

Poetry of Motion and the Aural Imagination in *The Brothers Karamazov*

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*I have conceived and will soon start writing a large novel where, among other things, children . . . will play a great role. Many children will be introduced. I am studying them and have studied them all my life, and love them dearly, and have children myself. . . . So write me about children—everything you know.*

(letter 617)

These words, written to Vladimir Mikhaylov on March 16, 1876, predict the content of Dostoevsky's greatest artistic achievement, *The Brothers Karamazov*, completed just two months prior to his death in 1880. Most readers, however, find the work to be only implicitly about children, noticing instead those "other things" to which the author alludes in his letter. At the heart of the novel are the events surrounding the grisly murder of Fyodor Karamazov, the foolish father of the story's principal characters, his three legitimate sons, Dmitry, Ivan, and Alexey Karamazov. In the course of the novel, however, it is each son's respective encounter with children and, specifically, their suffering that plays a crucial role in that son's movement either toward or away from hope. Rather than "stick to the fact" by focusing on *what* is conveyed during these crucial encounters, I will examine *how* they take place, in hopes that an examination of the means by which the brothers come to knowledge can shed light on Dostoevsky's larger imaginative project, the denouncement of abstraction in nineteenth-century Russia.

Alexey, or Alyosha, the youngest of the Karamazovs, is the son whose encounter with suffering children is most noticeable. We learn early in the novel that Alyosha has been a disciple of one of the local monastery's elders, Father Zosima. As such, he has

witnessed the way in which the holy man has lived a life consistent with the “active love” to which he calls others—bringing one’s flesh under the rule of a willing spirit and one’s deeds into conformity with the spoken word. Zosima acknowledges, however, that such love does not come easily. Rather than mere sheepish sentimentality, this love is experienced as “labor and fortitude, and for some people too, perhaps, a complete science” (48-49). Zosima also describes it as being more than kindness or benevolence that is given from lover to beloved, for it is a “teacher” that one acquires only after having paid dearly with much slow, long labor (298). Thus, the monk’s understanding of love surpasses the mere moral teaching that is often associated with Christian charity. His belief is that this engagement in active love is the way that one learns of the truth of the world. In other words, active love is the means by which a lover comes to know the beloved fully. In Zosima’s dying discourse he tells Alyosha and those gathered to hear his final words that they are to “Love all men, love everything” (301). Unlike Father Ferapont, he does not instruct his fellow monks to abstain from love of the world in order to prove the depth of one’s singular devotion to God. Instead, this rather unconventional holy man believes that he is called, in a sense, to make a mistress of, and to be a lover to, the whole of creation and, subsequently, to know the Creator by loving what He loves, His own handiwork.

In speaking specifically of children, Zosima instructs his listeners to love them especially, “for they too are sinless like the angels” (298). Such teachings prepare the elder’s disciple for his first encounter with children. When readers see them, however, the schoolboys, if anything, refute Zosima’s assertion of their sinlessness. In simple unsophistication, they exemplify the darkest and cruelest of human wickedness. By the

time that Alyosha first meets the children, he has already been instructed by his elder to leave the monastery, to work unceasingly in the world, and, ironically, to find his happiness in the sorrow that he is to bear (67). Just prior to his instruction to Alyosha to love everything, Zosima tells the youth that he is to “seek suffering” for himself during his pilgrimage in the world (301-02). Though the call to “love everything” seems radical, it is at least understandable, for the joy of loving rarely evokes dread, as should this new, seemingly irrational call to the pursuit of suffering. But, as Maire Jaanus Kurrick writes, “Love is the free choice of nonautonomy” (109). As such it must necessarily bring with it discomfort and suffering (109). Therefore, the calls to suffer without guilt and to love without cause might be interpreted as a single, synonymous calling. If the two—loving and suffering—are, in fact, the same, then suffering might also be known as a “teacher” that instructs the loving sufferer, or suffering lover, in the truths of God’s world.

Alyosha’s encounter with suffering children shows that he, though just beginning his sojourn in the world, has learned much from his elder. When he first meets little Ilyusha Snegiryov, who begins his encounter with the Karamazov by hurling stones at him and ends it by biting his finger to the bone, Alyosha is able to look below the boy’s apparent hostility. Given the circumstances, Alyosha would have been guiltless had he defended himself and struck back at the attacking child. Instead, he is able to look beyond Ilyusha’s cruelty, actively loving the child with the careful, almost scientific-like, labor called for by Zosima. He says to the boy,

Now tell me, what have I done to you? . . . Though I don’t know you and it’s the

first time I've seen you, yet I must have done something to you—you wouldn't have hurt me like this for nothing. So what have I done? How have I wronged you, tell me?" (164)

Rather than react to the boy's strange behavior, Alyosha, by painfully enduring the child's cruelty, understands that only great torment would lead the boy to such actions. His response reveals his understanding of his own responsibility in having provoked the child; thus, he presumes the truth of one of his elder's enigmatic teachings: namely, that each man is responsible for all. Of course Alyosha later learns that his identity as a member of the Karamazov family—the brother of Dmitry, who has humiliated Captain Snegiryov—does make him, in some non-judicial way, responsible for the torment that Ilyusha suffers as the son of the shamed man. Ilyusha shares his father's shame in the same way that Alyosha shares his brother's guilt. Full knowledge of the situation, however, comes to Alyosha prior to his knowledge of his "guilt," and after he has already suffered the wrath of Ilyusha by sharing in the boy's distress. His understanding is preceded by a comprehension that is more than mere cerebral intelligence; instead, it is active and participative, requiring that he know the actual suffering, even to the point of shedding his own blood. This type of knowledge cannot be gained from a distance, for active suffering and loving requires that one's whole person be engaged. The love for Ilyusha is known in the suffering that it yields, and, correspondingly, that suffering leads to greater knowledge of the child.

I have already asserted above that *The Brothers Karamazov* and, in particular, its hero, Alexey, is Dostoevsky's attempt to refute and counter the movement toward abstraction in his homeland. Before moving on to consider the remaining brothers'

encounters with suffering children, let us look at the basic meanings of the word *abstract*, which is the type of knowing to which at least one of the older Karamazov sons is tempted. The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes the etymology of *abstract* as deriving from the Latin prefix *abs*—meaning *away*—and the Latin root *tract*—meaning *drawn*. The English language has given a number of meanings to the root word *tract*, two of which are important for our study. According to *Oxford*, the word can refer either to “a book or a written work” (def. 1.2.a), or to “a plot of land with definite boundaries” (3.3.c). The similarities between the two meanings are evident. On the most fundamental level, both types of tract refer to objects that have been marked by an outside agent, and both are defined and recognized by these markings. *Tract*, therefore, must always describe something falling squarely within the realm of becoming, the passing world of finite objects. Hence, one who is *abstract* is one who is *away from* that which has been *drawn*, or *marked*, for him. If he is removed from his land and the story of that land (i.e. history), then he is guilty of abstraction in both ways, for he is removed geographically and temporally from his rightful place within the world.

The names that Dostoevsky chooses for the two older sons would seem to identify them as rather un-abstract characters. The first-born, Dmitry, bears a name derived from the ancient goddess of grains and agriculture, Demeter. Through the course of the story, Dmitry’s behavior confirms his affinity with his namesake, for he is an undeniably earthy man who openly longs for intimacy with the physical world. He has been a man of action, serving as a soldier in the Russian army. While awaiting his trial, he shamelessly confesses to Alyosha that his now noble love for Grushenka began in sheer physical desire for her “infernal curves” (563). His sins are those of the body, for he brawls and

imbibes and revels with equal immoderation. And when he must suffer for his wrongs, the retributive measures—i.e. the physical incarceration he is to endure in prison—are in accord with his bodily crimes, just as Ivan’s thought crimes must be punished through his own mental suffering.

Ivan’s name, however, is not associated with ancient paganism but with the Christian world. In the same way that *Demeter* would connote earthiness to the pagan imagination, the Russian name *Ivan*, or its English equivalent *John*, calls to the Christian mind the incarnation of divine love. It is the name *John* with which Ivan is twice associated in the novel. However, he denies his two namesakes. The first is the writer of the fourth gospel and the epistles bearing his name, the Apostle John. From John’s gospel come the “Cana of Galilee” reading (John 2:1-12), which plays such an important part in Alyosha’s development, and the book’s epigraph (John 12:24). John’s writings, including his epistles, are known for their emphasis on God’s coming to mankind by taking on the physical body of a particular man, Jesus of Nazareth. It is just such physicality, with all of its inherent “problems,” that Ivan will not accept. The second of Ivan’s namesakes is John the Merciful, mentioned directly by Ivan in the telling of his “Rebellion” to Alyosha (217). This saint’s active love was capable even of embracing disease and putrescence. What John the Apostle writes of—the revelation of God’s compassion for man by his entering into his distress—the saint exhibits in his life. The world with its unavoidable suffering that is manifested in man’s physical nature is just the place that divine love was revealed through John the Merciful. Contrarily, Ivan makes clear his belief that it is intimacy with others that makes love impossible (218). Man’s physicality does not evoke love from Ivan, but disdain and revulsion. As he tells

Alyosha, “I could never understand how one can love one’s neighbors. It’s just one’s neighbors, to my mind, that one can’t love, though one might love those at a distance” (218). Ironically, readers hear in these words a striking similarity to Zosima’s own honest admission to Madame Khokhlakov. The elder tells her that “love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams. . . . Men will even give their lives [for love in dreams] if only the ordeal does not last long but is soon over . . .” (49). This love in action is just what Ivan believes man unable to accomplish; love in dreams is all that he might hope ever to achieve. Thus, Ivan does not live according to his name’s Christian significance, but in opposition to it, denying the part of himself that verbally marks his identity. In doing so, he reveals the division between his name and his person, or the word and its significance, that parallels the split between the love that he professes for creation and that love’s call to inevitable suffering, which he will not accept. This rejection of his name’s meaning is consistent with his attitude toward the physical world. As Denis Slattery writes, “Ivan’s denial of the world is, in effect, to disincarnate it, while still believing in God” (8). But, if God is to be known through the sufferings of the world, then Ivan must ultimately fail in his attempt to maintain this belief in the Creator while rejecting His creation. In the end he must either accept or reject both.

Furthermore, Ivan’s behavior does not indicate any particular devotion to his native Russia. He is a western man—one identified by his ideology, not his place, ethnicity, or tongue—who has been influenced by the European ideas sweeping through his native homeland. His affections do not tie him to his own people, whom he disparages as being exceptionally cruel and stupid. Instead, he longs “to travel in Europe,” that “most precious graveyard” (211-12). Like other nineteenth-century



enlightened romantics, he longs for “the distant” and “the other,” allowing his imagination to be drawn away from his land and his people to that with which he is not intimate and, therefore, still able to love. Hence, Ivan’s character lines up with the second definition of *abstract*, for he is removed from his land and its people that are his own.

The contrast, however, between the different ways that Ivan and Dmitry encounter the suffering of children reveals what is, perhaps, the most dangerous form of abstraction, that which is more in line with the word’s primary definition. To be *abstract* according to the first definition above is to be removed from a written work or book. As a noun, *abstract* can even refer to that part, that content, that has been excerpted from the work (i.e. “an abstract”). But one of poetry’s distinctives is its chief concern with form, not content. Abstract knowledge, or even knowledge of abstracts, is a valid type of knowledge only if form is unimportant. To determine whether such knowledge is trustworthy, one must simply ask if a statement can be deemed true if it has no context. The answer, of course, is that it cannot. A statement may, in fact, be true, but one cannot deem it so without contextual knowledge. Therefore, the larger form in which a single statement finds itself dictates one’s ability to know the truth of that statement. In other words, understanding makes sense of facts, but facts do not lead to understanding. Ivan clearly discerns this truth when he acknowledges that his “Euclidean earthly mind,” which is capable of perceiving facts, cannot lead him to any coherent understanding of the whole (216-24). He declares defiantly:

I understand nothing. . . . I don’t want to understand anything now. I want to stick to the fact. I made up my mind a long time ago not to understand. If I try to

understand anything, I shall be false to the fact and I have determined to stick to the fact. (224)

He goes on to confess to Alyosha that he will never be satisfied by an otherworldly solution, whatever it be, to earthly injustice. Here readers learn how Ivan has become the abstract character that he is. He is resigned to accept the fact that he will never see what he longs for—earthly, “this-worldly” justice; thus, he rejects a world that only God could perceive as good. Robert Louis Jackson writes, “[T]his abstract balancing of things, or justice, is completely unacceptable to Ivan’s moral sense” (“Wound” 326). It is a paradox that his longing for justice, not “in some remote infinite time and space, but here on earth” (225)—in a word, *unabstract* justice—has driven him to his abstraction and rejection of an unjust world.

Ivan concludes that the world is irreparably unjust because of the suffering of children. As he tells Alyosha, he has purposely limited his subject only to children, for any consideration of adults, who are tainted by having already “eaten the apple,” would make his argument stronger, perhaps, but much more complicated (218-19). Again, we see the abstraction in Ivan’s reasoning. Just as one might abstract the essential “meaning” of a written work, reducing the “scope of [its] argument to a tenth of what it would be,” so might one reduce human suffering to only its most noticeable manifestations—suffering children. Here we might even agree with Ivan, that there is no more disturbing manifestation of injustice in the world than a child’s suffering. But Ivan’s means of knowing such a truth should also disturb us. He tells Alyosha, “I am fond of collecting certain little facts, and, would you believe, I even copy anecdotes of a certain sort from newspapers and stories, and I’ve already got a fine collection” (220).

Ivan confesses with an ironic, even embarrassed, disdain, revealing to Alyosha his mixed attitude toward his chosen pastime. Robert L. Belknap points out that Ivan, like Rakinin, who is arguably the novel's most loathsome character, has chosen an occupation as a journalist ("Rhetoric" 69). And readers can presume that Ivan, with his commitment to be true to the facts, will, indeed, make a fine journalist. Theoretically, understanding, which Ivan believes to be beyond him, is not the journalist's end. The task of the journalist is merely to observe, to report the facts, and to be content, as Ivan is, to "know what [one] knows" (224). To choose to be only an observer, however, is to limit one's knowledge to surfaces, to appearances. To see beyond surfaces requires one to see what is not immediately present, or, stated more plainly, to see what is not visible. While introducing to Alyosha his "anecdotes," Ivan does not speak of them as being what they are—stories. Instead he employs language that depicts them as snapshots or images. In commenting on the cruel beating of a child, he remarks, "Charming pictures" (222). As he offers his final specimen, he assures his brother, "One picture, only one more" (223). When he speaks of the type of justice that he would find satisfactory, he reiterates his sensitivity for the visible, saying, "I must have retribution . . . that I could *see* myself. . . . I want to *see with my own eyes* . . ." (225, emphasis added). His imagination is distinctly visual. And just as sight must conform itself to the laws governing the visible physical world, which do not allow two objects to exist in the same space at the same time, Ivan's Euclidean mind must conform itself to the law of non-contradiction, which says that a statement cannot be true and false at the same time. Vision, and its analog, reason, cannot reconcile seeming contradictions into an acceptable unity. In the visible and rational paradigm, reconciliation can be achieved only at the expense of truth. For

example, Jeremy Begbie has shown that the world as it is perceived by human sight is unable to present in the same space two colors as coexistent without destroying their distinctions. To present red and blue in such a way—i.e. in the same space at the same time—would leave only one color visible to the human eye. The two primary colors would blend and lose their distinctions, making a secondary color, purple. Thus, the visible “conflict” would be resolved by either rejecting one of the initial colors—either red or blue—or by altering their two natures by blending them into a third. Similarly for Ivan, the world cannot exist as both unjust and good at the same time. For him it is clear that either injustice or goodness must be rejected, must go, for the *tertium quid*—the third alternative of an altered, “muddied” reconciliation that would somehow blend the two—would be, though reasonable, utterly unacceptable. Goodness could no longer be good, and justice no longer just. In *The Devils*, Shatov articulates his own similar understanding of reason. He says, “Reason has never been able to define good and evil, or even to separate good from evil, not even approximately; on the contrary, it had always mixed them up in a most pitiful and disgraceful fashion” (257). Ivan, in false humility, speaks as if he agrees with Shatov when he acknowledges the impotence of his Euclidean mind, and yet he cannot free himself from the paradigm through which it sees the world.

His rejection of the world, however, is not the result of his inability to imagine differently, for he seems to know clearly what it is that he will not accept. In describing the Christian belief concerning the end of time, he speaks of a day when “everything in heaven and earth [will join in] one hymn of praise,” but this is a “harmony” that he finds unacceptable (225). Here readers will notice that Ivan’s acknowledgement of a possible

reconciliation causes him to shift from visual imagining to aural, from sight to sound. No longer does Ivan think of pictures; instead he imagines a song whose proffered harmony he will not accept. As Begbie has demonstrated, sounds, such as musical notes within a song, will maintain their distinctions while being played simultaneously. The “problems” presented to, what might be called, Ivan’s visual thinking can truly be reconciled by a different kind of imagination, which can, in turn, shape one’s understanding.

His distrust of the non-visual, however, is not limited only to music, but to other forms of knowledge that require listening. As Ivan begins recounting his anecdotes of the world’s cruelty, the following exchange takes place:

“Brother, what are you driving at?” asked Alyosha.

“I think if the devil doesn’t exist, but man has created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness.”

“Just as he did God, then?” observed Alyosha.

“It’s wonderful how you can turn words, as Polonius says in *Hamlet*,”

laughed Ivan. “You turn my words against me.” (220)

Alyosha’s inquiry seems sincere, even intelligent, but Ivan does not trust it, for it raises one of those questions that he later admits he cannot answer (225). The spoken dialogue between the two brothers, which is quite unlike the monologic, presentational style of his journalistic anecdotes, causes Ivan to realize that his knowledge may, in fact, be suspect. The facts, of course, are not, but the unquestioned conclusion to which he believes those facts must lead exposes his vacuous understanding. As he introduces “The Grand Inquisitor,” Alyosha seems surprised to hear that his philosophic brother has written a poem. Laughing, Ivan assures him, “I’ve never written two lines of poetry in my life.

But I composed up this poem in prose . . .” (227). Belknap points out that the laughter in *The Brothers Karamazov* is rarely comic and almost always associated with wickedness (*Structures* 29-31). Ivan’s laughter here may be no exception. He does not deny having composed a creative, imaginative work, but he does deny having concerned himself with any of its formal beauty or musical qualities that might allow it to be deemed poetry. His leading compositional concern is with the work’s content and the picture that it presents. Even as he experiments with what is arguably literature, Ivan demonstrates how strongly he distrusts the artful use of language, and he is either unwilling or unable to take on the poet’s interest in formal, not merely ideological, beauty.

Readers of Dostoevsky, if forced to choose, might place themselves in one of two critical camps—either with those who understand Dostoevsky’s novels to be primarily iconic, or among those who interpret his novels as being primarily *polyphonic*, as Mikhail Bakhtin has described the author’s method. Ivan’s attention to visual truth is, perhaps, an example of the iconic in Dostoevsky’s novels, but it is not, for the character, a promising disposition. His complete acceptance of the iconic brings with it a rejection of any hope for harmony. The aural imagination, as has already been argued, might allow for the existence of some inequity, some unresolved tension, in the world; the visual does not. The truth that he claims to know has come through the fixed, static images, abstracted from the active, moving world.

In *Philosophy of Mind*, Hegel divides the five senses into two categories (197). The first includes sight and touch, those two senses that perceive an object that theoretically remains materially unaffected when perceived. Taste and smell, which make up the second category, perceive objects as they undergo a passing away, or a

diminishment. Hegel writes, “Smell is connected with the volatilization or evaporation of the object, taste with its consumption” (197). For our purposes, we might describe the former category as those senses that could exist without time, and the latter as those that can exist only within it. The fifth sense, hearing, stands alone between the two categories, for it is able to perceive sensations from objects that remain undiminished materially as they are experienced in their necessary passing through time. Hearing’s unique ability to join the two categories is the result of the nature of sound phenomena. Sounds, like smells or tastes, also require movement through time and space, but a song, for example, is not changed by being heard; its very essence is not altered, but simply revealed, in the passing. It is possible theoretically (although not practically), for the same, undiminished song to be heard and known again. Likewise, the singer who sings the song is not volatilized or evaporated in the singing, but remains materially unaffected, just as a seen image or a touched object remains essentially unchanged after being perceived.

Ivan’s rejection of sound and his acceptance of sight are part of his attempt to know the world’s essence. What he might know through a process similar to hearing, requiring time and movement, cannot be trusted. Only that which can be arrested and secured long enough for careful observation is to be trusted. Ivan’s rejection of truthful knowing *in time* is the rejection of any sense of meaning in history, itself. In a letter to N. A. Lyubimov, Dostoevsky described this nineteenth-century Russian tendency:

All of socialism emerged and began with the rejection of sense in historical reality and developed into a program of destruction and anarchism. . . . My hero chooses

a theme *I* consider irrefutable: the senselessness of children's suffering, and develops from it the absurdity of all historical reality. (letter 660)

History, which is the human "story" (like a song, requiring knowledge through time), cannot be trusted. Furthermore, to arrest a story or a song as one might an image, is not to capture its essence, but to destroy it. Songs and narratives must be apprehended differently—submissively, patiently, and wholly. If life is to be experienced like a picture, then Ivan truly does know what he knows. On the other hand, if life is like a hymn, then his stasis is without knowledge and, ultimately, deadly.

Jackson argues that it is inaction and silence that mark Ivan's character early in the novel, and "silence, for Dostoevsky, epitomizes the moral atrophy of the spirit" ("Sentencing" 313). He also asserts that it is a character's "moral stagnation" and "inertia," even more so than the presence of evil, that provoke the wrath of Dostoevsky against his characters ("Dmitry" 343). But Dostoevsky's condemnation of his characters might be described by Zosima as being like Joseph's treatment of his brothers after they had journeyed to Egypt: "[H]e loved them beyond measure, but he harassed and tormented them in love" (272). In his encounter with the paltry devil, Ivan experiences the author's most severe judgment. The unwavering belief in what has been described as a kind of visual knowing of the world is shaken by the appearance of the paltry devil, whose detailed description includes unclean linen and tight, checked trousers, which Ivan clearly sees but is reluctant to believe (602). Sight, which he once trusted unreservedly, must now be questioned. Shortly thereafter, Ivan's final torment begins. His proud, abstract intellect is thrown into madness as brain fever—that worst of all Dostoevskian



maladies—sets in, leaving readers at the close of the novel hoping for his ultimate restoration.

John Jones has pointed out that Dostoevsky's novel is concerned with “a widening of vision . . . , a learning of what is there and not what happens next” (144). Thus, the work is not about facts, or deeds that can be abstracted as “images,” but, like Aristotle's description of tragedy, it is an imitation—a *mimesis*—of a single action. In *The Brothers Karamazov* that action is able to join, in a unified whole, discordant realities, such as life and death, righteousness and wickedness, ecstatic joy and horrific suffering. Gary Saul Morson argues that the truth of Ivan's case against God's world is refuted internally by the “nonreferential ‘truth’ of a novel [which] differs from the truth of journalism” (91). To know the story is to submit to the movement through time, for “a book takes time to read,” and “the temporal experience of the turning the pages” imitates one's experience of life (Jones 144). It is Ivan's unwillingness to submit to life's action that defines his rebellion. And that rebellion eventually leads him into the company of his devil.

Whether we interpret his devil as a vision or hallucination, we can be assured that the appearance of his unwanted guest, the climax of his personal journey, is “a manifestation of a non-rational function of Ivan's mind” (Peace 21). It is then, with reason's sovereignty being shaken by something from beyond its realm, that Ivan begins to be offered the possibility of conversion. Similarly, Dmitry's encounter with the suffering of children is not the result of rational thought, for he sees the suffering “babe” in his dream at Mokroe. The dream, like Ivan's nightmare, marks his turning point, revealing to him the true nature of his guilt (24). Although the dream is not an embodied

encounter with an actual child, the life-like quality of dreams denies Dmitry any opportunity to be a disinterested observer who remains abstract, removed from the suffering that he observes. Maire Jaanus Kurrick writes that Dostoevsky understands the need of his characters to encounter others by way of the conscience, for conscience causes one to recognize the other as a subject, not an object (107). Furthermore, Kurrick argues that Dostoevsky found “living speech” to be the spark that brings about this “recognition of coexistence” of another subject, for “only speech entails the actuality of another” (106). Dreams, like real life, allow multiple characters the freedom to speak, and even to act. Their words and deeds often surprise the dreamer, causing the dream players to be seen as independent subjects whose identities are not reliant upon the subconscious of the dreaming subject. Through speech and actions, which are able to reveal a person’s free intellect, will, and emotions, the other’s selfhood is realized and, hence, recognized by the dreamer. Therefore, the interaction of one self with another in dreams is an imitation of the same type of interaction that takes place in life.

Like his presentation of the devil’s shabby attire, Dostoevsky describes Dmitry’s dream in language vivid and detailed, including the “big wet flakes” of snow, the “fair, long beard” of the peasant driver who is “not an old man, somewhere about fifty,” and the little fists “blue from cold” of the crying child (478-79). The engagement of his senses is similar to what Dmitry might expect to experience in his waking life. The “babe,” with its flowing tears and audible weeping, moves him to respond as he would to a real, living child. Like his brother Ivan, he is unable to stop asking why there is the suffering that he has witnessed. Dostoevsky writes of Dmitry, “And he felt that, though his questions were unreasonable and senseless, yet he wanted to ask just that, and he had

to ask it just in that way” (479). Dmitry realizes the limits of his own Euclidean mind and that his questions go beyond what man’s intellect is able to comprehend. But the unanswered questions do not drive him to despair. Dostoevsky continues:

And he felt also that a passion of pity, such as he had never known before, was rising in his heart, and he wanted to cry, that he wanted to do something for them all, so that the babe should not weep, that no one should shed tears again from that moment, and he wanted to do it at once, at once, regardless of all obstacles, with all the Karamazov recklessness. (479)

This non-rational encounter of suffering calls Dmitry to action. He too will be Zosima’s unlikely disciple who will fulfill the elder’s enigmatic command to go into the world to seek suffering that will comfort his heart, leading him to understand that he too is guilty (300-01). Immediately upon waking from his good dream, we hear Dmitry speak words that prove the wisdom of the monk’s teaching. First, he reveals his willingness to suffer, saying simply to those who would imprison him, “I’m ready” (480), and, again, “I accept the torment of accusation, and my public shame, I want to suffer” (481). Second, he indicates his belief that suffering will bear good fruit, saying, “[B]y suffering I shall be purified” (481). Third, we see that he has acquired a new understanding, telling the men, “*I understand* that there’s nothing else for you to do” (480), and, “*I understand* now that such men as I need a blow of destiny” (481, emphasis added). Finally, he recognizes the depth of his own guilt, telling the men, “[w]e’re all cruel, we’re all monsters, . . . but of all . . . I am the lowest reptile!” (481). He even acknowledges guilt that the law does not require, confessing, “I accept my punishment, not because I killed him, but because I meant to kill him, and perhaps I really might have killed him” (481). Although Dmitry’s

suffering is still at its beginning, there should be no doubt in the reader's mind that his reversal, unlike Ivan's, is complete. His encounter with the suffering child has not hardened him or turned him away from the good world. Instead, it has softened him, moving him to feel the passion of pity, and to suffer injustice for the innocent.

In writing his letter to Lyubimov, Dostoevsky says that Ivan has chosen an "irrefutable" theme when choosing the senselessness of the suffering of children. The novelist then, however, promises that a refutation is to follow the chapters "Rebellion" and "The Grand Inquisitor" (letter 660). What does follow in the novel, of course, are the sections leading up to Zosima's death, in which the elder speaks to those gathered in his cell, revealing the cause of his love for Alyosha, the story of his becoming a monk, and his last wishes for his disciples. These passages, which never directly address the problems raised by Ivan, serve as Dostoevsky's refutation of the irrefutable theme. The author himself had concerns about his project's success, which he continued to express in his subsequent correspondence with Lyubimov (letters 664, 685, 694). Readers might be tempted to conclude that Ivan's blasphemous arguments are too powerful, too persuasive, ever to be overcome by Dostoevsky's holy elder. But perhaps the novelist intended for readers to experience the allure of despair. Belknap explains, "Dostoevsky prefers to tempt his readers, as Rakitin and Ivan tempted Alyosha and as the devil tempted Christ. He tries to carry his readers through a death of grace . . ., hoping he can bring them out beyond as fertile disseminators of grace" ("Rhetoric" 84). One's experience of the world's good and evil through the reading of the novel parallels the experience of the characters within it. To submit to the existence in time is to realize that the paradoxes that make up life can, in fact, coexist. To remain outside of the work by attempting to

abstract the important moments within it is to conclude that Dostoevsky's elder did indeed fail to match Ivan image-for-image. If grace, however, is to be found within the song of suffering and redemption to which the good are called, a life devoted to active love is the only life that could ever offer hope.

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