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Dostoevskii's *Idiot* and the Epistle of James

SARAH J. YOUNG

RELIGIOUS issues have long been a central preoccupation of Dostoevskii studies, with analyses from all the main Christian traditions leading to the most disparate conclusions about the religious (or anti-religious) basis of Dostoevskii's work.¹ In recent years the post-Communist era has witnessed a huge resurgence of Orthodox interpretations among scholars from Russia,² and Pattison and Thompson's new collection of essays has shown that the religious basis of Dostoevskii's work, and in

Sarah Young is the Leverhulme Special Research Fellow in the Department of Russian and Slavonic Studies at the University of Nottingham.

¹ See the varied approaches offered by, among others, D. S. Merezhkovskii, *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii: Khristos i antikhrisť v russkoi literature*, St Petersburg, 1901; V. V. Rozanov, *Legenda o Velikom Inkvisitore F. M. Dostoevskogo: Opyt kriticheskogo kommentariia*, St Petersburg, 1906; N. O. Losskii, *Dostoevskii i ego khristianskoe miroponimanie*, New York, 1946; R. Guardini, 'Dostoevsky's *Idiot*: A Symbol of Christ', trans. F. X. Quinn, *Cross Currents*, 6, 1956, pp. 359–82; Eduard Thurneysen, *Dostoevsky: A Theological Study*, trans. Keith R. Crim, London, 1964; Metropolitan Antonii, *F. M. Dostoevskii kak propovednik vozrozhdeniia*, Montreal, 1965; Nikolai Berdiaev, *Mirosozertsanie Dostoevskogo*, Paris, 1968; A. Boyce Gibson, *The Religion of Dostoevsky*, London, 1973 (hereafter, Gibson, *The Religion of Dostoevsky*); Sven Linnér, *Startets Zosima in 'The Brothers Karamazov': A Study in the Mimesis of Virtue*, Stockholm, 1975; Louis Allain, *Dostoievski et Dieu: La Morsure du divin*, Lille, 1981. Other works are cited below.

² See, for example, articles in *Dostoevskii v kontse XX veka*, ed. Karen Stepanian, Moscow, 1996; the three volumes of *Evangel'skii tekst v russkoi literature XVIII–XX vekov*, ed. V. N. Zakharov, Petrozavodsk, 1994, 1998 and 2001 (hereafter, *Evangel'skii tekst*); or *Russkaia literatura XIX veka i khristianstvo*, ed. V. B. Kataev, Moscow, 1997. References to individual authors and articles are given below.

particular of his narrative innovations, remains a fruitful area of debate.³

Analysis of the religious aspects of Dostoevskii's work tends to focus on two main areas, although they overlap considerably: (i) biblical references, specifically the influence of the Pauline epistles and the Johannine scriptures (the fourth Gospel, in particular the image of Christ represented therein, the Johannine letters, and Revelation), and the book of Job; and (ii) Orthodox symbols, teachings and *topoi*.⁴ These topics have come to the fore largely as a result of our knowledge of the author's professed interests as expressed, in particular, in his correspondence and journalistic writings.⁵ The publication of Dostoevskii's marks and notes in his copy of the New Testament has confirmed these concerns.⁶ Many aspects of his fiction also testify to the same preoccupations, for example the apocalyptic theme in *Idiot* (*The Idiot*, 1868) and *Besy* (*The Devils*, 1871),⁷ the image of Christ in 'The Grand Inquisitor' and Alesha Karamazov's experience of divine Grace in

³ George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson (eds), *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, Cambridge, 2001 (hereafter, Pattison and Thompson, *Christian Tradition*). See also essays in Jostein Bortnes and Ingunn Lunde (eds), *Cultural Discontinuity and Reconstruction: The Byzanto-Slav Heritage and the Creation of a Russian National Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, Oslo, 1997 (hereafter, Bortnes and Lunde, *Cultural Discontinuity*). Both books demonstrate that the religious approach is far from being incompatible with Bakhtinian readings; see Pattison and Thompson's introduction, 'Reading Dostoevsky Religiously', in *Christian Tradition*, pp. 1–28 (pp. 21–22 and *passim*). On the Christian foundations of Bakhtin's poetics, see Ruth Coates, *Christianity in Bakhtin: God and the Exiled Author*, Cambridge, 1998.

⁴ For examples of the former approach, see L. Müller, 'Obraz Khrista v romane Dostoevskogo *Idiol'*, *Evangel'skii tekst*, 2, 1998, pp. 374–84; V. Lepakhin, 'Khristianskie motivy v romane Dostoevskogo *Idiol'*, *Dissertationes Slavicae*, 16, 1984, pp. 65–92; or B. N. Tikhomirov, 'O "khristologii" Dostoevskogo', in E. A. Smirnova (ed.), *Dostoevskii: materialy i issledovaniia*, 11, St Petersburg, 1994, pp. 102–21. The latter approach can be seen in I. A. Esaulov, 'Paskhal'nyi arkhetyv v poetike Dostoevskogo', *Evangel'skii tekst*, 2 (1998), pp. 349–62; V. N. Zakharov, 'Simvolika khristianskogo kalendaria v proizvedeniakh Dostoevskogo', in idem (ed.), *Novye aspekty v izuchenii Dostoevskogo*, Petrozavodsk, 1994, pp. 37–49; or A. E. Kunil'skii, 'Problema "smekh i khristianstvo" v romane Dostoevskogo *Bral'ia Karamazovy*', in *Evangel'skii tekst*, 1 (1994), pp. 192–200.

⁵ See, for example, Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 30 vols, ed. V. G. Bazanov et al., Leningrad, 1972–90, xxi, p. 59; xxiii, p. 41; xxv, pp. 65–74; xxviii/ii, p. 251; or xxx/i, p. 10. Henceforth all references to Dostoevskii are to this edition, and are cited in the text. Translations are based on Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. Alan Myers, Oxford, 1992, with considerable alterations. Translations of the notebooks are my own.

⁶ Geir Kjetsaa, *Dostoevsky and His New Testament*, Oslo and New Jersey, 1984, indicates Dostoevskii's pencil marks in his New Testament; the on-line concordance, 'Ves' Dostoevskogo', <<http://www.karelia.ru/~Dostoevsky/evang/info.htm>> (accessed 15 January 2001–18 November 2002) also shows nail marks made by the author during his imprisonment in Siberia. For an example of the kind of interpretation this has led to, see Irina Kirillova, 'Dostoevsky's markings in the Gospel according to St John', in Pattison and Thompson, *Christian Tradition*, pp. 41–50.

⁷ See William J. Leatherbarrow, 'Apocalyptic Imagery in *The Idiot* and *The Devils*', *Dostoevsky Studies*, 3 (1982), pp. 43–52; David M. Bethea, *The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction*, Princeton, NJ, 1989, pp. 62–104, or Robert Hollander, 'Apocalyptic Framework in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*' (hereafter, Hollander, 'Apocalyptic Framework'), *Mosaic*, 7, 1974, pp. 123–39 (pp. 126–27, and p. 136).

Brat'ia Karamazovy (*The Brothers Karamazov*, 1880),⁸ and the presence of Orthodox motifs such as *urodstvo* ('holy foolishness'), kenosis and hesychasm.⁹

Idiot has been subject to numerous interpretations based on the similarities of Prince Myshkin to the Christ of John's Gospel, owing to Dostoevskii's comment in the notebooks for the novel, '*Kniaz' — Khristos*' (ix, pp. 246, 249), and his famous letter to his niece Sofia Ivanova, in which he writes of the difficulty of depicting a 'positively beautiful man', and relates the image of such a man specifically to the Christ of the fourth Gospel (xxviii/ii, p. 251).¹⁰ However, there are major problems with this approach, in that it fails to account for much of what we actually see in the novel. Attempts to label Myshkin as a specifically Russian, Orthodox Christ-figure are undermined by the fact that he has no formal connection with or knowledge of the Orthodox church, and that his major religious experiences are connected with a Western, Protestant setting.¹¹ Furthermore, although the Prince may exhibit Christ-like qualities in Part One, there is a very definite move 'away from the light' in the rest of the novel.¹² Myshkin's integrity and compassion decline severely in the second half of the novel, with the result that he not only fails to save anyone, but in fact makes matters worse for several of the protagonists; in particular, his union with Rogozhin over Nastas'ia Filippovna's corpse in the final scene evinces his shared responsibility for her death. However pure Myshkin's intentions (and, as his relationship with Aglaia develops and he moves towards the pursuit of his personal desires, these become distinctly less positive *vis-à-vis* Nastas'ia Filippovna),¹³ their disastrous effect cannot be ignored. In the light of this, claims that he failed as

⁸ See, for example, Roger Cox, *Between Earth and Heaven: Shakespeare, Dostoevsky and the Meaning of Christian Tragedy*, New York, 1969 (hereafter, Cox, *Between Earth and Heaven*), pp. 194–213.

⁹ On *urodstvo*, see Harriet Murav, *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky's Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique*, Stanford, CA, 1992, or V. V. Ivanov, *Bezobrazie krasoty. Dostoevskii i russkoe urodstvo*, Petrozavodsk, 1983; on kenosis, see A. Webster, 'The Exemplary Kenotic Holiness of Prince Myshkin in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 28, 1984, 3, pp. 189–216; on hesychasm, see M. V. Jones, 'Silence in *The Brothers Karamazov*', in Horst-Jurgen Gerigk (ed.), *Die Bruder Karamazov?: Dostojewskijs letzter Roman in heutiger Sicht*, Dresden, 1997, pp. 29–45, or V. V. Ivanov, 'Isikhazm i poetika kosnoiazychiia u Dostoevskogo', in *Evangel'skii tekst*, 2 (1998), pp. 321–27.

¹⁰ See, for example, G. G. Ermilova, *Taina kniazia Myshkina. O romane Dostoevskogo 'Idiot'*, Ivanovo, 1993.

¹¹ As noted by Malcolm Jones, 'Dostoevskii and Religion', in W. J. Leatherbarrow (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii*, Cambridge, 2002 (hereafter, Leatherbarrow, *Cambridge Companion*), pp. 148–74 (p. 165).

¹² See Roger B. Anderson, *Dostoevsky: Myths of Duality*, Gainesville, FL, 1986, p. 69; Dennis Slatery, *Dostoevsky's Fantastic Prince: A Phenomenological Approach*, New York, 1983, p. 79; or Hollander, 'Apocalyptic Framework', pp. 126–27, and p. 136.

¹³ As pointed out by Diane Oenning Thompson, 'Motifs of Compassion in Dostoevskii's Novels', in Bortnes and Lunde, *Cultural Discontinuity*, pp. 185–201 (p. 192).

Christ failed, or because he is 'not Christian enough', which do not take into account the changes in the hero and the fact that his positive qualities are compromised by the end of the novel, seem insufficient.¹⁴ The suggestion that Nietzsche based his critique of Christ in *Der Antichrist* (*The AntiChrist*, 1895) on the image presented in *Idiot* gives even greater cause for concern.¹⁵

Other aspects of the religious dimension of *Idiot* are scarcely less problematic. The apocalyptic theme, which is so central to the novel, is brought to the reader's attention by Lebedev, a congenital liar with a history of intrigue, dishonesty and double-dealing. Although the theme in the novel as a whole is a serious one, associated with the ultimate questions of death and new life through Myshkin's understanding of the phrase from Revelation, 'There shall be time no longer' (viii, p. 189), the element of buffoonery in Lebedev's eschatology undermines its initial significance. It is well known that Dostoevskii was in the habit of putting some of his most sacred ideas in the mouths of buffoons such as Marmeladov and even Fedor Pavlovich Karamazov, but such incidences are not neutral; the ideas are through this process dialogized, exposed to questions and doubts, and tested to see whether they can survive such debasement. In *Idiot*, the ideas do not stand up well to this test, because by this stage there is no longer a positive image at the centre of the novel to sustain them.

These problems, however, pale into insignificance in comparison with the issues raised by the Holbein painting of the dead Christ, which hangs in Rogozhin's tomb-like house and acts as a direct challenge to the entire basis of Christianity.¹⁶ In this horrific, naturalistic painting, as Ippolit and Myshkin perceive, resurrection and new life are specifically denied, with profoundly negative consequences for the possibility of faith.¹⁷ If Myshkin is intended as a Christ figure, then the

¹⁴ See Donald M. Feine, 'Pushkin's "Poor Knight": The Key to Perceiving Dostoevsky's *Idiot* as Allegory', *IDS Bulletin*, 8, 1978, pp. 10–21 (p. 21), and Gibson, *The Religion of Dostoevsky*, p. 38, for examples of these conclusions.

¹⁵ See Liza Knapp, 'Myshkin Through a Murky Glass, Guessingly', in eadem (ed.), *Dostoevsky's "The Idiot": A Critical Companion*, Evanston, IL, 1998, p. 209n.

¹⁶ On the themes raised by the painting, see, for example, E. I. Marchenko, "'Strannaia kartina" Gansa Golbeina Mladshego v romane F. Dostoevskogo *Idiot*', in M. N. Sokolov (ed.), *Stil' — obraz — vremia. Problemy istorii i teorii iskusstva. Sbornik statei*, Moscow, 1991, pp. 93–118; I. Molnár, "'One's faith could be smashed by such a picture": Interrelation of Word and Image (Icon) in Dostoevsky's Fiction: Holbein's "Christ in the Tomb" in the Ideological and Compositional Structure of the Novel *The Idiot*', *Acta Litteraria Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 32, 1990, 3–4, pp. 245–58; Julia Kristeva, 'Holbein's Dead Christ', *Zone*, 3, 1989, pp. 238–69.

¹⁷ In 'Kartina Gol'beina "Khristos v mogile" v strukture romana *Idiot*', in T. A. Kasatkina (ed.), *Roman Dostoevskogo "Idiot". Sovremennoe sostoianie izuchenii*, Moscow, 2001, pp. 28–39, I argue that the painting is instrumental in the Prince's moral decline. See also Jostein Bortnes, 'Dostoevskij's *Idiot* or the Poetics of Emptiness', *Scando-Slavica*, 40, 1994, pp. 5–14 (p. 13).

Holbein painting threatens to deprive his depiction of all spiritual meaning and value; and if Dostoevskii is to be seen as an Orthodox writer, we have to ask why in this novel the negation of the central tenet of Orthodoxy is given such a prominent place. In *Brat'ia Karamazovy*, Ivan's negation of God is counterbalanced by the teachings of the Elder Zosima and the figure of Alesha, but in *Idiot* there are no such enduring images of faith or spiritual qualities to stand against the challenge to the religious ideal.

The unavoidable and tragic conclusion of the Holbein image, which permeates the entire novel, is that God is dead, as is certainly the case for many of the inhabitants of Dostoevskii's fictional world. In his stories of executions, the hero emphasizes that the idea of resurrection or an afterlife is missing,¹⁸ while Lebedev's apocalyptic vision ends with death and the fourth horse, not the 'new heaven and new earth' of Revelation 21.1. The only positive reference to resurrection occurs in General Ivolgin's tale of Private Kolpakov, where the meaninglessness of the event, because it is divorced from faith, is highlighted.¹⁹

What, then, are we to make of a novel which has a positive hero and is replete with biblical allusions, but ends in abject failure and a denial of Christ's divinity (not to mention the complete absence of the doctrine of Grace), which has been called Dostoevskii's most ethical text, but is also his darkest, ending with no image of spiritual redemption or hope?²⁰ We cannot deny Dostoevskii's deep concern with religious and associated ethical issues, or that an intense dialogue of faith and unbelief forms the core of all his mature fiction. However, in the case of *Idiot* at least, the biblical sources he claimed were important leave too many questions unanswered.

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Notwithstanding the ambiguities of Myshkin and the novel as a whole with regard to the Christian tradition, *Idiot* 'maps on to' one biblical text, the Epistle of James, particularly well, partly because both are anomalous in similar respects. In James, as in *Idiot*, the divinity and resurrection of Christ are absent, a fact which is just as shocking and arresting (in Dostoevskian terms, one might say scandalous) in the context of a New Testament Epistle as the Holbein painting is in Dostoevskii's novel. This feature of the Epistle seems even more curious

¹⁸ See Michael Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel*, Princeton, NJ, 1977, pp. 102–23 for an excellent discussion of the theme of executions.

¹⁹ Olga Meerson, 'Ivolgin and Holbein: Non-Christ Risen vs Christ Non-Risen', *Slavic and East European Journal*, 39, Summer 1995, 2, pp. 200–13 (p. 202).

²⁰ L. A. Johnson, 'The Face of the Other in *The Idiot*', *Slavic Review*, 50, 1991, pp. 867–78 (p. 867), and George A. Panichas, *The Burden of Vision: Dostoevsky's Spiritual Art*, Lake Bluff, IL, 1985, p. 51, give these contradictory views.

in view of the fact that its author is according to popular tradition Jesus's brother, who had a conversion experience as a result of seeing the resurrected Christ.²¹ This anomaly, which causes James to stand out as being qualitatively different from other books of the New Testament, was in part responsible for the theological disputes which prevented the Epistle from becoming part of the New Testament canon until the comparatively late date of the fourth century.²²

Whether or not Jesus's brother was the author of the Epistle, the fact that it is in his name gives its theology the subtext of James's conversion experience, so that the absence of the Resurrection in the text itself acknowledges the difficulty of faith for those who have not witnessed this miracle. Instead of any mention of the Resurrection, or of the Pauline doctrine of Grace, faith and salvation in the Epistle of James are revealed through the simple and practical values of honesty and compassion for the needy, supported by a strong faith untainted by doubts and backed up by appropriate actions ('faith with works'). The Epistle sets up an opposition between the wise man who is unconcerned with worldly affairs, and acts righteously towards his fellow men and God, and the 'doubter, being double-minded', who is 'unstable in every way',²³ and treats others badly, causing division and disorder in society. The key 'testing' factors are money and speech, and much of the Epistle is taken up with descriptions of the contrasting attitudes of the wise man and the double minded man to them.

The epithet 'double minded' is unique, within the context of the New Testament, to James. The Greek in both cases (1.8 and 4.8) is *dipsuchos* meaning literally 'of two souls', 'of two minds';²⁴ the Authorized Version and the New Revised Standard Version have 'double-minded' both times, preserving the use of the same phrase, as in the original; the Russian translation has 's dvoishchimisia mysliami' for the first, and 'dvoedushnye' for the second occurrence. Sophie Laws goes to considerable lengths (four pages) to connect it to Jewish and Old Testament thought in order to claim that it is 'most likely that the background is an idiom current in Greek-speaking Judaism. Its coining is not remarkable'.²⁵ However, the very fact that it is worthy of such attention highlights its significance for the theme of dualism (the result

²¹ I Corinthians 15.7.

²² See Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, 1982 (hereafter, Davids, *Epistle*), p. 7.

²³ James 1.8. All biblical quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise stated; references to the Epistle of James will henceforth be given in the text.

²⁴ Alexander Souter, *A Pocket Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Oxford, 1916 (hereafter, Souter, *Lexicon*), p. 67.

²⁵ Sophie Laws, *A Commentary on The Epistle of James*, London, 1980 (hereafter, Laws, *Commentary*), p. 60.

of the Fall and the source of sin in the Old Testament) in New Testament teaching. One should also recall that the Fall introduced a disjunction between words and meanings as a result of the serpent's lie.²⁶ Falsehood, therefore, becomes particularly important in relation to the theme of dualism.

Dualism in many guises pervades Dostoevskii's oeuvre as a whole, and echoes of James's 'double minded man' can be heard in Myshkin's admission that he suffers from 'dvoinye mysl'i' ('double thoughts') (viii, p. 258), which has an enormous impact on the subsequent development of the novel. It has practical implications for his interaction with other characters, for example in relation to the downfall and death of General Ivolgin and in the dilemma the hero faces over reconciling his love for Aglaia and his compassion for Nastas'ia Filippovna, which harms both women. It also undermines the reader's positive opinion of the hero, garnered in Part One, as the previously firm motivational basis for his actions and attitude to the other is placed under question. Moreover, it points to the source of conflicting impulses and contradictory actions of other protagonists, most significantly in Nastas'ia Filippovna's oscillation between Myshkin and Rogozhin, but also in Ippolit's mirroring of the same dilemma, the confusing signals Rogozhin sends in taking the heroine and Myshkin to be blessed by his mother when he is harbouring murderous thoughts about both, and Aglaia's constant, incomprehensible reversals with regard to the hero. Among the minor characters, the mysterious and unexplained activities of Lebedev, Radomskii and Gania, who all show positive impulses alongside deceit, demonstrate that practically no one remains untouched by the phenomenon. It is in large part contact with the 'double thoughts' of the rest of society which infects Myshkin and precipitates his decline.

Kunil'skii, noting the similarity of the images of doubleness, concludes that 'the author of *Idiot* could not have ignored these words'.²⁷ According to the Petrozavodsk concordance, there are seven marks in the Epistle of James, but the references to the 'double minded man' are not among these. While this means we can be certain that Dostoevskii knew this book of the Bible, we cannot prove that he was aware of the coincidences between the two texts. Nevertheless, the similarities in their images, oppositions and theology suggest a new framework for interpretation.

Early in the notebooks for *Idiot*, before Dostoevskii had any firm idea about its form, direction or characters, he wrote, 'A Christian and at

²⁶ See M. V. Jones, *Dostoevsky after Bakhtin*, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 183–84 on the Fall and dualism in language; my article 'Bibleiskie arkhetypy v romane F. M. Dostoevskogo *Idiot*', in *Evangel'skii tekst*, 3 (2001), pp. 382–90, explores the implications of this theme in *Idiot*.

²⁷ A. E. Kunil'skii, 'Printsip "snizheniia" v poetike F. M. Dostoevskogo: Roman *Idiot*', in *Zhanr i kompozitsiia literatury*, Petrozavodsk, 1983, pp. 28–52 (p. 37).

the same time does not believe. *The duality of a deep nature. The tongue in the mirror*' (ix, p. 185, author's emphasis). The theme of doubleness and the tongue as its agent are major problems for the Epistle, while doubt is a source and sign of double-mindedness, 'For the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind' (1.6). Doubt is, moreover, the central example of faith without works in the Epistle, against which tendency the Old Testament figures of Abraham (2.21), Rahab (2.25) and Job (5.11) are presented as unwavering in their faith and demonstrating this in their actions. The fact that James refers to righteous characters from the Old Testament, where doubleness is depicted as being the fruit of sin, further reinforces the idea that freedom from double-mindedness and doubt are the keys to an ethical life; one should not forget that Job is an important figure for Dostoevskii, and a significant influence on the religious ideals of Starets Zosima.²⁸ Furthermore, James also employs the metaphor of the mirror: 'For if any are hearers of the word, and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror' (1.23). Significantly, Dostoevskii marked this verse, which also pertains to the problem of faith without works, in his copy of the New Testament. Therefore, by juxtaposing doubt, doubleness, the tongue and the image of the mirror in his note, Dostoevskii demonstrates an instinctive awareness of the interconnections between these issues and a certain sympathy, whether conscious or not, with James's theology, suggesting that he perceived the relevance of these problems to the novel and in relation to each other before its form, plot or characters were developed.

It is the particular patterns of imagery presented by the Epistle which coincide so well with the thematic structure of the novel. No one would suggest that James is the only book in the Bible to warn against excessive attachment to worldly goods, for example, but it is the juxtaposition of this theme with those of false speech, the testing of the righteous, doubt and double-mindedness, faith without works, and the conflict to which all these problems lead, which suggest significant parallels between the biblical text and *Idiot*. The novel is often seen as 'testing' Dostoevskii's 'positively beautiful man' through his encounter with the materialistic and dualistic world of St Petersburg.²⁹ The central opposition of the novel, the Myshkin–others axis,³⁰ supports this theory as, in contrast to the greed, jealousy and harsh speech of the other characters, the hero, particularly in the opening section of the novel, is driven by compassion, open-heartedness and generosity, and

²⁸ See V. Liakhu, 'O vliianii poetiki Biblii na poetiku F. M. Dostoevskogo', *Voprosy literatury*, 4, 1998, pp. 129–43 (pp. 140–41).

²⁹ See V. N. Belopol'skii, *Dostoevskii i filosofskaia mysl' ego epokhi. Kontseptsia cheloveka*, Rostov, 1987, p. 123.

³⁰ See F. I. Evnin, 'Myshkin i drugie', *Russkaia Literatura*, 3, 1968, pp. 37–52 (p. 39).

speaks with the aim of increasing others' understanding of the need for these qualities. In this Myshkin strongly resembles the 'wise man' of the Epistle, standing out as avoiding the abuses of speech, as well as money and power, to which others are prey. However, as he subsequently admits to double thoughts as a result of his trials, the pressures brought to bear on him, and on society as a whole as it is depicted in the novel, deserve serious consideration. Analysing *Idiot* through the prism of James reveals various ways in which different aspects of the thematic structure of the novel are interconnected.

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James's assumption that the wealthy tend to be unjust and unrighteous is evident in his repeated warnings about their ultimate fate, such as, 'Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire' (5.1–3). Money is ephemeral (4.13) and meaningless in terms of one's relation with God.³¹ The poor, in contrast, are 'rich in faith and [. . .] heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him' (2.5). The juxtaposition of rich and poor runs throughout the Epistle, highlighting the divisive nature of wealth, for example, 'Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich, in that he is made low' (1.9–10),³² while the poor are 'brothers', the rich, through the absence of this appellation, are specifically excluded from this spiritual community.³³ Money thus divides people not only from God, but from each other as well.

Money is also a vital force in the structuring of *Idiot*, and an obsession for most of the characters, as it is in some form in most of Dostoevskii's major novels. Catteau sees money as a 'ruling power' in Dostoevskii's artistic world, and the fact that he devotes thirty-three pages to a 'brief summary' indicates the extensive implications of the subject.³⁴ From the outset of *Idiot* money is a topic of conversation, as Myshkin and Rogozhin discuss the latter's inheritance and the former's medical fees (viii, pp. 6–9). Both General Epanchin and Rogozhin offer Myshkin money, Ferdyschenko's story of his 'worst deed' involves stealing three rubles, and later General Ivolgin's theft of Lebedev's wallet plays a

³¹ See Davids, *Epistle*, p. 44.

³² Here I use the Authorized Version which, in using the word 'brothers', preserves the precise sense of the Greek, whereas the New Revised Standard Version has 'believers'; the Russian is 'da khvalitsia brat unizhennyi vysotoiu svoiu'.

³³ Laws, *Commentary*, p. 62.

³⁴ Jacques Catteau, *Dostoyevsky and the Process of Literary Creation*, trans. Audrey Littlewood, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 135–68.

major role in his decline and death. Christa sees money as a test of spiritual worth and moral identity in Dostoevskii's fiction;³⁵ it is a source of temptation for those who have none, and an instrument of power for the rich. Gania's determination to become a 'Rothschild' reveals the power of wealth to obviate the need for other positive attributes: 'when I've got the money, you know, I'll be as original as can be. Money's the most hateful and despicable thing because it even gives you talents' (viii, p. 105). Like Arkadii in *Podrostok* (*A Raw Youth*, 1875), Gania is seduced by the power money bestows, not by wealth *per se*, indicating its wide sphere of influence; it can gratify material desires or be used to dominate others. The Epistle's question, 'Is it not the rich who oppress you?' (2.6) shows that James also saw the abuse of power as part of the issue of wealth.

Money also plays an essential role in several important scenes in the novel; for example, the economic situation of Radomskii and his uncle provides Nastas'ia Filippovna with a point of attack for her appearances in Parts Two and Three, which have reverberations for long periods in the middle section of the novel. However, the focus on money is sharpest at the heroine's birthday party. The proposed engagement of Nastas'ia Filippovna is a financial transaction between Totskii, General Epanchin and Gania, but with the help of Rogozhin, the heroine strips away the polite façade to reveal the true nature of the event, turning it into a public auction, with the package of 100,000 rubles wrapped significantly in the pages of *Birzhevye vedomosti* (*Stock Exchange News*) (viii, p. 135) taking the centre of attention when it is thrown on the fire as a signal that Nastas'ia Filippovna is freeing herself from the slavery of money and its dominating influence.

Myshkin's inheritance is revealed in the same scene and has great significance for the subsequent development of the novel. In the early part of the novel, in contrast to others, the hero shows a balanced relation to money, being neither attached to it (selling his diamond pin to help Marie [viii, p. 60]), nor offended by offers of financial assistance from others, and thus recalls James's ideal 'wise man' who is unconcerned about worldly treasures. The fact that the Prince is taken more seriously by the other characters after they have heard about his new-found wealth has parallels with James's contrast of 'a person with gold rings and in fine clothes' who is given every respect and is treated in full accordance with his dignity, and 'a poor person in dirty clothes' who receives no such respect (2.2–5). While Myshkin only takes on the external trappings of wealth when he returns to Petersburg in Part Two, the subtle change in others' attitudes towards him on discovering

³⁵ Boris Christa, 'Dostoevskii and Money', in Leatherbarrow, *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 93–100 (p. 109).

that he is of material worth indicates that they do not treat others equally, a fact most clearly seen in General Epanchin, who severs his ties with General Ivolgin after the latter's fall from grace, and treats Gania with contempt over Nastas'ia Filippovna, as well as becoming distinctly more solicitous towards Myshkin at the birthday party and afterwards.

A further result of Myshkin's inheritance is the appearance of false claimants and other rogues and hangers-on, whose primary motive is to make a profit out of the hero. The affair of 'Pavlishchev's son' is the most obvious and sustained example of this tendency, and the fact that this confrontation constitutes one of the central scenes of Part Two suggests the importance the author attached to the theme. As well as being targeted for his generosity and supposed simplicity, this episode also reveals an additional change in Myshkin. From being a character who could give and receive money with equanimity, his inheritance places him in a more problematic position as, although he is still happy to give his money away, he fails to recognize the implications for the pride of the other, and thus offends the nihilists' sense of self-worth even when acting generously. The hero's new-found wealth automatically places him in a position of social superiority, which leads others to form antagonistic and coercive relations with him, and despite his overriding concern for the status of the other's 'I', he becomes unable to persuade others of this ideal of compassion and self-effacement, as they ascribe their own greed and fascination with money to Myshkin.

Money is therefore a major source of envy, which leads inevitably to conflict, 'For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work' (James 3.16). 'Confusion' here is a translation of *akatastasia*, meaning 'disturbance, upheaval, revolution, almost *anarchy*',³⁶ the adjectival form of which, *akatastatos*, is used to describe the double minded man of 1.8. Although the Russian Bible does not employ the same word in both cases, using 'ne tverd' in the first instance and 'neustroistvo' in the second, even the synonyms make the matter clear: division and disorder, the essence of double-mindedness, are the result of greed and craving, which undermine the foundations of harmonious societal relations. In this sense money is not only important in its own right as a cause of disunity in the theology of the Epistle, but also stands as a metaphor for any kind of material or physical desires, which equally create division between people: 'Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts' (4.1-3).

³⁶ Souter, *Lexicon*, p. 10.

Rogozhin's sexual jealousy and feelings of rivalry towards Myshkin are equally a strong source of envy and conflict in the novel, and Nastas'ia Filippovna's and Myshkin's alternative pictures of Rogozhin's life had he not met the heroine also illustrate the powerful connection between money and sexual passion. The hero says Rogozhin would have turned into his father, 'just piling up money in gloomy silence', while Nastas'ia's version goes much further: 'you'd fall so much in love with your money that you'd probably make ten million, not two, and die of starvation sitting on your money bags, because for you everything is passion, and you turn everything into a passion' (viii, p. 178). The character who bears the brunt of his passions sees most clearly that the mania for possessions is the same whether its object is another person or money.³⁷

The role of money as a motivating force for the characters in *Idiot* is reinforced in Lebedev's interpretation of the Apocalypse, which explores the ethico-religious implications of materialism:

we're in the age of the third horse, the black one, the one with the horseman who has the scales in his hands, because in this century everything is done by weights and agreements, and all men seek only their own rights: 'a measure of wheat for one denarius and three measures of barley for one denarius' . . . as well as wanting to maintain freedom of spirit, a pure heart and a sound body, and all God's gifts. But they cannot maintain these things by right alone, and the pale horse will follow and he whose name is Death, and after him comes Hell . . . (viii, pp. 167–68).

The fact that *Idiot* abounds in apocalyptic references and symbolism, such as the names Princess *Belokon'skaia* ('White horse'), and the *Vesy* ('Scales') hotel, which both echo the above quotation, signals the importance of the theme to Dostoevskii's artistic conception. It augments the doom-laden atmosphere of the novel, highlighting the unethical attitudes and actions which are standard practice for many of the characters, and suggesting that judgement and damnation are perilously close.

Hollander, however, points out that Lebedev's eschatology is not traditional, as the third horse normally signifies famine,³⁸ and it is in this idiosyncratic element of his interpretation that parallels with the Epistle of James stand out. Connecting money and mercantilism to the third horse, and to the Apocalypse in general, places responsibility for the nearness of Judgement firmly on human action, characterizing wealth and the negative emotions and actions that spring from it, as

³⁷ See Sidney Monas, 'Across the Threshold: *The Idiot* as a Petersburg Tale', in Malcolm V. Jones and Garth M. Terry (eds), *New Essays on Dostoevsky*, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 67–93 (p. 85). Christa also notes the link of money to sexual power, in 'Dostoevskii and Money', in Leatherbarrow, *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 101–04.

³⁸ Hollander, 'Apocalyptic Framework', p. 130.

James does, as a major source of strife and sin. Furthermore, by linking railways and the tendency they represent to the star Wormwood of Revelation 8.11 (viii, p. 309), Lebedev creates a new, broader level of apocalyptic imagery, which reinforces the notion of man's responsibility for the current physical and emotional environment: 'the railways themselves alone won't pollute the springs of life, but the whole thing's altogether accursed, sir, the whole spirit of these last centuries, in its general, scientific and practical totality, really is perhaps accursed, sir' (viii, p. 310).

The role of railways in the novel is evident from the first page, when Myshkin meets Rogozhin and Lebedev in a carriage on the Warsaw–St Petersburg train, and continues as train journeys and railway stations feature throughout, most significantly in the Prince's wanderings before his first fit. The theme is further emphasized in the fact that several of the characters are investors in the railway system (notably General Epanchin, who is characterized by the narrator as a 'practical man' (viii, pp. 268–70), linking him to Lebedev's idea quoted above). Even more significant is Lebedev calling his nephew, Doktorenko, who works on the railways, 'the future second murderer of a future second Zhemarin family' (viii, p. 161), as in the juxtaposition of railways, money and murder, he provides the first example of the inevitable consequences of mercantilism and materialism. The Epistle of James points to the same conclusion: 'You have condemned and murdered the righteous one' (5.6; see also 1.15). Thus money is not simply a disunifying element, but can lead to the ultimate self-assertion and denial of the other. This is emphasized in *Idiot* in the images of Rogozhin as both the murderer of Nastas'ia Filippovna and the miser amidst his money bags, and the machines which link Lebedev's interpretation to both Myshkin's description of the guillotine in his first story about execution, and Ippolit's alienated depiction of nature 'in the form of a vast machine of the latest design' (viii, p. 339). As anti-human and devoid of a spiritual dimension, science, connected to wealth through Lebedev's railway metaphor and the recurring motif of investment in the railway system, has its basis in materialism and is thus a destructive force.

The problem typified by the railways and the 'scientific tendency' is expressed most clearly when Ptitsyn, the archetypal practical man who, as a moneylender, both perpetuates and profits from the desires, envies and external inequalities of others, defends the benefits of the new transport system: 'it leads to universal solidarity and the balancing of interests', to which Lebedev responds, 'and that's all, that's all it does! Without taking any moral stance except the satisfaction of the individual ego and material necessity! Universal peace, universal

happiness — out of necessity!' (viii, p. 310). Concentration on individual desires and self-assertion has damaged society by reinforcing the separation of self and other and ignoring man's spiritual development and concomitant moral responsibilities, as 'those carts bringing bread to all mankind without a moral basis for their action, could cold-bloodedly exclude a significant part of humanity from the enjoyment of what they bring, and that has indeed happened already' (viii, p. 312). Echoing the Gospel (and Old Testament) axiom 'One does not live by bread alone' (Matthew 4.4), Lebedev illustrates how a society based on material and financial values 'without that binding idea which directs men's hearts and fertilizes the springs of life!' (viii, p. 315) has the power to exclude. Thus *Idiot*, through a complex web of interrelated motifs surrounding the central theme of money (encompassing other material obsessions, including sexual lust and the desire for worldly power, and the scientific-rationalistic tendency), expresses the same attitude as the Epistle of James: wealth both retards spiritual and ethical practice and divides people from each other, the ultimate consequences of which are double-mindedness and murder. Myshkin's moral decline is clearly not of this order, in spite of his shared responsibility for the death of the heroine, but the erosion of his image as a 'positively beautiful man' is apparent.

* * *

While money is seen largely as a source of external disunity, the abuse of speech is indicative of (and a further impulse to) both outer and inner double-mindedness. False and harsh speech are a source of division in the community for James, with gossip and slander singled out for particular condemnation: 'Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against one another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law' (4.11). On the internal level, this also signifies that slander and gossip are signs of inconsistency between the words a person uses to speak to God and to other men, which renders faith worthless: 'If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless' (1.26). This tendency for James is manifested physically in faith without works (1.23; 2.14, 17, 20), as an inconsistent life-style is incompatible with claims of wisdom.³⁹ In this sense, concentrating on gathering worldly rather than spiritual wealth is also part of this theme.

This aspect of the Epistle is generally seen as being a warning against possible misreadings of the Pauline theology of justification: 'a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.

³⁹ See Laws, *Commentary*, p. 161.

And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law'.⁴⁰ As Davids states, 'James has observed much verbal commitment to Christian affirmations without endurance and with a lack of practical follow-through'.⁴¹ The assertion that 'faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead' (2.17) is his response.

In terms of Dostoevskii's dialogue with the New Testament, James's theology is significant for two reasons. Firstly, of the seven marks Dostoevskii made in the Epistle, three relate directly to the problem of faith without works (1.23; 2.14, 20), and two indirectly, referring to the abuse of speech and mastery of the tongue (3.2, 6), suggesting that Dostoevskii saw these as important aspects of the Epistle. It is clearly relevant to *Brat'ia Karamazovy*, where Zosima states that it is possible to open one's eyes to the reality of faith through the practice of active love (xiv, p. 52), and to Sutherland's concept of faith embedded in the lived life.⁴² Secondly, as Cox notes, Dostoevskii also saw dangers in Pauline theology from the opposite extreme, as the assertion that 'All things are lawful'⁴³ can be taken out of the context of faith and used as a rationalistic argument, leading to Raskol'nikov's experimentation with the Napoleon theory, Stavrogin's terminal alienation from life, Petr Verkhovenski's opportunistic revolutionism, and Ivan Karamazov's rebellion.⁴⁴

The fact that all these characters are subject to radical dualism, owing to their extreme self-assertion,⁴⁵ suggests that in his search for the antithesis of his anti-heroes, Dostoevskii might have turned to an antithetical theology. As a corruption of the original meaning of 'All things are lawful' is the mainstay of his ideological heroes, it is plausible to argue that the simple, unambiguous call to ethical action, supported by faith, which characterizes the Epistle of James, would have appealed to Dostoevskii in his attempt to depict a 'positively beautiful man' as an antidote to the self-assertion and dualism of his negative and spiritually isolated characters.

In Part One of the novel the Prince lives up to this ideal; he always speaks honestly and openly, without dissembling, and his parable-like stories confirm his essential integrity. The Prince also demonstrates the ideal of faith with works, as we see in his move to positive action to help

⁴⁰ Galatians 2.16. See also Galatians 3.24; Romans 5.1; Ephesians 2.8–9.

⁴¹ Davids, *Epistle*, p. 50.

⁴² Stuart R. Sutherland, *Atheism and the Rejection of God: Contemporary Philosophy and 'The Brothers Karamazov'*, Oxford, 1977, pp. 95–98 and *passim*.

⁴³ 1 Corinthians 10.23.

⁴⁴ Cox, *Between Earth and Heaven*, p. 42.

⁴⁵ S. Askol'dov, 'Religiozno-eticheskoe znachenie Dostoevskogo', in A. S. Dolinin (ed.), *Dostoevskii: Stat'i i materialy*, vol. 1, St Petersburg, 1922, pp. 1–32 (pp. 3–10).

Marie in his story, and later Nastas'ia Filippovna, General Ivolgin and Ippolit. His belief-system is not passive, but involves active participation to relieve the suffering of others; as Dostoevskii wrote in the notebooks, 'gradually pointing out *the Prince in action* will be sufficient' (ix, p. 252, author's emphasis). However, his later decline is equally evident in his speech, for example in his dishonesty to General Ivolgin and his inability to express his ideas at the Epanchins' soirée, as he shifts away from the ideal man James postulates, and towards the double-mindedness of the rest of society. At the end of the novel he is unable to turn his compassion into action and thus fails to save either Aglaia or Nastas'ia Filippovna.

Lies, gossip and harsh criticism account for a significant proportion of the characters' communication in *Idiot*. As Miller notes, practically every inserted narrative in the text contains some sort of falsehood, such as Aglaia changing the initials on the poor knight's shield, General Ivolgin's tall tales and Totskii claiming that a trivial story about sexual rivalry is his worst deed.⁴⁶ They are similarly prevalent in general conversation, in Lebedev's constant and meaningless falsehoods, to the extent of reversing his name and patronymic, Aglaia's lies about her feelings for the Prince and Gania, and Ippolit's pointless claim to have consulted Dr B-n, which he later admits to be untrue (viii, pp. 165, 360, 322). Lies, which when they concern others are a source of conflict, also introduce contradictory impulses and separate people from the truth internally.

The boundaries between lies, gossip and criticism in the protagonists' discourse frequently overlap, with the result that the 'truth' is distorted and obscured; for example, while Aglaia's harshness towards Nastas'ia Filippovna is undoubtedly caused by envy, her utterances about the latter are based on rumours, rather than any direct experience or knowledge, which perpetuate a false perception. This form of judgement by men of each other is particularly condemned as an abuse of speech in James, who asks, 'who, then, are you to judge your neighbour?' (4.12). Furthermore, the irony of Aglaia's criticism of Myshkin, 'You have no tenderness, only truth, and that means you're unjust' (viii, p. 354), lies in the fact that, while only the ethically-oriented hero is ready to judge with forgiveness and to be judged and forgiven, and also sees that this is what others need for their self-affirmation (in particular Ippolit), others are merely moralistic, passing judgement with no element of forgiveness.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Robin Feuer Miller, *Dostoevsky and the 'Idiot': Author, Narrator, and Reader*, Cambridge, MA, 1981, p. 10.

⁴⁷ Cox, *Between Earth and Heaven*, pp. 179–80.

Gossip becomes a particular problem towards the end of the novel with respect to the narrator. As he moves away from omniscience and the direct representation of events and instead reports rumour, we have little guarantee of reliability, particularly as Myshkin's relationship with Nastas'ia Filippovna returns to the foreground; as we are already aware that the popular assumptions of her promiscuity and of a sexual liaison between them are almost certainly false, we have little reason to believe that the events which the narrator reconstructs for us from the same gossip-mongers are any more accurate. Rumours and gossip are problematic for human relations as they provoke speculation, judgement, and mistrust, as well as giving rise to further potential falsehoods; they are also problematic for narrative, as they undermine the reader's reference points, according to which a coherent standard of truth for the literary text, within its own terms, may usually be defined. When falsehood is the habitual mode of address in a narrative, it becomes impossible for either readers or protagonists to define any such standard; lies and gossip jeopardize not only the characters' interrelations, but also the stability of the text. The integrity of the narrative therefore depends on one of the central ethical precepts defined by the theology of the novel.

Keller's article and the visit of the nihilists during which it appears provides one of the most consistent examples of lies, gossip and criticism in the novel. The article itself interweaves truth, half-truth and absolute un-truth concerning Myshkin's inheritance and casts gross aspersions on his, his father's, and Pavlishchev's characters (viii, pp. 217–21), leaving both the reader and the other protagonists listening aware that they have been presented with a wildly inaccurate version of events, but unable to provide a more accurate or fair account to counter most of its accusations. As a result, trust in the hero is further undermined.

One of the paradoxes of dialogue is that it is founded on the impulse to self-assertion, but simultaneously requires the active participation of another. This participation cannot be assumed, and is easily lost as a consequence of the dualistic nature of man. Myshkin in Part One of the novel offers a harmonious alternative of interaction for the sake of the other. However, the lies about him in Keller's article provide an alternative past to the one we have already been given, which undermines the other characters' and the readers' perception of the hero's goodness and capacity to help others. The falsehoods the article contains introduce doubt into Myshkin's mind, damaging his confidence in his mission and his ideas, which threatens his ability to act for the sake of the other; they have a similar effect on the other protagonists, who cease to trust him and suspect he is not being open, particularly

after Nastas'ia Filippovna's attack on Radomskii which follows this scene.

The confrontation with the nihilists also highlights another aspect of the abuse of speech and the dualism it reflects. The rationalism of the visitors is evident, as the main points of their argument concern not moral obligation but logic and rights: 'whoever your witnesses may be, even if they are your friends, they cannot but acknowledge Burdovskii's rights (since it is, obviously, mathematical)' (viii, pp. 224–25). Their credo, 'human, natural right, the right of common sense and the voice of conscience' (viii, p. 223), bases the whole of life within the sphere of the human, and repudiates all notion of a divine or spiritual dimension.

However, the scene is saturated with irony, demonstrating that the nihilists are also guilty of faith without works, even according to their own rationalistic beliefs. The rights of man are apparently an article of faith to them, yet in the reality of their speech, it degenerates into mere assertion of their own rights at the expense of the other. Throughout the episode, they repeat the word *pravo* ('right') like a mantra, uttering it thirty-one times in chapter eight of Part Two alone, always in the form of a demand ('[we] demand, demand, demand, and don't beg! . . .' [viii, p. 224]) for their rights to be respected ('we're within our rights'), or as a denial of the rights of others ('do you have any right?', and 'But you have no right, no right, no right [. . .] you have no right!' [viii, p. 216]). Furthermore, their insistence on being treated as equals and that Burdovskii is not a charity case implies that they are democrats who repudiate social and financial distinctions, yet in contrast to Myshkin, who talks to the Epanchins' footman as an equal and is unconcerned when Nastas'ia Filippovna mistakes him for a servant, the nihilists are affronted at being treated in this way, complaining, 'we've been waiting for two hours in your servants' room' and 'I'm not your servant!' (viii, p. 216). Despite their protestations of equality, they are far from applying this principle to others, and are thus not backing up their belief with appropriate actions and words, thus exposing their double-mindedness. It is in large part their inability to translate words into deeds which compromises the ability of these characters to persuade others of the merits of their ideology or the case in hand.

Burdovskii's and his associates' persistent denial of others' rights whilst asserting their own also demonstrates the distinction that they make between self and other, which engenders division and conflict. The tendency to falsehood and self-deception is also illustrated in the visitors' mistrust of others, as they presume that everyone, like them, is prone to deception and lacks integrity: 'Well, Prince, your arithmetic's very weak, or maybe a bit too strong, though you pretend to be a simpleton' (viii, p. 228), and 'it's either slightly too innocent or slightly too cunning' (viii, p. 235).

Moreover, the mathematical and logical formulae the nihilists use to support their case are shown to provide an inadequate basis for values when their case is disproved. Having set out Burdovskii's claim purely with the intention of securing Myshkin's agreement that they are logically in the right, their argument cannot hold good when one aspect of it is found to be faulty. The logical conclusion of their claim, when the new proof that Burdovskii was not Pavlishchev's son at all is introduced, is that the Prince has no moral obligation whatsoever to settle. When a single factor in an equation is proved to be untrue, the rationale of their entire argument disintegrates.

The mathematical and logical stance of the nihilists is therefore an intellectual analogy to the railways/science motif discussed above, as both tendencies prioritize a rationalistic basis for life at the expense of the spiritual. The two strands are connected firstly in the fact that the episode with 'Pavlishchev's son' pivots on the issue of money, but more significantly in the other characters' discussions of the moral implications of the radicals' ideas. When Lebedev compares his nephew to Gorskii, he establishes the link between railways, mercantilism and murder, and this idea is continued when he characterizes the visitors' political views, thus: 'nowadays it's considered an absolute right that, if you want something badly, you shouldn't stop at any obstacle, even if you have to bump off eight people in the process' (viii, p. 214).

The twisted logic that Doktorenko uses to 'prove' that 'it's the principle that's important', and 'it's all the same whether it's one hundred or two hundred and fifty' when challenged about the money they have returned to Myshkin, is compared by Radomskii to the utilitarian defence of the Gorskii case (viii, p. 236), and the exposé of the moral consequences of nihilism and rationalism is completed by this character and Mrs Epanchina. The latter sees that the radicals have lost their 'binding idea', as 'they don't believe in God, they don't believe in Christ!' (viii, p. 238), and suggests that the inevitable result of a reliance on earthly values is murder: 'your money, the ten thousand, he won't take, perhaps, because it's against his conscience, but he'd come in the night and cut your throat and steal it from your cash box. That would be according to his conscience! That wouldn't be dishonourable for him!' (viii, p. 237). Significantly, her outburst contains echoes of Rogozhin's knife, his interest in Myshkin's story of the murderer, and his attempt to kill his 'brother' and rival. Although Rogozhin operates at the opposite extreme, with no rationality at all, the two paths converge, as both end in moral cannibalism. Radomskii makes the connection more explicitly: 'from there you can jump straight to might is right, that is, the right of the individual fist and the personal will as, incidentally, has often happened in world affairs', and

'from might is right to the rights of tigers and crocodiles, and even to Danilov and Gorskii, is not very far' (viii, p. 245).

Through the nihilists' assertion of their rights and Lebedev's exposition of the loss of a 'binding idea', alongside the recurring motifs of contemporary murder cases and money, a broad set of interrelated ideas is introduced into *Idiot* which illustrates the continuing relevance of James's themes of the abuse of wealth and speech and the divisions, doubts and double-mindedness they cause, both internal and external. It is these factors which are ultimately responsible for the downfall of Prince Myshkin, and which account for the difficulties of portraying 'a positively beautiful man [. . .] especially nowadays' (xxviii/ii, p. 251).

* * *

The practical theology of the Epistle of James is some way removed from that usually associated with Dostoevskii, or with Orthodoxy, but in the opposition of Myshkin and others, and in the spiritual and moral decline of the hero under the pressures of the materialistic and dualistic world, we see, as in James, the practical difficulties of sustaining faith and spiritual values in a world of doubt and temptation. The formal and thematic parallels I have identified suggest that the Epistle of James 'maps on to' *Idiot* better than the Johannine or Pauline scriptures, placing a question mark over the thesis that Dostoevskii, as an Orthodox Christian (and also because of his marks in the New Testament), always gave priority to Pauline and Johannine teachings. In our quest to understand the basis of Dostoevskii's imaginative depiction of faith and spiritual values in his fiction, we need to widen the scope of the debate to look beyond his professed interests. In doing so, we may well come to the conclusion that Dostoevskii as an artist, at least, is not as Orthodox as we — or indeed he — might have thought.