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**BUGS, BURROW, INQUISITOR:  
DOSTOEVSKIAN INTERTEXTS IN *EYELESS IN GAZA*****«Слепец в Газе» Олдоса Хаксли и подполье Достоевского:  
интертекстуальное прочтение****Аннотация**

Нынешнее интертекстуальное прочтение романа 1936 года «Слепец в Газе» Олдоса Хаксли (1894–1963), одного из основных моментов модернистских экспериментов английского писателя, исходит из общепринятого факта что художество Достоевского оказало глубокое влияние на творчество Хаксли. Однако, хотя параллельные отрывки романов «Контрапункт» (1928) и «Бесы» (1872) или текстов «О дивный новый мир» (1932) и «Братья Карамазовы» (1880) подробно обсуждаются в литературе, этого нельзя сказать о межтекстовых отношениях прозы Достоевского и романа «Слепец в Газе». Цель настоящего исследования – сравнить критику Достоевского именно в этом романе Хаксли с подтекстом его «Контрапункт», то есть романа, который, наряду с его эссе о Бодлера, опубликованным в 1929 году, легче всего толкуется как ожесточенное нападение на русского писателя. По моему мнению, хотя «Слепец в Газе» оказывается органичным продолжением этой более ранней полемики, примечательно изменение тона Хаксли: его критический подход здесь оказывается гораздо более сложным и даже уважительным по свидетельству параллельных отрывков с такими текстами Достоевского как «Записки из подполья» и «Преступление и наказание».

**Ключевые слова:** *интертекстуальность, полемика, подполье, модерн кризис индивида*

The present article is devoted to the discussion of intertextual connections between Aldous Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) and three works by Dostoevsky: *Notes from the Underground* (1864), *Crime and Punishment* (1869) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880, Grand Inquisitor scene). As is well-known, the Dostoevskian novel of ideas was a major inspiring force for Aldous Huxley's art: Huxley's rewriting of the Grand Inquisitor episode in *Brave New World* (1932) is probably the best-known case in point. Nonetheless, insufficient critical attention has been devoted to the actual intertextual connections between the two novelists' output. As I have demonstrated earlier, on closer inspection *Point Counter Point* (1928) turns out to be a rewriting of *Devils* (1872), which, however, also proves to be a low point in Huxley's assessment of Dostoevsky – a companion piece to his incidental vicious critique included in his 1929 essay on Baudelaire, in which Huxley also targets spiritual quest. Let me argue that *Eyeless in Gaza* can be read as a sequel to that polemic, in which a change of Huxley's attitude to Dostoevsky is clearly notable: the novel provides a much more subtle and even respectful critique of Dostoevsky by implying



the universal relevance of the Dostoevskian underground to the understanding of the modern human condition and by re-embracing spiritual quest.

While Aldous Huxley's dystopian *Brave New World* (1932) is still a cult book, his critically acclaimed high modernist experimental *Point Counter Point* (1928) and *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) constitute a relatively underresearched facet of his fiction. Even less interest is paid to intertextuality in those novels, and once the issue is addressed, as for instance in Olga Redina's recent study, his allusions to the English tradition are put in the limelight [REDINA 2016]. This is the more curious since Peter Firchow has repeatedly pointed out Huxley's indebtedness to Dostoevsky [FIRCHOW 1972: 39–40; FIRCHOW–ROSSEN 2003: 4] and the view that Huxley rewrites the Grand Inquisitor scene in *Brave New World* [FIRCHOW 1972: 126–27] has become a critical commonplace. More than twelve years ago I myself thoroughly scrutinised *Point Counter Point* as a polemical rewriting of Dostoevsky's *Devils* (1871–72) and came to the conclusion that together with Huxley's 1929 Baudelaire essay, which incidentally involves a vitriolic reading of *Devils*, it presents a transitory phase – unquestionably, a low point – in Huxley's assessment of the Russian novelist. That I connected with the period of Huxley's closest friendship with Dostoevsky's fierce English rival and attacker, D.H. Lawrence, who died in 1930 [REICHMANN 2008]. Let me argue in the present paper that compared to the earlier straightforward rewriting of one particular novel, the Dostoevsky allusions of *Eyeless in Gaza* are both more subtle and diverse: their list includes, in my view, explicit references and allusions to *Notes from the Underground* (1864), *Crime and Punishment* (1869) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) – again, to the Grand Inquisitor scene, as far as the latter novel is concerned. Nonetheless, they present a sequel to the earlier polemic, in which Huxley conveys a definitely more sophisticated and arguably more respectful critique of his revered Russian master than in his late-1920s texts.

The change I am to address in Huxley's views on Dostoevsky is thrown into relief against the main points of his earlier, harsh Laurentian critique: apparently at odds with Huxley's own beliefs on spirituality, they are focused on a flat or slightly ambiguous, but definitely heavy-handed rejection of spiritual quest in the Baudelaire essay and *Point Counter Point*. The former, as R. S. Baker convincingly argues, is a vicious attack on “modern” romanticism [BAKER 1982: 25], which apropos of that devotes a section to *Devils* and lashes out at Stavroginas Dostoevsky's fictional *alterego*. What Huxley finds unacceptable in Dostoevsky/Stavrogin in particular, and Dostoevskian heroes in general, is their rejection of the body, which he traces back to their hyperconsciousness: in his view, they are fearsome mementoes of what intellect is without the control of the body, how that situation leads to solipsism and the emergence of “self-made madmen,” who entertain “monomaniac imaginings,” realised in acts of violence [HUXLEY 1960: 178–79]. These charges are repeated in *Point Counter Point* by the Laurentian character Mark Rampion, who addresses them to Maurice Spandrell, a figure explicitly identified with both Dostoevsky and Stavrogin [HUXLEY 1978: 417]. Both the fierce charges themselves and the Lawrence *alterego* who voices them seem to flag up their resemblance to Lawrence's own preoccupations – as Peter Kaye highlights – with the modern disease of “mental

consciousness,” embodied in Dostoevsky [KAYE 2006: 44–45]. It is a matter of critical consensus that this rejection of spiritual quest was a “passing phase” in Huxley’s own career [BOWERING 1969: 20, cf. CUSHMAN 19, FERNS 1980: 39], compared to which he fundamentally took a U-turn in his post-war writings.

As for *Eyeless in Gaza*, it explicitly mentions *Notes from the Underground* as one of the main character’s, Anthony Beavis’s readings during his university years [HUXLEY 1975: 76]. The implications of that fact can be primarily assessed, in my view, against the backdrop of Anthony’s character and the context of the mention. As for the first, Anthony is one of Huxley’s own fictional *alteregos*: a bookish intellectual who finds establishing meaningful emotional ties extremely difficult. He is also the novel’s most important focaliser and occasionally – in the diary sections – its narrator. Thus, whatever shapes his mind can be understood to shape the novel’s fictional universe. Indeed, the mention of *Notes* – together with a diverse set of Anthony’s other readings – is followed by a representation of his dilemma on what to read first: in his craving to familiarise himself with the infinite number of books he is curious about, he wishes for the ability to read two of them at the same time [HUXLEY 1975: 77]. The result of his meditations is a case study of polyphony: reflecting his thought processes, the narrative features excerpts and ideas from various texts pasted next to one another, which, if it was not for the linearity of writing and reading, would appear to be simultaneously present in his mind. Accordingly, *Eyeless in Gaza* is the heavily intertextual product of a highly intellectual author. That fact is showcased by revealing the intertextual and polyphonic nature of his main character’s and focaliser’s thought processes in this excerpt and by introducing this meta-fictional section with the mention of a textbook case of dialogic and polyphonic writing, *Notes from the Underground* by Dostoevsky.

Although this mention positions Dostoevsky as one of Anthony’s – and Huxley’s – masters as far as structuring their texts is concerned, its implications are far from unanimously positive, since the image of the underground evokes precisely the type of Dostoevsky characters Huxley – together with Lawrence – had critiqued earlier. Indeed, identifying the Russian novelist with a fictional character of his – or rather a whole group of them – and seeing them as versions of the same phenomenon, in other words, a type, was not peculiar to Huxley’s or Lawrence’s understanding of the Dostoevsky *oeuvre*. Contemporary readers, for instance Huxley’s one-time editor-in-chief at *Athenaeum*, literary critic John Middleton Murray, also had a predilection to see a distinct typology among Dostoevsky’s characters, in which Ivan Karamazov, Rogozhin, Raskolnikov, Stavrogin and, naturally, the Underground Man, would form one distinct group. Murry, however, in his 1916 monograph almost idolises the most troubled, rebellious – and demonic – Dostoevskian characters (Svidrigaylov and Stavrogin), whom he also identifies with Dostoevsky [MURRY 1923: 58–9; 198]. Given the connection Murry established later between his own concept of romanticism and these rebellious Dostoevskian figures [MURRY 1924: 155–58], just as well as Huxley’s rejection of the former, his late 1920s outlash against both at the same breath is most understandable. Just as importantly, all of these critical approaches reflect a typological view of Dostoevsky characters, which



is akin to that of current Dostoevsky criticism. Indeed, the type Lawrence, Huxley, Murry and probably many others at that time recognised, is named after the Underground Paradoxalist in Dostoevsky studies. Thus, for instance Aleksandr Krinitsin highlights that the underground or mouse-hole [DOSTOEVSKY 2008] is a general metaphor for Dostoevskian hyperconsciousness, for a character type including Raskolnikov, Stavrogin and his doubles, just as well as Ivan Karamazov [KRINIT SIN 2001: 8–9]. His typical features include a bookish imagination, which results both in an infinite dialogue with his self and an inability to act [KRINIT SIN 2001: 9–25]. The same type is labelled the irresistibly fascinating yet abhorrent abject hero [cf. KRISTEVA 1982: 2–18] in Michael André Bernstein’s Bakhtinian-Kristevan interpretation – a character that is inseparable from Nietzschean *ressentiment* [BERNSTEIN 1992: 108]. In short, when Huxley mentions *Notes from the Underground* – of all Dostoevsky texts – by the title, he recalls an image which identifies a handful of Dostoevsky characters instead of just one, and thus he implicitly continues his earlier discussion of Dostoevsky as Stavrogin.

At the same time, as the various critical insights above show, by mentioning the underground Huxley uses an image that at his time was already becoming an effective shorthand for representing modern consciousness in crisis. Indeed, as I will demonstrate, *Eyeless in Gaza* develops an understanding of the underground in this vein, through recurrent mentions of its Kafkaesque version, the burrow. In advancing that view, I take my clues from Roman Struc, who calls attention to the distinct parallels between the *Notes* and Franz Kafka’s 1931 short story of that title (translated into English as early as 1933), despite the lack of philological evidence for a direct influence [STRUC 1981: 115]. In “The Burrow,” Kafka transforms the underground, as it were, into an animal’s secluded habitat, and focalises the narrative through that animal’s consciousness to reinterpret the Dostoevskian figure as a shocking, almost existentialist image of modern, alienated, solipsistic, utterly selfish, constantly terrified, hyperconscious human existence. In my view, introduced by the mention of *Notes*, the image of the underground keeps resurfacing in *Eyeless in Gaza* as a Kafkaesque burrow associated with many of the critical notions mentioned.

Most obvious of these connotations of the burrow/underground are those of abjection (death, dissolution and disgust) and *ressentiment*. Huxley criticism was quick to notice the writer’s morbid disgust of physical experiences [FERN 1980: 100], which appears in *Eyeless in Gaza* through a set of leitmotifs, a complex of images associated with the body and sex: the kidney Helen abhors to touch, her dead kitten, and the pulped carcass of a dog, which falls on Anthony and his lover literally out of the sky (VITOUX 1972: 217). Added to that list must be Helen’s aborted foetus, whose vision keeps haunting her, similarly to Brian’s mangled dead body, which Anthony cannot unsee, Staithes’s gangrened leg, and that epitome of abjection, the ghastly body of aging Mary Amberly. A drug addict and only a ghost of Anthony’s formerly irresistible maternally-aged first lover in the near-present of the novel, Mary is allegedly the cause of Anthony’s betrayal of Brian and thus of Brian’s death. In short, she is a blatant representation of the abject maternal body, an object of disgust and irresistible fascination at the same time both in physical and moral terms.

Early on in the novel, it is through her that a metonymical relationship is established between the interrelated leitmotifs of abject images and the underground: decades after their fatal affair, Anthony sees her in 1933 as “a hardly human creature festering to death, alone, in a dirty burrow” [HUXLEY 1975: 19]. When James Beavis applies the same metaphor to a very different character, Anthony’s father, an intellectual recluse, he evokes an apparently much less revolting form of existence, a kind of slumbering cosy near-death: “a marmot with its female, crowded fur to fur in their subterranean burrow” [HUXLEY 1975: 136]. Not only is the similarity of this intellectual to the Dostoevskian characters more obvious than that of Mary Amberly, but the linguist Beavies Senior’s obsession with language also offers yet another parallel. When Anthony confirms the image later, all the repressed hatred the Underground Paradoxalist feels because of his insignificance is unearthed from below the innocent surface of his father’s eventless life:

There was his father, first of all, still deep in the connubial burrow, among the petticoats and the etymologies and the smell of red-haired women—but agitated, [...] hurt, indignant, bitterly resentful. [...] At any moment a Jenkins might be elected to some presidency or other, and then, defenceless in one’s burrow of thought and sensuality, one would be at the mercy of any childish passion that might arise. [HUXLEY 1975: 303]

Apparently, burrows come in various kinds, tailored to the individual in *Eyeless in Gaza*, but they are invariably associated with qualities of abject loneliness, a sense of living death, suffering and resentment.

As the application of the same metaphor to such diametrically opposed characters as Mary Amberly and John Beavis might suggest, the image of the underground—in the form of the burrow – acquires a wider scope through various doubles in *Eyeless in Gaza* and actually comes to signify the modern human condition in general. First and foremost, Anthony’s musings above trail off into the realisation that he himself, an intellectual and procrastinator, is not so different from his slightly derided begetter: “And suddenly he perceived that, having spent all his life trying to react away from the standards of his father’s universe, he had succeeded only in becoming precisely what his father was – a man in a burrow” [HUXLEY 1975: 303]. Similarly, Helen, his lover and female counterpart, represents herself in images that make her Mary Amberly’s, her own mother’s equally abject double: “Instead of leaving me here, rotting away, like a piece of dirt on a rubbish heap. Like a dead kitten [...]. So much carrion” [HUXLEY 1975: 389]. Anthony and Helen are just two of the five of the younger generation whose *Bildung* (cf. PAULSELL 2003: 95) – obviously with most attention devoted to the central couple – is presented in the novel, and both seem to be trapped in repeating their parent’s fate in one way or another. A closer look at the three other male figures, Brian Foxe, Mark Staithes and Hugh Ledwidge suggests that they stand for the various possible outcomes of a life rooted in the social circumstances of the upper middle class and boarding school education. In other words, they are doubles, who represent the alternatives that Anthony could have chosen from. Each of them, however – similarly to his own life – has led to a



dead end: Brian's idealism to suicide, Hugh's aestheticism – embodied in his novel, *The Invisible Lover* – to his inability to see the flesh-and-blood Helen, his wife, and Mark's obsession with being a man of action [BOWERING 1969: 128] to a fatal colonial adventure and a gangrened leg. Anthony's metaphor of a lonely human being "festering [...] in a [...] burrow" seems to equally apply to basically all the major characters of the novel, two generations of high society intellectuals produced by the various permanent crises of the *fin de siècle*.

In my view, a revision of Huxley's earlier harsh critique of Dostoevsky is implied by the wide scope of the underground image, which is corroborated by another, markedly different application of the burrow metaphor in *Eyeless in Gaza*. To put it simply, if the underground is a figure for the modern disease of "mental consciousness," then its widespread nature in Huxley's novel simply testifies to the excellent diagnostic skills of the Russian writer. Not only that, but the hyperconsciousness and intellectual focus associated with the underground still appear to be prerequisites for finding a way out, for the spiritual and mental quest that process implies. At least, that much is suggested when the word burrow – this time as an active verb – resurfaces in the context of Anthony Beavis's newfound creed, the "applied scientific religion" of Doctor Miller's pacifism. True to the double nature of that creed, Anthony's (and Huxley's) "conversion" [PAULSELL 2003: 95; BOWERING 1969: 114] is implied by the figurative language he uses to tell of a "resurrection" in an "incredibly beautiful [scientific] film showing the life-history of the blow-fly" [HUXLEY 1975: 316]: "In twelve more days, the fly emerges. Fantastic process of resurrection! [...] (Minor and incidental miracle!) Burrowing upwards, towards the light" [HUXLEY 1975: 316]. The underground, the burrow itself is transformed – consistently with Huxley's post-war views – into burrowing, a metaphorical act of active intellectual and spiritual quest. This is no less than a rehabilitation of Dostoevsky, whose tormented, questing heroes Huxley had attacked with such ferocity in "Baudelaire" and *Point Counter Point*.

Indeed, Huxley's earlier rejection of spiritual quest in Dostoevsky seems to be rephrased as a critique of the Nietzschean superman, who is recognisable, for instance, in Raskolnikov's denial of subjecthood to the other through the metaphor of the louse and, ultimately, through the murders he commits. Even that critique – a recognition of the folly of the man of action – is given with much compassion and respect through the figure and plot line of Mark Staithe in *Eyeless in Gaza*. Raskolnikov and Staithe are connected by their application of various insect metaphors to their fellow humans, which sums up their sense of superiority and concomitant immorality. That – in Dostoevsky's case – has been associated with Nietzschean thought most famously by Lev Shestov [SHESTOV 1969: chapter 15]. As is well-known, Raskolnikov sums up his hatred for inferior human beings, like the old woman he kills, by reference to them as insects: "No more than the life of a louse, of a black-beetle" (DOSTOEVSKY 2006: part I, chapter vi). Indeed, as Shestov cannot fail to highlight, the final collapse of his philosophy is inseparable from the recognition that he himself is no different from – maybe worse than – the "louse" he has killed (DOSTOEVSKY 2006: part iii, chapter vi; part v, chapter iv). Similar insect

metaphors are used by Staithes to explicate – in a context aptly updated to the inter-war period – his superiority to the colonial other in his narrative of an attack on the coffee plantation he was running:

Superior, as though I were holding a durbar of my loyal subjects. [...] A hundred villainous, coffee- coloured peons, staring up at one with those beady tortoise's eyes of theirs [...]. It helped a lot, I found, to think of the creatures as some kind of rather squalid insects. Cockroaches, dung beetles. Just a hundred big, staring bugs. It helped, I say. [...] But bugs, bugs only. Whereas the one was a man. [HUXLEY 1975: 371]

Staithes, just like Raskolnikov, ruins himself out of a misconceived zest to prove the superiority he mentions here – again and again. Following him is presented to Anthony repeatedly as an option to save himself by becoming like Staithes, but it is only in his final desperation, after losing Helen, that he harkens to that call. Thus he becomes witness to Mark's bathetically unheroic downfall – the loss of his leg because he has to push limits out of *hybris*, as it were – which occasions Anthony's own "resurrection" in an unexpected way: he is necessitated to seek Doctor Miller's help. Here, as throughout *Eyeless in Gaza*, Staithes is represented through Anthony's perspective with much respect and awe – even envy – as a potentially great man. It is only the folly of this last adventure that seems to unveil his fallibility to Beavis, though compassion for his mortally wounded friend shades much of his disillusionment. Huxley seems to be much more disappointed and cruel at this point than his fictional character: "punishing" Staithes with being rotten alive in a fictional world where disgust is a more significant sense than even guilt is a straightforward indicator that for Huxley his – and Raskolnikov's – Nietzschean superiority is unacceptable.

That, however, needs to be spelt out for the benefit of Anthony Beavis, and this is what occasions the embedding of a philosophical debate on human nature [HUXLEY 1975: chapter li] – a scene fit for a Dostoevskian novel of ideas and most aptly shaped as yet another, this time inverted, restaging of the Grand Inquisitor scene. The opponents are Staithes and Doctor Miller, Beavis's fallen idol and new spiritual leader. The latter, with a rather unexpected turn, has been described earlier as a curious-looking tormentor and is to be accepted – in contrast to the Dostoevskian Grand Inquisitor – as Anthony's benevolent new spiritual leader:

A mouth like an inquisitor's. But the inquisitor had forgotten himself and learned to smile; there were the potentialities of laughter in the deep folds of skin which separated the quivering sensitive corners of the mouth from the cheeks. And round the bright enquiring eyes those intricate lines seemed the traces and hieroglyphic symbols of a constantly repeated movement of humorous kindness. [HUXLEY 1975: 354–55]

Jerry Wasserman, apropos of an earlier scene, identifies Anthony with Alyosha Karamazov in the Dostoevskian context [WASSERMAN 1980: 201], which leaves the role of Ivan Karamazov open for Mark as opposed to this transformed inquisitor turned healer [BOWERING 1969: 114]. Indeed, Mark's self-torturing nature is thrown

into relief by the sharp contrast between Miller's above description and Anthony's earlier abject vision of Mark's "flayed smile" [HUXLEY 1975: 155] on his "fanatical hermit's face" [HUXLEY 1975: 153]:

Under the skin each strip of muscle in the cheek and jaw seemed to stand out distinct and separate like the muscles in those lime-wood statues of flayed human beings that were made for Renaissance anatomy rooms. When he smiled—and each time that happened it was as though the flayed statue had come to life and were expressing its agony—one could follow the whole mechanism of the excruciating grimace... [HUXLEY 1975: 153]

While many of the ideas advocated by Huxley's new prophet, modelled on Gerald Heard [BOWERING 1969: 114], might not bear repetition, the contrast of these two faces suggests a reinterpretation of the Grand Inquisitor in then-fashionable Rabelaisian terms: Miller appears to be not so much a "travesty" of Zossima, as Wasserman suggests [WASSERMAN 1980: 201], but someone who has been freed from (self-)torture by laughter. Conversely, it is Mark's inability to smile without evoking a most horrible form of medieval torture – flaying – that shows his essential affinity with the hyperconscious, self-torturing Dostoevskian characters, below his guise of a man of action. Just like his gangrened leg, it is an aspect of his character that confirms Huxley's 1920s critique of the Underground Man, though in a subtle form and a subdued, respectful tone.

All in all, the diverse – and mostly allusive – intertextual connections of *Eyeless in Gaza* with Dostoevsky's major works clearly suggest a continuation of Huxley's earlier polemic with the Russian novelist. Some of Huxley's earlier conclusions are subtly reiterated here. These include the representation of Dostoevskian hyperconsciousness, summed up in the metaphor of the underground/burrow, as a potential dead end, both in the form of solipsistic intellectualism (Anthony and his doubles, John Beavis and Hugh Ledwidge) and in the figure of the man of action, the Nietzschean superman, who denies subjecthood to others. Interestingly, in that respect Mary Amberley, who irresponsibly conducts human experiments on Anthony and Brian, is Mark's female counterpart, just as Helen is Anthony's own. These multiple doublings, however, suggest the universal relevance of the underground as an image of modern consciousness in crisis. That, in turn, implies a rehabilitation of Dostoevsky as a visionary writer who foresaw modern man's predicament. Not only that, but as an ultimate gesture of reconciliation, Huxley also creatively transforms the burrow – the underground – into a prerequisite of spiritual quest and potential rebirth, a celebration of which hallmarks the end of his crude, Laurentian, anti-Dostoevskian phase.



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