, reacts with incomprehension, Jesus asks, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things" (John 3: 10)? The Pharisees' pretension of understanding questions of theology stands in stark contrast to their ignorance of the intrinsically spiritual significance of everyday life. Nicodemus' knowledge is exposed as wanting in the test of the plane of the present day, In the case of Stepan Trofimovich, we can once again point to another instance where the narrator reduces the distance between himself and the object of his humor, as well as between the reader and the same. He begins by mocking Stepan Trofimovich's paranoia about being persecuted, and then makes a tongue-in-cheek remark about his being "an intelligent man, such a gifted man, even ...a scholar ..." (Dostoevsky 1995: 8). He goes on to disparage the notion of his being a scholar by stating that he "did very little as a scholar, nothing at

all, apparently” (1995: 8–9), and yet concludes his remarks by once more widening the target of his humor to include Russian society as a whole, thus encompassing both himself and the reader: “But with scholars here in Russia that is ever and always the case” (1995: 9).

The relationship between the narrator and Stepan Trofimovich has indeed been the topic of much discussion in studies on the novel for some time. It has been argued that, “much of G – v’s ironic narration in relation to Stepan Verkhovensky represents his attempt to sort out his conflicting feelings for Stepan’ and results from Dostoevsky creating a narrator grappling with his own gullibility” (Stromberg 2012: 474). It is abundantly clear that Anton Lavrentievich G – v is as much susceptible to the deception of demonic ideas as any other character in the novel, as much as we the readers also are. This is why what Lewis Bagby terms the “third story” of the novel is so important; this third story, the story of Stepan Trofimovich’s evolution from liberal intellectual of the 1840’s to repentant pilgrim, is what Bagby believes serves as the heart of the narrative and brings together all the elements of the novel: the epigraph with its quotations from Pushkin and the gospel of Luke, the tragi-comic Chapter One/“Instead of an Introduction, and the insert story of intrigue involving Trofimovich’s pupil Stavrogin and his son Pyotr Stepanovich” (Bagby 2016: 107). Anton Lavrentievich is the ideal narrator precisely because he is not immune to the snares of intellectual vanity and pride and is thus able to at once both expose the fallacy of the ideas which formerly charmed him as well as make those who promote them more relatable.

Joseph Frank calls “Demons” “practically an encyclopedia of Russian nineteenth-century culture filtered through a witheringly derisive and often grotesquely funny perspective” (Frank 2002: 13). This brings us to our next major point of comparison between the menippean characteristics of the Pharisees’ portrayal in the gospels and that of Stepan Trofimovich, namely the bold and unrestrained use of the fantastic and adventure for the provoking and testing of a philosophical idea (Bakhtin 1984: 114). In the gospels Jesus provokes and tests the teachings of the Pharisees by likening them to fantastic, sometimes impossible images such as “straining out a gnat but swallowing a camel” (Matthew 23: 24) or a cup that is sparkly clean on the outside but full of filth on the inside (Matthew 23: 25). And in Matthew 12 when the Pharisees demand that Jesus prove his authority with a sign, he enigmatically responds that, “no sign shall be given ...but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12: 39–40). The connection between the two elements of this seemingly fantastic metaphor exposes the hollow core of the Pharisees’ idea of divinity. Having failed to learn the lesson of the prophets, namely humility before God, they continue to rebel against a God who does not meet their expectations and whose will remains mysterious before them. Similarly, the hubris of Stepan Trofimovich’s intellectual vanity is mocked through

a fantastic situation, encapsulated in the title of Chapter Three, “Someone Else’s Sins” (80). He is asked by Varvara Petrovna, the object of his affection and his benefactress for many years, to marry a young girl named Dasha Pavlovna, whom Varvara Petrova suspects of having an illegitimate liaison with her son, Stepan Trofimovich’s former pupil. Therefore, whereas it may seem that he is being asked to cover for “someone else’s sins”, his pupil’s behavior can in large part be traced back to his ideas. It is a trap which he, in effect, set for himself.

Norwegian scholar Geir Kjetsaa, in his article “Dostoevsky and His New Testament”, notes how, „From the mid 1860’s one can observe in Dostoevsky an increasingly strong urge to see human beings and their actions in the divine perspective of the Bible. Every single ‘natural’ thought seems to have its special spiritual and divine counterpart” (Kjetsaa 1983: 104–105). He also points out Dostoevsky’s attack on the “Western disease” of hubris which “showed itself in the revolt of mankind against God” (1983: 104) and goes on to name Stepan Trofimovich as the originator of this great apostasy (1983: 107). The problem, according to Kjetsaa, is that while Stepan Trofimovich aroused an “eternal holy longing” in his pupil Stavrogin with his lofty ideas, they proved inadequate as a bulwark against “demonic forces of the human mind” (1983: 107). They led instead to the third characteristic of the menippea, namely the representation of the unusual, abnormal moral and psychic states of man (Bakhtin 1984: 116). In the New Testament Jesus uses images of poison and disease to unmask the hidden intentions of the Pharisees and reveal the true state of their thoughts, calling them at one point a “brood of vipers” (Matthew 3: 7). And in one of his most well-known uses of irony, when he is criticized by the Pharisees for associating with tax-collectors and sinners, Jesus replies that “it is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick” (Mark 2: 17), at once both vindicating his actions and implying that it is rather those who criticize him who suffer from the graver disease and are even more in need of his remedy. The narrator of “Demons” also goes to great lengths to portray the perverted nature of Stepan Trofimovich’s state of mind. In one particularly hilarious passage he confides in Anton Lavrentievich that he has “discovered something new ...and terrible” and goes on to drawl out, partially in French, that he is a “mere sponger” and nothing more! And to emphasize his abnormal state of mind, he rapturously rolls the “r” on “rien” the second time around, “r-r-rien” (n-n-nothing) (28). Rather than arousing shame in Stepan Trofimovich, he appears to be quite giddily proud of his status as a sponger.

The gospel of John plainly states that the Pharisees “loved human praise more than praise from God” (John 12: 43), a statement so pregnant with the ridiculous that it begs the question, how does a mind become so contumacious that it deliberately and actively seeks that which it rationally knows to be of lesser value? And in Matthew’s gospel we read about how the Pharisees plainly understood Jesus’ message but were still more concerned with what the multitudes thought of them (Matthew 21: 45–46). Likewise, Anton Lavrentievich describes how Stepan Trofimovich suddenly

becomes religious when he fears that he will be arrested for being a revolutionary. He writes about how he is “surprised” that upon visiting his friend he finds a lamp lit in front of the icon in the corner where there had never been one before. Stepan Trofimovich’s reaction when he notices his surprise is to “glance slyly” at him and explain in French, “Quand on a de ces choses là dans sa chambre et qu’on vient vous arrêter, it makes an impression, and they really must report that they’ve seen ...” (When one has these things here in one’s room, and they come to arrest you, 428). At this point Stepan Trofimovich shows no sign of regret or repentance for the demonic ideas he has helped to foment. Instead, he entrenches himself deeper in his disease of hypocrisy and intellectual vanity.

In “Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet”, Joseph Frank writes of the populist Nikolai Mikhailovsky’s critique of “Demons” and its portrayal of socialism as purely atheistic. Yet as Frank asserts, it was precisely the populist misconception that one could preserve the moral code of Christianity without Christ which spurred Dostoevsky to give the theme of the necessity for religious faith new importance and intensity in the novels of his last decade (Frank 2002: 86). He goes on to write that, “In two of his great novels – *Crime and Punishment* and *The Devils* – he had portrayed the tragedy of those members of the intelligentsia who had become alienated from their Christian roots and hence from their people” (2002: 382). That Stepan Trofimovich clearly imagined himself to be a true patriot is evident in his remark to Anton Lavrentievich after his first meetings with his son Pyotr: “But, in fact, I’ve always considered myself a Russian ...yes, a true Russian cannot but be like you and me. Il y a là-dedans quelque chose d’aveugle et de louche” (There is something blind and shady about it, Dostoevsky 1995: 215). His statement is both patriotic and denigrating, witnessing to what Dostoevsky considered to be “the weakest link in the populists’ ideology ...their willingness to revere the Russian people and ‘the Russian people’s truth’ while refusing to accept the root of this ‘truth’ in the people’s inherited belief in Christ as the divine God-man” (Frank 2002: 86). Since, as Sean Illing notes, “Dostoevsky held that one’s experience of reality was inextricably linked to one’s ideas concerning reality” (Illing 2015: 230), instead of providing an abstractly philosophical or religiously dogmatic resolution to this dilemma of the Russian intelligentsia, he deftly employs another characteristic of the menippea: the playing out of ultimate questions of life and death in the “concretely sensuous form of carnivalistic acts and images” (Bakhtin 1984: 134). In the gospel of Luke Jesus asks, “To what then shall I compare the men of this generation and what are they like” (Luke 7: 31)? He then likens them to petulant children whining to one another that the others were not willing to do exactly as they bid them, whether it be to dance or weep at their whim. Thus he exposes the immature egoism at the root of the Pharisees’ criticism of both him and John the Baptist. Stepan Trofimovich is also portrayed as a pusillanimous child who is completely out of touch with reality. Shortly after hearing the news of his “perquisition”, Anton Lavrentievich describes the following scene and his resulting

fascination and disillusionment with his mentor: “And he suddenly burst into hot, hot tears. Tears simply poured out of him. He covered his eyes with his red foulard and sobbed, sobbed for a good five minutes, convulsively. I cringed all over. This was the man who for twenty years had been prophesying to us, our preacher, mentor, patriarch, Kukolnik, holding himself so loftily and majestically over us all, before whom we bowed so wholeheartedly, considering it an honor – and now suddenly he was sobbing, sobbing like a naughty little boy waiting for a birching from the teacher who has just gone to fetch the rod ... Such full, such total ignorance of everyday reality was both moving and somehow disgusting” (Dostoevsky 1995: 429–430). This scene is in keeping with what Stromberg terms Stepan Trofimovich’s „unpredictable hysterical character”, yet although he may be “consistent in his inconsistency” (Stromberg 2012: 473), his ultimate answers to questions of life and death are plainly wanting. They are as much wanting as those of Simon the Pharisee, who demonstrated a flagrant want of propriety in condemning the sinful woman for her supposed want of propriety. Whereas it was her act of washing Jesus’ feet with her tears and drying them with her hair which seemed carnivalistic, it was in fact Simon’s lack of doing so which was the truly ridiculous act. Jesus asks, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair” (Luke 7: 44). The woman’s tears, unlike Stepan Trofimovich’s, were not for herself. Unlike Simon, she demonstrated no ignorance of everyday reality but rather a profound awareness of its connection with transcendence. It was from such stories as these that Dostoevsky no doubt gleaned his method of, as Bakhtin puts it, portraying truth as the “subject of a living vision, not of abstract understanding” (Bakhtin 1984: 153).

Bakhtin also speaks of Stepan Trofimovich’s story as being “constructed in parodic-ambivalent tones” (1984: 166) and of the final aspect of the menippea, the provocative anacrisis, as being “singled out by Dostoevsky himself as the major distinguishing feature of his own creative method” (1984: 144). In the New Testament the Pharisees delighted in interrogating Jesus to try to provoke him to make explicit his underlying assumptions and beliefs and thereby trip him up. Jesus, however, always had a rejoinder which rather made explicit their underlying assumptions and beliefs. In the gospel of Matthew we read of one instance where a Pharisee, even specified as a lawyer, decided to ask him the question of all questions: “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law” (Matthew 22: 36)? Jesus not only gives him a satisfactory answer but poses a question of his own: “What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He” (Matthew 22: 42)? It is this which turns out to be the question to end all questions. When the Pharisees’ answer proves inadequate and illogical, they are left speechless, and “nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask him another question” (Matthew 22: 46). In „Demons” Anton Lavrentievich also speaks of an occurrence which gave Stepan Trofimovich a “shock and finally determined his course” (Dostoevsky 1995: 434). The narrator is so taken unawares by the change in

Stepan Trofimovich's course that he even confesses to never having "expected as much pluck from our friend as he suddenly showed that morning" (*ibid.*). The change, the revelation to himself and to others of his underlying assumptions and beliefs, occurs, similarly to the case of the Pharisees, partly as a result of his vanity and pride and partly as a result of his tacit admission of his hubris. The first cause of the change is his reading of Chernyshevsky's novel "What Is To Be Done?". The narrator describes how he finds the book lying open on the table in his friend's room when he goes to visit, and he connects this with Stepan Trofimovich's vain fancy to "fight a last battle", to prove that his original ideas do not and could not lead to the conclusions laid out by Chernyshevsky (303). "Thumping the book with his fingers", Stepan Trofimovich cries out, "It's our same idea... but it's all perverted, distorted, mutilated! Who can recognize the initial thought here" (304)? This is the beginning of the anacrisis which culminates in his impassioned speech at the revolutionary gathering organized by his son Pyotr, the fête at the home of the governor's wife, Yulia Mikhailovna. It is also at this point that Stepan Trofimovich is parted from Varvara Petrovna and symbolically states, "I have moved from my place of twenty-five years and suddenly set out – where, I do not know, but I have set out ..." (458). During the fête, in one brilliant stroke, the schism in Stepan Trofimovich's underlying assumptions and beliefs becomes explicit when, as he declaims the superiority of Shakespeare and Raphael to the emancipation of the serfs, his son incites the rioting peasants to set the Shpigulin factory ablaze. And while he considers his speech a personal triumph, Anton Lavrentievich tells him frankly, "... the matter is more serious than you think. You think you smashed someone there? You didn't smash anyone, but you yourself broke like an empty glass" and then even adds as an aside, "oh, I was rude and impolite; it grieves me to remember" (490).

Stepan Trofimovich has yet to make the connection between himself and the epigraph of the novel, the passage from the gospel of Luke describing the exorcism of the demons from the Gerasene demoniac. And yet it is precisely he and he alone among the characters who does make this connection, as Kristian Mejrur writes, "The analysis of Luke 8:31-35 belongs both to Dostoevsky and to Stepan Trofimovich, but it is the latter who connects it to the Book of Revelation" (Mejrur 2012: 6). The Bible-seller Sofia Matveevna's reading aloud of Revelation 3:14-17, where Christ indicts the church at Laodicea of being neither hot nor cold, serves as a prelude to Stepan's interpretation of the gospel passage, his confession of being "the first, at the head" of the herd of swine rushing down the cliff to destruction in the sea (Dostoevsky 1995: 655). It is these verses, opened randomly upon Stepan's request, which become the catalyst for his recognition of having birthed the lukewarm morality of Stavrogin, which in turn spawned the outright wickedness of Pyotr. "In a farcical scene near the outset of Stepan Trofimovich's self-proclaimed pilgrimage, he has an epiphany regarding the fallacy of his intellect while trudging next to a cow and for the first time becomes aware of "a morbid weakness of mind": 'How amazing,' he

thought to himself, 'I've been walking next to this cow for such a long time, and it never occurred to me to ask if I could ride with them... This 'real life' has something rather characteristic about it... At times he senses in himself that he was somehow terribly distracted and not thinking at all of what he ought to be thinking of, and he marveled at that. This awareness of a morbid weakness of mind at times became very burdensome and even offensive to him" (Dostoevsky 1995: 634–635). However, it is only in the throes of his illness and following Sofia Matveevna's reading of the Sermon on the Mount that Stepan Trofimovich openly acknowledges that he had been lying all his life, "even when I was telling the truth. I never spoke for the truth, but only for myself, I knew that before, but only now do I see ..." (1995: 652). With his last words he claims to have „come to know Russian real life" and promises to "preach the gospel" (1995: 657).

Throughout the novel Stepan Trofimovich, as the carrier of the original revolutionary idea, is tested by the five aspects of Menippea delineated by Bakhtin and derived by Dostoevsky from his careful study of Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees in the Gospels: 1) the absence of epic or tragic distance, with the subject presented on the plane of the present day, 2) the bold and unrestrained use of the fantastic and adventure devoted to a purely ideational and philosophical end, 3) insanity of all sorts, 4) no abstractly philosophical or religiously dogmatic resolution to ultimate questions, rather their embodiment in carnivalistic acts and images, and 5) the creation of an extraordinary plot situation, or a provocative anacrisis. In the end he serves as a living vision in response to Nikolai Mikhailovsky's criticism concerning Dostoevsky's misrepresentation of the socialists as atheists. Certainly, they may not have started out as atheists, acknowledges Dostoevsky, however the idea that Christian morality, the beauty of Shakespeare and Raphael declaimed by Stepan Trofimovich, could be maintained without Christ, according to him carried within itself the seeds of nihilist atheism. This is why Stepan Trofimovich had to undergo a journey which took him from being the author of the new tower of Babel to being the champion of the gospel.

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ZITIERNACHWEIS:

- LÉVAI, Ruth Karin. „Twice As Much a Son of Hell': Stepan Trofimovich and the Menippea of the Pharisees“, *Linguistische Treffen in Wrocław* 26, 2024 (II): 105–114. DOI: 10.23817/lingtreff.26-6.