



Luigi Lugiato's "Madmen, deranged, criminals": Dostoevsky and Italian psychiatry after Cesare Lombroso

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Abstract

This essay provides an exploration of the intertwining realms of psychiatry and literature, focusing particularly on the case of Fyodor Dostoevsky. The paper gives an overview of the interest in Dostoevsky's opus and biography displayed by Italian psychiatry, in particular by Cesare Lombroso and the connection he made between genius and mental illness. The essay is divided into two parts: the first, more theoretical, aims to address the question of the osmosis between psychiatry and literature, paying particular attention to the fact that, in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, this osmosis seems to have centered mainly around Dostoevsky. The first section delves into the theoretical underpinnings of this intersection, highlighting the influence of figures like Cesare Lombroso and the attraction Dostoevsky's works and biography held for psychiatrists and alienists. The second section examines Luigi Lugiato's unpublished study on Dostoevsky. Luigi Lugiato (1879-1950), an Italian psychiatrist and alienist, is a perfect example to demonstrate how decades following Lombroso's death and notwithstanding all the polemics and critiques surrounding his theories, his strong positivist paradigm continues to shape psychiatric analysis and remains influential in the European cultural panorama. The "law of contradiction", observed in Dostoevsky's works and life, permeates Lugiato's own examination of the author.

Keywords Dostoevsky · Lombroso · Lugiato · Psychiatry and literature

*In our times, the fantastic can only find a place in asylums and not in literature
and is under the jurisdiction of doctors and not poets.*
Vissarion G. Belinsky, *A View of Russian Literature in the Year 1846*

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Introduction

This brief exploration into the history of psychiatry is motivated by a desire for a sober and more grounded approach to Dostoevsky, reintegrating him into the cultural horizon in which both he and his reception have been situated. To get a detailed insight into this cultural horizon we should consider the role that mental medicine played in the second half of the nineteenth century.

From its inception, mental medicine tended to incorporate literature: the alienist¹ found in literature a confirmation of his practice, using literary texts for descriptive purposes, even implicitly recognising an anthropological relevance to fiction.

Moreover, Romanticism conveyed the concept of the intrinsic value of literature through the figure of the writer. Pierre Bourdieu, in his theory of the literary field, has effectively shown how literature, in its search for autonomy, has presented itself as ostentatiously peripheral, created by writers who possess extraordinary talent but are marginalised in society: prophets, madmen, outcasts (Bourdieu 1992, pp. 93–96; 320). The Romantic perception of the writer as unique, unconventional, exceptional, and ultimately isolated extended its influence well into the mid-nineteenth century and beyond, determining the fortune of the psychobiographic genre.

In this context it is natural that literature made use of the findings of psychiatry, sometimes sharing, sometimes rejecting, the positivist scientific approach. Thus, throughout the nineteenth century, the intersection between medicine and literature developed in a constant and often turbulent dialogue.

The case of Dostoevsky, as we shall see, is particularly significant: his life and literary production were marked by nervous illness and, in particular, epilepsy, which was at that time the focus of the alienists' interests, from Esquirol onwards.

In his convincing "use" of his own morbid states Dostoevsky seemed to reflect, or even anticipate, the most advanced discoveries of neurology and psychiatry of the time. Oliver Saks notes how in the *Sosia* (1846) we read descriptions of "forced thinking" and "dreamy states" that are almost identical to what Huggings Jackson was working out in his neurological studies at the same time (Sacks 2012, p. 151).

In order to give an overview of the interest in Dostoevsky's opus and biography displayed by Italian psychiatry, in particular by Cesare Lombroso, the essay will be divided into two parts: the first, more theoretical, aims to address the question of the overlap between psychiatry and literature, paying particular attention to the fact that in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century in Russia this osmosis seems to have centered mainly around Dostoevsky. In Italy, too, Dostoevsky's name appears regularly in the works of positivist psychiatrists and criminologists at the turn of the twentieth century. Thus, in the second part of the paper, we will examine the persistence of the "mutual love" between psychiatry and literature, focusing on the presence of Dostoevsky in this discourse through the specific example of the Italian psychiatrist-alienist Luigi Lugiato (1879-1950).

The focus extends beyond the narrative connections between Russian literature and medicine, which have been extensively studied (Sirotkina 2008; Bogdanov

¹The medicalisation of madness in the Enlightenment was followed by the need for a specific professional figure for mental disorders, the 'alienation of reason'. Doctors and scientists of mental illness were called "alienists".

2017).² Rather, the aim is to document how, for a certain period, both disciplines viewed humanity through the same paradigm. The result was a vicious circle: a peculiar circle predominantly shaped by medical science, yet validated in literature, almost as counter-evidence to its experimental method, precious counter-evidence, as Lombroso himself said³ because this validation came from another field of knowledge. Several researchers have pointed out the contradiction of a method that proclaims itself to be strictly scientific and at the same time justifies itself in fiction (Hiller 2013, pp. 229–231; Dahlkvist 2015, p. 588).⁴

The selection of the two Italian psychiatrists for this essay offers a valuable perspective for two main reasons. Firstly, Luigi Lugiato stands out as a rare example among Italian psychiatrists who have invested considerable effort in the examination and promotion of literature, explicitly delineating his medical-psychiatric perspective as that of an alienist. Secondly, his contributions emerge during a period when the positivist-Lombrosian paradigm ought to have been surpassed. Nevertheless, as we will see, notwithstanding his professed intentions and criticism of specific issues, the epistemological framework within which Lugiato operates still bears significant influence of the inventor of criminal anthropology.

Therefore, the case of Lugiato, which is studied in the second part of this article, is illuminating in understanding the persistence of Lombroso as a more or less conscious theoretical reference, despite the crisis of the positivist paradigm from the 1920s onwards (Montaldo 2018).⁵

Contextualizing Dostoevsky through his reception

Examining Dostoevsky's presence in the positivist and psychiatric discourse at the turn of the twentieth century aids also in the interpretation of his works. It is crucial to note that readings of a work are never solely arbitrary and detached from the work itself, and in our case, it would be a great limitation to link them only to the pathological condition of the author.

²For some time now, literature and medicine have even merged into a single discipline, as sub-discipline of literary studies and a part of the 'medical humanities'. For an insightful and problematising status quo of the connection between medicine and literature in world literature, see Rigoli 2001; Shuttleworth and Dickson 2021; Dickson 2022. The Russian situation is also studied in: Rice 1985; Bogdanov and Nikolosi 2006; Beer 2007a,b; Medvedeva and Kazakov 2011; Nicolosi 2017; Nicolosi and Hartmann 2017; Nikolosi 2018; Gindin 2019. For an overview of the Italian scenario, see: Ferro 1989; Rondini 2001; Frigessi 2004; Berré 2015; Aliverti 2018.

³"Of course, Dostoevsky's descriptions in *The House of the Dead* are so accurate that they can serve as counter-evidence and provide new confirmation of anthropological findings, precisely because they come from a different source" (Lombroso 1893, p. 341).

⁴On the other hand, this is the logic of Zola and his article "The Experimental Novel", in which the writer not only observes but also creates a narrative that confirms the initial hypothesis, according to "le déterminisme des phénomènes mis à l'étude" (Zola 1902, p. 8).

⁵In the preface to the first volume of the Lugiato series, Enrico Morselli, although a disciple of Lombroso, an exponent of what he calls "renewed lombrosism", argues that Lugiato avoids "all alienist prophylaxis" and the error of Lombroso and Nordau, who considered every feature of art as a pathological symptom (Lugiato 1926, III).

Riccardo Nicolosi, in his book *Degeneration Erzählen* (Nicolosi 2018) argues that Dostoevsky's counter-experiment, aimed at challenging the deterministic anthropological hypothesis and the biomedical reduction of the human soul, leads to results opposite to the original intention. This is illustrated by the character of Smerdyakov, a born criminal trapped in his hereditary degeneracy. It is noteworthy that the positivist theory of atavism associated with insanity is already present in *Demons*, as evidenced by Kirillov's beastly transformation on the threshold of death. This suggests that the dominant discourse of the time somehow conditions and penetrates even the creative system of the one who makes himself the herald of its rejection.

Dostoevsky certainly mocks and uses the refined weapon of humour to reproduce the biological reductionism of contemporary neurology in the delirious impromptu of Dmitri Karamazov, but at the same time he cannot fully detach himself from the mainstream narrative of his time.

In general, one must be very careful not to overstate Dostoevsky's presumed aversion to science and even to the scientific mentality prevalent in his era (Scanlan 2002, p. 16; Thompson 2002). He often uses it skilfully and bends it to his purposes, for example, when he argues for the existence of God from a positivist standpoint: "Science cannot ignore the importance of religion among humanity, if only as a historical fact notable for its continuity and steadfastness" (27:85).⁶

It was during that period that psychiatry, criminal anthropology and literature were developing their "mutual love", as the historian Delia Frigessi well put it (Frigessi 2003),⁷ a mutual love centred on the issue of crime and deviance, read in fact as a degeneration.

For its part, literature closely followed and was often influenced by the development of the "positive" sciences of man. As a long and fruitful critical tradition attests,⁸ Dostoevsky incorporated the themes of contemporary human sciences into his works, such as the Darwinian theme (Zohrab 2010; Barsht 2021), especially as presented in *Demons*, or in his polemics with the neurophysiological approach of Claude Bernard and Sechenov,⁹ and in the vexed question of heredity and degeneration in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

On the other hand, the positivist and determinist scientific discourse of the time, with all its nuances, was persistently directed to Dostoevsky as a test and confirmation of the theories of atavism and degeneration. Dostoevsky was considered a reliable example of psychopathological research into deviations from the norm, "a great master in the depiction of morbid mental phenomena", as Vladimir Fedorovich Chizh wrote in 1885, defending this approach in his book *Dostoevsky as a Psychopathologist*, infused with the teachings of Lombroso: "The exact methods of study employed

⁶These citations are referenced from the complete collection of Dostoevsky's works, and any citations that appear in this manner are such.

⁷The scholar speaks of a kind of "annexation of literature" by the alienist. See also Rigoli 2001.

⁸See note 2.

⁹It should be noted that Bernard's seminal work about experimental medicine was translated by Nikolay Strakhov in the mid-60s, the period of peak collaboration with Dostoevsky (Bernard 1866).

by psychiatrists enable them to scientifically study and better elucidate the material given by artists" (Chizh 2002).¹⁰

As stated by the Italian literary theorist, Paolo Getrevi, "Physiological and psychiatric imperialism now captivates the European imagination" (Getrevi 2001, pp. 195–199). And Dostoevsky, the epileptic genius, will be a key carrier of this new discourse and the controversy it provokes through the perception of his works as repositories of his personal case history, as Lombroso's interpretations suggest:

If, as appears likely, Dostoevsky portrayed himself in *The Idiot*, we have another example of an epileptic genius, whose entire life trajectory is shaped by the distinctive psychology of epilepsy — impulsivity, double personality, childishness, which goes back even to the earliest stages of human life, alternating with prophetic insight, and marked by morbid altruism and the heightened emotionalism of a saintly character. This latter aspect is particularly significant, countering the objections that the typical immorality of the epileptic would preclude associating this type with saintliness. (Lombroso 1891, p. 348)

Lombroso's Dostoevsky

One could go even further and suggest that Dostoevsky's sudden popularity in Europe was fueled by the penetration of the neuropsychiatric paradigm into the continental study of the humanities. Obviously, such a predilection for Dostoevsky on the part of psychiatrists and alienists cannot be a coincidence.¹¹ The controversies that stirred the scientific world of the time manifested tangibly in the life and work of Dostoevsky, who closely followed the medical literature of his time, also thanks to the friendship (and the library) of his personal physician, Dr. Ianovsky.¹²

To understand the extent to which the issues central to the medical debate of the time were relevant to Dostoevsky, it is enough to mention just a few of them: the classification of mental disorders in all their diversity;¹³ the clash between the historical, sociological, and relativistic conception of insanity (Esquirol, Micah) and the

¹⁰Chizh examines Dostoevsky's characters from a psychiatric perspective and meticulously constructs detailed case histories for approximately a hundred characters. He identifies clear examples of psychopathology in at least a quarter of these cases. Beginning with the premise that the understanding of hereditary factors in mental illness represents one of the greatest advancements of the past three decades, Chizh finds validation for this concept not only in Lombroso's statistical analyses but also in Dostoevsky's novels. Specifically, he points to *The Brothers Karamazov*, highlighting characters such as Smerdyakov and Ivan with his hallucinogenic dementia, as well as the "strange character" exhibited by Ivan's mother, the "klikushka" (shrieker). For the Lombrosian influence on Russian culture (see also Mogilner 2013, pp. 331–334).

¹¹In turn, Dostoevsky is well informed about epilepsy and psychological disorders, (see Nikolosi 2019, p. 979; Rice 1985, p. 45).

¹²"Fyodor Mikhailovich often borrowed medical books from me, especially those that dealt with diseases of the brain and nervous system, diseases of the soul, and the development of the skull according to the old, but at that time in vogue system of Gall" (Ianovsky 1964, p. 163).

¹³Dostoevsky borrowed Esquirol's book from Ianovsky's *Des maladies mentales* (1838). The book associates epilepsy with insanity or morbid mental states and mentions childhood hallucinations as a symptom of hereditary epilepsy. In the short story included in the *Diary of a Writer, Muzhik Marei* (1876), the narrator recalls a childhood fear of his own triggered by an auditory hallucination. The term 'hallucination',

structural analysis of mental illness portraying it as a progressive decline towards the zero point of human nature (Morel, Lombroso); the conflict between the spiritual and medical theory of insanity (Morel, Lombroso); the conflict between the spiritualist theory, which defines insanity as a violation of the spirit's connection with itself (Langermann, Heinroth), and the materialist endeavor to ground madness in a differentiated organic space (Spurzheim, Brousset, Lombrosian school); the debate on the necessity for a medical verdict, evaluating the insanity-afflicted individual's irresponsibility based in the internal mechanisms at play, and the issue of human culpability and guilt.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Lombrosian school occupied a central position in the osmosis between literature and medicine in Europe. It is worth noting that Lombroso himself took a keen interest in the history of literature, and particularly Russian literature (Salomoni 2009). This was partly due to the contributions of his colleagues and correspondents, such as Praskovia Tarnovskaya, “who provided new information on Russian literary history as well as on the Russian and English translations of my work (London, 1891, St Petersburg, 1886)” (Lombroso 1894, p. 4).¹⁴ Indeed, Russia held a particular allure for Lombroso precisely because it represented an antithetical pole to Italy due to the youthfulness of its culture, which he describes as almost “barbaric”. He notes that “where civilization has recently emerged and barbarism has hitherto prevailed, as in Russia, new ideas are met with real fury” (Lombroso 1894, p. 246).¹⁵

Lombroso specifically mentions Dostoevsky, whose appearance he describes as “cretinous and degenerate” (Lombroso 1894, p. 9). The Italian alienist frequently cites Dostoevsky, whom he regards as a “true criminal anthropologist”. Lombroso provides a physiognomic portrait of Dostoevsky, drawn from Melchior de Vogüé's renowned book on the Russian novel (de Vogüé 2010, pp. 299–362):

Dostoevsky and Tolstoy [...] have prominent wrinkles that suggest suffering. Regarding the former, de Vogüé, writes: ‘In his face, more than in his books, one can discern the long habits of fear, distrust and martyrdom. The eyelids, the lips, and all the muscles of his face tremble with nervous tics’. When he was roused to anger or to an idea, one might have thought that he had seen that head before, on a jury bench or among the vagabonds begging at the gates of the prison. Occasionally, it exhibited the melancholic humility of the elderly saints depicted in Slavic icons. (Lombroso 1894, p. 704)¹⁶

introduced by Esquirol, who considered childhood hallucinations a symptom of hereditary epilepsy, is added by Dostoevsky to the last draft just before printing (Rice 1985, pp. 47–49).

¹⁴And further he continues: “If there are civilizations that foster the development of genius, there are also those that hinder it. For instance, in Italy, where civilization is deeply rooted and has seen the rise and fall of multiple epochs, each surpassing the previous, the general disposition of the population [...] tends to resist novelty and instead reveres and almost compulsively adheres to traditions of the past” (Nicolosi 2017; White 2021).

¹⁵Lombroso's interest in Russian society and culture is well attested by letters and documents which can be found in his digital archive (<https://lombrosoproject.unito.it/larchivio/>). In 1897, Lombroso also visited Tolstoy in Russia at his family estate at Yasnaya Polyana. (Mazzarello 2005).

¹⁶Here Lombroso notes the absence of ethnic characteristics in geniuses. Being degenerates, they resemble each other regardless of other factors. Actually, Lombroso quite freely quotes Vogüé, as this description

Lombroso's treatise on genius, while originating from a long-standing stereotype revived by Romantic culture, confers a new significance on the association of genius with pathological conditions: "I do not imply that genius is a form of alienation, but rather an excessive imbalance of cerebral activity and sensitivity may bring it into proximity with insanity" (Lombroso 1877, pp. 186–7, 193). This new approach to the problem raises the question of epilepsy, as any deviation from the norm, whether it be genius or criminality, according to this vision, requires an organic etiology.¹⁷

The reason for Dostoevsky and his characters capturing the author's attention is evident. In *Criminal Man*, Lombroso essentially provides a detailed diagnosis of Raskolnikov as an occasional criminal (suffering from what he calls "moral insanity"): Dostoevsky describes him as a person who committed an occasional crime, influenced by misfortune and circumstances, with a temper that is not entirely criminal. Despite being unrepentant, he is nonetheless unable to exploit his crime. Additionally, Lombroso observes that Raskolnikov has experienced several episodes of amnestico-epileptic seizures (Lombroso 2013, pp. 1219–21). *Demons* furnishes the psychiatrist with material for his investigations into political crime and its nexus to psychiatric disorders (Lombroso and Laschi 1890, pp. 258–9).

Thus, the study's focus extends beyond individual writers to encompass the characters within their works. In *Criminal Man* Dostoevsky is accorded the status of a psychiatric scientist; he is cited as frequently, if not more so, than Lombroso's fellow alienists.¹⁸

served Vogüé for the opposite idea, to note the typical Russian appearance of Dostoevsky. A little earlier, the Italian criminologist had observed that Dostoevsky had physical features common to other geniuses, which are characteristic of degenerates: "Darwin and Bryant, like Socrates and Dostoevsky, had exaggerated frontal sinuses, cheekbones, sunken and protruding noses" (Lombroso 1894, p. 704) It should be noticed that Vogüé provides biographical data that attracts the attention of alienists throughout Europe. When speaking of his heroes, Vogüé even mentions Charcot.

¹⁷Lombroso gradually arrived at these conclusions and presented them in various amendments to his work *Genio e follia* (Genius and Insanity 1864); the 1888 edition with a new title, *L'uomo di genio* (The Man of Genius) contains a chapter dedicated to epileptoid geniuses. See also the classification of epileptoids in general terms in *L'uomo criminale* (The criminal Man), published in 1889, p. 99. In his *Writer's Diary*, Dostoevsky repeatedly expressed his understanding of crime as a disease, but always with some nuances. For example: "in the West, the idea that crime is often just a disease has a deep meaning. This is because it varies greatly. However, this idea has no meaning for us because it is not differentiated. Any wrongdoing, even committed by the red jack, is almost recognized as a disease, and unfortunately, some even see something liberal in this" (23: 8). In the issue for 1877 of a *Writer's Diary*, commenting about Tolstoy's newly published novel *Anna Karenina*, he wrote: "It is clear and obvious that evil lies deeper in humanity than the socialist doctors assume, that no social structure can avoid evil, that the human soul will remain the same, that abnormality and sin come from within it" (25: 201).

¹⁸"When comparing modern dramaturgy to that of the past, even just a few years ago, one is struck by the significant differences in the characters and, above all, by the strange frequency of the appearance of insane or criminal heroes. We have gone so far that when we approach Ibsen's new masterpiece, for example, we can be sure that we shall see three or four madmen or villains in it, if not all the heroes will be madmen or villains, and each of them has such a peculiar character that it seems as if they had been molded by an alienist or a criminal anthropologist. [...] It is noteworthy that Zola portrays Jacques after a criminal in order to make an immortal statue of him, and that Dostoevsky paints natural-born criminals in *The House of the Dead* and criminoids in *Crime and Punishment*" (Lombroso 1899, pp. 665, 671).

In conclusion, literature, and in particular Dostoevsky's oeuvre, serves as a realm for validating and legitimizing Lombroso's theories, as he questions: "why is truth accepted from novelists and not from scholars?" (Lombroso 1899, p. 681).¹⁹

A case study: Luigi Lugiato's Dostoevsky

The Italian psychiatrist and alienist Luigi Lugiato (1879-1950)²⁰ shared Lombroso's and his school's (including Enrico Ferri,²¹ Enrico Morselli, Mario Carrara) interest in literature and devoted himself to it with passion. Between 1926 and 1935 he authored a six-volume work titled *Pazzi squilibrati e delinquenti nelle opere dei letterati (Madmen, Deranged and Criminals in the Works of Literati)*, wherein he examined the interplay between psychology and art in the works of Shakespeare, Zola,

¹⁹He concludes: "However, this raises the question: why do the works of Argenson, Daudet, Zola's Jacques, Dostoevsky's *Betsy*, and Goncourt's *Elise* find easy acceptance in the unofficial literary world? Although many great artists, including some of the oldest, have portrayed the type of person that I associate with born criminals in their depictions of executioners and criminals, society still struggles to acknowledge the existence of a criminal type, the presence of insanity in both geniuses and criminals, and the link between epilepsy and crime, concepts readily accepted in novels and dramas. When presented with accurate figures depicted by skilled artists, our innate sense of truth, often suppressed and distorted by academic norms, is awakened and rebels against these conventions. This is especially true because art's appeal expands the boundaries of truth, making them more visible and therefore easier to comprehend. When drawing conclusions from statistics or a skeletal study of facts, the past can hinder us. It can force us to deny evidence, even when united with feeling and artistic expression" (Lombroso 1899, p. 681).

²⁰After graduating in medicine and surgery from the University of Padua in 1903, and after various experiences, in 1907 Lugiato was appointed chief physician at the newly founded Padua Asylum. He then directed the psychiatric hospitals of Sondrio and Macerata. During the First World War, he served in the field before being called back to direct the Psychiatric and Consulting Service for Nervous and Mental Illnesses at the military command. At the end of the conflict, he took over as director of the psychiatric hospital in Bergamo and then the one in Milan, where he introduced numerous innovations. Official recognitions such as the appointment as commendatore of the Italian Crown in 1926 attest to his professional prestige. However, his career slowed down for political reasons that led to his imprisonment during the Second World War on charges of anti-fascism.

Lugiato carried out research on various somatic aspects in some mental pathologies. A good reputation, even outside a highly specialized environment, came to him through the work *I disturbi mentali. Patologia speciale ed anomalie dello spirito* (Mental Disorders. Special Pathology and Anomalies of the Spirit), Milano 1922, which is a kind of review of all the main sections of the neuropsychiatric nosography of the time, as well as of anthropological and criminological problems. He wrote in many journals; for our topic, I would just mention *Rivista sperimentale di freniatria e medicina legale delle alienazioni mentali* (Experimental Journal of Mental Alienation and Forensic Medicine).

His publications embraced topics such as psychiatry, psychology and the intersection of art and the mind. He published a novel *Il padre oscuro* [The Dark Father] under the pseudonym Giulio Gualti. He recently appeared as a character in the novel *Il figlio perduto* by Alessandro Gallenzi (Milan 2018). G. Armocida, sv Lugiato Luigi, *Dizionario biografico Treccani*. [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/luigi-lugiato_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/luigi-lugiato_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) See also his page on the ASPI (Italian Psychology Historical Archive), edited by Paola Zocchi (<https://www.aspi.unimib.it/collections/entity/detail/103/>).

²¹For example, in the eighth chapter of the criminologist Enrico Ferri's book *I delinquenti nell'arte* (Delinquents in Art) in the chapter devoted to Northern art, Dostoevsky, the "Dante of criminology", occupies one of the key places (along with Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata*). According to Ferri, if Silvio Pellico and Kropotkin provide interesting data from the point of view of social anthropology and criminology, Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Dead House* (which he calls the *Tomb of the Living*) is the real "'vein of criminal psychology'" (Ferri 1886, p. 267).

Manzoni, D'Annunzio, Dante, and the Greek tragedians (all regular guests in Lombroso's works, except perhaps Manzoni), constructing a comprehensive characterological repertoire based on literary heroes.²²

In the archives of the research centre ASPI – Historical Archives of Italian Psychology – at the University of Milan-Bicocca,²³ there exists a seventh volume of this series, which Lugiato did not have time to publish, titled *I personaggi delle opere di Fjodor Dostoevski visti da un alienista* (The Characters of Fedor Dostoevsky's Works as Seen by an Alienist).

The typescript, containing numerous handwritten corrections, consists of 260 sheets and is undated; however, based on the cited literature, it must have been written after 1936. It is divided into the following chapters: "Introduction"; "Brief Notes on the Biography and Personality of Fjodor Dostoevski"; "The Works – 'Poor People'"; "The Double"; "Mr. Prokharčin" – "Novel in Nine Letters – The White Nights"; "The Landlady and The Notes of the Underground"; "Netocka Nezvanova"; "The Grave of the Living"; "The Humiliated and the Injured"; "The Humorous Novels – The Uncle's Dream – The Village of Stepanchikovo and its Inhabitants – The Wife and the Husband under the Bed – A Bad Anecdote"; "The Gambler"; "Crime and Punishment"; "The Idiot"; "The Eternal Husband"; "The Demons"; "The Adolescent"; "The Brothers Karamazov"; "Concluding Remarks".²⁴

Here the psychiatrist offers a "psychological analysis" of the characters created by the Russian author's "cyclopean" narrative genius. Here, too, Lugiato attempts to partially distance himself from Lombrosian theories, both with regard to the status of genius and the inevitable degeneration of the criminal. Despite his alignment with the constitutionalist approach (evidenced by the frequent use of the term "constitutional criminal", especially in reference to Petr Verkhovensky, alongside the Lombrosian concept of the "natural-born criminal"), Lugiato advocates for a nuanced perspective that seemingly presupposes, at least in theory, the notion of responsibility and, albeit to a minimal extent, individual freedom.²⁵

²²Here are the volumes with a preface by Enrico Morselli: *G. Shakespeare e le sue "Masterpieces"*, Bergamo 1926; E. Zola. Zola. *La famiglia di Rougon-Macquart*, ibid. 1927; *I promessi sposi (parentesi manzoniana)*, ibid. 1930; *G. D'Annunzio e le sue opere (romanzo e teatro)*, ibid. 1930; *I personaggi de "La Divina Commedia" visti da un alienista, I, L'Inferno e il Purgatorio; II, Il Paradiso*, Roma 1932; *I personaggi delle tragedie greche visti da un alienista: Eschilo, Sofocle, Euripide*, Bergamo 1935.

²³(<https://www.aspi.unimib.it/centro-aspi/>).

²⁴We have tried to maintain certain particularities of the author's transliteration. Thus in Italian: "Introduzione"; "Brevi note sulla biografia e sulla personalità di Fjodor Dostoevski"; "Le opere – Povera gente"; "Il sosia"; "Il signor Procharcin – Romanzo in nove – Lettere – Le notti bianche"; "La padrona di casa e Le memorie del sottosuolo"; "Nètosccka Nesvànova"; "Il sepolcro dei vivi"; "Umiliati ed offesi"; "I romanzi umoristici – Il sogno dello zietto – Il villaggio di Stepančikovo e i suoi abitanti – La moglie altrui e il marito sotto il letto – Un brutto aneddoto"; "Il giocatore"; "Il delitto e il castigo"; "L'idiota"; "L'eterno marito"; "I demoni"; "L'adolescente"; "I fratelli Karamazov"; "Considerazioni conclusive".

²⁵On the Italian and international scene, the period from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century witnessed important changes in the directions of criminological research. In 1885, the 1st Congress of Criminal Anthropology was held in Rome and organized into four sections, with the fourth section entitled "Criminal, Educational and Social Psychology." Cesare Lombroso's position was still prominent at this event, and it was he who chaired the fourth section of the congress, but it was in this section that the line of research associated with the differential clinical-experimental approach emerged.

However, as we will show, thirty years following Lombroso's death and notwithstanding all the polemics and critiques surrounding his not-always-well-founded theories, the positivist paradigm remained influential. While Lugiatto strives to distance himself from Lombrosian theories, by proposing a spiritual, and therefore free, way to determine one's destiny, he remains a creature of his era and the categories of contemporary criminal anthropology emerge clearly from his analysis.

Similarly to Lombroso, Lugiatto proceeds from the cliché of Russian culture's specificity and its extreme "modernity", which he contrasts with Ancient Greece on geographical, climatic and characterological grounds. Russia had undertaken a sharp leap from antiquity to the immersion in the "restlessness of modern man, who endeavors to dig through everything to satisfy his curiosity", gripped by the "fever of change". The supposed characteristics of the Slavic soul (the troubled oddities, the labyrinthine crises of conscience, the "instability of reasoning, tossed, with the indefatigable motion of a pendulum, from one thought crisis to another") are found in concentrated form in "the uniquely distinctive *forma mentis* of our Dostoevsky" [3-4].²⁶ Racial biases, generated by the spirit of the time, occasionally manifest in the study, albeit Lugiatto strives to transcend them, overcoming psychological clichés deemed "eminently inelastic and erroneous", because "the human soul is mutable and unclassifiable, just as the spectrum of diverse individualities is infinitely varied" [5].²⁷

To depict the essence of the "most obscure Slavic soul" [159] in its peculiarities in comparison with the rest of Europe, Lugiatto employs prevalent clichés of his time: the inclination to mysticism, sometimes bordering on excessive fanaticism, when belief transforms into spiritual intoxication; paroxysmal expression of feelings; the inability to "maintain the moderate demeanor characteristic of other European peoples" (e.g., not a smile, but unrestrained laughter). In this portrayal, the Russian man emerges as an "ideological thinker", prone to indulging in dreams and fantasies as if they were tangible realities [6]. "*Si vera sunt exposita*, all the characteristics of the Slavic mentality coincide strangely with those which we alienists (with not always unanimous agreement) propose to attribute to the hysterical mentality" [6].

However, employing and acknowledging these clichés as interpretive tools for his analysis, the Italian psychiatrist himself calls them "exaggerated rumours", conventional prejudices that require contextualization. And yet, from these conflicting accounts, he proposes a form of "synthetic distillation", an intuitive conclusion as a guide [7-8].

²⁶We quote the typescript (n.d.; b. 2, fasc. 3) with the number of sheets in brackets in the text. <https://www.aspi.unimib.it/collections/object/detail/7912/>.

²⁷It is interesting that in the field of psychiatry-psychology, these clichés about Russian man and civilization are endlessly repeated and varied. From Lombroso's "barbaric youth" to Freud's primitivistic atavism. "In this connection it makes sense to refer again to Freud's letter to Stefan Zweig of 19 October 1920, in which Freud, seven years before the publication of his essay, outlined the essence of his ideas about Dostoevsky. In this letter, Freud explained that the reason for Dostoevsky's ambivalence was his "ambivalent attitude towards his father". Moreover, Freud declared this ambivalence to be "a legacy of the psychic life of the primitive races, which is much better preserved and more accessible to consciousness in Russians than in any other peoples, 'as I showed some years ago in a detailed analysis of the case history of a typical Russian patient'" (Majer Cur 2020).

This oscillation between adherence to the positivist paradigm and openness to at least a hint of a differential approach can also be found in the neuropsychiatric description of Dostoevsky himself, whose convulsive epilepsy is read in the Lombrosian vein as a familial degenerative heredity.

Similarly, Lugiato delves into the purported pathological constitution of Dostoevsky's "incurable unhappiness", the disorders he believes led the writer to the political adventure of the Petrashevsky Circle.²⁸ Additionally, Lugiato meticulously examines the precise descriptions of the mental pathologies in Dostoevsky's characters, viewing them as the product of acute, autobiographical introspection.

Lugiato is struck by Dostoevsky's keen observational prowess in integrating his innermost experiences to craft narratives of absolute truth, deriving genuine psychopathic insights from the "abyss of his own imbalance", akin only to Shakespeare among literati [227].

In a way, Dostoevsky's artistic utilization of his morbid states, particularly his depiction of the aura in *The Idiot* as a "powerful artistic objectification", challenges Lugiato's critique of Lombroso's theory regarding the correlation between genius and insanity. While Lombroso posits that genius bears an epileptoid nature, Lugiato responds:

In the case of our author, however, epilepsy is unquestionable, and hence the phenomenon of Dostoevsky represents a kind of triumph of the theory. Undoubted genius, in fact, and undoubted epilepsy: it is therefore easy to establish a close connection between these two factors, especially if this connection is supported by other concrete observations, which, it is true, are set forth by the school in a really seductive and acute form. [17]

However, at this point Lombroso's correlation of genius and epilepsy is directly challenged, for Lugiato claims that Dostoevsky "departs from the canons of the Lombrosian school [...] I do not believe that epilepsy should be regarded as the *primum movens*, the driving force behind the manifestation of genius, but rather as a complication", hindering rather than helping the psychic production of genius [17-19].²⁹

Indirectly accusing Lombroso of having "devolved from a scientific position into unified and hasty piles of data", Lugiato argues that it is impossible to develop a genuine theory of the genius mind. Each genius is too individual and too different.

Dostoevsky is a genius, but "a genius undoubtedly sick and almost monstrous", Lugiato says about *Demons*, "a genius whose writing intuitive gift [...] is almost demonic". Almost like a necromancer, he gets to the "truth of things" [226].

This extraordinary distortion of vision, magnifying and deforming reality, akin to a "vice of perspective" or "sentimental colour blindness", stems from Dostoevsky's neuropathic constitution, yet enables the synthesis of his powerful genius.

²⁸Interestingly, this diagnosis echoes that of Dostoevsky's physician Ianovsky (Ianovsky 1964, pp. 244–246).

²⁹This is how Enrico Morselli puts it in the preface to Lugiato's book on Shakespeare: "I have fought against the Lombrosian thesis by pointing out that genius is not a pathological variant, but rather a progressive one, that is, it consists either in a more perfect adaptation to the historical-psychological environment or in an anticipation of evolutionary changes and future acquisitions of the social psyche" (Morselli 1926, VII).

Dostoevsky navigates a complex interplay between fantasy and verisimilitude, synthesis and truth, which Lugiato suggests are nearly irreconcilable [37].

For example, *The Double* (the adventures of an acknowledged madman) is defined as a work of fantasy, but it is crafted within the framework of “rigid verismo”, where the “psychic dissociation, aka schizophrenia” is only apparently described from the outside, in reality, the hero’s point of view permeates the whole narrative [59].

The analysis of Dostoevsky’s characters, who Lugiato essentially treats as the author’s *alter egos* or as embodiments of his philosophical ideas, unfolds from work to work with some gross errors, such as the identification of *Notes from Underground* with the second part of *The Landlady* or questionable choices dictated probably by ignorance (the stories from *The Writer’s Diary* are not mentioned, but humorous early stories are).

Lugiato’s examination of *Notes from the Dead House*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Demons* and *The Brothers Karamazov* reflects a Lombrosian interpretation of the criminal psyche, wherein the criminal becomes trapped within their crime and therefore unable to feel remorse, as this would mean denying his own personality, his “moral constitution, which would be absurd in itself” [93].

Lugiato traces the entire phenomenology of Dostoevsky’s criminal – from the born criminal (Svidrigailov, Verkhovensky, Smerdyakov), to the occasional criminal, to the morally insane – in all the variety of their dissociative symptoms [141-150]. He offers precise diagnoses of characters, for example, Stavrogin, identifying him as suffering from “a true form of schizophrenia (early dementia). [...] A schizophrenic of a superior (rather than gross) order, but despite his capacity for dominance, his nobility of character, a schizophrenic of the catatonic and impulsive type” [170-173]. The use of the term “superior” to describe those termed morally insane by Lombroso reflects the terminology of neurologist Paul Moebius.

It is evidently not coincidental that the psychiatrist dedicates particular attention to *Demons*, remarking:

On the whole, *The Demons* or *The Obsessed* constitute a robust and potent novel, which, despite its many flaws, captivates the reader’s interest due to the breadth of the political and religious issues it raises, and the richness and variety of the types presented on its stage. Types that are for the most part mad or criminal, but certainly portrayed with sculptural and robust effectiveness. And it is from the sum of all these elements, most of which are dark and endowed with an almost unexplored depth, that the novel acquires its own note of demonic power, which at various moments truly evokes a sabre-rattling and infernal chaos. A formidable note, with a Dantean atmosphere, that irresistibly captures the reader’s soul, leaving one emerging from the reading as if awakened from an agonising dream. An immense work by a great genius, but undeniably a genius who is sick and almost monstrous. [186]

The Brothers Karamazov is similarly examined through the lens of Lombroso and possibly influenced by Zola’s experimental novel, to which Lugiato devoted an entire volume of his research: “The novel raises for the first time and decisively the question of psychoneuropathic heredity manifested in an entire family” [204].

Thus, Fedor Karamazov is portrayed as a criminoid degenerate, a degenerate of mind, affects, and will, and from his “degenerate breed” are born three legitimate

sons who inherit varying degrees of degenerate traits, not to mention the illegitimate son. The father's hereditary influence is evident in Dmitry, while Ivan's hereditary degeneracy is manifest in his atheism and theoretical rejection of all morality. In Alyosha, on the other hand, the degeneration disintegrates in a revival of mysticism.

Smerdyakov's suicide is attributed not to remorse or fear of judgement, but to the "collapse of mental stability", the "insane impulse" characteristic of severe degenerates [208-213].

However, Lugiato occasionally breaks out of this purely Lombrosian framework, as seen in the case of Stavrogin, whom he describes as a "terribly bottomless" character because of his "intimate and often monstrous" feelings and his inability to choose the good. Similarly, when discussing Dmitry, he evokes the tragedy reminiscent of ancient Greece — a tragedy of guilt and punishment, concepts antithetical to and explicitly rejected by Lombrosian criminal anthropology: in Dmitry's case, fate punishes him for his reckless atheism, a just sentence delivered through profoundly unjust means [213].

According to Lugiato, Dostoevsky is a "devouring abyss" over which one cannot lean – lest one feel the temptation to fall, a whirlpool that sucks one in, a perilous allure that intoxicates the mind [223]. A dug-out mystery that reveals another mystery. Going beyond any positivist point of view, which assumes the perfect cognoscibility of the human psyche (not the soul), Lugiato ultimately views Dostoevsky as "an unexplored colossus, a torment that is not easy to unravel", a genius resistant to analysis: it is hard to put him on the cold table of the anatomist. "Only a synthetic impression can be given of him, a state of mind that eludes precise definition" [224].

Recognizing the limitation of the tools of "anemic psychology", Lugiato sought assistance from "spiritualist" critics (Borgese,³⁰ Moscardelli,³¹ Di Frisco,³² even the Swiss theologian Thurneysen³³), but above all from Stefan Zweig, who "had to use the tools of poetry" for his convincing analysis (Zweig 2013, pp. 63–64).

Lugiato himself acknowledges the risk of reducing the writer's great soul utilizing a "somewhat crushing", narrowly analytical exegesis. He appears to oscillate between

³⁰Giuseppe Antonio Borgese (1882-1952) is quoted regarding the autobiographical nature of Dostoevsky's characters. In his book *Ottocento europeo* (European 19th Century), the Germanist critic devotes several essays to Russian literature, three of which focus on Dostoevsky (*Dostoevskij minore, I Karamazov, Gide e Dostoevskij*, in Borgese 1927, pp. 114–139).

³¹Nicola Moscardelli (1894-1943) wrote two works on Dostoevsky from a spiritual and religious point of view, not free of anthroposophical influences: *Dostojewski: l'uomo, il poeta, il maestro* (Moscardelli 2021) and *Vita di Dostojewski tratta dalle sue lettere e da ricordi di testimoni* (Moscardelli 1936). In 1932 he had already included a chapter on the Russian writer in his book *Anime e corpi. Saggi sulla letteratura contemporanea* (Moscardelli 1932, pp. 25–64). See Garzonio 2021). From him Lugiato may have taken the idea of the mysterious, "necromantic" origin of Dostoevsky's art.

³²In his essay "Il pensiero religioso di Dostoevski" (Di Frisco 1935), Salvatore Di Frisco emphasises Dostoevsky's love of life and compares him to St. Francis, something Lugiato himself echoed, especially in his discussion of the character of Zosima.

³³E. Thurneysen's *Dostojewski* had already been translated into Italian by Rosenthal (1929). However, at the time Lugiato was working on his book on Dostoevsky, a French version had just come out (ed. Je Sers, Paris 1934) and the work was particularly present in the debates of the time. See the review in *Archivio Generale di Neurologia, Psichiatria e Psicoanalisi* (1935). Lugiato cites the Swiss theologian in connection with the particularity of Dostoevsky's faith, a faith that is only given to him in despair, in crisis, in the obscure search for Christ, but nevertheless it should be noted that he merely quotes the cited review verbatim [258].

a kind of modern Kantian position, where the wholeness of the work is an unattainable noumenon, and the circle of positive knowledge, where we can only collect “modest pebbles” of “various more specialised knowledge” [224].³⁴

Conclusion

In 1923 Giuseppe Prezzolini could speak with disdain about the era when the Lombrosian framework held significant influence in Italian culture: a period

when genius was a pathology, crime was a heredity [...] and one read Leopardi to discover his degeneration. Although this time has passed into history, it remains interesting in the dynamics of Italian culture, because of this denial of any spiritual value [...], this putting everything into calculations and statistics, this judging everything from the stomach and the nerves [...] prepared [...] the idealist and nationalist revival of later Italians. (Prezzolini 1923, p. 182)

However, despite all the theoretical debates about philosophy and science, or, more specifically, despite all the discussions in psychiatry concerning the status of genius and morphologism as a semiological practice, it is evident that the positivist-Lombrosian model continued to exert a significant presence in the Italian intellectual landscape in general and in medical sciences in particular.

During the first four decades of the twentieth century, the decline of positivism, and consequently of the medical-biological alienist model, was gradual, and the marginalization of Lombroso, seen as “representative of the prevailing mentality”, sometimes appeared more asserted than genuine.

This is also evident in Luigi Lugiato’s interpretation of Dostoevsky, which we have examined as an exemplar and case study. The study we have briefly analyzed underscores the slow disintegration of the positivist-Lombrosian model, or rather the long coexistence of two opposing paradigms, neither of which is able to impose itself in its absoluteness. The point of view of science, which is used as the dominant paradigm, turns out to be “anemic” and calls for support from philosophy and poetry. In conclusion, the study mirrors the “law of contradiction” [257] observed in Dostoevsky’s works, permeating Lugiato’s own examination of the author.

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³⁴It had been several decades since psychology had attempted to go beyond the positivist approach. In 1912, the positivist Enrico Morselli himself had founded a journal, *Psiche*, in which psychology proposed itself as the scientific study of man par excellence, replacing philosophy, but trying to go beyond quantitative psychology, which was considered a ‘soulless psychology’ (Garin 1975: I, pp. 56–57; Marhaba 1981, pp. 100–114).

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