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LAWRENCE, DOSTOEVSKY AND THE LAST TEMPTATION BY CHRIST

CATHERINE BROWN

D. H. Lawrence's fraught and rivalrous relationship with Fyodor Dostoevsky was throughout his life connected with his fraught and rivalrous relationship to Christ. Both authors were haunted by Christ, and both were likened to him. John Middleton Murry wrote that Lawrence would "become the anti-type of the man who is from the beginning, and will be to the end, his veritable hero – Jesus Christ".¹ Lawrence criticised Dostoevsky for endorsing what he perceived to be one of Christ's false doctrines – the obligation to love one's fellow man – albeit he believed Dostoevsky only endorsed this with the mental, willed and unartistic part of his essentially-divided self. In response to S. S. Kotliansky and Murry's translation of Dostoevsky's *Pages from the Journal of an Author*, Lawrence wrote to Kotliansky in December 1916:

How is it that these foul-living people ooze with such loving words. 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' – well and good, if you'll hate thy neighbour as thyself. I can't do with this creed based on self-love, even when the self-love is extended to cover the whole of humanity. – No, when he was *preaching*, Dostoevsky was a rotten little stinker. In his art he is bound to confess himself lusting in hate and torture. But his 'credo' – ! – my God, what filth! (3L 53)

Lawrence made his final paired meditation on Dostoevsky and Christ just five weeks before his death, in an eight-page Introduction to Kotliansky's translation of 'The Grand Inquisitor' episode of Dostoevsky's 1879–80 novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (itself completed only four months before Dostoevsky's death). Although

Lawrence used this Introduction to rehearse several of his long-standing criticisms of Dostoevsky, he also manifested in it a greater approbation of his writing than he had ever done before. This new approbation rested on his attribution to Dostoevsky, for the first time, of criticism of Christ (again with the mental rather than instinctual part of what he considered to be Dostoevsky's divided self). However, this criticism took the form of hoisting Christ by his own petard, by suggesting that Christ's doctrine of universal love imposed the obligation to lead the masses of the people for their own good. Lawrence's last appreciation of Dostoevsky and criticism of Christ therefore constituted – at another level – a new acceptance of Christ's doctrine of love on his part. It is this vision that this article seeks to describe – the understanding that kindness to the masses entails the obligation to control them. The dying Lawrence perceived this “devastating truth, which Christ had not seen” to have been the perception of the dying Dostoevsky, “perhaps the first to realise this ... A truth it is, none the less, and once recognised it will change the course of history” (*IR* 130).

It is worth acknowledging at the outset that Lawrence's perception involves misreading. F. R. Leavis wrote of Lawrence's response to Tolstoy: “It is astonishing that so marvellously perceptive a critic as Lawrence could simplify in that way, with so distorting an effect”.² In fact it is *not* surprising; as Bakhtin did with Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy with Shakespeare, so Lawrence converted other writers into his own critical vocabulary. In Dostoevsky's case, both Lawrence's differences from and similarities to him provoked a hostility that may have encouraged liberties of this kind. In fact, many of the criticisms levelled by others towards Lawrence were felt by Lawrence towards Dostoevsky: that he was uncouth, scandalous and unhealthily obsessed with psychological extremes (Turgenev called Dostoevsky “our Sade”).³ In 1910 Lawrence wrote to Violet Hunt (in relation to his recent play *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd*): “Mr Hueffer accuses me of Dostoieffskyism – it is an accusation, for all the dear cranky Russian's stuff is as insane as it can be. ... I thought these Holroyd folk were nicely levelled down” (*IL* 199). In

February 1916 he wrote to Ottoline Morrell about *The Possessed* (1871–2): “It seems so sensational, and such a degrading of the pure mind, somehow. It seems as though the pure mind, the true reason, which surely is noble, were made trampled and filthy under the hoofs of secret, perverse, undirect sensuality” (2L 521; here, in contrast to the quotation from December 1916 given above, he elevates Dostoevsky’s rational above his passionate self).

Both authors were – Christ-like – outsiders to their respective establishments, were accused of treason, aroused controversy with their treatments of sexuality, had a sense of living in decayed civilisations heading towards destruction, and tried to point the way to humanity’s salvation. Their admirers and detractors alike have perceived them as more concerned with intense emotion than with artistry *per se*. When *The Trespasser* (1912) was reviewed in the *Athenaeum* alongside Constance Garnett’s translation of *The Brothers Karamazov*, the reviewer praised Lawrence in terms of Dostoevsky’s “psychological intensity” and “poetic realism of a Dostoevskian order”.⁴ In 1956, Murry wrote that ‘The Man Who Died’ (*The Escaped Cock*) was as great as ‘The Grand Inquisitor’.⁵ John Galsworthy, having turned against Dostoevsky after his initial enthusiasm, wrote to Edward Garnett in complaint about *Sons and Lovers* (1913): “Confound all these young fellows: how they have gloated over Dostoevsky”.⁶ Henry Miller, to whom Lawrence was exceeded in importance only by Dostoevsky, argued that “Of all his forerunners, Jesus included, it was with Dostoevsky that [Lawrence] had the most difficulty”.⁷ Gilbert Phelps thought that “the fact that Dostoevsky’s principal figures are, as André Gide pointed out, always in the course of formation, never quite emerging from the shadows, was closer to what Lawrence was attempting than anything that had gone before”.⁸ George Panichas not only likened their modes of characterisation, but went to the length of pairing their characters: Ivan and Gerald, Svidrigailov and Loerke, and the Underground Man and Hermione.⁹ Peter Kaye claimed that:

as a novelist Lawrence travelled a distinctively Dostoevskian path after the publication of *Sons and Lovers*, which moved him away from the English tradition of the novel as biography, the story of individual lives largely immune from metaphysical debate and cultural crisis. In a manner worthy of Dostoevsky, he sought to combine the particular with the universal, the concrete with the abstract.¹⁰

He also might have added, Lawrence sought to make "philosophy and fiction ... come together again, in the novel", as advocated in 'The Future of the Novel' of 1923 (*STH* 154).

Such likenesses increased the urgency to Lawrence of breaking free from Dostoevsky's influence, but he had the additional inducement of a generalised irritation at the Russian Craze, which by 1916 focused heavily on Dostoevsky.¹¹ Many of those who helped launch Lawrence on his own literary career were enthusiasts, and Kaye suggests that "Lawrence felt the cloying presence of his rival because the height of Dostoevsky's English influence coincided with his own most creative and troubled years".¹² George Zytaruk suggests that it may have been the more irritating to Lawrence that the leader of the worship was Murry (who was to follow his 1916 monograph on Dostoevsky with one on Christ eight years later).¹³ Kaye suggests that "Murry's zeal proved especially galling; in a move tantamount to John the Baptist abandoning the camp of the Nazarene, he exchanged devotion to Lawrence for the worship of his rival".¹⁴ Although early in 1916 Lawrence had offered to collaborate with Murry on his book, he was not involved in the final version, to which he reacted coolly. Murry's book ends with the claim that "an epoch of the human mind came to an end in [Tolstoy and Dostoevsky]. In them humanity stood on the brink of the revelation of a great secret".¹⁵ Lawrence responded that:

the trick is, when you draw somewhere near the 'brink of the revelation', to dig your head in the sand like the disgusting ostrich; and see the revelation there ... Dostoevsky, like the rest,

can nicely stick his head between the feet of Christ, and waggle his behind in the air. And though the behind-wagglings are a revelation, I don't think much even of the feet of Christ as a bluff for the cowards to hide their eyes against. (2L 646)

In his letter to Kotliansky, quoted above, Lawrence yoked Dostoevsky and Murry in his criticism of them: "Thank you for the little Dostoevsky book. I have only read Murry's Introduction, and Dostoevsky's 'Dream of a Queer Fellow'. Both stink in my nostrils ... Dostoevsky is big and putrid, here, Murry is a small stinker, emitting the same kind of stink" (3L 53). Yet, when Kotliansky approached Lawrence, three months before the end of his life, for an introduction to 'The Grand Inquisitor', Lawrence agreed to revisit Dostoevsky.

About one third of the way through Dostoevsky's last novel, two of the three legitimate Karamazov brothers are discussing the ethical nature of the universe. Alyosha, a novice monk, turns the conversation to Christ, to which Ivan responds with an imaginative account (supposedly the plot of a poem that he has written) of Christ returning for a visit, between his resurrection and his second coming, to sixteenth-century Seville. The people recognise and worship Christ, and he performs one miracle, of raising a child from the dead. But the Cardinal, a Grand Inquisitor, rather than worshipping him, has him arrested. He visits him in prison, and tells him at length why he is going to "condemn Thee and burn Thee at the stake as the worst of heretics" – for the same reason that he had the day before burned "almost a hundred heretics" – because the Church's autocratic rule relieves the spiritually-weak masses of the overwhelming burden of "freedom of faith" which Christ would otherwise impose on them. "Nothing has ever been more insupportable for a man and a human society than freedom".¹⁶

The Cardinal illustrates his point by referring to Christ's three temptations in the wilderness. When Christ declined to turn stones into bread, He was declining to maintain his rule by feeding the people. In refusing to fling Himself from a cliff, or to make the

nations worship Him, Christ refused miracle and mystery as a means to enforce his authority, and in so doing failed to unify the people. Unity in worship is, the Cardinal maintains, a fundamental human need, which the Church provides by deceiving the masses. His utilitarian and self-sacrificial conclusion is that the church leaders accept the burden of freedom in order to remove it from others, if necessary by burning free-thinkers: "There will be thousands of millions of happy babes, and a hundred thousand sufferers who have taken upon themselves the curse of the knowledge of good and evil" (*BK* 284). Since the Cardinal argues that Christ would have done better to succumb to Satan's temptations, his principles are, by his own admission, Satanic. He says that for the eight preceding centuries the leaders of the Catholic Church *have* actually worshipped Satan rather than Christ. The distinction is also that between the secular and the divine. The Cardinal calls Satan "the spirit of the earth", and Ivan agrees with Alyosha's supposition that the Cardinal does not in fact believe in God (*BK* 276).

Lawrence's response to Ivan's story can be summarised as three points. First, he identifies Dostoevsky with Ivan and Ivan with the Grand Inquisitor. When Christ's only response to the Inquisitor's death sentence is to silently kiss him on the lips, and Alyosha's only response to Ivan's narrative is silently to kiss *him* on the lips, Lawrence characterises these as narratively-condoned acts of acquiescence (*IR* 128).

Second, he sees all five (Dostoevsky in his endorsement of Ivan, Ivan in his endorsement of the Inquisitor, the Inquisitor, Christ in his assent to the Inquisitor and Alyosha in his assent to Ivan) as correct. Whereas on earlier readings of the novel he had found the story "just a piece of showing-off: a display of cynical-satanical pose which was simply irritating", now "under that, I hear the final and unanswerable criticism of Christ" (*IR* 127).

Third, he thinks that they are not *wholly* right. Dostoevsky, being divided between his perceptive self and "his epileptic and slightly-criminal perversity", has perverted an accurate perception, which Lawrence purports to correct (*IR* 131). He says that someone with

the insight into human nature that is what Lawrence calls “the spirit of all great government” would not be the character that Dostoevsky makes him:

Where Dostoevsky is perverse is in his making the old, old wise governor of men a Grand Inquisitor ... The Spanish Inquisition actually was diabolic. It could not have produced a Grand Inquisitor who put Dostoevsky’s sad questions to Jesus. And the man who put those sad questions to Jesus could not possibly have been a Spanish Inquisitor. He could not possibly have burnt a hundred people in an *auto da fé*. He would have been too wise and far-seeing. ... The man who feels a certain tenderness for mankind in its weakness or limitation is not therefore diabolic. (IR 131)

Here Lawrence makes the opposite and counterpart objection to the story to Alyosha, who disputes with Ivan that someone with the Inquisitor’s views could in fact be self-sacrificial and loving, as Ivan claims him to be. Since Alyosha’s point is a defence of Christ from the argument of the Inquisitor, it follows that Lawrence, in putting the objection the other way round, is criticising Christ (“I hear the final and unanswerable criticism of Christ” [IR 127]).

In his Introduction, Lawrence once more and for the last time expresses his distrust of egalitarian, democratic social systems, and his interest in strong, enlightened leaders. This was after something of a break from doing so. Lawrence’s last so-called “leadership novel”, *The Plumed Serpent*, was completed in 1925. The satire in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1926–28) is anti-hierarchical in spirit. In the novel’s first draft, Parkin ends as the secretary of the Communist group in his Sheffield factory; the concluding vision of the final version is one of equality, anarchy, and a kind of literal communism, with no reference to authority (LCL 299). During the last summer that he spent working on this novel (in 1927), he was also writing *Sketches of Etruscan Places*, which contrasts the bullying, authoritarian Romans (and Fascists) to the pacific Etruscans, and

laments about subsequent history: "Why has mankind had such a craving to be imposed upon! Why this lust after imposing creeds, imposing deeds, imposing buildings, imposing language ... ?" (*SEP* 33).

Immediately before, in May 1927, Lawrence had finished his own Christ-returning-to earth-in-the-flesh story, probably negatively inspired by Dostoevsky's. In *The Escaped Cock*, the criticism of Christ (in this case for over-sacrificing himself) is very different from that in Lawrence's Introduction. The story also refutes aristocratic and authoritarian values; the risen Christ is an individualist, whose ambition is to make his way through the world living as fully as possible. So, far from being either an administrator or a subject of an authoritarian system, he repudiates all society, breaking even his bond with the Priestess of Isis at the obvious point (the birth of a child) for them to form a social unit. Such a rootless cosmopolitan is a trouble-maker in any strictly-ordered society, and the risen Christ would certainly have taken it severely amiss were a Pontius Pilate to re-imprison him. He would not silently kiss his Roman Inquisitor on the lips, much less submit to the burden of authority. Kaye notes (achronistically) that "The new gospel presented by *The Escaped Cock* subverts what Lawrence endorses in his *Grand Inquisitor* essay".¹⁷

Five weeks before his death, Lawrence swung back towards a vision of a despotism which those who were enlightened had a duty to enforce. The mood in which he did so differed from that of the excited, if also tentative, exploration of the leadership novels: the tone is sombre, and in its exasperated way submissive to what it describes as reality. Lawrence says that in his last few readings of the story he "each time found it more depressing because, alas, more drearily true to life ... my heart sinks right through my shoes" (*IR* 127). He is no longer merely, as in *Sketches of Etruscan Places*, expostulating against the human "craving to be imposed upon" (*SEP* 33), but accepting what he sees as the political and moral implications of its existence. These implications are in dialogue with Lawrence's feelings (which had vacillated over the course of his life)

about Communism. This dimension is apparent in the Introduction's focus on bread.

Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor tells Christ that He, Christ, refused to turn stones into bread on two grounds: "what is that freedom worth if obedience is bought with bread?" (BK 276) and Christ's actual response to Satan in *Matthew* 4:4: "man lives not by bread alone". Implicit in the Grand Inquisitor's argument is that the second response is beside the point, since if Christ had turned stones into bread, the bread would have been the bread of heaven as well as physical bread, which he could have given to the people, thus filling their stomachs *and* satisfying their need for miracle, mystery, and somebody to worship in unison. Christ refused this (and the Inquisitor conveniently passes over such Biblical miracles as the feeding of the five thousand, and indeed the resurrection of the child of Seville, which Christ had performed just before the Inquisitor arrested him).

The Inquisitor continues:

Dost Thou know that the ages will pass, and humanity will proclaim by the lips of their sages that there is no crime, and therefore no sin; there is only hunger? 'Feed men, and then ask of them virtue!' that's what they'll write on the banner, which they will raise against Thee, and with which they will destroy Thy temple. (BK 277)

According to the Inquisitor, these people will raise a tower of Babel, which like the original will not be finished.

This is a clear reference to events which were happening in Dostoevsky's and Ivan's time – the promulgation of atheist, anarchist thought which promoted physical provision for the masses at the expense of any other moral imperative. In the year after the serialisation of *The Brothers Karamazov* was completed, in 1881, Tsar Alexandr II was assassinated by anarchists. Nonetheless, the fact that Marxism itself had by that point had little impact in Russia made Ivan's vision – in Ellis Sandoz's term – "amazingly predictive"

of the Revolution, which never fully accomplished Communism.¹⁸ The prediction's felicity is enhanced by the fact that "bread" was the last term in the Bolshevik Revolutionary slogan: *мир, земля, хлеб* [peace, land, bread]. Indeed, the Grand Inquisitor not only predicts an atheist, anticlerical revolution, but its eventual fall:

... they will come back to us after a thousand years of agony with their tower. They will seek us again, hidden underground in the catacombs, for we shall be again persecuted and tortured ... They will find us and cry to us "Feed us, for those who have promised us fire from heaven haven't given it!" And then we shall finish building their tower, for he finishes the building who feeds them. (*BK 277*)

In the Inquisitor's conception, only a theocracy, as loosely-defined, can supply the needs of all people. A few "tens of thousands" are willing to follow Christ for the sake of the bread of heaven alone, but the "millions and tens of thousands of millions of creatures who will not have the strength to forego the earthly bread for the sake of the heavenly" must also be fed (*BK 277*). The bread which the church will give to the people will of course be simply bread, as made *by* the masses, but it will be given back to them, as though by miracle. At one level the people will not be deceived, but they will nonetheless be satisfied in their desire to worship:

They will see that we do not change the stones to bread, but in truth they will be more thankful for taking it from our hands than for the bread itself! For they will remember only too well that in old days, without our help, even the bread they made turned to stones in their hands, while since they have come back to us, the very stones have turned to bread in their hands. (*BK 283*)

Lawrence echoes much of this argument. He expands the concept of bread to money and other material goods: "All that remains is for the elect to take charge of the bread—the property, the money—and

then give it back to the masses as if it were really the gift of life” (*IR* 130). He implicitly rejects capitalism as a form of distribution, arguing that the people “is too weak, or vicious or something, to be able to” share it out, so:

He has to hand the common bread over to some absolute authority, Tsar or Lenin, to be shared out. And yet the mass of men are *incapable* of looking on bread as a mere means of sustenance, by which man sustains himself for the purpose of true living, true life being the “heavenly bread.” It seems a strange thing that men, the mass of men cannot understand that *life* is the great reality. (*IR* 129)

To accept and work with this incapacity is to demonstrate love for all mankind, such as Christ himself demanded; this is the point on which the Inquisitor purports to hoist Christ by his own petard:

If a love of mankind entails accepting the bitter limitation of the mass of men, their inability to distinguish between money and life, then accept the limitation, and have done with it ... And is that serving the devil? It is certainly not serving the spirit of annihilation and not-being. (*IR* 130-1)

Lawrence’s defence of the Inquisitor is therefore to this extent Christian, and his praise of Dostoevsky here reverses his previous criticism (cited above) of Dostoevsky’s preaching of love for one’s neighbour.

Responding to his own period’s knowledge of collectivisation-induced famine in the Soviet Union, Lawrence says: “Lenin, surely a pure soul, rose to great power simply to give men—what? The earthly bread. And what was the result? Not only did they lose the heavenly bread, but even the earthly bread disappeared out of wheat-producing Russia” (*IR* 131). He seems to sense that the Russian Revolution, with its extremism, could have been averted if, amongst other things, Dostoevsky had not been so perverse as (with part of

his being) to identify this compromise with the devil. This perspective is apparent in his anti-Bolshevik poem of late 1928 or early 1929, 'Now it's happened', where the "it" is the Russian Revolution. The poem asserts:

Dostoevsky, the Judas
with his sham Christianity
epileptically ruined
the last bit of sanity
left in the hefty bodies
of the Russian nobility.

So our goody-good men betray us
and our sainty-saints let us down,
and a sickly people will slay us
if we touch the sob-stuff crown
of such martyrs; while Marxian tenets
naturally take hold of the town. (*Poems* 466)¹⁹

By contrast, Lawrence asserts: "Whatever makes life vivid and delightful is the heavenly bread. And the earthly bread must come as a by-product of the heavenly bread" (*IR* 132).

Here we see Lawrence twisting the Inquisitor's ideas into his own. The Inquisitor's vision is entirely cynical; he sees the masses' need for miracle as a weakness that must be pandered to by mendacity. His spiritually-orientated monist ontology makes itself felt in his interpretation of what it is to make physical bread:

it is the earthly bread as a miracle, a yearly miracle. All the old religions saw it: the Catholic still sees it, by the Mediterranean. And this is not weakness. This is *truth*. The rapture of the Easter kiss, in old Russia, is intimately bound up with the springing of the seed ... They eat dead bread, now [the Bolsheviks]. (*IR* 132)

What follows reprises, in its syntax and diction, the opening of *The Rainbow* (1915):

the reaping and the harvest are another contact, with earth and sun, a rich touch of the cosmos, a living stream of activity, and then the contact with harvesters, and the joy of harvest home. All this is life, life, it is the heavenly bread which we eat in the course of getting our earthly bread. (*IR* 133)

Yet this conflicts with his original argument in support of the Grand Inquisitor, since his description of the Easter kiss in “old Russia” has nothing to do with the existence of the Tsar:

Men bow down to the lord of bread, first and foremost. For, by knowing the difference between earthly and heavenly bread, he is able calmly to distribute the earthly bread, and to give it, for the commonalty, the heavenly taste which they can never give it. That is why, in a democracy, the earthly bread loses its taste, the salt loses its savour, and there is no one to bow down to. (*IR* 134)

Lawrence also vacillates as to whether the masses are helplessly limited, or right, to demand the miraculous: on the one hand, only the elect “are capable of abstaining from the absolute demand for bread, for miracle, mystery, and authority” (*IR* 128). On the other:

the Inquisitor says that it is a weakness in men, that they must have miracle, mystery and authority. But is it? Are they not bound up in our emotions, always and forever, these three elements ... If Jesus cast aside miracle in the Temptation, still there is miracle again in the Gospels. (*IR* 132)

Either way – in caring for the limited masses as he finds them, or in condoning the miraculous – his argument is Christian, and his contradiction can be argued to mirror one in Christ (though the Inquisitor himself ignores Christ’s miracles).

Insofar as his attitude is one of resigned acceptance rather than approbation, it is forecast in the very ending to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Mellors writes to Connie: "If you could only tell them that living and spending aren't the same thing! But it's no good. If only they were educated to *live* instead of earn and spend, they could manage very happily on twenty-five shillings" (*LCL* 299). But "you can't do it" (*LCL* 300). He finishes his letter "a little droopingly, but with a hopeful heart—" (*LCL* 302); in Lawrence's Introduction, drooping predominates over hopefulness. In 1912 Lawrence had criticised Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (1911), which is widely understood to parody Dostoevsky, in these terms: "I can't forgive Conrad for being so sad and for giving in" (*IL* 465). In his Introduction he displays a somewhat Conradian resignation, even as he praises Dostoevsky. This apparent paradox is soluble in the light of Lawrence's creative misreading of the latter, which is in turn connected to his understanding of Dostoevsky's characterisation.

In identifying Ivan with the Inquisitor, he describes him as:

the thinking mind of the human being in rebellion, thinking the whole thing out to the bitter end ... He is also, of course, Dostoevsky himself, in his thoughtful, as apart from his passional and inspirational self. Dostoevsky half hated Ivan. Yet after all, Ivan is the greatest of the three brothers, pivotal. The passionate Dmitri and the inspired Alyosha are, at last, only offsets to Ivan. (*IR* 127)

But he is wrong to present Dostoevsky's support for Ivan and the Grand Inquisitor as dominant, albeit subverted by a covert, passionate hatred. As would have been the less apparent to Lawrence in rereading only this chapter of the novel, Ivan is distanced from the Inquisitor. Before he tells Alyosha his story, he has been expressing distress at the fact that the world is one in which torture exists. He claims nescience: "I recognise in all humility that I cannot understand why the world is arranged as it is" (*BK* 266). He gives no sign of belief that any kind of social organisation – least of all one

such as the Inquisitor's, which relies on torture – could improve it. The Grand Inquisitor story reflects Dostoevsky's long-standing and patriotic hostility towards Roman Catholicism.

Ivan's story appears as a therapeutic exercise of his imagination, which he is provoked to retell by Alyosha's piety. He gives the Russian literary antecedents for writing a secular story featuring Christ, thus displaying literary self-consciousness. Afterwards he tells his dismayed brother:

Why, it's all nonsense, Alyosha. It's only a senseless poem of a senseless student, who could never write two lines of verse. Why do you take it so seriously? Surely you don't suppose I am going straight off to the Jesuits, to join the men who are correcting His work? ... I told you, all I want is to live on to thirty, and then ... dash the cup to the ground!" (BK 288)

Of course, we do not need to take him at his word here. Throughout the novel, Ivan is presented as a character whom one must *not* take at his word, but that applies to his story too. He is a "rounded character", as E. M. Forster, who popularised the concept, praised all of Dostoevsky's characters for being.²⁰ Lawrence, on the other hand, describes only Dostoevsky, not his characters, as self-divided: "As always in Dostoevsky, the amazing perspicacity is mixed with ugly perversity. Nothing is pure. His wild love for Jesus is mixed with perverse and poisonous hate of Jesus" (IR 129).

On this Lawrence had been consistent over time. On 24 March 1915 he wrote to Ottoline Morrell what has become his most famous comment on Dostoevsky:

I have been reading Dostoevsky's *Idiot*. I don't like Dostoevsky. He is again like the rat, slithering along in hate, in the shadows, and, in order to belong to the light, professing love, all love. But his nose is sharp with hate, his running is shadowy and rat-like, he is a will fixed and gripped like a trap. He is not nice. (2L 311)

The charge is reiterated in 'The Spirit of Place', the first essay in *Studies of Classic American Literature*, which manifests Lawrence's turn to American literature and away from Russian literature (SCAL 14). In his belief in the unity of Dostoevsky's characters he accorded with his (unknown) contemporary Mikhail Bakhtin. In his 1923 book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Works*, Bakhtin praised Dostoevsky as an innovative practitioner of heteroglossia [разноречие], polyglossia [многоязычие], polyphonia [полифония], and co-being [событие], by presenting non-coinciding consciousnesses, *including* that of the author, in mutual interaction.²¹ Where Lawrence differs from Bakhtin is that he regards Dostoevsky as split *between* his characters. In the notes that Lawrence sent to Murry for his book in 1916, he identified three types of desire in Dostoevsky:

His [Dostoevsky's] desire to achieve the sensual, all-devouring consummation comes out in Dmitri Karamazov, and Rogozhin, and, not so clearly, in Stavrogin.

His desire for the spiritual, turn-the-other-cheek consummation, comes out in the Idiot himself, in Alyosha, partly in Stavrogin.

There is the third type, which represents pure unemotional will: this is the third Karamazov brother [Ivan]. (2L 543)

As Peter Kaye has argued, in fact, "The three types of desire that Lawrence identifies as predominantly unmixed and isolated can be found in varying proportions in virtually all of Dostoevsky's major characters".²²

Notably, Lawrence excepts Ivan from his usual practice of interpreting Dostoevsky's characters with respect to their endings. In February 1916 he explained that in Prince Myshkin, "The Christian ecstasy leads to imbecility" (RDP 282). Rather as Marxist critics such as Lukács praised Tolstoy for revealing the contradictions of life under Tsarism despite his own reactionary politics, Lawrence grudgingly praises Dostoevsky for acknowledging the truth about people like Myshkin and Father Zossima: "Zossima is pure Christian, selfless, universal in the social whole. Dead, he stinks" (2L 543). He

does not apply this logic to Ivan, who later in the novel has a conversation with the devil, recognises that his doctrines have incited his half-brother to parricide, and becomes mad.

Murry, in his 1916 monograph on Dostoevsky, echoed Lawrence and Bakhtin in finding his characters to be unitary, going so far as to say that they were not humans but symbols.²³ Like Lawrence, he senses that Dostoevsky is *in* all of his “heroes”, by which he means his male protagonists. But unlike Lawrence (except in Ivan’s case), and like Bakhtin, he makes no distinction between them with reference to their endings. They are all approaching heights of consciousness and wholeness, and suffer the endless terror of experiencing the timeless world in the temporal one; it is then a detail whether or not they are good. Murry finds the real hero of *Crime and Punishment* to be Svidrigailov, who in self-consistency achieves what Raskolnikov cannot.²⁴

None of these writers – Bakhtin, Lawrence and Murry – entertain the possibility that if Alyosha ends *The Brothers Karamazov* being hurrahed by the little children, and Prince Myshkin ends *The Idiot* in a post-traumatic coma in a Swiss sanatorium, that is (presented as being) to the respective glory of Alyosha’s society and the disgrace of Myshkin’s. In this respect, Dostoevsky and Lawrence were more similar as authors than Lawrence allowed; if Murry shaped Dostoevsky into a (Nietzsche-inflected) idealisation, Lawrence shaped Dostoevsky against himself. Many of Lawrence’s fictions rhetorically favour one character, whose plot may not end happily, but who does not suffer complete disaster. This character often has obvious similarities to Lawrence himself, and voices his idiosyncratic values, whereas Dostoevsky’s most positive characters manifested that of which the author generally approved. It follows from this that, as Kaye observes, “Lawrence’s heroes are self-sufficient, and find their own heaven. Dostoevsky’s characters don’t”.²⁵

Lawrence sees all of Dostoevsky’s characters as self-conscious. In his ‘Introduction to *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, by Giovanni Verga’ (1923) he presents Verga and Dostoevsky as antitheses in this respect

(IR 151–2). In this his view coincides with that of Bakhtin, who wrote:

Everything that usually makes up who a character is becomes in Dostoevsky an object of self-consciousness on the part of the character. At a time when the self-consciousness of a character was usually seen merely as an element of his reality, as merely one of the features of his integrated image, here, on the contrary, all of reality becomes an element of the character's self-consciousness.²⁶

Yet what neither Bakhtin nor Lawrence seem to recognise is that the characters whom Dostoevsky's novels most value (such as Alyosha) are the least self-conscious. It is a near-total lack of self-consciousness that makes Prince Mishkin his novel's eponymous Idiot.

In treating Ivan Karamazov with such critical indulgence, Lawrence not only manipulated Dostoevsky to reinforce his own vision, attributing Ivan's self-division to Dostoevsky himself, but he made several new departures in his own thinking. He praised the novel's most hyper-conscious character. He accepted the need to care for the masses, as the world-weary Grand Inquisitor trumped for him not only Alyosha's loving but non-utilitarian Christ, but Lawrence's own independent and detached Christ of two years earlier. This perception was, of course, one amongst many that he had in the last weeks of his life. Yet, given its essay form and sustained thought, it is not to be treated as one of the *Pensées* which Lawrence held to be "true while they are true and irrelevant when the mood and circumstance changes" (*Poems* 671). With his physical condition rapidly deteriorating, he imagined not an asocial, revived gamekeeper, nor an asocial, revived Christ – but an old man with a mission to take people as they were, and serve them. Lawrence's eight pages represent an extraordinary buckling down to service.

¹ John Middleton Murry, *Son of Woman: The Story of D. H. Lawrence* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931), 54.

² F. R. Leavis, *'Anna Karenina' and Other Essays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1967), 21.

³ Susanne Fusso, *Discovering Sexuality in Dostoevsky* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2006), 3.

⁴ Peter Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism 1900–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 34.

⁵ John Middleton Murry, 'The Living Dead – I: D. H. Lawrence', *The London Magazine* III (May 1956), 58.

⁶ Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism 1900–1930*, 170.

⁷ Maria Bloshteyn, *The Making of a Counter-Cultural Icon: Henry Miller's Dostoevsky* (Toronto, London: U of Toronto P, 2007), 59.

⁸ Gilbert Phelps, *The Russian Novel in English Fiction* (London: Hutchinson, 1956), 183.

⁹ George Panichas, 'F. M. Dostoevskii and D. H. Lawrence: their vision of evil', *Dostoevskii and Britain*, ed W. J. Leatherbarrow (Oxford: Berg, 1995), 249–76.

¹⁰ Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism 1900–1930*, 52.

¹¹ The "Russian Craze" was a craze for Russian culture which peaked in England during the First World War, particularly amongst the most highly educated. Its causes included the simultaneous arrival into English translation of Golden (nineteenth-century) and Silver (modernist) Age Russian literature; the advent of modernism in England itself, and its taking inspiration from Russian art, literature and music; the arrival in England of the Ballets Russes; First World War allegiance; a new interest in depth psychology (which was perceived to be explored by Russian literature more than any other); and a new interest in Theosophy and spiritualism (which originated particularly in Russia), as stimulated by loss of life during the War. The University of London's School of Slavonic Studies was founded in 1915 to meet the new demand for knowledge of Russian, and of a part of the world which had a new importance. The peak of the Craze was reached in 1916, when it centred on Dostoevsky (after the Russian Revolution it moved on to Tolstoy and Chekhov). Several of Lawrence's friends and acquaintances, including John Middleton Murry, Leonard and Virginia Woolf, Constance Garnett, Katherine Mansfield, and Ottoline Morrell, were

prominent in this Craze, whilst Murry was the leader of the Dostoevsky Craze in particular.

¹² Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism 1900–1930*, 29.

¹³ George J. Zytaruk, *D. H. Lawrence's Response to Russian Literature*, *Studies in English Literature* LXIX (1971), 113.

¹⁴ Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism 1900–1930*, 29.

¹⁵ John Middleton Murry, *Fyodor Dostoevsky: A Critical Study* (London: M. Secker, 1916), 263.

¹⁶ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett, intro. A. D. P. Briggs (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2007), 276. Garnett's translation of 1912 is the one that Lawrence read three times. This edition will henceforth be referred to in the text as *BK*.

¹⁷ Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism 1900–1930*, 63.

¹⁸ Ellis Sandoz, *Political Apocalypse: A Study of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor* (Wilmington: Isi Books, 2000), 242.

¹⁹ In his criticisms of Soviet Communism in his 'Introduction', Lawrence is ignoring or denying the senses in which Leninism itself had a religious aspect. This was deliberately emphasised by the Bolshevik government in order to harness the people's religious emotions, and desire for transcendence, which now had no legitimate object in Christianity. The image of Lenin's face was iconised and worshipped; Communism had its own versions of rituals, holy places, narratives of origin, saints, demons, virtues, vices, catechisms, commandments and heresies; and a future paradise was promised. In this sense, the earthly bread produced and distributed under Communism itself had something of the aspect of heavenly bread.

²⁰ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1927), 68–9.

²¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. by Emerson (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984), 90–1.

²² Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism 1900–1930*, 41.

²³ Murry, *Fyodor Dostoevsky: A Critical Study*, 48.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁵ Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism 1900–1930*, 53.

²⁶ M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. by Emerson (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984), 92.