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*The Female Characters of
Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky*

Lisa Di Bartolomeo

*A thesis submitted for the degree of
Master of Letters
to the Department of
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To the hard, natural font of poetic inspiration.

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Abstract

Dostoevsky is renowned throughout the world as a great psychological writer. His deep understanding of human behavior enabled him to create within his *oeuvre* some of the most memorable, credible characters — many of them female — in world literature. Unfortunately, Dostoevsky scholarship has tended to forget the women enlivening his myriad works, leaving them largely unobserved. The present study was undertaken in an effort to provide a unified examination of all of these women, with special regard to their similarities and their differences. Despite the prevailing opinion, which holds that they can be fit into tidy categories, Dostoevsky's women never cease to defy typology and stray from their assigned slots. Their allure for the reader is not part of some adherence to a predictable persona. Rather, it is their all-too-human irrational disobedience and unforeseeable autonomy which enlivens them and the books they inhabit. For it is in their breathing individuality that the reader finds the power and the reality of Dostoevsky's female characters; in their diverse forms and nuances shines the magic ore of Dostoevsky's genius, his "fantastic realism."

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements and Author's Declaration</i>	5
<i>Preface</i>	6
<i>Chronology</i>	10
1 Introduction to the female characters: the works of 1845-49	11
2 Three unifying archetypes: beauty, sexuality, pride	57
3 Sophia as archetype	81
4 Divine fools	123
5 Mothers and older women	135
6 Proud young women	149
7 An example of the categorization-defying character: Grushen'ka	177
8 A space all her own: Nastas'ya Filippovna	185
Conclusion	215
<i>Appendices</i>	221
<i>Bibliography</i>	233

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I declare this work to be entirely my own.

Preface

Even at its inception, this study proposed to concentrate on the female literary creations of Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky. The rather scant notice received by most of these characters has become even more evident during the two-year period of postgraduate research, providing further conviction that a void exists within Dostoevsky scholarship. To begin to address this problem, the present study is offered.

That Dostoevsky's female figures have gone largely ignored is partly the result of a lack of attention to Dostoevsky's fictional characters *in general*. Naturally there are a few exceptions (for instance Raskol'nikov, or the Underground Man), but these exceptions often typify the trend toward overlooking the persona, in that they usually focus almost exclusively on the philosophical, political, or religious aspects of the characters under study. Often characters are treated as ciphers for a powerful Dostoevskian agenda rather than as wilful individuals occasionally independent of their master — this despite the universally acknowledged description of Dostoevsky as “the great psychologist.” This neglectful approach greatly impoverishes the credible human personalities Dostoevsky successfully molded. Obviously the philosophical realms of the characters cannot be ignored, given the importance Dostoevsky himself attached to them; likewise, however, one should not surgically remove the ideological tenets from the flesh in which they were intentionally embodied. To do so splits the characters (who so often already are split) and tears them from their roots, a painful phenomenon which Dostoevsky observed in his own time and sought to portray negatively in many of his characters.

Obviously this tendency toward fission is not all-powerful; some critics have ventured beyond this restrictive prevailing *modus operandi*. But even

among this small group, few have deemed it necessary to devote exclusive concentration to the female characters Dostoevsky created. So far as I have been able to determine, no one has attempted a treatment of *all* of these women. That is the purpose of the present study. To understand Dostoevsky's works better, one must better understand his characters. Not only would an all-inclusive study of these fictitious women deepen interpretations of Dostoevsky's repertoire, but perhaps additionally it would broaden the study of the female components of Russian literature as a whole.

Regarding the present examination, the most valuable of the extant works on the subject are varied. The Russian scholar-poet Vyacheslav Ivanov is one of the most notable to have examined Dostoevsky. Published in German translation in 1932 and in English translation in 1952, his masterful *Freedom and the Tragic Life* contains some of the most poetically insightful, if brief, treatments of Dostoevsky's major women figures. Including discussions of a "feminine principle" and the "universal Mother," Ivanov spends a limited amount of time on certain individual females, as well as on the concept of the Earth as Mother. Much of what he says is without parallel, both in terms of purity of prose and depth of understanding.

Following Ivanov, Konstantin Mochulsky's great critical biography of 1947 includes intermittent observations about various female characters, as well as biographical information concerning the real-life loves of Dostoevsky. Close on Mochulsky's heels came L.A. Zander, Frank Thiess, and Romano Guardini, all continuing Ivanov's deep and mystical exploration of the feminine principle.

Two of the most prolific and influential Dostoevsky scholars in the second half of the twentieth century are mentioned frequently in the present study:

Victor Terras and Joseph Frank. Victor Terras' book *The Young Dostoevsky (1846-49). A Critical Study*¹ contains a rare extended treatment of the female characters, albeit at times dismissive and harsh.² However, even his thorough study evaluates only the *early* (i.e., pre-Siberian) Dostoevsky. Potentially, Joseph Frank's serial biography of Dostoevsky could begin to address the latter portion of the writer's creative life. The present three volumes, encompassing Dostoevsky's life and works up to and including 1865, conclude with his brief liaison with Marfa Braun and the failure of *Epokha*; there still remains the period in which he wrote the great novels of his life, when he remarried, had a family, and eventually began to enjoy some degree of peaceful prosperity. The characters created in this latter period are the most involved and complex, thus warranting the most extensive study. Within the completed three volumes are respectable observations concerning both the women Dostoevsky created and those he became acquainted with in this time period; but often these critiques are too limited and brief to enrich deeply the scholarship of this area.

Individual characters have been dealt with by many authors, often brilliantly,³ but almost without exception they focus on only one character in the context of one work, isolating the figure from her literary ancestry. It is extremely valuable, of course, to examine each character in her turn, but once again it underscores a need for some sort of cumulative, integrative study, in which the flow between works and characters may be evinced. A study of this kind would serve to delineate the strengths and weaknesses of the great writer, the psychological motifs, the thematic links, and the

¹ Victor Terras, *The Young Dostoevsky (1846-49). A Critical Study*. The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1969.

²For a more specific discussion of the shortcomings of Terras' book, please refer to Chapter 1, which discusses the early female heroines of Dostoevsky's works.

³For a complete citations list, please refer to the Bibliography.

stunning reality of *all* his creations, both male and female. The current study hopefully will prove useful in this respect, although for obvious reasons of space limitations it cannot aspire to examine all the characters in the depth and breadth possible in a lengthier dissertation; perhaps a broader treatment will be attempted in the future. Likewise, a more qualitative assessment, evaluating the whole of Dostoevsky's female characters, feminine images, as well as the women of his own life and analyzing them as part of a greater whole, is beyond the restricted scope permitted within the boundaries here. In this work the female characters Dostoevsky created in his fiction have been studied in and of themselves, within their own novelistic contexts, with a view to understanding how the author himself wished them to be seen. No deliberate attempt has been made to assign them other values or to criticize them from an external, modern mindset. For such an examination an interested reader may refer to a work such as Barbara Heldt's impressive document, *Terrible Perfection*.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1821— 30 October: Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky born.
1837— Death of mother, Mar'ya Fyodorovna Nechaeva.
1839— Death of father, Mikhail Andreevich Dostoevsky.
1845— Finishes *Бедные люди*.
1846— 15 January, *Бедные люди* published.
1846— *Двойник* published.
1847— *Хозяйка*.
1848— *Белые ночи*.
1849— *Неточка Незванова*
1849— Composes *Маленький герой* in prison (published 1857).
1854— In Siberia in the Army he meets Marya Dmitrievna Isaeva.
1857— Marries Marya Dmitrievna in February.
1859— *Дядюшкин сон* and *Село Степанчиково и его обитатели*.
1860— *Записки из мёртвого дома*.
— Flirtation with Aleksandra Schubert, wife of Yanovskii.
1861— *Униженные и оскорбленные*.
1861-5— Friendship, correspondence and travels with Apollinariya Suslova.
1863— First trip abroad with her.
1864— Death of Marya Dmitrievna, of Mikhail, and of Grigor'ev.
— *Записки из подполья*.
1864-65— Acquaintance with Marfa Braun (Panina).
1865— Second and final trip abroad with Suslova. The affair is formally ended.
1866— *Преступление и наказание*.
— *Игрок*.
— Meets Anna Grigor'evna Snitkina.
1867— Marries Anna Grigor'evna; they go abroad.
1868— *Идиот*.
— Their first child, Sof'ya, is born; she dies three months later.
1869— Birth of Lyubov'.
1871-72— *Бесы*.
— Birth of Fyodor.
1875— *Подросток*.
— Birth of Aleksei.
1876— *Дневник писателя*, including *Кроткая*.
1877— *Дневник писателя*
1878— Death of Aleksei. Trip to Optina Pustyn'.
1879-80— *Братья Карамазовы*.
1880— Pushkin speech.
1881— Dies of lung hemorrhage, 28 January. Buried 1 February, in Tikhvin Cemetery of Aleksandr Nevskii Monastery.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the female characters: the works of 1845-49

For the most part, Dostoevsky's female characters are far too varied and individualized to encourage any imposition upon them of demeaning categories. This section will treat the characters and works of Dostoevsky's earliest literary period, from 1845 to 1849, including *Bednye lyudi*, *Khozyaika*, *Belye nochi*, *Netochka Nezvanova*, and *Malen'kii geroi*. This preliminary discussion is intended to introduce the developing themes which recur throughout Dostoevsky's works in the female characters. Even within these often ignored, early works, a reader cannot help but be struck by the obvious relation of some of the characters to later creations. This chapter will proceed as follows: the female personae in each of the aforementioned works will be discussed individually, analyzed in and of herself. This accomplished, certain ideas or themes which become evident will be treated, with special regard to their interrelation among the women and among the novels themselves. Before beginning, however, one fact should be stressed. Although at times this work will divide Dostoevsky's repertoire both into segments of time and into overall thematic discussions, this is only for convenience and clarity of discussion. The notion that there exists a dichotomy within Dostoevsky's creative lifetime (chopping off his pre-Siberian years from his post-Siberian decades) suggests a sort of schizophrenia which woefully denigrates the master. As this study intends to demonstrate, there exist unifying themes linking the two time periods inextricably, and these themes are especially plentiful in his feminine creations. Additionally, this work should not be seen as an attempt to catego-

rize or type-cast the actresses in his imaginary troupe; to do this weakens the psychological reality of each individual character and reduces them to a Potemkin village of women. There are prevalent and recurring images throughout Dostoevsky's works, but in no way do they constitute a tenuously rigid typology.

VAREN'KA

Although Varvara Alekseevna Dobroselova is the main female character in Dostoevsky's first novel, she is hardly his most interesting creation. Varen'ka may be of much less importance in the writer's mind than is her impoverished, elderly and tragi-comic "benefactor," Devushkin, but she nevertheless holds the status of a main protagonist. The letters written by Varen'ka and Devushkin comprise the novel and provide its structure; all action is seen either through their eyes or is reported by them from another source. Thus, despite her far from intriguing personality, she warrants some study, especially as Dostoevsky's first heroine.

To begin, there is a young woman named Varvara Alekseevna Dobroselova. Her surname is a Dostoevskian invention, integrating the Russian words *dobryi*, "good," and *selo*, "village, country town." By this method, Dostoevsky imparts an image of provincial wholesomeness, a girl who grew like a flower in pastoral sunshine, far from the immorality of cities like St. Petersburg. Her name colors her like a maidenly blush, enhancing a picture of a girl full of naive sensibilities, believing devoutly in the Orthodox Christian tradition.

From the diaries written early in her youth, the reader learns of her tragic family life along with Devushkin. Raised in a romantic country setting where her father tended an estate, she was educated in accordance with the standards of her day. Early on in her adolescence, however, Varen'ka's father died. His death forced the now destitute family to move to the city, to stay with Anna Fyodorovna, a nebulously distant relative. In Petersburg, Varen'ka experiences the romantic love of her life with Pyotr Zakharovich Pokrovskii, the young tutor who shares their lodgings. Though it is a chaste, platonic love, Varen'ka is nevertheless broken and miserable when the young man unexpectedly dies. Her grief is doubled when her mother passes on, leaving Varen'ka alone with the predatory Anna Fyodorovna. Varen'ka becomes the target of a sinister plot; Anna Fyodorovna apparently plans to sell her young ward to a lecherous older squire, Bykov, for which purpose she has presumably been keeping Varen'ka fed, housed, and educated. After Bykov "insults" her, presumably in some sort of seduction, she frees herself from the evil designs of Anna Fyodorovna and moves in with Fedora, a generous and kind old woman. From this point the letters between Makar Devushkin and Varen'ka begin; and, as the letters comprise the work, so does the novel begin.

Despite its importance as Dostoevsky's first work, *Bednye lyudi* and its main female character have gone largely ignored by Dostoevsky scholarship. Beyond the scant paragraph or two mentioning Varen'ka, only a few works distinguish themselves by examining her extensively. Victor Terras' *The Young Dostoevsky* with its chapter "The Young Dostoevsky and the Very Young Female," particularly stands out. However, this thorough treatment is unfortunately a negative one, and in its unremitting harshness it attains a rather unbalanced stance. A much more acceptably

integrated approach is undertaken by Gary Rosenshield in his article "Varen'ka Dobroselova: An Experiment in the Desentimentalization of the Sentimental Heroine in Dostoevskii's *Poor Folk*."⁴

Terras asserts that Varen'ka lives in a Madame Bovary-like romantic world of self-delusion which is merely a pleasant facade for the real truth: she is actually pragmatically selfish and self-centered, willingly accepting sacrifices from others while she herself offers nothing in the bargain. Terras waxes cynically poetic on *fal'bala*, basically reducing the Varen'ka of the letters (as opposed to the earlier diary) to a materialistic clothes-horse concerned with beads and baubles, fluffs and flounces, her head filled with nothing more than her wedding finery and shopping, as though she were some credit card-bearing, mall-devouring teen.

While his cynicism is certainly entertaining to read, it is not always accurately analytical. Terras employs Varen'ka's occupation with *fal'bala* to dismiss her as a character; but, as Rosenshield argues, these details make her all the more realistic, providing psychological motivation. For Terras, Varen'ka's realistic personality traits and natural flaws attract scornful deprecation, and they become personal failings; he is perhaps too immured in his scathing bombast to notice that these failings enliven Varen'ka. An overall sense of personal scorn disfigures the trustworthiness of the tone and derides the verity of Terras' more valid points.

With Terras firmly entrenched on the red end of the spectrum, Joseph Frank, in the first volume in his series of biographies of Dostoevsky, *The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849*,⁵ dallies in the violet area. Assuming the opposite opinion of Varen'ka, Frank prefers to see her in a far less harsh

⁴ Gary Rosenshield, "Varen'ka Dobroselova: An Experiment in the Desentimentalization of the Sentimental Heroine in Dostoevskii's *Poor Folk*," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 45, no. 3, Fall 1986, pp. 525-33.

⁵ Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.

light, finding her to be an innocent maiden, exemplary of Dostoevskian realism. Frank attributes her insensitivity to her natural absorption in her upcoming wedding, though she admittedly does not love her husband-to-be; but for “any normal young bride”⁶ [sic], her interest in the pretty things of which she has been relatively deprived is understandable. While Frank’s main argument is acceptable, it is far too brief and limited to resolve the problems left behind by Terras’ assault. The reparations are made by Rosenshield.

“Dostoevsky undermines the stereotype not by going to the opposite extreme, but by amending it, by engaging it in a dialogue”,⁷ Rosenshield asserts in his essay. He points out what Terras failed to discern: that “Dostoevsky more effectively desentimentalizes Varen’ka by first establishing her as a sentimental heroine”.⁸ The arcadian setting of her childhood, her father’s dramatic loss of position and his death, the family’s forced migration to the corrosive city, the brief budding of young, innocent romance which ends all too quickly and tragically, her mother’s death, Varen’ka’s seduction by Bykov — all these are the tired and true hallmarks of the sentimental heroine. Dostoevsky employs their legacy indirectly, to establish the flavor of Varen’ka’s life, but he does not rely on them for the composition of her character. Rather, he allows her to be a normal, realistic adolescent girl of her time, not overly melancholy despite her past. She can be silly, she can be giddy, she can take pleasure in trifles and pretty things, especially because the life she leads is so devoid of joy and hope. Certainly it is selfish and self-centered to accept gifts from someone who obviously cannot afford them; but although we might not accept such offerings, is it right to fault Varen’ka for her indulgences, especially when

⁶ Frank, *ibid*, p. 141.

⁷ Rosenshield, p. 527.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 527.

Dostoevsky is not particularly opprobrious? The very fact that she acts in such a realistic, understandable way denotes the power of Dostoevsky's realism in her portraiture. She is in an unenviable situation and she does what little she can to improve it. When Bykov shows up with his unexpected offer of marriage, a chance to regain her reputation and better her circumstances, it is only natural — although perhaps morally and ethically questionable — for Varen'ka to accept, even though she does not love him.

The ultimate test of Dostoevskii's injection of realistic elements into the most stock of sentimental types is his treatment of Varen'ka's attitude toward Bykov, her seducer and later husband. [...] Though not a practical girl, she knows that she must make the best of an intolerable situation. [...] Towards the end of the novel, Varen'ka realizes that she will never be able to rely on Devushkin for support and protection and that she cannot survive on sewing alone, so when Bykov out of the blue proposes marriage to her she immediately accepts.⁹

Varen'ka's shortcomings are human and realistic; they serve to make her a more believable character. As faults certainly they should not be mimicked or encouraged, but recognized for their importance in creating a credible literary portrait. As Rosenshield indicates, this more balanced critical view of Varen'ka takes a fuller account of Dostoevsky's range and talent, evident even in his very first work. To decide that Varen'ka is "a device, essential only to the characterization of the hero, no more lifelike than the two-dimensional manikins of Gogol'... [...] is to underestimate both the tal-

⁹ Rosenshield, p. 530.

ent and the achievement of the young Dostoevsky, for it implies that, though Dostoevsky was a talented writer, he not only lacked knowledge of women, but also was uninterested in them and was satisfied to limit himself to the female stereotypes of the day.”¹⁰

Varen'ka's situation was the stock in which nineteenth-century female characters in general boiled. As such it is not remarkable in and of itself. It may appear that this is echoed in the later situations of many a Dostoevskian feminine creation, but this is probably as much a result of the reality and the literary fashion of the times as of any particular penchant of Dostoevsky's for the “girl in trouble.” The situation is in itself dramatic, and yields many of the things which Dostoevsky so highly valued: reader interest, suspense, debauchery, the moral triumph of victim over victimizer. Rather than seek connections for their own sake, it would be more useful to examine the context of the characters. Women like Varen'ka (and Dunya in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*) endured certain circumstances. Living perhaps without parental protection, indubitably poor and unable to make enviable matches, obliged to earn a living however possible in that day and age — these circumstances create a definite reality for women. That reality often involves the unwanted sexual advances of an employer, to whom a woman must yield or else lose her post, or else an involuntary form of prostitution, in which the young woman is basically sold off for marriage, if she is fortunate. Varen'ka lives this life, the day-to-day details of which a reader should recall. She is unprotected economically, socially, and to a degree even legally; without a husband to shield her (and to lord over her), she is helpless, an easy target, especially as she is young and attractive. Even money cannot always insulate a woman from these ravages: Nastas'ya Filippovna is in much the same position, though it is her legal guardian and

¹⁰ Rosenshield, p. 527.

her financial supporter who victimizes her; Katerina Ivanovna of *Brat'ya Karamazovy* is a member of the local gentry, but her father is such a profligate that his crimes require her to sell herself to pay his debts. Apart from the context of their time and chromosomal arrangement, these characters have little in common with one another; to assume that Varen'ka is the meagre seed from which sprang the whole garden of Dostoevsky's feminine characters is to belittle the gardener and to ignore the brilliant, blooming diversity of his cultivations.

KHOZYAIKA

After his initial success with *Bednye lyudi*, Dostoevsky wrote and published a series of stories: *Dvoinik*, *Gospodin Prokharchin*, *Khozyaika*, and *Belye noch*i, all during 1845-1848. The former two stories contain no females worth mentioning, but the latter pair present two young women deserving attention.

Khozyaika (*The Landlady*)¹¹ evolved over a fourteen month period, from October 1846. The central female figure is Katerina, the first to whom Dostoevsky bequeathed this name. She is a young woman of surpassing beauty, and the sorrowful expression controlling her countenance immediately ensnares the prototypical young dreamer, Ordynov. Ordynov wanders into a church at sunset: "Лучи заходящего солнца широкою

¹¹ All quotations from Dostoevsky in Russian are taken from *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (in future, PSS); *Khozyaika* is in PSS, 1, 1972, pp. 264-320.

струёю лились сверху сквозь узкое окно купола”,¹² and he seems to lose consciousness, falling into some sort of religious stupor. He suddenly opens his eyes and he sees a mysterious couple: the old man Murin leading Katerina into the church. Katerina falls prostrate at the base of the icon of the Mother of God and loses herself in prayer.

Минуты через две женщина подняла голову, и опять яркий свет лампы озарил прелестное лицо её. Ордынцов вздрогнул и ступил шаг вперёд. Она уже подала руку старику, и оба тихо пошли из церкви. Слёзы кипели в её тёмных синих глазах, опущенных длинными, сверкающими на млечной белизне лица ресницами, и катились по побледневшим щёкам. На губах её мелькала улыбка; но в лице заметны были следы какого-то детского страха и таинственного ужаса.¹³

Inside the mystical, suggestive atmosphere of the church Ordynov first glimpses his lady-fair. Surrounded by the gentle glow of candles, incense smoke, and chanted hymns, Katerina's face strikes Ordynov's heart. The heady effect which, according to legend, first enticed the Russian Tsars into Orthodox Christianity, now conspires to mesmerize Ordynov. For a young man whose head constantly clouds with fantastic dreams and contempla-

¹² PSS, 1, 1972, p. 267. It is interesting to note this recurring image, in English: "Rays from the setting sun were flooding down from above in a broad stream through the narrow window of the cupola..." (trans. David Mc Duff, Penguin Books, 1989, p.137). The image of the setting sun is often associated with the maternal feminine or suffering Sophian archetype. See Chapters 2 and 3 for a fuller discussion.

¹³ Ibid, p. 268.

tion of canon law, this luminously beautiful woman weeping before the icon could well take form as an incarnation of the Mother of God.

Katerina haunts his thoughts, even appearing in his mind's eye when she is physically absent. When he leaves the church, he returns to his tiny room and lights a candle, the light of which re-conjures the beautiful woman's image, the heartbreakingly lovely face he has memorized. Making a particular impression on him was the mysterious sorrow woven into the purity of her features. He dreams of her, and the next day he unconsciously returns to the church, where Katerina again is praying.

As the story proceeds, however, the spiritual element is overcome by a more profane eroticism. Ordynov infiltrates Murin's home, falling passionately in love with his landlady and sinking into a feverish illness, the two nearly indistinguishable. Dostoevsky spends an unusual amount of time giving rapturous descriptions of Katerina's hypnotic beauty.

When Ordynov falls ill, Katerina ministers to him, and he looks at her "как на солнце".¹⁴ Eventually Katerina tells her story, such as it is, in a trembling, tearful voice, with the words of folklore and the style of superstition. An incestual theme dominates much of her tale, presaging the role in Dostoevsky's later works to be played by the exploitation and sexual conquest of young girls or women by much older men, especially obvious in *Idiot* and *Brat'ya Karamazovy*. Katerina believes Murin to be her mother's former lover and her own natural father; nevertheless, Katerina does not resist his seductive (and undeniably sexual) power. Her mother dies, her father is murdered (by Murin), and their estate destroyed by arson (also courtesy of Murin). In the aftermath she flees with this demoniacal predator, who stops along the way to kill Katerina's fiancé for good measure. With

¹⁴Ibid, p. 276.

this she links herself to him, for all intents eternally, believing that her “participation” in the rampage of evil dooms her to suffer for her guilt. Murin seizes on this, ensuring her obedience and company by encouraging her guilty conscience, reading to her from the books of the schismatic *raskol’niki*, deepening her sense of sinfulness and torturing her. As many critics have pointed out, it is impossible to tell if Katerina’s guilt is real or purely imagined. “It is never clear whether Katerina is really mad and suffering from hallucinations herself, or whether the frenzied tale she narrates so poetically is true.”¹⁵ Murin cannily exploits Katerina’s “weak heart,” using it to convince her of her guilt and thereby to tie her to him the more firmly.

What concerns the present study, however, is Katerina herself, and the fact that, regardless of the questionable reality of her sins, *she* believes in them. This young woman probably is not guilty of the crimes she narrates. The name “Katerina” comes from the Greek, καθαρὸς, meaning “pure.”¹⁶ She is seen as too pure a victim, too weak to have participated actively in the hun-like destruction and death which seem to have occurred. Even if she did watch passively as Murin committed these flagitious deeds, she cannot truly be blamed for them.

Katerina was a beautiful, no doubt imaginative, young girl, and the man who visited her mother infrequently seems to have caught her childish eye and entered her fantasy world. His other-worldly wildness, his dark, frightening eyes, the fear he always provoked in her mother — all this would have made a great impression on such a girl, especially at that stage of incipient rebellion from parental control, when the adolescent child begins to hunger for adventure and newness. She fell into his trance and allowed

¹⁵Frank, *The Seeds of Revolt*, p. 337.

¹⁶Charles E. Passage, *Character Names in Dostoevsky's Fiction*. Ann Arbor: Ardis Publishers, 1982, p. 122.

him to carry her away, even after recognizing that he, in all probability, had just murdered her father. She helps him escape even as her family's estate smolders. The seductiveness of a powerful older man enthralled her, lured her in.

What won Katerina was Murin's superb self-assurance that she could not fail to obey his wishes, and his pledge to release her if she so desired it — "but stir only your sable eyebrows, turn your black [sic] eye, stir only your little finger and I will give you back your love with golden freedom" (I: 298).¹⁷

Even in her later rendition of the story, Katerina's language is unmistakably erotic, making it plain that the relationship between them bore a palpably carnal aspect.¹⁸ This idea, too, finds its serpentine way into Dostoevsky's later works, especially evident in *Idiot* and Nastas'ya Filippovna's initial attraction to and later her carnal hatred of Totskii. Even when she was a child, Katerina tells Ordynov, Murin had frightened her, and no doubt this fear played an influential role in her attraction to the old man and his arcane allure, her awe of his power. As mentioned earlier, it is vaguely hinted that Katerina is herself Murin's daughter. It is this sin with which Murin later reproaches her, reading to her the curses allotted such a profligate by the gloomy books of the *raskol'niki*. Believing that she is doomed, that Murin himself will come for her soul after his death, that she will never be free of him or her own sins, Katerina falls ever more irretriev-

¹⁷ Frank, pp. 337-8.

¹⁸ Terras, p. 88.

ably into Murin's facinorous clutches. Murin consciously manipulates and encourages her feelings of guilt until they fester and begin to infect her sanity. Even more than this, Katerina herself has begun to *love* her own sinfulness, to contemplate her own wicked deeds with the pleasure of self-laceration. Her endless enraptured prostrations before the icons, her blissful moments of consciousness lost in ardent prayer — all this affords her a sickly sweet pleasure. Echoes of Katerina's dolorific enjoyment of the guilty pangs of conscience can be seen through many of Dostoevsky's works, most obviously in the Underground Man, Nastas'ya Filippovna, Grushen'ka, and many of the Katerina Ivanovna characters. This unhealthy revelry in opprobrium and shame represents one of the sole pleasures left to Katerina. Driven almost beyond her reason by Murin's constant threats of damnation, exiled practically beyond human contact, Katerina is forced to retreat into frenzy and prayer. Until Ordynov comes, that is. Now she can unleash her pent-up emotions in a flood of imaginative ravings, a torrent of passion, with all the force of a youthful heart imprisoned. She comes to include Ordynov in her fantasies, casting him in the active role of savior. Such vigorous endeavors, however, fall beyond the inert dream-world in which Ordynov exists, and he can only fail her expectations, leaving her mired in unhappy disillusionment and approaching madness, and leaving him saddened but nonetheless still drifting apart from reality.

Katerina's perverse symbiosis with Murin exhibits the Dostoevskian struggle of the weak heart against the strong, the pusillanimous character subjugated, as seen earlier in figures like Devushkin and Golyadkin, and as remains to be seen in Vasya Shumkov, to a degree in Netochka Nezvanova, and many other, greater characters. She is a weak heart

struggling with her own nature. Katerina had all but given up — and then the handsome (we suppose) young Ordynov arrives. On him she may focus her longing for escape from Murin, to him she hopes to transfer her submission. For there is never any question that Katerina *wants* her own free will. As Murin himself observes later on, in a speech that has been recognized for its anticipation of Ivan Karamazov's Grand Inquisitor:

—...Спознай, барин: слабому человеку одному не сдержаться! Только дай ему всё, он сам же придёт, всё назад отдаст, дай ему полцарства земного в обладание, попробуй — ты думаешь что? Он тебе тут же в башмак тотчас спрячется, так умалится. Дай ему волюшку, слабому человеку, — сам её свяжет, назад принесёт. Глупому сердцу и воля не впрок!¹⁹

When Ordynov enters her life, Katerina sees a convenient new hero. Unfortunately for her, Ordynov is far too weak and inert even to rescue himself, let alone anyone else. Thus, faced with the ineluctable truth of Ordynov's lack of heroic action, Katerina detaches her hopes from him and returns to her paroxysms of prayerful abandon, side by side with the keeper of her cage.

This voluntary submission and yielding of will presents Katerina as Dostoevsky's first truly masochistic figure, resolutely acceptant. The unmitigated pleasure she draws from her shame, her absolute insistence on her

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 317.

deep guilt — these move Katerina to the head of the long procession of self-lacerating characters, male and female. As Joseph Frank capably asserts:

It is only in *The Landlady* that Dostoevsky begins to grasp the implications of this psychology [of masochistic enjoyment of self-punishment] and to exploit it seriously. His artistic focus thus shifts from the inner conflict within the individual caused by socially conditioned attitudes to the struggle of the individual with his own character. Katerina is still a victim of Murin and all the dark forces that he represents; but she is also a victim of her inability to conquer the “enjoyment” that she derives from her enslavement and degradation. A new dimension is thus added to Dostoevsky’s portrayal of personality, which now moves in the direction of transferring to the individual some of the moral responsibility for his own plight.²⁰

Thus do Katerina and her story evince new rudiments of a great Dostoevskian concern, to be marked in most of his later works. In Katerina’s refusal to resume command of her own free will, in her stubborn refusal to accept the reality of, and responsibility for, her sins, and thus expiate and atone for them, Dostoevsky embeds the first glimmers of what would later become a dazzling jewel of his creation.

Katerina and the tale she comes from presage many other important thematic structures and characteristics to be fully embodied in his later works. One of these details is elucidated particularly well by Joseph Frank.

²⁰ Frank, pp. 341-2.

Dostoevsky never again tried to write so extensively in an epic-ballad style; but a similar haunting note of folk-poetry occasionally appears, most notably in the lyrical accents of the crippled Marya Lebyadkina in *The Devils*. And there is, indeed, a certain similarity in situation between Katerina and Marya that explains the stylistic echo. Katerina hopes that Ordynov has come to rescue her, just as Marya waits for Stavrogin and imagines him to be her “deliverer;” but in neither case is the Russian folk-maiden delivered from the enchantment of evil by her “false” swain from the intelligentsia.²¹

With her fabled beauty and captured soul, Katerina represents one of Dostoevsky’s earliest attempts to depict the eternal feminine world-soul, in expectation of her saving “bridegroom.” This theme has so many reverberations throughout Dostoevsky’s works that it would be impossible to list them fully here; but apart from Mar’ya Lebyadkina, a prime example is evident in Nastas’ya Filippovna, who at first believes she has found in Myshkin the saving Expected One. Here again, however, despite whatever pretensions to goodness he may have, the male character is unable to enact the salvation of the suffering feminine soul. In *Idiot* the feminine world-soul is left to endure a fate worse than Katerina’s continued existence with Murin and her perpetual self-punishment and abandonment in prayer.

Unfortunately, despite all its value as a source and incubator, *Khozyaika* does not live up to the expectations Dostoevsky has encouraged in us. The style is largely imitative, as has been shown by many crit-

²¹ Ibid.

ics,²² and it is far too undeveloped and contrived to be considered one of Dostoevsky's most worthy achievements. Despite its prominent shortcomings, however, *Khozyaika* is valuable, because scattered within the story are so many productive seeds. Later, as Dostoevsky develops as a writer and moves into the lengthier works which allow him his full range, these seeds will give rise to a plethora of treasured offspring.

NASTEN'KA

The analysis of *Belye noch*i to follow here evolved mainly as a response to Victor Terras' treatment (or mistreatment) of Nasten'ka to be found on pages 94-101 in his book *The Young Dostoevsky (1846-49). A Critical Study*.²³ My arguments were molded by the charientisms with which Terras accompanies his often deep insights; too many of his assertions and conclusions deserve addressing, and redressing.

*Belye noch*i is one of Dostoevsky's most simple, honest, delightful stories, and Nasten'ka is certainly one of his most straightforward and enjoyable heroines. Perhaps the brevity of the tale lent itself to this purity of form and thought. Out of the presumably Romantic story emerges one of Dostoevsky's least sentimental, least riven, least troubled characters, Nasten'ka.

The plot lies open. A Dreamer straight out of one of Dostoevsky's Petersburg portraits walks through Petersburg in the white nights, engulfed

²² See Terras, especially pp. 88-91.

²³ For a full citation of the objectionable passage, please refer to Appendix 1. Despite the general acumen of many of his analyses, his unmitigated derision at the expense of these female characters and, usually, women in general, is entirely objectionable.

in fantasy as usual. Suddenly the young man comes upon a young woman leaning on the rail overlooking a canal, quietly crying. He yearns to speak to her, but is unexpectedly interrupted by the girl herself, who realizes she is no longer alone and walks on. The Dreamer follows, and is presented with an opportunity both to rescue her and to speak to her. From this humble beginning the story continues. The two meet one another at night thereafter, telling one another their "story," sitting beneath the never-ending daylight. Nasten'ka, we learn, is anxiously anticipating the return of her beloved, a young man of presumably good character who had left her to secure his fortune, promising to return in a year's time and marry her. She expects him any day, and as time wears on she worries; the Dreamer offers to help find him, but they do not succeed in contacting the young man. Finally, when it seems that too much time has passed for any hope to remain, the betrothed arrives and claims his bride, leaving the Dreamer alone to continue his reveries.

This pretty young brunette possesses a radiant vigor and an irresistible personality. Nasten'ka is always, above all, honest, practical, realistic. In her head float a few romantic fantasies, dreams of Chinese princes, but never does she forget to leave that world and inhabit the real one. Her common sense, still unmarred by adult experience and disillusionment, enables her to recognize immediately the Dreamer for what he is; from the first encounter she understands him intimately, though perhaps she could not explicitly formulate her evaluation or how she came by it. She has had some education, has read a little, but has been brought up with an understanding of her own station and her own worth as a human being. Her self-confidence and pride are natural and youthful, never overbearing or "infernal." She is not vindictive or deliberately cruel, and she tells the Dreamer

from the very beginning that she loves another, that he should not fall in love with her — for she knows he will. Even when she believes that her lover has actually abandoned her she shows only a moment of spite, and indeed, how believable would she be without this? Rather, she shows a brief moment of pride, feeling ashamed that she allowed herself to get so carried away and be spurned, when she begins to question her absent lover's motives— but only briefly. She does not allow herself to collapse in a rage of spiteful tears; she is only genuinely sad, sad for the presumed loss of a love which she sincerely felt. She grieves, not for the loss of face she has suffered, nor in despair for the loss of the future she had planned on, nor for any other such petty concerns. But even in her grief she is cognizant of reality, reluctantly beginning to admit to herself that *he* isn't coming and that she must begin to consider alternatives. Like her grandmother, she is practical; the old woman knows, as does Nasten'ka, that it is time for her to marry. There is no other choice. Nasten'ka realizes that she must face the possibility, now apparently distinct, that she will have to look elsewhere for a husband. Beside her stands a young man whose heart she knows beyond doubt, who loves her and who has all but made her an offer. Her innate practicality influences her decision, as does the unspoken fact that she could do much worse, though she is still hesitant — obviously her heart is not so callous that she may refocus her affections immediately. But Nasten'ka also knows that this would make her friend happy, that the Dreamer loves her, and this is at least some consolation to her. A prospective marriage based on friendship and mutual enjoyment is far preferable to a loveless match. She sees no harm in this ostensible arrangement, because she is a kind, simple-hearted girl, and because she does value him and love him as a friend. Opportunism should not be counted among

Nasten'ka's faults.

But Victor Terras feels otherwise. Each reading of his chapter "The Young Dostoevsky and the Very Young Female" only provides further evidence of its unbalance. These passages were not only written by a literary critic; they were penned by a man who has chosen this forum to give vent to some strongly misogynistic feelings, on the pretext of criticizing imaginary women. Terras unleashes cruelly vehement denunciations of, and a scathing condescension to, the female characters he is discussing, almost always unwarranted and personal. He interprets every action, every word by these heroines as vindictive, insincere, shallow, petty, self-serving, manipulative, illogical, exploitative, poorly reasoned, at worst stupid — and all of these traits he boils down to one all-encompassing word: *feminine*. At times this catch-all may be extended to include such allegedly positive characteristics as sweetness, naïveté, charm, but all attributed in the most *patronizing* manner possible.

Terras begins his assault from the inside, appearing at first indulgent of Nasten'ka's whimsical cuteness, though within the second paragraph he already mentions her "feminine weaknesses."²⁴ His description of her and her situation seems straightforward enough, and perhaps the reader will allow to slip by what seems vaguely deprecating, his remark that she is "concerned with her own personal happiness, and little else."²⁵ After all, most human beings are, and readers can easily overlook the criticism, especially when it could be redirected at themselves.

A few paragraphs later, however, a disturbing statement is made, one which cannot be ignored. After claiming that "Nastenska is not very strong in logic" (and of course, how could she be, poor *girl*), Terras attributes to

²⁴ Terras, p. 95.

²⁵ Ibid.

her the ever-popular, mythical feminine intuition. "...Nastenka knows instinctively that it does not matter what a woman tells a man so long as there is genuine warmth and sympathy in her words."²⁶ It is difficult to decide how to begin deconstructing this blatantly offensive sentence. Are we to understand that Nasten'ka can know something only *instinctively*, given that she is so obviously incapable of rational rumination? Perhaps Terras believes that this ability is one passed on through generations from mother to daughter, an archetypally conspiratorial callousness, that women, in their animal-canniness, recognize that men are helpless and less than analytical when an estrogen-enriched voice coos to them, that women count on this and maneuver consciously around it? After all, what would it matter *what* she said, since no woman could possibly say anything worth close attention. Terras' paragraph seems to have been catapulted — expelled, no doubt — by some archaic monk, rather than composed by a well-respected critic in 1969.

Terras continues, criticizing Nasten'ka's apparent abandonment of her fiancé when she believes he is not coming. "Nastenka loves her fiancé not humbly and unselfishly, as a Varenka [sic] or a Netochka Nezvanova would, but as the independent, proud, and rather egoistic girl she is."²⁷ It is difficult to believe that Terras could hold up Varen'ka, the girl he has just harangued, as a paradigm of womanly love and loyalty. But more importantly, when he does use Varen'ka or Netochka as exemplary lovers, Terras also neglects to see that Nasten'ka's love has not been extinguished. He pretends that "she quickly enough collects herself," as though she shuts off one emotional valve when it becomes inconvenient, opening another spigot in its stead. How could she be called selfish, the girl who went to the

²⁶ Ibid, p.97.

²⁷ Ibid.

man she loved unbidden, throwing herself on his mercy, trusting that he was a good enough soul to value her and not to take advantage of her, the girl who has waited patiently while her love is away, for a year holding only his assurances as a promise? No, this is not a completely selfish girl.

Continuing in the same vein, Terras accuses Nastenka of taking “command” of the Dreamer. She does. The point here should not be that Nasten’ka is therefore a conniving dominatrix, but rather that the Dreamer *by his very nature* requires someone to take charge of him. Obviously he is incapable of driving himself — he is a Dreamer. It is not insignificant that the last two pages of the story demonstrate the hopelessly inert future which lies before him, as he envisions himself sitting in exactly the same chair, his servant Matryona still near, with only the configuration of cobwebs altered. Now, is Nasten’ka to blame for this? She is responsible neither for his nature nor for his inactivity. If anything, this encounter with such a lively young girl should have imparted to the Dreamer some life-force, some impetus to act. Nasten’ka should not be faulted for what happens to the Dreamer after she is reunited with her love; he himself is wholly culpable. This is not to say that she is completely irreproachable in her behavior after her fiancé returns; certainly she could have been a bit more considerate. But, realistically speaking, what should she have done? Would it have been less painful for the Dreamer to continue to see her after her marriage, to encounter her at home, in her presumed wedded bliss, than for her to suggest indirectly and diplomatically that they probably should not extend their friendship, thus allowing the Dreamer to save face? Or should she perhaps have thrown over her lover in favor of the Dreamer, regardless of her true feelings? Surely Terras would not expect such false behavior in so genuine a girl? The situation, a love triangle, is designed so that in-

evitably someone is hurt.

Soon enough Terras resumes his nebulous semantic assignments, creating something he calls Nasten'ka's "peculiar 'feminine' logic."²⁸ It is difficult to imagine exactly what he means by this, even if one generously attributes to him gentle motives. The implication, however, in what follows, is less than acceptable, for soon he adds that "thinking is not Nastenka's forte." This grating remark is unfounded. Dostoevsky did not create a stupid character in Nasten'ka. On closer inspection, Nasten'ka's spontaneous and genuine exclamations are portrayed as much more human, much more real, and much healthier than the convoluted, interminable philosophical ramblings embarked on by the Dreamer. This is not to say that she doesn't think, but rather that she doesn't think *too much*. The distinction is an important one, especially given Dostoevsky's estimation of those who *do* think too much. Terras himself recognizes this a few paragraphs later, commenting (and conveniently ignoring his own self-contradiction) that Nasten'ka says "what is to be said; anything further would be idle philosophizing."²⁹

Actually, this idea of " 'feminine' traits" is a pet of Terras'. One of the components of this gender distinction is simple speech; no great shock that it should be so, since women themselves are no great thinkers. It would be illogical to expect them to express themselves otherwise. Not the least of these traits is Nastenka's frequent use of the word "perhaps," Terras tells us.³⁰ In fact, this phrase comprises a hallmark of her femininity. With it, "she still insists that it is *not* a promise" when she agrees tentatively to do something. With a condescension as yet unparalleled, Terras continues. "How important that little word 'perhaps' can be! It gives a woman indepen-

²⁸ Ibid, p.98.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 99.

³⁰ Ibid.

dence, dignity — and power. Nastenka certainly makes liberal use of it.”³¹ As well she should! In actuality, what real power do these women possess, that they are even begrudged semantic distancing? Independence is a valuable commodity, and considering how little access to it these female characters enjoyed, we should not be surprised to see them desperately clinging to any minor expression of freedom they find.

Altogether, Terras seems to expect complete emotional maturity from these young women, from Varen’ka to Nasten’ka, an adult understanding and level of experience which he does *not* presume in their male counterparts. His asymmetrical treatment of all of Dostoevsky’s early female characters (who are, of course, imperfect, both artistically and in themselves) is disturbing for its combativeness and disproportionate harshness. This element of personal derision, as opposed to a reasonably detached critical assessment, itself invites criticism in an attempt to redress some of the more serious imperfections of Terras’ chapter.

Netochka Nezvanova

Netochka Nezvanova (“Nameless Little Nobody”) begins her fictional life in unenviable, lonely conditions and savagely bitten by the rodent called poverty in Dostoevsky’s first attempt at writing a novel. The first, finished part of the book, published at the end of 1849, was apparently intended only as a prelude, a description of the girl’s childhood. Unfortunately the larger plans for the work were never to be completed, for

³¹ Ibid.

shortly after the publication of this fragment Dostoevsky was arrested and sent to prison, never to finish this story which he had planned as a “confession.” But despite the lack of development and closure in the work, it is deeply valuable for the study of Dostoevsky.

The purpose of the novel is subject to conjecture. Joseph Frank is probably accurate in his speculation about Dostoevsky's motives.

...the work was designed as a *Bildungsroman*, depicting the life history of Netochka written in maturity or old age and reflecting the experiences that have formed her character and shaped her life. [...] The subtitle of the book — *The History of a Woman* — also suggests that Dostoevsky intended to emphasize similar motifs involving the status of women as the work proceeded.... Born of humble parents and living her earliest years in abject misery, Netochka's success in becoming a great artist would reveal all the wealth of neglected talent hidden in the socially outcast and despised as well as in her supposedly inferior sex. [...] In all these ways, Dostoevsky was endeavoring to tap some of the lively interest in “the woman question” then so prominent on the Russian literary scene. [...] Dostoevsky's aim, unprecedented in the Russian novel of his time, was to depict a talented and strong-willed woman who refuses to allow herself to be crushed — who becomes, in short, the main *positive* heroine of a major novel.³²

The novel *Netochka Nezvanova* provides abundant female characters. There are four female characters worth discussion here: Netochka herself, her mother, Princess Katya, and Aleksandra Mikhailovna. Each of these characters is important to the story, and although it is incomplete, the novel

³² Frank, *The Seeds of Revolt*, pp. 349-53.

nevertheless displays in the early Dostoevsky the tendencies and concepts which later come to typify his longer, greater endeavors.

The reader is first introduced to the young girl Netochka in dreadful environs: her tiny, abnormal "family" desperately clings to each kopeck, each day shared with privation. Netochka does not attend school and she is often left completely alone, with no outside stimulation, no playmates or friends, no attention, and certainly no affection. This little girl is confronted with the harshly real needs facing her suffering, ill mother, whom she fears. Netochka is burdened with tasks unsuitable for a small child, tasks which deepen her fear of her mother: she must do the limited shopping which they can afford without losing the change, without being cheated by the purveyor of the goods. She learns to dread the reactions of her mother — which themselves are wholly understandable, considering the straightened means they endure — upon learning of any losses. The picayune and thankless life of the pitiful mother leaves the woman no time, energy, or inspiration for the expression of tenderness to her small child, who needs it so terribly. In this bleak, monstrous existence, Netochka escapes through the only route open to her: imagination. This window in her mind opens with the window through which she stares, out onto the dreams and beauty which are so brutally lacking in her dreary world. Her fantasies revolve around wealth and lavish riches, all the sumptuous beauty money can buy. Almost consciously playing on the dreams of his deprived little stepdaughter is Efimov, the tortured and torturing "artist." His dreams fit with Netochka's, his fantasies afford her a supposedly real path by which to reach her illusory paradise. An impressionable and emotionally starved child will eagerly clutch at the merest drop of the blood of love, and Netochka becomes devoted to her "father's" inventive stories. So hungry

is she for the smallest slice of beauty in her horrifying existence that she is persuaded by her step-father's assertions that her mother is all that stands in the way of attaining a good life; she takes her father's side, and so full of need is she that she even begins to resent and hate her mother as such an immovable and cruel barrier to happiness. The combination of fear of her mother and the vivid portrait Efimov paints of her mother's obstruction provides an ineluctable animosity which Efimov actively seeks to engender in Netochka. Yet even while pining for that life of splendor and love apparently just beyond her grasp Netochka cannot totally hate her mother. She remains tortured by guilt; her tiny, pure heart cannot completely annihilate the bonds between child and mother. Even years later, after her rescue and inclusion in family life, Netochka reminisces about the injustice she did to her mother when she allied herself with Efimov, her mother's torturer; still affected by her past, she attempts to right the wrong she did her mother as she unhesitatingly stands with and protects her adoptive mother, Aleksandra Mikhailovna.

But before Netochka can stand with confidence and righteousness, she must endure and triumph in the fight to win the love of the young and violently proud Princess Katya. After her mother's death and her step-father's abandonment, Netochka is found and rescued by the kindly Prince Kh., who takes her into his home and treats her as his own. It is in this alien atmosphere of familial affection that Netochka meets Princess Katya, a girl her own age with whom she immediately falls in love. So starved for affection is Netochka, still so tortured by the legacy of her years of emotional malnutrition, that she falls deeply in love with the little princess. Katya is herself the fulfilled manifestation of the world of beauty and riches of which Netochka dreamt in her attic prison. In Katya she sees the pinnacle of her

fantasies. It naturally becomes Netochka's tortuous goal to have her love reciprocated by Katya, for without this she will never be able to heal the shatteringly tragic past which haunts her so. Towards this goal she knows not how to proceed; inexperienced as she is in loving relationships, Netochka has no guide to hint how to achieve it. As a child steeped in herself and uncannily attuned to the unconscious motivations of others, she gropes her way along in the dark towards the solution of her unrequited adoration. She senses that the only way to jolt Katya out of her self-absorption and sadistic torturing is a gesture of which Katya herself is incapable: self-sacrifice. Only when she sees Netochka take the blame for a deed she herself had committed does Katya's pride vanish like a mist, clearing the way for her heart to express the passionate affection she feels for Netochka. Only by taking on herself the punishment that should rightfully fall to Katya does Netochka become an empowered person whom Katya can now see as worthy of love.

That love itself is worthy of discussion. The relationship between Katya and Netochka becomes overtly homoerotic, albeit immaturely so, as soon as Katya admits her love; but even before, as Netochka dreams of Katya, the diction is distinctly that of a love affair, of longed-for physical expressions of love. When Netochka first sees Katya, she falls in love with her.

Вновь открыв глаза, я увидела склонившееся надо мною лицо ребёнка, девочки одних лет со мною, и первым движением моим было протянуть к ней руки. С первого взгляда на неё,— каким-то счастьем, будто сладким предчувствием наполнилась вся душа моя. Представьте себе идеально прелестное личико, поражающую,

сверкающую красоту, одну из таких, перед которыми вдруг останавливаешься как пронзённый, в сладостном смущении, вздрогнув от восторга, и которой благодарен за то, что она есть, за то, что на неё упал ваш взгляд, за то, что она прошла возле вас. Это была дочь князя, Катя, которая только что воротилась из Москвы. Она улыбнулась моему движению, и слабые нервы мои заныли от сладостного восторга.³³

There is a plethora of phrases of physical desire at the beginning of their acquaintance: “мне так хотелось поцеловать её!” (197); “Появление её всегда более и более приводило меня в восторг. Я не спускала с неё глаз...”(197); “Влечение к ней было так сильно, я шла вперёд в новом чувстве моём так горячо....[...]...я не выдержала, бросилась ей на шею и начала её целовать” (199). Finally she states it unequivocally.

Короче — и нусть простят мне мое слово — я была влюблена в мою Катю. Да, это была любовь, настоящая любовь, любовь со слезами и радостями, любовь страстная. Что влекло меня к ней? отчего родилась такая любовь? Она началась с первого взгляда на неё,

³³ PSS , 2, 1972, pp. 196-7.

когда все чувства мои были сладко поражены видом прелестного как ангел ребёнка. Всё в ней было прекрасно....[...] Она родилась на счастье, она должна была родиться для счастья — вот было первое впечатление при встрече с нею. Может быть, во мне первый раз поражено было эстетическое чувство, чувство изящного, первый раз сказалось оно, пробуждённое красотой, и — вот вся причина зарождения любви моей.³⁴

Later, after Katya relents and admits her love, having seen Netochka's full ardor, the homoeroticism becomes even more explicit as the little girls give vent to their passionate love for one another.

Но мигом она вскочила с места и, вся покрасневшись, вся в слезах, бросилась мне на шею. Щёки её были влажны, губки *вспухли, как вишенки*, локоны рассыпались в беспорядке. Она целовала меня как безумная, целовала мне лицо, глаза, губы, шею, руки; она рыдала как в истерике; я крепко прижалась к ней, и мы сладко, радостно обнялись, как друзья, как любовники, которые свиделись после долгой разлуки. Сердце Кати билось так сильно, что я слышала каждый удар. (*Italics mine*)³⁵

³⁴ Ibid, p. 207.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 217.

Later that night, Katya pulls Netochka into her bed, and they continue to hug and kiss. “И мы целовались, плакали, хохотали; у нас губы распухли от поцелуев” (220).

This blatant sexuality between two little girls is remarkable enough considering the time and society in which it occurs and was invented—by a male writer. More noticeable still is the lack of judgment or moralizing by the author, as well as the almost complete dearth of self-censure on the part of Netochka herself, unconscious or otherwise.³⁶ While the fantastical sexual symbols and vocabulary may be disturbing, it becomes almost irrelevant that the relationship between these two girls takes on an explicitly erotic thrill; for Netochka, a girl so deprived of any truly loving attachments, it is perhaps to be expected that she would throw herself headlong into love at the first opportunity. However, one must again lament the fact that we were never to read of their encounter several years later, in young adulthood, with both girls in the flower of womanhood. It is intriguing to speculate as to whether the homoeroticism would have continued its dominance later in the novel; intriguing, yes, but not very productive. [It is also worth noting the future reverberations of Dostoevsky's apparent fixation with describing the cruelty of adult male sex with girl children, in which he uses many of the same erotic symbols and hallmarks employed here to depict Katya.]

Unfortunately, however, for young Netochka, this new-found saving object of jubilation leaves her all too quickly. Katya goes with her family to Moscow, and Netochka is sent to live with Katya's older half-sister,

³⁶ The closest the little girls come to any explicit manifestation of their awareness of the censored nature of their love is this, pointed out by Victor Terras (p. 107, *The Young Dostoevsky*): “ ‘Ah, what shameless hussies we are!’ Katja exclaims, which suggests that the girls (as well, of course, as the narratress) are fully aware of the forbidden, erotic nature of these goings-on.” In a footnote Terras explains, “The Russian *besstydnica*, ‘shameless woman’, is a rather strong expression.”

Aleksandra Mikhailovna. This woman warmly brings Netochka into her home and affection, truly accepting her as her own daughter. Although unable to assuage the pain Netochka feels upon losing Katya, Aleksandra Mikhailovna nevertheless supplies Netochka with a semblance of familial stability and unequivocal acceptance, despite her own "secret sorrow" and her own need for love which her husband, Pyotr Aleksandrovich, is unwilling to provide as she deserves. Aleksandra Mikhailovna sets about Netochka's education with an enthusiastic animation which infects the needy girl, whose adoration for her adopted mother knows no bounds. But Netochka is not blinded by her own happiness, and she sees the evident ache plaguing Aleksandra Mikhailovna. Her understanding and perception of this unspoken sorrow affect her, and she internalizes and shares her friend's pain. Netochka even notices the masked animosity of Pyotr Aleksandrovich, and although unaware of the rudiments of his hostility, she comes to resent him for his obvious mistreatment of his worshipful wife. "Once again [Netochka] is confronted with the trauma inflicted in her childhood by Yefimov's relation to her mother; but now she aligns herself unhesitatingly with the victim against the persecutor and the oppressor."³⁷ This time around, Netochka exhibits her moral strength and actively opposes the tyrant, Pyotr Aleksandrovich, for the sake of her new mother, Aleksandra Mikhailovna. "...Netochka willingly takes on herself the onus of a secret correspondence with a presumptive lover",³⁸ rather than allow Pyotr Aleksandrovich to torment his wife with what Netochka discovers to be a past love affair of Aleksandra Mikhailovna's, with which he has by allusion driven her to grief over the years. Netochka exerts a morality higher than the exploitative diagrams of hell and sin drawn by the sadistic hand of

³⁷ Frank, *The Seeds of Revolt*, p. 363.

³⁸ Ibid.

Pyotr Aleksandrovich to bind his pusillanimous wife to him. As a human being, Netochka is unable to stand by and allow another to suffer when she can intervene. She bravely and unflinchingly absorbs the blows which Pyotr Aleksandrovich launches against her, for she knows that if the truth were told, the violence would be redirected against her beloved Aleksandra Mikhailovna; Netochka is percipient that her adopted mother lacks the strength to withstand such brutality.

... Netochka hands the letter over privately to Pyotr Alexandrovich and bitterly denounces his moral tyranny over his long-suffering wife. ““You wanted to maintain a superiority over her, and you did so. But why? Because you wanted to triumph over her... in order to show her that she had erred and that you were *more virtuous*””(2:266). With these accusing words, Netochka shows Pyotr Alexandrovich that she is made of sterner stuff than his wife and will not allow herself to be trampled on.³⁹

Thus although Dostoevsky was never to complete the novel, we may assume that Netochka would continue to act truthfully and justly. Because she is, finally and irrevocably, a woman who knows what is right and who will unhesitatingly sacrifice herself to save another. In fact, in her acts of self-effacement — both for Katya and for Aleksandra Mikhailovna — Netochka carries the embryo of Dostoevsky's philosophy, to be fully developed and concretely manifested in the later, great novels, that “Salvation ...would always depend on the capacity of the prideful ego... to surrender to

³⁹ Ibid, pp. 363-4.

the free self-sacrifice of love made on its behalf by Christ.”⁴⁰ Thus perhaps does Netochka’s sacrifice help Katya grow as a human being, although the novel’s lack of ending precludes definite developmental proof.

Princess Katya warrants analysis in her own right, both as the haughty little girl who knowingly taunts Netochka, whose pride prevents her — for a time — from returning Netochka’s affection, and also as the “...Princess Katya...whose fineness of character conquers the temptation of egoistic resentment in a[n] ... active and decisive fashion”.⁴¹ The young sun around which the whole universe of Prince Kh.’s household revolves, Katya is comfortably unaware of conflict, blissfully happy in her secure fiefdom — until Netochka arrives. Even at an early age she knows her ascendancy and unconsciously manipulates the people surrounding her to achieve whatever evanescent whim dawns across her horizon. When Netochka arrives, however, Katya’s world changes, and this does not please her. Although Katya knows that her hold over Netochka is potent, she is repulsed by the ease with which she succeeds in gaining her will, as well as by the pull she feels Netochka exerting on her, the recognition of shared love, and therefore of equality. Joseph Frank explains this with clarity.

It is evident from Dostoevsky’s portrayal of Katya, that he was already a master of the love-hate dialectic.... [...] ...in Katya for the first time it becomes completely self-conscious. When asked about her past behavior by Netochka, she replies: “Well, I always loved you, always! But then, I was not able to bear it; I thought, I’ll devour her with kisses, or I’ll pinch her to death” [2:220]. This is the naive form in which Katya explains her am-

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 360.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 358.

biguous feelings, which stem from the unwillingness of the prideful ego to surrender its own autonomy to the infringement represented by the temptation of love. In *Netochka Nezvanova*, this conflict is still presented purely in moral-psychological terms; but one should never overlook that the self-sacrifice of Netochka, and Katya's response, already contain the emotive-experiential basis of Dostoevsky's Christianity.⁴²

The recognition of mutual love, as well as the feeling of love itself, require a surrender of ego-control to the beloved. This Katya cannot bear. Her youthful pride is obstinate and strong, and only a gesture of strength *through* weakness (martyrdom) from Netochka can force Katya to admit the true run of her emotions. Only an act of selflessness can wash from Katya's vision the grime of sovereign pride and vanity. Again Joseph Frank provides insight into the novel.

Princess Katya is thus the first of Dostoevsky's "infernal women," whose wounded pride stands in the way of their acceptance of the gift of love and generates, rather, hatred and persecution of the lover; but in this early phase, where the drama is played between children, the wound is not yet so deep that it can no longer be healed.⁴³

In fact, Princess Katya is the predecessor of the other characters named Katerina, beginning probably with Katerina Ivanovna Marmeladova in

⁴² Ibid, p. 360.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 359.

Prestuplenie i nakazanie (although we can see echoes of her character in Nellie of *Unizhennye i oskorblennye*) and finally reaching the ultimate personification in Katerina Ivanovna of *Brat'ya Karamazovy*. By observing the relations between Netochka and Katya, paying close heed to the way in which Netochka at last wins the love of Katya, an attentive reader possesses an important model for understanding the relations later in *Brat'ya Karamazovy* between Katerina Ivanovna, Dmitrii, Ivan, and Grushen'ka.

The love-hate arena of the relationship between Netochka and Katya will send echoes into the future as well, and it will touch and deeply affect several other connections. For instance, the link between Raskol'nikov and Sonya in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* will be clearly marked by this conflict. The ambivalence and ephemeral emotions of Raskol'nikov stem from his failure to harness his pride and his unwillingness to relinquish self-control in any degree, to free his love for Sonya, which ties him so strongly to her, despite his self-preservation. Katya therefore partly prefigures Raskol'nikov, as well as others, and Netochka's act of heroic self-abnegation reverberates in Sonya's acceptance of Raskol'nikov's punishment as her own, in her decision to follow him to exile in Siberia.

In Katya one also laments the novel's lack of closure, and the reader must ponder ineffectually what changes Katya would have brought to the reunion with Netochka. Would she have regained her stubborn ways, forcing Netochka to undergo still more trials? Perhaps, in a way, Dostoevsky did develop further Katya's portrait, though in a different novel; we see Katya quite clearly in the vain and self-centered "infernal" Katerina Ivanovna of *Brat'ya Karamazovy*.

Another absorbing problem the work presents is this: why did Dostoevsky — a *man*, and, at the time, unmarried and childless — choose

to write a book about a young girl? Now, it has been argued that Netochka is an extremely efficient narrator, in fact so efficient that she slides into the murky background of the events she describes, ceasing to be an active player in her own life's game.⁴⁴ Granted that she is perhaps not the arbiter of the action of the novel, and even if she herself is so unimportant that her gender is almost irrelevant, it is nevertheless written from her point of view. Even more: not only is the narrator female, but the most important characters (with the exception of Efimov) are also women. Katya and Aleksandra Mikhailovna dominate the latter two-thirds of the book.

Dostoevsky had younger sisters, but even during his childhood it seems unlikely that he was very close to them. Beyond his female siblings, however, his exposure to girls the age of Netochka was extremely limited. He was too young for many of his friends to have had children whom he could observe closely, and there seems to be no mention of any neighbor children or the like whom he could have befriended for long enough to compose the portraits of *Netochka Nezvanova*. Thus we may presume that these characters did not spring from any actual people. The original query stands. The work could easily have been written with a young boy as narrator; in fact, had this been the case, some of the most disturbing aspects of Netochka's love affair with Katya would have been eliminated. (It is far more acceptable for a young boy to fall passionately in love with a beautiful young girl, to dream of her red lips, to fall kissing her at every opportunity, than for a little girl to feel so strongly and explicitly erotically attracted to another girl.) It would be difficult to say that the work would have been less

⁴⁴ Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967, pp. 107-8. "Netochka is too pale a figure, too much the narrator and not the heroine. With discreet modesty she invariably yields the foreground to other individuals and is incapable of focusing the novel's events on her own personality. She relates the story of her life but it is her fate to act as an accessory to the lives of people more significant than herself."

effective with Ivanushka Nezvanov rather than Netochka as narrator. But all this obscures the central fact: Dostoevsky *did not* write the work with a male narrator. In fact, as Victor Terras has pointed out, the changes which Dostoevsky made to the novel-fragment upon his return from Siberia worked to remove any traces of a male hero, when Dostoevsky expunged his character Larya, “who was to be the hero of the novel,” from the text as it was modified in 1860.⁴⁵ Even with the Larya character included in the novel, Netochka’s centrality would not have been usurped. But the fact that Dostoevsky did delete the little boy from the novel is nevertheless important, as it did serve to sharpen the focus on his heroine.

Joseph Frank indicates at least a partial justification for this choice when he points out how unusual it was to depict a woman as the heroine of a novel at that time in Russia. “In so doing he hoped once again, as with *Poor Folk*, to reestablish his independent position on the Russian social-cultural scene...”⁴⁶ For whatever reason, though, he must have felt that it would be better to use a female narrator in this story, because a craftsman such as Dostoevsky did not make choices arbitrarily, or with purely opportunistic motives. Perhaps he felt a female narrator would be more effective in eliciting sympathy from his readers; perhaps he felt it would be more dramatic to see a woman battered by fate but who finally stands up for herself and others. Another factor influencing Dostoevsky in his choice of a female narrator was his abiding admiration for George Sand. Terras believes “that Dostoevsky has taken the femininity of his narratress quite seriously and has actually produced as George-Sandian a narrative as any Russian writer, male or female, ever has. The emotional pose, the sentimental cliché, and the moral phrase practiced by the narratress of *Netochka Nezvanova*

⁴⁵ Terras, *The Young Dostoevsky*, p. 48.

⁴⁶ Frank, *The Seeds of Revolt*, p.353, and see above for other relevant citations.

are an exact replica of George Sand's mode of diction in the 1830's and 1840's...."⁴⁷ He goes on to posit "that [Dostoevsky] has consciously followed the example of George Sand, imitated her stylistic mannerisms, even adopted some of her patterns of thought, in order to create the image of a genuinely feminine narratress."⁴⁸ If the weightily sexist atmosphere of this analysis is overlooked,⁴⁹ it does at least hint at a partial influence in Dostoevsky's election of a female narrator, if, indeed, he did set out to pastiche George Sand. Apparently, in order to siphon some of the curiosity of the "woman question," Dostoevsky deemed it worthwhile to imitate Sand's follies in order to achieve verisimilitude.

For whatever reason, though, Netochka Nezvanova gave her name and her story to Dostoevsky's arcade, leaving behind her a legacy of characters and ideas which would be inherited by the entire family tree of Dostoevsky's literary creations.

Malen'kii geroi

As he endured the passage of the spring of 1849⁵⁰ within his cell,

⁴⁷ Terras, *The Young Dostoevsky*, p. 101.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 102.

⁴⁹ See Appendix 2 for Terras, pp. 101-3. Terras asserts that women writers write differently from and *not as well as* male writers, who in their genius can even imitate the form of their inferiors, as in the case of Dostoevsky deliberately using his talents to lower his style to match that of a mere woman. Also objectionable is Terras' inventive new *narratress*, the justification for which usage is incomprehensible, unless of course female narrators are as inferior as female writers. *Narrator* has been and is sufficient to denote a *human* storyteller, not requiring any of the gender distinctions which tend, as in this case, to lead to value judgments.

⁵⁰ Although Dostoevsky completed the story before his departure to Siberia in December of 1849, *A Little Hero* was not published until 1857, when the author slowly regained his rights. In Russian the full title is *Malen'kii geroi. Iz neizvestnykh memuarov*.

Dostoevsky wrote one of his most cheerful stories: *Malen'kii geroi*. The narrator of this tale reminisces about a significant time in his childhood, at age eleven. The setting is pastoral, full of summer country air and warmth and light, all of which elements are usually lacking in Dostoevskian narrative. Perhaps because he himself lived without all the more enjoyable aspects of life, Dostoevsky entertained himself with substitutes in reverie.

The young boy, never named, spends the summer holidays with a wealthy relative outside Moscow. There he observes the fine, easy lifestyle of the Russian gentry, of which he is himself a member. He watches the lush feasts, the glittering guests, the frivolity of the leisured classes, remarking at times on the apparent wastefulness of the idle amusements. But on the whole his attention is distracted from this precocious social commentary by the female guests of his benefactor, in particular two: "the blonde," and Madame M.

Although she possesses no proper name, the former has many sobriquets. The narrator refers to her alternately as the blonde (блондинка), the beauty (красавица), tormentor (гонительница), Amazon (амазонка), and tyrant (тиранка), occasionally adding adjectives like "perfidious" (коварная). Obviously these appellations describe her more precisely than even the most symbolic Christian name. However, if she were named in the conventional sense, clearly she, too, would be Katya. This woman is the quintessential Katerina, pared down and simplified, perhaps, but nevertheless she is an amalgamation of all the other Katyas, both before her and yet to come. She is blonde, as the Katerinas usually are, "с пышными, густейшими волосами,"⁵¹ and, again as usual, she is the

⁵¹ PSS, 2, 1972, p. 269.

sort of beauty who transfixes the onlooker, as Netochka Nezvanova described the effect of Katya's lovely face.

Она была чудно хороша, и что-то было в её красоте, что так и металось в глаза в первого взгляда. И, уж конечно, она непохожа была на тех маленьких, стыдливеньких блондинок, беленьких, как пушок, и нежных, как белые мышки или пасторские дочки. Ростом она была невысока и немного полна, но с нежными, тонкими линиями лица, очаровательно нарисованными. Что-то как молния сверкающее было в этом лице, да и вся она — как огонь, живая, быстрая, лёгкая. Из её больших открытых глаз будто искры сыпались; они сверкали, как алмазы, и никогда я не променяю таких голубых искрометных глаз ни на какие черные, будь они чернее самого чёрного андалузского взгляда, да и блондинка моя, право, стояла той знаменитой брюнетки, которую воспел один известный и прекрасный поэт и который ещё в таких превосходных стихах поклялся всей Кастилией, что готов переломать себе кости, если позволят ему только кончиком пальца прикоснуться к мантилье его красавицы. Прибавь к тому, что *моя* красавица была самая весёлая из всех красавиц в мире, самая взбалмошная хохотунья, резвая как ребёнок, несмотря на то что лет пять как была уже замужем. Смех не сходил с её губ, свежих, как свежа утренняя роза, только что успевшая раскрыть, с первым лучом солнца, свою алую, ароматную почку, на которой

ещё не обсохли холодные крупные капли росы.⁵²

This young woman is not only beautiful, as are all the other young Katyas, she is also a tormenter. The narrator believes she had sworn never to leave him in peace, and indeed, she does appear to be keen on her work. She is infernal, to be sure, with her eternal torture and gay tricks; but once she sees what a serious boy he is and how genuine his feelings are, the blonde immediately ceases her jesting hostilities and goes into *his* service, completely won over by his self-sacrifice and heroism with the untamable stallion.

Truly, she is beautiful, and she charms all who see her, but her beauty has not the depth, imprinted by suffering, of a Madame M. In this aspect she prefigures Aglaya Ivanovna Epanchina, and the role the latter plays in one of the love triangles of *Idiot*. The echoes are notable: Myshkin admires Aglaya, feels her beauty, but hers is not the powerful beauty of Nastas'ya Filippovna, whose suffering is evident in her lovely features; similarly the boy admires the blonde, appreciates her ravishing qualities, but actually loves only Madame M., with her pure face displaying her sadness. As Joseph Frank notes in relation to this story, "physical beauty alone will rarely attract a Dostoevsky protagonist, who is usually drawn to those who suffer";⁵³ apparently even an eleven-year-old boy is subject to this gravitational influence. Even Aglaya's later trick with the hedgehog seems to be a caprice which the blonde might have perpetrated.

⁵² Ibid, pp. 269-70.

⁵³ Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1850-1859*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 29.

The blonde, then, has obvious bonds tying her with the Princess Katya of *Netochka Nezvanova*, with her “dazzling” beauty and selfish, naughty, schoolgirlish ways. In her turn, the blonde contributes her characteristics to the inheritance of later Katerinas and some other “infernal women.” As mentioned above, she resurfaces subtly in Aglaya and similarly in Liza Tushina in *Besy*; undeniably, however, the tendencies present in the blonde are most fully expressed, with the deepest psychological insight, in Katerina Ivanovna in *Brat'ya Karamazovy*.

Madame M. is the beloved of the “little hero.” She is also very lovely, although the narrator does not assert whether she is more beautiful than the blonde. Within the beauty of his paramour, the boy sees more than is evident in the glittering, almost inhuman beauty of his tyrant.

М-ме М была тоже очень хороша собой, но в красоте её было что-то особенное, резко отделявшее её от толпы хорошеньких женщин; было что-то в лице её, что тотчас же неотразимо влекло к себе все симпатии, или, лучше сказать, что пробуждало благородную, возвышенную симпатию в том, кто встречал её. Есть такие счастливые лица. Возле неё всякому становилось как-то лучше, как-то свободнее, как-то теплее, и, однако-ж, её грустные большие глаза, полные огня и силы, смотрели робко и беспокойно, будто под ежеминутным страхом чего-то враждебного и грозного, и эта странная робость таким унынием покрывала подчас её тихие, кроткие черты, напоминавшие светлые лица итальянских мадонн, что,

смотря на неё, самому становилось скоро так же грустно, как за собственную, как за родную печаль. Это бледное, похудевшее лицо, в котором сквозь безукоризненную красоту чистых, правильных линий и унылую суровость глухой, затаенной тоски ещё так часто просвечивал первоначальный детски ясный облик,— образ ещё недавних доверчивых лет и, может быть, наивного счастья; эта тихая, но несмелая, колебавшаяся улыбка — всё это поражало таким безотчетным участием к этой женщине, что в сердце каждого невольно зарождалась сладкая, горячая забота, которая громко говорила за неё ещё издали и ещё вчуже роднила с нею.⁵⁴

This description is remarkably similar to that of Aleksandra Mikhailovna in *Netochka Nezvanova*, although perhaps the beauty of Madame M. is more emphasized. The two characters are remarkably similar in their situations as well, and in their perceivable kindness toward others. Madame M. is perhaps more concentrated and therefore perhaps less subtle, and she is more explicitly linked with the image of the Madonna than Aleksandra Mikhailovna was. With this overt tie Madame M. becomes a reference point to consult when examining similar characters in Dostoevsky's later works. Specifically, Madame M. (like Aleksandra Mikhailovna before her) is a faint, early ancestor of the later Sophian characters, such as Sonya Marmeladova and Sonya Dolgorukaya-Versilova (of *Podrostok*). The features of her character as well as the features of her face provide the link between these women. The suffering which they en-

⁵⁴ PSS, 2, 1972, p. 273.

ture is plainly legible on their faces, although their suffering differs. This idea of *visible* pain is often found in Dostoevsky's women. As mentioned earlier, it echoes even in *Idiot*, in a character as divergent as Nastas'ya Filippovna; it is the suffering draped across the striking loveliness of her features which irrevocably draws Prince Myshkin, rather than the innocent and unsullied Aglaya. The pain Raskol'nikov sees on Sonya's face reminds him of the meekness of his deceased fiancée and is part of what brings him close to her. Versilov meditates aloud about the meekness and submission to pain he sees in his "wife" Sonya, and again, that pain ties him to her, despite his attraction to other women. Resonating throughout his career,⁵⁵ Dostoevsky's deep esteem for the suffering, loving women is most explicitly manifested in *Malen'kii geroi*.

It should be evident, then, that the early works of Dostoevsky are integrally related to his later works, and that certain ideas exist which link the pre-Siberian creations with the post-exile works, that the two periods are not mutually exclusive, artistically speaking. Some of the best sources for evidence of this unity are Dostoevsky's female characters, who obviously share a sisterhood reaching beyond time brackets. Rather than presenting a schizophrenic division, Dostoevsky's pre- and post-Siberian writing present the unity of the artist's vision, altering only in the usual maturation process which the passage of years entail.

⁵⁵ The discussion of Dostoevsky's ideas of feminine beauty, in both the specifically physical aspect and the more universal, thematic qualities, follows this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

Three unifying archetypes: beauty, sexuality, pride

As the foregoing chapter began to demonstrate, even in his earliest creative years Dostoevsky already had a few, perhaps unconscious notions about the nature of women, which he expressed in his fictional creations. As early as his pre-Siberian works an identifiably thematic quality appears which, although unifying the whole of his oeuvre, does not constitute a cement categorization by which to distinguish the heroines of Dostoevsky's creation. These themes simply link the female characters to one another and reveal some of Dostoevsky's ideas about women. An examination of this unity at once requires and supplies a deep understanding of these figures. To avoid the typecasting which is so popular now, the idea of the *archetype* is particularly useful. This concept is a perceptive arrangement which can help to distinguish various trends or themes visible in the female characters Dostoevsky produced. According to *The Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary*, an archetype is "a recurrent symbol or motif in literature, art, etc."⁵⁶ This definition, rather than the one found in Jungian psychology, is to be employed here. The psychoanalytic term postulates a collective unconscious for all humankind; the archetypes under observation here are peculiar to Dostoevsky and, though many of their aspects may stem from a collective Russian cultural heritage, they are unique. This examination of Dostoevsky's female characters in part uses *archetype* as a convenient term with which to represent the themes recurring throughout his works.

In this context, then, several plainly visible themes or archetypes are

⁵⁶ *The Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary*, ed. Joyce M. Hawkins and Robert Allen. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, p. 69.

recognizable. This chapter will examine three of these: Dostoevsky's archetypal concepts of beauty, sexuality, and pride. The discussion of the first of these three will dominate the chapter, while the other two, for reasons of space, will receive only limited examination.

The *idea* of beauty, as well as its particular manifestation in woman, assumes a deeply archetypal form for Dostoevsky. Or, rather, *two* archetypal forms. As observed in the preliminary discussion of Dostoevsky's works of the 1845-49 period, two readily distinguishable variants of beauty exist for him. This section will discuss the spectrum of Dostoevsky's thoughts and expressions about beauty, both in the obvious, physically descriptive sense and in the spiritual significance he attached to beauty and its earthly expressions in woman.

Although *Bednye lyudi* contains little or no mention of Dostoevskian ideals of beauty, his next few works (those with feminine characters worth mentioning) evince the rudiments of Dostoevsky's expressions of his most cherished meditations on beauty. As discussed earlier, *Khozyaika*, *Netochka Nezvanova*, and *Malen'kii geroi* each exhibit to some extent their author's views of beauty just beginning to attain the forms of their expression — immature and incomplete but startlingly clear.

In each of these early works there are two marked motifs: beauty as a hypnotic power, and a beautiful face wearing an expression of suffering. At first, in *Khozyaika*, these two appear as one within the single heroine, Katerina. She is at once a brightly beautiful mesmerizer, transfixing Ordynov as though he were blinded by the sun, and yet sorrowful, her lovely face evincing the image of the suffering Mother of God, before whose icon she bows. This apparent fusion of the two kinds of beauty is a mark of Dostoevsky's immaturity, evidence that he had yet to formulate artistically

his thoughts on beauty. Through the creative process, probably unconsciously and without deliberation, Dostoevsky rapidly evolved a belief in the forms of the manifestation of beauty. From *Katerina*, mingling aspects of both the earthly, carnal guise of beauty and the more ethereal, dreamlike links to the suffering of the Mother of God, Dostoevsky moved to a more banal expression of womanly beauty in *Nasten'ka*. Although she is represented as an extremely pretty seventeen-year-old, there is in *Nasten'ka* and *Belye noch'i* none of the meditation on the meaning of beauty begun in *Katerina* and her story. It is Dostoevsky's apparent treatment of the "woman question,"⁵⁷ *Netochka Nezvanova*, that once again presents Dostoevsky's thoughts on the matter, now clearly assuming the rudiments of their later form. In *Netochka* Dostoevsky delineates basic models of the two kinds of beauty, now divided: there is the beauty that "transfixes" (Katya) and the beauty of suffering (Aleksandra Mikhailovna). Whereas earlier these two were intermingled (in *Katerina*), now they find embodiment in separate characters, part of and influencing two different personalities.

Chapter 1 in this work examined the young Princess Katya, with her wily tricks and hubris, as an early "infernal" beauty. *Netochka* narrates the effects this beauty has both on herself and on the entire household which Katya in effect controls. There is no evidence of any kind of pain on Katya's radiant little face as she flits through life subjecting others to her will and avoiding responsibility for any of her own actions. Although the reader witnesses her admission of love for *Netochka* and the watershed change in her personality which it apparently effects, the continuation of this change, the development in Katya of a responsible, caring fiber is never seen — obviously in part because the novel was never finished. But

⁵⁷ See pp. 35-6 in Chapter 1 for the full citation of Frank (pp. 349-53).

it is clear that, had the novel been completed, uninterrupted, Dostoevsky would have shown a grown-up Katya very similar to the child. Her wanton ways and prideful fits formed an integral part of her personality, making a complete change impossible without the essential destruction of her character. Katya's beauty is part and parcel of her personality, one affecting the other in an endless *uroboros*, indicating the future for other characters like her.

To balance Katya there is Aleksandra Mikhailovna, accepting a partial inheritance from the Landlady and wearing her suffering visibly on her attractive face. Netochka knows from their first meeting that her new guardian is unhappy, though she is always kind and giving. Netochka's new friend is not as developed in her own sort of beauty as Katya is in hers, but the contrast is immediately apparent. Aleksandra Mikhailovna suffers in silence, never burdening another by revealing her secret, though she does not hesitate to carry the painful baggage of others. The preliminary expressions here of this duality of beauty are simple, but they enabled Dostoevsky to delineate further his formulation of the beauty dichotomy in his next work, *Malen'kii geroi*.

Having left *Netochka Nezvanova* unfinished, perhaps Dostoevsky tied up what he had begun to express in his novel-fragment as he sat in prison working on *A Little Hero*, in terms of the manifestation of beauty and its effects on the personality. In *Malen'kii geroi* a much more identifiable bifurcation of beauty is visible. The blonde and Madame M. are cousins, an important if seemingly casual detail. Though different, they are relatives, linked by blood and by a deeper understanding which is in fact based on their divergent personalities.

As demonstrated earlier, the blonde is directly reminiscent of Princess Katya, both in appearance and nature. She is playful and naughty, selfish

and proud, enjoying the torment of others. But she can finally be won over by the little hero's self-sacrifice, albeit a prideful display; his heroism enables her to see the depth of his feeling for his beloved. In a similar way Katya relents in her torture of Netochka when she sees Netochka's active love.

Obviously these beautiful women (or girls) are not hard-hearted enough to ignore such valiant selflessness. But though they are affected and won over by such acts, they remain in essence unchanged, their basic persona not reaching any new identification with suffering. In the later novels this remains apparent; the first of the *infernal'nye zhenshchiny* are viewed basically as permanently selfish, however beautiful.

Madame M. advances the image of suffering beauty far beyond where Aleksandra Mikhailovna had left it. With this portrait, Dostoevsky explicitly states what would become the motto of this kind of beauty, later to achieve such sublime expression in characters like Sonya Marmeladova and Sof'ya Dolgorukaya-Versilova. Madame M., moving past the initial manifestations in Katerina and Aleksandra Mikhailovna, wears the same visible pain and sorrow that they do; but with this portrayal Dostoevsky elevated and defined the essence of this beauty in descriptive statements which at times seem out of place in the narrative. Although much of the story proceeds in a style consistent with that of a man looking back on his boyhood and telling his experiences, in one or two places the mature narrator overtly intrudes for commentary. Once, this occurs to denigrate the husband of Madame M., but before this the narrator makes his presence known to give forth on the nature of women like Madame M. This is the passage on the women who are "sisters of mercy." This lauding interlude presents these women as earthly representatives of Christ, bearing their own burdens silently while seeking to take on the pain of others, to alleviate their neigh-

bor's suffering. These merciful angels are distinctly identified as female, and indeed, throughout Dostoevsky's works, the true Christ-figures are women, with the exception of Alyosha and Father Zosima, although even they are not on the same plane as these silent *female* sufferers.

This beauty of suffering is directly and specifically joined with the beauty and the presumably inseparable suffering of the Madonna, especially in *Malen'kii geroi*.

The adolescent hero of "A Little Hero" ... notes something special in the beauty of Madame M. which sets her apart from the crowd of beautiful women. He speaks of her "quiet, gentle features, recalling the luminous faces of the Italian Madonnas... the irreproachable beauty of pure, regular lines"; this was a pale, thin face stamped with the "somber severity of an obscure, concealed anguish," through which, nonetheless, shined "a primordial, child-like, clear face — the image of still recent years of confidence and, perhaps, naive happiness."⁵⁸

It is well known that Dostoevsky adored the Sistine Madonna, prizing the print of it which hung above his sleeping couch in his study. His admiration for this work of genius resurfaces throughout his works: in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, Svidrigailov, although by no means the author's faithful spokesperson, "may be expressing Dostoevsky's view when he remarks that the Sistine Madonna has 'a fantastic face, the face of a sorrowful God-afflicted woman.'"⁵⁹ In *Besi* it may be to a portrait of the Madonna

⁵⁸ Robert Louis Jackson. *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966, p. 215.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 214.

that Stepan Verkhovenskiĭ refers when he asks his audience at the literary event which is more valuable, Raphael or petroleum. It seems that for Dostoevsky the chief virtue of any rendering of the Madonna was its portrayal of suffering: "Myshkin in *The Idiot* admires Aleksandra Ivanovna's 'beautiful' and 'sweet' face but discovers in it a 'secret sadness.' 'You have a kind of special touch in your face such as in Holbein's Madonna in Dresden.'"⁶⁰ Also in *Idiot* Myshkin describes Nastas'ya Filippovna's beauty in terms of the great, visible suffering on her face. Thus, from his earliest expressions of beauty, a reader may witness Dostoevsky's devotion to the idea that the most sublime beauty to be found in a woman stems not merely from her physical traits but rather from some mysterious suffering within her soul, which achieves expression on her features. Even his most physically beautiful women, like Nastas'ya Filippovna or Grushen'ka, have upon their countenances and their hearts a deep pain, which, it seems, renders them all the more irresistible. The grave, suffering, beautiful perfection of Nastas'ya Filippovna wins and retains the heart of Myshkin, despite the presence of the apparently equally but differently beautiful Aglaya, whose lovely features betray her painless existence. But the most pure representations of this beautiful, Madonna-like ideal are those who match her most exactly in nature, the Sophian characters, to be discussed later. Their visible suffering provides the unbreakable link between them and the men in their lives, no matter how the latter contest it.

Another important aspect concerning beauty in *Malen'kii geroi* should be mentioned. At the very beginning of the story, juxtaposed between the descriptions of the two heroines, there is what at first appears to be merely a transitional statement. Dostoevsky's narrator, in turning his attention from the blonde, uses the occasion to comment on the relationship between the

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 215.

two women. This paragraph is extremely valuable, especially in terms of the future ramifications of this story.

Но из всех подруг своих, она [the blonde] всех больше любила и отличала одну молодую даму, свою дальнюю родственницу, которая теперь тоже была в нашем обществе. Между ними была какая-то нежная, утонченная связь, одна из тех связей, которые зарождаются иногда при встрече двух характеров, часто совершенно противоположных друг другу, но из которых один и строже, и глубже, и чище другого, тогда как другой, с высоким смирением и с благородным чувством самооценки, любовно подчиняется ему, почувствовав всё превосходство его над собою, и, как счастье, заключает в сердце своём его дружбу. Тогда-то начинается эта нежная и благородная утонченность в отношениях таких характеров: любовь и снисхождение до конца, с одной стороны, любовь и уважение — с другой, уважение, доходящее до какого-то страха, до боязни за себя в глазах того, кем так высоко дорожишь, и до ревнивого, жадного желания с каждым шагом в жизни всё ближе и ближе подходить к его сердцу.⁶¹

The relationship is characterized by a worshipful and jealous awe on the one hand and indulgent care on the other. It is significant that at this

⁶¹ PSS, 2, 1972, pp. 272-3.

early stage, as in *Netochka Nezvanova*, the relationship is still a positive one, especially when the two natures are so carefully separated. Netochka herself can be considered one of the suffering women. Later, however, the two do not coexist so peacefully, although the woman representing the Madonna-like beauty never actually enters the furor; the more secular beauty often becomes yet another cross for her to bear. This situation can be seen in *Podrostok*, wherein Katerina Nikolaevna's beauty and independent nature interfere with Versilov's love for the more spiritual Sof'ya.

From the first period of Dostoevsky's creative life there emerge two at times opposing and at times concordant visions of womanly beauty: the first a beauty wrought of suffering, a visible pain alloyed to beautiful features, symbolized by the masterpiece of the Sistine Madonna and the sorrowful expression she wears; the second a beauty of the earth, often embodied in a carnally attractive form, bearing a power to entrance its beholder. The former is found most purely in the later, spiritually perfected Sophian figures, the Sonyas, although traces exist within other, less pure characters. The latter beauty is often an integral part of the infernal personality, though which precedes the other is impossible to know. This beauty, while possessing the power to sway a man's thoughts, nevertheless ultimately loses when vying for a man's heart against a woman whose face shows her pain.

A complete study of Dostoevsky's aesthetic ideals of womanly beauty is outside the sphere of this limited work.⁶² However, a cursory look at his physical descriptions, where appropriate, is relevant at this stage.

Thus far in Dostoevsky's works of 1845-1849, there have been some very beautiful women, many of whose features reappear on the counte-

⁶² For an interesting partial treatment of this study see Jackson, *Quest for Form*, especially pp. 214-17.

nances of later heroines. From these early works enough of a sample can be taken to see that there is no single physical feature which Dostoevsky always particularly singles out for admiration (though he does have a few recurring favorites). There are blondes and brunettes, women with eyes as blue as the sea and women with eyes like glittering coals. Often he does not even mention specific details of a woman's appearance, just as he habitually omits conventional environmental description. For instance, the reader does not know the color of Madame M.'s eyes or of her hair. For Dostoevsky, it is much more important to state that she has "mild eyes" (тихие взгляды)⁶³ and a sad look despite her gentle smile.

Of particular importance, seemingly, is a woman's voice. At least, it is important when the woman is young and beautiful. For example, the voice of Mme. M is described with loving attention: "я...вслушался в каждую вибрацию густого, серебристого, но несколько заглушенного голоса...."⁶⁴ This will find a future echo in Grushen'ka, whose voice has a "какая-то особенная слащавая выделка,"⁶⁵ like her body, at least judging by the way she carries herself. Graceful, proud, or noiseless carriage is another noticeable feature shared by many of Dostoevsky's beautiful women. On the whole, Dostoevsky pays particular attention to the body politics of his characters, male or female, using movement as an expression of personality in a subtle and effective way. Proud women display their hubris on their faces and in their bearing, and meek women submissively efface themselves physically in regard to others.

A natural companion to the kinetics of a character is her figure. Here again the beauty dichotomy expresses itself. The Sophian, meek women

⁶³ PSS, 2, 1972, p. 274.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ PSS, 14, 1976, p. 136.

are usually thin and quiet, as expressed in *Malen'kii geroi*.

М-ме М* была высока ростом, гибка и стройна, но несколько тонка. Все движения её были как-то неровны, то медленны, плавны и даже как-то важны, то детски скоры, а вместе с тем и какое-то робкое смирение проглядывало в её жесте, что-то как будто трепещущее и незащищённое, но никого не просившее и не молившее о защите.⁶⁶

This will be found again later, in Sonya Marmeladova and Sof'ya Dolgorukaya-Versilova. The first time Raskol'nikov sees her, Sonya enters her family's room to find her father dying, moving “неслышно и робко”; she is “худенькая, но довольно хорошенькая блондинка, с замечательными голубыми глазами.”⁶⁷ Later, when Sonya first comes to visit him, he is immediately struck by her child-like appearance and manner, as well as her horrified embarrassment. She provokes in Raskol'nikov a deep pity; he feels as if “в нём что-то перевернулось.”⁶⁸

Между разговором Раскольников пристально её разглядывал. Это было худенькое, совсем худенькое и бледное личико, довольно неправильное, какое-то

⁶⁶ PSS, 2, 1972, p. 273.

⁶⁷ PSS, 6, 1973, p. 143.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 182.

востренькое, с востреньким маленьким носом и подбородком. Её даже нельзя было назвать и хорошенькою, но зато голубые глаза её были такие ясные, и, когда оживлялись они, выражение лица её становилось такое доброе и простодушное, что невольно привлекало к ней. В лице её, да и во всей её фигуре, была сверх того одна особенная характерная черта: несмотря на свои восемнадцать лет, она казалась почти ещё девочкой, гораздо моложе своих лет, совсем почти ребёнком, и это иногда даже смешно проявлялось в некоторых её движениях.⁶⁹

It is important here to note the comparison of Sonya with a child. Perhaps a cynical critic would remark on its apparent implications concerning Dostoevsky's much-maligned interest in children. But such an idea would have no relation to the truth. For Dostoevsky, children were the most holy beings on earth, and any link between Sonya and children could only be positive. There is no hint of anything sexual, especially when Dostoevsky himself points out how comical she seems; he takes trouble to show how absurd Sonya is in the guise of a prostitute, how out of place she is, as though it were completely inconceivable to insult such a child with carnal intentions. Indeed, this is his commentary on those who *do* insult child-women in such a way, especially one like Sonya. An example of Dostoevsky's reproof of such men is the scene in which Raskol'nikov chases "Svidrigailov" away from the drunken, defiled, nameless young prostitute.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 183.

Sonya's clear blue eyes do not mask anything from Raskol'nikov's gaze, and the pallor and thinness of her face mark her suffering. Many other Dostoevskian heroines are thin in the face, and pale as well. Even Nastas'ya Filippovna, who is "действительно необыкновенная," or, in Myshkin's exclaimed words, "удивительно хороша!"⁷⁰, is thin. Nastas'ya Filippovna's mingled role is marked here by her beauty, which is at once dazzling and suffering.

Это необыкновенное по своей красоте и ещё по чему-то лицо сильнее ещё поразило его теперь. Как будто необъятная гордость и презрение, почти ненависть, были в этом лице, и в то же самое время что-то доверчивое, что-то удивительно простодушное; эти два контраста возбуждали как будто даже какое-то сострадание при взгляде на эти черты. Эта ослепляющая красота была даже невыносима, красота бледного лица, чуть не впалых щёк и горевших глаз; странная красота!⁷¹

Nastas'ya Filippovna is *osleplyayushchaya* and, as Myshkin muses later, her face is full of *stradaniya*. Her special status, which has inspired an entire chapter devoted to her alone, will be discussed in Chapter 8.

As Robert Louis Jackson has noted, Dostoevsky's figural ideals of womanly beauty are distinctly Classical. "Of Grushenka, also, Dostoevsky writes significantly: 'Her body, perhaps, suggested the form of the Venus of

⁷⁰ PSS, 8, 1973, p. 30.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 68.

Milo.”⁷² Of course, much of Dostoevsky's aesthetic was formed according to the standards of his society and period, and it ought not to surprise a modern reader accustomed to anorexic models that he values “plumpness” in women, seeing thinness as a sign of weakness. Grushen'ka is one of the best remembered women in Dostoevsky's fiction, both by her fictional compatriots and by readers. As the woman who drove much of the plot of *Brat'ya Karamazovy*, inciting internecine violence, she obviously demands recognition. Her name alone is highly suggestive: “juicy little pear,” or some such approximation, which conjures up all sorts of erotically charged images. Grushen'ka is described as beautiful, but in a strange, reverse psychology Dostoevsky's narrator repeatedly tells the reader how ordinary she is, how quickly her beauty will fade; but almost as soon as the storyteller has done this, Grushen'ka gets the better of him and he begins to undermine his own assertions with his portrayal of her as very extraordinary indeed. The whole first description of her — the first time both Alyosha and the reader have seen this legendary woman — gives the impression of someone almost hypnotically beautiful, a sorceress. Indeed, she is called a beast and a creature, and her whole presentation closely resembles that of a cat. From her unsuspected hiding place she emerges, slinking into the room with a powerful quietude as though sneaking up on her prey (which, in fact, she is doing), waiting for her adversary to commit herself and reveal a weakness, the better to pounce mercilessly. Even her hair, her brows, her eyes, are suggestive of some feline subtlety, an insidiously affecting attraction. The manner in which she seats herself at her meeting with Katerina Ivanovna recalls a supple cat selecting the most comfortable chair in which to nap in the sun, slowly sidling up to it, circling before finally settling, making sure every limb is properly arranged, per-

⁷² Jackson, *Quest for Form*, p. 217.

haps preening a bit, smoothing silky fur. “Мягко опустилась она в кресло, мягко прошумев своим пышным чёрным шёлковым платьем и изнеженно кутая свою белую как кипень полную шею и широкие плечи в дорогую чёрную шерстяную шаль.”⁷³ Only sentences later, Alyosha is struck by something he cannot quite understand, the narrator claims. “Было и ещё что-то в ней, о чём он не мог или не сумел бы дать отчёт, но что, может быть, и ему сказалось бессознательно, именно опять-таки эта мягкость, нежность движений тела, эта кошачья неслышность этих движений.”⁷⁴ Presumably Alyosha's moral purity partially clouds his Karamazovian appreciation of this woman, who seems to entrance everyone, especially his family. The narrator himself appears to need a bit of this moral immunity. Perhaps with this need for distance in mind, immediately after allowing himself to indulge in a contemplation of Grushen'ka's fruits, the narrator feels it necessary to assume a more stoic stance, as though trying to convince himself and the reader that, well, she is not *that* beautiful. Even if she is, he insists, it will pass; she will wither and shrivel like an apple, turning ruddy and wrinkled, her youthful figure sagging, a fate he asserts is particularly foreseeable for a Russian woman. But for all his protestations, the narrator does not convince, especially when he himself sabotages the bystander's resistance to Grushen'ka's charms with such lasciviously descriptive lapses.

Also in this scene (“*Obe vmeste*”), a very interesting echo of the homoeroticism of *Netochka Nezvanova* can be heard. Katerina Ivanovna and Grushen'ka are playing at the same game Katya and Netochka indulged in

⁷³PSS, 14, 1976, p. 136.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 137.

as little girls. Katerina Ivanovna looks as though she's in love with Grushen'ka, calls her *obayatel'nitsa* and *vol'shebnitsa*, kissing her time and again, bringing a blush to the inexperienced young cheek of Alyosha. Even the detail of the swollen lips recurs, as Katerina Ivanovna says, "Вот я нижнюю губку вашу ещё раз поцелую. Она у вас точно припухла, так вот чтоб она ещё больше припухла, и ещё, ещё..."⁷⁵ Believing herself completely in control of the situation and of "the other woman," this impetuous fool cannot restrain herself from kissing every part of Grushen'ka she can. Alyosha is disturbed by her "rapturous" behavior, embarrassed by her zeal. But in this scene Dostoevsky turns the tables on the prideful young woman, changing from the days of Princess Katya. Whereas Katya and Netochka are mutually affectionate, Katerina Ivanovna is sadly mistaken in her risky gamble on Grushen'ka's misleading guise of good-natured complacency. She unilaterally lets loose her inhibitions because she is taken with Grushen'ka and with her own apparent success in manipulating this "sorceress." Her gamble is lost, and Grushen'ka leaves the table with all the winnings as well as the deck of cards, which she had brought along with her in the first place. The scene is one of the most powerfully dramatic, as well as psychologically illustrative, of the novel. Grushen'ka is no mere Netochka, Dostoevsky wants to show, and, although she is of a sufficiently mixed nature to enact her own and Mitya's salvation in the end, she cannot resist the opportunity to stick Katerina Ivanovna with her own pins. The scene is similar in attitude to the confrontation between Nastas'ya Filippovna and Aglaya Ivanovna, in the manifestations of hubris which inevitably cause the downfall of the proud character.

The beauty of Grushen'ka as transitory deserves attention. The narra-

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 138.

tor several times refers to Grushen'ka as a "Russian beauty," and it is precisely this quality, this Russianness, which seems to foretell its premature withering. He speaks of Grushen'ka thus: "Правда, хороша она была очень, очень даже,— русская красота, так многими до страсти любимая."⁷⁶ But soon after, a grim pronouncement is made, on the authority of "знатоки русской женской красоты," that this now youthful flower will not weather the years gracefully, the narrator enhancing his prediction with some rather macabre concrete details of exactly what will happen to which feature. Apparently this inescapable outcome is immediately legible on Grushen'ka's face despite its present unspoiled state, although most of the male characters in the novel either do not notice or are unperturbed by this knowledge. This observation concerning Russian beauty and how quickly it fades is an echo of a speech by Versilov in *Podrostok*, in which he tells his son the sad truth about "Russian women."

“Русские женщины дурнеют быстро, красота их только мелькнёт, и, право, это не от одних только этнографических особенностей типа, а и оттого ещё, что они умеют любить беззаветно. Русская женщина всё разом отдаёт, коль полюбит, — и мгновение, и судьбу, и настоящее, и будущее: экономничать не умеют, про запас не прячут, и красота их быстро уходит в того, кого любят. Эти впалые щёки — это тоже в меня ушедшая красота, в мою коротенькую потеху.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 136.

⁷⁷ PSS, 13, 1975, p. 370.

What at first would seem to be nothing more than a devaluation of the beauty of a maturing woman, Dostoevsky sees as somewhat tempered by Versilov's declaration of the inability of Russian women to hold back any of their love. Through this consuming lack of self-preservation, they sacrifice themselves wholly for the man they love, and apparently this self-sacrifice reaches even beyond the self-abnegation found so often in Dostoevsky's women. Not only do these women yield their fates to their loved ones, accompanying them to Siberia, living in abject poverty, enduring cruel mistreatment at times — much more: they physically *spend their beauty* on their lover. This emphasizes the recurring perception of womanly beauty as *commodity*. Obviously this is not a conscious decision on the woman's part, just as she does not ruminate over whether the course before her with her man is the right one for her; she simply *does*, in a selfless love that Dostoevsky particularly cherished. It is irrelevant here to discuss the ramifications of this submissiveness in the present clime of budding liberation. Though from a modern reader's perspective this view in essence means that woman and womanly beauty, like wine or gourmet feasts, were created for the pleasure and consumption of men, what is important is that Dostoevsky placed this self-effacing love among the most valuable human assets, the most Christlike. Indeed, his women characters display the most admirable behavior in a Christian sense,⁷⁶ as will be discussed later. Thus, although it is exploitative (which Versilov freely admits), a reader should bear in mind the value Dostoevsky placed on it, within his own context. As for any "ethnographical" generalization about "Russian women," this study hopes to avoid any such pronouncement.

⁷⁶ Herein I am always, as Frank Friedeberg Seeley has written, "using 'Christian' to mean 'as Dostoevsky conceives Christianity'" (p. 300, "Dostoevsky's Women," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 39, 1960-61, pp.291-312).

The sexuality of Dostoevsky's female characters ranges from the asexual, childlike Sophian women, through the virginal young society ladies epitomized by Katerina Ivanovna in *Brat'ya Karamazovy*, to the hypererotic, sensual beings like Grushen'ka or, at times, Nastas'ya Filippovna. The sexuality predominating in each of these feminine representations will be more fully discussed in specific relation to each grouping, but for now it seems necessary to examine a charge against Dostoevsky which is specifically linked to the sexuality of women. There is a common misconception regarding Dostoevsky and the sexual violation and exploitation of girls and young women; this charge is so debasing and ludicrous as nearly to preclude its mention herein, but as it stems partially from a misperception of Dostoevsky's female images, it warrants some remark.

Even in his own day, Dostoevsky was maligned by unfounded charges involving the molestation of young girls. The history of this allegation is well documented,⁷⁹ perhaps beginning with Strakhov's letter to Tolstoy. It is said that Dostoevsky was far too fixated with the exploitation of girls, as shown by the repeated presence of the young girl prostitute in his works, or the motif of a young girl violated by her father/guardian, or in anonymous, consciously evil rapes of girl-children such as those to which Svidrigailov and Stavrogin confess; this fixation, it is argued, could only be a manifest result of Dostoevsky's own indecent obsession. The all too bitter accusatory tone taken by Strakhov in alleging that Stavrogin's confession was in fact Dostoevsky's confession, a deed of which he supposedly boasted, is simply not credible. For anyone to consider that this man — who wrote so tenderly about children, who considered sin against children the one unforgivable violation of God's laws, for whom the undeniable existence of this evil constituted a problem of faith, as expressed by both Ivan *and* Alyosha

⁷⁹ See especially Terras, *The Young Dostoevsky*.

Karamazov — could commit such an atrocity shows only a sad lack of observation and a perhaps malicious motivation. Given as evidence against Dostoevsky is his own unparalleled psychological realism; it is asserted that he could write about such deeds so convincingly only if he himself had taken part in them. Other writers of the time period did not see fit to detail such unseemliness, so if in fact Dostoevsky was portraying a reality which disturbed him, was he alone, the only writer to feel the need to address such anathema? These questions are rhetorical. Dostoevsky's deep understanding of human psychology allowed him to write truthfully about many things which he himself would never actually do, just as his own social consciousness was not of the sort to be disturbed by depicting the less than attractive peripheries of humanity. As Edwin Muir has aptly stated: "Dostoevsky wrote of the unconscious as if it were conscious: that is in reality why his characters seem 'pathological' while they are only visualized more clearly than any other figures in imaginative literature."⁸⁰

One of the most often repeated words regarding Dostoevskian women is *gordost'* (гордость). From Princess Katya through Nastas'ya Filippovna to Katerina Ivanovna, Dostoevsky's *infernal'naya zhenshchina* always exhibits this pride. While the Russian word is not usually positive, implying an un-Christian hubris, it is not entirely pejorative, and often has a strong personal motivation.

As clearly evident in Princess Katya, this pride is often in part a response, a compensatory mechanism, by which the ego may maintain an illusion of superiority, especially when wounded. Katya's prideful behavior toward Netochka is in part a response to the change Netochka's presence has wrought throughout the household Katya once ruled so comfortably.

⁸⁰ See the back cover of the Signet Classic 1962 edition of *The Possessed* (trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew).

Katya's ego is not at all pleased by the new presence in her life, distracting the attention that she believes rightfully belongs to her. This conviction of her own centrality has nursed Katya from birth, it was the milk on which the entire family fed her. Now her accepted reality is altered, and not at her request; events are no longer exclusively hers to control. Katya's only choice, given her personality, is to respond as she does, pridefully, resenting the usurper of her hegemony. This challenge to her authority ventures even further: Netochka wants something more from her, something which involves a much deeper and vulnerable commitment and the relinquishing of total ego control — love. The act of surrendering oneself to the beloved is a dangerous act for an ego like Katya's, a nature which has never given, only taken. It is an adventure into unknown and frightening territory — a journey she may not want to undertake. Thus not only is this *gordost'* innate within the personality of the *infernal'naya zhenshchina*; it is elicited as a response to some external threat, i.e. love.

This is mirrored in the behavior of the later Katerina Ivanovna, in *Brat'ya Karamazovy*. Everything she does is tempered in her internal furnace of raging pride, and again, much of the action surrounding her is caused by retaliatory responses to attacks on her pride. When she first goes to Dmitrii for money, it is to save her father and thus herself from public shame; but in this act which seeks to avoid shame lie the seeds of a greater humiliation. Everything depends on how Dmitrii receives her: he could have acted in such a way as to provoke the minimum of compensatory pride in her, had he allowed her to save face in some way. Instead, he only compounds the fracture, widening the cracks in her suffering soul. Of course, given the magnificent fount of pride that is Katerina Ivanovna's character, Dmitrii probably could not have failed to step in a puddle of her self-image. As it happens, his decision not to extract some form of payment in

kind from her probably wounded her vanity almost as much as the humiliation of selling herself to pay her father's debt; no doubt she felt rejected, as though she were not attractive enough to entice Dmitrii into such a debauched exploitation of her position. He is astute enough to see that their betrothal reassures Katerina as to her value, (i.e., her attractiveness), and he also sees that what she loves is her own virtue, not him. Even while recognizing this, however, Dmitrii goes on to worsen the situation by expressing his own nature and indulging his uncontrollable passion for Grushen'ka. This wild abandon Katerina Ivanovna can see only as a personal insult, confirming the probable doubts she had already had concerning her own allure as a woman. Her pride forces her to compensate, to torture him as he tortures her, making him wear the weight of her shame around his neck like an amulet, a constant reminder of how he has wronged her. It suits her to play the role of the wronged young lady, her finest sensibilities trod upon by the callow brute she can't stop loving, thus eliciting from others admiration for her own steadfastness in the face of adversity.

In much the same way that Katerina Ivanovna manufactures her own humiliations, Nastas'ya Filippovna seeks fresh wounds to her ego, though for different reasons. Her response is generated not like Katya's; it is not the pride enraged by the challenge of love, or by the wounding of her self-image, but rather a pride pouring from the wound made by the violation of love, the maiming of trust and defilement of dignity which Totskii had perpetrated. The man she had thought of as a second father, whom she clearly once cared for and trusted, horribly shattered her youthful illusions, leaving her to feel the salty flood of conscience. The psychic tsunamis washed up on the shore of her mind the dead shells of her own virtuous self-image, her proud self-esteem. These dry, rotting remnants she carries with her as

totemic reminders of her shame, which she now seeks to enhance. By every day deepening her humiliation, she believes that she may perhaps punish Totskii, by completing the degradation he began in order to confront him with the spectacle of his own sinful monster. But it also comforts her pride to believe that she has an active role to play, even if it is in her own ignominy.

Proud women, then, manifest their pride differently from proud men. Raskol'nikov, partially out of pride, commits murder, as does Rogozhin. Pyotr Verkhovenski's pride leads him to the destruction of innocent lives, while Ivan Karamazov's intellectual hubris leads to his father's death and his brother's imprisonment. Pride, for Dostoevsky, is not a positive attribute, certainly; nevertheless it was usually a psychologically motivated response to an environment hostile to the ego which, for Dostoevsky, led to pain and destruction.

CHAPTER 3

Sophia as archetype

The first two chapters of this work mentioned the rudiments of one of Dostoevsky's most beloved feminine images, the Sophian archetype. Beginning mainly with *Netochka Nezvanova* and *Malen'kii geroi*, the early expressions of this womanly ideal of spiritual purity and gentleness underwent observation. Subsequently, the links were observed between this personality and one of Dostoevsky's ideals of beauty: the visible suffering of these meek souls, infusing their faces with a loveliness unparalleled by more conventional attractions. Firmly in place, this background empowers a close study of the continuation of this image in Dostoevsky's later, and greater, works.

These characters may be introduced partly by the name which so many of them share. Dostoevsky hardly ever named his characters haphazardly, and the frequent recurrence of the name "Sof'ya" would alone indicate the important emblematic nature of the appellation. *Sophia* is the Greek word, feminine in gender, for "wisdom."⁸¹ In some ancient, pre-Christian and Christian religions, she was the daughter of the original Mother goddess, Silence. Sophia in her turn created lesser male deities (like Jehovah) who later came into favor with the early patriarchal Christian Church fathers. Sophia was spiritual feminine wisdom, dispelling ignorance and giving life.⁸² Later, after the Catholic Church fathers had successfully eradicated such variety of belief in favor of their own versions, the dedication to

⁸¹ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. New York: Penguin Books, 1979, p.75.

⁸² See Pagels for a discussion of early Christian sects.

Sophia lingered, forcing the Church to co-opt and re-invent this powerful feminine figure in a way unthreatening to their narrow hegemony: many features they attributed to Mary, the Mother of Christ, and, rather uncreatively, they contrived a Saint Sophia, "a minor 'virgin martyr'... whose phony legend lacked even a date."⁸³ Sophia, in her more gnostic aspects, was particularly revered by Eastern Christianity.

Even when the name may not be present, the personal and spiritual aspects most intrinsic in this portrait remain. From Aleksandra Mikhailovna and Madame M. of the early works, Dostoevsky learned lessons which would slowly be developed into the great, officially named Sophian characters of his great works. To a degree the theme is visible in Natasha of *Selo Stepanchikovo i ego obitateli*, in her quiet submission to fate and her supportive, protective love of the Colonel, although neither she nor her story is developed or serious enough to supply more than a crude, composite drawing. In 1864, with the publication of *Zapiski iz podpol'ya*, the character emerges more sharply, in the figure of Liza.

Liza is the young prostitute humiliated by the Underground Man out of solipsistic spite. Her origins are nebulous, but her apparently indestructible stores of meekness, kindness, forgiveness are obvious. Her hopeful, naive trustfulness in the Underground Man allows him to abuse her trust, but even when he has insulted her cruelly, Liza is not bitter. Liza's situation, her occupation, and her acquiescence to suffering imposed from without are all to reverberate later in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*; but, on the whole, Liza is too marginal a character, too briefly featured, and too deliberately sentimentalized to be a fully realized Sophian. It is only in Sonya Marmeladova that the image attains its ultimate clarity, to be later only approached, never fully regained. The next few Sophian characters (in

⁸³ Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983, p. 952.

Besy, Podrostok, and Brat'ya Karamazovy) can be seen as attempts to age the essential elements of Sof'ya Semyonovna.

SONYA

Even before Sof'ya Semyonovna Marmeladova physically appears to Raskol'nikov he is seized by her image and she lingers in his thoughts. He first hears word of her beautiful character in conversation with her father, the chronic drunkard and buffoon, Semyon Zakharovich Marmeladov. Raskol'nikov learns of her deeds through this man as they sit in a tavern, surrounded by the putrid residue of Petersburg society. Her image floats before him as an icon, despite his "fall" from God and truth; her father relates the entire story of Sonya's first evening of prostitution, the thirty roubles she brought to her step-mother, how she was forced to take up other lodgings because of her "yellow pass," and finally the unconditional pardon of her father as he comes to beg for her last kopecks for a drink. Raskol'nikov listens to all this and is not completely unaffected by it, because he takes the inebriated orator home. Upon seeing the squalor in which the Marmeladovs dwell, he leaves behind what little money he himself has. Soon, however, the split opens up within him, and he bitterly derides the generous, human impulses which had just motivated him. He chides himself and, to do so, he denigrates Sonya; he laughs callously at her self-sacrifice, as though trying to convince himself how futile and amusing it all is, this altruism and desolation. To help distance himself from the feelings he has just experienced, he must distance himself from Sonya, as the embodiment of those feelings of sacrificial self-denial. He is harsh to

her as he talks to himself, leaving the house of Marmeladov; this very cruelty is so unjustified as to ring false, as he himself recognizes almost immediately.

As discussed earlier, there was a vast trove to which Dostoevsky gained access with his choice of the name "Sof'ya" for the heroine of *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*.

... [Sonia's] is the Christian love which deserves to be called 'wisdom,' in Greek: *sophia* [...] ... she embodies that faith from which Raskol'nikov is 'cut off.' [...] To Raskol'nikov she propounds the Christian Truth of the Gospels, with special regard to Christ's raising of Lazarus from the dead. In so doing she 'speaks prophecy' for Raskol'nikov's own resurrection from spiritual death, so that in her patronymic of 'Semyonovna'... we see an allusion to Simeon in the temple at Jerusalem prophesying over the boy Jesus as future Savior (Luke 2:25-35). It may be that Dostoevski gave her the patronymic first and named her father Semyon for *her*" ⁸⁴

Sonya is doubtlessly the Christ figure of the novel. That Dostoevsky intended her to represent the Savior of the Christian faith in his novel is well-substantiated. For Sonya bears within her the image and the suffering of Jesus Christ, the love he had for all humanity, the redeeming power of this love, and his willingness to suffer for the sins of all.

The sacramental significance, and thus the justification, of suffer-

⁸⁴ Passage, *Character Names*, p.60.

ing resides in the fact that the victim, without knowing that he does so, suffers not only for himself, but also for others; that he not only himself experiences salvation through suffering, but also, whether he knows it or not, is saving others. [...] She who brings salvation to the murderer, the teacher of repentance, the meek-hearted Sonia, who becomes a prostitute in order to save her parents, brothers and sisters from starvation, is also a victim for the sins of others. [...] ... Sonia is at the same time herself a great sinner; for, albeit to save others, she deliberately and overweeningly takes upon herself not only suffering, but also the curse of another's deed, by making it her own. In the sinner who expiates his sin by suffering, there is an antinomy of curse and salvation⁸⁵

Sonya is a true martyr, and seldom does she complain; she is never seen in doubt about her God, or questioning her situation. She is the embodiment of Christian acceptance, of Christ-like humility, meekness, gentleness. Rather as Ivan Karamazov's Christ silently kisses the Grand Inquisitor, so does Sonya humbly bow down to her fate, unhesitatingly yielding her own well-being for the sake of others. It is Sonya who unendingly represents what Dostoevsky would later explicitly formulate in the words of Father Zosima: active, unconditional love. Rather as Zosima bows down to the potential murderer Dmitrii, so does Sonya bow before the actual murderer Raskol'nikov. By her unquestioning love she resuscitates him, she breathes life into his spirit, which he had all but annihilated when he killed the pawn-broker and Lizaveta. At Raskol'nikov's request, Sonya reads to him the biblical passage about Christ's revivification of Lazarus. As Christ called Lazarus back from physical death, so does Sonya work to resurrect Raskol'nikov from his spiritual decay, his moral en-

⁸⁵ Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life*, pp. 81-2.

tombment. She is not afraid of the stench of the putrefaction of his soul; she faces even his confession of murder without adjudication, so great is her faith. Fearlessly she accepts him and loves him by accepting his deed as her own, by taking upon herself his guilt as though she herself had swung the axe. She is a genuine Christ figure, much more so than Myshkin could ever be. She suffers, she loves: all she does, she does actively, with a Christian love, not a detached, idealized pity. A dear figure of Christ's earthly love, Sonya manifests his sacrifice of suffering and death for the reality of humankind's sins. Christ died, says Christian myth, that we might be forgiven our sins and forgive those of others; Sonya involvedly engenders this forgiving warmth, as she takes on herself the sins of others, with genuine concern for the other rather than reproach. She seeks Raskol'nikov's confession not for the sake of any banal legal stipulations, but rather for the sake of humanity, for the sake of Raskol'nikov's own split soul, because she instinctively knows that until he confesses his sin against the world and asks forgiveness, he will not forgive himself and will not rejoin the circle of the human family, preferring to fester in his coffin of hubris, pain and guilt. Unfettered by false notions of the spirit, of philosophical justifications for crime, of the irrevocably splitting forces of detachment from the living God, Sonya sees Raskol'nikov's need and its fight for recognition: the need for forgiveness, for suffering for his crime, and for the love that alone can help to coax him back into the human family. She struggles to set him free from his self-deluding philosophical ramblings just as relentlessly as he struggles to hold on to them. She wants to free him from himself, to heal his inner duality. To do this, she takes on herself the responsibility for his crime — indeed, she can do naught else. She is human, therefore she shares in the sins of all humanity. His sins are in fact hers, and she must suffer with him, especially because her presence is es-

sential for his regeneration and reintegration into the flawed but warm human circle. Frank Friedeberg Seeley expresses this concisely.

Christian love, as Dostoevsky conceives it and represents it in the person of a Sonya... comprises three main elements: first, the immediacy and humility of its approach to others, which implies the absence of egoism...; secondly, a 'primary intelligence'... or insight, ... an immediate intuition of the latent meanings of the words and acts of other people; and thirdly compassion in its full etymological sense. ... Sonya suffer[s] with the suffering which [she] become[s] aware of, and apprehend[s] the negative qualities of [her] fellows not as evil but as reactions to suffering..., and hence [she] react[s] not with indignation, but by identifying [her-self] with the suffering of that heart.⁸⁶

This is the cardinal beauty of Sonya, the beauty of which so many critics write with copious poetry.⁸⁷

While few readers of *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* deny the spiritual aspects of Sonya Marmeladova, her intelligence has been seemingly overlooked. Some critics fail to recognize the irrepressible signs of intelligence in Dostoevsky's portrait. Obviously, she is not as educated as the esteemed Rodion Romanovich; in fact, before she is introduced personally, her father tells of her limited book-learning, in the scene in the tavern. But the question left for the reader to ask is whether this lack of erudition is to

⁸⁶ p. 309, Frank Friedeberg Seeley, "Dostoevsky's Women," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 39, 1960-61, pp. 291-312.

⁸⁷ See especially Romano Guardini, *Religiöse Gestalten in Dostojewskijs Werk* (Leipzig: Jakob Hegner, 1939); Ivanov (see above); and L.A. Zander, *Dostoevsky* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1948, trans. Natalie Duddington).

be deplored as such, whether Raskol'nikov's knowledge has helped to make him a better person. Without doubt, this is not to say that education is inherently corruptive and evil; I am hardly in a position to assert such an opinion. But from Dostoevsky's view, it should not be taken as a sign of stupidity that Sonya has had little formal education. The existence of innate intelligence and the experience of formal education do not always coincide, especially in Dostoevsky's time. It was common for a woman to have had only a smattering of book-learning, and indeed unusual for her to have any knowledge beyond reading and writing and the so-called acceptably feminine subjects which would not over-tax the female mind, presumed by most to be weak and easily damaged by undue exertion. But apart from that, Sonya's family was not able to send their daughter to a proper school for young ladies; indeed, clearly, Sonya's family is in such need that she herself must be sacrificed. The fact that she yields herself meekly for the sake of her loved ones should likewise not be presumed to represent a bovine intellect. For Dostoevsky this act of self-abnegation was the zenith of human love in this novel, and certainly not something for which to fault Sonya. Sonya is gifted with an intelligence that cuts through rhetoric, that sees deeply into people and their motives, knowing what they themselves might not even recognize. Hers is an intuitive intelligence which cannot be gained from libraries, which can only be enriched by experience. Similarly, Dostoevsky would not have wanted her blind and unquestioning faith in her God to be seen as betise. For him, such belief spanned beyond human capacity for knowing in a concrete, rational way, and can only be submitted to, as Sonya teaches.

Sonya considers herself "a great, great sinner." By this she does not mean, however, that her prostitution is sinful; on the contrary, as has been argued elsewhere, Sonya went essentially unsullied by her employment.

Rather, for Sonya, her sins comprise selfishness and self-preservation.

Yet when Sonya tells him that she is a “great, great sinner” (246:48), this is more than the confession of a Magdalene, ashamed of what she does. Sonya is also ashamed of what she does not do. The reason she “hasn’t been saving for a rainy day” (246:1) is that she doesn’t walk the streets every day: “You don’t make something every day?”, Raskolnikov probes as mercilessly as Porphyry. And Sonya confesses that she doesn’t “with painful effort” (246:9-12). Sonya’s days off are her crimes of self-perpetuation. They are the prudent pauses by which she forestalls her own mortification. [...] Yet her time off is also the duration of Sonya’s bad conscience, for it puts the lives of her loved ones in jeopardy. Therefore, Sonya experiences her own self-perpetuation as a worse evil than prostitution.⁸⁸

For Sonya, selfishness is the greatest evil. Painfully cognizant of the needs of her family, Sonya knows instinctively that her self-preservation is a moral evil, and she punishes herself severely for this trespass. This very model of self-sacrifice presents Raskol’nikov with the truth of his own ordinary sinfulness. “[H]e universalizes Sonya into a symbol of unjust suffering which will last until the end of human history: ‘Sonyechka, Sonyechka Marmeladova, the eternal Sonyechka, for as long as the world turns!’ (38:15).”⁸⁹ By witnessing Sonya’s meek submission to the laws of an incomprehensible and, to Raskol’nikov (as to Ivan Karamazov), unjust fate or God, Raskol’nikov begins slowly to grasp the notion that he has sinned

⁸⁸ Leslie A. Johnson, *The Experience of Time in “Crime and Punishment.”* Columbus: Slavica Publishers, Inc., 1984, p. 116.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.38.

against the world, that he owes suffering for his deed, that everyone is indeed guilty before humanity, as Zosima would later teach. This relational morality is the vortex of Sonya's spirit; around this pivot turn her world-view and her unquestioning acceptance of suffering. It is this force of knowing which sends Sonya to Siberia with Raskol'nikov to share his punishment, because not only does she herself share the guilt of his crime (as do we all, Dostoevsky would assert), but she knows that his spiritual regeneration cannot even begin if she is not by his side. His dependence on her is natural, neither self-abasing nor other-aggrandizing; his need for her is like his need for air, for food, for water. For Raskol'nikov, the as yet unrepentant sinner against humanity, the fallen son cut off from the love of others, Sonya is the food of the spirit. As Christ's body and blood allegedly becomes transubstantiated in the banal bread and wine of the Roman Catholic Eucharist, so did Sonya acquire a metaphysical ontology separate from but directly related to her earthly reality. For Raskol'nikov to accept the divine in her, he had first to accept the human, the sinful, the weak: all the things he had formerly and vaingloriously striven to rend from his own nature by the murder. Sonya's earthly embodiment is the conduit of the spiritual, and for Raskol'nikov she becomes the living Word of God in her humility and meekness. Without this presence — at once the presence of the divine and the human — Raskol'nikov would forever wallow in ego-riven solipsism in the fault lines of his cracked, dualistic soul.

But just as she represents the "Living God," Sonya represents humankind. Her humanity is undeniable: every day of her life is spent in relatedness, in the living of the Word, amongst the human ties and threads which she does not seek to sever or disentangle, even when she herself is at risk. Sonya is no mere cipher of Dostoevsky's Word incarnate; no unmitigated saint whose actions know no split or soil; no isolated nun, shut up in

a convent to contemplate her deity piously while the world groans. She lives the Word of God, she lives the life of Christ, she stumbles through life bearing her cross, murmuring no more than did her savior, making her mistakes, accepting her suffering as just and fair. Within herself she carries both the potential for schism and the potential for salvation; at any time she could choose the first, and, indeed, she occasionally does, as demonstrated earlier, when she allows herself respite from her self-sale, or when she indulges in a selfish whim. But it is her innate bond to Christ and her own inner wisdom that every time bring her back from the shadowy recesses of her own dualism, even though sometimes the return is itself a further step into what necessarily causes the fissure: her prostitution. Sonya not only sacrifices herself in the physical sense, but this sacrifice leads inevitably to a psychic sacrifice, the yielding of her own identity, her own freedom, her own dignity as a woman. She sells her virginity, which in her time was a commodity, absolutely prerequisite if she ever hoped to marry "in to decent society." But more than this, she sells her body, the repository of her soul, and no amount of schizophrenic absentia can separate from her heart the experience of paid sex, of lying down with a man she does not love, like, or even know, the painful loss of dignity involved as she becomes the thing for which the man has paid, in essence becoming sex itself in the moment of the transaction. The times of living as a commodity effect a flow of the tears which eventually wear through her soul, leaving behind them echoing chasms in the rock of her self. But without these moments of loss of self, perhaps Sonya would not be able so deeply to understand the sins and weaknesses of others, of Raskol'nikov. Probably she always had the capacity within her (cf. her step-mother), otherwise these moments of soul-rupture would have left behind the bitter brine of hatred rather than the forgiving salve of love. Without these moments, hovering on the edge of her

self, Sonya would not have been able to accept the murderer Raskol'nikov as a man, as a human being, worthy of love and forgiveness. It is this fundamental humanity clinging to the precipice of her soul that makes Sonya a true, genuine person, a woman, not a cardboard "Potemkin" character conveniently speaking the lines she is fed like an obedient literary slave. Likewise, it is her prostitution which in part links her so inextricably with humanity; therefore, her prostitution is not itself merely an episemon, as has been argued by some critics. Certainly Dostoevsky did not depict her directly engaged in carnal acts, but the question must be asked: is that truly necessary to prove that Sonya is a prostitute? It is true, as Zander quotes, that "...Dostoevsky himself says that 'all that infamy had only touched her mechanically, not one drop of real depravity had penetrated to her heart.'"⁹⁰ But Zander goes on to write: "Indeed, one may go further and say that the whole situation is a literary device used to emphasize the magnitude of her sacrifice: there is not a single word in the novel referring to any facts, feelings or experiences testifying to her being a 'harlot'. Such description of her is merely a dark background serving to bring out more clearly her gentle and tender profile."⁹¹ No, one may not go further. While it is true that her prostitution had not left her depraved, as Dostoevsky himself said, it is unforgivable to pass over it as though it were merely plot aid. Sonya's prostitution had not left her depraved because she did it to save the lives of her family, not from selfish motives; indeed, this stimulus could hardly render her unsympathetic! Her incentives, so deeply pure, ensured that the prostitution did not sully her. Of course she is not depraved; she is spiritual, ever-mindful of her sins. The passages in which she is directly portrayed in her working clothes are powerful and do not fail to move either Raskol'nikov (though he immediately covers his emotions with scorn) or

⁹⁰ L.A. Zander, *Dostoevsky*, p.78.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

the reader. In the funeral scene the diction painstakingly describes Sonya in her working garb, a cheap, garish costume, so out of place, and how ashamed Sonya feels, dressed in such a way. The fact that Sonya is a prostitute does not merely provide a commodious “dark background” against which Sonya can shine all the more; rather, it provides Sonya’s character with a depth and understanding of sin and pain, one that hardly leaves her unscathed. She becomes the more beautiful, the more precious, because she is all the more human — that much closer to the reader, and to Raskol’nikov.

The fact that Sonya was a prostitute also allowed Dostoevsky to link her to the Biblical tradition of Mary Magdalene; again, not as a simple plot machination, but to point out once more her proximity to Christ and to the holy tradition of forgiveness and love.

Mary Magdalene is commonly assumed to be the woman who showed “great love” in Luke 7: 37-50. Although this is apparently unsubstantiated, it is important that most people identify Mary of Magdala as the sinful woman who washed Christ’s feet with her tears. It may also be assumed that Dostoevsky shared this associative belief, and believed he had tapped into the passage about the sinful woman as well as the specific mentions in the Gospels about Mary Magdalene. The description of the “sinful woman” in Luke 7 comes just before the first mention of a woman named Mary Magdalene. “Soon afterwards [Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out....”⁹² The proximity of the two passages is the probable origin

⁹² *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, Luke 8:1-2, p.68.

of the apparently mistaken notion that the "sinful woman" was also Mary of Magdala. Regardless of the veracity, it is obviously an assumption logically made. It may^{be} assumed that Dostoevsky likewise linked the two women. Later mention is made of Mary Magdalene as the first person to see Jesus reappear after his crucifixion and burial. This is vital, especially when one considers the relation between this and the story of Lazarus.

The links between Mary Magdalene and the fallen women who later become saved or the saintly whores, especially from the nineteenth century, have been well-studied and well-documented. As Olga Matich states: "Mary Magdalene is the archetypal saintly prostitute."⁹³ Despite her sinful past, she is forgiven by Christ and is accepted into his entourage. Sonya, despite her prostitution (and, in some ways, mainly by virtue of her prostitution), is a saintly figure overtly linked to Christ, and she exhibits Christ-like compassion and willingness to suffer for others. In this way Sonya becomes a nineteenth-century sister of Mary Magdalene. Not shameless in her life as a harlot, Sonya never forgets her God or her faith, and actually becomes the more acceptant of her defilement because of her religious beliefs. She takes to heart Christ's teaching to "turn the other cheek," and she holds no bitterness against the step-family for which she was forfeited. She helps Raskol'nikov along his slow, lancinating return to humanity. Rather as Mary Magdalene was the first to see the resurrected Christ, so is Sonya, in Siberia, the first to be greeted by the signs of Raskol'nikov's evanescent reanimation.

As a suddenly necessary afterthought, Raskol'nikov is forced to kill the *yurodivaya* Lizaveta, who enters the murder scene before Raskol'nikov can escape. He himself almost forgets this second murder, and later, in a

⁹³p.325, Olga Matich, "A Typology of Fallen Women in Nineteenth Century Russian Literature," *American Contributions to the Ninth International Congress of Slavists, Vol.II: Literature, Poetics, History*, ed. Paul Debreczeny. Columbus: Slavica Publishers, Inc., 1983, pp. 325-43.

reverie, he says to himself, “«Бедная Лизавета! Зачем она тут подвернулась!... Странно, однако ж, почему я об ней почти и не думаю, точно и не убивал?... Лизавета! Соня! Бедные, кроткие, с глазами кроткими... Милые!... Зачем они не плачут? Зачем они не стонут?... Они всё отдают... глядят кротко и тихо... Соня, Соня! Тихая Соня!...»”⁹⁴ Raskol'nikov himself compaginates Sonya and Lizaveta early on in the novel, before his confession to Sonya. The two women turn out to have been friends who gathered together to talk and to read the Bible which Lizaveta herself had brought to Sonya. Raskol'nikov learns this as he asks Sonya to read to him the story of Lazarus; he reacts violently, almost forcing Sonya to read from the Bible which was Lizaveta's. Later, after he has confessed to Sonya, she asks him:

—Есть на тебе крест?— вдруг неожиданно спросила [Соня], точно вдруг вспомнила.

Он сначала не понял вопроса.

—Нет, ведь нет? На, возьми вот этот, кипарисный. У меня другой остался, медный, Лизаветин. Мы с Лизаветой крестами поменялись, она мне свой крест, а я ей свой образок дала. Я теперь Лизаветин стану носить, а этот тебе. Возьми... ведь мой! Ведь мой! — упрашивала она. —Вместе ведь страдать пойдём, вместе и крест понесём!...⁹⁵

⁹⁴ PSS, 6, 1973, p. 212.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 324.

This exchange of crosses, even though it is actually postponed, concretely emphasizes the tight bond between Lizaveta and Sonya and Raskol'nikov. Now he is inextricably forced to concede the interrelatedness of humankind, the relation between himself and his victim, between his victim and his personal, earthly savior. Sonya does not force the cross on him; rather, she admits that it is too soon for him to take the cross from her. She knows intuitively that to thrust it upon him too early would probably drive him away from her — and thus from reconciliation with himself and the world — perhaps irretrievably. With the crosses, he must also acknowledge his kinship to the dead woman Lizaveta, because Sonya, in her mention of Lizaveta in daily reality and interpersonal relation, puts before Raskol'nikov undeniable reminders of the fact which, as he himself had admitted, he had hitherto forgotten: that he has killed Lizaveta, a person who had not wronged him, a woman whose innocence defied even his own philosophical justifications of murder, a woman who lived a relational life among others. This stark fact he had previously obscured in his memory, preferring to consider as a victim only the pawnbroker herself, the original object of his crime and of his supposed extraordinariness. But now he must look upon the truth: Lizaveta was an undeserved victim of his own pride, his own delusions. Much more, now she serves as an icon of his weakness, his mistake, his lack of planning and composure, since her murder resulted from his own subconsciously deliberate delays. As such, he must forget her; she is an unremitting confrontation with his own "ordinariness." Subconsciously, Sonya cannot allow this "forgetting" to continue. She knows that he must see his victims as people in order to see his deed as wrong. He must see his deed as wrong before he can ask forgiveness, and he must ask forgiveness before he can be forgiven. Sonya, in tiny, almost imperceptible ways, edges him toward that realization, and slowly he

begins to accept the truth. It must start with his connecting Sonya herself with Lizaveta, which he does early on. But in the end, he must finally concatenate *himself* with Lizaveta, for without this bond he cannot become truly repentant. Sonya undemonstrably draws him along this lane of awareness, knowing that he must eventually reach its end, knowing that without her he could not even find its entrance.

In *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* there are myriad female characters, many more than are usually found in Dostoevsky's works. Raskol'nikov has a mother and sister, but his father goes virtually unmentioned. Both of the people he kills are women. His redeemer is female. This abundance of the female, directly associated with Raskol'nikov, creates a very feminine world. The important agents of his discontent are women. His mother loves him in an overly-maternal way, more as an overpowering, devouring mother who seeks to control than as a gently nurturing, warm mother. She herself endures hardship for her son's sake, but she never lets him forget that fact. Indeed, anything she does "for his sake" actually becomes self-aggrandizement, because she lives through her son. His sister indirectly causes him pangs of conscience, because his mother is actively subverting the future of her daughter in favor of her son.

He finds in Alyona Ivanovna, the pawnbroker, a convenient surrogate for the life-sucking pull he feels his mother exerting upon him, and he targets the old woman in part because he cannot truly target his mother.⁹⁶ He

⁹⁶ For fuller discussions of this idea, see especially Roger B. Anderson, *Dostoevsky: Myths of Duality* (Gainesville: The University of Florida Press, 1986); M. Kanzer, "Dostoevsky's Matricidal Impulses," (*Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. 35, 1948, pp. 115-25); David Kiremidjian, "Crime and Punishment: Matricide and the Woman Question," (*American Imago*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 1976, pp. 403-33); and Edward Wasiolek, "Raskol'nikov's Motives: Love and Murder," (*American Imago*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 1974, pp. 252-69). While Dostoevsky explored both father-son rivalries and parricide (most fully in *Brat'ya Karamazovy*), he never ventured any further into an examination of matricide than the situation considered here.

sees in her what he sees in his own mother: the need to feed on the strength of youth.

Raskol'nikov's murder of the pawnbroker severs him from the maternal social world he had known. His choice of victim is particularly interesting in this regard. She is an older woman to whom he is indebted, as he is to his mother and her surrogates, and, in expecting payment from him, she is supported by social law. Rodion, of course, cannot pay back what he owes to the women he depends on. [...] As Edward Wasiolek convincingly argues, Raskol'nikov seizes on the pawnbroker as the embodiment of a chthonic, maternal element that has "held his spirit as a pledge." Murder (the breaking of social law) and elimination of a looming maternal image fuse in a single act that makes concrete and irreversible his unconscious demand for release from his origins.⁹⁷

Raskol'nikov's philosophical rationalization enables him "safely" to direct his anti-maternal feelings at a substitute, without actually having intellectually to acknowledge his resentment at his mother's qualified, conditional love. Thus he strikes the pawnbroker down with an anger that is not fully accounted for by his desire to prove his extraordinariness.

After his hideous and shameful crimes, Raskol'nikov considers suicide; he stands on a bridge and contemplates throwing himself into the water. Water is an archetypal symbol for the unconscious, the feminine. It is significant that he at once desires death and re-communion with the feminine element from which he has cut himself off; he senses he has wronged the feminine and that he must return to her in some form to right things. Water

⁹⁷ Roger B. Anderson, *Dostoevsky: Myths of Duality*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1986, p. 53.

is unconsciousness, which he desires to free him from the awareness of his deed; water is womb-like, signifying a sort of re-birth, if even through death, and he must be re-born into the world because he has killed the self which lived in that world; water is numinous and eternal, it is the Earth herself, which he has sullied, and which he now needs to cleanse himself of the blood he has spilled. Sonya, as tied to Mother Earth as she is tied to Jesus Christ, is the living incarnation of the Earth Raskol'nikov has cut himself off from, the Earth which he has stained with his crime.

The mythical element in the fundamental idea presented by *Crime and Punishment* ... can ... be much better expressed in the technical language of ancient tragedy than by the concepts of modern ethics: the turbulent revolt of human arrogance and insolence (*hybris*) against the primitively-sacred decrees of Mother Earth; the preordained insanity of the evil-doer; the wrath of the Earth over the blood that has been shed; the ritual purification of the murderer — who is hunted by the Erinyes of spiritual anxiety, but is not yet repentant in the Christian sense — by the kissing of the Earth in the presence of the people assembled to try him; and the discovery, through suffering, of the right path....⁹⁸

This mythical realm expresses itself in Sonya, as she helps Raskol'nikov along the path of spiritual regeneration. It is Sonya, in her offering of unconditional love (Christ's love, and Father Zosima's love, love of Rodion as himself, not as an extension of her own wishes), who begins to repair the damage Raskol'nikov has done the Earth, the community. Sonya offers love without strings, without commitment, without expectation.

⁹⁸ Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life*, pp. 76-7.

This love is precisely what Raskol'nikov both needs and desires, it is the antidote for the provisional love which holds him in debt, the poisonous love with which his mother had bound him.

Dostoevsky devotes a good deal of narrative emphasis to Sonya's marked difference from conventional female (maternal / social) references. Sonya is a prostitute, outside ordinary social and moral categories, who wears outlandishly gaudy clothes. At the same time, however, she is presented as naive, childlike, and frail. Her hands, face, arms, and body are described in diminutive terms. Her "inappropriate" and humble smile are [sic] framed by a large, audacious hat. Beneath the trappings of the streetwalker, she has an angular little face whose appearance is that of a holy fool (*iurodovaia*) [sic] (337).⁹⁹

As a partial *yurodivaya*, Sonya is manifestly associated not only with the murdered woman Lizaveta, but also with Mother Earth. Holy fools were deeply connected with the earth, with pagan as well as Christian traditions. As a holy fool of sorts, Sonya becomes symbolic of the Earth herself; thus it is wholly fitting that she should induce Raskol'nikov's revivification. He obeys her instructions and bows to the Earth: "Он стал на колени среди площади, поклонился до земли и поцеловал эту грязную землю, с наслаждением и счастьем."¹⁰⁰ And Sonya watches him, does not leave him in his trial: "В то время, когда он, на Сенной, поклонился до земли в другой раз, оборотившись влево, шагах в пятидесяти

⁹⁹ Anderson, *Duality*, p. 60.

¹⁰⁰ PSS, 6, 1973, p. 405.

от себя, он увидел Соню. Она пряталась от него за одним из деревянных барачков, стоявших на площади, стало быть, она сопровождала всё его скорбное шествие! Раскольников почувствовал и понял в эту минуту, раз навсегда, что Соня теперь с ним навеки и пойдёт за ним хоть на край света, куда ему ни вышла судьба.”¹⁰¹ This act of confession is full of meaning, on many levels. “Raskolnikov fell not simply on the earth, but at Sonya’s feet. [...] ... for Sonya is for Raskolnikov the bond between his self-centred soul and the rest of the world, and accordingly, is for him the symbol of the cosmos — that is, the earth.”¹⁰² The criminal bows to beg forgiveness both from the earth itself, the soil, and from her direct representative, the *yurodivaya*, the prostitute, the meek Sonya.

The kiss of submission, indeed, is the symbolic climax of the entire action, which is, as it were, overshadowed by the invisible, gigantic figure of Gaia. It symbolizes the conflict and reconciliation between her and the proud son of Earth. [...] The hero of *Crime and Punishment* is guilty in the sight of the Earth, and receives absolution through his expiation made unto Earth.¹⁰³

The Earth has been wounded by the trespasses of her prodigal son, and She requires Her fallen yet deeply spiritual daughter to reunite the family. Sonya, the earthly representative of unconditional love, love which

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 406.

¹⁰² Zander, p. 23, n. 2.

¹⁰³ Ivanov, p. 77.

offers true concern for his soul, can win him back. What she offers is the opposite of his mother's love — the provisional, almost parasitic love of a mother who demands recompense from her children. It is provisional in that she loves her son only as he is useful to her, rather than loving him for himself. This demanding pseudo-affection sucked the energy and desire for familial and societal inclusion from Raskol'nikov like a vacuum. To win him back into the human family, to convince him to repent, Sonya gives him exactly what he needs, but without calculation, without deliberate manipulation of his responses, unlike his mother, who manipulates his loyalties for her own personal advantage. Her motives are entirely unselfish, and center rather on *his* benefit, not hers. She knows, without considering it, that when he accepts her love and asks for forgiveness, he will himself become enabled to give love and to forgive himself. It is this feminine reality — the reality of relation — which Sonya unconsciously serves to correct.

Among the most disputed aspects of *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* is what occurs in the Epilogue, when Raskol'nikov, in penal servitude in Siberia, slowly comes around to Sonya. As Raskol'nikov sits by a riverbank, he begins to have a sort of vision. Many critics see this as a "conversion," and claim that it was unjustified and essentially false.

С высокого берега открывалась широкая окрестность. С дальнего другого берега чуть слышно доносилась песня. Там, в облитой солнцем необозримой степи, чуть приметными точками чернелись кочевые юрты. Там была свобода и жили другие люди, совсем не похожие на здешних, там как бы самое время остановилось, точно не прошли ещё века Авраама и стад его. Раскольников сидел,

смотрел неподвижно, неотрываясь; мысль его переходила в грезы, в созерцание; он ни о чём не думал, но какая-то тоска волновала его и мучила.¹⁰⁴

Raskol'nikov, immersed in the endless beauty of nature known as the Siberian steppes, notices a nomadic, non-Christian tribe, whose freedom of movement and harmony with the land cannot fail to strike him in contrast with his own lack of range and eurhythm. Into this moment of musing, Sonya, quietly, as always, steps.

Вдруг подле него очутилась Соня. Она подошла едва слышно и села с ним рядом. Было ещё очень рано, утренний холодок ещё не смягчился. На ней был её бедный, старый бурнус и зелёный платок. Лицо её ещё носило признаки болезни, похудело, побледнело, осунулось. Она приветливо и радостно улыбнулась ему, но, по обыкновению, робко протянула ему свою руку.¹⁰⁵

Sonya, ever Raskol'nikov's link between his own severed consciousness and the events and people surrounding him, comes to him precisely at the moment when he most deeply senses his disconnectedness. As he sits below a wide open sky, his mind tries to find its way back to his troubling ideas of the "square yard of space" for which he claimed earlier he

¹⁰⁴ PSS, 6, 1973, p. 421.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

would willingly sacrifice so much. But Sonya is there to interrupt the harmful flow of thoughts at the precise juncture when he becomes troubled.

This time when she reaches out her hand to him he does not pull away. Slowly, after a time, he had begun to need her, though he had hitherto been unwilling to admit this even to himself. Now, after her illness and his worry over her, after not having seen her for a few days, as he sits on the belly of the land which gave him birth, he does not recoil from her human touch. He takes her hand in his, and seems almost ashamed of the powerful emotion that this contact draws from the well of his soul.

Но теперь их руки не разнимались; он мельком и быстро взглянул на неё, ничего не выговорил и опустил свои глаза в землю....

Как это случилось, он и сам не знал, но вдруг что-то как бы подхватило его и как бы бросило к её ногам. Он плакал и обнимал её колени. В первое мгновение она ужасно испугалась, и всё лицо её помертвело. Она вскочила с места и, задрожав, смотрела на него. Но тотчас же, в тот же миг, она всё поняла. В глазах её засветилось бесконечное счастье; она поняла, и для неё уже не было сомнения, что он любит, бесконечно любит её и что настала же наконец эта минута...

Они хотели было говорить, но не могли. Слёзы стояли в их глазах. Они оба были бледны и худы; но в этих больных и бледных лицах уже сияла заря обновленного будущего, полного воскресения в новую жизнь. Их воскресила любовь, сердце одного заключало

Throughout the novel Dostoevsky has subtly created a leitmotif for Sonya and Raskol'nikov: the repetition of the description of their "pale, thin faces." Now, at the end of his opus, when he writes this phrase again it has the effect of the leitmotif fulfilled, of a symbol taking on a real life of its own, just as the love between these two characters has begun to live. The reader can incorporate all the other painful memories of the mention of their "pale, thin faces" into the joy now felt upon seeing the hope and love fully expressed on those faces. Now there is a sense that the pallor will ebb away as it is infused with the radiance of living life and love's recognition, that the gaunt thinness will be replaced with the gradual development of healthful vigor, their faces swelling with smiles rather than washed with strain and tears.

Mary Magdalene was the first to see the resurrected Christ; it is therefore doubly fitting that Sonya, the cause and source-spring of this renaissance, should be the first to behold the new life-force animating Raskol'nikov. This is a scene of poetic beauty, simple yet powerful, marked by recognizable, genuine human emotion and responses.

Raskol'nikov falls to the ground, at Sonya's feet, in a more sincere echo of his earlier act of contrite prostration. This time he does not check himself; now he allows his feelings sovereignty, without the damaging doubts and insecurities born of his Luciferian fall from the face of god.

The prostration and the kiss [at the Haymarket] proved not to be

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

final: they were so to speak a token of his betrothal to the earth, but the sacrament of marriage had not yet taken place. Only when he was in penal servitude was his soul miraculously liberated from its prison of solitude and united to her who was for him life, the world, and the earth.¹⁰⁷

Throughout the work, Dostoevsky has been busily but not disruptively setting up the easel, the palette, preparing his brushes, all to paint the more beautifully the final scene of regenerative love. The earlier acts of near-confession and near-prostration, Raskol'nikov's slow acceptance of Sonya's presence followed by his self-acknowledged *need* of her nearness — all of this serves as the prepared background against which Dostoevsky may now freely paint the hints of a future masterpiece: Raskol'nikov's re-inclusion into life.

Sonya, as Earth's (and Christ's) emissary, is present to share this moment with Raskol'nikov and fulfil its meaning for both of them. Indeed, the novel could not have ended otherwise, for Dostoevsky. Although he cannot state categorically anything so naive or simplistic as the proverbial "happily ever after," he likewise is unable to leave off writing while his hero is still banished from the human nucleus. As Alexandra F. Rudicina has argued convincingly, "in activating the archetype of rebirth as crystallized in the Christian myth of Fall and Redemption, Dostoevsky was conceptually as well as artistically bound to stay within his particular frame of reference. Deferring to an indefinite future Raskol'nikov's emergence into 'perfect resurrection' and limiting himself to mere intimations of an 'undreamed-of reality,' Dostoevsky fundamentally follows the Christian myth, with its promise

¹⁰⁷ Zander, p. 23, n. 2.

of man's redemption."¹⁰⁸ It might be added that the Christian myth of the son's death and resurrection was built on the infinitely fertile grounds of many pre-patriarchal and patriarchal religions, many of which also postulated the fall, death, and rebirth of a divine son, and thus the archetype is, as might be expected, perfectly consistent with the additional "pagan" flavor of the previously cited interpretations, including this one, as well as with Dostoevsky's own reference to the non-Christian yurts.

Thus, the apotheosis of regenerative love between Raskol'nikov and Sonya concretized in the Epilogue climax is not inconsistent with the rest of the novel, nor is it unwarranted, over-optimistic, or psychologically unfounded. For Dostoevsky, the arduous psychic journey of his protagonist could not have ended any other way.

In the notebooks for *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* Sonya was a much more complex character, with more inner conflict, more expressed anger and rebellion, more contradictions than the simple, pure Sonya of the final version. Edward Wasiolek, in editing and commenting on Dostoevsky's *Notebooks for "Crime and Punishment"*, has rather thoroughly discussed the differences between the Sonya of the *Notebooks* and the Sonya of the final version, so only a rudimentary scrutiny is needed here.

In the notebooks, Dostoevsky repeatedly toyed with the description of a physical, actual love between Sonya and Raskol'nikov; they became more like lovers in the conventional sense than in the spiritual sense, even embracing from time to time.

¹⁰⁸ p. 1067, Alexandra F. Rudicina, "Crime and Myth: The Archetypal Pattern of Rebirth in Three Novels of Dostoevsky," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, Vol. 87, No. 5, 1972, pp. 1065-74.

Perhaps the most significant omission in the final version is a love affair between Raskolnikov and Sonia that Dostoevsky toyed with repeatedly. In the novel itself Raskolnikov is, of course, fatally drawn to Sonia. [...] Spiritual love, yes, but of physical love there is not a word, although she is a prostitute. But love in the ordinary sense is something Dostoevsky returns to again and again in notebooks.... [...] Dostoevsky decided apparently that love in this sense was not compatible with the sacrificial and purifying humility that Sonia was to represent. Yet one cannot help wondering whether Dostoevsky lost one dimension of realism in purging their relationship of at least the temptations of romantic love.¹⁰⁹

Actually, one *can* help wondering if Dostoevsky sacrificed realism when he erased the traces of physicality from the relationship between Sonya and Raskol'nikov. Had Raskol'nikov experienced any physical relationship with Sonya, anything more than what is found in the final version of the novel (wherein lie traces of affection), he would have come to hate and resent Sonya fatally, becoming more embittered and severed from human contact through the very act of contact itself. The parallels between Raskol'nikov and the Underground Man are too obvious to ignore what would have happened both to Sonya and to Raskol'nikov had they had a sexual relationship. Raskol'nikov's solipsism and rebellion could easily have deepened to become permanently engraved in his soul, leaving him "a sick man," "a spiteful man," forever banished from human nearness to an Underground of loathing, stagnant mordancy and existential isolation. The outcome for Sonya would have been equally distressing, surely, recalling the cruelty with which the Underground Man treated Liza, the young prosti-

¹⁰⁹ *The Notebooks for "Crime and Punishment", Fyodor Dostoevsky*, ed. and trans. Edward Wasiolek. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967, p. 7.

tute whom he leads away from the edge of loneliness and despair only to cast her into the chasm when her back is unsuspectingly turned. This would have been both unpleasant and unproductive for Dostoevsky; had he chosen the path outlined in the notebooks, he would merely have repeated what he had written two years earlier in *Zapiski iz podpol'ya*. Thus Wasiolek's finding in this instance is questionable.¹¹⁰

Sonya's Christian acceptance and wholeness are much less evident in the notebooks, wherein she actually recoils from Raskol'nikov at one point, upon hearing of his deed. There was judgment, there was emotional conflict in the original Sonya. Her love for Raskol'nikov was much more similar to that the mother, in that her feeling for Raskol'nikov was conditional, dependent on his enslavement to her. The mother's love is unconditional in the sense that, no matter what horrible crimes Raskol'nikov commits, she would be troubled only if his trespasses interfered with the plans she has for him. Her love is unconditional in that sense — and in the Dostoevskian world extremely negative and selfish. She has no concern for Raskol'nikov's soul, for the stains left behind by his crimes. She only worries that he will no longer be able to fulfil her dreams for his future. In the final version, of course, Sonya offers Raskol'nikov a *truly* unconditional love, based only on a genuine and selfless concern for the well-being of his soul, something which he craves desperately as an antidote to the “burdensome” conditional love his mother lays upon his shoulders. The final

¹¹⁰ In keeping with the idea of Sonya as a Mary Magdalene figure (and a Christ figure), it may be observed here that the original Gnostic Gospels depicted Mary Magdalene and Christ as intimate: “[Christ] used to kiss her [often] on her [mouth]” (p. 15, Pagels). One may speculate whether Dostoevsky was in part motivated by the same tenets which caused the official, historical Christian Church to expunge any such portrayal of physical love involving Jesus Christ: whether the purity of the symbol in the character was of such primary importance that any deviation from it lessened the effectiveness of the beauty of the image.

Sonya is a perfection of the Christian ideal, perfection in human form. Even her fallibilities are beautiful, human: she confesses to be a great sinner, she feels guilt because she does not save for a rainy day, because she does not walk the streets every day, because she allows herself psychic recuperation time, and because of one occasion when she refused to give a collar to Katerina Ivanovna. She deeply regrets these moments of hubris, and feels the pain of her deeds with an agonizing clarity. But even these moments of weakness and self-consideration are highly spiritual, because not only does she suffer for them, she works even harder to try to expiate her sins later. Sonya admits to being a great sinner, but in the notebooks she immediately displays signs of a rebellious consciousness: "N.B. She thinks of herself continually as deep sinner, a fallen profligate beyond salvation; she is terribly modest, but once insulted she is beside herself."¹¹¹

As Wasiolek points out, Dostoevsky was correct to move from the notebooks Sonya to the Sonya of the final version. Although some critics find her endless self-sacrifice unrealistic, Dostoevsky obviously very much intended her that way. At this point, one either argues with a dead man over his explicit intention and novelistic vision, or one accepts the reality of one of the most truly spiritual characters Dostoevsky's hand ever sculpted.

The Sonya of the notebooks did not fully disappear. Ten years later she resurfaced in *Dnevnik pisatelya*, in the unnamed "Meek one."

In the notebooks for *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* Dostoevsky had written: "she is terribly modest, but once insulted she is beside herself." In *Krotkaya* he writes:

¹¹¹ Wasiolek, *Notebooks*, p.6.

...я не удержался и вдруг сказал ей что-то, вроде как бы остроты. Батюшки, как вспыхнула! Глаза у ней голубые, большие, задумчивые, но — как загорелись! Но ни слова не выронила, взяла свои «остатки» и — вышла.¹¹²

The “Meek One” of the story *is* the eventual expression of the plans Dostoevsky had abandoned for Sonya Marmeladova, in favor of a less riven, more perfect image. The Meek One is both meek and rebellious, at once shy and proud. She is very young, downtrodden, and sincere, and she attracts the hardly sympathetic notice of the narrator, an extension of Dostoevsky’s original *podpol’nyi chelovek*; he sees in her a victim, a submissively easy target, an additional device for “taking... revenge on society”,¹¹³ as she herself lucidly points out. He enjoys the power that he has over her, the more so because he knows she is proud; likewise, he savors the “voluptuous”¹¹⁴ thrill he finds in the twenty-five-year age difference between them, in the inequality of their relationship. He wants her to kneel before him in submission and worship but she will not. In her meek way she rebels. They live together in hostile silence, each struggling to maintain their independence of the other, the narrator straining to assert his power over her, the Meek One attempting to hold on to whatever semblance of compensatory mockery she can muster. But this clash of wills ends in violent tragedy when the Meek One leaps to her death rather than endure living with the man who was legally her husband.

The narrator constantly asks why she killed herself, assuring the reader

¹¹² PSS, 24, 1982, p. 7.

¹¹³ *The Meek Girl*, trans. David McDuff, Penguin Classics, 1989.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.260.

that he still does not understand her death — even while he recognizes that this is not true. He knows that he has all but killed her, though he circumlocutes an actual confession. He had consciously set about to torture her, to inflict upon her the pain and humiliation he had felt at the hands of others. In this he might at least feel gratified knowing that someone else was more humiliated than he — just as the Underground Man denigrates Liza in retaliation for his own self-abasement and humiliations. He admits that he “на ней затем и женился, чтобы её за то мучить.”¹¹⁵ Truly he is a typical *podpol'nyi chelovek*, asserting: “Итак — стыд так стыд, позор так позор, падение так падение, и чем хуже, тем лучше....”¹¹⁶ He had tried to triumph over her, but soon enough he falls on his knees before her, rather as Raskol'nikov had prostrated himself before Sonya.

She had struggled with her pride, this Meek One; indeed, her rebellion taxed her strength, so much effort was needed to maintain her mockery and defiance against her own true, meek nature. When the narrator breaks down before her she is frightened (again as Sonya was at first frightened of Raskol'nikov's sudden outburst of love on the steppes), and she feels embarrassed and guilty before him. Unable to witness his self-torture and prostration, she begs him to stop. She protests that *she* is guilty, *she* is in the wrong, that “она преступница, что она это знает, что преступление её мучило всю зиму, мучает и теперь... что она слишком ценит моё великодушие... «я буду вашей верной женой, я вас буду уважать...»....”¹¹⁷ For her, the sin of pride, of resisting

¹¹⁵PSS, 24, 1982, p. 30.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 24.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p.32.

her husband is so deeply evil that she can no longer live with herself. So meek is she that she cannot overcome her fear and her shame, and she throws herself from the window, having decided that she was not worthy of his love.

Or does she? The narrator feverishly tries to convince himself that it was so, that she was too honest, too sincere, to go on living with him not loving him fully, that she had “made too many promises, she got scared she wouldn’t be able to keep them — that’s clear.”¹¹⁸ But immediately after reassuring himself on this point, the narrator again asks himself and his invisible judge why she died. This time the answer is correct: “Измучил я её — ВОТ ЧТО!”¹¹⁹ He knows now that he is beyond the laws of society, that he is beyond public reprobation because the crime he has committed, one tantamount to murder, is his burden to carry for the rest of his life, that his suffering without her can never equal the dismal pain he had inflicted on her throughout their life together. The Meek One stepped from the window looking calm, contented, placid, according to the witnesses and Luker’ya; she did not die looking disturbed or tormented. She stepped beyond the confining walls within which *he* had trapped her, tortured her; she stepped to her death with relief and dignity, clutching the icon firmly, trusting in the resurrecting forgiveness of the Holy Mother, under whose protection all Meek Ones live.

Other Sophian characters

Chronologically, after Sonya Marmeladova the next Sophian character

¹¹⁸ *The Meek Girl*, p. 292.

¹¹⁹ *PSS*, 24, 1982, p. 35.

is Sof'ya Matveevna Ulitina of *Besy*. As an extremely minor personage, found only in the last few pages of the book, she hardly encourages great critical attention. But her role is important *vis-a-vis* the thematic dominance of the Sophian figure, as she attends the dying and slightly insane Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovenskiĭ.

Sof'ya Matveevna is a young widow who sells attractively bound Bibles. She comes to Stepan Trofimovich at the time when he most needs a woman nearby. Despite the personal hardship it causes her, Sof'ya Matveevna abandons her own travel plans to stay on in the remote village and nurses him in his illness. She reads to him from the Bible, she smiles at him, comforts him with her presence and her shy, meek looks. When finally Mrs. Stavrogina appears, she unfairly assumes that Mrs. Ulitina is a less than virtuous woman, but almost immediately she is convinced of her true nature. After Verkhovenskiĭ's death, Mrs. Stavrogina brings Sof'ya Matveevna to live with her.

In her linkage — rather overt and almost comical — with the Gospels, Sof'ya Matveevna is not only a brief continuation of Sonya Marmeladova, but she also becomes a sort of holy fool, as is often the case with Sophian characters. Her angelic ministering further ties her in with the Sophian aspect. These commonalities, including the shared name, cover the surface of a minor character whose appearance in the novel is altogether too brief to deepen the characterization of the Sophian theme.

Podrostok (1875) provides the next development of this theme: the raw youth's mother, Sof'ya Andreevna. This woman may almost be seen as Sonya Marmeladova grown up, so similar are they. She is painted with as much detail as her younger Sophian sister, affording the examiner an especially rich canvas. Not only in her own actions and words do we see her; indeed, she is most fully portrayed by others — especially by the man with

whom she has lived for twenty years, the man on whom she has spent her youth, the man for whom she has forsaken the vows of her marriage and the stipulations of society: Versilov.

Sof'ya Andreevna is a devoutly Christian peasant. Her father's dying wish gave her hand in marriage to Makar Dolgorukii, a much older man who promised to look after her as a father would. Shortly after her marriage, however, she became involved in an inexplicable love-affair with her master, Versilov, at which time Sof'ya's official husband willingly left to become a pilgrim. Thus, a sort of *de facto* marriage began, linking Sof'ya with Versilov through twenty years and two illegitimate children. Her son is at a loss to explain the circumstances of his parents' liaison and Arkadii is unsure of Versilov's true feelings for Sonya, although he knows "он таскал её за собою всю жизнь — это верно."¹²⁰ Rather strangely, what concerns Arkadii is not so much why Sof'ya became involved in such an affair, but rather why Versilov did. Versilov attempts to elucidate this on a few occasions, and through his introspection a clear picture of Sof'ya is given.

Versilov tells Arkadii that his mother "была одна такая особа из *незащищенных*, которую не то что полюбишь, — напротив, вовсе нет,— а как-то вдруг почему-то *пожалеешь*, за кротость, что ли, впрочем, за что? — это всегда никому не известно, но пожалеешь надолго; пожалеешь и привяжешься... «Одним словом, мой милый, иногда бывает так, что и не отвяжешься»."¹²¹ Although Arkadii doubts this, it is indicative of the power of the Sophian character to inspire love in possibly unwilling men, to hold them in the

¹²⁰ PSS, 13, 1975, p. 12.

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 11.

sway of a love more spiritual than logical. Certainly Versilov would have tired of Sof'ya years ago when her first bloom of beauty had faded if there were no deeper tie connecting him to her than two children. Versilov is not one to be hampered by the boundaries of traditional morality. Obviously what holds him to Sonya is something even he cannot contest, though at times he does try to ignore it. This bond is something more than pity, more than the fact that she seems defenseless; it is a sort of cosmically predetermined match, as Mochulsky asserts: "This love-pity is stronger than the most fiery passion, its source is mystical. It is an earthly reflection of a heavenly mystery. The semiliterate, silent, gentle, meek Sofya Andreyevna does not refrain from being unfaithful to her husband, takes the sin upon her soul, because *it must be so*: Versilov has from eternity been predestined as her companion, she is his heavenly friend."¹²² Her acceptance of this love, this burden, is blind, unquestioning, as though some part of her knows without thinking that she belongs with Versilov. Her torment is that *Versilov* does not know this so intuitively; or that, if he does know, he struggles against this fate, adding to Sonya's suffering in the process.

Versilov also tells Arkadii that "«Мы все наши двадцать лет, с твоею матерью, совершенно прожили молча...»."¹²³ Silence, as the reader may recall, was the mother of the Sophia ("Wisdom") of the Gnostics. It is fitting that the respectful daughter heed her mother; Sonya knows in a spiritual way that words are unnecessary, and, indeed, external to her relationship with Versilov. She obviously could not aspire to his learned level considering her background, and there is little reason for her to do so; he does not love her for any intellectual discussions. Theirs is a link beyond words, beyond rationalization, beyond ordinary small-talk.

¹²² Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 519-20.

¹²³ *PSS*, 13, 1975, p. 104.

This is something Versilov is not cognizant of, for in the next paragraph he speaks of Sonya rather condescendingly, «...твоя мать иногда и скажет, но скажет так, что ты прямо увидишь, что только время потерял говоривши, хотя бы даже пять лет перед тем постепенно её приготавлил.»¹²⁴ Even preparation from one so learned as he, even for five years, cannot penetrate her mind. A moment later he seems to realize his insult, and attempts to remedy it by claiming: «Опять-таки заметь, что я совсем не называю её дурой; напротив, тут своего рода ум, и даже презамечательный ум...»¹²⁵ Not much of a retraction, though again it is Versilov speaking, not Dostoevsky.

Toward the end of the novel, a more honest confession is made by Versilov, a more reflective contemplation. He shows his son a portrait of Sonya which he considers a good likeness. This portrait inspires some of his most truthful meditations on his “wife,” some of his most soul-searching moments of understanding. He hits upon the central motif of Sonya: “впалые щёки” (“hollow cheeks”). With an unfeigned, natural eloquence borne of love and understanding rather than of egoism, Versilov muses on the cheeks whose glow was worn down prematurely for his pleasure. He recognizes that he has used Sonya and given little or nothing in return. Those “hollow cheeks” become the emblem of Sonya’s love and suffering for him; they first unconsciously signaled to him his deep love for his “wife” years ago as he gazed at her likeness and began to miss her. It is much the same leitmotif as in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*: the Sophian suffering symbolically starves the character, wastes her in the service of her meek submission to fate. This deprivation is paradoxically spiritually enriching,

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 105.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

filling the meek one with a nourishment grown by faith; the havoc it wreaks on her appearance — the “hollow cheeks,” and “pale, thin faces” — also gives her the hallmarks of suffering, the other-worldly beauty of the Madonna which attracts even the unobservant eye, even the reluctant heart, drawing the pity which evolves into and is part of an unbreakable bond of love. It was Sonya’s “hollow cheeks” that affirmed Versilov’s love for her, inspiring him to call her to him, reminding him of the suffering he has plagued her with for twenty years.

One of the most lasting childhood images Arkadii has of his mother is set in a church, with a dove¹²⁶ flying across the cupola. This symbolic mental memento is for Arkadii a conceptualized personification of his mother as a spiritual reality. Echoing this icon of motherly love and faith is a similar passage in *Brat'ya Karamazovy* wherein Alyosha recalls *his* mother. Although she died when he was only four years old, as the narrator repeatedly points out, Alyosha “запомнил её потом на всю жизнь, её лицо, её ласки, «точно как будто она стоит предо мной живая».”¹²⁷ The impression was very powerful indeed, becoming an iconicized memory. Alyosha connects his mother with a sort of religious, mystical experience.

...он запомнил один вечер, летний, тихий, отворенное окно, косые лучи заходящего солнца (косые-то лучи и запомнились всего более), в комнате в углу образ, пред ним зажженную лампадку, а пред образом на коленях рыдающую как в истерике, со взвизгиваниями и вскрикиваниями, мать свою, схватившую его в обе

¹²⁶ The dove is often considered emblematic of the spirit, of wisdom or Sophia, and, in Christian lore, of the Holy Spirit. Its association with Sonya here is unmistakable.

¹²⁷ PSS, 14, 1976, p. 18.

руки, обнявшую его крепко до боли и молящую за него богородицу, протягивающую его из объятий своих обеими руками к образу как бы под покров богородице....¹²⁸

The “slanting rays of the setting sun” are a favorite of Dostoevsky’s, associated not only with the Sof’yas. These rays always seem to iconicize his most delicate, dear memories and feelings, their waning warmth and brightness all the sweeter for their swift passage. Alyosha’s mother dedicates him to the service of the Mother of God, symbolically offering him to her, holding him near the lamp in a manner vaguely reminiscent of Achilles, whose sea-goddess mother held him over a fire to burn away his mortal flesh. He also remembers his mother’s face: “исступленное, но прекрасное,”¹²⁹ and no doubt full of suffering. This mystical association of faith with the mother is especially indicative of the Sophian mother figures.

These Sophian women are not women in the sexual sense. Even when they are obviously not virgins — when they are prostitutes, wives, or mothers — they are seen by the men in their lives (and indeed, by Dostoevsky and his narrators) as *asexual*, much in the sense that children are asexual. Their beauty is not of the sort to arouse passion or “confuse” male hearts and bodies; about their appearance nothing is sensual or sexually enticing — except to the repugnant sensuality of Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov, who was tempted by his second wife’s “замечательною красотой... и, главное, её невинным видом.... «Меня эти

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

невинные глазки как бритвой тогда по душе полоснули».¹³⁰ This desexualization of the mother is understandable, especially if the mother is associated with such purity and spiritual wholeness or if she is described as childlike and meek. For Dostoevsky, violation of these meek, pure creatures was as unholy and loathsome as the exploitation of a child. For instance, Sonya Marmeladova, despite her “yellow pass,” is never seen as a lover by Raskol’nikov; she is in fact a maternal figure for him. Nine months after his confession and exile, Raskol’nikov is born again *through Sonya*. As the “good mother,” with unconditional, forgiving love, Sonya’s influence brings about his re-birth into the world. This is made especially explicit in the Epilogue, when he finally allows himself to admit his love and need of Sonya: he falls on the ground and weeps at her feet, he does not suddenly embrace her and swathe her in kisses.

Versilov speaks of this asexual aspect of his Sonya as he shows Arkadii the portrait of her. “«Здесь же, в этом портрете, солнце, как нарочно, застало Соню в её главном мгновении — стыдливой, кроткой любви и несколько дикого, пугливого её целомудрия.»”¹³¹ This *tselomudriya* — “integral wisdom” or “essential wholeness” — has been examined by many, most notably L.A. Zander.¹³² It is interesting that chastity should be so integral a part of a woman who has been “living in sin” for twenty years. Indeed, Sonya is more like a mother and nursemaid to Versilov than a lover or wife; as Adele Marie Barker points out in her book, *The Mother Syndrome in the Russian Folk Imagination*, “It is deliberate that Versilov and Sophia do not marry, for she

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 13.

¹³¹ PSS, 13, 1975, p. 370.

¹³² For a fascinating and poetic discussion of this “characteristic moment” see L.A. Zander, *Dostoevsky*, especially pp. 77-9.

is then left free to be the mother figure for him as well."¹³³ Versilov speaks of her modesty before him, her fear of him and his higher stature.

When Soŕya Matveevna Ulitina meets Stepan Verkhovenskii she is embarrassed and anxious, and he is quick to reassure her that his intentions are honorable. Sonya Marmeladova is a prostitute, but she is not seen in any sexual interludes, not even with Raskol'nikov. Aleksandra Mikhailovna and Madame M. are married, but even their extramarital loves are chaste and pure, not at all like affairs. Liza in *Zapiski iz podpol'ya* is the sole exception; she is a prostitute, and she is seen *in flagrante delicto* with the Underground Man. But even this sexual encounter fits the Sophian asexuality: Liza is shown as child-like and pure, and the Underground Man, in his baseness and bitterness, tramples on her and violates her. He purchases her commercial favors, and the Underground Man is harshly judged by himself and by his creator for this act, as well as for the fact that he takes advantage of her vulnerability. The whole episode is seen as a vile exploitation, and as such it harmonizes with the archetypal sanctity of the Sophian sufferer.

With this desexualization, the Sophian characters are linked by Dostoevsky symbolically and spiritually with two other groups he considered inviolable: children, only briefly examined here, and the *yurodivye*, who people the next chapter.

¹³³ Adele Marie Barker, *The Mother Syndrome in the Russian Folk Imagination*. Columbus: Slavica Publishers, Inc., 1986, p. 144.

CHAPTER 4

Divine fools

Connected very closely to the Sophian elements is an essence most justly be described as *yurodstvo* (state of being a “holy fool,” or “God’s fool,” or “fool for Christ”). In fact, the two natures ought not to be split apart, so closely are their aspects intertwined. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, however, this chapter will deal with these characters separately, mentioning the links when appropriate.

Yurodivye have been cited by many scholars of Russian history, culture, and literature. Most frequently in the definitions, the *yurodivye* appear to be masculine. A concise definition is rather difficult to pinpoint. “The origins of the *iurodivye* may be found in the Greek *saloi*, or holy men, but their appearance and behavior, as well as the areas where they were generally to be found, suggest a Christianized continuation of pagan shamanic practices. [...] The Russian *iurodivyi* served the *narod*, slept upon Mother Moist Earth, and exposed himself to elements without fear. [...] ... the Russian Fool was tied to the Mother of God, his particular protector.”¹⁹⁴ In the new English translation of *Brat’ya Karamazovy*, an annotation explains briefly the idea of *yurodstvo*: “a ‘holy fool’ (or ‘fool in God,’ or ‘fool for Christ’ — *yurodivyi* in Russian) could be a harmless village idiot (cf. ‘Stinking Lizaveta,’ *B.K.* 1.3.2.), but there are also saintly persons or ascetics whose saintliness is expressed as ‘folly.’ Holy fools of this sort were known early in the Orthodox tradition. The term reappears several times in

¹⁹⁴ Joanna Hubbs, *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988, p.193.

B.K., notably in reference to Alyosha.”¹⁹⁵ Many critics have noted the existence of this characteristic element in Dostoevsky’s works: in Prince Myshkin, in Makar Dolgorukii, in Alyosha Karamazov, as well as in such female characters as Lizaveta (*Prestuplenie i nakazanie*), Mar’ya Timofeevna Lebyadkina (*Besy*), and Lizaveta Smerdyashchaya (*Brat’ya Karamazovy*). The differences between the male and the female *yurodivye* are interesting. Almost always the female fools are more closely tied with paganism, *mat’ syra zemlya*, in addition to the conventional links with the Mother of God and the Christ of Dostoevsky’s version of Christianity, while the male “fools” often lack this supplement. Beyond this, the female fools enjoy a less glorified social status and often occupy a less important role in the plot than do the males. Even more striking, especially when properly linked with their Sophian sisters, the female *yurodivye* are usually much more pure, more meek and gentle, more effective as representatives of goodness than their male counterparts can claim to be. The chief characteristic of the *yurodivaya* and the Sophian character is a deep, innate, instinctual goodness, a holiness endowed by spiritual purity and acquiescence to suffering. The male *yurodivye*, in contrast, lead rather pain-free existences, or, as in Myshkin’s case, endure pain which they themselves bring about.

In *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, Dostoevsky attaches Lizaveta explicitly to the feminine world, the maternal earth which Raskol’nikov has wronged and which Sonya assuages. Sonya and Lizaveta are very closely associated, as demonstrated in the previous chapter: their quiet, meek endurance of pain, the crosses they each bear without complaint, the childlike qualities with which Dostoevsky infuses them. Raskol’nikov himself links them

¹⁹⁵ *The Brothers Karamazov. A Novel in Four Parts with Epilogue*, trans. and annotated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990, p. 779, Notes to “1.1.4., The Third Son, Alyosha, n. 2.”

in his mind, in his lament over his crime and the sadness he feels for Lizaveta and Sonya. The conversation he overhears in the tavern about Lizaveta informs us that Lizaveta is “constantly pregnant” (p.54, *PSS*, 6, 1973, my translation), despite her ungainly appearance. The reader never learns what happens to Lizaveta’s babies, but the very fact that she is pregnant links her with the fertile Mother Earth. Mar’ya Timofeevna is linked much more overtly with both *mat’ syra zemlya* and the *bogoroditsa*, as has been observed by many critics, especially Ivanov. She speaks of a baby, though even she is unsure of its reality. Her most poetic link with *mat’ syra zemlya* is through the prophesy of an old pagan woman, who tells her “Так, говорит, богородица— великая мать сыра земля есть.... а как напоишь слезами своими под собой землю....”¹⁹⁶ And Mar’ya herself knows this, and “каждый раз землю целовать, сама целую и плачу.”¹⁹⁷ Much of her imagery is based on the cult of *mat’ syra zemlya*, as well as on folk tale, myth, and a pantheistic animism.

Lizaveta Smerdyashchaya never speaks. She is long dead by the time of the narrative which comprises the plot of *Brat’ya Karamazovy*, and the reader hears of her only through indirect reminiscences. Thus as a figure she is more distant but also more pure, more “natural.” She spends her life outdoors, sleeping in the dirt and the dung, her form decorated by nature’s refuse, ornamented by bits of straw, clods of dirt. She is looked after by the town, especially after the death of her abusive father; as an orphan she is even more dear, even more an “unfortunate.” Her poverty elicits material aid from the charitable, but these items she immediately discards, giving them away again or simply abandoning them. She wanders the town, silent and unprotesting. When she is raped the town is outraged, and she

¹⁹⁶ *PSS*, 10, 1974, p. 128.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

dies because of the atrocious sin of another. She bears a son, but a son who is more of an aborted human than a child. The result of the evil abuse of one of God's holy fools is an evil man who in his turn brings down the evil father who sired him. In fact, Lizaveta becomes almost less a person, especially as a result of the distancing of time, than an instrument and representative of God's punishing, if belated, wrath.

The most common appellation of the female *yurodivye* in Dostoevsky is "Lizaveta." Two have been partially examined above. But it is interesting to extend this premise to those not normally included in the "category." For instance, Lizaveta Epanchina exhibits many qualities befitting a *yurodivaya*. In *Idiot* Myshkin constantly compares her with a child, and such an description by a person who values children so deeply can be only positive. To her Dostoevsky bequeaths some of his most deeply held beliefs, as well as his most lucid insights into the purpose and meaning of the novel in which she lives. She has an instinctive mental clarity which enables her to see past the superficial actions of the story and, finally, to evaluate the whole of the foregoing action, as well as the essentially destructive character of the Idiot himself. She is trusting and good but not stupid; in fact, her *proniknovenie* concerning the scourge of Prince Christ is remarkably similar to that of Mar'ya Timofeevna about "the false Dmitrii," Stavrogin.

Another Elizaveta who bears resemblance to Mar'ya Timofeevna is Lise Khokhlakova. The "frenchified" derivation of her name indicates her spiritual fall, her need for reintegration into her Russian roots. Her lameness links her with Dostoevsky's Cripple and the Jacobian fight with God; but in the later book hope prevailed, and the Eternal Bridegroom turned out to be real, not a sham like Stavrogin. Her lameness is at times admitted to

be fake, a self-laceration she employs. But the point is that her handicap, or her desire to invent it, is healed by Alyosha, and she is now able to join the healthy circle of God's Christian family, to go about active good works in the world with her spiritual partner. Likewise Alyosha is aided by her, and he will continue to need her support throughout his lifelong journey.

The name "Lizaveta" (sometimes "Elizaveta" or "Liza") seems to link the characters with an internal well of spiritual wholeness which, depending on the degree of their internal *raskol*, may or may not save them from themselves and others. For the young society women like Liza Tushina and Lise Khokhlakova, the healing depends on the influence of the male; in *Besy*, Liza is doomed by the fact that her counterpart is poisoned, thus poisoning her, while Alyosha's own links with the divine enable Lise to overcome her self-crippling. Liza in *Zapiski iz podpol'ya* is slightly different because she is less developed and more an appliance, although aspects of *proniknovenie* link her with both the Sophian and the *yurodivaya* tradition. Again, these comparisons demonstrate the earlier contention: the characters are *all* linked in one way or another, and many themes operate throughout Dostoevsky's works to interrelate the female characters even while enhancing their individuality. The fact that these figures share the same basic forename signifies in some cases a greater concatenation of personalities; but even so, there are no rigid rules consigning them to a typology or category from which they never stray.

By far the most intriguing and the most important of these characters is Mar'ya Timofeevna. In *Besy* she is partially an embodiment of some of Dostoevsky's most cherished thoughts, and he gives her his words of praise for the beauty and the sadness of Mother earth, his own mingled theology of Orthodoxy and pantheistic pagan metaphysics.

Two of the most profound and intuitive studies of Mar'ya Timofeevna come from Vyacheslav Ivanov and Konstantin Mochulsky. Their examinations are closely related, stemming from similarly spiritual and poetic ideas of the "Eternal Feminine," which somehow is never actually defined. Both writers maintain that Mar'ya is part of Mother Earth and of the Mother of God, a sort of feminine "World Soul" enchained and awaiting her eternal Bridegroom.

She who sings the song of love in her inward cell is not only a "medium" of Mother Earth...but also Mother Earth's symbol. In the myth she represents the soul of earth, under the specific aspect of Russian earth. That is why she has her little mirror in her hand: the universal soul is perpetually reflected in Nature.¹⁹⁸

The mirror is a recurring motif in folklore throughout the ages and cross-culturally. The mirror is, in both senses, "reflective": it reflects the image before it in an interplay of light, but it also reflects in the sense of contemplation. Mirrors are tiny pieces of *proniknovenie*, with their own intuitive "seeing through." They reveal the cold facts without the psychic embellishments which our own ego may see fit to add. "Keeping a mirror in your pocket is a precautionary measure to be taken whenever there might be a fear of losing yourself to the other side," writes Nor Hall.¹⁹⁹ Mar'ya needs the constant reminder of the mirror to bring her back into the physical world, out of her daydreams of the Expected One.

¹⁹⁸ Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life*, pp.61-2.

¹⁹⁹ Nor Hall, *The Moon & The Virgin. Reflections [sic] on the Archetypal Feminine*. New York: Harper & Row, 1980, p.233.

Her face is perpetually painted, in readiness for His coming. As Mochulsky writes: "Her beauty is obscured, for having sinned, she has fallen into vanity and corruption."²⁰⁰ Her heavy rouge and powder also hint at her mental imbalance and other-worldliness, as though to be seen in this world she must enhance her features, lest she appear a pale reflection of her true self. She is thin, her neck as "scrawny" as a chicken's (and Dostoevsky is particularly keen on women's necks), making her all the more absurd as the wife of the beautiful Stavrogin. But perhaps her modest appearance delineates the heavenly perfection of the Expected One: the Eternal Bridegroom will not be distracted from the true beauty of the inner person, he will see past the superficial details to the deserving heart, sweeping her away into her dreams, making her feel truly beautiful.

Along with the mirror, Mar'ya possesses other articles used for divination. Her cards allow her to see into the future, and she is linked with prophesy. Mar'ya's cards should alert her to her eventual fate, but she apparently either does not foresee her own immanent doom or else she is untroubled by it, so fleeting is her contact with reality. She does foresee the knife, Fedka, which Stavrogin has "in his pocket." She dreams of Stavrogin before he actually appears to her, and the dream is as upsetting as his "false" reality, which she now understands. Stavrogin would have no reflection in Mar'ya's world-soul mirror: he is a mask with no substantiality beneath, he is a vampire, a creature which casts no image in the looking glass. Just as darkly beautiful, just as coldly hypnotic, Stavrogin exists as a member of the undead.

On the table beside her, along with the mirror, Mar'ya has a songbook. Although she is never actually seen reading the book or singing the songs, Dostoevsky is careful to point out that it is in fact a *song* book, rather than

²⁰⁰ Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky*, p. 464.

a Bible or some other text. This songbook could be the *dukhovnye stikhi*, “sung by wandering *cripples* [italics mine], beggars, and blind men and women.... Called *liudi bozhie* (people of God), they were devoted most particularly to the Mother of God.”²⁰¹ These songs were an attempt by women “to counter the masculinized dogma of the church,” to inject an “essentially feminine vision of the cosmic order into the teachings of the church” with the “body of popular ‘Spiritual Verses,’ called *Dukhovnye stikhi*, whose subject is Christian myth and apocrypha, much of which revolves around the Mother of God.”²⁰² According to Joanna Hubbs, “The most famous of these, ‘The Wanderings of the Mother of God in Hell,’ like many others, was interwoven with pagan themes. A considerable number of songs center on the life and laments of Mary, who appears as an all-knowing goddess.”²⁰³ Mar’ya Timofeevna is undoubtedly one of the *lyudi bozhie*, and her links to the Mother of God are obvious. Perhaps the songs in her little book are these “Spiritual Verses,” to keep her company in the long wait for the Savior’s return.

Even in death, Mar’ya Timofeevna is not completely violated. Her wholeness is symbolized by her icon of the *bogoroditsa*, which is undefiled and intact, the silver still gleaming in the rubble and soot of the burned house. She is still pure, still virgin, still loyal to the falcon who will come to carry her soul to heaven and rescue her from the suffering of the world. In old Russia, the bride and groom “assumed the parts of folkloric characters: He was...the falcon, she the swan....”²⁰⁴ Mar’ya *Lebyadkina* is the swan,

²⁰¹ Hubbs, p. 261, n. 21.

²⁰² Ibid, p.95.

²⁰³ Ibid, p.262, n. 21.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p.82.

“(lebed’), the popular symbol of purity, grace, and redemption,”²⁰⁵ the “swan-*rusalka* who tells fortunes....Mother Moist Earth of the peasantry, searching for her true tsar to deliver her from barrenness and oppression.... the icon of Mother Russia abandoned and martyred”²⁰⁶ Mary as the Mistress of Swans moves easily between the earthly world and the other-worlds, the insubstantial realms of the spirits,²⁰⁷ as does Mar’ya Timofeevna, who glides noiselessly through all worlds. Her swan-maiden persona awaits the rapture of the falcon’s arrival, the saving action of the raptor-husband.

Why did Mar’ya fall in love with Stavrogin? For much the same reason that everyone in *Besy* becomes enamored of him. She sees in him the Savior, the man-god of whom Kirillov speaks so often in the novel. Because of his physical beauty and undeniable charm he seems to possess a goodness, a power; Mar’ya Timofeevna feels the same attraction to him that others do. Stavrogin is himself a highly polished reflective surface on which others may project their own images; he has no reflection of his own, he is empty. Everyone feels his power, his strength, his magnetic beauty, they look for an explanation because they need to see something in him. Surely, they say to themselves, surely such a man *is* divine, surely this man can fulfil his destiny, can bring to life all my hopes and dreams. This is no ordinary man, they tell themselves. This is a god worthy of my worship, my trust, my hopes. *This* is the secret of Stavrogin’s attraction: he is the lure of easy fulfilment, the convenient screen onto which may be projected hopes, dreams. Pyotr Verkhovenskiï is a perfect illustration of this projection: he seeks a monument, an icon to carry before him into battle, to inspire love and devotion and attract an army of followers. In fact, this de-

²⁰⁵ James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe*. New York: Random House, 1966; Vintage Books Edition, 1970, p.421.

²⁰⁶ Hubbs, p.229.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p.113.

cluding need so drives Pyotr that he is perpetually unable to see the real Stavrogin and his unwillingness and inability to perform such a role. Mar'ya Timofeevna, in her earthen madness, finally recognizes this and sees the real man before her for what he is. She, too, had been taken in; four years earlier in Petersburg she fell in love with the romantic ideal she thought he was, indeed which he seems to try to be at times. Her need for salvation and affirmation was so strong that the wretched girl eagerly sought it in any guise. As Kirillov had noticed, the sudden attention and kindness paid to her by Stavrogin, the unexpected personification of all the dreams she had dreamt, maintaining hope through years of abuse and neglect — this finally drives her over the edge of madness. She waits four years for her Bridegroom, increasingly losing her enfeebled grasp of reality; she begins to fear she has done him some wrong to make him stay away from her for so long. She imagines a baby, though she is virgin, and this invented baby seems, in her confused mental wanderings, to have died at her own hand, or else to have been still-born: an aborted result of a twisted conception of reality and of a dark, impotent malfeasance, the infertility of the empty, evil Stavrogin and the virginal, expectant young Bride cruelly deceived. When Stavrogin visits her in the little village house four years after their marriage, she does not recognize him — because he is not the Savior of whom she had dreamt for four years. She speaks to the Stavrogin who stands before her as though he were a different person from the man she knew in Petersburg. Indeed, she refers to the man in Petersburg as "him," as distinct from the man before her now, whom she calls "Prince." This title links Stavrogin with the false Dmitrii, the tsar-prettender, as well as with the Prince of Darkness in a vampiric guise. Mar'ya Timofeevna realizes that the man before her now is not her true Bridegroom, that he is an impostor who has betrayed her dreams and her

Savior's reality. She still has faith in her Savior, believing him to be the victim of some plot by the man standing before her now and the "Countess" (Mrs. Stavrogina). Indeed she feels herself guilty before her Bridegroom, as though perhaps some lack of faithfulness (signified by her lameness) or betrayal on her part has weakened him and allowed his enemies to triumph. Perhaps she had even felt a physical attraction to this impostor, represented by the child she imagines to have borne, though she and Stavrogin never actually consummated their marriage. Now Mar'ya is determined to remain rigidly loyal, to reject and defame the pretender before her, to hold fast to her conjured memories of the Bridegroom who saved her four years earlier. She staunchly adheres to her Expected Bridegroom, knowing he will come for her, believing his delay to be caused by enemies like the man before her. Psychically, Mar'ya cannot relinquish the myth of the Savior. Her mind is too fragile: having built itself on the foundations of belief in her True Bridegroom, it would collapse in on itself like a supernova were she to face the truth of Stavrogin's less than perfect nature; she prefers to envision a split. She sends him away, cursing him, seeing him for what he is — a void behind the mask, a poor actor, an owl, not a falcon. She knows her Savior will come again. Awaiting the return of this man-god, Mar'ya applies her powder, her rouge; she dozes on her couch, sitting up and fully dressed as though he might swoop down on her at any moment. She is the Earth who in spring adorns herself in colors, flowers and blooms, to greet the awakening of creation.

CHAPTER 5

Mothers and older women

The temptation to overlook the mothers and older women in Dostoevsky's fiction is obvious; his youthful, dynamic heroines certainly attract more interest. But the importance of mothers in many of Dostoevsky's works should not be neglected. His valuation of them was high, especially linked with his religious world view. Likewise, the older women he created have been ignored, and, though they are of less significance than are his mothers or beautiful young heroines, they deserve notice, both for their apparent lack of primary importance and as evidence of Dostoevsky's amazing talent for characterization — even of the most insignificant person.

Dostoevsky's own cult of motherhood, with its attendant positive and negative images, was deeply influenced by his culture, his religious ideas (with all their contradictions), and his own mother.²⁰⁸ The cult of *mat' syra zemlya* has already been mentioned in connection with the Sophian characters as well as the *yurodivye*.

Tied in with *mat' syra zemlya* was an abiding reverence of the soil, the earth, "regarded as a maternal body creating and nourishing her children."²⁰⁹ This soil connection has tremendous reverberations in Dostoevsky's own philosophy of *pochvennichestvo*. The soil is "the universal mother, the living earth, as a mystical entity."²¹⁰ This mother is destruc-

²⁰⁸ As this subject is far beyond the specific goals of this study, the reader is referred to a few external sources. See especially Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life*, Zander, *Dostoevsky*, G.P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind: Kievan Christianity*, Vol. I (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1946), and Hubbs, *Mother Russia*.

²⁰⁹ Hubbs, *Mother Russia*, p. 21.

²¹⁰ Ivanov, p.57.

tive as well as life-giving, and thus evinces a dichotomy of the feminine principle: the "good" mother, loving, all-forgiving, accepting and meek, and the "devouring mother," a Baba Yaga who controls her children, manipulates them, sucks back the life she gave them. This is a split which will resurface in Dostoevsky's own concept of motherhood.

The Russian Orthodox veneration of the *bogoroditsa* was primarily an attempt to co-opt the widely held peasant beliefs in the Earth Mother into Christianity. It was in part successful, creating a paradoxical *dvoeverie* in the Russian population, that peculiar intermingling of Orthodox Christianity with the much older, much more intrinsic pantheistic reverence for the *mat'syra zemlya*. Mary "is maternal love incarnate.... Mary the mother appeals to the hearts of her votaries; her cult is not in doctrine and theological debate but in image and right found in the symbolism of the icon."²¹¹

While the peasantry accepted the church's inclusion of Mary's, Christ's, and the saints' holidays in the rituals of the year, they insisted on tying the maternity of the Mother of God to the fertility of the soil and likened her Christian law of brotherly love to the veneration of the *rod* under the aegis of Mother Moist Earth. Like the telluric mother, Mary told her children to love and respect one another as brothers. And like earth, she too insisted on the sanctity of the mother's order in the family and household [...]. Mary reinforced the archaic belief that the law of the mother was the law of the whole cosmic order.²¹²

Dostoevsky's own association of Mother Earth with the Mother of God is

²¹¹ Hubbs, p. 103.

²¹² Ibid, p.114.

evident in Mar'ya Lebyadkina in *Besy*. The two are apparently indistinguishable. As the infinitely merciful mother, Mary came to personify the "good" mother aspect of Mother Earth, and she touched Dostoevsky's maternal, meek, suffering characters indelibly.

Dostoevsky's own mother naturally affected his concept of motherhood in general, exercising the continual psychical influence which all our mothers have over us, if only by virtue of the fact that they gave us birth and gave most of us some degree of nurture and attention. Dostoevsky had a particularly whole image of his mother: she was a cameo which he carried with him throughout his life. Mar'ya Fyodorovna had died young, and in his mind Dostoevsky would always remember her young and beautiful, if wasted by disease, perhaps with "hollow cheeks." Insofar as she died young, *he* was young, in fact not quite sixteen; all his memories of her remained unsullied by his advanced development or the disillusionment with one's parents which adulthood necessarily fosters. To him, she would always be the young mother who had nursed his illnesses, sung to him, read to him. From the time of her death until his first marriage, Dostoevsky's life was all but devoid of any extended feminine presence, both starving him emotionally and simultaneously allowing him to idealize the feminine and motherhood, without any contradictory images to disturb him. This enabled him to formulate a remarkably pure, holy idealization of the "good" mother — at times perhaps too idealized, seemingly pale and distant, signifying his deep need for closer contact with the mother. Reality, however, never went unnoticed by Dostoevsky, and his keen observation and psychological understanding of people enabled him to depict convincingly other mothers as well; but the most beautiful images of motherhood stem not only from the pagan and Christian idylls of loving motherhood, but from the equally cherished and sacred memories he had of his own mother, Mar'ya Fyodorovna

(Nechaeva) Dostoevskaya.

Motherhood in Dostoevsky's fiction can be divided fairly simplistically into positive and negative images, each obviously differing in intensity, but for the most part exclusive.

Representatives of the negative mother in Dostoevsky's works are plentiful. This mother is the controlling mother, the manipulator of her children, the devouring, negative feminine archetypal energy. She can be subtle and insinuating, or she can be overtly cruel, nasty, and frightening. Examples are numerous, and a chronological examination can avoid overlooking anyone significant.

Until 1849, the mother image is rather unimportant; the figures in *Bednye lyudi* and *Khozyaika* are not worth attention. But with *Netochka Nezvanova*, Dostoevsky presents two portraits of motherhood: Netochka's biological mother, and her later, adoptive mother, Aleksandra Mikhailovna, who is a definite positive mother. The first picture is interesting for its unrelentingly pathetic mixture of suffering endured and suffering caused. Netochka's mother is crushed beneath her unhappy life, struggling against illness and horrible poverty, living with a man who refuses to help his little family financially, a man who instead takes advantage of the mother's abuse (inspired by her own hopelessness and pain) of the daughter to turn the little girl against her. Such unendurable conditions drive the mother to despair, and she dies feeling her deep wrongs against her daughter, for which Netochka later forgives her. Netochka's mother is an early shadow of Katerina Ivanovna Marmeladova, whose pathetic sufferings weigh on her so much that she seeks to increase them, tormenting her poor, frightened children in the bargain. In *Netochka Nezvanova*, however, the mother is not entirely wicked, and the forgiving daughter excuses the pain she

had borne previously.

In his first efforts to return to a literary career after service and exile, Dostoevsky presents us with another pair of devouring mothers. In *Dyadyushkin son* and *Selo Stepanchikovo*, Dostoevsky gives two prime, if brief, examples of the controlling mother-manipulator. The woman in *Selo* is elderly, and thus will be treated in the context of her age-grouping more thoroughly. But Mar'ya Aleksandrovna Moskalyova of *Dyadyushkin son* is "конечно, первая дама в Мордасове," as the narrator tells us in the very first sentence of the story. She is disliked but feared, holding the entire town in sway, every inhabitant bowing to her dictates. This woman has a daughter who is really more a possession to be bartered than a beloved child: Zina's worth is a function of what fame and admiration she can bring to her mother. When a feeble-minded old prince comes to town, Mar'ya Aleksandrovna devises a cunning plan by which she may reap profit for years to come: if she can get the old man to marry Zina, her daughter will become a wealthy princess; and, in a few short years, when the old man inevitably gives up the ghost, Zina will be free to re-marry, her chances improved for an even more advantageous match. Such opportunistic use of an offspring is revolting, and, never fear, Mar'ya Aleksandrovna gets her just reward. But her role in the story is a central one, and she allows a first study of the activities and attitudes which later resurface in other manipulative mothers, perhaps mitigated or altered, but essentially pointing out the unpleasant features of a woman who lives her life through her children, directing their fates for her own purposes.

In *Unizhennye i oskorblennye*, the negative mother is almost overlooked, so long ago are her actions. Little Nellie is victimized by her mother's proud refusal to pursue her legal claims against the evil Prince Valkovskii. This, too, will find echoes in Katerina Ivanovna Marmeladova in

Prestuplenie i nakazanie. Nellie would have been saved from her sad fate, as would her mother and grandfather, if only her mother had sought help. Instead, she chose out of spite and bitterness to endure her poverty and shame, in the end allowing the Prince to escape the worst consequences of his deed, not punishing him. This overweening pride only brings ruin and sorrow upon those spirits who invoke it, as well as their innocent offspring. Although she loved her daughter, Nellie's mother loved her pride more, thus dooming her family to destruction.

The next significant mother figures arise in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*. As already described, Raskol'nikov's crime was in part motivated by rage at the maternal control everywhere manifested in his life.²¹³ His mother uses guilt and insinuation to control her son, and to encourage him to live out her expectations of him. He is in debt to three significant older women/ mother figures in his life, and his most convenient and accessible target is Alyona Ivanovna, the pawnbroker, who is a Baba Yaga, "the negative mother from Russian epic and folklore. She represents all the hostile feelings Raskolnikov harbors against his own mother but is prohibited from expressing."²¹⁴ The entire maternal world seems to be wholly negative, crushing, manipulative, extorting. Raskol'nikov's actual mother sends him money to deepen his debt to her; he has no hope of redeeming his pledges from the wicked pawnbroker, who, as Edward Wasiolek points out, keeps his soul and his future, not just his father's watch, in pawn. Raskol'nikov also owes money to his landlady, whose family he had nearly entered by marrying her crippled daughter; thus she presents him with another image of motherhood, which, while less frightening and extorting than the others, nevertheless worsens his plight. The other mother in the work, Katerina Ivanovna, is a suffering consumptive who deliberately in-

²¹³ See the citations in Chapter 3, n.96, p.97.

²¹⁴ Barker, p.124.

creases her own suffering in order to increase the guilt laid at the feet of her second husband. "Here the image of money as a form of control is stripped away, and Raskolnikov is able to see clearly the dialectic of torment between one human being and another in its naked form as [Katerina Ivanovna] browbeats her husband...."²¹⁵ These frightening figures as it were gang up on Raskol'nikov, almost inciting his eventual violent attempt to free himself.

Varvara Petrovna Stavrogina is a slightly less corrosively negative mother, although she, too, helps to bring about the downfall of her offspring. Stavrogin is himself empty, a shell of a human being, but he is a beautiful shell, with which his mother is in love. She has great hopes for him, but in this she is not merely a proud mother: this disease seems to infect the entire town. She is not represented as overly manipulative of Stavrogin; actually, quite the reverse is true, and it is plain how deftly *he* controls *her*. But she does control the town as well as her own household, and she is seen as a vain woman with pretensions to education, breeding, causes. While she does not apparently attempt to influence Stavrogin's life (indeed, she seems afraid of him, of angering him and driving him away), she does make her presence felt, vexing her son. Still, she is not a wicked or nasty specimen; she is simply misguided and proud, and her punishment seems to be the loss of her idol, Nikolai.

Later, in *Podrostok*, Dostoevsky balances the "good" mother Sof'ya with Arkadii's godmother, Tat'yana Pavlovna. As Barker points out, "Sophia's image remains a positive one in the mind of her son partially because Dostoevsky [...] bifurcates the character of the mother. The hostile feelings that Arkady experiences in relation to her are directed at the negative mother, Mrs. Prutkov...."²¹⁶ It is true that Tat'yana Pavlovna surfaces at vari-

²¹⁵ Barker, p. 121.

²¹⁶ Barker, p. 133.

ous times in his life and does motherly things for Arkadii, but on the whole she is not alone in bearing the brunt of Arkadii's negative reaction to the maternal. Many times throughout the novel, Arkadii manifests his hostility towards the maternal against his own mother, not just against her surrogate. Although his anger should justly be directed against Versilov, Sof'ya herself is also resented — until Arkadii comes to understand her, that is — much as Raskol'nikov resents Sonya's presence until he himself is on the way to wholeness. Later in the novel Arkadii comes to terms with Tat'yana Pavlovna and resolves his negative feelings for her, just as he resolves his relationships with his parents. Thus the "bad" mother can also be reincluded into the human family.

To a degree, the study in Chapter 3 of the Sophian characters can also be considered an investigation of the "good" mother. Each of the Sophian characters represent a spiritually whole, unconditional love, a maternal acceptance of the loved one, despite their sins. Sonya Marmeladova, Sonya Dolgorukaya-Versilova, and Sof'ya Ulitina (*Besy*) all exhibit aspects of maternal care and nurture. Sonya Marmeladova provides Raskol'nikov with the all-forgiving love he had been lacking from his own manipulative mother, healing his self-inflicted wounds, giving him spiritual (never sexual or erotic) succor until, nine months later, after the period of human gestation, he is re-born, through her. Even at the moment he realizes and admits his love for her, Raskol'nikov does not descend upon her with a passionate attack of kisses; rather, he kneels before her in supplication and gratitude. Likewise, Versilov and Sonya never actually marry, thus allowing Versilov to continue having Sonya as mother and nursemaid, not a true wife. From the moment he meets Sof'ya Ulitina, Stepan Verkhovenskiï assures her that he bears her no ill intent, that he only feels a need for her feminine,

healing presence and, on a more banal level, her nursing skills.

The “good” mother is hardly ever depicted in a sexual sense. Her love is spiritual, and physical only in the sense that she loves actively. She loves a person, her love is not metaphysical or non-relational. Her entire manner of being is relational, she *is* her relationship with others.

One of the earliest hints we have of both the Sophian and the maternal character is in Aleksandra Mikhailovna in *Netochka Nezvanova*. She gives Netochka the welcoming maternal love she has lacked all her sad little life. She fears her husband and will not stand up for herself, but when he begins to antagonize Netochka, Aleksandra Mikhailovna does not hesitate to come to her “daughter’s” aid.

Mrs. Ikhmeneva, Natasha’s mother in *Unizhennye i oskorblennye*, is a minor character, rather weak. She loves her daughter and it pains her to see her family torn apart by petty pride and stubbornness, but she does not actively endeavor to alter the situation, apart from urging the narrator to interfere somehow. Altogether she is minor and shadowy, though nevertheless basically “good.”

Idiot provides one of the most interesting, non-Sophian “good” mothers. Elizaveta Epanchina has three daughters, all of whom she loves dearly. They manipulate her, but not in a nasty manner; Elizaveta herself is aware of how easily her daughters get their way with her. She is indulgent but never stupid; though she may appear quite naive, she is always realistic, her powers of intuitive psychological understanding allowing her to see past superficial claims to the actual motivations of other people. She is one of Dostoevsky’s most wonderful, ordinary (meaning not mentally “split” or self-lacerating) characters, whose insight into her fellow characters often contains Dostoevsky’s own feelings. His writing about her contains proof that Dostoevsky held Elizaveta particularly dear, with a genuine ten-

derness that shows in his repeated comparison of her warm, innocent goodness and clarity with that of children. Any linkage by Dostoevsky of a particular character with children is always positive. Sometimes she is as much a child to her daughters, who often treat her as such, as they are her children.

For Dostoevsky, probably the ultimate portrait of the mother was Sof'ya Dolgorukaya-Versilova. She is, first and foremost, a mother; and "Arkady Versilov's unconscious search for his own mother takes place within the context of the more conscious search for a father.... Once this is done the mother's true role emerges."²¹⁷ Arkadii has never known his parents as anything more than iconic memories shadowing his whole life. His mother was as absent from his life as his father was, and he unconsciously resents her as well as Versilov for this "abandonment," not to mention for his humiliating illegitimacy. For Arkadii, Sof'ya is as nebulous a character as his father is.

Dostoevsky faced a difficult task in delineating the character of this woman. On the one hand, the love and meekness she emanates are precisely those to which both father and son will return, frustrated in their vain search for their "idea." On the other hand, however, Arkady cannot help but feel some ambivalence and confusion about her since he has been raised apart from her and understands little of her character or the motivation behind her decision to remain with Versilov all these years. [...] ...questions float through young Arkady's mind, yet despite his doubts and questions, the image of the mother remains sacrosanct and whole for him.²¹⁸

²¹⁷Barker, p. 132.

²¹⁸Ibid, p. 133.

Slowly, as he begins to understand his father, Arkadii learns to understand his mother and to accept her forgiving, loving nature. His gradual understanding comes in time for him to reconcile himself with his family and join it as a worthy, if imperfect, member. Sof'ya's budding relationships with her son and her "husband" Versilov exemplify what Dostoevsky had already shown in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*: that "the ultimate source of salvation and values was female."²¹⁹

Brat'ya Karamazovy also contains a "good" mother figure, though only living in Alyosha's memory. In his mind's eye, the picture of her is frozen by a child's perception, an icon of spiritual love, a rendering linked with the *bogoroditsa* and tied to Alyosha's deep faith. Embedded in his psyche and omnipresent in his soul, his mother's dedication of the boy to the Mother of God guides him throughout his life and touches him as God touches the *yurodivye*. This iron *pech'* of stability and spiritual wholeness warms Alyosha throughout the novel, stoking his inner fires of faith at his most trying moments. His mother, Sof'ya, symbolizes his deep and abiding love of humanity and faith in God's world.

Mothers in Dostoevsky's works are obviously not as neatly dichotomized as first glances may suggest. Within the two groupings of "good" and "bad," simplistic in themselves, are to be found an assortment of women as believable in motherhood as any we might encounter in our own everyday lives. The very fact of their interrelatedness belies some psychological truths about Dostoevsky's own conceptual idealization of womanhood in the specific aspect of motherhood. For Dostoevsky, ultimate spiritual salvation and stability of faith were inextricably fused with the saving, forgiving, loving mother.

²¹⁹Barker, p. 144.

After a certain age, the women in Dostoevsky's fiction seem to lose their gender-specificity; they cease to be women, becoming instead simply *old people*, members of an androgynous grouping of unsexed males and females. These "old people" (this appellation is hesitant, since the standards of age in Dostoevsky's time differ substantially from those of our own) "are always secondary characters, though Dostoevsky tends to invest his secondary characters... with such richness of detail and such extraordinary vitality that one may well hesitate to relegate the most striking of them to the second rank."²²⁰ Rather than assigning to them some positive or negative label, it would be more useful to examine the most interesting of these characters individually.²²¹

If the housekeepers are ignored (since they are almost always the same), one of the first old women to be seen is the old Princess in *Netochka Nezvanova*. Or, rather, she is not *seen*, we only hear of her. Her crankiness and the malignant tumor called her heart are household legends. She is rigid and cruel, not at all fond of animals or children. Her thick sourness inspires the young trickster Katya to target her for fun and games, and though Netochka describes her wrath, she does not depict the old lady's beliefs or motivations. She is instead an unrelenting portrait of decrepit stagnation and harshness. In *Malen'kii geroi* another old woman is presented as an unfavorable accomplice of the blonde tormentor's escapades. The Grandmother in *Belye noch'i* is harmless and well-meaning, and though she does force Nasten'ka to become her prisoner, it is clear that, if a bit overzealous, she only has Nasten'ka's best interests in her rather old-fashioned heart.

²²⁰ p. 295, Frank Friedeberg Seeley, "Dostoyevsky's Women," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 39, 1960-61, pp. 291-312.

²²¹ Rado Pribic treats the elderly women in Dostoevsky's early works quite thoroughly in his brief article, "Female Characters in Dostoevsky's Pre-Siberian Work," *Dostoevsky Studies*, Vol.9, 1989, pp.163-70.

The two most memorable of these “secondary” characters are without doubt Grandmaman in *Igrok* and the General’s Lady in *Selo Stepanchikovo*. The General’s Lady is seen as a complete fool, a tormentor of her son and his family, a devout believer in the vile charlatan Foma Fomich. Her antics are practiced and her faints induced, all of which Dostoevsky renders without omission of realism.

Grandmaman is the wealthy old woman who arrives in the gambling town with imperial splendor — she is even carried on a high chair not unlike a throne. Her straightforward manner is sometimes confused by bystanders with a rude lack of tact, but she never fails to hit upon the undercurrent of truth no one else dares mention. Her “broad” Russian nature plunges her into a downward spiral of addictive impoverishment at the gaming tables, and she is unable to stop herself until she has lost everything. This does not concern her greatly, since she knows she is old and won’t be around much longer to enjoy her money; besides that, she would rather squander it than give it to the worthless General. Her personality is vital and humorous, adding comic relief to much of the story.

As characters, these creations of Dostoevsky’s add life, realism, and sometimes humor to his works; but as women they are unsexed, mere shadows of their younger fellows. Their influence is peripheral, their importance to plot and philosophical expression marginal; but they never fail to enliven the books in which they live.

CHAPTER 6

Proud young women

Netochka Nezvanova introduced a character called Princess Katya, a spoiled, rich young girl, a veritable treasure chest of all the gems of fate: she is beautiful, loved, given everything her whims decree. Katya loves her sad little orphan friend, but only when she truly understands how much Netochka loves *her* first. This wilful, dazzlingly beautiful, proud young princess is the very first embodiment of what would later evolve into Dostoevsky's "proud woman." She heads a long line of other young heroines, marked equally by their beauty and their pride, wreaking havoc upon the lives of others. Many of these later heroines will even share the name *Katerina* or *Katya*, emphasizing the connection between the characters; but even when the nomenclature differs, the essence of the personality shines through, making the basic characteristics easy to discern. The interrelation of fundamentals within this very loose grouping of "proud women" provides a common ground on which to encounter each fresh new apparition of the spirit, though always with a caveat not to overemphasize the similarities at the expense of the differences.

The final Katya — Katerina Ivanovna Verkhovtseva of *Brat'ya Karamazovy* — traces her ancestry through the blonde of "Malen'kii geroi" to the Katya of *Unizhennyye i oskorblennyye*. That Katya also has blue eyes and an "original nature," splendid blonde hair (a particular feature of the Katyas) and a strong will. Her role in the story and her part in Natasha's eventual loss of her beloved Alyosha is a familiar one, although

the outcome will not always be the same. Usually the Katya eventually loses her man to the suffering heroine, because Dostoevskian heroes value suffering more highly than mere earthly beauty. (The difference here is that Alyosha Valkovskii is not a broad-natured Dostoevskian hero.)

Katerina Ivanovna Verkhovtseva is neither whore nor martyr. She is an educated society lady from a well-respected family. As opposed to the vast majority of Dostoevsky's characters, who have nothing, Katerina Ivanovna has everything. She need not work, cook, or clean, she has no husband or family to occupy her time. What is there left for her to do with her idle hours? Amuse herself at the expense of others, seems to be the obvious answer. This bored young lady must use her intelligence somehow, must give vent to her energies; the only avenue opened to her by her society seems to be interference in the lives of others. Her vanity is wounded by ineffectual existence; the lacerations of boredom can be assuaged only by the momentary thrill of power she feels when she manipulates people, especially the male characters of the story, Dmitrii, Ivan, and Alyosha. She must toy with them and their emotions or else go mad from inactivity.

As presented in the third section of Chapter 2, Katerina Ivanovna's chief characteristic, as Netochka says of Princess Katya, is her pride. Her whole personality is a function of her pride, her every action and word are determined in part by the *gordost'* which rules her. Her engagement to Mitya is a means of rescuing her maidenly reputation as well as her own personal self-image. His disregard of her, his continual preoccupation with Grushen'ka — everything Mitya does only serves to pour fuel on the raging fire of her pride. Her vengefulness roars with the full ardor of "the woman scorned," and she constantly strives to remind Mitya of the grievous wrong he has done her. Of course, this only encourages Mitya, and so the cycle escalates, as Edward Wasiolek describes.

... Katerina seeks what hurts her and supports her flattering image of herself. She is not a passive sufferer of [] bruising relations. [...]

In both notes and novel Katerina contemplates her fidelity, but in the novel she reproaches Dmitri for his infidelity. Katerina needs a Dmitri who is abased so as to ensure her own elevation, a Dmitri mired in vice so that her virtue will shine all the more. In the process of writing between the notes and the novel, Dostoevsky saw more and more clearly the active role that Katerina played in pursuing and arranging the drama of hurt and self-hurt.²²²

Katerina Ivanovna is a very beautiful young woman. Even Alyosha, whom one might be tempted to consider above such earthly valuations, appreciates her attractiveness.

Красота Катерины Ивановны ещё и прежде поразила Алёшу, когда брат Дмитрий, недели три тому назад, привозил его к ней в первый раз представить и познакомиться, по собственному чрезвычайному желанию Катерины Ивановны. [...] Алёша молчал, но многое очень хорошо разглядел. Его поразила властность, гордая развязность, самоуверенность надменной девушки. И всё это было несомненно. Алёша чувствовал, что он не преувеличивает. Он нашёл, что большие чёрные горящие глаза её прекрасны и особенно идут к её бледному, даже несколько бледно-жёлтому продолговатому лицу. Но в этих глазах, равно как и в

²²² *The Notebooks for The Brothers Karamazov*, ed. and trans. Edward Wasiolek. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971, p. 15.

очертании прелестных губ, было нечто такое, во что, конечно, можно было брату его влюбиться ужасно, но что, может быть, нельзя было долго любить.²²³

Especially with her exceptional height, Katerina Ivanovna's beauty certainly "transfixes." However, as Alyosha recognizes intuitively, her beauty is not the kind to hold a man's attention for long; he knows his brother's tastes and knows that Katerina Ivanovna is not ideally suited to Dmitrii. Grushen'ka, with her pale cheeks, mad behavior, and suffering countenance, will inevitably come to stir in Mitya's soul something which Katya's superficial qualities never could.

Katerina Ivanovna has seen the way to get what she wants in her societal contexts, and she makes deft use of her knowledge. She must abandon the innate knowledge of good, the "in-touchness" which for Dostoevsky is the feminine birthright, in order to become an active participant in events — in effect masculinizing herself. She must torment others in order to have something to do. Beyond a certain point she cannot educate herself, and resigning herself to morning social calls and afternoons of needlepoint is not a viable alternative for a brilliant young lady of substance, who was, through no fault of her own, "cursed" by fate to be female. She must do *something*; why not strive to manipulate the lives of those around her? Such a pursuit would at least prove amusing and informative. And yet she does not fully abandon herself to her pride and selfish pursuits. At Dmitrii's trial, when she fears that Ivan (her true beloved) has given some self-damning testimony, Katerina Ivanovna forsakes her pride and comes to his aid. Inevitably, this young woman comes to understand

²²³ PSS, 14, 1976, p. 133.

— of herself, not through a series of lessons she has endured learning — that such interference is wrong. No doubt she was aware of this all along, and continued to thwart her own innate morality only through the dull torpor of her life.

The essence of Katerina Ivanovna can be further illuminated by a comparison with a folkloric-mythological figure, the siren or *rusalka*. The *rusalka*-siren of Russian lore was a beautiful young woman-creature, usually one who had drowned herself as a result of a broken heart. The creature then lived on as a water nymph with a new purpose: to lure men in to her watery abode to drown, like the mermaids or sirens of Greek and other mythologies. On a psychological level, these figures come to represent an element of the feminine psyche, as illustrated by M. Esther Harding in her remarkable book, *Woman's Mysteries: Ancient and Modern*.

The rising of instinctive femininity which sweeps through a woman as part of the experience of her moonlike quality... would make her into a fish. She would be in fact, in her effects, much like a mermaid, or one of the Sirens who are proverbially the undoing of men. These mythological creatures, half-fish, half-woman, are represented always as only concerned with themselves, they were autoerotic. They conquer men not for the love of the man, but for a craving to gain power over him. They cannot love, they can only desire. They are cold-blooded.... [...]

These are the women who play the role of the anima to men, as a game, a technique — deliberately repressing their own reactions so that they may the more surely get what they want.²²⁴

²²⁴ M. Esther Harding, *Woman's Mysteries: Ancient and Modern*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971, p.118.

Katerina Ivanovna's siren-like manipulation of Dmitrii would indeed spell his doom if he allowed himself to stay with her. She wants him only in the sense that he is useful to her and her pride; he says himself that she does not love him, only her own virtue. Katerina Ivanovna's instinct tells her that Mitya's own self-lacerating wallowing in debauchery needs her self-lacerating pride and self-abasement to thrive; without her participation, he would not be so driven to vitiate himself. Her involvement enables him to throw himself the more surely into the beauty of Sodom while enabling her to preen her own self-image. The rusalka is a vain creature whose pride ought not to be disturbed.

Just as surely as she does not love Mitya, Katerina Ivanovna seems to love Ivan. And just as surely, she tortures Ivan. Once she loses the safe, emotionally uninvolved distance separating her from Dmitrii, she loses her self-assurance and control of the situation. As Harding explains: "When the woman herself is immune to love, and regards it only as a game, a technique, she plays the role of Siren to the greatest advantage. [...] For this reason the woman... must not fall in love. Only so long as she herself is not emotionally involved can she control the situation."²²⁵ Katya does not follow these rules and so falls prey to the everyday weaknesses and insecurities that humans in love endure. The challenge before her is an interesting one, and it is certainly disappointing that the opportunity did not arise to see how Dostoevsky would have resolved the love-situation between Ivan and Katya, among other things.

Katerina Ivanovna Marmeladova presents an interesting twist on the fundamental essence of the "Katya" character. She is older, twice married, a mother. But even more important than the experiences of marriage and maturity for the development of this woman are the circumstances in which

²²⁵ Harding, p.120.

she exists: dire poverty. Her every appearance is an opportunity to bemoan her loss of stature: she wails repeatedly about how she danced the shawl dance before the governor when she was a girl, all the interest she had attracted, how the governor himself had complemented her talent and grace. Despite Katerina Ivanovna's tendency to exaggerate, we are led to believe that she had been raised in an atmosphere of gentility, instilled with pride and self-esteem, no needs unsatisfied. That self-esteem now torments her, set against the backdrop of desperate squalor and deprivation in which she lives. She sees her children dressed in rags and recalls the days when she went about adorned in pretty frocks; the sight of her hungry, ill-clad little waifs slowly drives her mad. She fights to hold on to at least a semblance of presentability and cleanliness, staying awake all night to wash and mend the children's only clothes as best she can, despite her own illness and desperate need for rest, lest her little ones appear dirty or ragged. Her own poverty is an affront to her dignity, and she cannot accept the fact that she has no power over her own situation. She torments her husband for the indignity of their lives, for which she blames him. Not for a moment can she tolerate being treated like a beggar, and she never loses her imperious, condescending tone (especially not with her landlady), because the moment she relinquishes this last claim to respect she would in fact collapse, as she does when she is forced on to the streets to beg with her children. But even when panhandling on the streets of the capital she holds steadfastly to her cherished dignity, railing against the society which brought her to this level of abasement and shame, preferring to blame others rather than to accept the fact that she herself figures in the culpability. Marmeladova encourages the debauchery of her husband, as well as the painful conditions of her consumption, the better to feel the fierce lashes of fate against her proud, defiant face.

The wife of an alcoholic civil servant who saved her from ignominy when her first husband died and who has turned out to be a deplorable provider for the family, Katerina Ivanovna consciously and tortuously suffers in her marriage, continually reminding her husband Marmeladov of how her fortunes and her social status have declined since her marriage to him. Mrs. Marmeladov is one of Dostoevsky's professional victims, for she seems unwilling to eliminate some of the factors that contribute to her own suffering. Dostoevsky remarks, for example, that although she is tubercular, Mrs. Marmeladov never closes the door between their flat and the neighboring one despite the fact that smoke is continually pouring in through the doorway. Raskolnikov sees all too well the effects of Mrs. Marmeladov's conscious suffering on those around her. Hurling accusations at Marmeladov, remonstrating against him as the source of her plight, she inculcates guilt in Marmeladov which exacerbates his endless downward spiraling self-esteem.²²⁶

She leaves the doors open, permitting drafts and smoke fumes to pervade her living space, aggravating her affliction. Her mind has lost its grasp of reality to the point that she can no longer envisage solutions; the only mental activity left to her is both imagining her glorious past and new ways to confront her husband with the shameful consequences of his weaknesses. This gives her an uncalm satisfaction, as though she now feels washed of any guilt of participation. Even when she drives Sonya away to sell her young body Katerina Ivanovna feels no pangs of conscience. It seems almost as though she considers it right and fair that Sonya should sacrifice herself for the sake of her step-family, knowing that

²²⁶ Barker, *The Mother Syndrome*, pp. 121-2.

Sonya would never refuse. She manipulates her step-daughter in other ways, too, as shown by the incident Sonya relates involving the pretty lace collar. Katerina Ivanovna wants the collar; for a woman with only one dress in which to clothe her prideful aches, the tiniest embellishment is a salve to the ego. Sonya at first wants to keep it, but, inevitably, she yields the collar to her stepmother, who no doubt knew all along that Sonya would never withhold anything from anyone.

In this aspect Katerina Ivanovna Marmeladova is very prophetic for her later descendant in *Brat'ya Karamazovy*. She willingly and, in fact, eagerly seeks any worsening of her situation, so that she may appear all the more pathetic and all the more virtuous, as a suffering victim who carries on with grace and dignity despite the torments others unleash upon her. The young Katya Verkhovtseva similarly uses Mitya's tendencies toward debauchery and infidelity as a means of bolstering in the eyes of others her own wounded self-image, to display her devotion and virtue in the face of cruel adversity. The pride of these two women is strong: even that which should wound them they turn around for self-aggrandizement. In Marmeladova lies the prophetic anticipation of what would have happened to Mitya and Katya had they, in a twisted fit of sadomasochism, actually married one another. The path of their eventual relationship was laid out prophetically by Dostoevsky years earlier in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*: had Verkhovtseva married the eldest Karamazov son, their mutual tortures would surely have driven them both to ruin, with even more violent consequences than for the Marmeladovs, given Mitya's strong temperament. Luckily, they avoid this possibility, and Mitya seems ready to spend his life with the "reformed" angel Grushen'ka; but for Ivan, apparently the true love of Katerina Ivanovna, one foresees a marital home crumbling with the force of two proud egos in combat. Perhaps this, in a way, is Ivan's punishment

for his role in his father's death. He certainly will suffer.

Just as Katerina Ivanovna will eventually lose Mitya to Grushen'ka, Katerina Nikolaevna (*Podrostok*) inevitably loses her fascinating hold over both Versilov and Arkadii. In *Brat'ya Karamazovy*, Katerina Ivanovna amuses Mitya only insofar as he can trample her virtue, flaunt his infidelity before her, debase himself and complete the cycle by feeling self-lacerating guilt over how he has wronged her. This sadomasochistic see-saw certainly appeals to a broad nature like Dmitrii's, but this ephemeral playground cannot provide the eternal joy for Mitya that Grushen'ka's love does. Likewise, the relationships between Katerina Nikolaevna and Versilov & Son lack the unconditional love which never fails to triumph over the more banal attractions of the flesh or the intellect. This Katerina is a brilliant beauty with glorious hair, no doubt far more attractive than Sof'ya and her "hollow cheeks." Katerina Nikolaevna's perfection can fascinate and capture men's attentions. But she herself has no great desire for these attentions, only insofar as they flatter her and give her power. She does not love, she only rules. Her wealth, charm, and society graces give her unfair advantages in competition with Sonya, as do her greater beauty and education. But her lures are merely those of this world, not of the other, spiritual realm wherein Dostoevskian matches are made.

Arkadii, like his father, perceives Katerina's true wilful pride when first he sees her; later, when his mind becomes clouded and his understanding is flung out of the window by infatuation, he repents of this evaluation, now believing her to be simple-hearted and good. But soon enough he comes to realize his self-delusions, kept up for the sake of his "ideal," his most precious component. For Arkadii and Versilov, time and experience slowly teach that this false idol is a usurper, pretending to possess the virtues

these men seek; this painful disillusionment plunges them into despair, until suddenly, from the depths of their consciousness, they recall the true ideal, Sonya. All along she had patiently awaited their return to her, as inevitable as the sunrise; finally they are free to see her spiritual reality and their dependence on her for support and love — an uncomfortable realization for two such independently-minded men. But the truth is ineluctable, and Katerina Nikolaevna is left alone, as she ought to be and, indeed, as she seems to prefer.

A “proud woman” can be one of the string of young society ladies often called Katya, but the term can also denote other characters, like Dunya Raskol'nikova, Aglaya Ivanovna Epanchina, Nastas'ya Filippovna, Liza Tushina (*Besy*), Liza Dolgorukaya (*Podrostok*), and Grushen'ka. The concept itself ought not be considered a category, but rather a description, a denotation. The proud woman, according to Mochulsky, “is always a dazzling beauty who transfixes the soul with aesthetic rapture. [...] ...the ‘terrible force of beauty.’”²²⁷ This powerful beauty can also be related to the idea of the *infernal'naya zhenshchina*, most particularly found in the characters Nastas'ya Filippovna and Grushen'ka. Joseph Frank provides a definition: “Dostoevsky’s ‘infernal women’” are those “whose wounded pride stands in the way of their acceptance of the gift of love and generates, rather, a hatred and persecution of the lover....”²²⁸ This declaration will be partially disputed in the following two chapters, but for now it is acceptable when dealing with female characters other than Grushen'ka and Nastas'ya Filippovna.

Dunya, Rodion Romanovich's sister in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, is more than the usual *infernal'naya zhenshchina*. She is a loving sister who

²²⁷ Mochulsky, p. 108.

²²⁸ Frank, *The Seeds of Revolt*, p. 359.

is willing to subvert her own happiness, at her mother's behest, to the interests of her brother. But she is also the woman who takes a pistol to her interview with Svidrigailov, knowing the threatening advances he will continue to make against her. In the heat of the onslaught, however, she relents; the loss of her dignity and virginity is more acceptable to her than shooting and perhaps killing her attacker. She drops the gun and stands defenseless; her submission piques Svidrigailov, but her detachment deters him, ruining the prospect of spirited struggle, and he lets her go unharmed. The fear he had wanted to see, the hatred and fiery pride he cherishes in the eyes of his victims are missing; without these elements the sadist feels no lure.

Aglaya Ivanovna Epanchina is quite similar to the young Katyas. One of the most thorough treatments of her is by Frank Friedeberg Seeley, who displays a remarkable understanding which I dispute only occasionally. As Seeley asserts, Aglaya is a beautiful, wealthy young woman who is the unrivaled center of her family's affections. In this she differs substantially from most of Dostoevsky's other heroines; her integration into her devoted and loving family is quite unusual for *any* Dostoevskian character. But this loving family plants the seeds of her fatal flaw, the fierce pride she constantly exhibits, as well as instilling in her unrealistic expectations for her future. For an idealistic young woman like Aglaya, no reality could ever approach her dreams; when she seems to meet the embodiment of her ideals she falls quickly. This rapid loss of autonomy sparks a proud rebellion within her, and she torments Myshkin accordingly. But her own self-assurance is battered beyond repair by his indecision (or, rather, by his decision against her), and this ego-wound in turn leads Aglaya to force his hand when Nastas'ya Filippovna calls her bluff and Myshkin deals her the fatal blow. Throughout the novel the responses of her pride against the real or

imagined attacks by the outside world can be seen.

...Aglaja's considerable gifts are partly crippled by her insecurity, vulnerability, excessive sensitiveness. [...] Partly to punish the offenders (however unintentionally they may have jarred), but partly also as a smoke screen for her own uncertainties, Aglaja constantly has recourse to misbehavior and aggression — mainly verbal: tantrums, fibs, rudeness, mystification, and mockery. This sort of behavior is common to Dostoevskij's characters whenever they are losing the struggle to define or assert their self on the plane of thought. They are then moved to switch their protest and/or self-assertion to the plane of action, seeking there, in various forms of misconduct, compensation or revenge for injuries to their human dignity.²²⁹

This course of defensive, proud behavior is also readily visible in Nastas'ya Filippovna, as well as in many other of the proud young heroines, like any of the Katyas discussed above.

For Aglaya, as for Nastas'ya Filippovna, Myshkin is the Expected One, the savior for whom each has waited, the Eternal Bridegroom, much like the one for whom Mar'ya Timofeevna was to wait in *Besy*. Their expectations are dashed, just as hers will be, by a false pretender, though in this case the disappointment stems not from the deliberate evil of the false savior, but rather from his inadequacy in the imperfect world in which he was embodied. Aglaya has manufactured an ideal personal world with which Myshkin dovetails perfectly, or so she believes. Soon enough, though, she will be forced to concede his inefficacy and the futile loss of her dreams,

²²⁹ p. 5, Frank Friedeberg Seeley, "Aglaja Epančina." *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1974, pp.1-10.

whereupon she will toss away all the hopes others had attached to her. From the moment she meets him Myshkin has a visible effect on her without his even trying. He is not of her world, the world of which she has grown weary and disillusioned, the world of society with its rampant falsehoods. With his ingenuousness, inexperience, and naive honesty he presents an alternative to this world. But even as she falls in love with him and envisions him as the ideal Bridegroom to whom she might marry herself and her deepest hopes, she remains fundamentally realistic, like her mother. Throughout the novel, Madame Epanchina exhibits an innate comprehension of character, a childlike ability to see what others cannot or will not; this *proniknovenie* she bequeaths to Aglaya, who is also described as childlike. This descriptor angers her, for she interprets it as meaning immature or innocent, which she does not wish to be. Regardless, her intuitive knowing of the "Other" enables her to see the truth of Myshkin, even in her deepening love for him.

Aglaja's love for Myshkin takes root in the depths of her, involving all that is best in her mind, imagination, and heart. She not only appreciates or admires him.... She achieves a fine understanding of him, an understanding at once subtle and profound, which is strikingly expressed in the scene of the Puškin recitation, in her definition of "glavnyj um," and in much of what she says about him in her duel with Nastas'ja Filippovna. In fact she understands not only his singular virtues but also his oddity and shortcomings, and that is a measure of her realism.²³⁰

Aglaya loves Myshkin's other-worldliness. She accepts that he cannot

²³⁰ Seeley, p. 6.

presume to begin a courtship of her, so she sets about prompting him, all the while her pride waiting in the background, ready to fight off attacks. This is very risky for someone so self-conscious; if she fails, she may not have the emotional equipment or experience to deal with the blow of rejection, as the novel later shows. Her entire life has assured her of her immense personal value and worth, her lovable self. When confronted with repudiation of this lifelong belief, on which her whole personality has been constructed, she will cave in and fall to horrible depths (as her later marriage to a Pole and conversion to Roman Catholicism assert for Dostoevsky).

Her flirtation with Myshkin actually provides some of the most charming and amusing scenes in the work. Aglaya's gift to Myshkin of the hedgehog is undeniably a brilliant jest invented by Dostoevsky the humorist, so often overlooked. This prickly little pet not only serves its purpose with Myshkin, it also vexes Aglaya's family, always a happy side benefit.

Aglaya's "duel" with Nastas'ya Filippovna, as Seeley names it, seems a practice run for the future confrontation between Katerina Ivanovna and Grushen'ka in *Brat'ya Karamazovy*, in the chapter entitled "*Obe vmeste*," though in *Idiot* the consequences are far more tragic. Aglaya's inexperience and jealousy lead her to overplay her hand: she insults Nastas'ya Filippovna, a sure way to send Myshkin flying to the latter's aid. Her resentment of this "fallen woman" and her power over Myshkin are completely natural and comprehensible, and here are enhanced by Aglaya's youthful pride in a first love affair threatening to go awry. Of course, as Seeley points out, Nastas'ya Filippovna cannot help but gloat a little, perhaps unconsciously feeling it her due to inflict pain when she feels pain, rubbing salt in the wound of Aglaya's already blistered pride.²³¹ Nastas'ya's mis-

²³¹Seeley, p. 7.

sives have hit their target, even though probably unintentionally, with a barrage of self-doubt: "For whatever else they contained or implied, what Aglaya was bound to read in them was: 'I give him to you....'"²³² This "duel" additionally evinces an underlying factor in Aglaya's insecurity. Seeley believes that Aglaya's "own innocence is an added torment. [...] To her, Nastas'ja's impurity is physically disgusting, as she cannot help showing by her looks and attitudes at their meeting. [...] But while she is conscious of her disgust, she can hardly be aware of a more insidious and poignant effect of her innocence: an unavowable curiosity, laced with doubt and fear, as to the exact nature of Nastas'ja's hold on Myshkin."²³³ In this Seeley's assumptions fall short. Yes, certainly, Myshkin loves Nastas'ya Filippovna "in some different way, in some way in which he might never be able to love [Aglaya]."²³⁴ However, the difference is not a carnality, some loss of virginity and physical purity; rather, Aglaya senses that the difference in Myshkin's love for Nastas'ya Filippovna is his love for her suffering. From the scene in the Epanchin home when Myshkin and the Epanchin women gaze at the portrait of Nastas'ya Filippovna, Aglaya has known, though she may have sought not to acknowledge, that what Myshkin loves in Nastas'ya Filippovna is the suffering soul of beauty. From the very first Myshkin differentiates between the beauty of the two women — even in Aglaya's presence. What Aglaya knows and fears is that her innocence and purity show on her face, that her cheeks are not hollow and pale, that Myshkin's love-pity for the fallen soul of beauty ties him irrevocably to Nastas'ya Filippovna, unbreakable by the more ordinary love he seems to feel for her, Aglaya. It is not the lack of innocence which Myshkin loves *per se* in Nastas'ya Filippovna, not some sexual knowledge which Aglaya

²³² Seeley, p.7.

²³³ Ibid, p. 8.

²³⁴ Ibid.

does not yet possess which lures him to the "fallen woman"; it is rather the fact that Nastas'ya Filippovna's impurity wounds her, brings her pain and anguish, both at her own hand and those of others. Aglaya's immunity to this kind of hurt is the source of her vulnerability to Nastas'ya Filippovna, and her pride cannot resist taunting her rival with her own purity. This childish, defensive attempt to wound another when one feels wounded results in the ineluctable "treachery" of Myshkin, as he feels compelled to comfort the once more denigrated Nastas'ya Filippovna. The fact that this painful thrust is delivered by the hand of the woman he presumably thinks he loves makes the occasion all the more imperative for Myshkin; he cannot abandon Nastas'ya Filippovna after she faces what is in his eyes unjustified venom from within his own camp.

Aglaya represents Myshkin's opportunity to base himself in the real world, to unite with an earthly, living bride in a normal union not wrought of pity and pain. Aglaya, "meaning 'day-bright' or 'brilliant,' was once the name of one of the three Graces of classical antiquity."²³⁵ Her earthly radiance could serve to bring Myshkin away from the "dark" face of Nastas'ya Filippovna and her sorrow. But apparently even this bright beauty of youthful purity and energy cannot ground Myshkin in this world. As he had done with Nastas'ya Filippovna, Myshkin gazes at Aglaya in their park rendezvous as though she too were a portrait, as though she, too, were not actually, physically real. Aglaya loves Myshkin as a real woman loves a real man, as her mother tells him reproachfully, but Myshkin is incapable of truly loving the reality of any woman, so immured is he in his ideals of beauty. He sees Aglaya as an object, as do most of the male characters in the novel. Aglaya, like Nastas'ya Filippovna, is a commodity to be bargained for and sold to the most prestigious bidder for the highest price. She feels

²³⁵ Passage, *Character Names*, p. 69.

this and rails against it as she struggles to anchor Myshkin in her world, in a real, human love for her. She refuses to be a portrait, an idol, and part of her downfall may be read as a response to the unfair external valuations of her by the men in her circle. She thwarts their grandiose plans and prospects for profits by throwing herself and her future away on a fake Polish Count, further sullyng herself by converting to Catholicism. She wants so badly to set her own value that she will even go so far as to destroy that value; in this, she is much like Nastas'ya Filippovna. If she cannot live in this world on her own terms, then she will not live in this world.

Liza Tushina is another beautiful young society lady with everything ahead of her. But she is not content with the ordinary life her mother seems to have mapped out for her, with marriage to the perfectly ordinary, pleasant, worshipful young Mavrikii Drozdov. Although she cares for Mavrikii, she does not value him, and in fact finds his attentiveness and very ordinariness annoying. Hers are other dreams than these. The excitement and mystery she sees in the handsome Nikolai Stavrogin lure her into her own sort of demonic possession: she seems to abandon all reason in his presence, losing self-control, giggling. This madness culminates in her sudden flight with him, when she throws away her carefully cultivated reputation and spends the night with Nikolai.

For Liza, as for all the other characters of *Besy*, Nikolai is the alluringly dark, handsome glass which reflects her own desires. She sees in him what she wants to see, and when she is finally, irrevocably, confronted with his empty reality, she plunges headfirst to her own death.

Dostoevsky makes it plain that the night Liza spends with Nikolai was not platonic. In part three, the third chapter, entitled "Законченный роман," begins with a description of Liza's dishevelled appearance: her

dress “надетое наскоро и небрежно,” without all the buttons fastened.²³⁶ Obviously our worst fears are confirmed: she has consummated her relationship with Nikolai. But now she sits with fevered brow looking worried. Her worry is not for the reactions of the town against her, or for the consequences of her action; if all had gone well with Nikolai, presumably he would have made things “right” by marrying her. No, her consternation is caused by some other thought. The time spent with Nikolai has proven to her that what she thought she saw in him was never there. She realizes that he does not love her, that he never did, and that in fact he is incapable of love. This moment is a tragic epiphany for her, as she sits with the awesome realization that she has thrown away her life for nothing, that her noble knight is nothing more than a shell of armor, without a beating human heart beneath it. She sees how bored he is with her — with anyone — how impatient and withdrawn. She had seen that even as she went with him, before it was too late; she had seen that she was “a dead woman,” that this choice had sealed her doom and she could not stop herself. Perhaps her hope was too great, she did not want to believe in what she knew to be true, perhaps she had hoped that she could shake him out of his deathlike trance. Perhaps she had simply reckoned that the price she would pay was a just one, that though she knew the eventual outcome, she had to act as she did. To be a real person, to live her own life, to taste for a moment the fruit of passion which might never again have passed her lips; she lived her whole life in the span of one night, in a painful honesty which would never have been possible had she lived her life conventionally. She asserts: “я разочла мою жизнь на один только час и спокойна.”²³⁷ This one hour of living is a truly Dostoevskian concept; we

²³⁶ PSS, 10, 1974, p. 454.

²³⁷ Ibid, p. 401.

saw it Raskol'nikov, and in both Aglaya and Nastas'ya Filippovna, among others, all for different reasons and in different ways, but nevertheless each had refused to continue (or temporarily refused, as with Raskol'nikov, since he later repents) living a life apparently contrary to themselves. Liza is willing to risk and, indeed, is complacent to accept, the loss of her life for the sake of one night with Stavrogin. She is like the heroine of *Dracula*, who voluntarily admits the darkly handsome Prince of the Night to her room, offering herself to his uses in fascinated desire, entranced by the lure of the forbidden as well as the lure of the promised Eternal Husband. Liza gives herself to Stavrogin, though all along she knows she will leave him the next morning. One cannot attribute her action to any mental unbalance — indeed, this robs her of what she most prized: her autonomy and free-will. Rather, her plunge into the consciousness of death is an affirmation of her independence, as well as of her despair upon finding the knightly armor uninhabited. She is Sorrow, she is the Maiden betrayed by the false savior, she is the virgin spirit still undefiled, for though she gives her body to him, she retains her self, she reclaims her self-control from the fascinating hold which Stavrogin had had over her. The night with Stavrogin was necessary to prove to her what she was afraid to admit: that he was empty and soulless, a traitor of her dreams.

Much as Nastas'ya Filippovna rushed to the Executioner in the person of Rogozhin, Liza feels an instinctive need to cleanse herself of sin, her own sins and those committed because of her. She offers herself up to the angry mob as a sacrifice for the blood needlessly shed, she runs to her killers in an almost religious ecstasy, an acceptance of suffering. She had known the evening before that she would die; indeed, given her circumstances, what choice was open to her? She was disgraced in society, befouled and fallen. She could not continue life as she had known it, not

even with the devoted Mavrikii beside her. Without her ideal, anyway, her life would merely have been a pale shadow of its former self, deprived of something in which she could believe. She rushes to the cleansing fire of anger at the hands of the mob in atonement, peacefully and submissively, seeming to have recognized the Dostoevskian "justice" in this end, as well as its necessity for her own salvation. Her soul is now linked with that of Mar'ya Timofeevna, whose life had been taken on the same spot.

Liza's pride had led her to test Nikolai, among others. She admits her insecurity to him on the morning she dies, she tells him that she had thought he avoided her because he disliked her. Her vanity had led her to taunt him, until she had understood why he had avoided her. Once reassured by the real reason he had stayed away from her, she proceeded to abandon all the face-saving self-restraint formerly employed against him.

In *Podrostok* another young woman named Liza awaits, another proud beauty wrestling with herself and others for a sense of identity. Her role is much more marginal to the plot of the novel than the other heroines under discussion here, although her brief appearances are not without interest. She is as intelligent as her sisters, with the same deep understanding of others that Aglaya possesses. Her pride is fierce and defensive, enacted by her lover's arrest and detention.

Лиза, столь сильно любившая, должна была очень страдать. По характеру своему она предпочла страдать молча. Характер её был похож на мой, то есть самовластный и гордый, и я всегда думал, и тогда и теперь, что она полюбила князя из самовластия, именно

за то, что в нём не было характера, и что он вполне, с
первого слова и часа, подчинился ей. ²³⁸

Liza holds her family at bay, refusing to endure their concern or sympathy. But eventually she is reconciled with them, returning to the family the way her father and brother do. Her proud need for control is eventually subverted to the apparent harmony of the family. She lives her days in silence, in apparent contentment, though this itself is questionable. Liza is definitely not one of Dostoevsky's most masterful figures.

There is another figure who should be included in this loose grouping of "proud" young women: Polina of *Igrok*. But Polina is a special case deserving separate consideration. In fact, she cannot be discussed without mentioning her real-life inspiration, Dostoevsky's lover, Apollinariya Suslova. Though it cannot be precisely dated,²³⁹ at some point in the early 1860's Dostoevsky's attentions were quickly and inextricably absorbed. Into his life walked the talented, independent, proud, and beautiful Apollinariya Prokof'evna, the "emancipated" woman who would occupy his

²³⁸ PSS, 13, 1975, p. 292.

²³⁹The affair between Dostoevsky and Suslova probably began as late as the winter of 1862-63, although some biographers date it back to 1861. See Joseph Frank, *The Stir of Liberation*, especially pp.253-54, and for contrasting dates concerning the inception of their sexual relationship see L. Grossman, p.275, and Marc Slonim, *Three Loves of Dostoevsky*, pp.120-21. Grossman is vague and writes: "In the early 1860's Dostoevsky experienced one of the strongest passions of his life" (p.275). Slonim is more presumptuously insulting. He imagines: "Apollinaria dabbled in literature and in September, 1861, *In The Meantime*, a story of hers, appeared in *Time*. This sketch, feeble and of little originality, was hardly remarkable as a work of art; evidently the editor of *Time* had special reasons for helping along the literary career of his young protegee" (p. 121). The patronizing insinuation here is that they *must* already have been lovers, because otherwise Apollinariya's story would never have been published. Regardless of the merit of the story, this insults both parties, presuming first of all that Dostoevsky would have used his magazine and his editorial position to satisfy the whims of his frivolous, talentless mistress, as well as that Apollinariya would have ever accepted such charity, let alone insisted on it, especially at such a price.

life like an army occupies a country: fiercely, forceably, unforgettably. The tempestuous course their relationship would travel for the next few years is well documented in the many biographies of Dostoevsky. (Especially worthy is Joseph Frank's lengthy and considered treatment of their liaison.) In 1863 he made his second trip abroad with her, meeting her in Paris a little too late. By the time Dostoevsky arrived, she had already fallen in love with a young Spanish student named Salvador. More of a swashbuckler than a student, it seems, this Salvador made quick use of Apollinariya's need for love and experimentation. The libertine Salvador threw her over in a particularly callous and cowardly way, leaving the newly arrived Dostoevsky to pick up the pieces and bear the brunt of Apollinariya's fury.

It was on this trip abroad that he first became obsessed with the gaming tables. Despite (or because of) the proximity of the woman he loved and desired, he could not tear himself away from the roulette wheels, even as he lost his and her last coins. She bore this, and at times the reunion he had dreamed of seemed at hand, with Apollinariya oscillating between coldly spurning his supplications and coquettishly encouraging him, perhaps occasionally through a sincere need of intimacy and friendship. In the end, however, they parted company, Dostoevsky returning to Russia, his hopes of regaining the old relationship with Apollinariya never fully extinguished by either party. He would never be fully free of her majestic, infernal spirit. In 1865, after a chain of personal tragedies — the death of his wife, for whom he still cared deeply, the death of his beloved brother and his assumption of the duties of Mikhail's family, the financially crushing closure of *Epokha* — Dostoevsky set off on his third trip abroad, to meet Apollinariya in Wiesbaden. The lapse of two years since he had last seen her had not lessened his affection for her, but she had already decided that for her the affair held only emptiness, and she tortured him fearfully. In be-

tween meeting Apollinariya and frequenting gambling establishments, Dostoevsky worked on the novel inspired by his experiences with Apollinariya and gambling: *Igrok*. No doubt the final composition of this story (interspersed with the writing of *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*) helped Dostoevsky begin to exorcize Apollinariya's demonic possession of him. After this trip and their penultimate parting he began to recover from her intoxicating influence. Despite their final parting in the spring of 1866 (before he met Anna Grigor'evna Snitkina), they would continue a correspondence, and he would never fully scour her from his soul; many of his subsequent female characters would continue to display their archetypal similarities to this emancipated woman, this *infernal'naya zhenshchina*. The torment she had beckoned forth from him would never cease to exist, and indeed could not, for it was too integral a part of his soul, as she herself was.

Dostoevsky's passion for Apollinariya was, in one way, similar to his love for Mar'ya Dmitrievna; it was less about the woman as an individual than about her coincidental and convenient congruence with an image he held within his soul. In the case of his first wife, it was the image of the maternal feminine, and the rebirth and renewal promised in that image. Later, Dostoevsky's psychic imprint of Russian beauty, with all its infernal qualities, was activated by his acquaintance with the young daughter of a former peasant, the fiery, intelligent, lovely Suslova.

Dostoevsky's ideal of Russian beauty preceded and thus precipitated his fall into abandoned adoration of Apollinariya; had this image not been already firmly ingrained in his soul (as expressed in his literature), his passion for her would not have been so strong, so uncontrollable, so enduring. For even when he had perhaps ceased to think of Apollinariya herself, the image of the *infernal'naya zhenshchina* lived on, to be even more fully,

more powerfully, developed in the later, great novels.

His works dating from before the winter of 1862-63 (when he probably first met Suslova) establish that Dostoevsky was already well-versed in the undulations of this female energy. His first expressions of this image — at once a perception of “Russian beauty” and of the *infernal'naya zhenshchina* — can be found even before his explicit linkage of the figure to Apollinariya herself. It is present, albeit imperfectly developed, in Katerina of *Khozyaika*, in Princess Katya of *Netochka Nezvanova*, the blonde of *Malen'kii geroi*, and to a degree it is even recognizable in Natasha of *Unizhennye i oskorblennye*. These specific characters in the works written prior to his relationship with Suslova provide evidence of Dostoevsky's obvious interest in and understanding of this character component long before he encountered the actual embodiment of it in Apollinariya.

Within himself, Dostoevsky carried certain firmly rooted ideas of womanhood, as do most men. As mentioned earlier, one of these ideals, based on his actual maternal experience, transmitted an archetypal power to his relationship with Mar'ya Dmitrievna; here another ideal, that of Russian womanly beauty and attraction (in all its nebulous contradictions), was activated by and in a sense took over his relationship with the young Suslova.

Apollinariya could hardly have better embodied Dostoevsky's archetypal image had she deliberately set about modeling herself on it. Born of peasant stock, she was raised on the land, in the country, enjoying a childhood probably free from most worries. By the time Dostoevsky met her, Apollinariya had been educated and had lived in the capital long enough to acquire more than a rudimentary grasp of the current philosophical trends, more than a general knowledge of literature. But for all her erudition, she had not yet shed her youthful enthusiasm, fiery idealism, girlish romanticism, or, more importantly, her virginity. Her apparent hero-worship

of him could hardly have left him untouched. For a forty-year-old man who had never been the object of female fancy, this adulation no doubt inflamed him. Apollinariya was at once of the people and yet educated, innocent but fiercely independent, chaste but scornful of traditional attitudes towards sexuality. This very contradictoriness no doubt further enraptured Dostoevsky, by now a doomed man.

All the traits she did in fact possess echoed Dostoevsky's archetypal ideals of Russian womanhood: she was beautiful, intelligent, daring yet retiring, unabashedly steadfast in her idealistic views while remaining essentially pragmatic. Indeed, one can easily understand her, as well as the character she directly inspired, Polina (a diminutive of *Apollinariya*), with a careful study of some of Dostoevsky's other literary creations: through the wounded Nastas'ya Filippovna, mourning her lost innocence and resentful of those she blames for her corruption; Grushen'ka's wilful taunting of her admirers, as well as many other female characters. Even the physical descriptions of many of these women, actual and literary, are remarkably similar. But obviously the woman she most resembles is her namesake, Polina.

Many of the similarities between the real life affair and the fictional relationship between Aleksei and Polina have already been thoroughly discussed by many critics. After a brief survey of the biographies involved, the associations become obvious: the grief Apollinariya felt at Salvador's betrayal as well as the attendant torture of a close friend whose heart is involved is obviously echoed in Aleksei's abuse at the hands of Polina in revenge for her mistreatment by the Marquis. The similarities between the two are not the most vital point here; rather, it is the fact that Polina was not the first expression of this essential character component, as many critics seem to wish to indicate. Certainly Dostoevsky's relationship with

Apollinariya deepened his understanding of this feminine figure, as demonstrated by his supreme expressions of it after he had met her, as well as by the psychological depth of Polina. But obviously this sort of woman had danced across the ballroom of Dostoevsky's fantasies before he had met Apollinariya. Asserting that she is the "prototype" of any of his later characters demeans Dostoevsky's innate psychological understanding. The fact that Apollinariya meshed so well with one of his prevailing ideals brought her even closer to his soul and tied her to his heart even more tightly. The act of writing down his experiences in novel form with *Igrok* helped Dostoevsky shake himself loose from the direct control of this female spirit, though he would always feel her shadow following him. Later, after time had separated him from his wild, painful passions, his relationship with Apollinariya enabled him to understand her personality better, and all the more convincingly to depict it within the framework of his novels, in the great, memorable female characters of his later works, especially the proud, wilful Nastas'ya Filippovna and Grushen'ka.

CHAPTER 7

An example of the categorization-defying character:

Grushen'ka

In a certain kingdom, in a certain land, there lived a woman named Agrafena Aleksandrovna Svetlova. She was a beautiful young woman with a sad past to haunt her, though her beauty and charm brought men to their knees. In her sadness this was of little comfort to her, and she spent her nights secretly weeping over the love she had lost, the cruel man who had deceived and left her. For five years she wept secretly, masking her pain with trifles and amusements, laughing away her ill-repute and public disgrace though it pained her. She did not endeavor to change the image she had acquired and, indeed, she seemed to revel in her shame. Until one day, that is, when she saw the truth and understood that her past love was over, and that before her stood a new love, a man who needed her desperately, a man for whom she was salvation and renewal. She rose to the call and heeded her heart, throwing off the sham of debauchery and self-laceration to take up the heavy mantle of rebirth and love, the warmth of which would protect her all the way to Siberia.

The finery of this young woman lies in her realism, her realism in her defiance of categories and labels, both within the world of the novel *Brat'ya Karamazovy* and beyond, in the minds of the reader and the critic.

Grushen'ka is doubtlessly one of Dostoevsky's most memorable female characters. Even her name attracts attention: who is this "juicy little pear"? Wherein lies her fascinating influence, both on the men she encounters

and on the reader? Grushen'ka lives beyond the paper on which her name is printed; her words and actions leap off the page into genuine life, emboldened by the complexity engendered in her by her creator, the master psychologist Dostoevsky.

Grushen'ka is a "beast," a "creature": she is called both *tvar'* and *sozdanie*.²⁴⁰ She is called *obayatel'nitsa*, *volshebnitsa*, *merzavka*, and, according to her rival, "Её нужно плетью..."²⁴¹ But she is also an angel, *tsaritsa*, *dragotsennaya dobycha*. She is at once an *infernal'naya zhenshchina*, proud and wilful, and a suffering sinner struggling to assert her faith in goodness, a savior who also needs saving, the source and the light for Mitya's resurrection from darkness, rather as Sonya was for Raskol'nikov. For Mitya, Grushen'ka is at once the beauty of Sodom and the Madonna. She is the beauty that will save the world, even as she herself is rescued. This time the earthly prince does not fail her; Alyosha, the boy-man of God, frees her from her earthly chains to rise and rescue the man she loves.

Victimized at an early age, Grušen'ka becomes a *femme fatale* whose humiliation has been transformed into power over the men that surround her. Unlike Nastas'ja Filippovna, however, she is not at the same time the object of salvation but assumes the role of the redeemer in her relationship with the accused murderer Dmitrii. She abandons the role of victimizer, and... is successful in bringing

²⁴⁰ See Terras, *A Karamazov Companion*. On page 186 (note 210, 135₂₃, 14:136₁₈) he observes: "Russian has several words for 'creature.' One of them — *tvar'*, opprobrious when applied to a human being — was applied to Grushen'ka earlier [in Part I, Book Two, Chapter 6, by Miusov], and will be again. Here [Book Four, Chapter 9] another word — *sozdanie*, often used with the epithets 'divine' or 'heavenly' — appears."

²⁴¹ PSS, 14, 1976, p. 141.

about the rehabilitation of the fallen male.²⁴²

Her pride has been aroused much as Nastas'ya Filippovna's was: she was seduced and then abandoned, although not by a father-figure. Her lover rejected her and left her, a thin, near-consumptive seventeen-year-old girl who could not stop crying. Rescued by a wealthy older man, Grushen'ka becomes a kept woman, though not very extravagantly kept. She learns about business and money from her miserly old keeper, and she stays with him despite his age and ill-health, nursing him and aiding his affairs. For the entire five years after her Polish lover jilted her, no one can boast of her "favors" save this old man, in contradiction of the commonly held opinion of her. This rumor inflames her self-esteem, and, in self-laceration, she strives to appear all the more debauched, encouraging rather than thwarting her bad reputation as though to spite the town gossips, the better to feel her pain and shame at the hands of her lover, to hate him and plot vengeance.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Grushen'ka embodies Dostoevsky's ideals of figural Russian feminine beauty, much as Nastas'ya Filippovna does. She, too, is seen by the male characters as an object of lust, a commodity to be purchased no matter what the cost, as we see in the frenzied struggle between father and son Karamazov to buy her hand (as well as the rest of her). Money becomes the tool by which one might own beauty, if not control it. Grushen'ka is susceptible to money, but is not so devoted a slave of Mammon that she will sell herself. She is a canny manipulator,

²⁴² p. 340, Olga Matich, "A Typology of Fallen Women in Nineteenth Century Russian Literature," *American Contributions to the Ninth International Congress of Slavists, Vol. II, Literature, Poetics, History*, ed. Paul Debreczeny. Columbus: Slavica Publishers, Inc., 1983, pp.325-43.

recognizing her position and exploiting it for her own amusement. She never intends to have any relationship with Fyodor Pavlovich beyond their initial commercial one, and her link with her benefactor seems to have at least a thin basis of mutual concern, not just a purely opportunistic foundation, as he evolves into a sort of father-figure for her (echoing the semi-incestuous relationship between Nastas'ya Filippovna and Totskii). Her feeling for Dmitrii, finally, is not motivated by anything like greed, although she does admit to a certain jealousy; rather, unbeknownst to both characters, Dmitrii has aroused in her a higher emotion, a deeper link born of a spiritual oneness, which she comes to recognize in the eleventh hour.

Grushen'ka has the body and the face to rule men, as well as the intelligence to manage them efficiently. However, this know-how developed through a painful hands-on experience, at the other side of the workshop; from her Polish lover she learned how desire controls the lover, who yields to the beloved no matter what the cost in dignity or morality. But her lover taught her more than this; he used her love to take advantage of her. Now Grushen'ka exudes the hypnotic attraction of the forbidden fruit, a woman with carnal knowledge, a woman of passion and physicality, the darkly alluring fallen flower whose past sins, real or imagined, serve to inflame lust. Even Alyosha is susceptible to the blazing glory of Grushen'ka's beauty. Her body promises voluptuous indulgence, something which the young novice only begins to sense, deep within his buried Karamazovian nature. This erotic power is one Grushen'ka exercises consciously, wielding it skillfully, the better to achieve her own ends. The narrator's descriptions of her hypererotic sensuality fairly drool, as do the remarks about her by the lascivious male characters of the novel. Apparently exuding passion like a bubbling cauldron, this witch spills her spells carefully, taking advantage of what little power a commodity-person

does possess, a function of her value: her power lies in her face, her body, her charm, and when those assets are gone, so is her power. She knows it is a losing game played against time, and she endeavors to reap its meager rewards while she can.

This knowing, conscious maneuvering and apparently cynical manipulation of her precarious situation she tosses aside freely when she comes to realize the true depth of feeling she shares with Dmitrii. Her essential integrity, the relatedness of woman to the spirit and to wholeness, enable her to see through her own veil of proud masochism to Dmitrii's genuine, passionate, reverent love for her. In this intuitive realization, Grushen'ka moves away from the prideful, ego-driven reactions which had ruled her, to the higher plane of Sophian spirituality, suffering, and love. Grushen'ka achieves what no other Dostoevskian female does: she saves herself, while saving another. Sonya had saved others only. There is no evolution in her: she appears before us the first time as she is when we leave her. Nastas'ya Filippovna and Mar'ya Timofeevna awaited salvation from their divine Bridegrooms, but this salvation was false, leading only to damnation and destruction. Grushen'ka, in a non-*self*-conscious way, leads two men to their personal epiphanies in their dark hour of need. Alyosha comes to her in search of a wicked soul because he believes the rumors about her, because his soul has been wrung nearly dry by the death and decomposition of his mentor. What he finds instead is a woman of substance, of feeling, of spiritual knowing, a woman who had fallen, yes, but one who lives in sorrow rather than in true wickedness. He finds a "sister," a soul who lifts him from his sorrowing pit and raises him to the sky, then throws him to the earth to weep for joy, to "water the earth with his tears," to exalt in his vision of wholeness and resurrection, his Cana of Galilee. It is Grushen'ka who gives this to him, rather as Sonya had

called out the spiritually dead Raskol'nikov and restored him to the path of life. A reciprocity of saving between Grushen'ka and Alyosha is embodied in the scene of the "one onion." Just as Grushen'ka brings to Alyosha a clarity of vision and a restored hope, Alyosha lifts *her* eyes from contemplation of her own sorrow and raises her gaze heavenward again. Alyosha forgives and loves her and, in doing so, he gives her an onion, just as she, the "wicked, wicked woman," has given him. Each take upon themselves the guilt and the sadness of the other, along with the love and hope. The two figures become linked in a beautiful spiritual awakening, one which heralds the ultimate hope and salvation pronounced in the novel. All are guilty for the sins of all. Alyosha and Grushen'ka experience a deep connection, pulling them together, away from their own separate griefs. This is made manifest when Grushen'ka falls to her knees before Alyosha, their tears mingling together as each waters the great Mother earth with tears of communion and joy.

Grushen'ka also brings about Dmitrii's epiphany. He throws himself at her feet, embracing and kissing her, watering her with his tears as though she were the human incarnation of the regenerating Mother Earth. She is his queen and his savior, his ruler and his slave, and she takes up the cross of his penal servitude with a truly Sophian vigor. "In token, so to speak, of her change, the author belatedly confers upon her the full name of Agrafena Alexandrovna Svetlova: *svet*, 'light,' *svetlost*, 'radiance,'... for she becomes illuminated with love. In the scene of Dmitri's arrest, he actually speaks of her as 'my light.'²⁴³ Grushen'ka becomes the light in Dmitrii's impending darkness, filling both their worlds with God's love and an understanding of universal guilt; for her, he is the bright falcon, the true Eternal Husband, a genuine earthly lover (whereas Mar'ya Timofeevna

²⁴³ Passage, *Character Names*, p. 99.

waited in vain for her falcon, finding before her only an owl).

Dmitri's spiritual awakening is shared by Grushenka. It is a new and chastened Grushenka who attends Dmitri on his way to Calvary. From the simple role of partner in the mutual renewal through love, Grushenka is elevated to the role of a participant in the communion of suffering into which Mitya has been initiated. Grushenka even anticipates Dmitri's own achieved readiness to atone when she assumes her whole share of guilt for the murder of the old Karamazov. "It was my fault! Mine! My wickedness!" she cries out, seeing Mitya arrested. "He did it through me. I tortured and drove him to it...."²⁴⁴[...]

Grushen'ka advances far beyond the stagnant levels of development where the other "proud young women" like Katerina Ivanovna languish. She becomes a model of hope for Dostoevsky, for the evolution both of the male and of the female, rather as Alyosha rises from his sorrow to save his own wounded bride and triumphantly march toward the hint of a better, new future. For Dostoevsky, these young characters represented the best, the truth, of Russian youth; in them lay his undying hope for the future, despite his obvious recognition of the pitfalls which lay ahead and the propensity of the young to fall to self-destruction.

Grushen'ka is truly unique among Dostoevsky's female characters. She rises from the ashes of her lost love, brushes off the dark stains of pride, and steps from the self-constructed prison of sorrow to emerge new, fresh, and whole. Now she is a holy figure, not just a ripe earthly beauty,

²⁴⁴ p.1071, Alexandra F. Rudicina, "Crime and Myth: The Archetypal Pattern of Rebirth in Three Novels of Dostoevsky," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, Vol. 87, No. 5, 1972, pp. 1065-74.

and her beauty denotes her angelic stature; now she is no longer an *infernal'naya zhenshchina*, caught in the never-ending inward spiral of defensive pride luring others to a torment she herself felt. She rises from her spiritual dust to be re-born from the Earth, with Alyosha's help, to reemerge triumphant and holy as the living embodiment of her lover's salvation. Her power is redoubled and made clean. No longer is she an object for barter: now she is one-in-herself, christened by the strength of love and faith, fully aware of her guilt and the guilt of all, which she does not hesitate to assume for herself. She becomes the new Sophia, no longer a pale figure of shadowy but divine delineation; she defines herself as a new woman, a new participant in the feast of life on earth.

CHAPTER 8

A space all her own: Nastas'ya Filippovna

Laboring on *Idiot*, "Dostoevsky relates that four heroes have appeared in his novel. 'Of them,' he continues, 'two are strongly delineated in my soul'"²⁴⁵ As Mochulsky asserts, one of these two characters was probably Nastas'ya Filippovna. No other female character of Dostoevsky's creation has presented criticism with so unrelentingly elusive a personality, such contradictory actions, so impenetrable a soul. This is as it should be; Nastas'ya Filippovna is Dostoevsky's most genuine, believable woman. As such, her psychic ball of string cannot be completely unravelled, cannot safely lead to the center of her labyrinthian persona where slumbers the monster of the unknown, the minotaur of the human mind, which no Other can ever fully know, not even her creator. Many critics, past and present, have sought to shine the light of understanding into the vast, sheltered recesses of this character; some have succeeded admirably, though never fully, never without leaving as many questions as they feel they have answered. This study will no doubt suffer the same fate, but so be it; better to let this woman rest in literary peace, some of her secrets still safe.

As the great protagonists of Dostoevsky do, Nastas'ya Filippovna struggles for freedom: freedom from the control of others, of society, of her own sinful past, but also from Myshkin's artificial imposition of innocence, which she knows is equally false. If not freedom in life, then she seeks freedom in death. Death, at least, is an escape from the falseness which had caged her in life. She knows instinctively that Myshkin is wrong when he denies

²⁴⁵ Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky*, p. 344.

her sinfulness. She knows she has sinned, but she wants so desperately to be loved, to believe she is worthy of her heavenly Bridegroom, that she can temporarily participate in Myshkin's illusory earthly Eden of sinlessness and guiltlessness, she can allow him to propagate the myth of her innocence. At last she realizes sadly that it is only inhuman and inhumane pity Myshkin feels for her, not the love of a human man for a human woman, imperfect though it may be, not the love of the Expected One who would redeem her through his love. She hands back her ticket to Myshkin's earthly paradise of innocence rather as Ivan Karamazov would later refuse his ticket to the heaven of God. Unable to accept the facade of guiltlessness, she hands herself over to the cleansing purge of Death at the hands of the priest, Rogozhin. She has survived a childhood of loss, an adolescence of defilement, violation, and destruction of trust, and her entire young-adulthood is a fervent attempt to punish herself for the wrongs others continually do her. Her revelry in humiliation is symptomatic of a past history of abuse, a history which she now seeks to repeat; knowing only suffering, not love, she actively searches for fresh wounds, finding in these the comfort of familiarity. Her self-flagellation is indicative of a need for forgiveness and redemption through healing love. As Victim, she has been taught to believe that she herself is at fault, that she has brought degradation on herself, that she deserves shame, that she is wicked. If taught this lesson long enough one believes it, especially when every new day reaffirms it; the lesson mingles with the psyche, becomes part of the personality, and is enacted through self-fulfillment. Nastas'ya Filippovna has been an excellent pupil, and what she has learned at the hands of the male teachers of her life's anguish she now recites by heart, accepting it as truth *de facto*, playing the role assigned to her with perfection.

But something in her awakens; perhaps she is stirred by the tremors of

hope she feels when she realizes Myshkin has come to save her, or by the quaking pain that runs through her as she sees that he cannot save her because he loves her only with a sort of inadvertently cruel pity, merely as an extension of his own idealization of beauty. The dawn of her awareness begins to melt away the years of training and falseness, and she sees that she can no longer accept pity in place of the genuine human love she deserves. The decision to throw herself into the seething, passionate hands of Rogozhin comes when she recognizes that this is paradoxically the only *free* choice open to her — submission to murder. At least Rogozhin loves her. His love is purely human — demented and destructive, greedy and acquisitive, yes, but immanently earthly. His passion is for her in her wholeness as a sinner, her complete womanhood, but also for woman as thing; he desires her sexually, unlike the impotent, chaste emotion with which Myshkin torments her.

Nastas'ya Filippovna was violated by Totskii, the man she had come to think of as her father; society blames her for this. Rather than retire quietly in the country in shame and degradation, Nastas'ya Filippovna rises and journeys to the capital to confront the evil man who had wronged her. For this she chooses an interesting method: to prove to him just how deeply he has stabbed her, just how irrevocably he has soiled her life, she parades before him and the rest of his corrupt society as exactly what he had made of her, a "fallen woman." Through no fault of her own, Nastas'ya Filippovna lost her maidenly stature; now she is blamed for it. Rather than repudiate this blame, or de-emphasize her shame, she consciously uses it as a tool of revenge. This technique is explicitly explained through Ptitsyn at the end of Part One.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ This comparison is also made by Victor Terras on p. 64 of his book, *"The Idiot": An Interpretation* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990).

—Знаете, Афанасий Иванович, это, как говорят, у японцев в этом роде бывает, — говорил Иван Петрович Птицын, — обиженный там будто бы идёт к обидчику и говорит ему: «Ты меня обидел, за это я пришёл распороть в твоих глазах свой живот», и с этими словами действительно распарывает в глазах обидчика свой живот и чувствует, должно быть, чрезвычайное удовлетворение, точно и в самом деле отместил. Странные бывают на свете характеры, Афанасий Иванович!²⁴⁷

In accepting the appellation of “fallen woman” which society has unfairly bestowed upon her, Nastas'ya Filippovna deepens her shame to ruin the reputation of her seducer along with her own. But in addition to presenting her seducer with evidence of his wrongs, Nastas'ya also lacerates herself in a sort of pleased frenzy of shame and self-punishment. The more deeply she feels the blows, now inflicted by her own hand, the more pleasure she feels. (This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.)

The mortification that Nastasia Filippovna feels is grief for the desecration of her sacred dignity as a woman — nay, more: for the violation and murder of her soul. Her assumed arrogance, her deliberately challenging behaviour, the self-torture of her feigned shamelessness — all these things are nothing but a mask behind which she seeks to hide her despair of rescue and redemption. Nearer the surface of her soul, emotions pursue each other in wild fluctua-

²⁴⁷ PSS, 8, 1973, p. 148.

tion: mortification and revolt, sullenness and shame, contempt for human beings, hatred of pity, even jealousy.²⁴⁸

This flurry of emotions, as well as the apparently inexplicable tendency towards her own further degradation, give the appearance which some of the other characters in the novel call "madness." This madness finds an echo in her later sister, Mar'ya Timofeevna; as both women wait for the Expected One, the Eternal Bridegroom, to rescue and bear them up to heaven with love, each slowly slips from the world inhabited by the ordinary characters.

Myshkin says he believes Beauty will save the world. For him, Nastas'ya is Beauty. At first he hears of her great beauty only second-hand; later he sees her portrait. Three times he looks at this portrait, on each occasion attempting to fathom something he sees in her face. What compels him so deeply is her suffering, in the contradictory company of pride. He sees her wounded soul laid bare by the artist's vision. This painful pride haunts Myshkin, possessing and consuming him: he falls in love with the portrait of the woman before he sees her in the flesh. For him she is the Eternal Feminine, as Ivanov writes; she is the soul of beauty, his ideal. And, as Arkadii Versilov will say in *Podrostok*, all this man needs is his ideal. But this ideal is mired in the sinful world in which she was incarnated, tainted by her own embodiment.

The heavenly emissary... must deliver the world's soul from the

²⁴⁸ Ivanov, p. 100.

bondage of an evil enchantment. [...] This is the liberator for whom waits... that Beauty who comes down upon earth to save the world ("it is beauty that will bring the world salvation"), but then... becomes imprisoned in matter and desecrated — she, the "Eternal Female" herself, who is depicted, in *The Idiot*, by the symbolic figure of Nastasia Filippovna.²⁴⁹

Nastas'ya Filippovna's beauty, instead of saving the world, brings her own destruction, because men want to own it, to control it, to keep its power for themselves. Totskii even goes so far as to blame Nastas'ya explicitly for the degradation he has brought on her, at the end of Part One in conversation with Ptitsyn.

— [...] Я давеча ей крикнуть даже хотел, если бы мог только себе это позволить при этом содоме, что она сама есть самое лучшее моё оправдание на все её обвинения. Ну кто не пленился бы иногда этою женщиной до забвения рассудка и ... всего? [...] Боже, что бы могло быть из такого характера и при такой красоте!²⁵⁰

Such is the unmitigated gall of society, that the rapist, the seducer, can successfully escape any reprobation, that he can be allowed to blame the rape victim, the seduced, for his reprehensible crime. It is of course Nastas'ya's fault that she is now a fallen woman, because she was *too*

²⁴⁹ Ivanov, pp. 96-7.

²⁵⁰ PSS, 8, 1973, p. 149.

beautiful, *too* tempting. Afanasii Ivanovich could scarcely be expected to deny the desires which this shameless seventeen-year-old conjured up in him. Such is the mentality that requires women in some countries to spend their lives hidden under black drapery.

Nastas'ya's beauty makes her an even more tragic figure when envisioned within the hopeful context that "beauty will save the world," as Myshkin asserts. "Nastasya Filippovna's divine beauty marks her for tragedy. The drama of the novel is then that of the tragic destruction of beauty personified. The men and women around Nastasya Filippovna contribute to her destruction. Beauty is Nastasya Filippovna's leitmotiv."²⁵¹ Just as Dostoevsky sought to create in the character of Prince Myshkin a "positively beautiful person" who would save the world with his goodness, so too did he attempt to render in a human woman the ideal of divine beauty. Both fail in their saving missions, and in fact are themselves destroyed. By combining the beauty of Myshkin's character with the beauty of Nastas'ya Filippovna's appearance and then slowly allowing them both to crumble under the unholy weight of this sinful world, Dostoevsky created a truly tragic doubling, a comment on the fate of any and all things beautiful in this decidedly unbeautiful world.

Beauty is, like goodness, an ideal. Dostoevsky has perhaps succeeded better in creating in Nastasya Filippovna a palpable hypostasis of beauty than in making Prince Myshkin a credible hypostasis of goodness. The tragedy of beauty, however, is analogous to that of Myshkin's ineffectual goodness. It is the tragedy of the incompatibility of beauty and carnal desire, man's divine nature and man's animal nature. Instead of loving and revering

²⁵¹ Terras, *An Interpretation*, pp. 52-3.

beauty, men seek to possess it, which inevitably results in its destruction. [...] The tragic denouement suggests a pessimistic denial of Myshkin's dream that "beauty will save the world."²⁵²

Myshkin first falls in love with the portrait of Nastas'ya Filippovna, the beauty of her pale, thin cheeks and burning eyes, the proud mask disguising her pain. By first falling in love with her *in absentia*, the Prince disembodies Nastas'ya Filippovna and separates her beauty from her reality as a human being. This is the essence of the destruction he brings her. Essentially Myshkin treats her as the other men in the novel treat her, as an object, a beautiful thing, though he wants not to possess her but to save her. She herself becomes less than fully human for him, eventually only a portrait of his ideal of beauty. He imposes much the same insubstantial surrealism on the more conventional beauty of Aglaya, at whom he gazes as though she, too, were a portrait rather than a person, staring at her in reverie. Myshkin is unable to distinguish reality from his own aesthetic fantasies. For Nastas'ya Filippovna, disembodiment robs her of what little human dignity remains to her and drives her over the edge of annihilation. She becomes for Myshkin an ideal, and no living, actual person can ever be another's ideal. Ideals are distinctly *not* human; they are of another world, a throwback to days in Plato's heaven, an echo of the beauty and perfection once known and now lost through birth into this imperfect world. An ideal cannot be alive; to be alive is to change, and ideals must be static and constant. An ideal cannot sin, cannot betray her beauty, cannot be defiled; Nastas'ya Filippovna is robbed of her essence, her reality, her actual humanity and her past when Myshkin throws her to the sky to be his con-

²⁵² Ibid, p.53.

stellation of beauty. She becomes for him an icon rather than a person, and in seeking to deny her guilt he seeks to deny her humanity, her imperfection and thence her reality, because stars cannot be imperfect, ideals cannot have flaws. Myshkin certainly sees a sister soul of perfect beauty in whom he recognizes the divine face of God. But by refusing to acknowledge the legitimacy and actuality of the flesh and blood woman in whom this revelation was made human, Myshkin errs as a true idealist would. According to Dostoevsky, even Christ, the most beautiful man, could not raise human beings above their own sinfulness, because in part their creation destined them for it, though they still retain sparkling, faded memories of the perfection of the divine realm whence they came. "...[A]s a vision, as the symbol of an ideal, [Nastas'ya Filippovna's beauty] is an immediate revelation of the divine",²⁵³ but as a person Nastas'ya Filippovna cannot overcome the wickedness of the world into which she was sent, just as the goodness of Myshkin cannot.

Myshkin's idealization of Nastas'ya Filippovna is further evident in the allegorical significance of the inclusion of Pushkin's poem, "Rytsar' bednyi," recited by Aglaya in the novel. The importance of this poem to *Idiot* has been discussed by a few critics,²⁵⁴ but in connection with the above discussion of beauty something further may be shown. As Mochulsky points out, Aglaya's reading of the poem in relation to the Prince "penetrates the very essence of the Prince's nature."

He arrives in the dark world with a shining vision of paradise:
bewitched by the primeval 'image of pure beauty,' he does not

²⁵³ Ibid, p. 81.

²⁵⁴ In particular see Donald M. Fiene's "Pushkin's 'Poor Knight': The Key to Perceiving Dostoevsky's *Idiot* as Allegory," pp. 10-21, *Bulletin of the International Dostoevsky Society*, No. 8, Nov. 1978.

perceive and does not want to perceive the distortions and perversions of the image. Here are his strengths and weaknesses. He looks at the filthy cow-maid Aldonsa and sees in her the beautiful princess Dulcinea; and he is right: in the most fallen being, the image of God is incorruptible. But he is wrong not to notice Aldonsa: she is an inferior reality, but nonetheless *reality*.²⁵⁵

Within the reading of the Pushkin poem lies the most explicit statement of Dostoevsky's true ambivalence toward his "positively beautiful person." Dostoevsky believes in Myshkin's beauty, he loves and cherishes it, but he knows that this form of incarnation of goodness is inappropriate for the world in which we live. In this lies a hint of the spiritual doubts that haunted the writer all his life despite his deep faith and devout spirituality, doubts expressed most vividly in *Brat'ya Karamazovy*, where Ivan is not alone in his inability to accept the suffering of little children in God's world: his brother Alyosha also cannot.

Ivanov and Mochulsky introduced to the analysis of Nastas'ya Filippovna a comparison with Psyche and the ancient Greek myth; however, the two critics did not develop the potential of this illuminating perception far enough.

Psyche, in ancient Greek mythology, was a woman whose beauty so rivaled that of Aphrodite herself that she incurred the wrath of the Goddess of Love. Psyche (in Greek, "butterfly" and "soul") was doomed to marry Death; a wedding feast was celebrated, becoming in actuality a funeral feast, after which she was chained to a rock high on a cliff, still in her wed-

²⁵⁵ Mochulsky, p. 374.

ding finery, to await the arrival of her husband, her destruction. As an added torment, Aphrodite sent her son Eros to shoot Psyche with one of his love-arrows, that she would fall in love with the Expected Husband, Death. But Psyche is saved from her monstrous fate by Eros' accidental self-wounding with his arrows, and he falls in love with her and rescues her.

Nastas'ya Filippovna is granted no such salvation. Rather, she is left, like Psyche, on a high cliff, waiting for her Bridegroom, Death. Her travails are accentuated by the sight of her possible rescuer, Myshkin, the True Husband she longs for; but rather than saving her, he speeds the arrival of her destruction. This woman accepts her own murder, choosing the knife consciously. Although she is no longer a virgin in the modern, patriarchal sense of "chaste," Nastas'ya Filippovna *is* a virgin in the more ancient definition — "one-in herself."²⁵⁶ She is chained on the mountain in full bridal splendor and is devoured. Dressed in white, she indeed marries death; she is sacrificed on the marriage bed, on the white sheets intended to be soiled by the mythical maiden blood upon her sexual union with her husband. Nastas'ya's maiden blood was spilled long ago, and now she sleeps on the marriage bed eternally. The blood that does trickle from her body is symbolic of the virgin blood of the Bride of Death, her white gown is stained by his murderous hand upon their union, her death. Rogozhin kills the maiden she still is. Finally now she is free — free of her sin and her innocence, free of the pains of living in a world which sought to own her. In a way, Rogozhin has been kind to her. He has given her this escape, has freed her from slavery to men's passions (including his own) and the ideals under which she toiled. He has unchained her from the rock so that she could fling herself from it, and now she will no longer have to look upon the painfully ineffectual countenance of her failed divine Bridegroom, Myshkin.

²⁵⁶ For explanation of this original definition, see especially Harding, *Woman's Mysteries* (pp.124-5), and Walker, *Woman's Encyclopedia* (pp. 1048-9).

As Terras writes, "Nastasya Filippovna Barashkova's name is clearly meaningful. Nastasya is short for Anastasia, 'the resurrected,' and Barashkova is derived from *barashek*, 'lamb.' She is thus marked as a victim to be resurrected by virtue of her sacrificial death."²⁵⁷ Rogozhin set her free with his knife, and no doubt she lay on the bed watching him approach, waiting for the gleam of the knife in her chest, anticipating the freedom and awful release of the Ultimate Bridegroom, Death.

In *Idiot* Prince Myshkin's role as a Christ-figure immured in an imperfect world leads him twice to the spiritual destruction of a sinful woman: first the Swiss girl, Marie, and later the heroine, Nastas'ya Filippovna. In his self-delusion, Myshkin effectively robs both women of the Dostoevskian way to salvation: acceptance of guilt before all humankind, and the ensuing, purifying suffering.

Prince Myshkin's character has, by some critics, been declared Christ-like; many others, however, have observed the myriad flaws which bar Myshkin from true savior stature.²⁵⁸ While an examination of Myshkin's character is beside the purpose here, its effects on Nastas'ya Filippovna should not be overlooked.

Possibly the most important Christian virtue Myshkin lacks is the ability to love effectively. One cannot ignore Dostoevsky's ideals, most fully es-

²⁵⁷ Terras, *An Interpretation*, p.85.

²⁵⁸ A full listing of these texts is impossible here, but some of particular interest are: Murray Krieger, "Dostoevsky's 'Idiot': The Curse of Saintliness," in *Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Rene Wellek (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1962, pp. 39-52); Simon O. Lesser and R. Noland, "Saint and Sinner — Dostoevsky's *Idiot*," *Modern Fiction Studies* (1975, 21: 387- 404); Diana L. Burgin, "Prince Myshkin, The True Lover and 'Impossible Bridegroom': A Problem in Dostoevskian Narrative," *The Slavic and East European Journal* (Vol. 27, No. 2, 1983, pp. 158-75); Joseph Frank, "A Reading of *The Idiot*," *The Southern Review* (5.1, 1969, pp. 303-31); and Terras, *"The Idiot": An Interpretation*. Terras in particular makes a point the others seem to have overlooked: "These critics do not consider the fact that Jesus Christ was in their terms a failure: people went on living as before and changed but little even after he departed this world" (pp. 77-8).

poused by Father Zosima and Alyosha in *Brat'ya Karamazovy*.

As early as in his notebooks to *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky had distinguished three kinds of love: passionate (immediate) love, love from vanity, and Christian love.... the third [is represented] by Father Zosima and Aliosha. Father Zosima's words about love make it clear that true love encompasses all of God's creation, which means not only "every leaf, every ray of God's light," and "animals,... plants,... everything" (Book Six, chap. iii [g], p.298), but implicitly death, decay, and suffering as well. [...] Father Zosima calls this "active love" and stresses that it is always directed at somebody or something in particular. Abstract love of humanity is professed by Ivan Karamazov's Grand Inquisitor, by Rakitin, and eventually by Ivan Karamazov's devil.²⁵⁹

It is precisely this "abstract love" which Myshkin feels, and which leaves him unable to care genuinely for anyone, beyond pity or abstraction. His feelings are detached, metaphysical rather than physical or concrete. In "loving" Nastas'ya Filippovna, the Prince loves an ideal, a face of beauty which touches his soul in an aesthetic sense, but which does not touch his heart truly in an ordinary human sense. It is this process of abstraction, of idealization, which causes Myshkin to obscure the reality of Nastas'ya Filippovna (as he did the reality of her Swiss predecessor²⁶⁰), to gloss over

²⁵⁹ Terras, *Companion*, pp. 76-7.

²⁶⁰ It is interesting to note that Myshkin's tendency to obscure the reality of these two women continues and takes a slightly different form with the innocent Aglaya Ivanovna Epanchina. It is not some sin of hers which Myshkin denies, but her actuality, her flesh and blood form, perhaps even more drastically than he does with the two other women. The appointment in the park is a prime example of this; Myshkin is awaiting a liaison with a beautiful young lady, and not only does he fall asleep while biding his time, he dreams of the *other* woman and, indeed, upon awakening cannot distinguish whether Aglaya is apparition or fact.

the actuality of her sinfulness, and to deny her the right and the necessity to accept her guilt in true Dostoevskian style, to pay for her failings in the coin of suffering.

For Dostoevsky, guilt and its naturally pursuant suffering were of vital spiritual import. An illustration of this can be found again in *Brat'ya Karamazovy*, this time taken from the New Testament and included as the epigraph.

Истинно, истинно говорю вам: если пшеничное зерно, падши в землю, не умрёт, то останется одно; а если умрёт, то принесёт много плода. (Евангелие от Иоанна, гл. XII, ст. 24.)²⁶¹

As Terras points out, "The epigraph of the novel [*The Brothers Karamazov*] (John 12:24), which recurs in a variety of contexts... tells us that suffering and death are necessary so that there can be resurrection."²⁶² According to Dostoevsky, feeling guilty before all creation is the primary root from which grows salvation. "Zosima, believing in God and immortality, feels guilty before all creation and loves all creation...."²⁶³ In *Idiot*, Myshkin's loveless pity cannot fulfill or save Nastas'ya Filippovna, who must feel her guilt and suffer for it in order to redeem herself and others. Myshkin seeks to deny her sinfulness, to ignore it (just as he had done with Marie in the Swiss village). As Dennis Slattery expresses clearly,

²⁶¹ PSS, 14, 1976, p. 5.

²⁶² Terras, *Companion*, p. 58.

²⁶³ Ibid, p. 49.

“...Myshkin has shown himself to be relentless in his compassion uninformed by love. He attempts to restore Marie to her unfallen condition rather than to love her in her sinfulness. While Marie repents and suffers for her sins, she nevertheless hopes, an action which is contrary to the prince’s denial of the flesh and of sin and repentance.”²⁶⁴ He points out that “[t]he kiss which Myshkin gives to the portrait of Nastasya [through pity]... poetically confirms the relationship between Nastasya and Marie.”²⁶⁵ This pity is the sole element in Myshkin’s “love” for Marie, and one of the few in his feeling for Nastas’ya. He wrongs both women with this pity. In Switzerland he allows Marie and the children to think he loves her truly; if she believes this until the moment she dies, then perhaps Myshkin has done her a kindness. If, however, she dies knowing the true nature of his emotions for her, he has wronged her severely. Nastas’ya Filippovna is confronted with the reality of his veneer of love masking shallow pity, and this recognition helps to speed her along towards her own destruction. And just as he takes away the hope of these women for true, human love, Myshkin’s denial of sin robs the women of their saving grace (or rather, their saving sin) and dooms them to a sacrificial death, for Nastas’ya Filippovna possibly not to be followed by ascension into heaven, because perhaps she has not been allowed to suffer enough, to expiate, ergo purify herself, enabling her to take on the guilt of all humankind. Nastas’ya Filippovna yielded willingly to Rogozhin, went away with him voluntarily, knowing that this meant her death.

[Мышкин] нашёл её в состоянии, похожем на

²⁶⁴ Dennis P. Slattery, *“The Idiot”: Dostoevsky’s Fantastic Prince*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1983, p. 56.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 58.

совершенное помешательство: она вскрикивала, дрожала, кричала, что Рогожин спрятан в саду, у них же в доме, что она его сейчас видела, что он её убьёт ночью... зарежет !²⁶⁶

In effect, in giving herself up to slaughter, Nastas'ya Filippovna commits a sort of passive suicide, knowing she had no hope of salvation, perhaps seeking the suffering of death instinctively at the hands of Rogozhin. "Dostoevsky had often asserted that suicide is a logical corollary of materialism and lack of faith in immortality."²⁶⁷ No detail in Dostoevsky is small; we should recall:

Все эти дамы рассказывали потом, что князь осматривал в комнатах [Настасьи Филипповны] каждую вещь, увидал на столике развёрнутую книгу из библиотеки для чтения, французский роман «Madame Bovary»...²⁶⁸

Although she did not actually imbibe poison as did the French anti-heroine, Nastas'ya Filippovna nevertheless undeniably accepted a violent end. Perhaps she instinctively realized the hopelessness of her situation

²⁶⁶ PSS, 8, 1973, p. 490.

²⁶⁷ Terras, *Companion*, p. 55.

²⁶⁸ PSS, 8, 1973, p. 499.

and the impossibility of the burden the Prince placed on her when he “relieved” her of her guilt, and so subsequently she sought to hand herself over to Death, in the person of Rogozhin. The ultimate tragedy of her end is crystalized in her appearance and attire as she decomposes on her deathbed, symbolically also the marriage bed. Still adorned in bridal finery left over from her near-marriage to Myshkin (the man who had finally driven her to this end), Nastas’ya Filippovna lies as though virginal — despite her befouled life history of near-incestual defilement, heartbreak, and self-lacerating debauchery — amid the accoutrements of wedded bliss. Her white gown is barely stained by the blood Rogozhin’s knife released from her body — suggestive of the fabled virginal blood of a maiden’s wedding night.²⁶⁹

—[...]...И...и вот ещё, что мне чудно: совсем нож как бы на полтора... али даже на два вершка прошёл... под самую левую грудь... а крови всего этак с пол-ложки столовой на рубашку вытекло; больше не было...

—Это, это, это, — принодняялся вдруг князь в ужасном волнении, — это, это я знаю, это я читал... это внутреннее излияние называется... Бывает, что даже и ни капли. Это копь удар прямо в сердце...²⁷⁰

It is highly evocative that the wound pierced her heart directly, a brutal twist on the mythical arrow of Eros, perhaps even suggesting that she was in love with Death, with the monster about to devour her (reminiscent again

²⁶⁹ I have no wish to associate myself with the obvious Freudian interpretations of the knife.

²⁷⁰ PSS, 8, 1973, p. 505.

of Psyche in Greek mythology²⁷¹). Rogozhin here is one half of the archetypal male husband/ lover/ devourer, and Nastas'ya Filippovna is wedded to him in sin and tragedy if not in church ritual and state record. Rogozhin has even contemplated surrounding her with flowers. It is into this macabre wedding chamber that Myshkin, the other half of the male archetype, enters, to be forced to realize the truth of Nastas'ya Filippovna's life and her death, a realization which also sends him flying headlong back into the depths of "idiocy."

Когда Рогожин затих (а он вдруг затих), князь тихо нагнулся к нему, уселся с ним рядом и с сильно бьющимся сердцем, тяжело дыша, стал его рассматривать.²⁷²

And later:

...князь протягивал к нему тогда свою дрожащую руку и тихо дотрогивался до его головы, до его волос, гладил их и гладил его щёки... больше он ничего не мог сделать! [...] Какое-то совсем новое ощущение томило его сердце бесконечною тоской. Между тем совсем рассвело; наконец он прилёг на подушку, как бы совсем

²⁷¹ For a brilliant interpretive study of this myth in Jungian terms, see Erich Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine. A Commentary on the Tale by Apuleius* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1956).

²⁷² PSS, 8, 1973, p. 506.

уже в бессилии и в отчаянии, и прижался своим лицом к бледному и неподвижному лицу Рогожина; слёзы текли из его глаз на щёки Рогожина, но, может быть, он уж и не слышал тогда своих собственных слёз и уже не знал ничего о них....²⁷³

Myshkin's weeping over Rogozhin manifests concretely the reality confronting the Prince in the corpse of Nastas'ya Filippovna. The tears he sheds are real, flowing from the source of true, human love, not the flawed, impersonal pity which formerly had motivated him. When he faces the demise of his misunderstood embodiment of ideal beauty, the psychic shock waves cause a complete ideological and philosophical quake which leaves in shambles all Myshkin's old misconceptions and idealistic sophistry. The tears he sheds are like shards of glass raining down from the now ruined transparent cathedral he had built for himself and his delusions. Finally Myshkin understands the truth, validity, and imperative of human suffering (and consequently of human dignity) as he weeps with Rogozhin; only now does Myshkin achieve a true, *physical* (not *meta-physical*) pity — and concomitantly, love — for Nastas'ya Filippovna, a pity which may then free her soul for some sort of redemption. Nastas'ya Filippovna is finally granted her guilt by Myshkin, and therefore perhaps finally her suffering is now admissible as evidence for her salvation, possibly symbolized by the fly on her pillow. “Вдруг зажужжала проснувшаяся муха, пронеслась над кроватью и затихла у изголовья. Князь вздрогнул.”²⁷⁴ The fly, a “popular soul symbol in

²⁷³ Ibid, pp. 506-7.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 503.

many ancient religions,"²⁷⁵ could represent here the soul of this Psyche, finally granted freedom. But it also hints that, despite all the precautions Rogozhin has taken, the corpse has begun to putrefy. The fly, the harbinger of disease, death, and decay, arrives on schedule. The fact that the body of Nastas'ya Filippovna has begun to cavitate brings in the earlier quoted epigraph of *Brat'ya Karamazovy*, as well as the chapter in which Zosima's body emits the odor of corruption, shaking the faith of Alyosha. Just as the saint created in Dostoevsky's later years begins to decompose, so does Nastas'ya Filippovna (indeed, scientifically speaking, they must); but just as we know that Zosima is the seed which dies but brings forth much fruit, so should we ask whether the death of Nastas'ya Filippovna similarly causes a sort of regeneration. With her death, and the corpse which lies near him, the Prince finally allows his eyes to see the necessity of the acknowledgement of guilt, the imperative to take on suffering. Now he comprehends the cold wrong he has done to Nastas'ya Filippovna and the cruel wastefulness of her death. It is this awesome revelation which sends the Prince staggering back into "idiocy." Penultimate withdrawal from the world which shattered the stained-glass window of his beliefs, the world which he had sought to help, is the only choice for the man whose entire spiritual and intellectual cosmos has collapsed in on itself. As anticipated in Myshkin's assertion, upon seeing Holbein's painting "Deposition of Christ," that such a painting could make a man lose his faith, when Myshkin is confronted with the painful actuality of Nastas'ya Filippovna's suffering perhaps he finally does lose his faith — and is forced to retreat to the unknowable depths of his disease.

²⁷⁵ Walker, *Encyclopedia*, pp.316-17.

Настасья Филипповна поднялась, взглянула ещё раз в зеркало, заметила, с «кривою» улыбкой... что она «бледна как мертвец», набожно поклонилась образу и вышла на крыльцо. Гул голосов приветствовал её появление. Правда, в первое мгновение послышался смех, аплодисменты, чуть не свистки; но через мгновение же раздались и другие голоса:

— Экая красавица! — кричали в толпе.

— Не она первая, не она и последняя!

— Венцом всё прикрывается, дураки!

— Нет, вы найдите-ка такую красавицу, ура! — кричали ближайšie.

— Княгиня! За такую княгиню я бы душу продал! — закричал какой-то канцелярист. — «Ценою жизни ночь мою!..»

Настасья Филипповна вышла действительно бледная как платок; но большие чёрные глаза её сверкали на толпу как раскалённые угли; этого-то взгляда толпа и не вынесла; негодование обратилось в восторженные крики.²⁷⁶

With this passage Dostoevsky explicitly links Nastas'ya Filippovna with Pushkin's poetic creation, Cleopatra. In the 1824 poem "Cleopatra" Pushkin delineates a Cleopatra ennuied by court life; suddenly she is enlivened by the invention of a challenge.

²⁷⁶ PSS, 8, 1973, pp. 492-3.

But again she lifts her brow
And says with solemn mien:
"Attend me: I can restore
Equality between us.
Is there bliss for you in my love,
You can buy bliss:
Who will step up and bargain for passion?
I sell my nights.
Say, who among you will buy
A night of mine at the cost of his life?" ²⁷⁷

Dostoevsky meant unambiguously to declare Nastas'ya Filippovna's literary descent from Pushkin's Ptolemaic Queen.

At the beginning of the Pushkin 1824 poem, the legendary Queen of the Nile throws down a daring and unprecedented gauntlet: she offers herself for sale. To the lucky taker, for one night the queen promises herself as slave, as concubine, to render whatever services are desired by the bidder. The toll for this night of bliss and heavenly carnal satisfaction: death. The one who accepts her challenge wins her divine sexual company for a night, but in return he must relinquish his life. She makes of herself a royal prostitute, an erotic slave to the demands of anyone brave enough to strike the bargain. She sells herself dearly, but nevertheless three men step forward to offer themselves in payment.

On more than one occasion does Nastas'ya Filippovna exact a similar, if slightly less final, pledge. First, a bidding war occurs, wherein competing

²⁷⁷ Leslie O'Bell, *Pushkin's "Egyptian Nights": The Biography of a Work*. Ann Arbor: Ardis Publishers, 1984, p.11.

suitors attempt to auction her off to the man with the deepest purse. The price stands at one hundred thousand rubles, which Rogozhin has brought to Nastas'ya Filippovna, who then challenges her supposed fiancé, Ganya, with the money Rogozhin has given her as the wages of sin.

—Ну, так слушай же, Ганя, я хочу на твою душу в последний раз посмотреть; ты меня сам целые три месяца мучил; теперь мой черед. Видишь ты эту пачку, в ней сто тысяч! Вот я её сейчас брошу в камин, в огонь, вот при всех, все свидетели! Как только огонь обхватит её всю — полезай в камин, но только без перчаток, с голыми руками, и рукава отверни, и тащи пачку из огня! Вытащишь — твоя, все сто тысяч твои! Капельку только пальчики обожжёшь, — да ведь сто тысяч, подумай! Долго ли выхватить! А я на душу твою полюбуюсь, как ты за моими деньгами в огонь полезешь. Все свидетели, что пачка будет твоя! А не полезешь, так и сгорит; никого не пущу. Прочь! Все прочь! Мои деньги! Я их за ночь у Рогожина взяла. Мои ли деньги, Рогожин?

— Твои, радость! Твои, королева!²⁷⁸

As Cleopatra had openly challenged the men of her court, of high and low estate, to sell their lives for a night of passion, so Nastas'ya defies social convention and offers herself for the bidding (while actually ironically

²⁷⁸ PSS, 8, 1973, p. 144.

throwing reality back in their faces — she is, after all, merely a “commodity”). Rogozhin even utters concrete evidence of Dostoevsky’s intended association: he calls her his “queen.”

By connecting his literary creation with the mythical dream of his beloved Pushkin, Dostoevsky accessed an entire legendary heritage for Nastas'ya Filippovna. Since the very same time period in which the historical Queen of the Nile lived, propaganda — both positive and negative — has been circulated, leading to phenomenal distortions of the truth of her life. The Queen herself contrived to embellish her reality; but the negative fallacies were first promulgated by her enemy, Octavius Caesar. He and his Roman legions of state scribes and poets sought to combat any power lingering in the image of Cleopatra’s independence, sovereign rule, and goddess stature by poisoning it as surely as a snake’s bite. (Another erroneous assumption of history holds that the Hellenic Queen died by asp-bite.) Thus, as recent scholarship has shown,²⁷⁹ the entire tradition of history and literature about Cleopatra originated with deliberate obliquity fabricated by her enemies and conducted through time by mainly unwitting transmitters. Pushkin himself was guilty of this, for the legendary banquet, challenge, amorous encounters and executions never actually occurred, and can in fact be traced to an inventive Latin historian in the fourth century.²⁸⁰ But of course he cannot be blamed, especially since the fantasy produced such lovely verse. Dostoevsky, who had ardently loved Pushkin from his youth,²⁸¹ was obviously equally engulfed by the prevailing view of Cleopatra, not to mention by the artistic sway of the Russian poet.

The heritage bequeathed to Nastas'ya Filippovna by Pushkin’s artistry

²⁷⁹ For a lucid, revisionist treatment of Cleopatra, see Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *Cleopatra: Histories, Dreams and Distortions* (London: Vintage, 1990).

²⁸⁰ Hughes-Hallett, p. 290.

²⁸¹ At the time of Pushkin’s death Dostoevsky had even said that, had he not already been wearing mourning for his mother’s passing, he would have worn it for that of the great poet. See pp. 64-5, Frank, *The Seeds of Revolt*.

was rich, one with which anyone reading *Idiot* at the time of its publication would certainly have been familiar. By linking his heroine with the Queen of the Nile, Dostoevsky endowed her with connotations beyond what would normally have been available. The Cleopatra of Pushkin was the world's most beautiful woman, a description which Dostoevsky applies to his own character. Cleopatra was proud, powerful, fiercely independent; Nastas'ya Filippovna likewise possesses these qualities. Cleopatra was bored with her life and sought to shatter conventions and morals; so does Nastas'ya Filippovna seek to shake those around her. Cleopatra was ruthless enough and desired enough to elicit the voluntary acceptance of execution; Nastas'ya Filippovna wields such a bewitchingly erotic potency over the men around her that she may extract mammoth sums of money and perilous physical tasks from them for her pleasure. As Nastas'ya Filippovna is bartered for, as a commercial value is assigned to her, her pride is stirred to fury and she flashes her strength as a commodity, that is, her monetary value as a female object which can be traded and purchased. She exercises force even when others seek to usurp that force. Cleopatra set her own price for a night in her bed; Nastas'ya Filippovna likewise extracts cash for her sexual company. (Although, it should be observed here, she never actually has sexual relations with anyone but Totskii.)²⁸²

Even in death the river of relation flows between these two great female figures. Rather than face deportation to Rome where she would be paraded through the streets by her enemy as war booty, chained to Octavius' chariot like a common prisoner of war or slave, Cleopatra, the earthly embodiment of the beauty of the supreme goddess Isis, instead chose her

²⁸² I agree with Victor Terras when he asserts: "The text... suggests that Nastasya Filippovna has slept with no one but Totsky and that she never slept with Rogozhin" (p. 63, Terras, *An Interpretation*).

own death. She adorned herself in her imperial robes, which also served to identify her as Isis' temporal incarnation, and took poison, lying down and dying a dignified, calm death, without struggle and without disturbing her majestic demeanor.²⁸³ Nastas'ya Filippovna, to all intents and purposes, commits suicide; having acknowledged that Rogozhin will kill her, she runs to him and quietly waits for him to end her life. She wants this death, she cherishes it. Indeed, she has no choice. As surely as Cleopatra's future was unendurable, Nastas'ya Filippovna has nothing ahead of her. As surely as Octavius would have made Cleopatra his miserable captive, so Nastas'ya Filippovna would have been further, eternally enchained, either to Myshkin's misshapen notions of her sinlessness, had she married him, or else to a continued subsistence as a plaything of rich men, until she would eventually lose her brokerable asset: her beauty. No choice — no dignified choice, worthy of such a beautiful and dazzlingly compelling woman — remained to her, save certain death at the dirty hands of Rogozhin. But even as she submitted to his knife, she exercised her authority: as he stabbed the blade into her, he did her will.

The *podpol'nyi chelovek* is most often interpreted to mean “underground man,” after the title character in Dostoevsky's work of that name. But it is worthwhile keeping in mind that in Russian this term is not gender exclusive; this fact seems to have been overlooked. That is surprising, because Nastas'ya Filippovna quite clearly exhibits many aspects of an underground personality.

The duality of Nastas'ya Filippovna is remarkably similar to that of the Underground Man (the actual character in *Zapiski iz podpol'ya*). As Mochulsky observes in the Underground Man:

²⁸³ See Hughes-Hallett, especially pp. 27-8, p. 49, pp.106-8, and pp. 138-9.

Consciousness opposes itself to the world. It is alone, against it is everything. As a result it feels itself brought to bay, persecuted; hence the morbid sensitivity of the underground man, his self-love, vanity, suspicions. [...] The breach in his personality yet increases. On the one hand, there is vicious, petty debauchery; on the other, lofty dreams. "It is amazing that these influxes of 'everything beautiful and noble' used to come in me during periods of dissipation, and just when I found myself at the very bottom, used to come so, in separate little spurts, as it were, reminding me of themselves, but not putting an end, however, to the debauchery by their appearance. They rather, as it were, seemed to enliven it by contrast." Duality is experienced as a contradiction and suffering, becomes the matter of "tormenting inner analysis," but out of suffering there suddenly grows a "decisive pleasure."

[...] Degradation is a torture, but a "too clear awareness" of degradation can afford pleasure. Looking into a mirror, it is possible to forget about *what* is reflected and to lose oneself in *how* it is reflected.²⁸⁴

Nastas'ya Filippovna's hyperconsciousness of her own degradation at another's hands leads her to degrade herself. The pleasure of this may not be comprehensible for us as hopefully stable modern readers, but obviously for Dostoevsky this was integral in certain personalities. Beyond the pleasure of presenting Totskii with the spoiled fruits of his own debauched exploitation of her, Nastas'ya Filippovna ventures into the realm of masochistic sensation. She is so convinced of her own impurity that she is now obsessed with deepening it, making it more manifest. She will not

²⁸⁴ Mochulsky, pp. 248-9.

marry any of the men who propose to her, nor does she try to force Totskii into marriage; she prefers to remain a fallen flower, on the rim of “decent” society, the better to feel her pain. Her self-lacerating revelry in shame procures for her an enjoyment she will not exchange for another, perhaps healthier, one. In this she finds a certain independence, an autonomy which prefers self-immolation to external control. Again, this finds an echo in Mochulsky's analysis of the *podpol'nyi chelovek*.

Man can come to desire what is not advantageous in order *to have the right* to desire; this is the most advantageous because “it preserves for us that which is most important and most precious, i.e., our personality and our individuality.”

This inspired defense of personality is summarized in a paradoxically incisive affirmation: “One's own unrestricted and free volition, one's own caprice, however wild it may be, one's own fancy, provoked at times although even to the point of madness — here this all is the *most advantageous advantage*.”

The author does not stop before the astonishing conclusion: “Man is in need of a purely independent desire, *whatever this independence may cost and to whatever it may lead*.”

The whole meaning of human existence, the whole meaning of human history lies in the self-assertion of the *irrational will* (“wild caprice, mad fancy”).²⁸⁵

Nastas'ya Filippovna indeed asserts her own “irrational will” throughout the novel. In fact, nearly everything she does seems to emanate from this impulse toward self-assertion. She is frequently described as mad by the other characters and the narrator; allegedly her madness traces its inception to the moment she meets Myshkin at her birthday party. But could not

²⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 252.

this madness be adduced to her apparently illogical tendency to manifest her own personality no matter how absurd or destructive the result? This inner drive towards autonomy informs every scene in which she plays; occasionally it is overcome by her own "better" instincts, for instance when she repents of her ill-behavior toward Ganya's mother and kisses her hand. But on the whole, she exhibits an overwhelming tendency to maintain her independence, no matter what the cost.

This "defense of personality" is nowhere more clearly evident than in her death. In voluntarily going with Rogozhin to her own murder, she evades the control which Myshkin had sought to establish over her. Only by dying, leaving this world, can she escape the ever-increasing encroachment upon her autonomy which this world inevitably wished to exercise over her. In *choosing* death, she at least chooses for herself, however paradoxical this may seem. She wilfully goes with Rogozhin, as though to spite the world, as though shouting to everyone, "Look here! I am leaving and you cannot stop me! I am going to my death because I want to, not because I have been told to do so! No one can rule over me! I am my own queen!" She will not submit to Myshkin's illusory and transitory Crystal Palace, his perfect world of sinlessness and guiltlessness, his Swiss idyll (much as Mar'ya Timofeevna refused Stavrogin's offer of life in the Swiss canton). She sees that this Crystal Palace is in fact only a chicken coop; the Crystal Palace leaves no room for suffering, and therefore it cannot be. She prefers the Gothic dwelling of Rogozhin as her tomb, dying at her own behest at the hands of another. Her death is the final attainment of autonomy by the personality, because now nothing can change her or assert itself over her — she is now immutable. She even deprives any god or fate of the chance to impose on her an appointed hour of death; she usurps the scissors from the Three Fates and clips her own thread.

Nastas'ya Filippovna appears separately here because she exemplifies so well one of the central tenets of this study: that the female characters of Dostoevsky are individuals, that despite shared traits and some recurring images, Dostoevsky has created a myriad array of individual women. This variance at once typifies and supplies his realism, and the realism of the women he wrote about. With Nastas'ya Filippovna this strength of characterization and power of reality is brought into sharply beautiful, if tragic, focus.

CONCLUSION

It is a recurrent motif in Russian folklore and literature that the female both represents and leads towards the hero's salvation. From pagan times to Ol'ga's conversion to Christianity and her rescue of her nation, this trend is evident. Either by the figure of the mother or a beautiful young maiden, the hero is brought to the proper path and set right on his course. Nowhere is this saving aspect more profound or lovely than in the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky.

Although his meek females may seem at first to be "under the thumb" of their masculine counterparts, a closer inspection reveals who holds the true power. This realization is stated explicitly by the Underground Man.

Пришло мне тоже в взбудораженную мою голову, что роли ведь теперь окончательно переменились, что героиня теперь она, а я точно такое же униженное и раздавленное создание, каким она была передо мной в ту ночь...²⁸⁶

The Underground Man comes to see that meekness and submissiveness are just what let these women rise above. A similar situation is evident in *Krotkaya*. The distraught narrator comes to realize that, although he had wanted her to cower before him, the "meek creature" has now be-

²⁸⁶ PSS, 5, 1973, p. 175.

come his "tyrant."²⁸⁷ Only when she has died does the narrator finally begin to see how he had trampled on the best of her spirit, extinguishing her last hopes for happiness.

Submissiveness and gentleness are what the male protagonist most often dislikes in the female, what most often irritates him. Within this irritation the male is unwilling to acknowledge what he knows to be true, according to Dostoevsky's ideology: that the meek woman is more holy, more spiritually pure than the supposedly strong male. The suffering she endures elevates her far above her earthly travails — and all through the stubborn pride of her male counterpart. The refusal of the male to confront reality leads him to make every futile, conscious or unconscious attempt to worsen the meek one's suffering. Her lowness is an illusion created by his pride to mask the transcendent, innately spiritual understanding found in her meekness; it is a convenient ego defense mechanism for him. It is utterly necessary for him to hide this from himself, to protect his fragile ego-system that he may continue to believe in his own superiority. To avenge himself, to assuage his vulnerable vanity and fragile cultural beliefs, the male protagonist endeavors to humiliate this quiet woman and deepen her suffering. This "cover-up" backfires, because soon the man is forced to see the unmistakable truth: each new grievous wrong he commits against a "meek creature" only serves to elevate her further, even to distance her from her pain, to make her holy and transcendent, more spiritual in the Dostoevskian cosmos. Each new vile act only brings more guilt and debauchery to the male. However, this is never a triumph for the female; on the contrary, she feels his every crime as her own, so deeply does she identify with the "other," so completely does she feel herself guilty for the sins of others.

²⁸⁷ See *PSS*, 24, 1982, p. 10 (I), p. 12 (II), p. 14 (III), pp. 15-16 (IV), p. 18 (V).

Often Dostoevsky's women represent to the men a choice: an irrevocable yes or no, right or wrong, a heavenly hosannah or a spider's web. The Sophian characters stand for the moral imperative, the spiritual knowing and acceptance of God's will. But this "right" is usually the exact opposite of the male's usual thinking or intellectual convictions. Despite abundant proof this male refuses to acknowledge that he has led himself astray through pride. He manifests his insecurity in wrath against the "right," transferring this petulance to the representative of the "right," usually a woman. It is often a choice between intellectual, bookish life and "living life," between insatiable striving for some abstract "idea" and a lifelong devotion to active love.

If there is a literary apotheosis of Russian womanhood for Dostoevsky, it is undoubtedly Tat'yana of Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin*. This immortal, poetic figure stands quietly behind all of Dostoevsky's most profound depictions of women. His most renowned public appearance was an address about Pushkin, in which Tat'yana played a prime role. In the "Pushkin speech" Dostoevsky expressed directly his lifelong admiration of that famous fictional female. For him she came to personify all the greatness and saving potential stored quietly away in the Russian land, the Russian people, and the Russian woman. Joanna Hubbs examines this idea:

Tatiana's prophecy of abandonment is Pushkin's warning that the rootless westernism of Mother Russia's educated sons will betray all that is best in the motherland, a theme taken up and developed by Fyodor Dostoevsky in the last half of the nineteenth century. In his "Pushkin speech" (1880), Dostoevsky points out

that Onegin lives as an exile and a wanderer in the very heart of his native land. Tatiana, on the other hand, is the embodiment of Russia. As Kore, the daughter, she has the power to reunite him with Mother Russia through marriage: "Here is contact with her own... people, with their sanctities." The tragedy of Onegin and Tatiana is that "she passed through his life unrecognized by him and unappreciated" [Dostoevsky, *Dream of a Queer Fellow and the Pushkin Speech*, 47-48, 51-52]. Yet Russian woman, Dostoevsky tells us, the guardian of life-affirming and altruistic values, was a "great power" leading to the "principal and most salutary regeneration of Russian society," because she drew her strength from the "sacramental" soil, the source of rebirth. But her qualities of gentleness were spurned and ignored; she was a "martyr for the Russian man" — like Tatiana and like the motherland, her analogue [F.M Dostoevsky, *The Notebooks for "A Raw Youth,"* E. Wasiolek, ed., V. Terras, trans. (Chicago, 1969), 307; and *The Diary of a Writer*, B. Brasol, trans. (New York, 1949), vol. 1, 418; vol. 2, 845-856.]²⁸⁸

Thus is Dostoevsky's profound understanding of Pushkin's Tat'yana made explicit; but even earlier, in any of the Sophian characters and especially in Mar'ya Timofeevna (as Joanna Hubbs points out), a reader sees the long shadow of Tat'yana. Dostoevsky's meek and good heroines are remarkably similar to Tat'yana, especially in the role they come to play in the lives of their male counterparts.

Не такова Татьяна: это тип твердый, стоящий твердо на своей почве. Она глубже Онегина и, конечно, умнее его.

²⁸⁸ Hubbs, *Mother Russia*, pp. 228-9.

Она уже одним благородным инстинктом своим предчувствует, где и в чём правда.... [...] Это положительный тип, а не отрицательный, это тип положительной красоты, это апофеоза русской женщины....²⁸⁹

Tat'yana understands Onegin's nature perfectly and, even though she loves him, she knows he does not love her; she remains loyal to the husband who loves and trusts her. In silence she suffers many years of unrequited affection never forgetting her first love, through a marriage which for her is built more on respect than romance. Even when Onegin returns and pitches woo, she cannot stray from her noble, painful path. Therein lies her ultimate beauty, according to Dostoevsky. She has not been spoiled by her years in the corrupt capital, by her tedious days amidst the socialites of Petersburg; "Нет, это та же Таня, та же прежняя деревенская Таня!"²⁹⁰ He goes on to write:

И вот она твёрдо говорит Онегину:

Но я другому отдана

И буду век ему верна.

Высказала она это именно как русская женщина, в этом её апофеоза. Она высказывает правду поэмы. [...] Но что же: потому ли она отказалась идти за ним, несмотря на то, что сама же сказала ему: «Я вас люблю», потому ли,

²⁸⁹ PSS, 26, 1984, p. 140.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 141.

что она, «как русская женщина» [...] не снособна на смелый шаг, не в силах порвать свои путы, не в силах пожертвовать обаянием честей, богатства, светского своего значения, условиями добродетели? Нет, русская женщина смела. Русская женщина смело пойдёт за тем, во что поверит, и она доказала это. Но она «другому отдана и будет век ему верна».²⁹¹

Again here are Dostoevsky's personal views and assertions on the essence and nature of the "Russian woman," echoing the thoughts he expressed through Versilov in *Podrostok*. Obviously these beliefs are very deeply a part of Dostoevsky himself, firmly integrated into his faith and religious feeling, stemming from his conceptualizations of the *mat' syra zemlya* and *bogoroditsa*, as well as from the figure of his own mother. The images recur throughout his works, in varying degrees; the dominance of this theme suggests how deeply Dostoevsky believed it. She knows her heart, this Russian woman, and she also knows what is right; she may have to remain loyal to her husband (Tat'yana), or she may abandon her husband and live in sin (Sof'ya Dolgorukaya-Versilova). Society's judgment of her actions does not matter to her, only that she chooses the course which her whole being tells her is the right one, no matter how much suffering she may have to endure because of her choice. "...есть глубокие и твердые души, которые не могут сознательно отдать святыню свою на позор...."²⁹²

²⁹¹ Ibid, p. 141.

²⁹² Ibid, p. 143.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Terras, Victor, *The Young Dostoevsky (1846-1849). A Critical Study*. The Hague: Mouton & Co, 1969, pp. 94-101:

In *White Nights* we have, for once, a perfectly normal love triangle. Nastenka, a pretty and very sensible girl, is secretly engaged to a young man of excellent character. When it appears for a moment that he may not return to her, Nastenka is willing to console herself with the other man who is the familiar romantic dreamer. But her fiancé does return after all, and she does not hesitate to discard the dreamer and to marry the "right" man.

Nastenka is not very different from the pretty but prosaic girls who are usually cast opposite the dreamer in the tales of Hoffmann, but she has more charm and personality than all of them put together. Even her feminine weaknesses have an inimitable personal touch. Nastenka is most different from what one's conception of a Dostoevskian heroine tends to be. She is neither a superbly proud Katja nor a dangerously high-strung Aglaja, neither a saintly, suffering Sonja, nor a pathetic, hysterical Katerina Ivanovna. She is just herself, a very attractive brunette of seventeen, concerned with her own personal happiness, and little else.

Nastenka's language is that of a girl her age and social background. It is purely literary, decidedly more 'genteel', more emancipated, and bolder, than Varenka's of *Poor Folk*. The prosaic worries and troubles of everyday life, which are crushing Varenka, have not touched Nastenka whose Grandmother has a pension, a small house, and even a maid. Nastenka at times displays the poise and grace of a young lady, while Varenka, in spite of her education and reading, is merely a timid little *petite bourgeoisie*. Circumstantially, Nastenka is infinitely better off than Varenka: the worst that could conceivably happen to her is that her admirer might fail to keep his promise. But then, this promise

had been quite unilateral and in no way an impediment to Nastenka's own pursuit of happiness, much less a blemish to her honor. The worst had already happened to Varenka: she had been seduced, abused, and abandoned.

The superb feminine poise which Nastenka displays at all times is a thing of beauty, stylistically one of the young Dostoevsky's finest achievements. Nastenka takes full advantage of the respect and consideration due her as a lady and is not averse to increase that advantage by coquettish play upon her charms. She is composed when the Dreamer is nervous, sympathetic when he is excited, serious (often not without a touch of amusement) when he is pathetic. She is gracefully impish — while he cracks jokes at his own expense. When it is her turn to be sad she never leaves one in doubt as to the fact that she will make a quick and complete recovery. Nastenka is also egoistic, self-centered, and practical — all in a most charming, delightful, adorable way. No wonder she is in full command of the situation, and of the Dreamer, from the very first moment.

She keeps the young man at a respectful distance (figuratively speaking), but is not afraid of granting a concession when she thinks he has deserved it. Only when the Dreamer appears sufficiently contrite, after Nastenka has insisted on getting an explanation as to why he decided to accost her in the street, does she graciously forgive him. She makes him feel very "small" and quite undeserving of her kindness, but the words in which she grants her forgiveness are a paragon of tact and mother wit: "Let it be enough, do not speak of it anymore", she says, "it is really my fault, I should not have started this discussion in the first place; yet I am glad to see that I didn't misjudge your character" (II, 14). Thus she forgives him, but not without making it clear that this is an exception, granted in consideration of the good impression he has made on her. And once she has decided to forgive him she tactfully shoulders the blame for the embarrassment of a moment ago, thus dismissing — by authority of her judgment as a lady! — the circumstance that she has just struck up an acquaintance and

is about to have a rendezvous with a man who, after all, as well as accosted her in the street.

When Nastenka tells the young man the story of her life she reports, among other things, that at one time her grandmother had put her under house arrest. She proceeds: "I shall not tell you what I had done, except that my crime was not a serious one." She will not discuss the incident, for it may be a little embarrassing, but insists that *honi soit qui mal y pense*. When a funny scene involving Nastenka's grandmother comes up, she laughs heartily herself. But when the young man joins in her laughter, she issues a reprimand — she demands respect not only for herself but also for her grandmother.

Nastenka tells the story of her young love in a simple and natural, and therefore dignified way. She conceals or disguises nothing for there is nothing about the story of which she might be ashamed. This is true even of the episode during which we see Nastenka, on the eve of her lover's departure, go and offer to leave with him. She offers no explanations, let alone excuses, for the way she acted, although she admits that this step cost her a good deal of effort. "I think it may have taken me a full hour to walk up the steps to his room", she relates. The very simplicity and naturalness with which she speaks about it all show that there never existed even a shade of reprehensible intent or the mere suspicion of a dishonorable thought on the part of either Nastenka or her lover. Altogether the simplicity of Nastenka's 'confession' stands in sharp contrast to the strained, rhetorizing, sometimes 'clowning' diction of the Dreamer.

When Nastenka has something serious to say she does it simply and in few words — again, in contrast to the verbose pathos of the Dreamer. For instance:

What you have told me about your Dreamer is all completely wrong, that is, I want to say, it doesn't concern you at all. You are already getting well, believe me, you are a different person now, not at all like you've described yourself to me. If you ever get to love somebody, may God give you happiness with her! As to *her*, I wish her nothing, for she will be happy with you. I know, I am myself a

woman, and you must believe me when I tell you. (II, 46)

Obviously Nastenka is not very strong in logic, for she claims, almost in one breath, that all he has said about the Dreamer “does not concern him at all”, and that “he is already getting well” and becoming “a different person”. But she has begun to like the Dreamer and tells him so. There is much sympathy, encouragement, and understanding in her simple words, for Nastenka knows instinctively that it does not matter what a woman tells a man so long as there is genuine warmth and sympathy in her words.

Then comes the moment when Nastenka has reason to believe that her lover has deserted her. She does not conceal her sorrow but even in her sadness retains her poise. When she quickly enough collects herself her words show great pride and assurance: if he has deserted her, this only shows that he was not worthy of her love — such is the gist of her little harangue. Nastenka loves her fiancé not humbly and unselfishly, as a Varenka or a Netočka Nezvanova would, but as the independent, proud and rather egoistic girl she is. She does not love the Dreamer, of course, but is willing to give him her friendship. Very typically, she values her friendship so highly that she never doubts it will be enough to keep the young man attached to her. Naturally she finds nothing wrong with ‘dropping’ the Dreamer and returning to her promised lover, for isn’t she perfectly willing to continue letting him enjoy her FRIENDSHIP?

No wonder Nastenka is always in full command of the situation, even though she is almost ten years younger than the Dreamer and intellectually by far his inferior, which she freely admits. As a young lady of great charm and beauty, she feels she has a right to command his respect, attention, and obedience. Her tone of command in addressing the Dreamer might almost qualify as a ‘label’ of her speech. Various verbs in the imperative mode, but especially the word “listen!”, occur with monotonous regularity throughout her part of the dialogue. Another feature, to the same

effect, is that Nastenka constantly interrupts the Dreamer, and that he never seems to mind.

Nastenka is a clever girl, as the narrator observes with delight. On occasion she is witty, or comes up with a psychological observation which is a credit to her acumen. On the practical side, this finds expression in the great tact with which she handles her thin-skinned and terribly selfconscious admirer. Time and again she stops the flow of the Dreamer's rhetoric and invites him to, please, be more sensible and down-to-earth. However, she invariably does it with the greatest delicacy, expressing her criticism in the form of praise.

With all this, Nastenka is only seventeen and has led a secluded, sheltered life. Hence her sweet naïveté which is particularly touching when combined with her usual assurance and resoluteness. Dostoevsky has succeeded in bringing out Nastenka's naïveté most admirably by means of delicate semantic nuances of her speech, which are never pointed out, much less commented upon by the narrator. Only once does he call a statement of hers "naive". Most of the time, however, the Dreamer, both in his capacity as Nastenka's collocutor as well as in that of a narrator, takes her words quite seriously, refraining from taking advantage of her naïveté in any way, not even for a good-natured smile.

After having listened to the Dreamer's confession, Nastenka exclaims: "Listen, do you know at all that it isn't good to live the way you live?" The finesse lies in the use of the rhetorical question by Nastenka — as if the Dreamer needed to be told that his was not the good life! She assumes that in order to quit it and start a new and better life he must only be told so firmly enough. The *clou* of the passage is that the Dreamer simply and wholeheartedly agrees with Nastenka's naive oversimplification of his problem.

Often Nastenka uses a peculiar 'feminine' logic. Dostoevsky's marvelous inventiveness is matched by most delicate consideration for Nastenka's dignity: he will let her appear "cute", very cute in fact, but never ridiculous or even funny. Here, for instance, is Nastenka's view of a certain old gentleman who used to room

with her grandmother:

He was a little old man, thin, dumb, blind, and lame, so that, at last, he could not go on living any longer, and so he died. That's why we had to have a new lodger, because we can't manage without one; that and Grandmama's pension is about all the income we have. (II, 31)

The formulation of the causal connection between the old gentleman's debility and his death is amusing, as is the statement concerning the need for a new roomer which suggests that roomers are made to support their landladies. And another example of Nastenka's logic:

By the way, you have given me an idea, in fact, you've given me food for days of thought, but I shall think about it later, and for the present I confess that what you have said is true. (II, 42)

This says as much as that she will "decide now, and think later!" Altogether, thinking is not Nastenka's forte. The fact is that she knows the answers to the questions that matter without having to think. If she has no answer, there probably isn't any, as in the following case:

You know what occurred to me just now? Only this has nothing to do with him at all. I'm speaking generally; and besides, all this has been going through my head for a long time: listen, why is it that we can't all be like brothers? (II, 45)

She asks the question as if it had never been asked before and in a tone as if it could be answered. Yet her naive approach to the problem has nothing ridiculous about it. She has said what is to be said; anything further would be idle philosophizing.

Even Nastenka's egoism has a quality of naïveté about it. She seems to be completely unaware that there may exist other viewpoints beside her own. "I want him to see how you and I love each other", she says to the Dreamer when they see her fiancé approaching them, and the Dreamer is about to withdraw hastily. She expects both young men will be delighted to form a "triangle"

with her! "When I'll get married, we'll continue to be friends, like brothers, or even better than brothers; I'm going to love you almost as much as him", she announces on another occasion. The poor Dreamer doesn't know if he should laugh or cry at so much naive egoism.

There are other 'feminine' traits which Dostoevsky succeeds in bringing out in Nastenka's speech. Her speech is much simpler than the young man's, her phrases usually quite brief with coordination prevailing over subordination (compare this with the Dreamer's involved sentences!), asyndeta and even anacolutha occurring not infrequently. Frequent ellipsis and aposiopesis suggest that Nastenka is often hesitant about the choice of her words. Syntactic traits which indicate that her speech is closer to the colloquial variety of the literary idiom than the Dreamer's bookish diction are: reduplication (such as "My God, my God!" or "I thought and I thought"), relatively frequent use of the imperative and the infinitive phrase (neither has an exact equivalent in English, so this particular effect is lost in translation), and an abundance of nominal phrases. A few finesses in her phraseology also underline Nastenka's femininity. For instance, the word "perhaps", in this or another form, figures prominently in her speech. When making her first date with the Dreamer she says: "Very well, perhaps I shall be here tomorrow, at ten o'clock" (II, 14). She is quite sure that she will come and come she does, but she still insists that it is *not* a promise and not really a rendezvous, as she proceeds to explain to the young man. How important that little word "perhaps" can be! It gives a woman independence, dignity — and power. Nastenka certainly makes liberal use of it.

Nastenka's farewell letter to the Dreamer is a masterpiece of stylization. Its language is quite different from that of her oral 'confession'. The Nastenka whom we know from the latter and throughout the story is simplicity itself. Here in the letter we suddenly face melodramatic phrases which have a distinctly false ring:

I thank you, yes, I thank you for this love, for it is imprinted in my memory like a sweet dream which stays with you long after your awakening; for I shall always remember the moment when you, with such brotherly candor, opened your heart to me, and so magnanimously accepted the gift of my own broken heart, to care for it, to cherish it and nurse it back to life. If you will forgive me, my memory will be hallowed by eternal gratitude to you, a feeling which will never be obliterated from my heart. (II, 57)

For one thing, she speaks of her “gratitude” and his “magnanimity”, thus turning back their story to the stage at which he had not yet declared his love and was therefore no more than a ‘brotherly’ friend. Secondly, either her assurances of eternal gratitude are extremely hyperbolic (granted he acted as a brotherly friend, what is it he has done for her that deserves “eternal gratitude”?), or — a better guess — their motivation is insincere. What she means here, although she doesn’t say it, is that she’s grateful he didn’t make any fuss when her fiancé finally showed up the other night; and further, that she sincerely hopes he will be so generous as to stay away now that she is about to get married. “If you will forgive me” is, to take it strictly, only a euphemism for “if you won’t cause me any trouble”, for in what other way could his ‘forgiveness’ be expressed? The Dreamer understands this part of the letter exactly as Nastenka — perhaps subconsciously, for we should not be too harsh in our judgment of so sweet a girl — wants it to be understood. He decides “to forgive her”, that is never to see her again. But Dostoevsky would not have been Dostoevsky had he not introduced a certain amount of ambiguity even into this letter. The last few lines strike a different note. While the first and longer part of the letter had been an aggregate of clichés, the last few lines reveal the true Nastenka who, little egoist that she is, cannot resist the temptation to try to retain the flattering, platonic courtship of the romantic Dreamer, while marrying the attractive, practical-minded young man of her choice. And so she writes:

We shall meet, you will come to see us, you will not forsake us, you will be my friend, my brother always... . And when you see me you will give me your hand, won’t you? You will give me your hand, you have forgiven me, haven’t you? You

love me *as before* ? [Dostoevsky's italics] Oh, do love me, do not forsake me, for I love you so at this moment, for I am worthy of your love, because I will earn your love... my dear friend! I am to marry him next week. He came back, in love with me, he had never forgotten me... You won't be angry that I am writing about him? But I want to come to you with him, and you will love him too, won't you?

Here's love from both of us, remember and keep loving your Nastenka! (II, 57-58)

We are dealing with an acute semantic conflict. Nastenka speaks of her "love" for the Dreamer, meaning a light, pleasant warm feeling of fondness and sympathy which, indeed, she has for him. Certainly all this is quite innocent: she just happens to like him and would enjoy "having him around". The word 'love' means something different to the Dreamer: pain, suffering, and despair. To be invited to come witness the young married bliss of the woman one loves — what agony!

APPENDIX 2

Terras, Victor, *The Young Dostoevsky (1846-1849). A Critical Study*. The Hague: Mouton & Co, 1969, pp 101-3:

In *Netočka Nezvanova* we have a heroine who not only dominates the scene but who also tells her own story. I think that Dostoevsky has taken the femininity of his narratress quite seriously and has actually produced as George-Sandian a narrative as any Russian writer, male or female, ever has. The emotional pose, the sentimental cliché, and the moral phrase practiced by the narratress of *Netočka Nezvanova* are an exact replica of George Sand's

mode of diction in the 1830's and 1840's, and so are the amateurish ratiocinations by which she tends to turn into platitudes her own usually accurate and sometimes profound psychological observations. Benedetto Croce's brilliant characterization of George Sand is almost literally true of the narratress of *Netočka Nezvanova*, especially parts II and III:

La Sand non era mente profonda, no aveva forte vita interiore [...] ma assorta nel sognare, nel tessere la tela delle imagonazioni, come donna ch'ella era. E, come donna, no concepí mai che l'arte andasse rispettata e sempre la tenne quasi naturale sfogo della propria sensibilità e della propria intellettualità; e, come donna, porto' nelle cose dell'arte il senso pratico [...] Osservava la realtà, e chi non la osserva? La osservava anche con attenzione; ma il suo lavoro consisteva, come diceva, nell' "idealizzarla". E perché non si pensi con questo idealizzamento al severo processo della purificazione ossia della vera e propria creazione artistica, e perché si veda di quanto scarsa importanza sia il consueto porre a contrasto i suoi romanzi come "idealistici" con quelli "veristici", è bene ricordare in qual modo ella intendeva quell' idealizzamento. L'intendeva a questo modo, come la costruzione di un personaggio che doveva compendiare il sentimento o l'idea principale del romanzo, e rappresentare la passione dell' amore. [Benedetto Croce, *Poesia e non poesia* (Bari, 1932), pp. 193-194.]

It is most interesting to note that Dostoevsky himself once expressed a view of George Sand's creative personality which approaches that of Croce. Here is what Dostoevsky has to say in a letter to his brother, dated January 13, 1856:

Our lady-writers write like lady-writers i.e., cleverly, nicely, and they are certainly in a great hurry to have their say. Tell me, why can a lady-writer hardly ever be a severe artist [the Russian *strogij* could also be translated by 'austere', or by 'disciplined', or even by 'pure']? Even George Sand, undoubtedly a giant of an artist, only too often did herself a lot of harm by her "ladylike" traits. (*Pis'ma*, I, 167) [Here Terras inserts a footnote to defend this passage: "It is important to note that it is not talent, sensibility, or intellect that Dostoevsky finds to be lacking in the typical 'lady author', but discipline and solid craftsmanship...."]

I presume that Dostoevsky must have held much the same view of

George Sand ten years earlier when he wrote *Netočka Nezvanova*. I also believe that he has consciously followed the example of George Sand, imitated her stylistic mannerisms, even adopted some of her patterns of thought, in order to create the image of a genuinely feminine narratress.

As to George Sand's tendency to 'idealize' the world which she describes, it is certainly present in *Netočka Nezvanova*, and in a very similar form, too. For instance Aleksandra Mixajlovna, the heroine of part III, strongly resembles the Sandian heroine of *Indiana*. Aleksandra Mixajlovna is externally glamorous yet modest to the point of being shy; there is a profound melancholy about her ethereal, sublime personality. A virtuous and devoted wife to a pedantic husband much older than herself, she experiences a pure and deeply tragic love for a younger man. Innocent victim of a cruel, unfeeling and sordid world, she remains kindly, generous, and pure to the end. Angelic simplicity, extraordinary nobility of emotions, loftiness of intellect — such are the basic traits of her character, which seems to lack negative traits altogether.

The sentimental subjectivity which the narratress displays throughout the novel becomes stronger as the narrative moves along, reaching a climax in part III. Dostoevsky's narrators are often subjective, but the narratress of *Netočka Nezvanova* goes a step further than most of them, displaying precisely the attitude toward her undertaking which Croce observes in George Sand: "...come donna, non concepí mai che l'arte andasse rispettata a sempre la tenne quasi naturale sfogo della propria sensibilità e della propria intellettualità." The narratress of parts II and III of *Netočka Nezvanova* may be shockingly personal in her revelations about what, after all, is her own past, yet she is careful not to tell anything that might be to her real and permanent disadvantage in the eyes of the reader. The humiliations which she must suffer only touch the surface of her soul and, moreover, are recompensed by appropriate triumphs; her virtue and honor are never in doubt; and her attitude toward the characters in her narrative is, in general, a condescending one. She is quick with her moral judgment of people, freely dis-

penses her worldly wisdom and, with disarming naïveté, philosophizes on subjects in which she is obviously a dilettante (I am thinking, in particular, of her discourses on education). The self-assurance and natural ease with which she produces her platitudes are typical of the “lady-writer” as conceived by Croce (and by Dostoevsky himself). While the narratress displays admirable critical judgment and heroic restraint in some sections of part I, parts II and III certainly show a very George-Sandian lack of discipline: superficialities, repetitions, careless formulations, and thoughtless ‘phrases’ abound in these two parts.

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