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Annotative Bibliography of Eight of Dostoevsky's Works

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ANNOTATIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY
OF EIGHT OF
DOSTOEVSKI'S WORKS

Robin Pounders
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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Feodor Dostoevski

The Brothers Karmazov (1879-1880)

Dostoevski's last novel is the story of three brothers, Dmitri, Ivan, and Alyosha, the sons of depraved Feodor Pavlovich Karmazov. The eldest, Dmitri, a violent man who lets his passionate nature run free, quarrels violently with his father over a woman and his inheritance. When the father is murdered, all the evidence points to Dmitri. In reality, Smerdyakov, a fourth, illegitimate, epileptic son committed the murder; however, he is not suspected since he was in convulsions at the time that the murder was discovered. Smerdyakov confesses to Ivan, the middle son, a tormented intellectual. Being a Dostoevskian character, he worries about and finally blames himself as the instigator of the crime, feeling that his cynical views inspired the killer. The real killer commits suicide before Dmitri's trial; Ivan, the only one who can then expiate his brother, is delirious with brain fever and so his testimony, hallucinations mixed with fact, is disregarded. The novel ends with the condemnation of Dmitri through his own foolishness: his idle threats to his father during their impassioned arguments are brought up, and no other evidence being available, the jury

makes its decision.

Ivan goes mad; Alyosha is the only one who ends up free, with his sanity and his life. This is a graphic example of Dostoevski's idea that, intellect failing, feeling and love can overcome, can make life bearable, an idea deliberated on, by the author, for many years. I feel that the book is a wonderful example of clarity of form. Dostoevski develops his characters fully and exactly and the reader finds himself anticipating their actions. These actions are, in themselves, a study of abnormal psychology, a field in which Dostoevski was a pioneer. The Brothers Karmazov is considered by many critics, and even Dostoevski himself, to be the masterpiece of his career. This is an assertion that I could hardly go along with wholeheartedly, but I do feel that it is an excellent piece of literature and worthy of much study.

Feodor Dostoevski

Crime and Punishment (1866)

In Dostoevski's first big novel, Raskolnikov, a poverty-stricken student in St. Petersburg, ridden with worry about finances and the defenselessness of his mother and sister, plans the murder of a greedy old woman pawnbroker. The plan formed on his theory is that superior people are above ordinary moral standards and laws (and that he is one of these superior people), and the notion common among the students that her wealth could be put to more beneficial uses if it were

distributed throughout society. He is both terrified of, and fascinated by the plan; and finally, on impulse, carries it out in a kind of stupor. Caught in the act, he is forced to also kill the retarded sister of the woman. The tormented times that follow, characterized by a delirious fever and growing paranoia, show Raskolnikov that he does not belong to the elite group of "amoral supermen." His craving for sympathy is fulfilled by Sonya Marmeladova, a young girl forced into prostitution to support her family. Raskolnikov believes in the intrinsic nobility of the girl; he is convinced by her oral reading of the Lazarus story. She urges him to confess, which he does after a cat-and-mouse game with the police. He is sentenced to Siberia for seven years, yet he is filled with hope for the future which he plans to spend with Sonya, to whom he's now devoted, in peace.

There is wonderful contrast, even irony, in the book concerning the character of the characters and their positions in the world. For instance, Sonya is the truly good, strong, wise soul in the book, yet by trade--a prostitute. Raskolnikov's sister's fiance, a leader in government, is the craftiest, most evil, basest personage in the story. Dostoevski reveals this smoothly so that you are aware of no incongruity and, indeed, on reflection, you can see that really no incongruity at all is involved. Perhaps it is rather an attempt by the author to generate some much-needed thought.

Feodor Dostoevski

The Double (1846)

The Double is concerned mainly with Yakov Petrovich Golyadkin, a humble civil servant who loves and consequently tries to woo the daughter of his employer. After being rebuffed, cruelly, several times, a strangeness enters into the mind of Golyadkin and he sees a carbon copy of himself, but without the previously persistent awkwardness. Soon Golyadkin #2 wins the hearts of all and achieves the success that Golyadkin #1 had only dreamed of. The phantoms disappear when Golyadkin is removed to the madhouse, no more quickly than I disappeared, however, upon completion of the novel. This book was his 1st in-depth study of abnormal psychology and perhaps its being dreadfully drawn out is excusable on the grounds of experimentation.

Feodor Dostoevski

The Eternal Husband (1870)

This book is a study of the relationship of a warped old man to the ex-lover of his now-dead wife. Trusotzki, the husband, torments himself and the lover, Vel'chaninov, even implying that the little girl that his wife bore was really the lover's. The husband is loved by the child, but he mistreats her and she dies. Finally, when Vel'chaninov thinks that he has seen the last of Trusotzki, the latter turns up, about to be married again, wanting to introduce the lover to his prospective wife.

The implication is that the man, perhaps mad, is inviting and setting up another instance of cuckoldry.

Though a short book, the work is a brilliant psychological study, deftly emphasizing the nature of self-inflicted hells and the ineptness of man to understand and accept himself, society, and convention. It boasts an extremely smooth style, and the plot construction is coherent and on the same high plane of quality as the other elements of the novel.

Feodor Dostoevski

The Idiot (1868)

Prince Myshkin, the epileptic protagonist of The Idiot, has for several years been under medical care in Switzerland. The secluded life that he lived there as an invalid seems to have drained him of many pettinesses and excesses common to man, and left him peaceful and innocent. Being thrust back into the corrupt and worldly society of St. Petersburg, Myshkin becomes involved with two women, Natasha and Aglaya. Natasha, a beautiful, reckless woman who is being used by the harsh merchant, Rogozhin, turns to the Prince for sympathy and understanding. He, in turn, in response to this trust, breaks off his engagement to save her from Rogozhin. She rejects this, feeling that he is acting only out of pity, and wins for herself death at the merchant's hands. Aglaya, the young well-bred girl to whom he is engaged, is consumed by jealousy, an emotion that he can't comprehend. She is utterly amazed by his

humility and magnanimity, of which she becomes the victim when he breaks their engagement to save Natasha. Finally, Myshkin, confronted with the murdered Natasha, is overcome and lapses into idiocy.

In the character of Prince Myshkin, Dostoevski is trying to portray a really good man, a Christian. He was not really successful in this for while he had the moral attributes, he had very few human attributes and no interplay of the two. It was his most difficult book to write and this comes out in the choppy confusion of the novel. However, there is a jelling at the end of the work and the pieces fit together to leave a more unified overall impression.

Feodor Dostoevski

Poor Folk (1846)

Poor Folk is a short novel about Devushkin, a poverty-stricken clerk, and his futile love for Varvara Dobroselova, an equally poor young girl who lives near him. He does everything that he can to keep her from being married off to a rich landowner, but is handicapped by many things including his bouts of drunkenness when his despair is too great to handle alone. In spite of his efforts, she is married to the rich man and leaves with him. The characterization, revealed through the letters between Devushkin and Varvara is very well done. This book, the first social novel, was very well received and established him as the poet of the city's poor.

Feodor Dostoevski

The Possessed (1871-1872)

The epigraph to The Possessed, an attack on nihilism, refers to the demons cast by Christ into the Gadarene swine. In Dostoevski's analogy, the nihilists, represented by the swine, were possessed by the social evils of Russia. Stravrogin, the central figure in the novel, is an emotionless, brilliant, true nihilist and he is contrasted with the affected nihilists, the revolutionaries. He gets involved with Verhovensky, the leader of one such band of revolutionary terrorists which includes a former servant, Shatov, and Kirillov, an engineer. There is a bloody finale: Lebyadkin, a crafty army captain, and his crippled sister being murdered and burned in their home; Shatov being killed by his own band; Lizaveta Tushin, a woman in love with Stravrogin, becoming a victim of mob vengeance; and both Kirillov and Stravrogin committing suicide.

Dostoevski's point in writing the novel seems to be to show that Russia's problems are caused by the introduction of western revolutionary doctrines and that the solution of these problems is a return to the Russian Orthodox religion and a renewed spirit of nationalism.

Feodor Dostoevski

The Raw Youth (1875)

Arkadi Makarovich Dolguruki, a bewildered, insecure, rebellious young man trying to evade the chaotic times by turn-

ing inward, is the central character of The Raw Youth. His goal in life is to become a "Rothschild"; i.e. to amass wealth that he may enjoy the resultant power and dominance. He is the illegitimate son of Versilov, a nobleman who's living in a type of common law arrangement with Arkadi's mother. The father and son go through many different phases of hatred and love, the influencing factors including shame, honesty, money, and a woman that they both crave. Arkadi's nominal father, now a religious pilgrim, is introduced and proves to be a great inspiration to the boy. He (the old man) prompts renunciation of Arkadi's wealth goal, and the latter substitutes a life goal of uprightness and seamliness.

The novel is another of Dostoevski's works that is so complicated that it requires a lot of concentration and review to be able to achieve a coherent picture of the story-line and characters involved. This gives the book a choppy overall character. The most skillful part of the novel seems to be the thinking processes of Arkadi, discussed in detail, particularly the maturing progression of his thinking from the beginning to the end of the book.