

The Grand Inquisitor



a graphic novel based on the
story from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's
The Brothers Karamazov



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Introduction by Gary Saul Morson



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BASED ON THE STORY
FROM Fyodor Dostoyevsky's
THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV

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INTRODUCTION

The Eternal Questions, Illustrated

Gary Saul Morson

WHEN EARTHQUAKES, FAMINES, AND PANDEMICS STRIKE, people often ask: Why does this happen? If they are religious, they pose the traditional question of theodicy (justification of God): Why does God allow the innocent to suffer? If their perspective is secular, they doubt the goodness of the universe. As believers question Providence, nonbelievers wonder whether there really are laws of progress built into the nature of things. Dostoyevsky was always asking these questions, and he recognized that they are essentially the same whether expressed in religious or secular terms.

The answers, however, tend to differ. Materialists have looked for technological solutions. If only people would allow experts the power to impose scientific (or social scientific) remedies, evil could be minimized or even eliminated. In this view, moral questions turn out to be fundamentally simple and solvable. In Dostoyevsky's time, numerous schools of thought, ranging from English utilitarianism to Russian populism and socialism, maintained that they had discovered the indubitable solution to moral and social questions.

This way of thinking appalled Dostoyevsky. With his profound grasp of psychology, he regarded the materialists' view of human nature as hopelessly simplistic. Deeply suspicious of what intellectuals would do if they ever gained the power they sought, he described in greater detail than any other nineteenth-century thinker what we have come to call totalitarianism. Even in its less terrifying forms, rule by supposedly benevolent experts was, he thought, more dangerous than people understood.

For Dostoyevsky, the Christian view of life, which most intellectuals regarded as primitive, offered a far more sophisticated understanding than materialist alternatives. He laughed at the worldview that is today prevalent in mainstream

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Introduction

economics, with its picture of people as rational agents seeking their greatest advantage. And he regarded it as a profound mistake to rely only on technological solutions to social problems, a perspective that, if anything, needs to be challenged all the more strongly today. Man does not live by iPhone alone.

Few people in any age have had a deeper appreciation of the importance of freedom than Dostoyevsky. The core error of the secularists, whether utilitarians or socialists, was to regard people as finished objects with defined needs. Satisfy those needs, the reasoning went, and people will be happy. Dostoyevsky posed a thought experiment: Imagine that some person – or some devil – offered to make you happy forever, so that every desire was immediately satisfied, by taking away all choice. Everything would be decided for you. Today we might say: If someone offered to make you happy by connecting your brain to electrodes and pumping in pleasure for the rest of your life, would you do it? If not, why not?

The answer is that we need to accomplish things where failure is possible, to make decisions that could be mistaken, to take responsibility, and to risk. If people accepted the devil's bargain, Dostoyevsky says, they would soon see "that they had no freedom of spirit, no will, no personality, that someone had stolen all this from them; they would see that their human image had disappeared . . . that their lives had been taken away for the sake of bread, for 'stones turned into bread.'" They would soon realize that they could not accomplish anything, "that it is not possible to love one's neighbor without sacrificing something to him of one's own labor." In short, they would understand too late that "happiness lies not in happiness but only in the attempt to achieve it."

We are all always in process, always making ourselves by our choices, or, as the philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin has paraphrased Dostoyevsky's point, we are all "unfinalizable." The most immoral thing one can do is treat another person as if he or she were a finished object, fully knowable from the outside and incapable of surprise. And that is precisely what social scientists and engineers tend to do. Here is how Bakhtin famously paraphrased Dostoyevsky's idea of the human essence: "A person never coincides with himself. . . . In Dostoyevsky's artistic thinking, the genuine life of the personality takes place at the point . . . of departure of all that he is as a material being, a being that can be spied on, defined, predicted apart from its own will, 'at second hand.'"

Introduction

In Dostoyevsky's view, only Christianity – as he interpreted it, of course – understands human nature and human life in this way. Christ came to save free people, and would not make them happy at the cost of their freedom, because then they would not be human at all. *The Brothers Karamazov*, often regarded as the greatest novel ever written, and certainly as the greatest Christian novel, is devoted to explaining the implications of this Christian understanding of the essential role of freedom in a meaningful life.

THE NOVEL'S CORE ARGUMENT APPEARS in a sequence of three chapters, "The Brothers Make Friends," "Rebellion," and "The Grand Inquisitor." Along with Hamlet's monologue, "Rebellion" and "The Grand Inquisitor," presented here in graphic form, rank among the most famous passages in Western literature.

Ivan and Alyosha, two brothers raised apart, meet at a tavern to get to know each other. Alyosha, a devoted Christian residing in a monastery, is deeply curious about his mysterious older brother. A nonbeliever thirsting to believe, the intellectual Ivan is torn between contradictory philosophies. On the one hand, he accepts the scientific view that the world is nothing but a chain of causes and effects. Good and evil, he concludes, are nothing but constructs. On the other hand, he deeply empathizes with human suffering and is morally outraged at cruelty. One view rejects the concept of evil as mere superstition, while the other treats it as the most important thing in the world. He cannot reconcile the two.

True Russians, Ivan declares, worry only about such eternal, "accursed questions." Just let two educated young Russians meet at some stinking tavern and even if they have never seen each other before, they will talk about "the eternal questions, of the existence of God and immortality. And those who do not believe in God talk of socialism or anarchism . . . so that it all comes to the same, they're the same questions turned inside out." That is, the same ultimate questions about life's meaning can take either a religious or a secular form.

It soon becomes apparent that the brothers' conversation is a sort of duel, in which Ivan tries to shake Alyosha's faith. It is an odd sort of duel because if Ivan were to lose, he might also win. If Alyosha could successfully answer his arguments, as Ivan half hopes, Ivan might achieve faith and resolve the contradiction tearing him apart.

Introduction

IN “REBELLION,” WHERE THE GRAPHIC VERSION of these chapters begins, Ivan sharpens the argument of the Book of Job. He begins obliquely by stating that people cannot actually care for, much less love, each other. To be sure, we hear about saints such as John the Merciful, who warmed a pestiferous, foul-smelling frozen beggar with his own body, but that was done not from love but from what Ivan calls “self-laceration,” a concept developed throughout *Karamazov*. People often claim to be harmed, invite others to harm them, even harm (lacerate) themselves in order to feel morally superior. Dostoyevsky had a deep appreciation of what we have come to call victimology. As the boys’ repulsive father has remarked, it can be very pleasant to take offense. Ivan maintains that all apparent acts of love are really selfish in this or some other way.

People may care for “humanity” in the abstract, Ivan continues, but that is very different from caring for particular people. Lovers of “humanity” are usually capable of intense cruelty, all the more so because they can use humanist ideology to justify their actions. It is said that people are bestially cruel, Ivan observes, but that saying is an insult to the beasts. Beasts tear each other apart, but they do not take sadistic pleasure in inflicting suffering.

“The question is,” Ivan asks, “whether that’s due to man’s bad qualities or whether it’s inherent in their nature.” That is, are our evil actions the result of something superficial that better education or a more enlightened social structure might eliminate, or are we depraved to the core? Ivan, literature’s most profound misanthrope, accepts the second alternative. Dostoyevsky agrees that evil goes all the way down, but, he would add, so does our capacity for good. As the third Karamazov brother, Dmitri, has declared, “God and the devil are fighting and the battleground is the heart of man.”

Ivan reasons that God made human nature, so ultimately the fault is God’s as well as ours. Job insists that evil people prosper while the innocent suffer, but Ivan takes this point about cosmic injustice a step further by focusing on the suffering of young children. After all, with adults it is always possible to say they must have some sins on their conscience – as Ivan says, “they have eaten the apple” – but one cannot say that about young children.

Ivan outlines in shocking detail several cases of child abuse, all in fact drawn from the Russian press. One little girl was tortured by well-educated, cultivated parents. They beat her until her body was one bruise, shut her up all night in the cold, and smeared excrement in her face. The child kept praying to “dear, kind

Introduction

God” to protect her, and as Ivan repeats this phrase it becomes an ever more searing indictment of the God who failed to protect her.

After each case of innocent suffering, Ivan paraphrases a traditional theodicy. He varies these with secular justifications of the universe as fundamentally good. For example, some believers argue that man could not have known good if he had not known evil. The secular equivalent is the progressive view that since history is evolving towards utopia, evil is but a temporary, if necessary, step.

Ivan does not offer counterarguments. Had he done so, there would always be the possibility of a new justification he hadn't considered. Rather, he demonstrates the horror of the very process of justifying child abuse, so that any conceivable justification is discredited in advance. He asks his audience to compare the abstract chain of reasoning with the particular tortured child, like that little girl beating her fist on her chest and praying to “dear, kind God.” One cannot help asking: What sort of a person could nod and say, yes, the bloodless argument matters more than the bloodied child?

Ivan continues: I want to believe that somehow, at the end of the world, it will all be made right; that the lion will lie down with the lamb and the mother forgive her son's murderer. But I am stopped short by the thought that she has no right to do so. Let her forgive the murderer for the sufferings of her mother's heart, but she has no right to forgive the child's sufferings, even if the child forgave them; and the child has no right to forgive the mother's sufferings. Is there a being with the right to forgive? Ivan asks rhetorically.

Ivan imagines the Last Judgment, where God says: Ivan, you have blasphemed, but you did so from love, so here is your ticket to heaven. Ivan claims he would decline the ticket because accepting it would entail accepting God's universe where children suffer. His “rebellion,” in other words, is against the entire universe.

Alyosha, deeply moved by the horrible stories (in the graphic version he throws up), at last cries out that Ivan has forgotten something. His argument would be right if there were only God the Father, but that, Alyosha suggests, is why we are not Muslims or Jews but Christians, who believe in God the Son. There *is* someone with the right to forgive, because he gave his innocent blood so that he would have that right.

Introduction

IT TURNS OUT THAT ALYOSHA has fallen into Ivan's trap. In asking whether there is someone who could forgive, Ivan was provoking Alyosha's reply in order to give his prepared response. That is, as "Rebellion" recounts Ivan's argument against God the Father, "The Grand Inquisitor" outlines his case against God the Son.

Ivan's tale is set in Seville during the Inquisition. Common people long for the Second Coming, and Jesus decides he will briefly show himself. They greet him ecstatically, but the Inquisitor—who is supposedly his vicar—has him arrested! Why?

The Inquisitor visits Jesus in his cell and outlines his philosophy, which turns out to be the exact opposite of Jesus'. These antagonistic views of life will always contend with each other. Cultures change, empires fall, faith and disbelief assume different forms, but there are always those who think like the Inquisitor and those who think like Jesus. Some offer happiness at the cost of freedom, and others regard freedom as essential to humanness. Dostoyevsky makes clear that the atheistic socialism of his day was the modern form of the Inquisitor's Catholicism. And Dostoyevsky's readers ever since have been able to recognize that the same debate still rages.

Jesus came to make people free. He wanted us to choose goodness freely. He did not crave the base worship of the slave. But free choice can exist only where there is doubt. Where there is certainty, there is nothing to choose; as soon as we understand a proof in Euclidian geometry, for instance, we simply accept it. Faith exists only where there is uncertainty. And so Jesus did not offer proofs. With only his image as our guide, we must choose goodness freely in the face of doubt.

For the Inquisitor, Jesus' view condemns everyone but a very few strong souls to misery. Except for that handful, people cannot live in doubt. They will do anything to avoid guilt and regret, the inevitable consequences of choice under uncertainty. They are eager to surrender their freedom to ideologues claiming moral certainty. The twentieth century was to show that happening frequently. People want to escape freedom while still clinging to the honorific word "free," which is why so many totalitarians have purported to offer "true freedom."

The Inquisitor retells the Gospel story of the devil's three temptations of Christ, which he reinterprets. First, the devil asks Jesus to transform stones into bread

Introduction

so people will follow him, but Jesus answers, “Man does not live by bread alone.” Just so, the Inquisitor replies, but that is why Jesus should have accepted the devil’s temptation. People do indeed crave the meaningful, but they cannot be sure they distinguish the truly meaningful from its counterfeits. But there is one thing that no one can doubt: matter itself. We all have bodies, and when we suffer great pain, that, at least, is indubitable. In other words, the appeal of materialism is spiritual! People accept it not for material rewards but because it is certain.

The devil next tempts Jesus to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple so God will save him by a miracle, but Jesus refuses. The reason, according to the Inquisitor, is to show that faith must not be based on miracles. Once one witnesses a miracle, one is so overawed that doubt is impossible, and that means faith is impossible. Jesus did perform miracles, but if you believe because of them, then – despite what churches say – you are not a Christian.

Then the devil offers Jesus the empire of the world, which he rejects, but should have accepted, according to the Inquisitor. The only way to keep people from doubt is by miracle, mystery (just believe us, we know), and authority, which universal empire would ensure. You came for the few capable of freedom, the Inquisitor tells Jesus, but we “who have corrected Thy work” serve the millions who cannot endure freedom. I know that I will go to hell for corrupting your teaching, the Inquisitor concludes, but for love of humanity I am willing to do so. That is, the Inquisitor betrays Christ for Christian reasons! And in a sense he outdoes Christ, who gave his earthly life, because the Inquisitor gives his eternal life!

Alyosha unexpectedly replies, “Your poem is in praise of Jesus, not in blame of him, as you meant it to be.” How can that be? Well, ask yourself: Having heard the Inquisitor’s arguments, would you choose to surrender all choice in exchange for a guarantee of happiness? Would you have everything decided for you by some wise substitute for your parents, so you were always a contented child? Or is there something higher than mere contentment?

In our time, people point to the horrors of socialism in practice, in Russia, China, and Cambodia, but Dostoyevsky depicts not some sadistic tyrant like Stalin but the best possible socialist, because he wants us to see what is wrong with the very idea of socialism or any scheme that would trade essential freedom for happiness.

Introduction

THE ATTENTIVE READER MAY ASK: If “Rebellion” is meant to discredit God the Father, and “The Grand Inquisitor” to discredit God the Son, where is the third person of the Trinity? That, indeed, is the very question Dostoyevsky wants us to pose. *Karamazov* as a whole justifies Christianity through the Holy Spirit. In this novel the third person of the Trinity is mentioned frequently and, explicitly or implicitly, takes a variety of forms.

In “The Brothers Make Friends,” it takes the form of the force of life itself. The Holy Spirit manifests itself in a love of God’s world in spite of all logic and in the face of all philosophical objections. Ivan in fact experiences this love, but he does not recognize it for what it is. Perhaps, he speculates, it is just biological, the way youth manifests itself in the organism; or maybe it is some other law of nature, like gravity.

As their discussion begins, Ivan tells Alyosha: “If I didn’t believe in life, if I lost faith . . . in the order of things, were convinced in fact that everything is a disorderly, damnable, and perhaps devil-ridden chaos, if I were struck with every horror of man’s disillusionment – still I should want to live and, having once tasted of the cup, I would not turn away from it till I had drained it!” This “frantic and perhaps unseemly thirst for life,” as Ivan calls it, is stronger in him than all moral disgust with the world, and so “I go on living in spite of logic. Though I may not believe in the order of the universe, yet I love the sticky little leaves as they open in the spring. . . . I love the sticky leaves in spring, the blue sky – that’s all it is. It’s not a matter of intellect or logic, it’s loving with one’s stomach.” Laughing at his own “tirade,” Ivan wonders if Alyosha has understood it.

Indeed, he has, and more deeply than Ivan does himself. Alyosha’s mentor, the wise Father Zossima, has taught him to look for faith not in reason or proofs but precisely in a deep love for the world God created and for each individual person in it. “I understand only too well,” Alyosha replies. “One longs to love with one’s inside, with one’s stomach. . . . I think one should love life above everything in the world.”

“Love life more than the meaning of it?” Ivan asks.

“Certainly, love it, regardless of logic as you say, it must be regardless of logic, and it’s only then one will understand the meaning of it. . . . Half your work is done, Ivan, you love life, now you’ve only to try to do the second half and you are saved.”

Introduction

You cannot reason your way to faith. If you could, it would not be faith at all. Atheists usually suppose that belief is nothing but acceptance of some purported fact without sufficient evidence, but belief – the belief Dostoyevsky identified with the Holy Spirit – pertains to a sense of the world as a whole.

The hero of Dostoyevsky's novel *The Idiot*, Prince Myshkin, describes how he once entered into a discussion with a learned atheist whose arguments were somehow beside the point. Shortly after this conversation, Myshkin says, he encountered a peasant woman with a smiling baby crossing herself with great devotion. She explained: "God has just such gladness every time he sees from heaven that a sinner is praying to Him with all his heart, as a mother has when she sees the first smile on her baby's face." In this "deep, subtle, and truly religious thought," Myshkin observes, "all the essence of Christianity finds expression." The woman understood the world as blessed, as a realm not of dead matter but of divine meaning and love.

This is what the atheists miss. They will try by reason to derive life's meaning from abstract propositions or scientific laws, but that effort can never succeed. One must first love life and God's world and only then will meaning be apparent. In this sense, meaningfulness and faith are gifts of the Spirit. Or as Father Zossima says, the existence of God cannot be proven "but you can be convinced of it . . . by the experience of active love."

THE GRAPHIC VERSION OF THIS STORY follows the original quite closely. Its drawings subtly offer two splendid additions. In the corner of the tavern where Ivan and Alyosha meet, we see a man writing – evidently Dostoyevsky – as if all that he overhears is a drama taking place in his own soul, and ours. Even more interesting, during "Rebellion" we see an unidentified person in the tavern listening in. He turns out to exactly resemble Jesus as drawn in "The Grand Inquisitor." It is as if Jesus is always with us in moments of deep spiritual dialogue, as people of Christian faith know he is.


How can one love one's neighbors?

It's just one's neighbors that one can not love! I once read somewhere about a saint, that a hungry, frozen beggar came to him and asked to be warmed up. So he took him into his bed, held him in his arms, and began breathing into his putrid and loathsome mouth. I am convinced that he did that from the self-laceration of falsity, for the sake of charity imposed by duty.

The face of a man often hinders many people not practiced in love from loving him. But yet there's a great deal of love in mankind, and almost Christlike love. I know that myself, Ivan...


Christlike love for others is a miracle impossible on earth. He was God. But we are not gods. Suppose I, for instance, suffer intensely. Another can never know how much I suffer, because he is another and not I, and a man is rarely ready to admit another's suffering.

Why won't he admit it, do you think? BECAUSE I SMELL BAD, BECAUSE I HAVE A STUPID FACE, BECAUSE I ONCE TROD ON HIS FOOT.

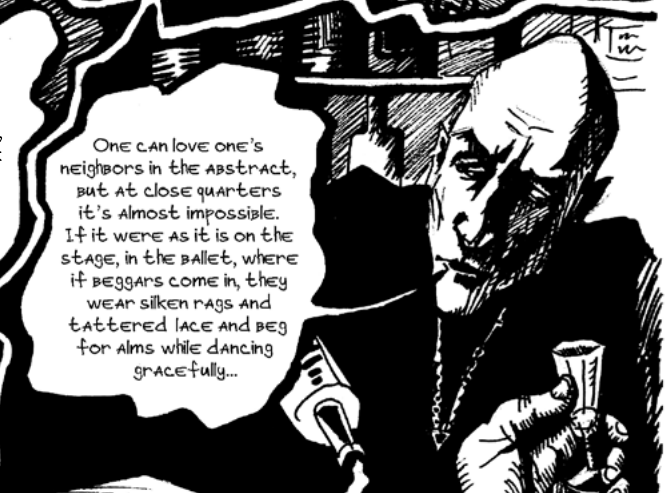


Besides, there is suffering and suffering. Hunger, for instance, is something everyone recognizes, but higher suffering - for an idea, for instance - he will not acknowledge. Why?


BECAUSE MY FACE STRIKES HIM AS NOT AT ALL WHAT HE FANCIES A MAN SHOULD HAVE WHO SUFFERS FOR AN IDEA.



BEGGARS, ESPECIALLY BEGGARS OF A HIGHER CLASS, OUGHT TO ASK FOR CHARITY THROUGH THE NEWSPAPERS.



ONE CAN LOVE ONE'S NEIGHBORS IN THE ABSTRACT, BUT AT CLOSE QUARTERS IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE. IF IT WERE AS IT IS ON THE STAGE, IN THE BALLET, WHERE IF BEGGARS COME IN, THEY WEAR SILKEN RAGS AND TATTERED FACE AND BEG FOR ALMS WHILE DANCING GRACEFULLY...



THEN ONE MIGHT LIKE LOOKING AT THEM. BUT EVEN THEN, WE SHOULD NOT LOVE THEM. BUT ENOUGH OF THAT.



I meant to speak of the suffering of mankind generally, but we had better confine ourselves to the sufferings of children. In the first place, children can be loved even at close quarters, even when they are dirty, even when they are ugly.

The second reason why I won't speak of adults is that, besides being disgusting and unworthy of love, they get what they deserve - they've eaten the apple and know good and evil, and they go on eating it still. But the children haven't eaten anything and are still completely innocent. Are you fond of children, Alyosha?

Are you fond of children?

Alyosha, I am awfully fond of children, too. And take note: cruel people, the violent, the rapacious, the Karamazovs, are sometimes very fond of children.

GOD IS LIGHT

Children up to seven are so remote from grown-up people; they are different creatures, as it were, of a different species.



A Bulgarian I recently met in Moscow told me about crimes committed by Turks when they invaded his country. They burn villages, murder, outrage women and children, they nail their prisoners by the ears to fences - All sorts of things you can't imagine.

These Turks take pleasure in torturing children, too, cutting the unborn child from the mother's womb and tossing babies up in the air and catching them on the points of their bayonets before their mothers' eyes. Doing it before the mothers' eyes is what gives zest to the amusement.

... Artistic, isn't it?

Turks are particularly fond of sweet things, they say.

Brother, what are you driving at?



I've already got a fine collection of stories like this, I have specimens from home too. A well-educated, cultured gentleman and his wife beat their own child with a birch-rod, a girl of five. There are people who at every blow work themselves up to sensuality, to literal sensuality, which increases progressively with every blow they inflict.

The child screams. At last the child cannot scream, it gasps, "Daddy! Daddy!" The case is brought into court. The counsel protests in his client's defense: "It's a minor matter, an everyday domestic event." The jury gives a favorable verdict. The public roars with delight that the torturer is acquitted.

In every man a demon lies hidden.

This poor child of five was subjected to every possible torture by those cultivated parents. They beat her, thrashed her, kicked her for no reason till her body was completely blue with bruises. Ultimately they came up with the utmost refinements of cruelty - they shut her up all night in the cold and frost in a privy, and because she didn't ask to be taken out at night, they smeared her face and filled her mouth with excrement. And it was her mother, her mother did this!



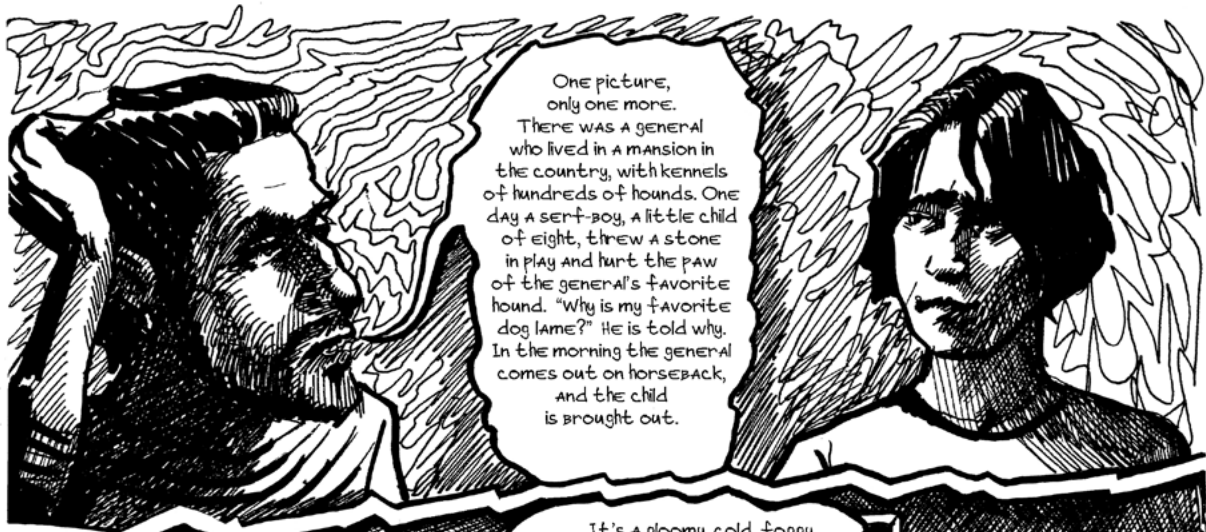
Why are you testing me?



And that mother
could sleep at night, hearing
the poor child's groans!
Can you understand why
a little creature, who can't
even understand what's
being done to her, should
beat her little aching heart
with her tiny fist
in the dark and the cold,
and weep her meek
unresentful tears
to dear, kind God
to protect her?

Why, the whole
world of knowledge
is not worth that
child's prayer
to "dear, kind God"!
I am making you
suffer, Alyosha, you
are not yourself.
I'll leave off
if you like.

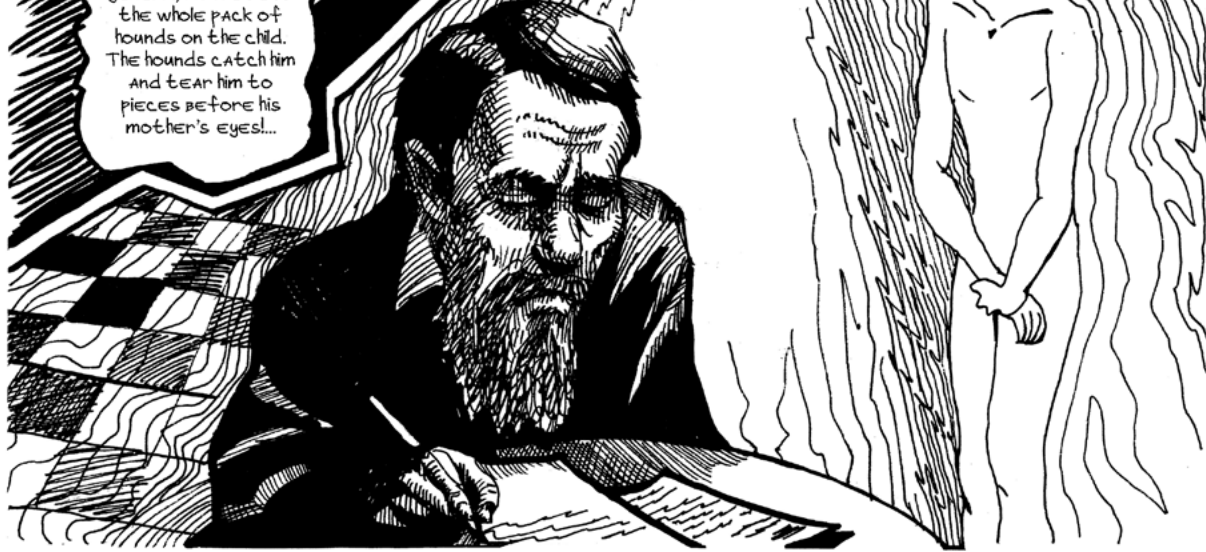
Never mind.
I want
to suffer.



One picture,
only one more.
There was a general
who lived in a mansion in
the country, with kennels
of hundreds of hounds. One
day a serf-boy, a little child
of eight, threw a stone
in play and hurt the paw
of the general's favorite
hound. "Why is my favorite
dog lame?" He is told why.
In the morning the general
comes out on horseback,
and the child
is brought out.



It's a gloomy, cold, foggy
autumn day, a capital day
for hunting. The general orders
the child to be undressed,
the child is stripped naked.
He shivers, numb with terror,
not daring to cry... "Make him run,"
commands the general. "Run!
run!" shout the dog-boys.
The boy runs...



"At him!" yells the
general, and he sets
the whole pack of
hounds on the child.
The hounds catch him
and tear him to
pieces before his
mother's eyes!...

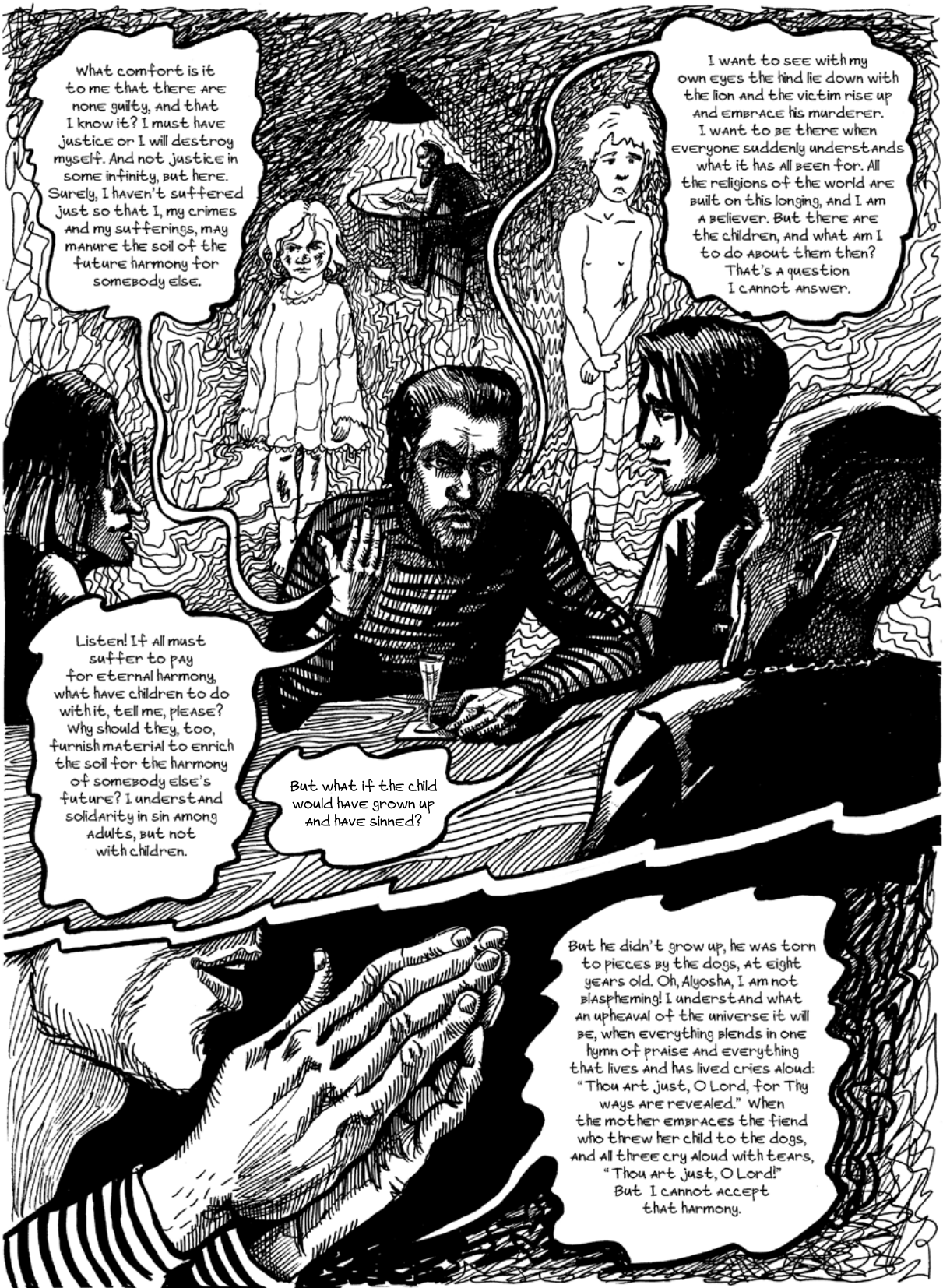


I believe
the general was
afterwards imprisoned.
Well - what did he deserve?
To be shot? To be shot
for the satisfaction
of our moral feelings?
Speak, Alyosha!

To be shot!

Bravo!
Some monk you are!
So, there is a little devil
sitting in your heart,
Alyosha Karamazov!

Listen! I took
the case of children only
to make my case clearer.
Of the other tears
of humanity, I will say
nothing. I have narrowed
my subject on purpose.



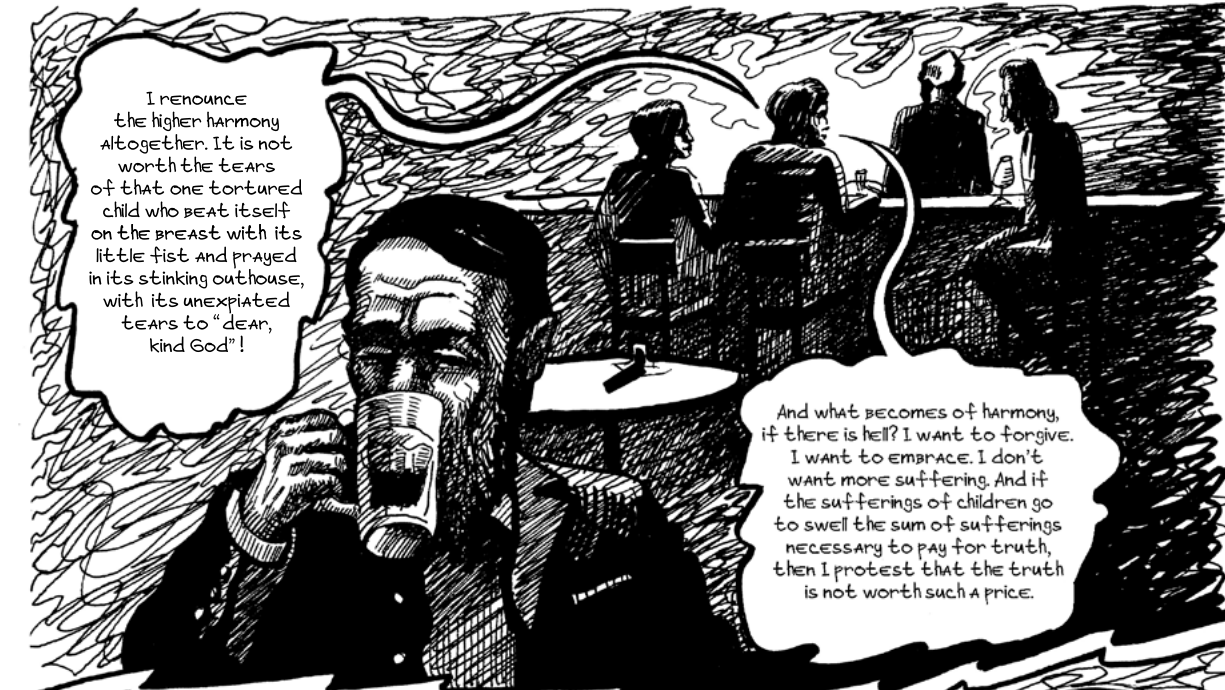
What comfort is it to me that there are none guilty, and that I know it? I must have justice or I will destroy myself. And not justice in some infinity, but here. Surely, I haven't suffered just so that I, my crimes and my sufferings, may manure the soil of the future harmony for somebody else.

I want to see with my own eyes the hind lie down with the lion and the victim rise up and embrace his murderer. I want to be there when everyone suddenly understands what it has all been for. All the religions of the world are built on this longing, and I am a believer. But there are the children, and what am I to do about them then? That's a question I cannot answer.

Listen! If all must suffer to pay for eternal harmony, what have children to do with it, tell me, please? Why should they, too, furnish material to enrich the soil for the harmony of somebody else's future? I understand solidarity in sin among adults, but not with children.


But what if the child would have grown up and have sinned?

But he didn't grow up, he was torn to pieces by the dogs, at eight years old. Oh, Alyosha, I am not blaspheming! I understand what an upheaval of the universe it will be, when everything blends in one hymn of praise and everything that lives and has lived cries aloud: "Thou art just, O Lord, for Thy ways are revealed." When the mother embraces the fiend who threw her child to the dogs, and all three cry aloud with tears, "Thou art just, O Lord!" But I cannot accept that harmony.




I renounce
the higher harmony
altogether. It is not
worth the tears
of that one tortured
child who beat itself
on the breast with its
little fist and prayed
in its stinking outhouse,
with its unexpiated
tears to "dear,
kind God"!

And what becomes of harmony,
if there is hell? I want to forgive.
I want to embrace. I don't
want more suffering. And if
the sufferings of children go
to swell the sum of sufferings
necessary to pay for truth,
then I protest that the truth
is not worth such a price.




Is there
in the whole world
a being who would have
the right to forgive
and could forgive?




Too high a price is asked for harmony; it's beyond our means to pay so much to enter it. And so I hasten to give back my entrance ticket, and if I am an honest man, I am bound to give it back as soon as possible. And that I am doing. It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return him the ticket.


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THAT'S REBELLION.



Rebellion? I am sorry you call it that. One can hardly live in rebellion, and I want to live.



Tell me yourself. Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making people happy in the end, but that to achieve that it is necessary and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature - that child beating its breast with its fist, for instance - and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears; would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell the truth.




No, I would not consent.

Brother, you said just now, is there a being in the whole world who would have the right to forgive and could forgive? But there is a Being and he can forgive everything, All and for All, because he gave his innocent blood for All and everything. You have forgotten him, and on him is built the edifice, and it is to him they cry aloud, "Thou art just, O Lord, for Thy ways are revealed!"

All the one without sin and his blood! No, I have not forgotten him; on the contrary I've been wondering all the time how it was you did not bring him in before.

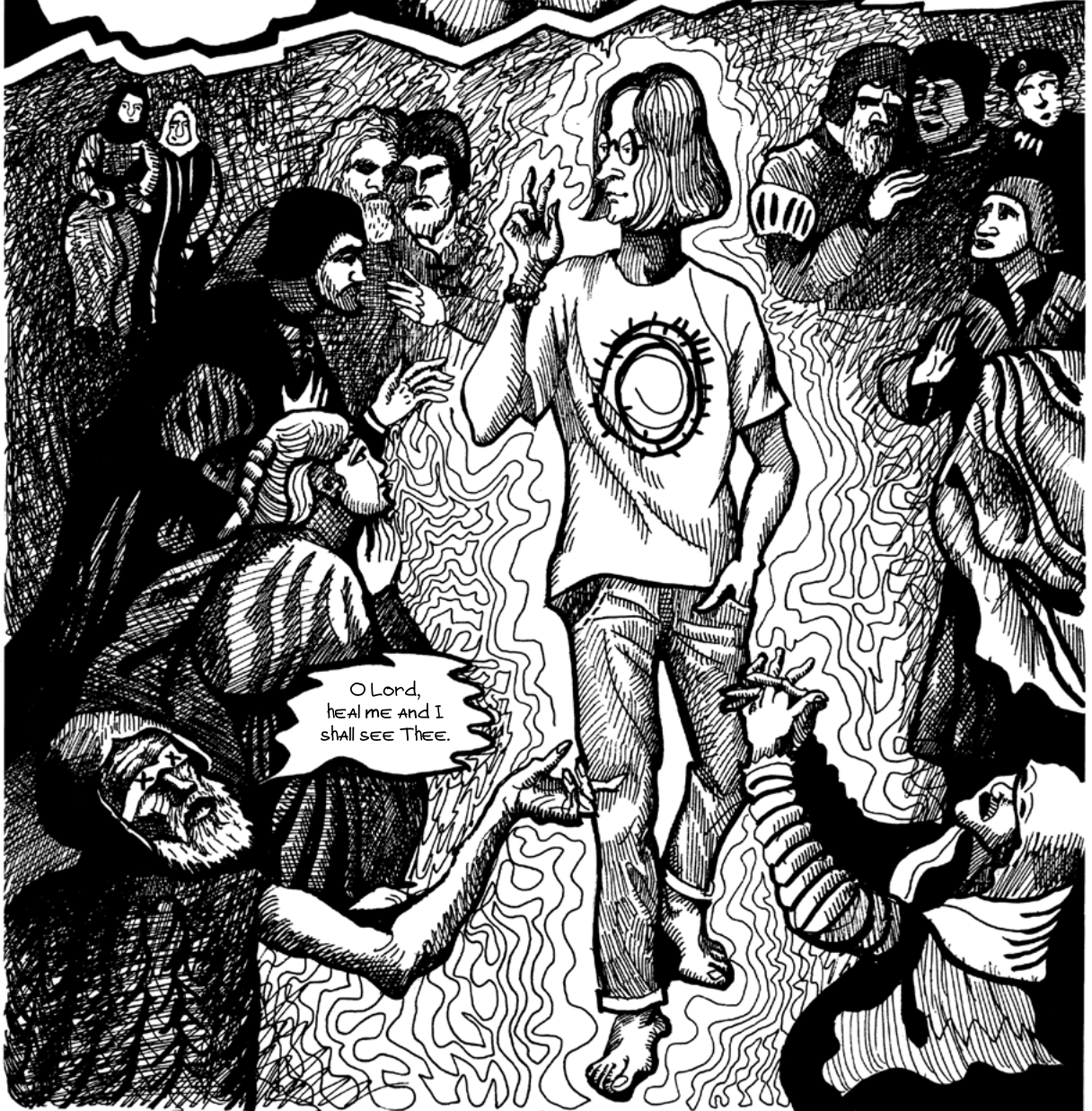
Do you know, Alyosha - don't laugh! I made a poem about a year ago. If you can waste another ten minutes on me, I'll tell it to you.

My poem is called "The Grand Inquisitor." My story is set in Spain, in Seville, during the most terrible time of the Inquisition.



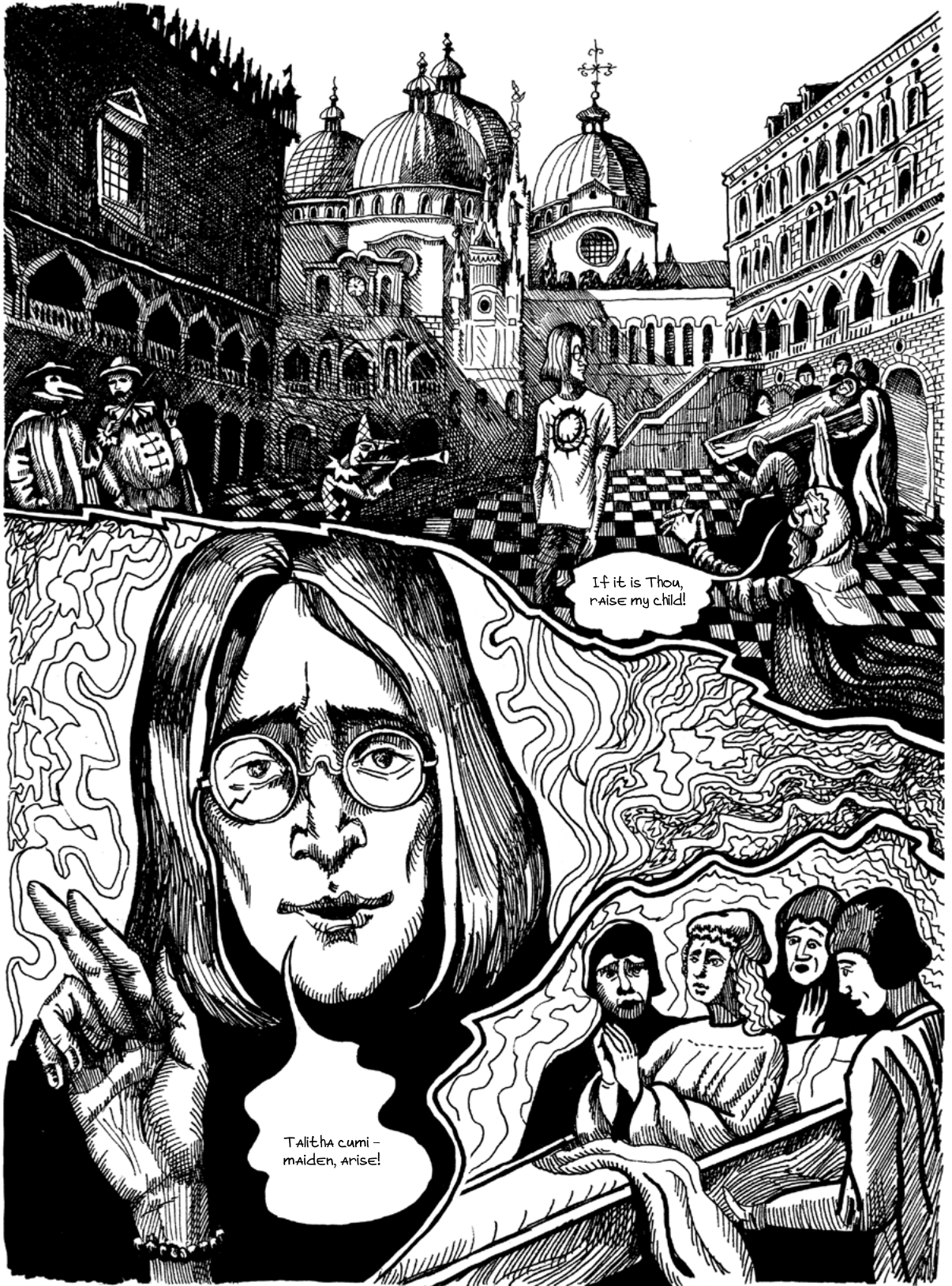
Oh, of course, this was not the coming in which he will appear according to his promise at the end of time. No, he visited his children only for a moment, and there where the flames were cracking round the heretics. In his infinite mercy he came once more among mankind in that human shape in which he walked among them for three years fifteen centuries earlier.

He came softly, unobserved, and yet, strange to say, everyone recognized him. He moves silently in their midst with a gentle smile of infinite compassion. The sun of love burns in his heart, light and power shine from his eyes, and their radiance, shed on the people, stirs their hearts with responsive love.



O Lord,
heal me and I
shall see Thee.

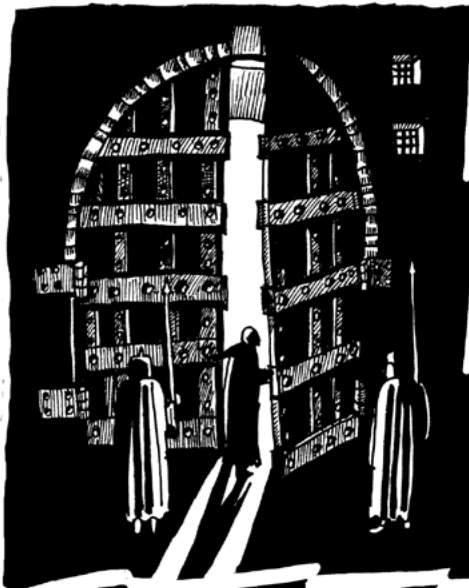




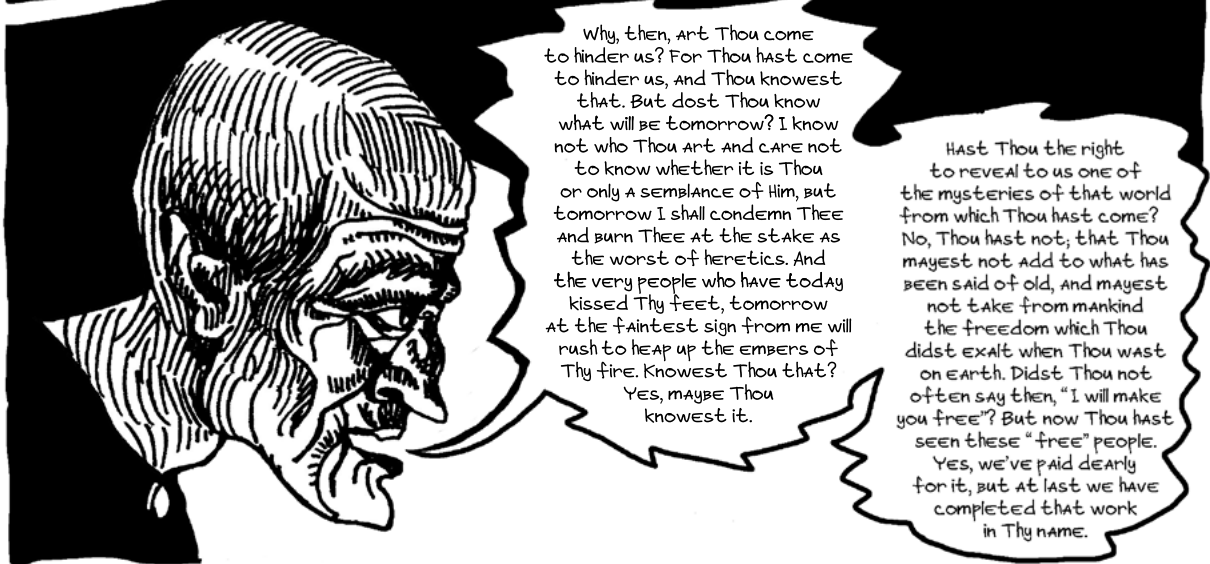
Talitha cumi -
maiden, arise!

If it is Thou,
raise my child!





Is it Thou? Thou?
Don't answer, be silent.
I know too well what Thou
wouldst say. And Thou
hast no right to add
anything to what Thou
hadst said of old.



Why, then, art Thou come
to hinder us? For Thou hast come
to hinder us, and Thou knowest
that. But dost Thou know
what will be tomorrow? I know
not who Thou art and care not
to know whether it is Thou
or only a semblance of Him, but
tomorrow I shall condemn Thee
and burn Thee at the stake as
the worst of heretics. And
the very people who have today
kissed Thy feet, tomorrow
at the faintest sign from me will
rush to heap up the embers of
Thy fire. Knowest Thou that?
Yes, maybe Thou
knowest it.

Hast Thou the right
to reveal to us one of
the mysteries of that world
from which Thou hast come?
No, Thou hast not; that Thou
mayest not add to what has
been said of old, and mayest
not take from mankind
the freedom which Thou
didst exalt when Thou wast
on earth. Didst Thou not
often say then, "I will make
you free"? But now Thou hast
seen these "free" people.
Yes, we've paid dearly
for it, but at last we have
completed that work
in Thy name.

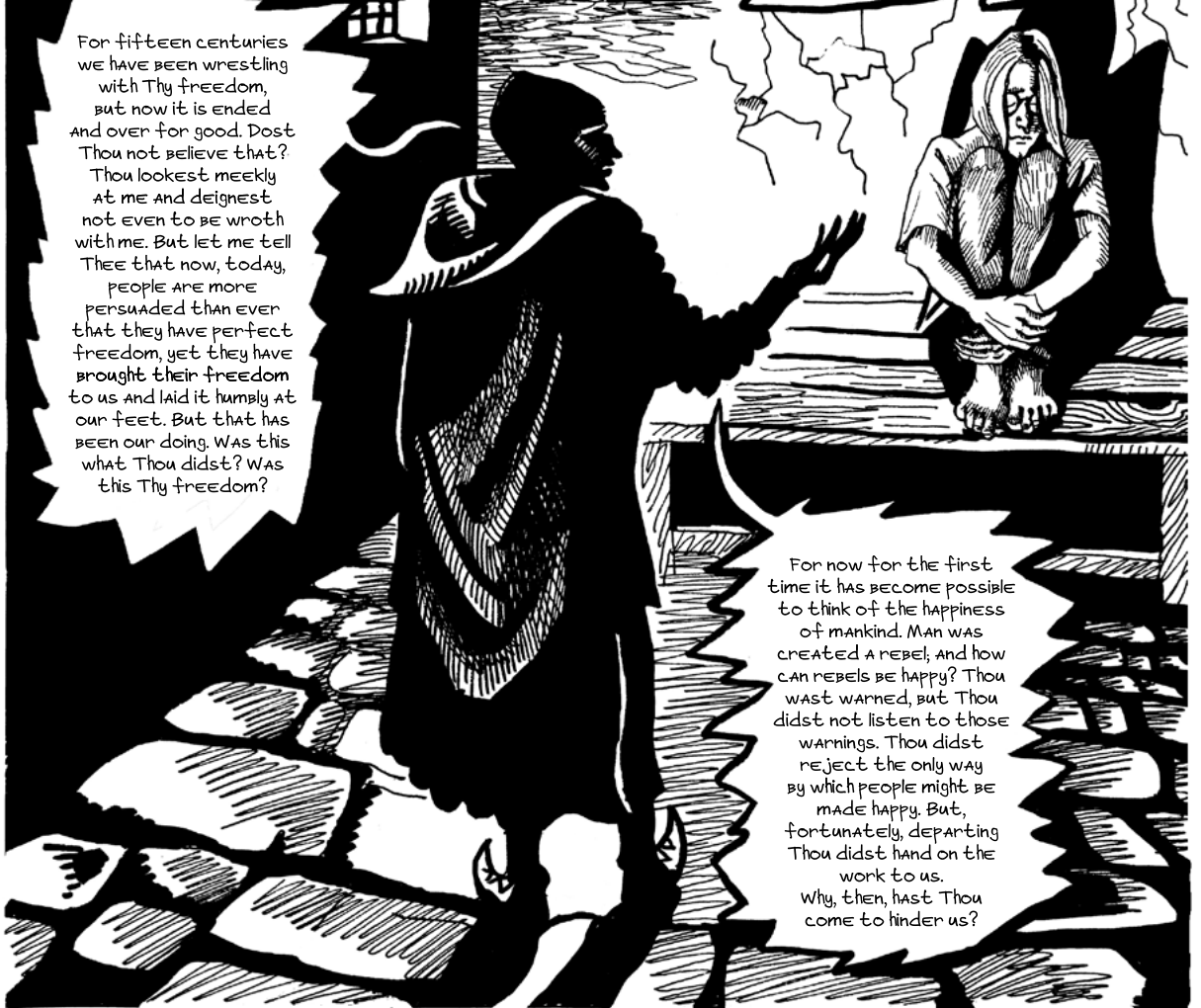


I don't quite understand, Ivan. What does it mean? Is it simply a wild fantasy, or a mistake on the part of the old man - some impossible quid pro quo?

Take it as the last.

And the prisoner too is silent? Does he look at him and not say a word?

For fifteen centuries we have been wrestling with Thy freedom, but now it is ended and over for good. Dost Thou not believe that? Thou lookest meekly at me and deignest not even to be wroth with me. But let me tell Thee that now, today, people are more persuaded than ever that they have perfect freedom, yet they have brought their freedom to us and laid it humbly at our feet. But that has been our doing. Was this what Thou didst? Was this Thy freedom?



For now for the first time it has become possible to think of the happiness of mankind. Man was created a rebel; and how can rebels be happy? Thou wast warned, but Thou didst not listen to those warnings. Thou didst reject the only way by which people might be made happy. But, fortunately, departing Thou didst hand on the work to us. Why, then, hast Thou come to hinder us?

The wise and dread spirit, the spirit of self-destruction and nonexistence, the great spirit talked with Thee in the wilderness, and we are told in the books that he "tempted" Thee. Is that so? And could anything truer be said than what he revealed to Thee in three questions and what Thou didst reject, and what in the books is called "the temptation"?

And yet if there has ever been on earth a real stupendous miracle, it took place on that day of the three temptations. For in those three questions the whole subsequent history of mankind is foretold.

Judge Thyself who was right - Thou or he who questioned Thee then? Remember the first question: "Thou wouldst go into the world, and art going with empty hands, with some promise of freedom! But seest Thou these stones? Turn them into bread, and mankind will run after Thee like a flock of sheep."

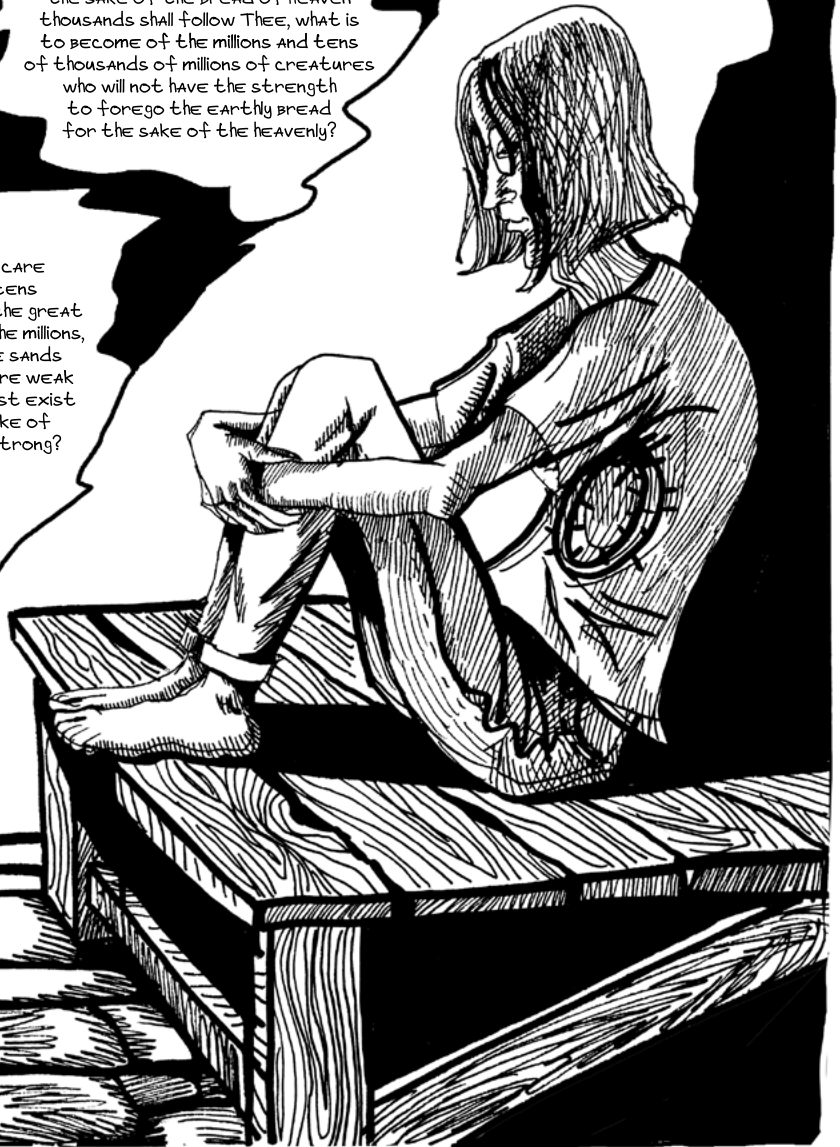
But Thou wouldst not deprive man of freedom and didst reject the offer. Thou didst reply that man lives not by bread alone. Dost Thou know that the Ages will pass, and humanity will proclaim: "Feed people, and then ask of them virtue!" - that's what they'll write on the banner, which they will raise against Thee, and with which they will destroy Thy temple.



No science will give them bread so long as they remain free. In the end they will lay their freedom at our feet, and say to us, "Make us your slaves, but feed us."

Thou didst promise them the bread of Heaven, but can it compare with earthly bread in the eyes of the weak? And if for the sake of the bread of Heaven thousands shall follow Thee, what is to become of the millions and tens of thousands of millions of creatures who will not have the strength to forego the earthly bread for the sake of the heavenly?

Or dost Thou care only for the tens of thousands of the great and strong, while the millions, numerous as the sands of the sea, who are weak but love Thee, must exist only for the sake of the great and strong?



No, we care for the weak too.

They are sinful and rebellious, but in the end they too will become obedient. They will look on us as gods, because we are ready to endure the freedom which they have found so dreadful and to rule over them - so awful it will seem to them to be free. But we shall tell them that we are Thy servants and rule them in Thy name.

That deception will be our suffering, for we shall be forced to lie. This is the significance of the first question in the wilderness.

Choosing "bread," Thou wouldst have satisfied the universal craving of humanity - to find someone to worship.

The secret of man's being is not only to live but to have something to live for.



Thou didst desire man's free love

Without this, man would not consent to go on living, and would rather destroy himself than remain on earth, though he had bread in abundance.

In place of the rigid ancient law, man must hereafter with free heart decide for himself what is good and what is evil. But didst Thou not know that he would at last reject even Thy image and Thy truth, if he is weighed down with the fearful burden of free choice?

Yet what was offered Thee? There are three powers, three powers alone, able to conquer and to hold captive forever the conscience of these impotent rebels for their happiness.

Those forces are miracle, mystery, and authority.

Thou hast rejected all three. When the wise and dread spirit set Thee on the pinnacle of the temple and said to Thee, "If Thou wouldst know whether Thou art the Son of God then cast Thyself down, for it is written: the angels shall hold him up lest he fall and bruise himself." But Thou didst refuse and wouldst not cast Thyself down.

Oh, Thou didst know then that in taking one movement to cast Thyself down, Thou wouldst be tempting God and have lost all Thy faith in Him, and wouldst have been dashed to pieces against that earth which Thou didst come to save. And the wise spirit that tempted Thee would have rejoiced.

But Thou didst not know that when man rejects miracle he rejects God too; for man seeks not so much God as the miraculous.

Thou didst not come down from the cross when they shouted to Thee: "Come down from the cross and we will believe that Thou art He." Thou didst not come down, for Thou wouldst not enslave man by a miracle, and didst crave faith given freely, not based on miracles. Thou didst crave for free love and not the base raptures of the slave. I swear, man is weaker and baser by nature than Thou hast believed him! He is weak and vile.

What though he is everywhere now rebelling against our power, and proud of his rebellion? It is the pride of a child and a schoolboy. They are little children rioting and barring out the teacher at school. But their childish delight will end; it will cost them dear. They will cast down temples and drench the earth with blood.



How is the weak soul to blame that it is unable to receive such terrible gifts? Canst Thou have simply come to the elect? But if so, it is a mystery and we cannot understand it. And if it is a mystery, we too have a right to preach a mystery, and to teach them that it's not the free judgment of their hearts, not love that matters, but a mystery which they must follow blindly. So we have done. We have corrected Thy work and have founded it upon miracle, mystery, and authority.

BE angry. I don't want Thy love, for I love Thee not. We are not working with Thee, but with him - that is our mystery! Oh the work is only beginning, but it has begun. It has long to await completion, but we shall triumph and shall be Caesars, and then we shall plan the universal happiness of man.

But Thou mightest have taken even then the sword of Caesar. Why didst Thou reject that last gift? Hadst Thou accepted that last counsel of the mighty spirit, Thou wouldst have accomplished all that man seeks on earth - that is, someone to worship, someone to keep his conscience, and some means of uniting all in one unanimous and harmonious ant-heap.



For the craving for
universal unity
is the third
and last anguish
of mankind.

But with us all will be happy and will no more rebel nor destroy one another as under Thy freedom. Oh, we shall persuade them that they will only become free when they renounce their freedom to us and submit to us. And shall we be right, or shall we be lying?

Oh, we shall persuade them at last not to be proud. We shall show them that they are weak, that they are only pitiful children, but that childlike happiness is the sweetest of all. They will become timid and will look to us and huddle close to us in fear, as chicks to the hen. Yes, we shall set them to work, but in their leisure hours we shall make their life like a child's game, with children's songs and innocent dance.

Oh, we shall allow them even sin; they are weak and helpless.

They will love us like children
because we allow them to sin.

We shall tell them that every sin will be expiated, if it is done with our permission. The most painful secrets of their conscience, all, all they will bring to us, and we shall have an answer for all. And they will be glad to believe our answer.

And all will be happy, all the millions of creatures except the hundred thousand who rule over them. For only we, we who guard the mystery, shall be unhappy. There will be thousands of millions of happy babies, and a hundred thousand sufferers who have taken upon themselves the curse of the knowledge of good and evil. Peacefully they will die, peacefully they will expire in Thy name, and beyond the grave they will find nothing but death. But we shall keep the secret, and for their happiness we shall allure them with the reward of heaven and eternity.

Know that I fear Thee not. Know that I too have been in the wilderness, I too have lived on roots and locusts, I too prized the freedom with which Thou hast blessed mankind, and I too was striving to stand among Thy elect, among the strong and powerful. But I awakened and would not serve madness. I turned back and joined the ranks of those who have corrected Thy work.

I left the proud and went back to the humble, for the happiness of the humble. What I say to Thee will come to pass, and our dominion will be built up. Tomorrow Thou shalt see that obedient flock who at a sign from me will hasten to heap up the hot cinders about the pile on which I shall burn Thee for coming to hinder us. For if anyone has ever deserved our fires, it is Thou. Tomorrow I shall burn Thee.





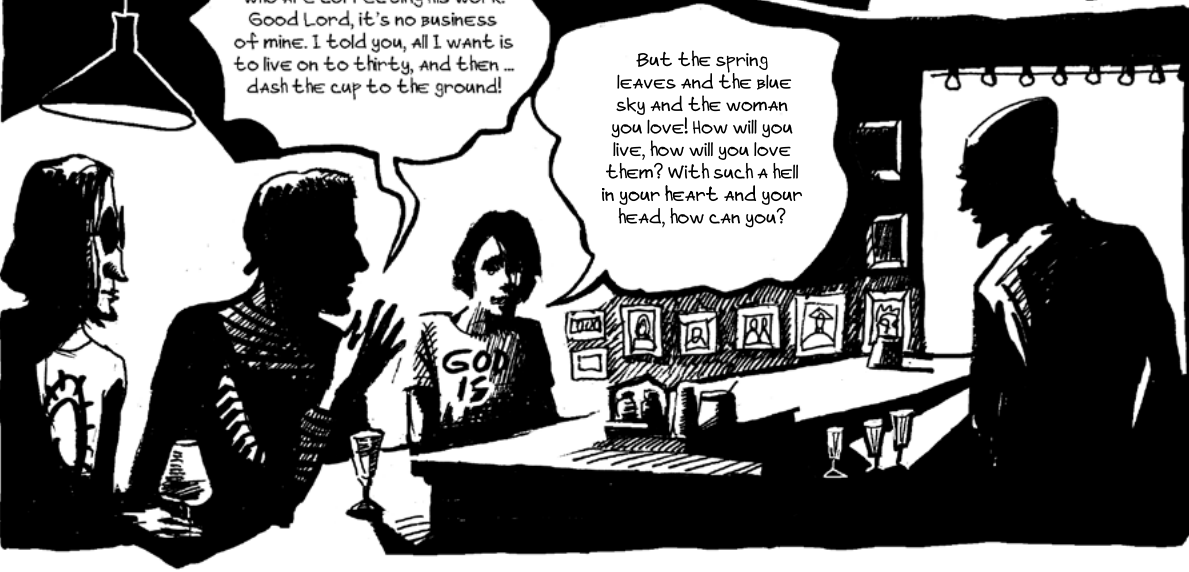
But... that's absurd! Your poem is in praise of Jesus, not in blame of Him - as you meant it to be. And who will believe you about freedom? Is that the way to understand it? And there could not be such a fantastic creature as your Inquisitor. What are these sins of mankind they take on themselves? Who are these keepers of the mystery? Your suffering Inquisitor is a mere fantasy.

Wait, wait, how hot you are! A fantasy you say, let it be so! Of course it's a fantasy. But why can there not be among them one martyr oppressed by great sorrow and loving humanity?

Your Inquisitor does not believe in God, that's his secret! How does your poem end?

The old man longed for Him to say something, however bitter and terrible. But He suddenly approached the old man in silence and softly kissed him on his bloodless aged lips. That was all His answer. The old man went to the door, opened it, and said to Him: "Go, and come no more... come not at all, never, never!" And he let Him out into the dark alleys of the town. The prisoner went away. And the old man? The kiss glows in his heart, but he adheres to his idea.

And you with him, you too?

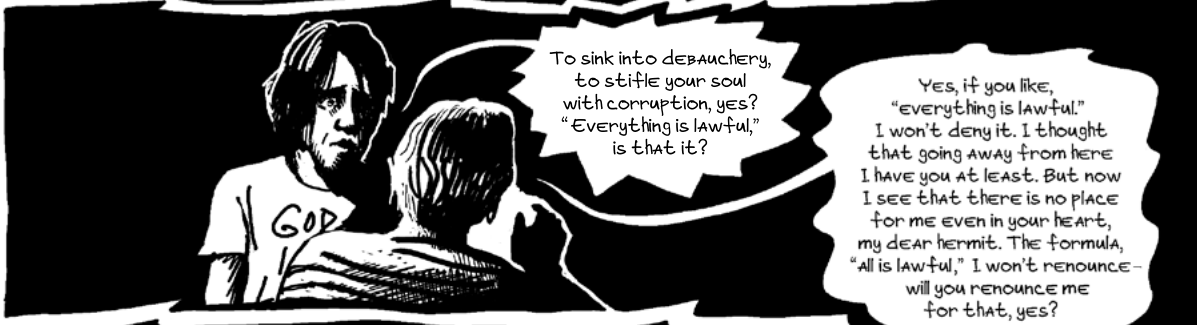


Why, it's all nonsense, Alyosha. It's only a senseless poem of a senseless student. Surely you don't suppose I am going straight off to join those who are correcting His work. Good Lord, it's no business of mine. I told you, all I want is to live on to thirty, and then... dash the cup to the ground!

But the spring leaves and the blue sky and the woman you love! How will you live, how will you love them? With such a hell in your heart and your head, how can you?



There is a strength to endure everything! The strength of the Karamazovs - the strength of the Karamazov BASENESS.



To sink into debauchery, to stifle your soul with corruption, yes? "Everything is lawful," is that it?

Yes, if you like, "everything is lawful." I won't deny it. I thought that going away from here I have you at least. But now I see that there is no place for me even in your heart, my dear hermit. The formula, "All is lawful," I won't renounce - will you renounce me for that, yes?



That's plagiarism! You stole that from my poem.

About the Authors



FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY (1821–1881), one of the greatest writers of literature of all time, is best known for his novels *The Idiot*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, and *Crime and Punishment*. In 1849 Dostoyevsky was arrested and condemned to death for his involvement with a revolutionary group. After being led before a firing squad, he was spared at the last minute and instead served four years of hard labor in a Siberian prison. Not surprisingly, these experiences greatly impacted his subsequent writing.



NATALIA OSIPOVA is a Russian language specialist with a postgraduate degree in nineteenth-century Russian literature. She has curated various cultural and art projects in Kirov and Moscow. Since 2015, Osipova has been head of the Creative Writing School in Moscow. The idea of graphic adaptations of the Five Greatest Russian Classics originated with Natalia Osipova, and she is the adaptor of Dostoyevsky’s text for this graphic adaptation project.



ELENA AVINOVA is an artist and theater-set designer. She is a member of the Russian Union of Artists, and has both participated in and curated a number of international art exhibitions. She is the illustrator of several graphic stories, including “Funny Stories About Kharms,” “The Hospital Diary,” “Lav Road Stories” (an exhibition), and the graphic adaptation of “The Overcoat,” as well as the music video of Aquarium’s “March of the Sacred Cows.”

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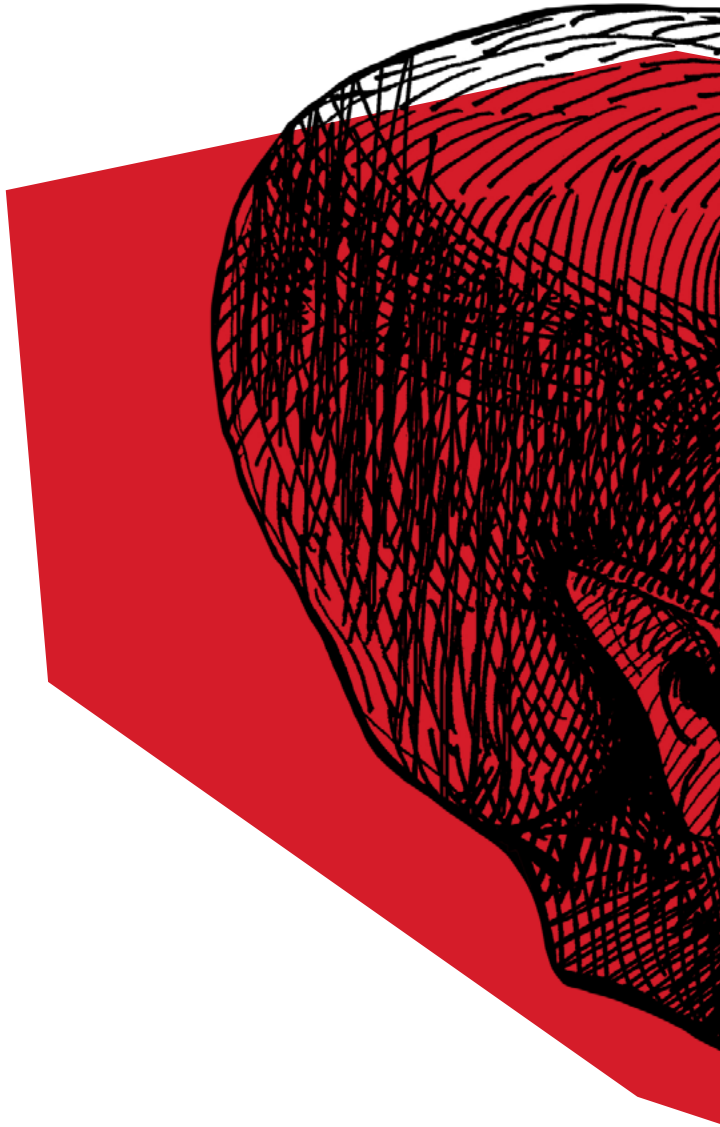
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