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D. H. Lawrence Edited by N. H. Reeve and John Worthen

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SECTION A
INTRODUCTIONS

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*FOREWORD TO ALL THINGS ARE
POSSIBLE, BY LEO SHESTOV*

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Foreword.

In his paragraph on *The Russian Spirit*,* Shestov gives us the real clue to Russian literature. European culture is a rootless thing in the Russians. With us, it is our very blood and bones, the very nerve and root of our psyche. We think in a certain fashion, we feel in a certain fashion, because our whole substance is of this fashion.* Our speech and feeling are organically inevitable to us. 5

With the Russians it is different. They have only been inoculated with the virus* of European culture and ethic. The virus works in them like a disease. And the inflammation and irritation comes forth as literature. The bubbling and fizzing is almost chemical, not organic. It is an organism seething as it accepts and masters the strange virus. What the Russian is struggling with, crying out against, is not life itself: it is only European culture which has been introduced into his psyche, and which hurts him.* The tragedy is not so much a real soul tragedy, as a surgical one. Russian art, Russian literature after all does not stand on the same footing as European or Greek or Egyptian art. It is not spontaneous utterance. It is not the flowering of a race. It is a surgical outcry, horrifying, or marvellous, lacerating at first: but when we get used to it, not really so profound, not really ultimate; a little extraneous. 10 15 20

What is valuable is the evidence against European culture, implied in the novelists, here at last expressed. Since Peter the Great* Russia has been accepting Europe, and seething Europe down in a curious process of katabolism.* Russia has been expressing nothing inherently Russian. Russia's modern Christianity even was not Russian. Her genuine christianity, Byzantine and Asiatic, is incomprehensible to us. So with her true philosophy. What she has actually uttered is her own unwilling, fantastic reproduction of European truths. What she has really to utter the coming centuries will hear. For Russia will certainly inherit the future. What we already call the greatness of Russia is only her pre-natal struggling. 25 30

It seems as if she had at last absorbed and overcome the virus of old Europe. Soon her new, healthy body will begin to act in its own reality, imitative no more, protesting no more, crying no more, but full and sound and lusty in itself. Real Russia is born. She will laugh at us before
 5 long. Meanwhile she goes through the last stages of reaction against us, kicking away from the old womb of Europe.

In Shestov one of the last kicks is given. True, he seems to be only reactionary and destructive. But he can find a little amusement at last in tweaking the European nose, so he is fairly free. European idealism
 10 is anathema. But more than this, it is a little comical. We feel the new independence in his new, half-amused indifference.

He is only tweaking the nose of European idealism. He is preaching nothing: so he protests time and again. He absolutely refutes any imputation of a central idea. He is so afraid lest it should turn out to be
 15 another hateful hedge-stake* of an ideal.

“Everything is possible”—this is his really central cry.* It is not nihilism. It is only a shaking free of the human psyche from old bonds. The positive central idea is that the human psyche, or soul, really believes in itself, and in nothing else.

Dress this up in a little comely language and we have a real new ideal, that will last us for a new, long epoch. The human soul itself is the source and well-head of creative activity. In the unconscious human soul the creative prompting issues first into the universe. Open the consciousness
 20 to this prompting, away with all your old sluice gates, locks, dams, channels. No ideal on earth is anything more than an obstruction, in the end, to the creative issue of the spontaneous soul. Away with all ideals. Let each individual act spontaneously from the forever incalculable prompting of the creative well-head within him. There is no universal law. Each being is, at his purest, a law unto himself, single, unique, a
 30 Godhead, a fountain from the unknown.

This is the ideal which Shestov refuses positively to state, because he is afraid it may prove in the end a trap to catch his own free spirit. So it may. But it is none the less a real, living ideal for the moment, the very salvation. When it becomes ancient, and like the old lion who lay in his
 35 cave and whined, devours all its servants,* then it can be despatched. Meanwhile it is a really liberating word.

Shestov’s style is puzzling at first. Having found the “ands” and “buts” and “because” and “therefores” hampered him, he clips them all off deliberately and even spitefully, so that his thought is like a man

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with no buttons on his clothes, ludicrously hitching* along all undone. One must be amused, not irritated. Where the armholes were a bit tight, Shestov cuts a slit. It is baffling, but really rather piquant. The real conjunction, the real unification lies in the reader's own amusement, not in the author's unbroken logic.

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NOTE

LEO SHESTOV is one of the living Russians.* He is about fifty years old. He was born at Kiev, and studied at the university there. His first book appeared in 1898, since which year he has gradually gained an assured position as one of the best critics and essayists in Russia. A list of his works is as follows:—

- 5
1898. Shakespeare and his Critic, Brandes.
1900. Good in the Teaching of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche: Philosophy and Preaching.*
- 10
1903. Dostoevsky and Nietzsche: The Philosophy of Tragedy.
1905. The Apotheosis of Groundlessness (here translated under the title “All Things are Possible”).
1908. Beginnings and Ends.*
1912. Great Vigils.*

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**MEMOIR OF MAURICE MAGNUS:
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