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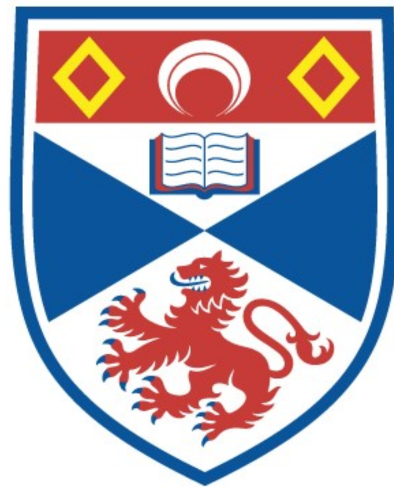

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<u>Somewhere Between Eschatology and Literature: F. M. Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism</u>

A thesis submitted to the University of St Andrews for the degree of Master of Philosophy

by Rebecca Carnighan

October 2001

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Abstract

Donald Fanger's work, *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens and Gogol* addresses the seemingly internal paradox of the nineteenth century literary genre 'romantic realism.' He claims that Dostoevsky, with his portrayal of the familiar and the strange in St. Petersburg, is the great inheritor of the romantic realism of Balzac, Dickens and Gogol. Fanger's category of romantic realism evolves from the realism of the nineteenth century, which began with the disillusionment with romanticism, and the desire to portray everyday life as truthfully as possible. Fanger names Balzac, Dickens, Gogol and Dostoevsky as the nineteenth century writers who accomplish what is impossible for other realists. According to Fanger, they present the world, with all its imperfections, both truthfully and beautifully. The question I will address, in regards to Fanger's work, is whether all four succeed, or whether only Dostoevsky does, because his personal vision allows him to see that the world, for all its ugliness, is marked for redemption. I will argue that, in fact, only Dostoevsky does not finally compromise his vision in an effort to construct a believable world. I suggest that Dostoevsky might be able to look at the world both romantically and realistically because of his Christian faith.

In the first part of my paper, I will attempt to show that Balzac, Gogol and Dickens strayed from the genre when their personal visions were shattered by reality, using examples from their fiction and excerpts from literary critiques. In the second part

of my paper, I will demonstrate how Dostoevsky saw the objective reality in terms of his Christian perspective for the final redemption of the world, rather than projecting his personal vision into an objective reality. I will illustrate this through Dostoevsky's own work, using *The Idiot* in Chapter Three, *Crime and Punishment* in Chapter Four, and *The Brothers Karamazov* in Chapter Five. Finally, I will compare the peculiar Christian logic, which claims the very best outcome for a broken world *because of* Christ's death on the cross, with Dostoevsky's Christian vision, which allowed his novels to hold together hope and reality. As a true romantic realist, Dostoevsky represents the world both truthfully and beautifully. As a Christian, Dostoevsky possesses the unique ability to demonstrate both the radical evil and uncompromising hope of the world.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Professor Trevor Hart and the Faculty of Divinity for giving me the unique opportunity to study and live in St Andrews for two tremendous years. I also wish to thank my friends and family for their advice and support. In particular, I am indebted to the amazing library staff at St Andrews, to Broons' Bar and Bistro for excellent lattes and an atmosphere conducive to study, to the Shelley family for their hospitality and encouragement during my final month of writing, and to Heather Huntley for her constructive criticism and willing ear.

Contents

Introduction...page 1

Chapter I..page 3

Chapter II...page 30

Chapter III..page 53

Chapter IV...page 63

Chapter V..page 77

Chapter VI...page 86

Conclusion...page 112

Bibliography...page 90

Introduction

Donald Fanger, in *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens and Gogol* claims that Dostoevsky is the inheritor of the 'romantic realism' of Balzac, Dickens and Gogol. I suggest that it is Dostoevsky's definitively Christian eschatology that allows him to see the world's radical evil and still to believe in an idealistic end to the story. I will demonstrate that towards the end of his life, he most certainly deserved to be called a 'romantic realist,' and will trace the evolution of his romantic realism through three of his novels, *The Idiot*, *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. Finally, I will compare Dostoevsky's romantic realism to the peculiar Christian logic, which finds its source of eternal hope within the death and resurrection of Christ. My final chapter will compare Dostoevsky's fiction to the theological viewpoint of P. T. Forsyth, a nineteenth century theologian, based upon the unique prophetic vision in the works of both. This chapter will reinforce my theory that, just as Forsyth was able to reconcile historical reality with terms of his faith, Dostoevsky's Christian perspective of the world allowed him to marry the terms 'romantic' and 'realist' in a genre which would otherwise seem to be an oxymoron.

Chapter 1

'The Genre of Romantic Realism'

Introduction

Donald Fanger, in *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens and Gogol* claims that these four authors successfully portray objective reality through their own subjective personal visions. At the heart of Fanger's study is the dilemma of the author who wishes to write responsibly about the world's disunity, yet longs to encourage readers with a story that points to a vision of unity. Fanger believes that Balzac, Dickens, Gogol and Dostoevsky present an imperfect world truthfully, without compromising their idealistic vision for that world. This chapter will address the task set before the romantic realists. How were they to write their own personal visions into realistic fiction without tending towards idealistic romanticism? According to Fanger, these novelists' subjective emphasis on a personal vision shaped the romantic realists' objective reality. Fanger attempts to provide evidence to designate Balzac, Dickens, Gogol and Dostoevsky as the only four successful romantic realists. I will suggest that Dostoevsky's success as a romantic realist was due to his faith, which allowed him to hold together the romantic and realistic tendencies of the genre without compromising one or the other.

Whereas the romantic movement of the early nineteen hundreds was characterized by its 'emphasis on feeling and content rather than order and form,' and 'on the sublime, supernatural and exotic, and the free expressions of the passions and individuality,' realism sought to 'represent the familiar or typical in real life, rather than an idealized,

formalized, or romantic interpretation of it.'[1] Fanger defines the nineteenth century mode of European literary realism as 'a special kind of representation of a special artistic vision' where the artists 'painting of the unvarnished truth around them' was sought in 'those areas of social life that society has contrived to gloss over in the first place.'[2] The realists were marked by their ability to make their readers 'see accurately,' without any 'intervention of the novelist's own ego.'[3] Harry Levin states that every realist is a 'reformed idealist, whose commentary is to be deduced from the ideals he has lived down.'[4]

For Fanger, the romantic realists were still 'unreformed idealists, inclined to see the world, for all its detail, in terms of one or more primary colors, in terms of energy, will, passion, or sentiment.'[5] But they would base their ideals and romantic visions in 'observed and observable reality, claiming it as warrant for the extravagances of the stories they used.'[6] They used their cities, and real people within their cities as the basis for their romantic realism, which accurately and delightfully incorporated both the world the authors lived in and the authors' own vision for that world. There is no enforced unity or inappropriate placement of emotions and significance onto a tableau where one or the other does not really belong, because, according to Fanger, all of the authors believed the real world to be possessed of color, expression and the supernatural. Therefore, so their representation of it would be.

[1] *Collins English Dictionary* (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), p. 1343.
[2] Fanger, D, *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens and Gogol* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p.3, 5.
[3] Fanger, p. 7.
[4] Quoted in Fanger, p. 8.
[5] Fanger, p. 13.
[6] Fanger, p. 13.

Fanger lists Balzac, Dickens and Gogol as Dostoevsky's predecessors in a genre that he claims is not a paradox but the fusion of romanticism and realism. The romantic realists borrowed from romantics such as Maturin, Dumas and Radcliffe their melodramatic climaxes, fantastic plots and supernatural conclusions, which still clung to the great myths of classical tragedy. They borrowed from realists such as Flaubert, Cervantes, Champfleury and Duranty, a natural habitat for their stories, drawing from real life the facts necessary to lead their readers into the world of the fictional novel.

The romantic theme of the transfiguration of the ordinary through the imagination rests upon the notion that there is an undiscovered and unarticulated depth beyond the reality we see. For the romantics, the power to search beyond surface reality lies within the self. Where the romantics believed that they were at once expressing and helping to complete and realize a truth behind reality, the realists endeavoured to imitate life with art. What separated their work from stenography or journalism was their ability to illustrate the mundane without idealism, to practice a transfiguration of reality which would give 'meaninglessness and banal unhappiness the closure and shape of fate.'[7] Writers such as Flaubert and Zola introduced a stoic vision they deemed necessary to overcome 'falsely consoling modes of representation.'[8] This understanding of vision stands in stark contrast to the romantic understanding of vision, a vision that supplied 'a hope, a consolation, a support and an ideal.'[9] Consider the words of Dumas, creator of *The Three Musketeers*, in a letter dedicated to his father.

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[7] Taylor, C, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 431.

[8] Taylor, p. 431. Taylor gives as an example Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, which destroys the lofty dreams of its characters, but attempts to transfigure reality with a new irresistible, deterministic beauty of inevitability. Compare to this the work of a romantic, such as Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*,

> Man surrenders himself completely only to sentiments which impassion and charm him, which move and elevate him, recalling the feeling of his own worth and dignity—of what he feels highest in himself; and it is the mission of the writer to awaken and encourage these aspirations. Man will never take a lasting pleasure in the history of his turpitude and baseness. He may, especially in his youth, at an age when curiousity is unbounded, find some unwholesome attraction in certain descriptions of his own baseness; but he will soon sicken of such pictures, and he will always return to what is healthy and cheering. In the mirror presented to him by poets and dramatists, by novelists and writers of all kinds, he does not care to see himself depicted as he really is; he knows himself well, and he seeks another self, a self whom he believes himself to be, and whom he never despairs of becoming. He knows, too, that if goodness and excellence are more rare, they are nevertheless as real as wickedness and evil, and that vice has not the monopoly of truth. Whenever his mind and heart are appealed to—and with the exception of religion and love, when are they more appealed to then by what he reads?[10]

Realism, as described by Georg Lukacs, opposed the 'destruction of the completeness of the human personality and of the objective typicality of men and situations through an excessive cult of the momentary mood.'[11] Champfleury and Duranty called for a 'de-poetization of fiction,' yet criticized artists such as Flaubert for their sordid portrayal of ordinary life.[12] The triumph of realism over the sentimentality of idealistic romanticism posed a problem for nineteenth century authors. How was the writer who felt the world's disunity, yet longed to encourage readers with a story of unity to write responsibly about this world? According to Stephen Heath, Flaubert

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[9] Dumas, A, 'Letters from Dumas,' in *The Three Musketeers* (Conneticut: The Easton Press, 1978), p. *xv-xvi.*
[10] Dumas, p. *xv-xvi.*
[11] Lukacs, G, *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki and Others* (London: Merlin Press, 1972), p. 6.
[12] Fanger, p. 5.

used the novel as a 'necessary counter' to romantic ideals, and to the 'versified lies' of the romantic endings.[13]

> The hatred of realism is a hatred of the reality it represents. Flaubert's constant words during the writing of *Madame Bovary* are 'stupid', 'fetid'—'the foulness makes me sick'—which apply both to the subject of the book he is writing and to the world around him, these being one and the same; one bourgeois reality from world to book and back again.[14]

George Sand, in response to Flaubert's comment that he didn't 'create desolation wantonly,' but believed the artist should 'no more appear in his work than God appears in nature,' asks,

> What shall we do? It is certain that you are going to create *desolation*, and I—*consolation*. I don't know what governs our destinies; you watch them pass; you criticize them; you abstain literarily from judging them; you confine yourself to painting them while hiding your personal feeling with great care, on principle. Nevertheless, one sees it through your story, and you make the people who read you sadder. As for me, I would render them less unhappy.[15]

What will authors do, who see reality in a harsh light, and yet, desire to write a novel that neither falsely harmonizes their own perspectives with the reader's hopes, nor dashes those hopes? Donald Fanger's work introduces a question about the artist's task. Should the novelist be committed to truth or to beauty? According to Fanger, it is his very subjective emphasis on a personal vision in his novels that shapes the romantic realist's objective reality.

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[13] Heath, S, *Gustave Flaubert: Madame Bovary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 30-31.
[14] Heath, p. 30-31.
[15] Quoted in Fanger, p. 74.

The Genre of Romantic Realism

Fanger lists Balzac, Dickens and Gogol as Dostoevsky's predecessors in a genre that he claims is not a paradox, but a fusion of romanticism and realism. The romantic realists borrowed from romanticists such as Maturin, Dumas and Radcliffe their melodramatic climaxes, fantastic plots and supernatural conclusions, which still clung to the great myths of classical tragedy. They borrowed from realists such as Flaubert, Cervantes, Champfleury and Duranty, a natural habitat for their stories, drawing from real life the facts necessary to lead their readers into the world of the fictional novel.

Fanger's work explores why the romantic realists were able to define the world in a way that romanticism and realism alone could not. All four writers used comedy that bordered upon tragedy to highlight the contrast between what is and what ought to be. In particular, they used the concept of the 'grotesque' to illuminate what Fanger describes as 'an exaggeratedly disgusting, repulsive representation of everyday life in somber colors,' to evoke that 'longing for a higher, non-terrestrial world.'[16] The grotesque in writing illuminates what is strangely ludicrous, or incongruous about life, by its contrast to the norm.

The city was the nexus where characters of different social classes met and dialogued, and where the romantic realists' new sense of reality allowed any action to be permitted. City life, which had been ignored by authors of the classics in the past, gave the genre substantiation, yet provided the hope for a better reality. The

discovery of the city gave romantic realists the title 'the new myth-makers' of an urban atmosphere, and their combination of different literary styles from ages past kept them from alienating any particular class.[17] According to Fanger, without the city, romantic realism would not exist.

He traces a shift of emphasis in the writings of the first three authors, the infinite possibilities and strangeness of their cities, to the emphasis in Dostoevsky's work, the mysteries of the human heart. Fanger's claim is legitimated by Stephan Zweig, who selects Balzac, Dickens and Dostoevsky from the rest of the nineteenth-century novelists as novelists 'in the higher sense.'[18] Each constructed a universe of his own making, where people and events happened in such a way that 'they not only become typical for him but for us likewise,' while at the same time giving the reader 'a vision of a new kind of world.'[19] .

Many realists of the nineteenth century battled against any myth of human progress, or any false vision for the future. Where there is no vision, the people will perish, as Dostoevsky illustrates in *The Idiot*, with his pathetic nihilist character, Hippolyte. In fiction, the reader is impressed with a unity of the world 'which is not really there.'[20] Our limited knowledge of the world continues to baffle us, while Art builds upon the precept that there might be a future order, something that will redeem our present pain and encompass random events within a pattern, or narrative. The writer of fiction must keep his or her material open to change; it is a balancing act, where the writer is

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[16] Fanger, D, *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens and Gogol* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 155.
[17] Fanger, p. 244.
[18] Zweig, S, *Three Masters: Balzac, Dickens, Dostoevsky* (New York, 1930), pp. ix-x.
[19] Fanger, p. 244.
[20] Gardner, H, *Religion and* Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 19.

pulled down on one side by the responsibility to mirror how the world really is, and pulled down on the other side by a desire to illuminate reality with a hidden harmony, which may console the reader.

Helen Gardner claims that tragedy satisfies the reader both through its disunification and reunification. Gardner believes it is the interplay, or tension, between the design of the world and what the design 'struggles to include' that allows a properly done tragedy to console and satisfy the reader.[21] The genre of 'romantic realism' achieves the balance between discordance and reconciliation, where romanticism and realism alone cannot. The 'tacit awareness' that we are spectators, rather than participants in a tragedy without ending allows us to find pleasure in a tragic performance.[22]

> Unlike the characters themselves we (together with the actors) know that we shall be able to leave the theatre at the end of the performance; and it is this tacit awareness which enables us to find even satisfaction and consolation in the tragic drama played out before us. It is not that we do not consider the script or performance to be true to reality, but simply that (for the time being at least) we are able to transcend it, to walk away from the stark vision of finitude and the questions lying at its boundaries with which the action presents us.[23]

By its very nature, tragedy is 'paradoxical and contradictory' because it deals with 'intense suffering and failure, yet it is strangely affirmative.'[24] The vision of the romantic realists allowed their reality to transcend any ultimate tragedy. Their work held some 'satisfaction and consolation' that there was an unseen element of reality, the total narrative of which had not yet been presented.

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[21] Gardner, p. 19.
[22] Bauckham, R and Hart, T, *Hope against Hope: Christian Eschatology in Contemporary Context* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999), p. 45.
[23] Bauckham and Hart, *Hope against Hope*, p. 45.

Tragedy portrayed human greatness and human failure after confrontation with the Divine. At the lower end of the scale, irreverent comedy mocked tragedy's interpretation of the world. Up until at least the eighteenth century, tragedy demanded the respect of cultured, high-brow audiences, while comedy was reserved for bawdy, decadent occasions, where its crude, vagrant heroes could be mocked, and also mock tragedy's version of reality.[25] Consequently, the novelists replaced ordinary, flat characters with the dregs of society, whom 'higher' art forms had previously ignored. Capturing these new low subjects proved to be captivating to the bourgeoisie, and thus, the realistic novel began to render ordinary life extraordinary, by drawing the underground out into society.

Realism betrayed its comic roots when it began to take both 'the character and the milieu seriously.'[26] Not only were the realists trying to tell a story, but they were also making statements against the society and the hierarchy of art that had defined their genre. They endeavored to reach truth by mirroring reality, rather than illuminating reality with fiction. Novelists such as Flaubert considered his faultless, tidy fiction a duty to the world. George Pellissier insists, however, that while the later realists reacted against the romantic mode and creed, the early realists of the nineteenth century owed their beginnings to romanticism.[27] The tendency in literature to uncover a rich depth within reality, which allowed the reader's imagination to be carried beyond her realm of known possible experiences, was shared by both the romantics and the early realists, and was later inherited by romantic realism.

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[24] Dollimore, J, 'Journeys into Night,' *The Independent Magazine*, August 17th, 2002, p. 20.
[25] There are, of course, exceptions to this generalization. Shakespeare, for instance, wrote both comedy and tragedy for all classes (including the queen herself).
[26] Fanger, p. 9.

In romantic realism, the vision unites the personal perspective of the artist with what is most objective about the world. The vision gives coherency to the readers' world, and 'makes the myth tenable and relevant for their times.'[28] As in reporting, novelists record the real world to the best of their ability, but the novelist's perspective is shaped by a vision given to the artist through that artist's life. Each of the authors within the genre of romantic realism contribute to the genre in a different way, and the first three all impact Dostoevsky's fiction, though some influences are more straightforward than others.

Gogol

Fanger's selection of Gogol is by no means arbitrary. Gogol's work deeply impacted the work of Dostoevsky in terms of technique. Even Fanger, however, admits that the justification for his selection of Gogol is to be found not in Gogol's theme, but in his technique.[29] Because his work is 'neither wholly subjective nor wholly objective, but rather a synthesis of a personal vision…and sensitively observed social fact,' Fanger believes Gogol deserves to be called a romantic realist.[30] Fanger points out that Gogol does not transform St. Petersburg, but creates a new city, which 'stands in a grotesque relation to the real city.'[31] Rather than transforming the reader's perspective of reality with a vision of how things might be in the readers' city, Gogol uses the romantic technique of heightening to create a fantastic city. There is no transformation of the city, because there is no synthesis of the old reality and Gogol's

[27] Quoted in Fanger, p. 6.
[28] Fanger, p. 14.
[29] Fanger, p. 114.
[30] Fanger, p. 115.

'fantastic' version of it.[32] In Gogol's short story, 'The Nose,' for instance, the honest barber, Ivan Yakovlevish, finds a nose baked into his breakfast roll. Elsewhere in town, the collegiate assessor, Kovalyov, wakes up to find a flat surface where his nose once was.

> Suddenly he stood rooted to the spot near the front door of some house and witnessed a most incredible sight. A carriage drew up at the entrance porch. The doors flew open and out jumped a uniformed, stooping gentleman who dashed up the steps. The feeling of horror and amazement that gripped Kovalyov when he recognized his own nose defies description...How, in fact, could a nose, which only yesterday was in the middle of his face, and which could not possibly walk around or drive in a carriage suddenly turn up in a uniform![33]

Gogol's world resembles a cartoon rather than a realistic fiction. In an animated story, the viewer is disengaged from the characters and events by the knowledge that *this would never really happen in real life.* Fanger compares Gogol's 'realized' metaphor to Dickens' more conventional metaphor. Though there is something surreal in both the animation of inanimate articles of clothing and furniture in Dickens' novels and in the personification of a nose and an overcoat in Gogol's stories, Dickens' characters belong to reality. Fanger accuses Gogol's characters of tending toward 'facelessness,' and says that they are 'all dead souls.'[34] Akaky Akakievich, proud owner of a new overcoat in Gogol's short story, 'The Overcoat,' once having lost his overcoat, dies of a broken heart. He returns to the earth as a ghost to take the overcoat of his oppressor in the fantastic epilogue of this story.

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[31] Fanger, p. 120.
[32] Todorov, T, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 73. The intrusion of the uncanny or marvellous into the everyday severs the story from acknowledged order. Unlike the other authors Fanger discusses, Gogol doesn't let his readers pause between illusion and the idea that it might be real. His story begins in the world of fantasy.
[33] Gogol, tr. R Wilks, *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 46.
[34] Fanger, p. 116-117.

Fanger admits that, unlike Balzac and Dickens, Gogol creates a city parallel to the real St. Petersburg, 'deprived of grace,' a place of 'kinlessness and alienation.'[35] While Dostoevsky would 'take elements of the Gogolian grotesque and, by adding new perspective, draw new power from the expectation of comedy that these grotesque elements raised,' Gogol's vision would always be subordinate to his fantastic style.[36] Would his characters ever outlive their feelings of alienation in urban Russia? The strange disappearance of a painting in 'The Portrait,' whose evil eyes cause the ruin of many talented artists and good people along Nevsky Avenue suggest that something grotesque and malicious will always be at work against any happy ending. Gogol himself did not, and it is doubtful whether he believed his characters ever could rise above their circumstances. The ambiguity of his 'fantastic' style leaves the reader to wonder whether his feet are firmly planted in reality, or whether his perception of the city he disliked, St. Petersburg, was false.[37]

Balzac

Critics such as Albert Beguin argue that Balzac was a visionary in his aptly named *Balzac*, while Dargan's *Studies in Romantic Realism* would claim that Balzac was a naturalist.[38] Baudelaire, in his *Le Art Romantique* calls Balzac an 'inventor, observer and a naturalist.'[39]

[35] Fanger, p. 120.
[36] Fanger, p. 125.
[37] Todorov, p. 25. Todorov defines the 'fantastic' as the 'duration of this uncertainty' following an inexplicable event that 'cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world.' The reader hesitates between choosing whether the event belongs to the dream world or reality, and once the choice has been made, 'we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvellous.'
[38] Fanger, p. 28.
[39] Quoted in Fanger, p. 28.

Fanger writes that Balzac aptly demonstrated 'the fusion of the comic and the pathetic under the aegis of that transformed melodrama which occupies so central a place in the tradition of romantic realism.'[40] He believes that Balzac accomplished this feat by introducing social differences within the locus of the city. Fanger's thesis rests upon the use of the metropolis by all his named romantic realists. Romantic realism preserved both 'the type and its mythical aura,' while at the same time, it worked to 'renew its appeal and deepen its relevance to contemporary life by discovering a milieu that would give it support and substantiation.'[41] Fanger depicts the city of the romantic realist as an organism imbued with a soul, as well as an atmosphere. Balzac discovered a source from which to draw his bizarre assortment of underground heroes and heroines in the hidden recesses of the city.

There is no doubt that Balzac influenced Dostoevsky. His translation of Balzac's *Old Goriot* was Dostoevsky's first printed work, and the speech Dostoevsky gave in honor of Pushkin towards the end of his life placed particular significance on a citation from Balzac. Leonid Grossman points out that in both Balzac's *Old Goriot* and Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, the hero is faced with the question of overcoming the senseless terror of life. Each must choose the role of the antagonist in a profound tragedy. Rastignac and Raskolnikov are both tortured with the option of murdering one person to aid the happiness of several 'better' humans.[42] Balzac's *The Poor Parents* taught Dostoevsky how to approach the poorest class of nineteenth-century Russians in his novels. The insulted and injured in Balzac's novels do not always receive the compassion a full-blown tragedy would afford them, but the

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[40] Fanger, p. 21.
[41] Fanger, p. 21.
[42] Grossman, L, tr. L Karpov, *Balzac and Dostoevsky* (London: Ardis, 1973), pp. 22-23. Balzac's citation from *Onegin* (in Dostoevsky's speech honouring Pushkin) alludes to this ethical dilemma.

absence of compassion is, in itself, a lesson. The suffering poor in Balzac's novels (particularly the women) provide a stark contrast to his villains' greed for pleasure and gold. Balzac gave 'direction to already inherent creative strivings.'[43]

Balzac's detailed fictional city resembles Paris, but the outcomes of events do not catch the reader off-guard. There are no surprises in Balzac's fictional work. There is, rather, a slow, inevitable progress toward a pre-figured fate that feels more like a place revisited than the uncovering of a transforming destiny. In *Old Goriot*, Balzac reminds the reader that the drama has already been decided, and that any dramatic action we are part of is the 'workings out of several interrelated destinies toward an end already known.'[44] Balzac invites the reader to view and to comment upon, but not to participate in the action of the story.[45] The author alludes to the future with clues about diamonds a woman will wear for the last time, or a girl whose beauty will never reach full bloom, or a love that will never be realized. In contrast to Dostoevsky's method of telling a story in such a way that the characters are allowed the freedom to determine their own fate, Balzac's story has been decided by the time the reader has finished the introduction.[46]

As characters grow up and grow old in Balzac's novels, life darkens and the dreams of youth are shattered by reality. Balzac's two Utopian novels, *The Country Doctor* and *The Village Priest*, were followed up by the less optimistic *The Peasants* and *Lost Illusions*. According to Georg Lukacs, the true realists will not let a 'cherished

[43] Grossman, p. 31.
[44] Fanger, p. 39.
[45] Fanger, p. 42.
[46] Bakhtin, M, tr. R W Rotsel, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (London: Ardis, 1973), p. 229. Bakhtin seeks to reveal Dostoevsky's unique 'polyphonic' mode of writing, which leaves his novels 'unfinalized,' through the loss of the authorial, monological narrator.

prejudice' or 'sacred conviction' triumph over their thirst for truth.[47] Contrary to Fanger, Lukacs argues that Balzac's romanticism 'was only one feature of his total conception,' which he 'overcame and developed further.'[48] Lukacs accuses Balzac's successors of transmuting their realism 'lyrically,' until they outgrew true realism and provided 'only elegiac or ironical moods and impressions instead of an active and objective presentation of things in themselves.'[49]

There is clear evidence that Dostoevsky inherited certain realistic techniques, and earlier romantic techniques from Balzac. Did Dostoevsky also inherit his romantic vision from Balzac? Luckacs believes it is the discrepancy between what Balzac sets out to accomplish and what he actually does in his novels that defines his genius. In *The Country Doctor* and *The Village Priest*, Balzac attempts to create a hypothetical compromise between the aristocrats and bourgeois capitalist. According to Lukacs, Balzac's Utopian dreams are shattered by reality in *The Peasants*. Lukacs notes that the distance between intention and performance in Balzac's work is the mark of his genius. He believes that

> What makes Balzac a great man is the inexorable veracity with which he depicted reality even if that reality ran counter to his own personal opinions, hopes and wishes. Had he succeeded in deceiving himself, had he been able to take his own Utopian fantasies for facts, had he presented as reality what was merely in his own wishful thinking, he would now be of interest to none and would be as deservedly forgotten as the innumberable legitimist pamphleteers and glorifiers of feudalism who had been his contemporaries.[50]

[47] Lukacs, G, *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki and Others* (London: Merlin Press, 1972), p. 10.
[48] Lukacs, p. 64.
[49] Lukacs, p. 64.

The gloomy prophecies in the introduction of *Old Goriot*, and the warning of an unhappy outcome through the use of the subjunctive are symptoms of Balzac's loss of personal vision. When describing Mademoiselle Victorine Taillefer, he predicts two futures—one possible and the other probable. The outcome of the story, the reader discovers, is not dependent on the participation of the reader. 'She was pretty by force of contrast, if she had been happy, she would have been charming.'[51] Balzac teases his readers with hints of a relationship between Eugene and Victorine, but Eugene will cause her more sadness than happiness. The exposition of the novel foreshadows events that may not take place for many years, but which still serve to illuminate the character of the moment, and nothing may alter the outcome. 'Balzacian plots require just such broad foundations, because their intricacy and tension, while revealing ever new traits in each character, never introduce anything radically new, but merely give explicit expression in action to things already implicitly contained in the broad foundation.'[52] So Balzac's use of the subjunctive places a solemn negation on the hopes of the present. The reader is taken by his challenge; mistrusting the author's ominous warning, she reads to the end to find that the narrator is right.

Lukacs claims that Balzac succeeded as a realist because he did not give in to his social ideal of a compromise between the aristocratic landowner and the bourgeois capitalist. Characters in *The Peasants* are not people at all, because the revolutionary working class 'was quite beyond the range of Balzac's vision.'[53] He could show the despair of the peasants, but could not make his vision feasible within the framework

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[50] Lukacs, p. 21.
[51] Balzac, *Old Goriot*, (London: J M Dent, n.d.), p. 14.
[52] Lukacs, p. 58.
[53] Lukacs, p. 46.

of the novel. *Lost Illusions* is a novel of disillusionment, structured to show a failed idea, rather than a possible idea. In this case, it is writers who are disillusioned by the commercial nature of the novel. According to Lukacs, Balzac's genius lay in his ability to depict disillusionment as 'an inevitable necessity.'[54]

Fanger succeeds in proving that Dostoevsky was acquainted with, and indeed, borrowed phrases and ideas from Balzac. Balzac's personal vision, however, was finally overcome and deflated by the realistic world he felt compelled to record.

One would, at first, not call the works of Dostoevsky 'triumphant.' 'Foreboding' and 'bizarre' are more fitting adjectives for his work, and these link him to Balzac, both in method and theme. According to Grossman, Dostoevsky imitates Balzac's style of writing because the romance novels 'expand the limits of the old novel,' and make it possible to set the extraordinary and fantastic within the ordinary, in order to transform the people and events of everyday reality.[55] He changed the way reality itself was understood, by introducing the supernatural to the realist genre. He owes to Balzac this technique of matching romantic style with grave questions. Like Balzac, he creates a philosophical adventure—he places many seemingly impossible philosophical hypotheses into ordinary life, and succeeds where romanticism and realism alone fail. Fanger adequately demonstrates that Dostoevsky is indeed the inheritor of Balzac's romantic realism. But Dostoevsky improves upon the genre significantly. Where Balzac ends his novels as soon as he has begun them, Dostoevsky leaves his endings open to the unexpected. Balzac has made up his mind before the introduction of his characters that Rastignac will choose greed over honor,

[54] Lukacs, p. 46.

but Dostoevsky plays with the reader, wavering between many possible decisions that Raskolnikov might make. In the end, Raskolnikov's choice comes as a happy surprise to both the reader and Raskolnikov.

Dickens

Dickens' novels are not social commentaries, as so many early realist works of the nineteenth century were, and neither can they be called melodramatic, in the great style of the Romantics of the eighteenth century. Unlike the works of Balzac and Dostoevsky, Dickens's novels do not revolve around an idea, but rest upon his 'opposition to Victorian society.'[56] Fanger believes it is not Dickens's main idea that classes him with Balzac and Dostoevsky, but Dickens's 'emotional italics,' which allow the reader to apprehend the larger significance in an ordinary event.[57] Fanger believes that rather than painting the world in vibrant colors, Dickens merely discovers what is already there. Dickens constantly utilizes the tension between the prosaic and the fantastic. Obscene crimes occur in a very familiar London. Country maids wed city boys. The classes meet within his city, and improbable plot twists are made probable by the wry wit of his narrative. His heightened narrative, which transforms a scene or character, is only possible through Dickens's use of comedy. But can Dickens hold together a vision of hope in a realistic nineteenth-century fictional London without compromising his perception of reality?

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[55] Grossman, p. 94.
[56] Fanger, p. 70. Fanger goes on to say that the lack of depth in Victorian novels, in comparison with French and Russian novels of the same time, may have had something to do with the stability of 'English institutions', compared to the turbulence experienced in France and Russia during that century.
[57] Fanger, p. 66.

Dickens remains true to the reality of city life in London by introducing what Chesterton calls 'motley grotesque' secondary characters as foils to the unnatural goodness of his main characters, who are simply trying to find a place in society.[58] But does comedy exist in his novels as a means to an end? It appears, at times, as if he uses comedy to make the hard message of social injustice easier to bear. The bizarre amusement Dickens lends to his London tales is the work of an idealist who both progresses toward and resists disillusionment.[59]

While novels such as *Our Mutual Friend* and *Bleak House* sacrifice hope to truth telling, other Dickens' stories are given a romantic ending the reader wishes for, but cannot believe. Like Balzac, Dickens attempts to impress his personal vision onto his representation of Victorian London. His comedy cannot find a balance, and produces fiction that either sacrifices its hope, or becomes an unbelievable, contrived happy ending.

David Copperfield is, at best, the tale of an individual who tries to make the best of a difficult situation, and endeavors to make a place for himself in society. After David is thrown from the gentle Eden of his mother's house into the bedlam of the Murdstone's way of living, he can never forget how it once had been. His life is haunted by the discrepancy between his joyful beginnings and the reality of his tortured life under the Murdstones' care. He is tormented by the notion that he deserves better, that something once there is now missing, and he becomes 'something of a representative nineteenth century man, for whom the realm of the

[58] Chesterton, G K, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (New York, 1906), p. 190.
[59] Fanger, p. 99-100.

imaginative, the spiritual and the ideal is divorced from the realm of the pragmatic.'[60] Rather than finding a resolution that involves the past, present and future, he compensates for the rough parts of his life with an overriding sense of sentimentality, and an outlook that order can be obtained through a strict moral code of morality. In so doing, he sacrifices the reality of his daily life, which will never adhere to this code. He settles for far less than a visionary future that will resurrect the memories of a past paradise. A fuilleton from Dickens' *Sketches by Boz*, entitled 'The Gin Shop,' is heartbreaking in its truth, but offers no consolation that a solution will present itself.

> It is growing late, and the throngs of men, women, and children, who have been constantly going in and out, dwindles down to two or three occasional stragglers—cold, wretched looking creatures, in the last stage of emaciation and disease. The knot of Irish labourers at the lower end of the place, who have been alternately making hads with, and threatening the life of each other, for the last hour, become furious in their disputes, and finding it impossible to silence one man, who is particularly anxious to adjust the difference, they resort to the expedient of knocking him down and jumping on him afterwards. The man in the fur cap, and the potboy rush out; a scene of riot and confusion ensues; half the Irishmen get shut out, and the other half get shut in; the potboy is knocked among the tubs in no time; the landlord hits everybody, and everybody hits the landlord; the barmaids scream; the police come in; the rest is a confused mixture of arms, legs, staves, torn coats, shouting, and struggling. Some of the party are borne off to the station house, and the remainder slink home to beat their wives for complaining, and kick the children for daring to be hungry. We have sketched this subject very lightly, not only because out limits compel us to do so, but because if it were pursued farther, it would be painful and repulsive.[61]

[60] Kincaid, J R, *Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter*(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 168.
[61] Dickens, C, *Sketches by Boz and Other Early Papers* (London: J M Dent, 1994), p. 185.

P. J. M. Scott wonders whether Dickens can artistically present an experience artistically while 'constituting a significance,' without at the same time 'denaturing the randomness of life.'[62] Is Dickens able to organize his art into a romantically realistic portrayal of the seeming inconsistency of life, and still present an underlying significance?

Little Dorrit presents characters that are not wholly good or simply decent, but with 'tendencies which in different spheres and finding other expressions have made their society the dark negating organism it is.'[63] Even Scott admits that the vision Dickens presents all along at best offers, 'a limited personal salvation in this world.'[64] He goes on to say that, in general, 'the social outlook must remain bleak indeed.'[65] Scott believes Dickens sincerely wished to offer solace to victims of the world's injustice with his humor. However, the reality of his experience of London at times seems to overpower his personal vision for social justice. He often balances a realistic portrayal of London as he knows it with the romantic ending he wishes for, but cannot find a harmonic depiction that is both hopeful and honest. The same author who allows his good people to live on in happy eternity in our minds, in *Oliver Twist* silences his most evil criminal by hanging. Amidst the morning crowds of vendors, chattering kitchen maids and quarrelling children, on a morning that will last on in Oliver's memory, stands the black cross-beam, the 'hideous apparatus of death,' dead center in the animated city.[66] The summary chapter of *Oliver Twist* reassures his readers that Rose Fleming and Harry Maylie will be married, that Mr. Brownlow will

[62] Scott, p. 90.
[63] Scott, p. 122.
[64] Scott, pp. 203-204.
[65] Scott, p. 204.
[66] Dickens, C, *Oliver Twist* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 367.

adopt Oliver, and that Master Charles Bates will turn away from a life of thievery. His fate seems to be borrowed from a fairy tale.

> Master Charles Bates, appalled at Sikes's crime, fell into a train of reflection whether an honest life was not, after all, the best. Arriving at the conclusion that it certainly was, he turned his back upon the scenes of the hard, and suffered much, for some time; but having a contented disposition, and a good purpose, succeeded in the end; and, from being a farmer's drudge, and a carrier's lad, is now the merriest young grazier in all Northamptonshire.[67]

[67] Dickens, C, *Oliver Twist* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 367.

Critics who accuse Dickens's of exploiting comedy to convey social injustice must, at the same time, acknowledge his genius. His comedy transcends bleakness, while at the same time, portraying what it must be like to live in it. A question which seems appropriate to ask here is whether or not Dickens believes the fiction he wrote was life as it might be, or whether he felt a responsibility to provide consolation to the reader. In works where Dickens's does not focus on the grime of the city, he offers impossibly perfect outcomes. Did his imagination soften hard facts, gracing the world of life-term mill workers with reminders that the beautiful was accessible to all? In his book, *Hard Times*, Dickens alludes to a strange, indescribable presence, which cannot be accounted for within an arranged sum of facts and data. A certain fascination with the conquering of death, allusion to tales of magic and illusion, and his devotion to the forgotten working class are all symptoms of a kind of romanticism that prioritizes the consolation of the reader above honesty. Where *Our Mutual Friend* exhibits Dickens as a most just and unforgiving reporter of facts, *Great Expectations*' happy ending has been called a blasphemy against real life.

Balzac and Dostoevsky (in his earlier work) were also committed to this 'humanitarian strain' of romanticism, which raised the question of Art's ideal.[68] Should the novel be loyal to truth or to beauty? Can the novel be committed to both at once? Does Art raise expectations about the nature of our existence, and if so, is it fair to those who will never experience a life of excellence for themselves? In the fiction of Balzac and Dickens, the future cannot redeem the past and present. The voice of the narrator in the novels of Balzac and Dickens oscillates between telling a story of a world defeated by evil and telling the story of a world where humanity's

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[68] Fanger, p. 73.

deepest wish comes true. There is neither uniformity between reality and the vision, nor redemption of that reality through the realised vision, because the narrative is severed before the vision can transform the present reality.

Dirk den Hartog speaks of Dickens's unwillingness to let his adults migrate home to a painful childhood, in order to return and develop fully as individuals. Pip's *Great Expectations* are marred by his inability to reconcile his present with his past, so he remains a split man. Pip cannot reconcile his memories with his vision for the future, his 'nostalgia with adventure,' and den Hartog asks, 'Who can, after all?'[69]

The question contains a challenge that Dostoevsky's work is more than able to meet. Dickens's ideal man is created in *Pickwick*, but is ruined by societal divisions, which even benevolence cannot heal.[70] N. M. Lary, in *Dostoevsky and Dickens* points out that Dostoevsky uses Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot* to test the ideal in the real world, and to find out whether or not the ideal can transform the real. 'It was as though Dostoevsky were looking for a life-enhancing or life-saving myth, turning on the mysteries of death, sacrifice, and rebirth.'[71] Fanger believes that the romantic realists were distinguished by their conscious creation of a myth.[72] Even Peter Verkhovensky, in *The Possessed*, knows that the men of his revolutionary circle will have no goal toward which to direct their actions if they have no myth.

[69] Den Hartog, D, *Dickens and Romantic Psychology: The Self in Time in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (London: Macmillan Press, 1987), pp. 151-152.
[70] Lary, N M, *Dostoevsky and Dickens: A Study of Literary Influence* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 79.
[71] Lary, p. 83.
[72] Fanger, p. 258.

Dostoevsky presents a myriad of de-mythologizers in *The Possessed*—Kirillov tries to usurp the role of Christ to prove that all are free, Verkhovensky wants to make a society which frees all from roles based on a hierarchical government, and Shatov looks for solace in an antiquated idea of God, discarded by the revolutionaries. Lary believes that Dostoevsky's novel is about the disintegration of life after the loss of God. Stavrogin, the closest Dostoevsky ever comes to creating a character of complete and radical autonomy, illustrates in his actions the importance of the myth in a society.

Lary criticizes Dostoevsky for turning to the Church to fight the disintegration of a society faced with revolution, Lary found this limiting to the survival of late nineteenth century Russia.[73]

> 'But the contingencies of his particular time and place in history limit his understanding when he turns to more general philosophical questions in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Perhaps this was an impossible novel to write. It lies somewhere between literature and eschatology. The solutions propounded by Dostoevsky (and by other prophetic writers) are more likely to lead to a cult than to a Church; and if a cult is not what we want, the danger is that a paralysing scepticism is all that is left to us. Dostoevsky can show that we shall be happier if we assume a basic harmony of the universe; he cannot show that this assumption is right.'[74]

Dostoevsky's novel, *Notes from Underground* addresses precisely the issue of the destruction of the ideal universe, and Dostoevsky presents a caricature of the dreamer of the 1840's. 'He is tormented by dreams he can neither disavow nor realize and

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[73] Lary, p. 145.
[74] Lary, p. 147.

drawn intermittently to a reality he cannot embrace...He is condemned to a perpetual vacillation, a perpetual, impotent imbalance.'[75] Two years after writing *Notes from Underground*, Dostoevsky would carry another hero, this time a realist from the 1860's, to a similar breaking point, in order to create a new, surprising vision, which would rise from the ashes of the protagonist's broken dreams.

No one who has read Dostoevsky can claim that he writes only about people of faith. The people in his novels who agonize over the decision to accept or reject Christ are his lasting legacy to the world. Ivan Karamazov, Hippolyte, and Raskolnikov who live in a world open to the transcendent, flaunt their own disbelief. It is Dostoevsky's emphasis upon the contrast between the prosaic and the supernatural, and his ability to integrate both in his fiction which gives him the distinction of a 'romantic realist.' Within his fictional world, there is no juxtaposition of two opposite tendencies, but the drawing together of two parts of a whole. The realism in Dostoevsky's novels is built upon his vision for the redemption of the world, and without that vision, his reality would cease to exist. Dostoevsky's Christian vision, which sees a redeemed world in the world that is, validates his reality and allows the terms of romanticism and realism to co-exist.

In the novels of Balzac, Gogol and Dickens, the characters, the style of narration, and the endings seem to fall too sharply to one side or the other. Ironically, the three founding 'romantic realists' share an inability to reconcile the two terms which classify their genre. It is possible that this literary riddle has a distinctly theological answer. It is precisely because Dostoevsky's fiction was 'somewhere between

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[75] Fanger, p. 178.

literature and eschatology' that he could reconcile the two terms. I suggest that Dostoevsky's belief in the redemption of the world through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ causes him to see romanticism and realism as two vital features of universal salvation, rather than two terms imbedded in a paradoxical genre. Dostoevsky unearths a world where romanticism and realism are not competitive or compatible, but are two parts of a whole, drawn together by an event that would seem to pull them apart. Rather than literature lending unity to life, a particularity of time and place was necessary to give all of life and all of fiction the hope of a meaningful narrative. The novels of Dostoevsky see the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ as the solution to a tragedy that fiction cannot redeem.

Conclusion

Gerald L. Sittser, in his book, *A Grace Disguised*, recounts his ordeal of losing his mother, wife and young daughter in an auto accident. His book discusses how his life and faith were affected by the darkness of his pain. His initial reaction was to run from the darkness of his suffering, but his sister reminded him that the quickest way to reach the light of day was not to chase after the setting sun in the west, but to plunge eastbound into the darkness, and to meet the sunrise. He experienced not only death, but also life, in ways he had never imagined. He discovered that new life did not come after the darkness, but, rather, *in* the darkness. He 'lived in it and found within the pain the grace to survive and eventually grow.'[76] Sittser's story emphasizes neither his pain nor his triumph, but demonstrates that our painful reality is redeemed only through the darkness of Christ's death. The crucifixion of Christ, an

event that both repels and attracts the people it saves, embraces all of the darkness and all of the light this world has to offer, when seen from the perspective of the resurrection. As P. T. Forsyth, a theologian and contemporary of Dostoevsky's says in his book *The Justification of God*, 'The solution of life is death shown practically as a victory over every death of every kind.'[77] Christ's crucifixion and resurrection answer the riddle of life by overcoming the darkness *through* the darkness. Thus, the writer who is given the ability can speak about a romantic end to a painful human history.

Dostoevsky felt that hope for humankind could only be found in one act, which encompassed at once all of the world's darkness and light. Dostoevsky's characters must live through their sorrow to reach the splendor that awaits them. I suggest that because of his faith, Dostoevsky saw romanticism and realism, not as two separate aspects of literature that must learn to share a common novel, but as integral to the existence of one another. His characters learn of grace in the midst of their despair. I am not suggesting that Dostoevsky's work provides the best interpretation of how to live life with expectations and without illusions. Nothing about Dostoevsky's work makes it an easily understandable text. The title 'romantic realist' simply marks Dostoevsky as a creator of characters for whom the world's lost dreams are not the ultimate reality. While his novels do not always console the reader, they provide a key to understanding how romanticism and realism might ultimately be linked, as two parts of a unified whole, rather than just a hybrid, a paradox, a contradiction in terms, or a compromise of two separate elements. I am suggesting that Dostoevsky was a romantic realist because of his belief in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. In

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[76] Sittser, G, *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan

life, as in great works of literature, the truth of the human situation alone, without reference to any possible redemptive hope, tells only a partial story. A narrative that begins with an indiscernible God remains consistent about the character of that God, in that He far exceeds the expectations of His people. Only a Creator who brought light into the world can imagine and create a world where mourning is turned to dancing. I suggest that Dostoevsky is a romantic realist because of his faith, which allows him to aptly portray a dark world that is latent with the hope of resurrection. My aim is to display how Dostoevsky's definitively Christian eschatology allows his literature to be entirely realistic and entirely romantic.

Jurgen Moltmann observes that the hope of resurrection 'must bring about a new understanding of the world.'[78] The world can no longer be understood as the idealists' self-realized utopia. Nor can it be understood in romanticist or existentialist terms as some self-estranged hell. 'The world is not yet finished, but is understood as engaged in a history. It is therefore the world of possibilities, the world in which we can serve the future, promised truth and righteousness and peace.'[79] I intend to show how, in three of Dostoevsky's novels, *The Idiot, The Brothers Karamazov,* and *Crime and Punishment* Dostoevsky depicts a world whose people's 'horizon of expectation' transcends their world.[80]

Publishing House, 1996, p. 37.
[77] Forsyth, P T, *The Justification of God* (London: Duckworth, n.d.), p. 224.
[78] Moltmann, J, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: Bloomsbury Street, 1967), p. 338.
[79] Moltmann, p. 338.
[80] Moltmann, p. 338.

Chapter 2

'Dostoevsky's Vision of Reality'

Introduction

Representing the world both truthfully and beautifully seems to be a nearly impossible task. Perhaps Balzac and Dickens do not finally believe the world to be a beautiful place, but wish to console their readers with an encouraging picture of how the world ought to be. Dickens stops short of describing in full detail the depths of despair to which poverty drives the people of London, because he does not want to cause his readers pain, or show them something repulsive. Balzac is both entertaining and truthful, but he does not remain true to his personal vision. The comedy in their works is overcome by the suffering world. Dostoevsky would take some of their techniques and themes, but let his personal vision guide his stories.

Fanger notes that Balzac's and Dickens' personal visions were of a social nature, whereas Dostoevsky's concerns were social, but 'otherwise motivated.'[81] He would readily admit, however, that those stories were not entirely of his own making. His personal vision of not simply social redemption, but universal redemption from a depraved human existence is drawn from his eschatological Christian perspective. Dostoevsky added the strange, tragic beauty of St. Petersburg to the bittersweet comedy of the realists, and introduced a new world of people redeemed within their suffering world, rather than defeated by it.

[81] Fanger, p. 130.

Dostoevsky's surprise endings redeem the dark humor of his narratives. An example of this occurs in *Crime and Punishment*, at Marmeladov's funeral supper, where Sonya is accused of stealing, and Raskolnikov finally stands up for her. Dostoevsky intentionally leaves both the reader and Sonya in suspended agony, which is at once jarring and humorous. The scene is transformed by the surprising recovery of Sonya's innocence by Raskolnikov, when there seems to be no hope for rescue. If Sonya had been disgraced, the comical element of the scene would have seemed a mockery. The outcome welcomes laughter, because Sonya feels exuberance equal to the measure of her previous despair.

Like Balzac, Dostoevsky had his dream of a social utopia shattered against reality, and like Dickens, he learned that the city bred as much evil as kindness, but his novels never lost sight of his personal vision, and his 'dream of universal harmony never left him.'[82] Dostoevsky does not see the tragic action in his stories as final. His double-eyed vision allows him to comprehend and incorporate into his writing the ultimate redemption of an imperfect and sinful world. Dostoevsky's people are transformed and united with others by their encounters with the real world, just as he was.

While Dostoevsky was greatly influenced by the work of both Balzac and Dickens, he envisioned and wrote about a true reality, which encompassed and went beyond their natural reality. He was indebted to their fiction, upon which he based his realistic technique, but his visionary fiction allowed for a deeper reality. His Christian perspective shaped and nurtured the realistic style he learned from Balzac and Dickens, because his fiction sees in reality an overall redemptive Christian order.

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[82] Fanger, p. 168.

Practically speaking, the romantic realists' work had to hold together both the vision and reality in such a way that their readers would be informed, encouraged and entertained. The task for the romantic realist was to try to portray the world truthfully without sacrificing the beautiful vision that Art gives to life. Was the artist's duty to inform or to inspire? In a nineteenth century world that had made the novel a commodity, and criticized both romanticism and realism, Dostoevsky faced a problem common to Balzac and Dickens: how to tell a story that was the *best* truth. Not only did the story have to be truer than life, but it had to entertain as well.

Dostoevsky's Style

The young Dostoevsky was meticulous about the precise external structure of his work, but his attempts at literary perfection would later give way to a more complex and riveting fiction. Dostoevsky's early novel, *Poor Folk*, is indicative of the popular social novel, and tells the story of the afflicted lower class from their point of view. His later novel, *The Possessed*, on the other hand, incorporates the whole of Russian society, telling the story from several points of view. The later novel doesn't end tidily, as does *Poor Folk*, and his characters are a haphazard mixture of good and evil. His unsettling literature is both realistic and enthralling because it is representative of the human tableau, without evidence of a steadying author's hand.

Leonid Grossman likens Dostoevsky to an artist of 'Raphaelesque' purity, who gives in to a feverish desire to sporadically daub paint and cast shadows, thereby destroying the continuity of the painting. The 'universal and free embodiment of life' could not

be achieved without the destruction of his earlier classical principles, which adhered to the doctrine of writing life through a filter of 'tiny nets of strict literary rules.'[83] No systemization could impress the random quality of life upon the reader without the form betraying the message. Dostoevsky attempts to represent life, not in its final form, but 'in its ever-changing stages of formation, maturation and development.'[84]

Rather than seeing Dostoevsky's novels as descending from the popular penny novel, the Gothic novel, or the 'adventure novel' of the early eighteen hundreds, Grossman traces only Dostoevsky's penchant for the mysterious and the unbelievable to the romantic genre. According to Grossman, all of the major classic Russian novelists were attracted to this adventure literature in their youth. Rather than soaking up Hegel, young people of all classes spent their time pouring over the latest Parisian 'slum adventures.'[85] Unlucky fugitives, poor orphans and vicious villains characterize the romantic literature at the turn of the nineteenth century. Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* chronicles the endeavors of Melmoth to win souls to the devil in order to prolong his own life. The young Dostoevsky hungrily read about Maturin's 'rich psychology of torture,' and later, made it his own.[86] Madness, blackmail, gluttony, murder, jealous rage and underground conspiracies, drawn from both the 'penny dreadful' and daily fuilletons, serve to heighten the significance of the eternal questions he is asking.

Like Balzac, Dostoevsky intrigues his readers with the fragmented external outworking of the plot, his rising action overwhelming and consuming the story all

[83] Grossman, L, tr L Karpov, *Balzac and Dostoevsky* (London: Ardis, 1973), p. 61.
[84] Grossman, p. 62.
[85] Grossman, p. 76.
[86] Grossman, p. 73.

the way to the end. All of the action and dialogue in his novels touches upon the core idea, some abstract concept or question, the significance of which holds the various characters and random events together. Dostoevsky's signature trait, as an adolescent writer, was to imagine a world that at once threatened and substantiated its central idea. He built a web of complicated circumstances and personalities around a basic dilemma—the move from evil to innocence in the incomplete version of *The Brothers Karamazov*, the rise of the revolutionary and the fall of faith in *The Devils*, the failure of attempts at human perfection in *Crime and Punishment*, and the experiment of the ideal man in *The Idiot*. Can philosophical hypotheses work in reality if they cannot work in fiction? Dostoevsky's world of fiction is the workshop that tests theories against life. The novel of the romantics liberates ideas from the old, stagnant writing techniques. Dostoevsky successfully sifts from the cheap sensationalism of the romantic novels profound themes, and unleashes each novel's central question upon the city. Dostoevsky situates the reader within his realistic fiction, and then begins a philosophical adventure, which incorporates his personal vision.

The Vision That Shaped Dostoevsky's Reality

Dostoevsky was a physically weak man with a passionate character, who, by his own definition, went to 'extremes.'[87] He did not break under the weight of the cross, nor did he merely survive. He was transformed by his suffering and freed from it. Dostoevsky's involvement in the Petrashevsky circle illustrates the level of the young romantic's idealism, before his own fall from grace. The epileptic fits which were rumored to have begun when his father was murdered by serfs (but most certainly by

the time he was exiled), his loveless first marriage, the death of his beloved daughter and the depression of his later life would impress his work and transform his faith.

Dostoevsky, at the esteemed literary critic Belinsky's insistence, converted to atheism, disposing of what fragile childhood pietism he had left. Still, this optimistic atheist could not reject Christ. There were times when Belinsky would scream at Dostoevsky, ranting that Christ's teachings cruelly contradicted the laws of nature, but even he was touched when, as he remarked to another guest about Dostoevsky, *'his whole countenance (changed) just as though he were on the verge of breaking into tears.'*[88] Dostoevsky's acceptance of atheistic communism was rapid, whereas his subsequent discovery of Christ occurred by degrees, in the most unlikely of places, amidst the community of Russian peasants in penal servitude. It was there that the idealist and atheist revolutionary died, and the new man, formed by a process we receive only glimpses of in *The House of the Dead*, rose out of the ashes to create *Crime and Punishment*. Christ, whom Dostoevsky could never completely surrender, became the central focus of Dostoevsky's novels, beginning with this story of the fall and resurrection of humanity.

Christ found among the convicts perplexed Dostoevsky, but answered the riddle of much of his life's work. He had been blessed with fame, education and an esteemed circle of friends, yet it was amidst those paying the price for their transgressions that

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[87] Maurina, Z, *A Prophet of the Soul: Fyodor Dostoievsky*, tr C P Finlayson (London: James Clarke and Co LTD, 1940), p. 107.

[88] Mochulsky, K, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, tr M A Minihan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 119. When Belinsky caused Dostoevsky to renounce Christianity, it was a decision that even after his conversion to Chrisitianity in exile would cause him to be plagued by doubt. For his entire life, he would be chased both by questioning and God. What Mochulsky calls his 'prolonged inner tragedy' would inspire Dostoevsky to create one of the greatest and most tortured atheists in the world of fiction—Ivan Karamazov.

he felt the presence of Christ. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan Karamazov tells the story of an Inquisitor who is baffled by a love that overcomes freedom, hunger and suffering. Dostoevsky, while his dialogical style never sought to present an answer to the great riddle of Christ, felt as P. T. Forsyth did that 'whatever solved the tragedy of life, also solved all of life.'[89] Christ had to defy reason, and to answer the hope repeated again and again in the stories and myths of all peoples, who hungered after a climax to their narrative.

Dostoevsky began his writing career with the overnight success of *Poor Folk*, which was acclaimed as a sincere social commentary. Nicholas Berdyaev believes that Dostoevsky's fifth novel, *Letters from the Underground*, divides the novels of the two periods of Dostoevsky's life. He evolves from a 'psychologist' into a 'metaphysician,' and

> ceases to be a humanitarian on the old pattern and no longer has anything in common with Hugo or Sand or Dickens; he breaks definitely with the theories of Bielinsky. If he still loves and pities mankind his love has something new and tragic about it. Man more than ever holds the centre of the stage of his work, human destiny is the only thing that interests him; he is no longer treated as a superficial creature but followed into his newly discovered spiritual depths; a new human kingdom has arisen, a "dostoievskian" kingdom. Dostoievsky is a writer of tragedy; in him the unrest that is latent in all Russian literature reaches its state of highest tension: the wound dealt by the sorrowful destiny of man and his world is quick in him.[90]

Dostoevsky would never entirely abandon the idea of the social novel, or the journalistic style that he picked up writing for his brother's newspaper. Whether it

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[89] Forsyth, P T, *The Justification of God* (London: Duckworth, n.d.), p. 210.

was a conscious decision, or the pressure of editorial deadlines that altered Dostoevsky's severe ideals about writing, his stint in journalism expanded his orderly fiction to include the raw, unexplained data and unexpected events of ordinary life. He evolved the social novel to encompass a larger universe. 'A social novel, in other words, was unthinkable for him except as it touched on moral resurrection: resurrection was the rationale, the rest important but subsidiary.'[91]

Dostoevsky's characters are set in contrast to one another, both in personality and situation. In *Crime and Punishment*, the proud intellect Raskolnikov bows to the humble, suffering Sonya. In *The Idiot*, the prince goes out of his way to help the ruined Nastasya and the evil Ragozhin. Even within one heart there exists a dichotomy. In Dostoevsky's characters, the beastly and the saintly nature of humanity inhabit one person. Nicholas Zernov points out that the rough Shatov exemplifies the most selfless love and the atheist Ivan recreates the story of Christ and the Grand Inquisitor.[92] Even in the most extreme of his evil characters (Stavrogin), one finds something with which to emphathize. In his villains, Dostoevsky 'tries to find something to offset the general sinful way of life, some sort of partial justification, even a trace of a conversion to good and truth.'[93] Often, Dostoevsky illustrates the contrast of characters and situations with a play of 'Rembrandtesque lighting.'[94] Patches of light battle against the darkness and the reader does not know which will triumph, the sheaves of light or the canvas of darkness. Similarly, elements of dark and light play against one another in the hearts of his characters, in a way that allows

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[90] Berdyaev, N, *Dostoevsky* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 28.
[91] Fanger, p. 190.
[92] Zernov, N, *Three Russian Prophets: Khomiakov, Dostoevsky, Soloviev* (London: SCM Press, 1944), p. 184.
[93] Zabolotski, N A, 'Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky Today', tr E Newton, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Volume 37, p. 41-57.

one to be illuminated by the other. Zernov, like Fanger, calls Dostoevsky's style 'visionarily realistic.'[95] Dostoevsky works by contrast to illuminate what should be against what already is. His idiot speaks words of profound wisdom, his prostitute points his hero the way to salvation, and his nihilist becomes the protector of a poor, disfigured woman. He weaves his vision for the destiny of humankind into the tapestry of everyday Russian life.

At the beginning of *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov is walking the 'rope stretched between the animal and the superman—a rope over an abyss.'[96] The dangerous crossing causes Raskolnikov to turn back in fear and fall. Zenta Maurina believes that Raskolnikov, at the end of the novel, is a cardboard creature, full of the sublime harmony of surrender, bereft of the dynamic element in most of Dostoevsky's characters. Maurina does not agree with Raskolnikov's resurrection, nor does he think that Dostoevsky believes in Raskolnikov's resurrection, else he would have painted it more convincingly. Maurina sees Raskolnikov's complete submission to punishment and his total reliance upon Sonya as a compromise of reality to Dostoevsky's faith. Taken within his entire body of work, however, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* presents one step in humanity's journey toward redemption.

The Brothers Karamazov presents a different part of the journey. Alyosha begins his ministry with complete trust in God, but seemingly random, tragic events cause him to call his faith into question. Dostoevsky died before he could write the sequel to *The Brothers Karamazov*, but there is much speculation as to whether Alyosha would grow more like his atheist brother, Ivan, or like the staret, Father Zossima. Perhaps

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[94] Zernov, p. 184.

Dostoevsky's own life can provide clues about Alyosha's destiny. Dostoevsky is a resurrected man who is neither defeated by his surrender to Christ, nor bereft of that dynamic of outspokenness particular to his writing. Dostoevsky resembled Raskolnikov and Ivan in more ways than he resembled Alyosha, but he was consumed with Alyosha's innocence. Perhaps it is because he empathized with the questioning Raskolnikov and Ivan, but the devoted Alyosha, as the Christ figure of his novel, amazed him. His life before his conversion experience was similar to that of Raskolnikov, but after his conversion, his life resembled some strange combination of Ivan and Alyosha Karamazov. While in reality, he still had doubts and often gave in to his temptations (Ivan), in his heart he strove after the ideal Christian life (Alyosha).

The Reality That Supported Dostoevsky's Vision

Dostoevsky went one step further than Joseph Conrad in his idea that beauty could be found within life's hardness. Conrad, who could not give up the romanticism of another era entirely, wrote in his preface to *Within the Tides* that

> The romantic feeling of reality was in me an inborn faculty. This in itself may be a curse but when disciplined by a sense of personal responsibility and a recognition of hard facts of existence shared with the rest of mankind becomes but a point of view from which the very shadows of life appear endowed with an internal glow. And such romanticism is not a sin. It is none the worse for the knowledge of truth. It only tries to make the best of it, hard as it may be; and in this hardness discovers a certain aspect of beauty.[97]

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[95] Zernov, p. 185.
[96] Maurina, p. 141.
[97] Conrad's preface to *Within the Tides* (1915), quoted in M Allott, *Novelists on the Novel* (New York: 1959), p. 54.

It would seem that, for Conrad, at the heart of reality was despair. In Conrad's fiction, there is no possibility of redemption once a character had chosen darkness. Dostoevsky held the hope that despair was not final, and this hope drove him towards finding some goodness, some beauty, even in his most cruel characters. Dostoevsky's work would subscribe to this beauty wrought out of life's 'hardness.' Dostoevsky's belief that beauty could save the world inspired open-ended stories of beautiful but tortured people. The fierce beauty Dostoevsky contributed to the world was neither peaceful nor graspable. Mitya Karamazov lamented that

> Beauty is a terrible and awful thing! It is terrible because it has not been fathomed and never can be fathomed, for God sets us nothing but riddles. Here the boundaries meet and all contradictions exist side by side...I can't endure the thought of a man of lofty mind and heart who begins with the ideal of Madonna and ends with the ideal of Sodom. What's still more awful is that a man with the ideal of Sodom in his soul does not renounce the ideal of the Madonna and his heart may be on fire with that ideal, genuinely on fire, just as in the days of youth and innocence...The awful thing is that beauty is mysterious as well as terrible. God and the devil are fighting there and the battlefield is the heart of men.[98]

The difference between Conrad's idea of 'hard facts' and Dostoevsky's acceptance of suffering lies in Dostoevsky's belief that suffering leads to an inversion of life as humans know it. Whereas Conrad (among others) accepted 'the romantic feeling of reality' as both a blessing and a curse, Dostoevsky understood the romantic ethos to be the axis of human reality.

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[98] Dostoevsky, F M, *The Brothers Karamazov, Volume I* (London: J M Dent and Sons LTD, 1957), p. 106-107.

The spheres of romanticism and realism intersected in the work of Dostoevsky. The frenzies of maddening sorrow and absolute joy transformed scenes of provincial Russian life, echoing the melodrama of the Romanticists. While much realism sought no answers outside the natural world, and romanticism consisted of fairy-tale and fantasy, the grotesque stories of Dostoevsky set the supernatural within St. Petersburg. Dumas's musketeers will always find a means of escape from their captors, whereas Flaubert's Emma and Tolstoy's Anna will find that nothing, not even love, offers escape from life's inevitable despair. Hardy's Tess will find that life actually works steadfastly against any overall plan for human happiness. Dostoevsky's faith allows him to write of a natural world set *within* the supernatural world, where no burden of suffering is unthinkable or no hope is too incredible, because evil exists, but death has been conquered by Christ.

It is impossible to write a synopsis of Dostoevsky that does him justice. Those who have tried end up portraying him from a particular perspective that only tells half of the story. Christians and atheists alike have emphasized either his concentration on the tragic psyche, his fascination with suffering, or his riddles, which seem to provoke arguments on all sides. Dostoevsky's writings summarize the nineteenth century dilemma—humanity caught between creation and the Creator. Dostoevsky's characters seem to possess a 'fourth dimension,' because they cannot be easily assigned into a positive or a negative category. Raskolnikov, for example, gives his money to a poor family, in order to bury their patriarch properly, but he also kills a woman in cold blood for her money. Dostoevsky's characters 'stand on the edge of a precipice of crime and degradation, and yet they long for goodness and truth...they are torn between their hopes and fears. Love and hate, a readiness to help and a desire

to hurt constantly contest in them, so that no one can predict which direction they will move.'[99]

Fanger suggests Dostoevsky creates such an impressive and unforgettable St. Petersburg is because he leaves sections of the city and secrets of the city-dwellers out of their narratives. The sense of mystery, marked by 'labyrinthine streets, dark staircases and nocturnal scenes' also masks the hearts of the people Dostoevsky brings to life.

> The mythified city, like the people it contains, can only be understood if its strangeness is acknowledged first...What Dostoevsky does, however, is to incorporate all these features and take them one step further by making the individual personality the ultimate respository of mystery, the nucleus, as it were, of all these concentric circles. His characters, as I have noted are not describable in the straightforward terms that usually surface to describe the characters in Balzac, Dickens or Gogol. They are compounded of contradictions, always in flux, always liable to realize in action some potentiality hitherto dormant.[100]

In Dostoevsky's work, God, rather than the feeling self, is at the center of reality. Surrender to God is liberation from self-enclosed suffering, and this surrender leads to a world 'much bigger and grander than we are.'[101] The religion of Dostoevsky embodies 'perpetual development and active love,' with no compromise; it is a 'religion of freedom with the personality of Christ at its center.'[102]

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[99] Zernov, p. 87-89.
[100] Fanger, p. 264.
[101] Sittser, G, *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1996), p. 88.
[102] Maurina, p. 210.

Dostoevsky did not depict an ideal nineteenth-century Russia, but he created characters that sought the ideal. The beautiful and free in Dostoevsky's novels are still tormented, still tragic, but they continue to hope for resurrection. The face of Nastasya Filipovna is described in *The Idiot* as immensely scornful, and yet, 'wonderfully good-natured.'[103] Her unbearable beauty arouses Prince Myshkin's compassion, because of the evidence of suffering in her features. From an eschatological point of view, Dostoevsky leaves room in his novels for the miraculous recovery of a hurting world, in a way that will far exceed human expectation. Dostoevsky did not depict an ideal nineteenth-century Russia, but he created characters that sought the ideal. To say that Dostoevsky's work is either realistic or visionary would be to pin down an artist "too fluid, too close to life, and life can never be divided by science without a remainder; there always remains something irrational.'[104] Dostoevsky does not attempt to explain or render evil and suffering meaningful. In his fiction, he accepts the 'irrational' element of life, and places his hope in a future transformation of this present reality.

Suffering, Love and Knowledge

'I shall look at the world through tears. Perhaps I shall see things that dry-eyed I could not see.'

—Nicholas Wolterstorff

Lament for a Son

[103] Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, (London: Penguin Books, 1955), p. 108.
[104] Maurina, p. 222.

Charles Taylor describes the transformation of the Romantic vision in the nineteenth century, which carries it forward, while at the same time negating certain features.

> The premiss of realism then and now is that we somehow in the normal course of things fail to see things aright, that we grasp them only through a veil of illusion which lends them a false enhancement or significance, woven by our fears and self-indulgence. It takes courage and vision to see them as they are; but more than this, it takes the resources of art. We live surrounded by this reality but don't really see it, because our vision is shaped—and clouded—by our falsely consoling modes of representation. It takes a new, fiercely veridical portrayal to break through the veil.[105]

Taylor cites Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* as a body of work that transforms reality through its very refusal to treat life idealistically.[106] Flaubert does not try to complete or enhance the world he sees, because he does not believe, as the romantics, that there is a unity beneath the ordinary reality, waiting to be discovered. The realists' tendency to affirm the goodness of things as they are, 'the arrogation to man of powers formerly confined to God,' does not belong solely to Nietzsche, atheist doctrine and realism.[107] Taylor suggests that this tendency, within the Christian perspective, belongs to Dostoevsky.

> In fact, the notion of a transformation of our stance towards the world whereby our vision of it is changed has been traditionally connected with the notion of grace. Augustine holds that in relation to God, love has to precede knowledge. With the right direction of love, things become evident which are hidden otherwise. What is new is the modern sense of the place and power of the creative imagination. This is now an integral part of the goodness of

[105] Taylor, C, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 431.
[106] Taylor, p. 431.
[107] Taylor, p. 449.

> things, and hence the transformation of our stance and thus our outlook helps to bring about the truth it reveals.[108]

Dostoevsky depends upon God for a transforming vision of the world. According to Taylor, he believes that the ultimate sin is closing ourselves to grace out of loathing for our selves and this world. The evils of the world are projected out onto the world and away from us, and we separate from the world, because 'we don't want to see our selves as part of the evil.'[109]

According to Taylor, love gives us a new knowledge of the world and one another. Where we once saw only the bad, we now see the good within the world. Taylor calls this ability a 'miracle,' because despite all of the evil and ugliness in the world, we desire knowledge of that which is outside of ourselves, and we long to affirm its goodness.[110] Dostoevsky, rather than affirming the world's goodness, sees its evil. He hopes for a promised but unseen redemption, in spite of the evil he perceives in the world. His work holds together reality and hope because his eschatological vision shapes his reality.

Flannery O'Connor insists that Christian writers have been given the freedom to affirm the overall goodness of the world, while at the same time bringing to light its evil. 'Just how can the novelist be true to time and eternity both, to what he sees and what he believes, to the relative and the absolute? And how can he do all this and be true at the same time to the art of the novel, which demands the illusion of life?' asks

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[108] Taylor, p. 451.
[109] Taylor, p. 451.
[110] Taylor, p. 454.

Flannery O'Connor, reiterating the main question of romantic realism.[111] Instead of restraining and limiting the subject matter of the Christian novelist, the Christian narrative gives the novelist a perspective of a reality imbued with the supernatural, where anything may happen. Rather than writing only about what is uplifting and edifying to the Church body, Christian novelists are freed by their knowledge of ultimate reality, and the vision that 'the universe is meaningful' allows them to make connections never before imagined.

> The Catholic fiction writer is entirely free to observe. He feels no call to take on the duties of God or to create a new universe. He feels perfectly free to look at the one we already have and to show exactly what he sees. He feels no need to apologize for the ways of God to man or to avoid looking at the ways of man to God. For him, to 'tidy up reality' is certainly to succumb to the sin of pride. Open and free observation is founded on our ultimate faith that the universe is meaningful, as the Church teaches.[112]

Certainly Dostoevsky could not be accused of 'tidying up reality.' It is more a question of whether or not the realistic mode of his work did not betray his romantic vision. In light of the heavily tragic undertones of Dostoevsky's body of work, how can Dostoevsky be called a true *romantic* realist? Rather than projecting his personal vision into an objective reality, Dostoevsky saw the objective reality in terms of his personal vision. Dostoevsky accepted this overwhelming reality, and through his uniquely Christian perspective, was transformed by the suffering within it.

In a chapter within *The Idiot*, entitled 'My Necessary Explanation,' Hippolyte lists among his reasons for committing suicide the repugnance of death, which conquered

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[111] O'Connor, F, ed S and R Fitzgerald, 'Catholic Novelists,' *Mystery and Manners* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 178.

even the Messiah. His verbal suicide note, given to a crowded room of party-goers, reminds them of the irresistible force of death, even over Christ, as depicted in Holbein's painting 'Dead Christ.' The most reverent of all the novel's characters, Prince Myshkin, declares that Holbein's depiction of the interim between Christ's death and resurrection may cause a believer's faith to be ruined.[113] It is this very interim that is central to the Christian faith. The only act that could conquer 'this blind, dumb, implacable, eternal unreasoning force' was the death of Christ. The solution to the tragedy of each human life is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead, then humankind has the promise of eternal resurrection. Lives lived in unending sorrow, servants burdened with back-breaking work, cycles that never promise any new life and evil that penetrates through the barriers of the faithful heart seem to overshadow the promise of eternal happiness. The human race still lives in the interim between death and resurrection. The mourners, however, have 'caught a glimpse of God's new day,' and ache because they have felt, in some tragic experience, how sharp its absence is. Those who mourn are 'aching visionaries.'[114]

Without attempting to give evil meaning, Dostoevsky illustrates how unchangeable loss can still bring about personal transformation, through grace, when his characters 'transcend what lies behind and reach forward to what lies ahead, directing their energies toward changes they can make now.'[115] Sonya, from *Crime and Punishment*, and Alyosha, from *The Brothers Karamazov*, act as catalysts to their families and their communities, when tragedy would otherwise immobilize them. It is her vision

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[112] O'Connor, 'Catholic Novelists,' p. 178.
[113] Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, p. 208.
[114] Wolterstorff, N, *Lament for a Son* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), pp. 85-86.

of a future redemption that gives Sonya the strength to return to her family, despite the ridicule she endures for being a prostitute. It is his faith in Dmitri's innocence that keeps Alyosha's brother, Ivan, from despair when his brother Dmitri is accused of his father's death.

Conclusion

Fanger's work on romantic realism calls into question the responsibility of Art and the artist. Is the artist one who 'penetrates the concrete world in order to find at its depths the image of its source, the image of ultimate reality?'[116] Or does Art aid the general assumption of a temporal and spatial continuity, and use the imagination to suggest an illusion of a universal unity that isn't really there?[117] Are artists guilty of the worst kind of myth-making, in an attempt to ease the anxiety of accident and chaos in the world?

Flannery O'Connor notes that the sacred history humanity holds in common, that which gives us 'ties to the universal and the holy,' that which allows the meaning of its action to be heightened and seen under the aspect of eternity, 'is most important to the fiction writer.'[118] Iris Murdoch places the question within a moral framework when she asks, 'How *can* art tell the truth, how can it not lie a little so as to console, even to convince?'[119] She points out that Christianity provides us with a mythology, a

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[115] Sittser, G, *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1996), pp. 85-86.
[116] O'Connor, F, 'Novelist and Believer', p. 157.
[117] Murdoch, I, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992).
[118] O'Connor, 'In the Protestant South', *Mystery and Manners*, p. 203.
[119] Murdoch, p. 136.

story, images, pictures, and 'a dominant and attractive central character.'[120] According to Murdoch, Western Christianity itself might be compared with a work of art.

> Western art, so solid and so clear, has helped us to *believe*, not only in Christ and the Trinity, but in the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, innumerable saints and a whole cast of famous and well-loved scenes and persons. Christ as *Logos* is unifying priniciple and guarantor of thought, Christ as Redeemer the suffering Saviour of man from sin and horror.[121]

Are Christians guilty of suggesting an illusion of universal unity? Do Christians romanticize reality with a picture of how they wish the world could have been, if only Christ had risen from the dead? Christians place a particular, supernatural event at the heart of their objective reality, and their personal vision of redemption transforms a world of endless suffering into one of eternal purpose. Is the central belief of Christianity, that Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead to give us eternal communion with God, part of a pre-Nietzschean need to reconcile all life's loose ends into a unified narrative that will give meaning to suffering? No artist or theologian should participate in a story that they themselves do not believe. While it is doubtful whether all of the romantics believed in the stories they created, they at least *wished* for a happy outcome. The realists chronicled their life and times as conscientiously as a journalist might (or perhaps more so), but they took beauty from the world. They told a story their readers already knew, but ignored what they could not understand, or could not see. Although they believed they were affirming life as it was, without trying to project their own prejudiced wishes onto that life, perhaps their writing

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[120] Murdoch, p. 82.

neglected a glorious reality that had yet to be experienced. Their fiction mirrored a one-sided reality, seen from the point of view of the defeated.

As Taylor suggests, Dostoevsky's Christian perspective gave him a double-sided vision. He saw and experienced life from the side of fallen humanity, yet believed in the promise of a risen world, and understood his experience of reality in light of that promise. He felt the weight of the suffering world, yet saw it as transformed, through the promise of redemption. Dostoevsky was not a perfect romantic realist, but that is the point. Dostoevsky knew that a certain ambiguity was 'not an embarrassment for Christian theology,' but was rather a sign of out 'utter dependence on the grace of God.'[122] He understood the limitations of his art, but his faith allowed him to comprehend a pattern his art could realize without fully articulating.

George Steiner, over and against deconstructionists, contends that Art is something more than just the synthesis of social and political conditions. He claims that Art surpasses rational understanding and is a revelation of the transcendent. What lies beyond all human understanding and language is an otherness, a 'real presence.'[123] In direct contradiction to those who believe that all texts are impossibly interwoven in infinite numbers of interpretations, Steiner believes that while texts are not fixed, they are not completely intangible. Art's indeterminateness of meaning makes it our surest access to the otherness of life.[124] If good art alerts us to an otherness, it does so from the basis of human disunity. How can Art, which typically beautifies and unifies the world, make sense out of evil and human suffering, which are neither beautiful nor

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[121] Murdoch, p. 82.
[122] Green, G, *Imagining God* (Grand Rapids: W B Eerdmans, 1998), p. 104.
[123] Steiner, G, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 230.
[124] Steiner, G, p. 232.

whole? Tragedy, which deals with unchangeable loss, must be some sort of a contradiction, 'destroying itself as an art, while maintaining itself as an art.'[125] Pain and death and hope and triumph have promise of resolution within the Christian narrative.

> The Gospel narratives show defeat turning into victory, the triumph of suffering into death, suffering set up as the adversary of death. The frightful story of Christ's death becomes a supreme cosmic event. The terrified confused abandoned disciples turn into heroes and geniuses. The story of Christ is the story which we want to hear: that suffering can be redemptive, and that death is not the end. Suffering and death are now joined in such a sway that the former swallows up the latter? Suffering need not be pointless, it need not be wasted, it has meaning, it can be the way. The dying Christ redeems suffering itself, even beautifies it, as well as overcoming death.[126]

Towards the end of his book, *A Grace Disguised*, in a chapter he entitles 'Life Has the Final Word,' Gerald Sittser shares how his seasons of despondency cast a shadow over everything, including his faith. In the Easter story, Jesus' resurrection promises that our suffering will be transformed into joy. But that is in the future, and Sittser reminds us that 'we live in the present, which is often full of sorrow and pain.'[127] The persistence of suffering causes ambivalence in those who await the resurrection.

> We feel the pain of our present circumstances, which reminds us of what we have lost; yet we hope for future release and victory. We doubt, yet try to believe; we suffer, yet long for real healing; we inch hesitantly toward death, yet see death as the door to resurrection. This ambivalence of the soul reveals the dual nature of life. We are creatures of the dust; yet we know we were made for something more. A sense of eternity resides in our hearts. Living

[125] Murdoch, p. 122-123.
[126] Murdoch, p. 128.

> with this ambivalence is both difficult and vital. It stretches our souls, challenging us to acknowledge our mortality and yet to continue to hope for future victory—the victory Jesus won for us in his death and resurrection, a victory that awaits us only on the other side of the grave.[128]

Dostoevsky's fiction captures the tension between mortality and the 'sense of eternity (that) resides in our hearts.' Those who mourn sense the discrepancy between this present reality and a promised redemption. Their view of reality is colored by their vision, and they act according to its possibility. Dostoevsky's fiction encompasses both life's tragedy and its comedy, and allows the reader to mourn and to be joyful at what is coming. As a Christian writer, he saw the world from 'the standpoint of the central Christian mystery: that it has, for all its horror, been found by God to be worth dying for.'[129] Throughout his adult life, his novels express great doubt alongside undying faith. But as his list of novels was growing, his faith was developing in a way very compatible to romantic realism. Before the source of Dostoevsky's particular romantic realism is traced, it is necessary to provide evidence that Dostoevsky was indeed a romantic realist. I shall look at three of his novels in order to investigate the suitability of the title 'romantic realist' for a writer such as Dostoevsky. I have chosen *The Idiot*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, beginning with one of his earlier works, and ending with the last novel he ever wrote.

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[127] Sittser, G, p. 151.
[128] Sittser, p. 151.
[129] O'Connor, F, 'The Church and the Fiction Writer', *Mystery and Manners*, p. 146.

Chapter 3

The Idiot

The Idiot was written during a time of great personal affliction for Dostoevsky. He and his new wife, Anna Grigorievna were hugely in debt due to his gambling, they had lost their three-month-old daughter, his epileptic fits were becoming more and more frequent, and he was unhappy in Europe—where he had come to in order to gain back his health and money. During the eighteen months it took him to write the novel, Dostoevsky went through eight different drafts of the novel, beginning with a story that hardly resembles *The Idiot.* The first idiot was callous, self-absorbed and demonic. It wasn't until he wrote his sixth draft of the novel that Dostoevsky introduced a new, positively good idiot. He wrote a letter in January of 1868, saying:

> For a long time an idea has tortured me, but I was afraid of writing a novel about this idea because it is too difficult and I'm not up to it. But the thought is very tempting and I love it. This idea is to depict the wholly beautiful man. There's nothing more difficult to do, especially in our age.[130]

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[130] *The Notebooks for* **The Idiot**, ed. Wasiolek, E, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 5.

Dostoevsky's wife tells of a trial that greatly interested him in September of 1867. The parents of Olga Umetskaia had two boys and two girls, all of whom they shamefully abused, starved and over-worked. Their daughter Olga had made several attempts to set the house on fire, but had awakened the household before the fire had done any real damage. As a result of the trial, Olga was charged with arson, and acquitted, and the mother was given six months in prison for beating her children. According to Edward Wasiolek, Dostoevsky took cases such as the Umetsky case as confirmation that fiction could only mirror how fantastic and horrid real life could be. The writing of *The Idiot* was a quest to discover an answer that life did not hold—Olga Umetskaia turning into Nastasia Philipovna, abusing those who love her in order to punish those who have abused her, and a truly innocent man whose efforts to do good were thwarted by hearts desperate for love and revenge.

If 'art must illuminate reality,' Dostoevsky's notes for his novel showed the world to be 'unstable, fluctuating, insubstantial, fluid.'[131] While this does not completely negate what Mikhail Bakhtin would say, that Dostoevsky let his characters create his stories and find the answers themselves through dialogue, it does suggest that Dostoevsky was rather uncertain about which idea he wanted as the basis for his story. In the case of *The Idiot*, despite publisher's deadlines, in the end he chose to throw his beautiful idiot to the hungry, abused and vengeful world, to see what effect this might have. The Prince is both loved and loathed for his honesty and originality, both trusted and mocked. His friends cannot understand how his foolishness houses his wisdom, and they fear it.

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[131] *The Notebooks*, p. 7.

> "Are you going to cross my path for ever, damn you!" cried Gania; and, loosening his hold on Varia, he slapped the prince's face with all his force. The prince grew as pale as death; he gazed into Gania's eyes with a strange, wild, reproachful look; his lips trembled and vainly endeavoured to form some words; then his mouth twisted into an incongruous smile... "It's nothing! It's nothing!" said the prince, and again he wore the smile which was so inconsistent with the circumstances.[132]

The idea for *The Idiot* comes from a motif recurring in ancient Oriental and Celtic tales. The Idiot is like the 'Fool of Nature' or the 'Gaelic Great Fool,' who acts as an agent of another world 'in certain trying episodes that prove his rarer faculty and unfoolish mind.'[133] This formula, coupled with what Ernest Rhys calls that 'Western restlessness, the anxious breathless precipitancy' makes the story more believable than fantastic, taken in the context of intense cultural uprooting in Russia at the time; the Idiot, so at peace with himself, and yet with a nervous condition and given to epileptic fits was 'led to diagnose the new Russian fever with a keener eye.'[134] 'And where on earth did I get the idea that you were an idiot?' remarks Gania to the Prince. 'You always observe what other people pass by unnoticed...'[135]

The story begins with Prince Myshkin's arrival in Petersburg. He has recently been to a sanitarium in Switzerland and is back in Petersburg to begin a new life, presumably with the help of a distant relative, the matriarch of the Epanchin family. Though he is a prince, he is practically penniless, and there is much comedy derived from the fact that he has brought with him only one small parcel of clothing. There will be much laughter at his expense throughout the novel. He works as the perfect protagonist, the

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[132] *The Idiot*, p. 111.
[133] Rhys, E, Introduction to *The Idiot*, p. vii.
[134] Introduction to *The Idiot*, p. vii.
[135] *The Idiot*, p. 115.

beautiful hero, whom all of the women love but mock, because his innocence makes him ridiculous. He meets Rogojin in his compartment on the way to Petersburg, and Rogojin shows him a picture of the great beauty, Nastasia Philipovna. Rogojin intends to marry her, though she 'belongs' to a man named Totski, who took her in when her family died, only to make her his mistress at sixteen. After a time, Totski tries to take a wife, but Nastasia won't let him. He has ruined her, and she will not let him carry on with his own life. Totski takes crafty means to try to break free from Nastasia.

> He tried to tempt her in various ways to lose her heart; he invited princes, hussars, secretaries of embassies, poets, novelists, even Socialists, to see her but not one of them all made the faintest impression upon Nastasia. It was as though she had a pebble in place of a heart, as though her feelings and affections were dried up and withered for ever.[136]

The most important scene of the novel takes place at Nastasia Philipovna's house, where everyone has collected for her birthday party. She has said that she will tell Gania whether or not she will marry him at the party, so many await her decision with bated breath. What follows her quick decision not to marry Gania, aided by the Prince, is sheer bedlam. Rogojin shows up and offers to buy her for one million roubles. The Prince cries out that she must marry *him*, that he would treat her right, and that he has, in fact, just inherited a large sum of money. She throws the seventy-five thousand roubles, which Totski had intended for her if she had married Gania into the fire and dares Gania to rescue it, but he 'did not intend to rescue the money.'[137]

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[136]Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, p. 42.

She thanks the prince, but tells him that she cannot ruin his innocence as her own was ruined. She then fishes the money out of the fire, hands it to Gania (who has fainted), and departs with the ecstatic Rogojin and his one million roubles. Someone remarks that the night seems to be borrowed from Japanese legend, where, if someone was insulted, they would march to the house of their insulter, and rip their insides out before their enemy, 'doubtless, that he is having all possible and necessary satisfaction and revenge.'[138] Totski himself quietly remarks as the guests begin to leave that

> Such a woman could make anyone forget all reason—everything! Even that moujik, Rogojin, you saw, brought her a hundred thousand roubles! Of course, all that happened tonight was ephemeral, fantastic, unseemly—yet it lacked neither colour nor originality. My God! What might not have been made of such a character combined with such beauty! Yet in spite of all efforts—in spite of all education, even—all those gifts are wasted! She is an uncut diamond...I have often said so.[139]

The reader grieves with Nastasia at her situation—she was plucked when she was barely a child by a man she trusted as a father—but realizes how futile the search for a happy outcome is. After spending four years living as Totski's lover, she learns of his plans to marry another and demands that he call it off. It is, after all, in his best interests to keep society on his side. For another five years, she sits by his side in the theater box and hosts many formal dinner parties, but avoids the advances of many suitors, including Totski himself. She is pristine and ethereal, but only as is a caged bird. After she decides to make what is in her mind the selfless choice, and to run away with Rogojin, she makes his life a living hell, embarrassing him with her sexual

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[137] *The Idiot*, p. 166.
[138] *The Idiot*, p. 168.

escapades and threatening to rescind upon her promise to marry him. Rogojin begins to loathe her as much as he still loves her.

After some time, the Prince returns to Petersburg, and, with his demeanor and honesty, charms the social circle of the Epanchins. He is the type of person who could show up in a city without money, lodging or food and would instantly be taken care of by strangers. Everyone adores Prince Myshkin, and Aglaya Epanchin loves him. In the words of Dostoevsky, his gift is in 'his way of looking at the world: he forgives everything, sees reasons for everything, does not recognize that any sin is unforgivable.'[140]

Dostoevsky seeks to use Prince Myshkin as the representative of Christ on earth in the nineteenth century. In more than one place in his notes he simply writes, 'Prince Christ.'[141] The Idiot suffers the outrages of others as Christ did, and like Christ, everyone, the Epanchins, Aglaya, Gania, Rogojin, and Nastasia Philipovna all need him. When he comprehends this '*the Prince is very touched and, in his humility, frightened…*' for this humility 'is the most terrible force that can ever exist in the world!'[142] The Idiot sees great affliction, and can '*do a little*,' but '*has only the slightest effect* on their lives.'[143] Prince considers himself incapable of any unparalleled action, and he is figuratively and literally impotent. His illness has left him incapable of the physical act of sex, by his own admission. So, his offer of

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[139] *The Idiot*, p. 169.
[140] *The Notebooks*, p. 165.
[141] *The Notebooks*, p. 198, 201. Wasiolek notes that after the words 'Prince Christ,' in the second instance, the following names are inscribed: "The humble Abbot Zosima, Vasili the Great, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, the Gospel of John the Theologian."
[142] *The Notebooks*, p. 165, 193.
[143] *The Notebooks*, p. 193. Dostoevsky remarks in this sequence of notes that 'everything he might have done and undertaken perishes with him.'

marriage to Nastasia Philipovna is not given in the context of physical love, but because he is moved by 'a feeling of extraordinary Christian love.'[144]

It is strange that Dostoevsky likens his Idiot to a Sphinx rising from its ashes into glory, because that is not how the story of his Prince ends. His Prince provides the perfect foil to Christ. Where Christ is omnipotent and confident, the Idiot is impotent and humble. All the good the Prince seeks to do is thwarted—Nastasia is driven into the arms of Rogojin, Aglaya Epanchin's life is nearly destroyed by the Prince's indecision, and those men who take him into their council are not redeemed—whereas Christ realizes throughout his ministry that his actions will have positive ramifications upon the entire world.

Though it seems at first queer, the Prince's uncanny ability to predict the future fits perfectly with his personality. He is the fool who sees what the wise cannot. He shows up to Nastasia's birthday party uninvited, without knowing why, but knows he must be there—he gives her answer to Gania and thus changes the story irrevocably. He knows that Rogojin has the intention of murdering—either him or Rogojin's beloved Nastasia, but he does not want to believe it. In his mind, Rogojin is not capable of committing such an evil.

> Among all the incidents of the day, one recurred to his mind to the exclusion of the rest; although now that his self-control was regained, and he was no longer under the influence of a nightmare, he was able to think of it calmly. It concerned the knife on Rogojin's table. "Why should not Rogojin have as many knives on his table as he chooses?" thought the prince, wondering at his suspicions, as he had done when he found himself looking into the

[144] *The Notebooks*, p. 169.

> cutler's window. "What could it have to do with me?" he said to himself again, and stopped as if rooted to the ground by a kind of paralysis of limb such as attacks people under the stress of some humiliating recollection.[145]

This passage precedes the Prince's severe epileptic fit, which saves him from falling under Rogojin's knife. It was almost as though the Prince's pre-epileptic tremors allowed him to see the world with supernatural clarity for just a moment. The Idiot feels just as strongly as Dostoevsky that someone will die. Dostoevsky's remarks in nearly every sequence of notes that either Nastasia Philipovna or the Prince shall die. It doesn't seem that he feels there is a way to redeem the story without a death, but this is not a resurrection story, where death brings with it new life. This is a story of the undoing of a woman—Nastasia Philipovna, and she will take part of the Prince's innocence to the grave with her. Just as the Epanchins learn that he is in the process of remaking Nastasia Philipovna, 'resurrecting her soul,' she runs away.[146] Despite his best intentions and efforts, there is something malignant working against the Prince's benevolence. Dostoevsky himself remarks that the main problem has to do with the Idiot's character. Anything that could have come to maturity in the Idiot is 'extinguished in the tomb.'[147] Like Holbein's 'Dead Christ,' The Idiot's potential will be 'extinguished' by human weaknesses, frailties and ultimately, by death.

If one were to take into consideration only the novel *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky would not seem to be a romantic realist. That he is a realist cannot be contradicted, considering that his story is based upon one of the most gruesome court cases in Russia at the time. He tells the tale of a perfect fool born into an afflicted world convincingly.

[145] *The Idiot*, p. 222, 223.
[146] *The Notebooks*, p. 198.
[147] *The Notebooks*, p. 203, 204.

Dostoevsky could have married the fool to Nastasia Philipovna, or better yet, to Aglaya Epanchin, but he knew that any such fairy tale ending would be too good to be true. The Prince could no more have guaranteed Nastasia happiness than he could have wed Aglaya without growing a destructively guilty conscience about Nastasia. The conclusion is anything but a happy medium. In this case Dostoevsky desired 'reality above everything,' and confined himself only to the facts.[148] In his own words,

> We recognize that nothing different could have happened to the Idiot. Let us bring to an end the story of a person who has perhaps not been worthy of so much of the reader's attention—we agree as to that...It is true perhaps that we have a different conception of reality, a thousand thoughts, prophecy—a fantastic reality. It may be that in the Idiot man is visible in a truer light. Furthermore, we admit that we may be told: "That's all very well, you are right, but you haven't succeeded in presenting the thing, in justifying the facts, you are a bad artist." But as to that, of course, there's nothing to be done.[149]

While the romantic elements of his realism are hard to find in this novel, it is chilling in its portrayal of the fool's dilemma. Caught between the world in which he lives and a beautiful place that only he belongs to, the idiot must love without malice those who do wrong and attempt to do the little he can to help. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the conclusion of the novel, where he and Rogojin lie in each other's arms, in what Wasiolek describes as a 'lyrical and deathly still-life,' beside the body of Nastasia Philipovna, whom Rogojin loves and has just killed.[150]

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[148] *The Notebooks*, p. 227.
[149] *The Notebooks*, p. 227.
[150] *The Notebooks*, p. 228.

Dostoevsky could be considered a 'romantic' realist from the point of view that he tried to see a vision to its finish in the novel. He was obsessed with representing a beautiful, wholly perfect human. In this, he has succeeded. His Prince Myshkin is all at once bashful, gentlemanly, courteous, honest, humble, self-sacrificing and innocent. But his prince is ridiculous in his innocence, he is mocked and he is not taken seriously. His prince is powerless to stop the destruction of those he loves, and while he acts as a catalyst in the lives of the women, his hope is the undoing of them.

As Dostoevsky continued to write, his vision for the novel became more cohesive with the text. The next chapter will explore how *Crime and Punishment* improved upon *The Idiot*, in that Sonya is a more convincing Christ-figure. Though the ending of *Crime and Punishment* betrays the genre of romantic realism to a certain extent, Sonya saves the novel from a purely romantic ending.

Chapter 4

Crime and Punishment

After his mock execution in 1849, Dostoevsky was sent to the Omsk penal settlement for four years of manual labor, followed by exile as a common soldier in Siberia. The imprint of these years of labor and servitude were to be found in *Crime and Punishment*, and to greatly influence the spiritual course of his life. He published *Notes from the House of the Dead* in 1860-62, which is a fictional account of his imprisonment and servitude. Whereas *Notes from the House of the Dead* looks at the inhumanities suffered by transgressors of the law, *Crime and Punishment* offers a look at the philosophical and spiritual ramifications of transgressing moral law.

Political prisoners were treated as common criminals; Dostoevsky found himself amongst child-killers, thieves, and unrepentant murderers. These experiences confirmed the view of his stories from the 1840s, those that told of the 'dark and irrational wellsprings at the heart of human nature.'[151] His experiences taught him that human progress and social change were powerless to redeem these villains, and that only a spiritual awakening could bring about transfiguration. Dostoevsky kept with him a copy of the New Testament, which had been thrust into his hands by

[151]Leatherbarrow, W J, Introduction to *Crime and Punishment*, p. xiii.

someone in the crowd on his way to his mock execution. The Dostoevsky who began his Siberian imprisonment as a political conspirator, devoted to reform and the destruction of the Tsarist regime, left his prison a more conservative writer with a 'religious mission.'[152]

Russia of 1860 had changed just as much as Dostoevsky had. After the embarrassing Crimean War, it was the hope of Russia that Alexander II would reform a very corrupt and oppressive autocracy. It was the desire of both radicals and many traditionalists that he would free the Russian peasantry from serfdom. Novels and newspapers were correspondingly sympathetic to the public's concern. Dissenting minorities within the Russian intelligentsia helped to create various literary journals, which were widely read. A certain radical section of the Russian educated, described as 'impatient, rude and aggressive,' and 'inhibited by neither the tolerance nor the vested interests of the older generation of liberal gentry'—'the new man'—demanded a new society, which rejected past tradition and ancient morality.[153]

Opposing *The Contemporary*, a journal written for 'the new man,' *Time* attempted to reconcile factions of Russian intelligentsia, the radicals and the conservatives, the atheists and the devout, the peasants and the aristocracy. The premise of *Time* was that the key to understanding Russian national and religious identity was the Russian peasant, and that the intellectuals should seek their roots in the 'soil of native Russia.'[154] Dostoevsky co-edited the journal with his brother, and *Time*'s ideology greatly influenced all of his great works. The Russian peasant seems to remind all of

[152]Introduction to *Crime and Punishment*, p. xiii.
[153] Introduction to *Crime and Punishment*, p. xiv.
[154] Introduction to *Crime and Punishment*, p. xv.

Dostoevsky's great protagonists of their ties to the past and their moral responsibility to the future.

Crime and Punishment addresses the question of the old liberal generation to the 'new man,'—is any crime forgivable if it is for the greater good? In Russian, 'crime' literally means 'stepping over,' and in this novel, Dostoevsky explores 'human nature when it oversteps the limits by convention, law and rationality.'[155] References to 'half-baked ideas that are in the air' indicate that Raskolnikov's crime was influenced by the utilitarianism of the rational Chernyshevsky, the spokesperson for the 'new man' of the sixties.

W. J. Leatherbarrow believes Dostoevsky's intention that his protagonist should discover 'unsuspected and unanticipated feelings' that 'destroy his convictions that a murder may be justified on the basis of the greater good of the greater number' provides evidence that this novel was written in opposition to the morality of the nihilists.[156] The concept for the novel began with a letter to the editor of the journal *Russian Herald* stating:

> A young man, sent down from university, of middle-class origins and living in extreme poverty, through thoughtlessness and some shaky notions, having come under the influence of some of those strange, 'half-baked' ideas that are in the air, has decided to break out of his appalling situation in one go. He decides to kill a certain old woman, a titular councillor's wife...He decides to kill her, to rob her in order to improve the fortunes of his mother, who is living in the country, to save his sister, who lives as a paid companion on a landowner's estate, from the lascivious attentions of the head of that landowning family,

[155] Introduction to *Crime and Punishment*, p. xvi.
[156] Introduction to *Crime and Punishment*, p. xviii.

> attentions which threaten her with ruin, to finish his course, go abroad and then for the whole of the remainder of his life to be honest, firm and resolute in the discharge of his 'humane debt to mankind.'[157]

Raskolnikov, the student, plans a heinous crime against an old woman and rationalizes his act by using Chernyshevsky's argument. He is not, after all, committing a crime against humanity, but is acting in the interests of the greatest number of people.

> This would, of course, 'expiate his crime,' if indeed the word crime can be applied to such an act, directed against a deaf, stupid, wicked, ill old woman, who herself does not know why she lives and who might well die anyway within a month...He passes almost a month after this before the final catastrophe. No one suspects him, nor could they. And here the whole psychological process of the crime unfolds.

The idea itself is a simple attack on the radical intellectuals of the sixties, and would have been remembered only for its stance on rational utilitarianism, were it not for 'the mysteries of the artistic process,' which blended Dostoevsky's polemical premise into an 'altogether more imaginative and stimulating concoction.'[158] What is remembered about Dostoevsky's work is not so much the idea at the start of the story, but that quality of investing the story with 'universal meaning,' and allowing it to 'transcend the particularities of its conception.'[159]

> Insoluble questions confront the murderer, unsuspected and unanticipated feelings torment his heart. God's truth and the earthly law take their toll, and he ends by being *compelled* to give himself up. Compelled, even if this means dying in prison, to rejoin his fellow men.

[157] Introduction to *Crime and Punishment*, p. xvi, xvii.
[158] Introduction to *Crime and Punishment*, p. xix.
[159] Introduction to *Crime and Punishment*, p. xix.

> The feeling of isolation and separation from mankind, which he experienced as soon as the crime was committed, wear him down. The law of justice and human nature take their toll and destroy his convictions, almost without resistance. The criminal himself decides to undergo suffering in order to redeem his crime.[160]

Raskolnikov's personality is an enigma, in which the reader is trapped. As the story develops, it appears that Raskolnikov may have other reasons for having committed his crime, much more complicated than his initial motive. He discusses his article on crime with the investigator Porfiry Petrovich, and it lays out almost prophetically the scenario from Raskolnikov's own life.

> On the one hand you have a stupid, meaningless, worthless, wicked, sick old crone, no good to anyone and, on the contrary, harmful to everyone, who doesn't know herself why she's alive, and who will die on her own tomorrow...On the other hand, you have fresh, young forces that are being wasted for lack of support...A hundred, a thousand good deeds and undertakings that could be arranged and set going by the money that old woman has doomed to the monastery! Hundreds, maybe thousands of lives put right; dozens of families saved from destitution, from decay, from ruin, from depravity, from the venereal hospitals—all on her money. Kill her and take her money, so that afterwards with its help you can devote yourself to the service of all mankind and the common cause: what do you think, wouldn't thousands of good deeds make up for one tiny little crime?[161]

Raskolnikov believes that humanity is divided into the *supermen*, who are intellectually superior, and may transgress human moral law in order to accomplish goals that will better humanity, and the *lice*, the materials used to accomplish goals and therefore bound to moral laws. Raskolnikov is haunted by the question of self-

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[160] Introduction to *Crime and Punishment*, p. xvi, xvii.

identity—is he a *superman* or a louse? Can he commit cold-blooded murder for the good of his family, and ultimately, for the good of the universe? Is the murder of Alyona Ivanovna a test to prove his superhuman quality, an act to prove his own greatness? The act does not prove his superhuman significance, nor does it justify itself; he ends up giving the money he has taken to others. All it succeeds in doing is ostracizing him from society.

After a long journey of torturous guilt, loneliness and despair, Raskolnikov is granted redemption through his confession and punishment in penal servitude. Some critics view his spiritual rebirth at the end of the novel as a way of cheapening the harrowing psychological dilemma of the first several hundred pages. Many people feel that it is Dostoevsky's own pat answer to a complicated question, 'a desperate effort to nudge his hero into God's camp,' and a 'pious lie.'[162]

Dostoevsky had originally planned the novel to be in first-person. This would have been difficult, because while readers would have been privy to Raskolnikov's hidden thoughts, it would have neglected all those details outside of Raskolnikov's sphere of experience. Raskolnikov should then have been present at every event that was important to the plot, or at least should have heard of it in such depth that he was able to describe it in great detail.

> Such restrictions compelled Dostoevsky to try something new—a selectively omniscient narrator, able occasionally to witness events Raskolnikov cannot, but who is for the most part compelled to share the subjective uncertainty of the hero himself. The choice of this

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[161] Dostoevsky, F M, tr. R Pevear and L Volokhonsky, *Crime and Punishment* (London: Everyman's Library, 1993), p. 65.
[162] Introduction to *Crime and Punishment*, p. xxi.

> technique allowed Dostoevsky to blur the very nature of perception in *Crime and Punishment*. The function of the narrator as merely another confused participant in the fictional world inevitably raises questions about the way he presents such fundamental features of that world as time, space, events and characters. Put more simply, we cannot trust what we appear to encounter in this novel. Our proximity to Raskolnikov's subjective and indistinct vision means that if he is confused, then we are confused; if he does not know what is dream and what is reality, then we cannot know. We are rarely afforded the opportunity to measure his experience against more objective criteria; we are thus compelled to participate in an intensely subjective world, which is arguably closer to our own experience of life than the measured narrative objectivity of other realist novelists.[163]

There is no objectivity within the mind of Raskolnikov, just as there is no sense of the time or space. In Raskolnikov's mind, two weeks seem to stretch into an eternal hell, and his bedroom becomes a dark, muggy prison. Raskolnikov is enclosed by his own terrifying guilt, and it closes around his heart, even when he is walking down the back-alleys and winding streets of St. Petersburg. Through Raskolnikov's subjective view of the world, the reader is introduced to the secondary characters of the novel, who visit Raskolnikov, one after another.

The secondary characters are all seen through the perspective of the hero's schizophrenic thought processes. It is never certain whether these personalities are themselves unstable or whether Raskolnikov has a warped perception of them. They tend to be extreme caricatures in some instances, as if Raskolnikov has already denounced some in his mind as 'lice' while others have risen to the status of 'superman.' Leatherbarrow believes that both the mistreated Lizaveta and Raskolnikov's own weak mother stand at one end of the spectrum, while the cruel and

[163] Introduction to *Crime and Punishment*, p. xxii.

calculating Alyona and his resolute and incorruptible sister Dunya stand at the other, 'echoing' the hero's dualistic theory.[164] Leatherbarrow goes on to say that the nasty landowner Svidrigailov and the gentle Sonya are incapable of being relegated to one of Raskolnikov's two categories.

> Each of these characters quickly loses the quality of "otherness", in the sense of a separate and objective identity, and they become symbols of the choices confronting the hero. Svidrigailov embodies the qualities of the Napolean, albeit in the form that Raskolnikov finds loathsome. He possesses the same moral freedom and indifference to the conventions of law and morality that mark out the superman. He regards others as disposable means for the realization of his designs, and it becomes clear that he has played some part in the deaths of his wife and servant. Raskolnikov is inevitably drawn to him, and the fact that his distaste for Svidrigailov grows in the course of the novel is just one example of the "unsuspected and unanticipated feelings" Dostoevsky planned for his hero in the aftermath of the crime.[165]

Sonya is Svidrigailov's perfect foil; Raskolnikov is drawn to her with the same intensity but in the opposite direction. Where Svidrigailov is haughty, she is humble, and where he is selfish and impatient, she is the unblemished sacrificial lamb who is patiently and willingly sacrificed for her family. Her suffering and calm accepting of the situation provide a challenge to Svidrigailov's detachment and radical self will. Sonya listens to Raskolnikov's confession with the same compassion and straightforwardness that one would expect from Christ, and it is one of the only scenes in the novel that is not colored by the exaggerated inner-workings of Raskolnikov's mind.

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[164] Introduction to *Crime and Punishment*, p. xxiii.

> 'What to do!' she exclaimed, suddenly jumping up from her place, and her eyes, still full of tears, suddenly flashed. 'Stand up!' (She seized him by the shoulder; he rose, looking at her almost in amazement.) 'Go now, this minute, stand in the crossroads, bow down, and first kiss the earth you've defiled, then bow to the whole world, on all four sides, and say aloud to everyone: "I have killed!" Then God will send you life again. Will you go? Will you go?'[166]

The scene indicates Raskolnikov's choice—confess and be forgiven or live with the torment and die a self-possessed, Napoleonic figure. Dostoevsky was not completely sure what Raskolnikov's decision would be. His notebooks suggest that perhaps he might have followed Svidrigailov 'down the path of moral independence, despair and eventually suicide.'[167]

Raskolnikov very nearly gives himself away at many points throughout the novel, and he subconsciously longs for absolution from his crime while at the same time running away from its consequences. It has been argued that the magistrate Porfiry Petrovich is merely a figment of Raskolnikov's imagination, conjured up to psychologically trick the hero into confessing. Porfiry Petrovich relentlessly pursues him, checking up on him at home and with his friends. Raskolnikov himself 'provokes suspicion,' however, by taunting members of the police with a confession, by making flippant comments about the murders, and by revisiting the home of Alyona and Lizaveta after the crime.

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[165] Introduction to *Crime and Punishment*, p. xxiii.
[166] *Crime and Punishment*, p. 420.
[167] Introduction to *Crime and Punishment*, p. xxiv; it is Leatherbarrow's belief that Raskolnikov's eventual redemption and resurrection were not only intended to give the story a highly Christian moral, but also to charge the story with 'positive energy' which would sway the hearts of the readers of *The Contemporary*.

> The way Raskolnikov is so attracted by the lure of capture and punishment should alert us to the possibility that Porfiry Petrovich's omniscience might exist only in the hero's tormented mind, and that this character, like so many of the others, is a dislocated fragment of the criminal's consciousness, stripped of his own identity and obliged to play out the whims of his manipulator. The careful reader will readily identify several occasions when Porfiry's speech and thought patterns reflect uncannily those of Raskolnikov himself, and all will question the detective's strange "disappearance" from the novel after he has finally elicited from his quarry an admission of guilt.[168]

Many realists don't see Dostoevsky's work as realistic, but rather as fantastic and melodramatic. His work is considered to be unbelievable, impossible and repulsive by readers and critics alike. *Crime and Punishment* was dismissed as a 'melodramatic penny-dreadful' and *The Spectator* called *The Idiot* 'so-called realism which consists in a display of deformities, more or less hideous, dragged forth and paraded for the public to gloat over.'

> Such views are far removed from Dostoevsky's own accounts of his artistic aims and achievements. He certainly recognized that, unlike many other realistic novelists, he avoided in his works strict verisimilitude and a preoccupation with everyday trivialities, preferring instead to concentrate upon abnormal characters in extreme situations. But he defended this choice, conceding that "I have entirely different notions of reality and realism from those of our realists and critics", and arguing that "what most people regard as fantastic and exceptional is sometimes for me the very essence of reality". In a comment in his notebooks, written towards the end of his life, he went even further, declaring: "I am a realist in a higher sense; that is, I depict all the depths of the human soul." [169]

[168] Introduction to *Crime and Punishment*, p. xxiv, xxv.
[169] Introduction to *Crime and Punishment*, p. xxvi.

To understand Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* as romantically realistic, it is necessary to cite a passage from Sonya and Raskolnikov's first meeting alone, before the scene of Raskolnikov's almost contrived confession. It is not the protagonist of the novel who catches glimpses of eternal joy within a private, very real hell, but Sonya. In *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky has managed to do what he could not in *The Idiot.* Raskolnikov asks himself how Sonya had been able to withstand social stigma, isolation and degradation for so long without losing her mind or attempting to drown herself. 'But can it be true?' he wonders to himself. 'Can it be that the pulling has already begun, and that she has been able to endure so far only because vice no longer seems so loathsome to her?'

> With a new, strange, almost painful feeling, he peered at that pale, thin, irregular, and angular little face, those meek blue eyes, capable of flashing with such fire, such severe, energetic feeling, that small body still trembling with indignation and wrath, and it all seemed more and more strange to him, almost impossible. "A holy fool! A holy fool!" he kept saying within himself.[170]

Prince Myshkin looked upon the world with eager, innocent eyes and could not ease its suffering. Sonya sees the world from a child-like point of view, not in terms of her experience of it, but in terms of her confident anticipation of better days. Raskolnikov is mystified by a woman who, having lost her dignity and honor *in vain*, continues to live expectantly. Sonya's source of strength does not come from an ignorant trust in humanity (Prince Myshkin) or a Damascus road conversion (Raskolnikov), but from a tattered book, which holds miracles of the dead being raised.

[170] *Crime and Punishment*, p. 323, 324.

> Raskolnikov partly understood why Sonya was hesitant to read to him, and the more he understood it, the more rudely and irritably he insisted on her reading. He understood only too well how hard it was for her now to betray and expose all that was *hers*. He understood that these feelings might indeed constitute her *secret*, as it were, real and long-standing, going back perhaps to her adolescence, when she was still in the family, with her unfortunate father and her grief-maddened stepmother, among the hungry children, the ugly shouts and reproaches. [171]

Sonya has a resilient hope despite her circumstances, that, unlike the Prince from *The Idiot*, she understands to be very grim. Her grim circumstances, however, are not her ultimate reality; Sonya ascribes to a higher sense of reality than her present situation dictates. Her reliance on Christ and the possibility of miracles is as concrete as her adolescent experience of extreme poverty and neglect.

> She was approaching the word about the greatest, the unheard-of miracle, and a feeling of great triumph sounded in it and strengthened it. The lines became confused on the page before her, because her sight was dimmed, but she knew by heart what she was reading. At the last verse: "Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind..." she lowered her voice, conveying ardently and passionately the doubt, reproach, and reviling of the blind, unbelieving Jews, who in another moment, as if thunderstruck, would fall down, weep, and believe... "And *he*, *he* who is also blinded and unbelieving, he, too, will now hear, he, too, will believe—yes, yes! Right now, this minute," she dreamed, and she was trembling with joyful expectation.[172]

Sonya's strength carries the novel to its Epilogue, which would otherwise seem too simple and sweet. It is not the action of story, the sub-plots of murdered wives and the 'new man's' rise to power that grips the reader, but the meek Sonya, who cannot

[171] *Crime and Punishment*, p. 326.

be put into one of Raskolnikov's categories and will not be forced to recant. Her reading of the story of Lazarus sheds some light upon the source of her fervent hope for a new life.

> 'Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. *And he that was dead came forth...*'[173]

Raskolnikov, who marvels at Sonya's faith, but cannot understand it, challenges her trust in light of her ruined life. He asks her to consider a more realistic and instant remedy to her own suffering—death by drowning. She remains the 'perfect fool' to the end of the novel, all too well aware of the evil shadow over the world and the gravity of her own sin, but with a sense of the unity outside of the finite realm that others cannot see. 'And what would I be without God?' she answers Raskolnikov. 'He does everything!'[174]

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[172] *Crime and Punishment*, p. 327.
[173] *Crime and Punishment*, p. 328.
[174] *Crime and Punishment*, p. 324.

Chapter 5

The Brothers Karamazov

The Brothers Karamazov was Dostoevsky's last novel, and the *denoument* of his entire life's work. Fragments of phrases, dialogue, characters and great ideas found within his notebooks, his diary and his novels all reappear in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Literary critics and psychologists alike—from Fish to Freud—have suggested that the duel between father and son for the love of a beautiful woman, the parricide, child abuse, loving and neglectful parents, the studied evolution of sibling relations and family narrative of epic proportions began with early trauma in Dostoevsky's own life. After his mother's death when he was just a child, he endured child abuse at the hands of his father (subsequently killed by serfs), the death of his tormenting wife, his favorite brother Mikhail, destruction of early radical ideals by years of hard labor, epileptic fits, the loss of his young daughter, and a severe addiction to gambling.

Robert Belknap has written an in-depth study of Dostoevsky's sources for *The Brothers Karamazov*, and suggests that Dostoevsky had a Shakespearean 'negative capability' of creating works under the pressure of deadlines that did not completely

'exhaust' the potential of a character, story or theme.[175] He would return to these images and continue to use them until they were of no longer of any use to him. Ivan Karamazov bears a striking resemblance to Raskolnikov, Svidrigailov, Rogojin and Stavrogin all are 'reworked' in the sensual Mitia Karamazov, and Prince Myshkin is famously transformed into a grander and more potent Alyosha Karamazov.

Like his diaries and notes, Dostoevsky's narrative is complex and confusing, though the plot is fairly straightforward. Fyodor Karamazov, a disgustingly selfish man with a strangely charismatic nature, has three legitimate sons: Dmitri (the sensualist), Ivan (the radical and atheist), and Alyosha (the pure novice). He also may or may not have one illegitimate son, Smerdyakov, by the 'idiot' girl, Lizaveta, but whether or not Smerdyakov is his son is open to speculation. Perhaps Dostoevsky himself did not know. The action of the novel races through *The Brothers Karamazov* in such a way that one doubts whether even Dostoevsky had full control over the outcome.

Fyodor and Dmitri fight over ownership of the beautiful Grushenka, and shortly afterwards, Fyodor is killed. Dmitri is the prime suspect, and while no one is certain who has committed the crime, it seems that Dmitri will be blamed for it. The court case itself is equal to any blockbuster courtroom drama and takes up a good deal of space in the book, but there are also several sub-plots. Katerina, a proud and beautiful aristocrat, borrows money from Dmitri to save her father's life, and now, though she loves Ivan, feels she must become Dmitri's wife. Dmitri and Grushenka are in love, and she is now entangled in the murder case. Katerina, Grushenka's nemesis, is

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[175] Belknap, R, L, *The Genesis of* **The Brothers Karamazov***: The Aesthetics, Ideology, and*

called forward to testify against Dmitri in the murder trial. While Alyosha is in disbelief that Dmitri could be framed for the murder, Ivan appears more sceptical. Ivan and Alyosha are involved in an academic and theological debate that lasts for the entire novel. Though Alyosha does not bend under the force of Ivan's argument in *The Brothers Karamazov*, it is uncertain whether he would have been consistently pious in the sequel. Had Dostoevsky lived to write the sequel, Alyosha would have undergone a temptation in the wilderness similar to that of Christ's.

Running through the novel are questions about the suffering of children and theodicy. These questions are eventually brought to life through the events that transpire in the course of the novel. Like *Hamlet* and *Crime and Punishment*, the story is woven into a pattern of 'thought and sensation,' depicting the flesh struggling with the spirit and the spirit struggling with the flesh.[176]

The Karamazov brothers all represent different philosophies in nineteenth century Russia. Dmitri is passionate, lustful, and actively demonstrates his will-to-live. Ivan represents the intellectual, and 'scientific' man, who has no faith, but is tormented by his doubt. Alyosha is the 'foil' to his brothers' greed and self-doubt, created to dispute destructive, hereditary tendencies. Fyodor, their father, is considered by Garnett to be a 'triumph of characterisation,' completely motivated by his own diabolic hunger for worldly goods.

> The depths of human nastiness, of piggish depravity, of heartless malice, of spiritual baseness, no less than of simmering sensuality, are incarnated in old Fyodor, and yet so

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Psychology of Making a Text (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1990), p. 51.
[176] Introduction to *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. vi.

> strongly are his roots planted in earth that we sympathise not indeed with his acts or words but with his fierce lust of life. He, the sinner, is judged indeed but is not cast out. There is something of epic force in the robust self-sufficingness of this terrible old buffoon.[177]

Smerdyakov, the valet (and 'son' of Fyodor and Lizaveta), presents the murder case with a suspicious secondary suspect, and the novel with a disturbing personality that seems to throw the Karamazov family into chaos. Dostoevsky's work is filled with disclosures of family secrets, negations of such gossip, and general confusion for the characters and the reader. It is only after several hundred pages that the ambiguity of Katerina's feelings towards the brothers is cleared up; her heart, Alyosha's loyalty and Dmitri's innocence are the only certainties the reader will ever know. While Ivan descends further into spiritual darkness, and Dmitri's accusers mercilessly seal his fate, Dostoevsky is diabolically exploring the question of innocent children suffering.

The young Ilusha dies just two days before the trial wraps up and Dmitri is sentenced to penal servitude or one-way passage to America, both fates worse than death for Dmitri. Ilusha's burial scene wraps up this first part of what Dostoevsky intended to be a series of novels on the Karamazovs. In the Epilogue, Dostoevsky strikes 'the harmonising note of joy and hope.'[178] Alyosha comforts Ilusha's boyhood friends, in much the same way as Father Paissy had comforted him when his beloved Father Zossima died. His eulogy for Ilusha, while focusing on the things of this earth, is concerned with everlasting significance. He speaks with those who have been left behind about eternal memory.

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[177] Introduction to *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. viii.
[178] Introduction to *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. viii.

> Let us remember how we buried the poor boy at whom we once threw stones, do you remember, by the bridge? And afterwards we all grew so fond of him. He was a fine boy, a kindhearted, brave boy, he felt for his father's honour and resented the cruel insult to him and stood up for him...But however bad we may become—which God forbid—yet, when we recall how we buried Ilusha, how we loved him in his last days, and how we have been talking like friends all together, at this stone, the cruellest and most mocking of us—if we do become so—will not dare to laugh inwardly at having been kind and good at this moment! ...Well, and who has united us in this kind, good feeling which we shall remember and intend to remember all our lives? Who, if not Ilusha, the good boy, the dear boy, precious to us for ever![179]

Where *The Idiot*'s hero sympathizes with the children, yet finds himself powerless to better their situation (an example is Ippolyte, the troubled, dying youth), Alyosha empathizes with the boys who have lost a friend. He too has loved and lost Father Zossima, and Dmitri as well, in a manner of speaking. He finds words for the bereaved that are not particularly articulate or reverent, but that remind the children of Ilusha's significance to them. This is no raising of Lazarus from the dead, but Alyosha, upon the father's prompting, confirms Ilusha's continued presence in their lives.

Is Alyosha a more convincing and effectual Christ figure than Sonya from *Crime and Punishment*? It should first be ascertained whether or not Dostoevsky was attempting to create a Christ-like character in his novels. Striking evidence of this can be found in Dostoevsky's correspondence with Strachov. In a letter dated March 18th, 1869, he writes:

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[179] *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 438, 439.

> Russia must reveal to the world her own Russian Christ whom as yet the people know not and who is rooted in our native orthodox faith. There lies, I believe, the inmost essence of our impending contribution to civilisation whereby we shall awaken the European peoples.'[180]

This letter, together with the personal reminders of the 'Prince Christ' in his notebooks for *The Idiot* leave little doubt about Dostoevsky's intentions. Belknap cites Dickens, Cervantes, Pushkin, the newspapers, and the Bible as resources for Dostoevsky's experiment of the 'positively good man'—the success of which remains dubious—and claims that Dostoevsky returned to this experiment to 'seek conditions in which such a figure could be more positively effective.'

> The polemical relation between Alesha and Myshkin makes Alesha an assertion that Myshkin's failures and passive successes are accidental and not generic, and that his active successes could hold a central position. Myshkin's brief account of converting schoolchildren to love the dying Maria is thus expanded into the major episode of Iliusha and the boys. Alesha and Myshkin both sense the danger but cannot prevent the murder of a person close to them; the failure drives Myshkin out of the world and Alesha into it. In the same way, Myshkin's loss of the fierce and beautiful kept woman to a strong and violently passionate rival splits into three separate episodes. The first is an active success for Alesha, when his love transforms Grushenka's plan to seduce him...[181]

Alyosha has many of the attributes of Christ: he is chaste, peaceful, tolerant, kind, forgiving, patient with his family, loves unconditionally and inspires love in others. Dostoevsky, 'consciously and often nostalgically' uses biblical imagery in *The Brothers Karamazov*, such as the mother's tears for her child, the benedictions, the

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[180] *Letters of Fyodor Dostoevsky*, tr E C Mayne, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1914), p. 175.
[181] Belknap, p. 95, 96.

candles, and ecstacy.[182] The godless people who surround Prince Myshkin are ambivalent about their faith, and tease him about his religious fervor. Alyosha, on the other hand, lives within the monastery walls, and his family's faithlessness contrasts a community that is steeped in Orthodox tradition. This community lives in the shadow of the monastery, and Dostoevsky is free to create analogies between rural Russia and the Hebrews.

Belknap believes that Dostoevsky references the Book of Job in order to answer the question of theodicy in *The Brothers Karamazov.* The Book of Job is one of the oldest sources Dostoevsky would have to combat objections to God resulting from physical and moral evil, beginning with the utter meaninglessness of suffering innocents. After the destruction of his home and his livelihood, the death of his children and the decline of his health, Job receives a visit from well-meaning friends. With 'Ivan's scholarly clear-sightedness,' they try to 'enunciate the tempter's argument with the most insistent eloquence the rhetoric of their time affords.'

> Dostoevsky's ideology excluded miracles or theophanies to justify or prove God. As Lia Mikhailovna Rozenblium has so clearly shown, Dostoevsky had very little of the mystic about him. In his notebooks we have seen that he specifically rejected mysticism as a trait for Alesha. Dostoevsky could draw his subservient Devil from the Book of Job, but in an antimystical age, with a nonmystical mind, could not invoke the voice of God after a whirlwind to refute the position argued by the Devil and those associated with him, even though he had told his editor first that it was irrefutable and second that he considered it to be his duty to overthrow it.[183]

[182] Belknap, p. 108.
[183] Belknap, p. 137.

Dostoevsky's ideology (and perhaps his devotion to the genre of realism) would not allow him to use a theophany to destroy arguments against the omnipotent goodness of God. Rather than giving any easy answer to his reader, Dostoevsky manipulates the reader into a first-hand experience of the novel. Not only does he involve the reader in the 'guilt, self-consciousness, stupidity, and savagery' to which this radicalism leads Ivan and other characters, but he also implicates the reader in Alyosha's inner struggle. In *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky writes a nineteenth century death and resurrection story, but it is not believed by many. Sonya, rather than Raskolnikov provides the strongest Christ-figure for this novel, and the catalyst for the protagonist's conversion. Dostoevsky makes *The Brothers Karamazov* a personal story for the reader by implicating the reader in both the novel's temptation and absolution.

> Dostoevsky prefers to tempt his readers, as Rakitin and Ivan tempted Alesha, and as the Devil tempted Christ. He tries to carry his readers through a death of grace as dangerous as Zosima's in his youth, or Alesha's when his faith is shaken, hoping he can bring them out beyond to the point where they become fertile disseminators of grace. Dostoevsky thus is engaging not in communication but in manipulation...This use of a novel for the propagation of active grace entails the danger that the process may stop at the first step, and the less grave but more likely danger that readers may interpret the author's intention as stopping at the first step. Dostoevsky took this risk, and a substantial, but I think decreasing, number of his readers have justified his fear and trembling.[184]

Dostoevsky, of course, did not work under the assumption that this would be his last novel. Perhaps this two-volume novel was a 'first step' in the story of one man's search for God, his active participation in the life of grace before his fall. Alyosha

travels from the serenity of the monastery to the insanity of his father's home. The maimed, the doubting, the depraved, and the wronged are all placed in his path to warn him that even with the grace of God, there is an earthly struggle. *The Brothers Karamazov* does not end like the Book of Job, with some visible manifestation of God, nor does it end like *The Idiot*, with the ruin of the Christ-figure. If Prince Myshkin played the perfect foil to Christ, then Alyosha, in his status at the end of *The Brothers Karamazov* could be considered like Christ before his ministry began, and before his temptation in the desert. The young Alyosha is optimistic without being idealistic and peaceful without being powerless. Like Sonya, he recognizes and does not underestimate evil—he is, after all, a Karamazov. Just as *The Brothers Karamazov* is the *denoument* of all of Dostoevsky's novels and journals, so Alyosha is the culmination of those positively good characters, which Dostoevsky had been seeking to create. Whether this last experiment could have withstood his period of temptation in the wilderness is open to speculation; some things can easily be surmised, while others have gone to his grave with the author. The Alyosha who will be remembered is the teacher of children, the caretaker of his family, and the proof that pure goodness can be found in even a family such as the Karamazovs.

I treat Alyosha Karamazov as the classic hero of a romantic realist's tale, because he has a strength that Prince Myshkin does not. He not only has faith in God, but he has faith in his own ability to be used within the world. Therefore, he does not retreat from the world, but marches into it. Likewise, Dostoevsky, with this last novel as evidence, can be called a romantic realist. He is not afraid to write about the tragic elements of the world, because he has a particularly Christian vision, which allows

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[184] Belknap, p. 157.

him to see a deeper significance carrying the story to an outcome that far surpasses even the best of all possible outcomes. In my next chapter, I will discuss the 'peculiar Christian logic,' which gave Dostoevsky (and gives the followers of Christ) the ability to see past this present reality to a 'higher reality.'

Chapter 6

'Dostoevsky's Peculiar Christian Logic'[185]

Introduction

I have suggested that the resources of Christian theology allowed Dostoevsky to incorporate both truth and beauty within his fiction. Dostoevsky shares with the theologian, P. T. Forsyth, his belief in a glorious final reality that encompasses all present reality, and gives a redemptive vision to this reality. The clearest way of demonstrating the parallel between the great author Dostoevsky and the great theologian Forsyth is to suggest that both were prophets. Both predicted the end of idealistic humanism.

Nineteenth century humanism was characterized by an emphasis upon the knowable, physical world, and the evolution of the inherently good, cultured person. Within the

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[185] This phrase was borrowed from a conversation with Professor Trevor Hart.

movement was a desire to subdue the terror of powerlessness, by coping with and taming the fiercer, darker elements of life. Advances in science gave rise to confidence in human progress, and in humankind's ability to remedy its own pain. Many theologians struggled to explain Christianity rationally, but in the process, denied that only Christ could finally save the world.

The theme of God's love dominates the theology of Albrecht Ritschl, and to a lesser degree, the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher.[186] In response to the claim that the gravity of humanity's sinful nature required a dramatic solution, the popular theology of the nineteenth century suggested that human love, emulating the love of God, might overcome human misery and despair. Ritschl understands God to have

> revealed himself to the Christian community as love. There is no other conception of equal worth beside this which need be taken into account. This is especially true of the conception of the Divine holiness, which, in its Old Testament sense, is for various reasons not valid in Christianity, while its use in the New Testament is obscure...The conception of love is the only adequate conception of God.[187]

Natural theology, which 'relativizes the necessity' of a revelation through the particularity of Christ, prioritizes the example of Christ's social gospel.[188] While Hegel and Ritschl differ in their doctrine of reconciliation, 'both united to obscure the idea of atonement or expiation.'[189] McCurdy notes that Forsyth's early work reflects

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[186] McCurdy, L, *Attributes and Atonements: The Holy Love of God in the Theology of P. T. Forsyth* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), p. 8.
[187] Quoted in McCurdy, p. 25.
[188] McCurdy, p. 58.
[189] Forsyth, P T, *The Work of Christ* (London: Independent Press LTD, 1952), p. 66.

Ritschl's influence. The younger Forsyth does not write of sin, and rather than being the focal point of his theology, Christ's death is 'an exemplary influence.'[190]

David Strauss, influenced by Hegel, attempted to strip away from the story of Christ all things supernatural or miraculous. Strauss did not set about to destroy the Christian faith, but only that which was mythological in Christianity, that which suspended belief. His lukewarm compromise was to reject the seemingly mythical Jesus, and to keep his social gospel.

Ludwig Feuerbach called religion a fictitious projection of ideal human attributes onto the Divine. Feuerbach complained that the divine was 'nothing else than the human freed.'[191] Feuerbach wanted to give back to humanity the ideal human attributes, which natural theology had projected onto God, but Friedrich Nietzsche offered humans a new ideal. Rather than taking back for humanity the attributes Christianity had projected onto God, he attempted to do away with all ideal Christian attributes. In his essay 'The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness,' he writes that 'God is dead...and our sea lies open again.'[192] Nietzsche prophesied that some would reach for their superhuman potential and live towards perfection for their short lives, and that others would be reduced to passive despair by the idea of eternal meaninglessness. They would either grow paralyzed by the thought of their own transitory existence, or they would rise to power, seizing their opportunity for earthly greatness.

In regards to the metaphysical question (can anyone know about anything in the spiritual sphere which is not immediately accessible to our sense experience), Forsyth

[190] McCurdy, p. 25.

declared that a triumphant human story must necessarily be based upon the work of Christ on the cross. Behind Strauss's search for the historical Jesus was the desire to assimilate faith to reason. It was reasonable to assume that there was a Jewish, Palestinian man who preached a social gospel and radically transformed his community. It was unreasonable to claim that his saving act transformed the metaphysical world as well. Nietzsche is said to have responded to Strauss's denial of the authenticity of the supernatural Christ that 'If you give up Jesus, you must also give up God.'[193]

Nietzsche, according to Forsyth, grew mad while participating in the tragedy of life. He attempted to present the world realistically, but also as a positive venture, just as Forsyth did in all his works. Nietzsche's challenge to nineteenth century Christianity was more 'searching' and more 'promising' than that of Strauss, because it grasped the tragedy of the human situation without ever finding its solution in the cross.[194]

Forsyth's Christian Vision

Caught between the popular, optimistic liberal theology and the conviction that the human tragedy could be assumed by none other than Christ, P. T. Forsyth came by stages to a pivotal sermon in April of 1891, entitled 'The Old Faith and the New.'[195] In this sermon, the former student of Ritschl acknowledged that the love of God, exemplified in human hearts, would not solve the crisis of sin. He felt that Christian

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[191] Feuerbach, L, *The Essence of Christianity* (Bruckberg, 1843), p. 14.
[192] Nietzsche, F, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pp. 279-280.
[193] Larsen, D L, *The Company of the Creative: A Christian Reader's Guide to Great Literature and its Themes* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999), p. 137.
[194] Forsyth, *The Justification of God: Lectures for War-Time on a Christian Theodicy* (London: Duckworth and Company, 1916), p. 210.

humanism, based upon human endeavor, was bound for disillusionment. Forsyth came to believe that the final answer to the riddle of life is 'Christ crucified and risen,' and in this answer humanity will see 'death as the key to life.'[196]

> Solve Christ's cross and you solve all life. At that point concentrates what would be life's moral problem even if there were no God—supreme goodness and supreme calamity. But with a God it must be His goodness and His calamity there—unless He be impotent or indifferent. Which if He be not, then the presence of His goodness means the conquest of His calamity; which again, could only mean the recovery of what He lost and whom He lost. There God's controversy with man draws to a head in the unity of reconciliation, which solves the tragedy of guilt and grief.[197]

Forsyth's theology presents a choice that affects all of history. Either the Christ of history shapes all of eternity, or his act was mere martyrdom. How can Christianity assume that a life filled with pain will end in glory, if its central declaration is only that a valiant man named Christ had died? If Jesus rose from the dead, then Christians may proclaim that no story will ever end in sadness. If he was only a man who died for what he believed, then basing a social gospel upon his life gives false hope of redemption. Forsyth's uncompromising stance holds both the theologian and artist accountable to the truth of their vision. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, even the artist who images a grand unity must consider the ethical dilemma of whether or not to sponsor such an image, if the reality does not exist.

> We have marked in the history and nature of Art the action of certain processes of reconciliation, redemption, spiritualisation, and so on. How do we know that these will

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[195] McCurdy, p. 27.
[196] Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, p. 230.
[197] Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, (London: Paternoster Press, 1997), p. 66.

> converge and close in a reconciliation and glorification of all things? Have we any access already in history to an act which is the final reconciliation and manifestation of the whole creation revealed in advance? Shall we rise and shine in the Light that is long already come? Are we already presented with the grand consummation? Does the Absolute emerge at an historic point? Has the Eternal Glory already lived among us and become a perpetual present and a constant power? Is there something already in historic experience for which all things work together? Now are we sons of God; will there be a conclusive manifestation of the sons of God and their eternal vindication? If we put it in aesthetic terms we ask: Allowing that an ideal beauty is at the core of things, are all things certainly working that out at last?[198]

Art cannot give any resolute assurance that the 'idea labouring in the world is the goal awaiting the world.'[199] Humanity may come to the conviction that a goal awaits the world by revelation alone, and not by the work of the artist. There is an evil, malignant force working against the idea of possible historical redemption, and Forsyth denies that Art may promise victory over destruction by this force.

> Art is not there to give us the *certainty* of faith in such a matter. Art is ethical in principle, but it is not ethical in function. It is not an ethical inspiration in the sense that the prophet is. It conveys, but it does not convince. It has an ethical foundation, but it is not there to give ethical security. A drama, an epic, a novel, a picture, a statue can set before us a new world within the world, and plant it in us in a most memorable way, a most exalted, refreshing way. It can reflect and represent life, its problem, its drift; its interior, its aspirations, and its great ventures, but it cannot give us assurance of God and His eternal venture among men.[200]

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[198] Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus: Lectures on Art, Ethic and Theology* (London: Independent Press LTD, 1959), p. 261.
[199] Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus*, p. 261.
[200] Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus*, p. 263.

While Art offers temporary solace, and a momentary deliverance from unrest, it cannot give more than an aesthetic harmony. Like Nietzsche, Ibsen touches upon the great tragedy of the world without discovering a solution. Forsyth believes that while Art and Philosophy may indicate the gravity of the human situation, only faith can promise the world a solution.

> The Ibsens of this world can help because they are finely tuned to the underlying realities of ordinary life and it is ordinary life that sets the problem. But they cannot proceed to identify the solution unless, unlike Ibsen himself, they have achieved the standpoint of faith which provides our only existential security and the only valid, though still clouded, view of the relation of the tragic human condition to the divine *commedia*.[201]

Forsyth reminds us that the reprieve won by Art is not a moral victory, which triumphs over the world for eternity. Forsyth is in the company of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer when he rejects attempts to rationally vindicate God. Like Dostoevsky, Forsyth accepts the tragic dimension of life, and recognizes its reality without surrendering to its finality.[202]

> Art's deliverance is but the promise, or *aura*, of this Redemption, in which alone we are free for life and death, for good and all. There the wicked cease, not only from troubling, but from wickedness. We lose not only care, but death. And our world is not only harmonised, but it is atoned and redeemed and reconciled for ever.[203]

Forsyth views reality as irrevocably changed after the death and resurrection of Christ. The greatest tragedy in history, the sacrifice of the blameless for the sinful,

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[201] Hall, G, 'Tragedy in the Theology of P. T. Forsyth,' in *Justice the True and Only Mercy: Essays on the Life and Theology of Peter Taylor Forsyth*, ed T A Hart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p. 81.
[202] Hall, p. 101. Forsyth is practical about the dimension of tragedy that resists a rational explanation.

becomes the *divina commedia*, the 'victory over sin and death on the self-same cross.'[204] Philosophy and Art do not act as transforming agents, but, rather, are transformed by this 'new departure in the history of *Creation*.'[205] Christ's sacrifice is order-breaking in a way that transfigures ordinary reality. Rather than allowing Art to shape reality, Forsyth sees how the reality of an artist like Dostoevsky might be shaped by his faith in eternal redemption. Centuries of art mark the history of human sorrow, but Dostoevsky's fiction is transformed by the knowledge that Christ's willing sacrifice saved human suffering from a final blow.

In *Christ on Parnassus*, Forsyth considers an ancient Greek painting, representing the sacrifice of Iphigenia at the moment when the oracle declares that her death is necessary for the safety of her father's fleet. The artist has drawn shock and sorrow onto the faces of loved ones gathered around her. Only Agamemnon, her father, has his face covered with his hand. Forsyth suggests that the artist's reluctance to depict Agamemnon's grief, instead of demonstrating the artist's inability to portray such grief, might reveal his sense of the limitations of his art. To convey such agony would be to destroy the beauty of the painting, and to lose sight of Art's aim. Yet does not all of Christendom worship 'the beauty of such a sacrifice raised to a far vaster scale?'[206] Dostoevsky's literature and the Christian account of Christ's death and resurrection find the beautiful message of redemption within the ugliness and horror of the crucifixion.

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[203] Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus*, p. 266.
[204] Hall, p. 101.
[205] Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, p. 216. The italics are Forsyth's.
[206] Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus*, p. 42.

> Has that ideal been one whose revelation to the soul of Christendom has filled it with horror and revolt? The very contrary. This belief has been the source of inspiration for some of the highest flights that pictorial art has reached. But what does that mean? It means that the human idea of Beauty has been altered and enlarged. It has been moralised by the beauty of holiness. We still insist that Art must be beautiful, but we give a wider scope to Beauty through a new treatment of sorrow, and a deeper significance for Love. We have expanded the whole modern canon of what beauty is, through the Christian beauty of holy, saving sorrow.[207]

The artist's perception of the world is deepened by a 'new sense of Infinity.'[208] The news of the resurrection of life increases its colors and intensity in a way Art itself could not. Artists painting 'in view of Eternity' might raise new possibilities in their work, which might have once seemed irresponsibly far from the truth, if death had not been overcome.[209] There is no perfect work of art, although most art strives to represent the ideal. In Christ's sacrifice, the ideal has been met, in both the material and the spiritual world. Christ, the only human born perfect, brought the ideal into reality, in a way Art could not. Christ, by his life, death, and resurrection, gave to Art the legitimacy of a credible ideal.

> Just as in Christ we see man with his sin and woe transfigured to goodness, standing through pain, and even through sin, on a height of glory not otherwise to be won, deified in a cross, and resurrection, and there determined as the Son of God with power, so in Art we see, for a time at least, man and his fate in spiritual and pacifying beauty. Art, in this respect, is the echo of Religion as the interpreter of life, nature and destiny...It has, for the hour, the power that faith has for good and all—to unloose, emancipate, and redeem.[210]

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[207] Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus*, p. 41-42.
[208] Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus*, p. 77.
[209] Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus*, p. 77.
[210] Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus*, p. 225.

Christ's action strips previous limitations from art, and allows the work of the artist to be opened up to eternity. Christ's work in history allows Dostoevsky to write romantically without idealizing reality, and to write realistically without destroying hope. Dostoevsky's faith emancipated him from both the improbable romanticism and the mundane realism of the nineteenth century. He did not suffer under the modern conventions of fiction writing, because he wrote for a greater readership than just the nineteenth century intelligentsia and the artist elite. For Dostoevsky, this meant that he would be free to invite the supernatural into his world. George Steiner speaks of the longest day in Western history, the Saturday between Good Friday and resurrection Sunday. The 'historical dimension of the human condition' serves as a frame of reference, but does not define Christian art.[211] Dostoevsky's depiction of Saturday heralds the dawn of Sunday. To Dostoevsky, as a Christian, the Saturday

> signifies an intimation, both assured and precarious, both evident and beyond comprehension, of resurrection, of a justice and a love that have conquered death. If we are non-Christians or non-believers, we know of that Sunday in precisely analogous terms. We conceive of it as the day of liberation from inhumanity and servitude. We look to resolutions, be they therapeutic or political, be they social or messianic. The lineaments of that Sunday carry the name of hope (there is no word less deconstructible). But ours is the long day's journey of the Saturday. Between suffering, aloneness, unutterable waste on the one hand and the dream of liberation, of rebirth on the other. In the face of the torture of a child, of the death of love which is Friday, even the greatest art and poetry are almost helpless. In the Utopia of the Sunday, the aesthetic will, presumably, no longer have logic or necessity. The apprehensions and figurations in the play of metaphysical imagining, in the poem and the music, which tell of pain and of hope, of the flesh which is said to taste of ash and of the spirit which is said to have the savour of fire, are always Sabbatarian. They

> have risen out of an immensity of waiting which is that of man. Without them, how could we be patient?[212]

Dostoevsky's Christian Vision

What is it about Dostoevsky's work that illuminates, amidst upheaval, the wealth of earthly beauty and the mark of the Infinite upon that earth? Forsyth suggests that the answer lies within the soul of an artist who believes that 'the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof.'[213] Dostoevsky possesses, because of his faith, an insight that cannot be gained by a simple and accurate representation. In his diary, he recounts that

> If only you are able and are endowed with vision, you will perceive in (life) a depth such as you will not find in Shakespeare. But the whole question is: *compared with whose vision, and who is able?* Indeed, not only to create and write artistic works, but also to discern a fact, something of an artist is required. To some observers all phenomena of life develop with a most touching simplicity and are so intelligible that they are not worth thinking about or being looked at. However, these same phenomena might embarrass another observer to such an extent (this happens quite often) that, in the long run, he feels unable to synthesize and simplify them, to draw them out into a straight line and thus to appease his mind. He then resorts to a different kind of simplification and *very simply* plants a bullet in his brain so as to extinguish at once his jaded mind, together with all its queries. Such are the two extremes between which the sum total of human intelligence is enclosed. But it stands to reason that never can we exhaust a phenomenon, never can we trace its end or its beginning. We are familiar merely with the everyday, apparent and current, and this only insofar as it

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[211] Steiner, G, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 230.
[212] Steiner, G, pp. 230-232.
[213] Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus*, p. 80.

> appears to us, whereas the ends and the beginnings still constitute to man a realm of the fantastic.[214]

It is not just the mark of his genius, but also the evidence of his faith that his fiction at once incorporates great evil and great glory. As Berdyaev notes:

> Dostoievsky's art was to express these underground disturbances of human nature, whose dynamic pressure continually throws existing things into confusion. It is no use looking to any established order sanctioned by past history (as Tolstoy did); man's eyes must be turned towards the unknown future, the Becoming. Such art is prophetic: it unveils the secret of man, and for that purpose studies him in his unconsciousness, folly, and wickedness rather than in his stable surroundings, the normal and rational forms of his everyday social life. For the deeps of human nature are sounded not in sanity but in insanity, not in law-abidingness but in criminality, in obscure unconscious tendencies and not in daily life and in the parts of the soul that have been enlightened by the daylight of consciousness.[215]

Like Forsyth, Dostoevsky's writing denounces humanism, because humanism can find no solution to the 'tragedy of human destiny.'[216] Berdyaev comments that humanity must be turned to 'the Becoming,' and Dostoevsky's characters are plagued by their sense of destiny. Their vision for a world that might be makes them constantly uneasy. Ivan Karamazov scorns human attempts at greatness, but an uncomfortable notion that the world should be just makes him restless. Dostoevsky's people cannot accept life as it is, and there is the idea within each of his central characters that they have untapped extraordinary potential. Many of Dostoevsky's characters are Nietzschean, born in sorrow with a hunger for rising toward excellence.

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[214] Dostoevsky, tr B Brasol, *Diary of a Writer* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985), pp. 468-469.
[215] Berdyaev, N, tr D Attwater, *Dostoevsky* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 39.

Dostoevsky sees one path that leads to the man-god and another, found in 'illimitable freedom,' and paved with temptations of self-deification, that leads to the God-man, Jesus Christ.[217]

His characters are plagued by evil in a way that understands Forsyth's insistence that humanity cannot redeem itself. Forsyth's theology seems to be laid out in Dostoevsky's fiction. Like Forsyth, Dostoevsky does not so much work against idealism and nihilism, as he seeks to work out the challenges they present. He unearthed a new way of believing, and discovered the great mystery of faith, that the only and dearest freedom is found in wholehearted surrender to God.

> He was not content to rediscover *the old and eternal Christian truth about man*, which had decayed and been forgotten during the humanist era. The experiment of Humanism and the experience of freedom had not been in vain, a negative quantity in man's history. A new soul had been born, one with new doubts and a new knowledge of evil but also with new horizons, new perspectives, and a thirst for new relations with God...[218]

Dostoevsky is romantic about reality in a way that his Russian contemporary, Tolstoy, never could be. Nicholas Berdyaev believes that Tolstoy's epic novels uphold an existing order. He is a 'portrayer of static things,' whereas Dostoevsky is a prophet who is concerned 'only with that which is to be.'[219] Berdyaev believes that Tolstoy seeks God as a pagan seeks God, but that Dostoevsky only tries to answer the riddle of the spiritual human. Dostoevsky considers it easier to regard the human riddle than to solve the divine problem. According to Berdyaev, the living God 'revealed himself

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[216] Berdyaev, p. 39.
[217] Berdyaev, pp. 62-63.
[218] Berdyaev, p. 61-62.

to (Dostoevsky) in man's destiny.'[220] It is important to note that, far from being anthropocentric, Dostoevsky places the personality of Christ at the heart of his novels.[221] He concerns himself with the discrepancy between the spiritual human and Christ, and the working out of the human riddle in his fiction is always a movement toward or away from the liberty found in Christ.

> Liberty in revolt, tumultuous aspirations without end, the irrational element in life, these are the phenomena of personality against world-organization and control is an interiorly Christian manifestation. Greek tragedy and the best of Greek philosophy had shown the need to pull down the barriers that shut their world in and thus pointed the way towards the new Christian dispensation; but neither the drama nor the philosophy of the Greeks knew anything about the soul of Faust and its awful freedom.[222]

Dostoevsky's Nietzscheans seek freedom from the figure of Christ, while the 'romantic realist' finds full freedom only in Christ. Sonya and Alyosha, from are perhaps the only true romantic realists of Dostoevsky's novels. While Prince Myshkin does not live in the real world, Sonya and Alyosha continue to believe in a happy ending, despite their knowledge of and inevitable participation in the world's corruption.

> Liberty with Dostoievsky was the manifestation of a new spirit as well as of Christianity; it belonged to a new stage of Christianity itself, which was passing from a period essentially transcendental to one of a greater interior penetration. Man was escaping from external forms and by hard ways finding light within himself; everything was being carried over into

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[219] Berdyaev, p. 22-23.
[220] Berdyaev, p. 25.
[221] Berdyaev, p. 30. Dostoevsky will not disassociate faith in humanity from his faith in Christ, the God-man.
[222] Berdyaev, p. 73-74.

> the deep places of the human spirit, and it was there that the new world was revealed. The transcendental conception of Christianity, by showing its truth from without as an objective truth failed to reveal the full extent of freedom.[223]

In Dostoevsky's novels, those who run away from Christ can understand neither Nietzsche's definition of freedom, nor the freedom offered by Christ. Kirilov plans to kill himself for all humankind, so that all might realize their ultimate freedom to decide when they will die. He explains to the narrator that 'God is the pain of the fear of death. He who will conquer pain and terror will become himself a god.'[224] By his suicide, Kirilov wishes to illustrate that all are capable of ultimate freedom from the pain of the fear of death. His act misunderstands both his own freedom and the very nature of sacrifice.

> It is not the depth of agony but the height of surrender; and that again is represented as the triumph of eternal life. It is the absolute active death of self-will *into* the holy will of God; but also *by* that will; the complete, central, vital obedience of the holy to the holy in a necessary act on the Eternal scale. A necessary act. It was in an act, and not in a mere mood of resignation. And in an act not gratuitously done (however voluntarily), not blindly done just to get some outlet for an irresistible instinct of self-sacrifice.[225]

Edward Wasiolek points out that Kirilov is trying to usurp the role of Christ. If Kirilov does indeed act out of love for all humanity, his method contradicts his aim. He will kill himself to achieve freedom from a bounded existence, but he believes only in himself. His act, therefore, is not one of sacrifice, but one of vanity.[226]

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[223] Berdyaev, p. 75.
[224] Dostoevsky, F M, *The Devils, Volume I*, (London: J M Dent and Sons LTD, 1931), pp. 103-104.
[225] Forsyth, *Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 92-93.
[226] Wasiolek, E, *Dostoevsky: The Major Fiction*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1964), pp. 121-122. Pyotr Stepanovich calls Kirilov's bluff by suggesting he kill someone else. Since there is no God, good and

Wasiolek believes Stavrogin to be the only true Nietzschean in *The Devils*, although it is doubtful whether Nietzsche would have supported Stavrogin's actions. Only Stavrogin knows his terrible freedom, and he alone represents the free will, wary of engagement with any person or idea that may jeapordize it. In the end, Stavrogin's suicide is his will overcoming life. His suicide is neither an act of pseudo-sacrifice, nor an act of complete freedom, but an act of total selfishness. Christ's act upon the cross involved both sacrifice and freedom.

> We have to say that it involved obedience of no gratuitous and arbitrary kind, no "voluntary humility," no self-willed, self-chosen obedience, no self-created task, as the manner of some great devotees is; but it obeyed the necessity of an actual historic and spiritual situation. It represents no mere historic necessity, rising from Christ's relation to Israel and its past. But there is a divine must which Israel's history itself was set to serve and failed. It was complete obedience on a universal scale to the moral requirements of grace, *i.e.* to a holy grace, to what the holiness of grace required in a situation of racial sin.[227]

Both Kirilov's act of supposed sacrifice for the revolutionary cause and Stavrogin's act of selfishness illuminate to a greater depth the tragedy of the human condition. In his diary, Dostoevsky states that it is only with faith in immortality that humanity may understand the human destination on earth. Without it, human ties with the earth are destroyed, 'while the loss of the sublime meaning of life (felt at least in the form of unconscious anguish) inevitably leads to suicide.'[228] Berdyaev believes Dostoevsky's work marks the defeat of Humanism.[229] Kirilov attempted to overcome his human

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evil must not exist. Therefore, it makes no difference whether Kirilov's act is a suicide or a murder. It is unlikely that Kirilov will choose the latter, because his vanity will not allow it, although supposedly the act is for the good of all humankind.

[227] Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 97.

[228] Dostoevsky, F M, tr B Brasol, *The Diary of A Writer* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985), p. 541-542.

[229] Berdyaev, p. 63.

limitations by becoming a god, just as Nietzsche attempted to overcome the disgrace of mere humanity by becoming a superman. After Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, a return to Humanism, with its self-sufficiency, was impossible.[230]

The Peculiar Christian Logic

'In the depths of your hopes and desires lies your silent knowledge of the beyond;
Trust the dreams, for in them is hidden the gate to eternity. There are no graves here.
These mountains and plains are a cradle and a stepping-stone.'

—Khalil Gibran

The Prophet

If nineteenth century humanism was characterized by grand expectations for humanity, it was also characterized by severe disappointment in unrealized ideals. The reaction on the part of many late nineteenth century and early twentieth century novelists was to portray life as they knew it, without ideals and expectations, and without disappointment. Art could still touch upon life's irrevocable loss without attempting to explain it. A novelist like Thomas Hardy could captivate a reader with his mastery of sheer realism, without resorting to any compromise between truth and beauty. Still, the notion that there might be some beautiful unity upon which the scheme of the world was based continued to haunt Art and life.

In Albert Camus's *The Plague*, the old priest tries to reconcile earthly devastation with a loving, all-knowing God. The only answer he can give is that it is a mystery

[230] Berdyaev, p. 64.

beyond human comprehension, and 'we should love what we cannot understand.'[231] The doctor of the town, Dr. Rieux, rejects this explanation and proclaims that until his dying day, he will 'refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture.'[232] Bertrand Russell claims that the world was caused by accident, but if it was done deliberately, then the Creator must be a 'fiend.'[233] Likewise, Ivan Karamazov refuses to take the ticket handed him by a God who would allow children to suffer in His world. In response to the 'scheme of things,' P. T. Forsyth declares that

> Our faith is not that one day we shall solve the riddles of providence, and see all things put under us, but that now we see Jesus; and that we shall commit ourselves to one who has both the solution of every tragic thing and the glory of every dark thing clear and sure in a kingdom that cannot be moved, and, therefore alone, moves for ever on.[234]

Jurgen Moltmann illustrates the dual nature of earthly despair. Its potency lies in our 'anticipation of the non-fulfilment' of that for which we hope.[235] Where we prematurely await this non-fulfilment, we guard against eventual disappointment. But this sort of realism leads to the 'utopia of the *status quo*,' and the 'absence of meaning, prospects, future and purpose.'[236]

> On the other hand, the celebrated realism of the stark facts, of established objects and laws, the attitude that despairs of its possibilities and clings to reality as it is, is inevitably much more open to the charge of being utopian, for in its eyes there is 'no place' for possibilities,

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231 Camus, A, *The Plague* (London: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 176.
232 Camus, p. 176.
233 Russell, B, *Why I Am Not A Christian And Other Essays on Religion And Related Subjects* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957), p. 74.
234 Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 34.
235 Moltmann, J, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1967), p. 23.

> for future novelties, and consequently, for the historic character of reality. Thus the despair which imagines it has reached the end of its tether proves to be illusory, as long as nothing has yet come to an end but everything is still full of possibilities.[237]

Berdyaev points out that Russia did not have a happy renaissance as Western Europe did.[238] They never felt the 'despair which has reached the end of its tether,' because they had never built up that illusory optimism in humanity. Nineteenth century Russian literature is, from its beginning consumed with distress for the salvation of the world, suffering as though for the sins of the world.[239] Berdyaev portrays Tolstoy and Dostoevsky as artists anguishing for the salvation of the rest of the world. Dostoevsky is wounded by earthly despair, but not fatally, because his tragedy rises above other Russian tragedies with a note of eternal joy.

> The work of Dostoievsky is the climax of Russian literature and it is the finest expression of its earnest, religious, tormented character; its path of sorrow led to Dostoievsky, and all the shadows of Russian life and history were gathered together in him. But there was a glimmer of light, shining through a crack in the old world. The tragedy of Dostoievsky, like all true tragedy, involves purification and release, though those who are held by it in unescapable darkness, who accept only its misery, do not understand this...It is the path the Christian has to tread. Dostoievsky renewed faith in man and in the notion of his depths, which Humanism had not recognized. Humanism destroys man, but he is born again if he believes in God—and only on this condition can he believe in himself.[240]

Dostoevsky's work celebrates the surprising nature of God's promise to the world, rather than bravely portraying only the 'stark facts.' His fiction is more perceptively

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[236] Moltmann, p. 23.
[237] Moltmann, p. 24-25.
[238] Berdyaev, p. 29.
[239] Berdyaev, p. 29.

realistic than that of his contemporaries, because his vision allows him to encompass all the latent possibilities of reality. In what sense, however, can he really be compared to other realists? While his content is too wretched to be considered romantic, his work is too improbable to be strictly realistic. As Berdyaev points out, nobody was less concerned with empirical reality than Dostoevsky, and his novels do not adhere to the structure of most realist works.[241] The exterior plots that clothe the ideas of his novels are, more often than not, exaggerated, and there is a strange and foreign quality about his tales. Berdyaev suggests that since great art is symbolic of a hidden reality, Dostoevsky is a master of expressing the deeper reality.

> For Dostoievsky, the ultimate realities are not the external forms of life, flesh and blood men, but their inner depths, the destiny of the human spirit. Reality is the relations of man with God and with Satan, reality is the ideas by which man lives...Beneath conscious life there was always hidden an unconscious world with which his visionary expectations were in touch, and he saw that human beings reach out to one another not only along the visible threads of consciousness but even more along the mysterious lines whose roots are hidden in the depths of their unconscious life.[242]

The bonds that connect Myshkin and Nastasia Philipovna, Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov, Ivan Karamazov and Smerdyakov, and Stavrogin and Shatov are not lines of an empirical nature, but of a higher will and an eternal reality.[243] It is not that Dostoevsky imposes upon his reality his particular vision, but that his vision expresses and constitutes his reality. Dostoevsky's work as a romantic realist represents the complete reality, because his personal vision, as a Christian artist, is of

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[240] Berdyaev, p. 30.
[241] Berdyaev, p. 25.
[242] Berdyaev, p. 25-26.
[243] Berdyaev, p. 27.

an ultimate reality. To Dostoevsky, the only true reality is one that is fraught with the possibility of redemption.

> Thus hopes and anticipations of the future are not a transfiguring glow superimposed upon a darkened existence, but are realistic ways of perceiving the scope of our real possibilities, and as such they set everything in motion and keep it in a state of change. Hope and the kind of thinking that goes with it consequently cannot submit to the reproach of being utopian, for they do not strive after things that have 'no place', but after things that have 'no place *as yet*' but can acquire one.[244]

Earlier I stated that Dostoevsky's reality is deepened and altered by his Christian vision of redemption. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that his vision is his reality. In his novels, he never chases up any orthodox dogma that will harmonize his text. In fact, he presents life in contradiction, faith against reason, truth against the ideal and revolutionary freedom against free surrender. His vision for the future redemption of the world, which makes his work romantically realistic, also makes his characters restless. They move toward or away from this vision of unity, but the shadow of what should be and what might be is their constant pursuant.

> All this must inevitably mean that the man who thus hopes will never be able to reconcile himself with the laws and constraints of this earth, neither with the inevitability of death nor with the evil that constantly bears further evil. The raising of Christ is not merely a consolation to him in a life that is full of distress and doomed to die, but it is also God's contradiction of suffering and death, of humiliation and offence, and of the wickedness of evil. Hope finds in Christ not only a consolation *in* suffering but also the protest of the divine promise *against* suffering...Faith takes up this contradiction to the world of death. That is why faith, wherever it develops into hope, causes not rest but unrest, not patience but

> impatience. It does not calm the unquiet heart, but is itself this unquiet heart in man. Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it.[245]

Forsyth also understands this tragic nature of a Christian vision that must live within, and, at the same time, work outside of the ordinary reality. Like Dostoevsky, he does not give present circumstances the power of conclusion. Forsyth upholds a holy love that 'forces us upon reality,' because in God's holy love the assurance is given that the 'deepest and last reality is now and for ever.'[246] Both Forsyth and Dostoevsky were prophets of a coming kingdom, who could not be satisfied with a human account of the universal scheme.

> In prophetic style, and to our mind, in a convincing way, Forsyth insisted that love alone was not enough for either a doctrine of the atonement or a doctrine of God. Secondly, it must not be forgotten that the constant repetition of this theme—the holy love of God—in the most significant contexts serves to keep God's *love* in a prominent theological place. Forsyth was not reverting to the opposite position, but insisting that it be qualified and deepened by what it lacked. A wider conception of God's nature was required, one that would take into account the full reality of God's nature revealed in Christ.[247]

The attribute of God's holiness, as conceived by Forsyth, 'qualifies and deepens' God's love. His holiness could not let sin live in the world, and his love could not let the sinful pay eternally, so both acted in accord at the juncture of Christ's sacrifice. In his act, Christ revolutionized the 'eternal foundations of our moral world,'

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[244] Moltmann, p. 21.
[245] Moltmann, p. 21.
[246] Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus*, p. 267.
[247] McCurdy, p. 278.

harmonizing for the first time and forever love and holiness, truth and hope, and the ideal and the real.[248]

> To believe means to cross in hope and anticipation the bounds that have been penetrated by the raising of the crucified. If we bear that in mind, then this faith can have nothing to do with fleeing the world, with resignation and with escapism. In this hope the soul does not soar above our vale of tears to some imagined bliss, nor does it sever itself from the earth.[249]

Reality, as conceived by Dostoevsky, is now constituted by the vision of Christ's redemption of the world. If Christ's death and resurrection really do end the human tragedy, then there is a peculiar Christian logic in the internal terms of 'romantic realism.' Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart also speak of the Easter Saturday in which all Christians live. We live between the reality of the horrible events of Good Friday, and the promise of resurrection on Easter Sunday.[250]

> In the meanwhile we live and travel in hope, able to face squarely in all their awfulness the horrific aspects of that history within whose temporal boundaries we actually still live precisely and only because the terror of history no longer haunts us. Instead, through the captivity of our imagination, God's Spirit draws us forward into the reality of his own future, a future the openness of which is no longer a threat, therefore, but a source of that joyful energy under the influence of which God calls us, for now, to live and labour in the world.[251]

His characters' illogical hope in the midst of despair is based upon Dostoevsky's peculiar, and uniquely Christian logic. Because Christ rose from the grave, not even

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[248] Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 102.
[249] Moltmann, p. 20-21.

death is final. Our world, and all of history is opened up to the possibility of eternal joy. Christ's resurrection robs our tragic human history of its finality, and validates Dostoevsky's romantic version of reality. His vision for reality is not only romantic, but also realistic. In a letter to Maikov he writes:

> Creation, the basis of all art, resides in a human being, as the revelation of a part of his organism, but it resides inseparable from the person. Consequently, art can have no different strivings than those to which the whole man strives...It will always live with a man as his real life; it can do no more. Consequently, it will always remain faithful to reality. Of course, in his life, a person can depart from normal reality, from the laws of nature; his art will depart after him. But that is what proves its close, unbreakable tie with the man, its permanent fidelity to the man and his interests...And since its interest and its goal are one with the goals of the person whom it serves, and with whom it is inseparably joined, the more freely it grows, the greater the service it will do for mankind.[252]

If Dostoevsky's interests and goals were one with his art, and his goal was to present the world with a picture of Christ as Russia saw him, then his last novel was not only a successful piece of romantic realism, but also the fruit of Dostoevsky's spiritual labor. The goal of the Christian is to exemplify Christ, and Dostoevsky's goal was to portray Christ as the Russians saw him, so he was both faithful to his art and faithful to his God. Both Dostoevsky and Forsyth understood that humanism would change the way that people thought about themselves and their God. They presented a sharper vision of Christ within the world for a generation who had made Christ a piece of fiction. Forsyth's legacy to the next century would be a stubborn belief in the

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[250] Bauckham, R and Hart, T, *Hope against Hope: Christian Eschatology in Contemporary Context* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999), p. 54.
[251] Bauckham and Hart, *Hope against Hope*, p. 54.

relentlessness of sin and the inconquerable power of grace. Dostoevsky's legacy is the personality to Alyosha, so endearing, so innocent, and so powerful.

Conclusion

Should the novel be loyal to truth or to beauty? Can the novel be committed to both at once? In the work of Balzac, Dickens and Gogol, there is no uniformity between reality and the vision, nor is there redemption of that reality through the realised vision. The narrative is severed before the vision can transform the present reality. In my first chapter, I use the literary commentaries of Dirk den Hartog, P. J. M. Scott, N. M. Lary and examples from Dickens's fiction to illustrate how Dickens's personal vision for an egalitarian Victorian society was overcome by his impression of reality. I also compare Balzac's *Old Goriot* and Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* to prove that Balzac's heroes are left without the hope of a future redemption that Dostoevsky guarantees his heroes.

In my second chapter, I give evidence from Dostoevsky's own work of his ability to project his uniquely Christian vision onto reality, without compromising either romanticism or realism. The characters he creates are given the terrifying freedom to choose between the good and evil in their own hearts, and the road to eternal salvation is always open. His novels are centered on the personality of Christ, and his people are haunted by his example and their own possible potential. As a Christian,

[252] Belknap, p. 11.

Dostoevsky sees romanticism as integral to reality. Hope and reality intersect in the crucifixion of Christ, an act which encompasses all the world's darkness and all of its light.

In my third chapter, I explain how Dostoevsky's faith widens the perameters of his fiction. I provide examples from nineteenth century Christian theology which support the theory that Dostoevsky might have looked to Christian theology as the resource of a romantic and realistic fiction. In his work, the natural world is set within the supernatural world, where no sin is unthinkable, and no hope is too outlandish, because evil exists, but death has been conquered by the death and resurrection of Christ. The person of Christ, the only human ever born perfect, validates art's ideal. Christ's act upon the cross legitimises the peculiar Christian logic, which continues to hope for an unseen but promised redemption of an imperfect reality. It is not Dostoevsky's artistic genius that provides him with the resources to create a romantic and realistic world. It is his Christian faith, which allows him to portray a realistic world fraught with the potential of redemption, so that somewhere between eschatology and literature lies the root of Dostoevsky's romantic realism.

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