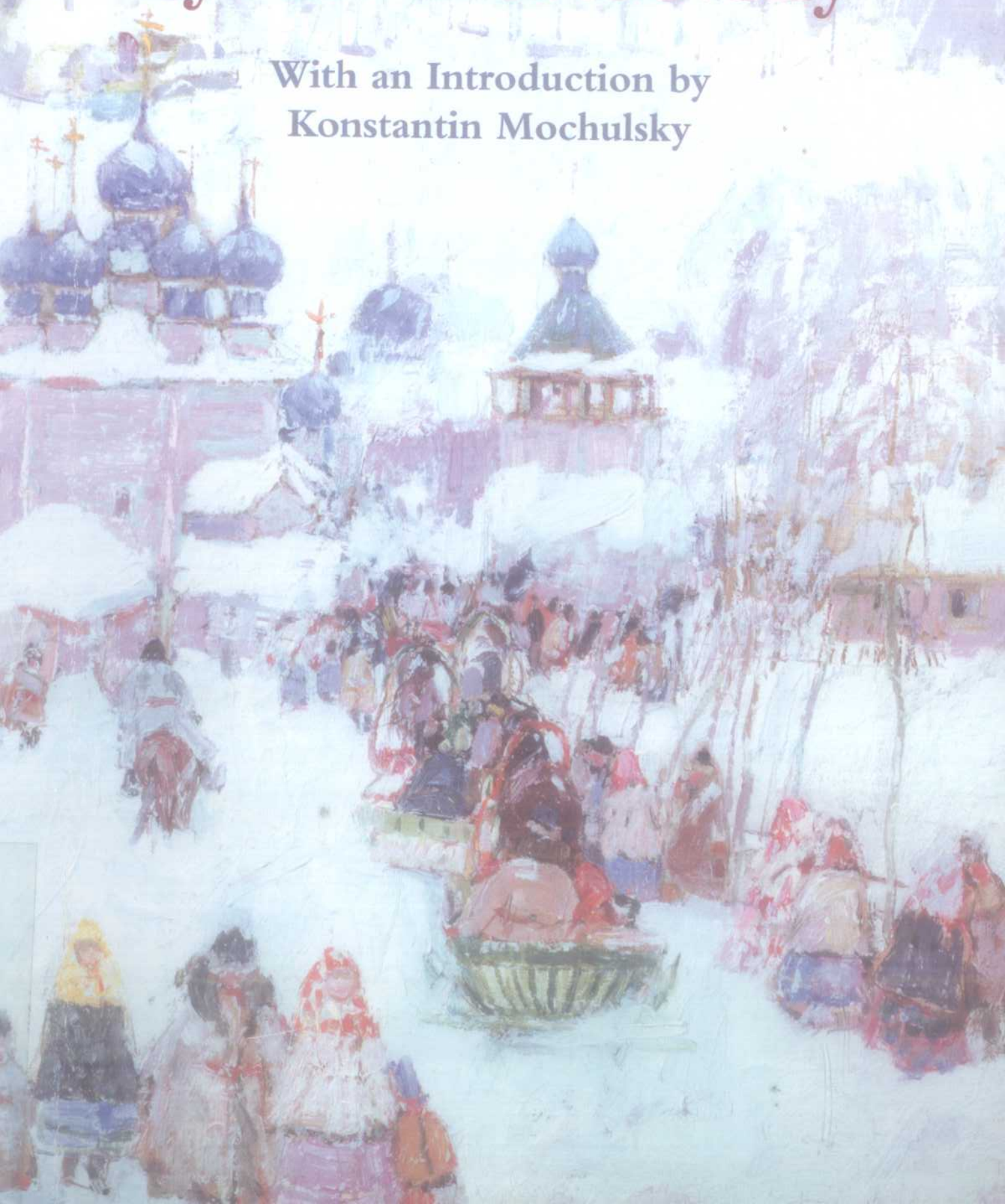


B A N T A M C L A S S I C

The Brothers Karamazov

Fyodor Dostoevsky

With an Introduction by
Konstantin Mochulsky



THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV

FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

Introductory Essay by Konstantin Mochulsky

Translated by Andrew R. MacAndrew



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FYODOR MIKHAILOVICH DOSTOEVSKY's life was as dark and dramatic as the great novels he wrote. He was born in Moscow in 1821, the son of a former army surgeon whose drunken brutality led his own serfs to murder him by pouring vodka down his throat until he strangled. A short first novel, *Poor Folk* (1846), brought him instant success, but his writing career was cut short by his arrest for alleged subversion against Tsar Nicholas I in 1849. In prison he was given the "silent treatment" for eight months (guards even wore velvet-soled boots) before he was led in front of a firing squad. Dressed in a death shroud, he faced an open grave and awaited his execution when, suddenly, an order arrived commuting his sentence. He then spent four years at hard labor in a Siberian prison, where he began to suffer from epilepsy, and he only returned to St. Petersburg a full ten years after he had left in chains.

His prison experiences coupled with his conversion to a conservative and profoundly religious philosophy formed the basis for his great novels. But it was his fortuitous marriage to Anna Snitkina, following a period of utter destitution brought about by his compulsive gambling, that gave Dostoevsky the emotional stability to complete *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1868–69), *The Possessed* (1871–72), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879–80). When Dostoevsky died in 1881, he left a legacy of masterworks that influenced the great thinkers and writers of the Western world and immortalized him as a giant among writers of world literature.

A NOTE FROM THE TRANSLATOR

The best way of handling a translation is about as slippery a business as the best way of organizing a society, the best way of living a life, or, for that matter, the best way of writing. In dealing with a piece of literature a translator must hear its tone, judge its language, appreciate its style, and understand its subtleties of meaning, and then as if such passive appreciation were not hard enough, he must re-create all these features as closely as possible in a tongue foreign to the original.

In trying to convey the essence of a literary work in another language, he is in the position of a conductor of an orchestra of outlandish instruments asked to perform a classical symphony. He must first adapt the piece to the unfamiliar instruments and then guide his barbarous musicians through it. If he is tone-deaf in the language into which he translates, the effect may be like playing the "Moonlight Sonata" on a tin can.

—Andrew R. MacAndrew

DOSTOEVSKY AND THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV

Konstantin Mochulsky

IN 1839 the eighteen-year-old youth Dostoevsky wrote to his brother: "Man is a mystery: if you spend your entire life trying to puzzle it out, then do not say that you have wasted your time. I occupy myself with this mystery, because I want to be a man."

The great psychologist had a presentiment of his vocation: all his creative work is devoted to the mystery of man. In Dostoevsky's novels there are no landscapes and pictures of nature. He portrays only man and man's world; his heroes are people from contemporary urban civilization, fallen out of the natural world-order and torn away from "living life." The writer prided himself on his *realism*; he was describing not the abstract "universal man," contrived by J. J. Rousseau, but the real European of the 19th century with all the endless contradictions of his "sick consciousness." The Russian novelist first discovered the real face of the hero of our "troubled time"—the "man from underground": this new Hamlet is struck by the infirmity of doubt, poisoned by reflection, doomed to a lack of will and inertia. He is tragically alone and divided in two; he has the consciousness of an "harassed mouse."

Dostoevsky's psychological art is famous throughout the world. Long before Freud and before the school of psychoanalysts he plunged into the depths of the subconscious and investigated the inner life of children and adolescents; he studied the psychics of the insane, maniacs, fanatics, criminals, suicides.

From *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, by Konstantin Mochulsky, translated by Michael A. Minihan (Copyright © 1967 by Princeton University Press): pp. 649–652 and 596–601. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

Special commentaries exist on Dostoevsky, the psychopathologist and criminalist. But his analysis was not limited to individual psychology; he penetrated the collective psychology of the family, of society, of the people. His greatest insights concern the soul of the people, the metapsychic "unity" of mankind.

Psychology is only the surface of Dostoevsky's art. It was for him not an end, but a means. The province of the inner life is only the vestibule of the kingdom of the spirit. Behind the psychologist stands the *pneumatologist*—the brilliant investigator of the human spirit. In one of his notebooks we find the following remark: "I am called a psychologist, it's not true, I am only a realist in the highest sense, i.e., I depict all the depths of the human soul." Dostoevsky had his own doctrine of man—and in this is his great historical importance. He devoted all his creative forces to struggling for the spiritual nature of man, to defending his dignity, personality, and freedom.

In his own personal experience, the author of *Crime and Punishment* lived through the tragic epoch of the *shattering of humanism*. Before his eyes humanism tore itself away from its Christian roots and was transformed into a struggle with God. Having begun with the emancipation of man from "theology" and "metaphysics," it ended by enslaving him to the "laws of nature" and "necessity." Man was conceived as a natural being, subject to the principles of profit and rational egoism: his metaphysical depth was taken away from him, his third dimension—the image of God. Humanism wanted to exalt man and shamefully degraded him. Dostoevsky himself was a humanist, passed through its seductions and was infected by its poison. The romantic idealist of the years of *Poor People* was captivated by utopian socialism and passed through the whole dialectical course of its development: he "passionately accepted" Belinsky's atheistic faith and entered Durov's secret revolutionary society. Starting out from Christian humanism, he came to atheistic communism. In the year 1849, sentenced to capital punishment, the writer stood on the scaffold. During these terrible minutes the "old man" in him died. In penal servitude a "new man" was born; there began a cruel judgment of himself and the "regeneration of his convictions." In Siberia, two events

took place in the life of the exiled writer which decided his whole subsequent fate: his meeting with Christ and his acquaintance with the Russian people. Amidst inhuman sufferings, in a struggle with doubt and negation, faith in God was won. Apropos of the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* Dostoevsky wrote in his notebook: "Even in Europe there are not and have not been atheistic expressions of such force; consequently, it is not as a boy that I believe in Christ and confess Him, but *my hosanna has passed through a great furnace of doubts. . . .*"

After penal servitude, the religious theme formed the spiritual center of his work. The question of faith and disbelief was posed in all the great novels. In 1870 he wrote to Maikov: "The main question, which has tormented me consciously or unconsciously throughout my entire life—the existence of God."

"God torments" all of Dostoevsky's heroes; all of them decide the question of God's existence; their fate is wholly determined by the religious consciousness.

Dostoevsky lived through a period of crisis in Christian culture and experienced it as his personal tragedy. Shortly after the Franco-Prussian War and the Parisian Commune, the hero of the novel *A Raw Youth* went abroad. Never had he traveled to Europe with such sadness and with such love. "In those days, especially, one seemed to hear the tolling of a funeral bell over Europe." The great idea of Christian culture was dying; it was being escorted out with catcalls and the flinging of mud; atheism was celebrating its first victories. "I wept," confesses Versilov, "wept for them, I wept for the old idea and, perhaps, I wept real tears."

The Russian Dostoevsky, at the end of the 19th century, felt himself the only European who understood the significance of the world tragedy, which was being experienced by mankind. He alone "wept real tears." And now the "old idea" was gone and mankind was left on earth without God. The writer's "novel-tragedies" are devoted to depicting the fate of *mankind abandoned by God*. He prophetically indicated two paths: man-godhood and the herd.

Kirilov in *The Devils* declares: "If God doesn't exist, then I am God." In place of the God-man appears the man-god, the

"strong personality," who stands beyond morality, "beyond the confines of good and evil," to whom "everything is permitted" and who can "transgress" all laws (Raskolnikov, Rogozhin, Kirilov, Stavrogin, Ivan Karamazov). Dostoevsky made one of his greatest discoveries: *the nature of man is correlative to the nature of God*; if there is no God, there is also no man. In the man-god, the new demonic being, everything human must disappear. The Russian writer predicts the appearance of Nietzsche: the superman of the author of *Zarathustra* also signifies in his presence the destruction of man: "the human, the too human" is eradicated in him as shame and disgrace.

The other path of atheistic mankind leads to the herd. The culmination of Dostoevsky's work is the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*. If men are only natural beings, if their souls are not immortal, then it is fitting that they be established on earth with the greatest possible well-being. And since by their nature they are "impotent rebels," then one must enslave and transform them into a submissive herd. The Grand Inquisitor will tend them with an iron rod. Then at last, an enormous anthill will be built up, the Babylonian tower will be erected, and now forever. Both ways—man-godhood and the herd—lead to one and the same result: the suppression of man.

Dostoevsky saw history in the light of the Apocalypse; he predicted unheard-of world catastrophes. "The end of the world is coming," he wrote. "The end of the century will be marked by a calamity, the likes of which has never yet occurred." The tragic world-outlook of the author of *The Devils* was inaccessible to the positivists of the 19th century: he was a man of our catastrophic epoch. But God's abandonment is not the last word of Dostoevsky's work; he depicted the "dark night," but had presentiments of the dawn. He believed that the tragedy of history would be culminated in the transfiguration of the world, that after the Golgotha of mankind would follow the Second Advent of Christ and "there would resound the hymn of the new and last resurrection."

Dostoevsky worked for three years on his last novel. For three years the concluding stage of the labor—its artistic embodi-

ment—continued. But spiritually he had worked on it his entire life. *The Brothers Karamazov* is the summit, from which we see the organic unity of the writer's whole creative work disclosed. Everything that he experienced, thought, and created finds its place in this vast synthesis. The complex human world of *Karamazov* grew up naturally, over the course of a decade, absorbing the philosophical and artistic elements of the preceding works: the *Diary of a Writer* is the laboratory in which the ideology of the final novel is given its definitive form; in *A Raw Youth* there is established the structure of the family chronicle and the tragedy of "fathers and children" is delineated; in *The Devils*, the atheist Stavrogin's clash with the prelate Tikhon anticipates the tragic conflict of faith and disbelief (the Elder Zosima—Ivan Karamazov); in *The Idiot* the subject schema, similar to *Karamazov*, is worked out: at the center of the action stands a major crime; the wronged beauty Nastasya Filippovna calls Grushenka to mind, the proud Aglaya—Katerina Ivanovna; the motif of a dramatic meeting between the rivals is repeated in both novels.

The "passionate" Rogozhin is just as engulfed by eros as is Mitya Karamazov; the "positively beautiful individual"—Prince Myshkin—is Alyosha's spiritual brother. In *Crime and Punishment* Raskolnikov steps beyond the moral law, declaring that "everything is permitted," and becomes a theoretician-murderer: his fate determines the fate of Ivan; the struggle between the prosecutor Porfiry Petrovich and the criminal develops in *Karamazov* into the "preliminary investigation" of Dmitry's case. But Dostoevsky's last and greatest creation is genetically linked not only with the "great novels." Mitya's erotic possession had already been delineated in the portrayal of the hero's passion for the fatal woman Polina in *The Gambler*; Ivan's "disease of consciousness" and Fyodor Pavlovich's "underground philosophy" had been outlined in *Works from Underground*. Prince Volkovsky in *The Humiliated and Wronged* already possesses the Karamazov element—sensuality; in *The Village of Stepanchikovo* appears the first draft of the figure of Smerdyakov (the lackey Vidoplyasov). Even the tales of the period before penal servitude are related by countless

threads with the last novel: the theme of "romantic dreaming" and the "solitary consciousness" is culminated in Ivan's "abstractness" and uprootedness; Schiller's romanticism finds its poetic expression in Dmitry's "hymn"; the idea of the *Grand Inquisitor* grows out of the tragedy of the "faint heart" (*The Landlady*). Finally, the motif of the personality's duality (Ivan Karamazov's devil) rises from his youthful work *The Double*.

The Brothers Karamazov is not only a synthesis of Dostoevsky's creative work, but also the culmination of his life. In the very topography of the novel his memories of childhood are united with the impressions of his final years: the city in which the novel's action is placed reflects the features of Staraya Russa, but the villages surrounding it (Darovoye, Chermashnya, Mokroye) are related to his father's estate in Tula province. Fyodor Pavlovich inherits several traits of the writer's father, and his violent death corresponds to Mikhail Andreyevich's tragic end. Dmitry, Ivan, and Alyosha are three aspects of Dostoevsky's personality, three stages of his spiritual way. Fiery and noble Dmitry, declaiming the *Hymn to Joy*, embodies the *romantic period* of the author's life; his tragic fate, the charge of parricide and exile to Siberia, was inspired by the story of the innocent criminal Ilyinsky and by this is connected with memories of the years of penal servitude. Ivan, the atheist and creator of a social utopia, reflects the *epoch of his friendship with Belinsky* and captivation by atheistic socialism; Alyosha is a symbol of the writer after the period of his penal servitude, when a "regeneration of his convictions" took place within him, when he discovered the Russian people and the Russian Christ.

The novel *Brothers Karamazov* opens before us as its author's *spiritual biography* and his *artistic confession*. But, having once been transformed into a work of art, the story of Dostoevsky's personality becomes the history of man's personality in general. The accidental and individual disappears, what is ecumenical and universal to mankind grows up. In the fate of the brothers Karamazov each of us recognizes his own fate. The writer portrays the three brothers as a *spiritual unity*. This is an organically collective personality in its triple structure:

the principle of reason is embodied in Ivan: he is a logician and rationalist, an innate skeptic and negator; the principle of feeling is represented by Dmitry: in him is the "sensuality of insects" and the inspiration of eros; the principle of will, realizing itself in active love as an ideal, is presented in Alyosha. The brothers are joined to one another by ties of blood, grow up from one familial root: the biological given—the Karamazov element—is shown in the father Fyodor Pavlovich. Every human personality bears in itself a fatal dichotomy: the legitimate Karamazov brothers have an illegitimate brother Smerdyakov: he is their embodied temptation and personified sin.

Thus in the novel's artistic symbols the author expounded his own *teaching about personality*. The conflicts of consciousness are converted into a struggle of the passions and into "whirlwinds of events."

The conception of the *organically collective personality* determines the novel's structure. All of Dostoevsky's works are personalistic: their action is always concentrated around the personality of the main hero (Raskolnikov, Prince Myshkin, Stavrogin, Versilov). The main hero of *Karamazov* is the three brothers in their spiritual unity. Three personal themes are developed in parallel, but on the spiritual plane the three parallel lines converge: the brothers, each in his own way, experience a single tragedy, they share a common guilt and a common redemption. Not only Ivan with his idea "everything is permitted," not only Dmitry in the impetuosity of his passions, but also the "quiet boy" Alyosha—all are responsible for their father's murder. All of them consciously or semiconsciously desired his death: and their desire impelled Smerdyakov to the crime: he was their docile instrument. Ivan's *murderous thought* was transformed into Dmitry's *destructive passion* and into Smerdyakov's *criminal act*. They are guilty actively, Alyosha passively. He knew and permitted it, *could have saved* his father and did not. The brothers' common crime also involves a common punishment: Dmitry atones for his guilt by exile to penal servitude, Ivan—by the dissolution of his personality and the appearance of the devil, Alyosha by his

terrible spiritual crisis. All of them are purified in suffering and attain a new life.

The architectonics of *Karamazov* are distinguished by their unusual rigidity: the law of balance, of symmetry, of proportionality is observed by the author systematically. It is possible to conjecture that Vladimir Solovyov's harmonious philosophical schema influenced the technique of the novel's structure. This is the most "constructed" and ideologically complete of all Dostoevsky's works. The human world of the novel is disposed in a symbolic order: at the center of the plot appears Dmitry—he is the promoter of the action and the source of dramatic energy. His passion for Grushenka, rivalry with his father, his romance with Katerina Ivanovna, the apparent crime, the trial and exile constitute the external content of the novel. On both sides of him stand Ivan and Alyosha; the first prepares the parricide by his ideas and by this influences Dmitry's fate: he is his ideational adversary and spiritual antipode, but is joined to him by blood, by their common hatred for their father and their common guilt. Alyosha sets his "quietness" in opposition to Dmitry's violence, his purity—to his sensuousness; but even in his modest chastity lives the "Karamazov element," he also knows the gnawing of sensuality. They are different and alike: the ecstatic sense of life mysteriously unites them. Therefore, Dmitry's sin is Alyosha's sin.

Behind the group of legitimate sons, set on the first plane, in the distance, in half-illumination, stands the figure of the illegitimate brother, the lackey Smerdyakov. He is separated from them by origin, descent, social position, character; the spiritual unity of the family is rent by his wanton isolation. But nonetheless how mysteriously profound is his tie with his brothers: as a medium, he executes their subconscious suggestion; Ivan determines Smerdyakov's destiny by his ideas, Dmitry by his passions, Alyosha by his squeamish indifference. The theme of "children" in its four ideational aspects is developed by the four brothers; the theme of "fathers" is represented only by Fyodor Pavlovich. It is unique and simple: the impersonal, innate element of life, the terrible force of the earth and sex.

A tragic struggle takes place between the father and his children. Only the men contend, masculine ideas clash together. Dostoevsky's women do not have their own personal history—they enter the heroes' biography, constitute part of their fate. Each of the brothers Karamazov has his own complement in a female image: beside Ivan stands Katerina Ivanovna, beside Dmitry—Grushenka, by Alyosha—Liza Khokhlakova; even Smerdyakov has his own "lady of his heart"—the maidservant Marya Kondratyevna. The brothers' indivisible unity comes forward on the "amorous" plane with special precision. The threads, uniting them with their loves, cross and intertwine. Ivan loves Katerina Ivanovna, Dmitry's fiancée; Alyosha for an instant becomes his rival, feeling himself stung with passion for Grushenka: Katerina Ivanovna is a fatal woman both for Ivan and for Dmitry; Grushenka unites in her love Dmitry and Alyosha. Finally, the unity of the Karamazov family is symbolically shown in Fyodor Pavlovich's and Dmitry's passion for one woman—Grushenka. The remaining dramatis personae are disposed around this central group. Fyodor Pavlovich is surrounded by his own "world" of boon-companions and dissolute women; Grushenka brings with her her admirers and a company of Poles; Mitya bursts in with gypsies, chance friends and creditors. Richest of all is Alyosha's world: the "young lover of mankind" introduces two aspects of human communality into the novel: the monastic communal life and the "brotherhood of children." He connects the dark Karamazov kingdom with the world of the Elder Zosima and Ilyusha Snegiryov. Only Ivan does not have his own world: he does not accept God's creation, that which is human is alien to him, he is disembodied. His sole companion is a phantom, the spirit of nonbeing, the devil.

The story of the Karamazov brothers' collective personality is depicted in a *novel-tragedy*. Everything is tragic in this artistic myth about man, both the enmity of the children toward the father, and the brothers' struggle among themselves, and the inner strife of each brother individually. The disclosure of the metaphysical significance of human fate belongs to Dmitry. In his experience of the passions he came to understand that "the devil struggles with God, and the field of battle is the human

heart." Before him are revealed two abysses—above and below. But he is powerless to make a choice and in this lies his personal tragedy. Among the brothers he occupies a middle, neutral position. Ivan and Alyosha, standing on his left and on his right side, already have made this choice. Ivan is irresistibly drawn to the lower abyss, Alyosha reaches for the higher. The one says "no," the other "yes." Fyodor Pavlovich, sitting over his "little cognac," asks Ivan: "Is there a God or not?" The latter answers: "No, there is no God." He appeals to Alyosha: "Alyosha, does God exist?" Alyosha answers: "God does exist." Ivan's personal tragedy is in that "his mind is not in harmony with his heart": with his feelings he loves God's world, although with his reason he cannot accept it.

Of the three brothers the most in harmony is Alyosha, but even in his integral nature there is a split: he knows the temptations of Karamazov sensuality and his faith passes through a "furnace of doubt." The religious idea of the novel—the struggle of faith with disbelief—emerges beyond the limits of the Karamazov household. Ivan's negation begets the ominous figure of the inquisitor; Alyosha's affirmation is mystically deepened in the Elder Zosima's image. Human hearts are only the field of battle, and God and the devil struggle. Under the psychological exterior of the personality, Dostoevsky unveils its ontology and metaphysics. The history of the Karamazov family is an artistic myth which encompasses a *religious mystery*: here is why the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* stands at its center.

Dostoevsky was writing not a philosophical treatise or a theological system, he was composing a novel. Religious-philosophical material was introduced into the framework of the novel genre and treated according to its laws. A tense dramatic plot is constructed, at the center of which stands an enigmatic crime; the ideological masses are drawn into the whirlwind of the action, and clashing together, produce effective outbursts. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the religious mystery-play is paradoxically joined with a crime novel. Notwithstanding all its depth, this is one of the most captivating and popular works of Russian literature.

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