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Marullo, Thomas Gaiton. *Heroine Abuse: Dostoevsky's 'Netochka Nezvanova' and the Poetics of Codependency*. North Illinois University Press, DeKalb, IL, 2015. xv + 204 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$35.00.

Marullo, Thomas Gaiton. *Fyodor Dostoevsky — In the Beginning, 1821–1845: A Life in Letters, Memoirs, and Criticism*. North Illinois University Press, DeKalb, IL, 2016. xi + 293 pp. Directory of Prominent Names. Notes. Source Notes. Index. \$59.00.

DOSTOEVSKII'S first attempt at a full-scale novel, *Netochka Nezvanova*, abandoned unfinished at the time of the author's arrest in 1849, has never received the same level of critical attention as *Poor Folk* or *The Double*. It seldom merits more than passing mention in studies of Dostoevskii's *oeuvre* as a whole, and has only infrequently been the subject of essays and articles in its own right. This is surprising, given the novella's importance both as a Russian *Bildungsroman*, and for its development of the themes we associate with the mature Dostoevskii, not least that of the suffering and innocent child. Thomas Gaiton Marullo has long bucked this trend, with occasional articles on the novella dating as far back as the mid-1980s. The ideas he initially set out therein — in which *Netochka* herself was generally not the primary focus — have now received significant further development and recasting to centralize the heroine, in a short but very welcome first monograph on the text, *Heroine Abuse: Dostoevsky's 'Netochka Nezvanova' and the Poetics of Codependency*.

The book's corny title notwithstanding, codependency proves a very useful concept for analysing Dostoevskii's only female narrator and precursor to many of the female characters we see in his post-Siberian works. Marullo is not the first critic to use codependency as an interpretative tool; Catherine MacGregor has previously analysed codependency in *Crime and Punishment* (in a doctoral thesis from the University of Ottawa and two articles that are not cited in the present work). However, her focus remains firmly on the question of alcoholism, rather than the range of addictive behaviours and damaging relationships Marullo addresses here. Codependency, as Marullo outlines it, takes the form of passive-aggressive relationship addiction, leading to the erasure of boundaries between self and other, 'in individuals who seek skewed or inordinate fulfilment in people, place, and things apart from themselves' (p. 1). Indeed, Marullo's identification of five symptoms of codependency (pp. 1–3) resembles a check-list of Dostoevskian character traits: a confused or lost sense of selfhood; problems in discerning and expressing experiences of the world, including an inability to distinguish dreams from reality; exaggerated reactions to events and a tendency to live life at the extremes; a reluctance to acknowledge needs or desires, leading to a refusal to accept anything but their absolute fulfilment; and a tendency to repress a sense of inner inadequacy by

demanding perfection from the self.

Marullo constructs his interpretation through a straightforwardly chronological analysis of the three family relationships *Netochka Nezvanova* depicts, showing how the same pattern of morbid co-dependency is translated from one situation and set of characters to another. As her step-father Efimov's appalling treatment of his family distorts the young girl's worldview, he sets in train a series of events that replicate the original abusive relationship. The interpretation establishes the link between alcohol abuse and the physical and emotional abuse of children in a way that enables a fuller understanding of the significance of the 'accidental family' in Dostoevskii's fictional universe. But occasionally the analysis goes too far. There is a good deal of merit, for example, in the idea that the landowner in whose serf orchestra Efimov played exhibits codependent traits, and that like the musician B., and Netochka's mother, he adds fuel to the fire of Efimov's addictive personality. But when Princess Katia's father, Prince X., and even her bulldog Falstaff, received the codependency diagnosis, the present reader at least was more sceptical. The Prince's unmasking as a much less benign character than we may be inclined to think is undoubtedly thought-provoking, but ultimately he appears too briefly, and plays too peripheral a role, to justify some quite fanciful claims. Marullo rather loses sight at these points of Netochka's role as narrator; if such characters are portrayed within the framework of codependency, that is more a sign of the heroine's skewed understanding of how relationships work (i.e., abusively) than it is an objective depiction of yet another abusive relationship. Nevertheless, overall readers will find much to agree with in this exploration of Netochka the child and Netochka the adult (as narrator), whose belief in her own recovery through the narrative process is subtly subverted by her persistent self-exoneration. It is also becomes abundantly clear in the course of the analysis how one might fruitfully extend aspects of the interpretation to Dostoevskii's post-Siberian texts. As such, *Heroine Abuse* goes a significant way towards restoring *Netochka Nezvanova* to its rightful place in Dostoevskii's oeuvre.

Fyodor Dostoevsky — In the Beginning, 1821–1845 ends before the writing, publication, and interruption to *Netochka Nezvanova* caused by the author's arrest, but gives a fascinating insight into Dostoevskii's early development as a writer, and offers clues as to some of the sources and ideas for his unfinished novella. Not a biography as such, but rather a compilation of sources, both contemporary and retrospective, on Dostoevskii's life up to the eve of the publication of his first original work, *In the Beginning* aims to look beyond the clichés and misinformation, particularly surrounding the author's family, that are uncritically repeated all too frequently. This is especially welcome in relation to Dostoevskii's early life, given the lack of attention it receives in other

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biographical works. As Marullo notes (pp. vii–viii), the first volume of Joseph Frank's biography of Dostoevskii is the only work that deals in any detail with the author's childhood, and even here, the emphasis is on his literary formation, rather than the 'Morsonian prosaics' of his everyday life, schooling and formative influences that the current volume foregrounds.

Marullo provides a brief biographical sketch, highlighting some comparatively neglected aspects of Dostoevskii's education and early influences. The subsequent material is arranged in three sections: 'All in the Family', up to the death of the author's mother in early 1837, 'To Petersburg', dealing with Dostoevskii's education at the Main Engineering Academy and the death of his father in 1839, and 'Darkness before Dawn', covering the vicissitudes of his nascent writing career and the pre-publication reception of *Poor Folk*. Occasionally one might question the placement of certain sources, and at one point a contradiction arises concerning whether Dostoevskii's father first visited St Petersburg in 1835 or 1837, in part due to an obvious error in the source note, referring to 1845 (p. 273). However, overall the approach works very well. The results include a far more nuanced picture than we are accustomed to of Dostoevskii's parents. Far from the pantomime villain of legend, Dostoevskii's father Mikhail Andreevich emerges as a solicitous parent in letters to his children, and a tender and loving husband in the correspondence with his wife. Sporadic accusations about the running of the meagre estate at Davoroe, and demands to punish their serfs for unspecified or unproven misdemeanours, bear witness to the unstable, suspicious side of Mikhail Andreevich's personality. But this certainly does not dominate to the extent usually claimed, even after Maria Fyodorovna's death and his descent into alcoholism. Anyone seeking a strong correlation between Dostoevskii's own family background and the cycle of addiction and abuse depicted in *Netochka Nezvanova* will be disappointed. Marullo's endnotes — here, as they are throughout the book, scrupulously researched — address very soberly the accusations of Mikhail Andreevich's violence against his serfs and the very persistent story, still regularly retailed today, of his supposed murder and its cover-up. 'Evidence' for the murder proves largely to consist of hearsay (including the memoirs, written forty years later, of Dostoevskii's younger brother Andrei, who was away at school at the time of his father's death) and contradictory accounts compiled many years later by early Soviet researchers, eager for lurid stories of the nobility's oppression of the poor.

The latter stages of the book give a fascinating portrayal of Dostoevskii's early, mostly unsuccessful, attempts to kick-start a translation and publishing career alongside his work on *Poor Folk*. The fervour of his creative plans, the obstacle of constant financial problems and his extremely difficult and often contradictory personality are all brought to life through letters and memoirs,

most evocatively those of fellow writer and student at the Main Engineering Academy, Dmitry Grigorovich. If Dostoevskii does not emerge as a likeable character (this much we already knew; his elder brother Mikhail by contrast comes across as a saint), then the rounded and fair-minded picture we are given at least makes him more understandable. There is no attempt to hide Dostoevskii's frankly unpleasant traits or behaviour, but we also see the pressures he was under, the understanding of his own talent and struggles to realize it, and the tensions between uncontrollable vanity and self-doubt that are more than a little reminiscent of Mr Goliadkin and his double, on whose story Dostoevskii was also working in this period. Marullo's selection is very revealing of Dostoevskii's creative process and his personality. Subsequent volumes covering the rest of the author's life will make excellent companion pieces to existing, more traditional, biographies, and are to be eagerly anticipated.

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