



Review

Reviewed Work(s): Dostoevsky and the Riddle of the Self by Corrigan, Yuri

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Reviews

Corrigan, Yuri. *Dostoevsky and the Riddle of the Self*. Studies in Russian Literature and Theory. Northwestern University Press, Evanston, IL, 2017. viii + 238 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$120.00; \$39.95.

THE starting point for this illuminating study by Yuri Corrigan is the tension apparent in Dostoevskii's works between two opposing conceptions of the human personality: an inward-looking, romantic model that identifies the source of the divine in what Dostoevskii described as the 'depths of the human soul'; and an inter-subjective model — Bakhtin's Dostoevskii — that frames selfhood in radically relational terms.

Tracing the loss of self to a collective personality throughout Dostoevskii's oeuvre, Corrigan identifies the friendship between Vasia Shumkov and Arkadii Nefedevich in the seldom-discussed 1848 short story, 'A Weak Heart', as a paradigmatic relationship in which the self is ultimately replaced by the other. Key leitmotifs in Dostoevskii's fiction appear for the first time in this early story, including Arkadii's manhandling and dressing of Vasia (recapitulated, for example, by Razumikhin after Raskol'nikov's illness) and his dream that Vasia is only pretending to sleep and seeking to escape, which Corrigan interprets as a strategy to evade the control of the other and preserve the self. For similar reasons, in *Crime and Punishment*, Raskol'nikov feigns sleep in front of both Razumikhin and Svidrigailov. A cluster of further recurring images, many related to sleep, death and traumatic memory, gain additional significance in Corrigan's fine analysis: dead bodies discovered too late (Nelli's mother in *The Insulted and Injured*; Nastas'ia Filippovna in *The Idiot*), and children tormented by adults whispering to them in the night (Murin's mysterious hold over Katerina in 'The Landlady'; Stepan Trofimovich in *Demons* waking his pupil Nikolai Stavrogin to inappropriately share his most intimate thoughts). Beating hearts that can be heard from a distance, the tears of one character falling on the face of another, and shadowy encounters on stairways all contribute to 'a core imagistic vocabulary surrounding the phenomenon of the shared self' (p. 45) that extends across Dostoevskii's oeuvre. It is this that transforms the depiction of merely intense inter-personal relations into a unique model of the personality that paradoxically 'annihilates the "I"' whilst becoming a self. Corrigan accounts for the pathological extremes of Dostoevskii's psychically wounded characters that are frequently elided in other interpretations, and looks beyond simplistic moral categories. We are in the realms of 'not an essential conflict between good and evil, but the process by which the suppression of memory leads to a state of possession by others — or to a helpless compulsion to enact and re-enact patterns suggested and imposed by the minds of other people' (p. 84).

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Following the chapter on the intense friendship and suppressed inner life at the centre of 'A Weak Heart', Corrigan turns to different conceptions of doubling and self-forgetting in various early works, re-calibrating the idea of self-consciousness to provide a welcome corrective to Bakhtin's overly optimistic assessment of Dostoevskian dialogue. Jumping to the post-Siberian texts, the analysis of *The Insulted and Injured* addresses motifs of transparency, self-revelation and hidden traumas, arriving at a striking reinterpretation of the 'Lazarus' theme from *Crime and Punishment*. The chapter on *The Idiot*, focusing on the triadic relationship of Prince Myshkin, Rogozhin and Nastas'ia Filippovna, offers new insights, but in covering ground that has been investigated by so many critics, its originality appears less pronounced. The 'empty' self of Stepan Trofimovich in *Demons* as the source of the mass loss of personality afflicting the town, and the self displaced to an external object — the letter Arkadii has sewn into his clothes — in *The Adolescent*, both show to good effect how the motifs from the earlier works are recast to fulfil Dostoevskii's more expansive later vision. The interpretation of *The Brothers Karamazov* addresses the main characters' dreams as epiphanic experiences that represent 'the very dramatic breach of a series of collective selves' at the centre of the novel's plot (p. 121), brings the study together effectively, but renders the Conclusion, which touches upon 'Dream of a Ridiculous Man', perhaps slightly redundant. Unusually, there are no separate chapters on *Notes from Underground* or *Crime and Punishment*. The final stages of earlier chapters elucidate connections with the latter, but the former is mentioned only in passing, an absence that may indicate the extent to which the approach adopted by Corrigan departs from the mainstream of Dostoevskii studies, but nevertheless feels like a slight gap in his theory. The analysis he presents, however, more than makes up for the omission, perhaps particularly in relation to works that are often neglected: 'A Weak Heart', 'The Landlady', *Netochka Nezvanova* and *The Insulted and Injured*. This is a study that will be required reading for Dostoevskii specialists for years to come.

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SARAH J. YOUNG

Cooke, Olga M. (ed.). *Andrei Bely's Petersburg: A Centennial Celebration. The Real Twentieth Century*. Academic Studies Press, Boston, MA, 2017. xiii + 260 pp. Illustrations. Notes. Index. \$99.00.

A fine tribute to the memory of Georgette Donchin, author of the pioneering *Influence of French Symbolism on Russian Poetry* (The Hague, 1958) and of the Introduction to the Chicago Russian Specialities 1967 edition of *Petersburg*, and